

Conflict Update Day 394

March 24th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 169,170 (+1,020) soldiers killed, 3,574 (+4) enemy tanks, 6,921 (+23) armored combat vehicles, 2,616 (+8) artillery systems, 511 (0) MLRS systems, 276 (+3) air defense systems, 305 (+0) warplanes, 290 (+0) helicopters, 2,208 (+5) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 911 (+2) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,464 (+12) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 277 (+4) units of equipment.

Death Toll

Another 1,020 Russian soldiers killed and an estimate 3,200 injured in the last 24 hours, primarily in and around the Bakhmut and Avdiivka areas to the east.

This sums to 19,280 killed in March to date with approximately 40,000 injured – heading to the highest monthly total thus far by the end of this month.

UK MoD figures estimate around 1,400 killed in the past day of reporting reportedly because of a lack of ammo.

It is being reported that the Wagner Group is almost out of troops and has been forced to start recruitment drives in order to replenish its “human stock.”

Atop this are Russian forces reportedly running extremely low on ammunition of all sorts, including artillery shells.

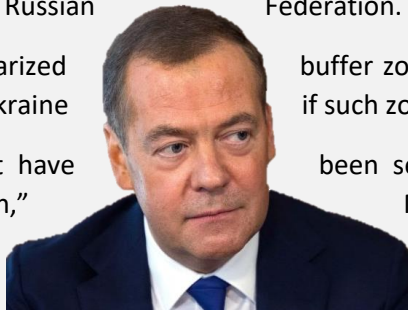
Key Events

Russia wants to create buffer zones – Russia wants de-militarized zones in all occupied territories, as states by Medvedev, previous president of the Russian Federation.

He said Russia wants to create de-militarized might be necessary to push deeper into Ukraine

“We need to achieve all the goals that have territories of the Russian Federation,” Russia’s Security Council, said in an

We need to “throw out all the foreigners



buffer zones around areas it has annexed, saying it if such zones cannot be set up.

been set to protect our territories, that is, the Medvedev, who is deputy chairman of interview.

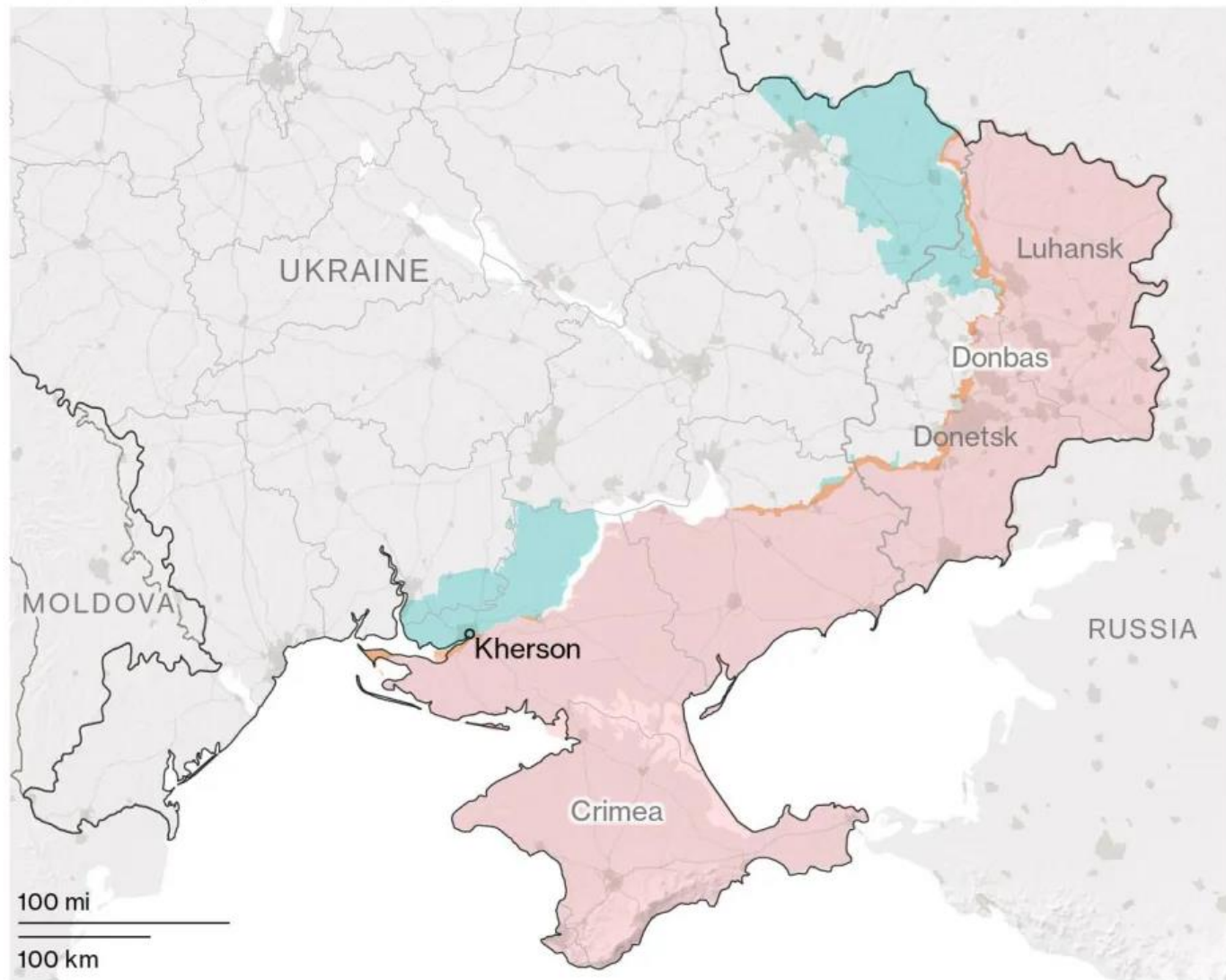
who are there in the broad sense of the

word, create a buffer zone which would not allow the use of any types of weapons that work at medium and short distances, that is 70-100km, to de-militarize it”, Medvedev said.

Russia would have to push further into Ukraine if such zones were not established, he added, taking Kyiv or even Lviv.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine

● Russian occupied Ukrainian territory ● Russian advances ● Ukrainian counteroffensives



Sources: [Institute for the Study of War](#) and the American Enterprise Institute's [Critical Threats Project](#)

Note: Map shows control areas as of March 24, 2023.

Bloomberg

Reading between the lines – Moscow is battling to contain Ukrainian forces and have failed miserably in the Bakhmut area, where it is now being reported they have lost around 30,000 soldiers killed.

The Kremlin also realizes the Ukrainian spring counteroffensive is about to commence – and that they are running out of or have run out of ammunition. They are also extremely low in troop count.

So everything points to a drastic “Moscow” solution – de-militarize what they have in order to conserve territory occupied. This points to a tremendously successful Ukrainian winter strategy of containing Russian BTGs and strengths in very narrow channels and geographical areas, all the while extracting enormous casualties and equipment damage.

We have reported as such throughout the winter and trust this to be the shortly proven position.

Russian mercenary group Wagner may lose thousands of fighters - In the coming weeks Russian mercenary group Wagner could lose most of the prisoners it recruited into its ranks as their six-month military contracts expire.

Analysis by ISW, citing British intelligence, estimates thousands of convicts recruited in the autumn of 2022 will be pardoned and released, in keeping with a promise by the head of the mercenary group.

The UK MoD predicts this will significantly weaken Wagner, already struggling after the Kremlin banned it from recruiting any more prisoners.

For months the group has been fighting a bloody battle for Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine which some argue is of little strategic value, but is increasingly symbolic importance.

Ukraine's staunch Bakhmut resistance is working - Ukraine's staunch resistance in Bakhmut in the Donetsk region appears to be paying off as Russia's offensive in the city is losing momentum, according to military intelligence.

Russian and Ukrainian forces have been engaged in a bloody fight for the city since July, in what has become the longest-running battle since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine last February.

Moscow is hoping to secure its first major battlefield victory by capturing Bakhmut, a small industrial city with a pre-war population of 70,000. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has said that the Russian Armed Forces will be able to advance deep inside Ukraine if Bakhmut falls.

Ukraine prepares counteroffensive as Russia's assault flags - Ukrainian troops, on the defensive for months, will soon counterattack as Russia's offensive looks to be faltering, a commander said, but President Zelenskyy warned that without a faster supply of arms, the war could last years.

The Ukrainian military said early on Friday that 1,020 Russian troops had been killed over the previous 24 hours as they launched unsuccessful attacks on the towns of Lyman, Avdiivka, Mariinka, and Shakhtarske. But their main focus was still the mining town of Bakhmut.

Russian forces have for months been trying to capture Bakhmut as they seek to extend control over eastern Ukraine.

There was no immediate word from Russia on the latest fighting and Reuters could not verify the battlefield reports.

Ukraine's top ground forces commander Oleksandr Syrskyy said earlier his forces would soon begin a counter-offensive after withstanding Russia's winter campaign.

Russia destroyed 50 villages in free Kherson - In the free territory of the Kherson region, more than 50 villages were almost completely destroyed by Kremlin forces, but people are returning even to such villages.

In some places, more than 90% of the buildings in the villages are ruined. But even in such villages, people return, and this is proof that life still prevails.

Today, the Russian army struck again at the Kherson region, hit Beryslav - the local administration, houses, the museum... Even the historical museum in Beryslav is a threat to Russia for some reason... An absolutely mindless state, purely a terrorist state, reported President Zelenskyy.

Russian forces may have to advance as far as Kyiv or Lviv in Ukraine, Russia's Medvedev said. "Nothing can be ruled out here.

If you need to get to Kyiv, then you need to go to Kyiv, if to Lviv, then you need to go to Lviv in order to destroy this infection," Russian news agency RIA Novosti quoted him as saying.

UN ‘deeply concerned’ by summary executions - The UN says it is “deeply concerned” by summary executions of prisoners of war by Russian and Ukrainian forces on the battlefield.

The head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Matilda Bogner, said her organisation has documented the killings of “up to 25 Russian prisoners of war” by Ukrainian armed forces as well as “the summary execution of 15 Ukrainian prisoners of war shortly after being captured by Russian armed forces.”

Ukrainian children deported by Russia - EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU would work to find some 16,200 Ukrainian children deported to Russia. Calling it a reminder of "the darkest times in our history," she said only 300 have been returned so far.

Slovakia delivers first four Soviet-era MiG-29 jets to Ukraine - The first four of 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets that Slovakia decided to give Ukraine have been transferred to the Ukrainian air force.

The warplanes were flown from Slovakia to Ukraine yesterday by Ukrainian pilots with help from the Slovak Air Force.

“I thank [all] involved for a fantastic professional job,” Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad said.

The ministry said the remaining MiG-29s will be handed over to the Ukrainian side in the coming weeks. It said it will not provide any additional details until they are safely in Ukraine.

The Slovak government approved a plan to give Ukraine its fleet of 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets last Friday, becoming the second NATO member to heed the Ukrainian government’s pleas for fighter aircraft to help defend against Russia’s invasion.

MiG-29 fighter jets were designed in the Soviet Union and came into service in 1983. Poland plans to send four to Ukraine in the coming days, while Slovakia has also approved sending the jets.

Max speed 2,400km/h (1,500 miles/hour)	Ferry range 2,100km (1,300 miles)	Altitude 18km (59,100 feet)	Crew MiG-29K - one
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Engine
2x turbofan RD-33 engines

Armament
GSh-30-1 30mm (1.18 inches)

2x R-27 air-to-air medium-range missiles; 6 R-73 and R-60 air-to-air short range missiles; 4 pods of S-5, S-8, S-24 unguided rockets

11.36m Wingspan

17.32m Length

4.73m Height

Source: Airforce Technology | Date: March 17, 2023

@AJLabs

Slovakia previously signed a deal to buy 14 US F-16 Block 70/72 fighter jets, but delivery was pushed back two years with the first aircraft to arrive in early 2024.

The defence ministry said on Wednesday the United States offered Slovakia 12 new military helicopters as compensation for the fighter jets the European country is giving Ukraine.

That the Ukrainians flew the jets home rather than disassembling them and transporting them by truck or rail flies in the face of ominous Russian warnings against nations providing additional fighters to Ukraine, and especially flying them directly into the country.

Russia building up defenses in Moscow after strikes hit inside borders - Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced plans to update anti-missile defense systems in Moscow.

"This year we will complete the modernization of the anti-missile defense systems of the city of Moscow," Shoigu said in an address to military officials, according to Agence France-Presse.

Moscow bolstering its defense systems comes after reports of Ukrainian drones allegedly entering inside Russia's borders. In late February, a drone crashed approximately 62 miles outside of Moscow, which a regional governor

claimed was likely an attempt by Ukraine to strike civilian infrastructure. Around the same time, Russia's defense ministry also reported its forces had taken down two Ukrainian drones in southern Russia.

Ukraine counterattack will take aim at 'exhausted' Wagner troops - The military hotbed of Bakhmut will remain a key strategic location in the Russia-Ukraine war, according to a high-ranking Ukrainian official.

Aleksandr Syrsky, commander of Ukraine's ground forces, said Thursday that a counteroffensive against "exhausted" Russian forces near Bakhmut would soon occur.

Bakhmut has been inundated with Ukrainian and Russian forces, as well as mercenaries from the paramilitary Wagner Group, since last summer in the 13-month war. Soldiers on the frontlines reportedly are at accelerated risks of death there compared to other regions.

"The aggressor has not given up hope of taking Bakhmut at all costs despite losses in manpower and equipment," Syrsky said, according to The Moscow Times, an independent English-language publication based in Amsterdam. "Russia's main fighting force on this front is the Wagner mercenary group. Sparing nothing, they are losing significant strength and becoming exhausted. Very soon we will take advantage of this opportunity, like we did near Kyiv, Kharkiv, Balakliya and Kupiansk."

Ukraine's armed forces have released a video that they say shows their troops resisting attacks from the Moscow-backed Wagner Group of mercenaries in Bakhmut. It said in a statement that Ukrainian soldiers had "managed to repulse the assault and force the enemy to retreat with losses" and "send the Wagnerites to hell with fire," according to a translation.

Russia only hits military targets – called “Willful Blindness” in US legal terminology - The Kremlin continues to target civilian infrastructure across Ukraine.

The UN estimated that nearly half of all Ukrainian medical services have been destroyed or severely damaged by Russian rockets and missiles.

Putin and every henchman or woman should be held to account, prosecuted and jailed for the willful and decided targeting of innocent men, women and children.

But he and his ilk in Moscow continue to deny any culpability, as does his fellow henchman in Beijing, Xi Jinping.

Every country supporting the Russian Federation should be held to account in similar vein and made to answer where in their national policies they find space to support such hypocrisy and double-speak.

Stalling eastern Ukrainian attacks by Russian forces - As Russia's last-gasp offensive in eastern Ukraine stalls, talk is building of a Ukrainian counter-offensive taking advantage of Moscow's heavy losses of troops, armor, and equipment.

Ukrainian, US, and UK analysts are all assessing that Russia's 10-month assault on Bakhmut in the Donetsk region is slowing.

Having taken the eastern part of the city, which had a pre-war population of about 70,000, Wagner Group mercenaries have been halted at the Bakhmutka River for weeks.

Білопілля. Сумщина. Після нічного обстрілу російськими авіабомбами триває розбір завалів.



The analysts note that the mercenary attacks are now on villages to the north and south of Bakhmut, still hoping to cut off the city, while Russian forces are focusing on the town of Avdiivka, about 90 km (56 miles) to the south.

Wagner Group to shift focus from Ukraine war after military feud, heavy losses – Bloomberg - The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group is likely to shift his attention away from the war in Ukraine, Bloomberg reported yesterday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

According to Bloomberg's sources, Yevgeny Prigozhin plans to turn his focus back to Africa, where his fighters are believed to have a presence in Sudan, the Central African Republic, Mali and other countries.

The alleged shift is believed to be connected to the recent rift between Prigozhin and top military commanders who have sowed doubts with Putin about Wagner's military capability, people close to the Kremlin and intelligence services told Bloomberg, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The commanders reportedly argued that the results Wagner achieved in Ukraine came from throwing huge numbers of recruited prisoners to their deaths.

A Wagner recruitment announcement posted Monday also offered applications to serve terms in Africa ranging from nine to 14 months, specifying that those who enlist would be placed on reserve, the outlet said.

After years of operating in the shadows, the Wagner Group has stepped into the spotlight amid the invasion of Ukraine, and has taken a leading role in fighting for the eastern city of Bakhmut since summer 2022, taking heavy losses in the process.

Russia can't meet India arms deliveries due to Ukraine war, Indian Air Force says - Russia is unable to honor its arms delivery commitments to India because of the war in Ukraine, the India said, placing a potential strain on New Delhi's relationship with its largest defense supplier as Moscow attempts to ramp up weapons production.

An IAF representative told an Indian parliamentary committee that due to the Ukraine war a "major delivery" from Moscow "is not going to take place."

The admission, published in a report by India's lower house of parliament on Tuesday, is the first official confirmation by Indian authorities amid swirling rumors and reports in local media suggesting shortcomings in Russian capacity.

"They have given us in writing that they are not able to deliver it," the representative said, according to the report.

The biggest ongoing delivery is the S-400 Triumf air defense system units India bought in 2018 for \$5.4 billion. Three of these systems have been delivered and two more are awaited, Reuters reported.

IAF also depends on Russia for spares for its Su-30MKI and MiG-29 fighter jets, the mainstay of the service branch, according to Reuters.

Those T-55 tanks the Russians are pulling out of storage? they were obsolete ... in 1973 - Russia is dusting off the cobwebs from military deep storage facilities in the country's Far East, for the first time railing un-upgraded Cold War T-54B tanks westward, possibly bound for Ukraine. Now, a video of the T-54s transported by rail has surfaced.

This news was first revealed on Wednesday in an investigative report by Conflict Intelligence Team, an independent investigative group from Russia.

Formed in 2014 with a focus on exposing Russia's initially covert war in Ukraine, its members were forced into exile after Moscow initiated its 2022 invasion.

The group posted still photos of T-54s seen transiting through the town of Arsenyev, on the southeastern tip of Russia near Vladivostok—the location of the 1295th Central Tank Repair and Storage Base.

Earlier in the summer of 2022, this base also furnished T-62MV tanks that were deployed into combat in Ukraine.

Though similar in appearance, the smaller T-54 can be distinguished by a visible gap between the front two road wheels not visible in its successor.

Based on satellite photos, the investigative group estimated at least 191 tanks, but possibly many more, were withdrawn from the facility between July and October 2022.

In



In addition to the video of the train carrying Soviet-era T-54B and T-55A tanks, the Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) separately reported on T54s and T55s being removed from a tank graveyard in the Russian Far East.

The deployment indicates 'serious problems with the provision of Russian troops with armored vehicles.' It is unclear if the antiquated tanks will be repurposed before they are deployed with troops in the war unleashed by Putin in Ukraine.

Taped call captures Putin's troops in self-loathing spiral - Russian troops in Ukraine say the situation has become such an embarrassment more than a year into the war that they're convinced no one wants to be there in the first place. That's according to a two-and-a-half minute recording released yesterday by Ukrainian intelligence that is said to capture a phone chat between two fed-up Russian soldiers discussing mass desertions.

After 119 soldiers fled the front line, one of the unnamed soldiers said, many of them were tracked down and 70 of them were hit with criminal charges, while 30 were "jailed for f----- two years or more."

Instead of venting his frustrations at his AWOL fellow troops, the man scoffed at military officials who he said "once again" explained to all the soldiers that they'd be tossed in jail if they left their positions for more than 48 hours, something that has apparently become a popular trend.

Ukrainian soldiers are reporting rising incidents of Russian soldiers deserting ranks in conflict areas and either fleeing or surrendering to Kievan forces. They relate having no ammunition and overly-authoritarian leadership as primary causes of running away.

The Kremlin has deployed, since Day 1 of their invasion of Ukraine, "special squads" who execute or imprison Russian soldiers heading away from front lines. It is reported that these "squads" are manned by Chechnyan soldiers who are known for their barbarity.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Russian lawmaker calls for wiping UK off the face of the earth - Andrey Gurulyov, Russian State Duma deputy, recently called for wiping the United Kingdom off the face of the earth, arguing that Britain is the "main instigator" in the Russia-Ukraine war.

His remarks came as part of a televised segment posted to Twitter with English subtitles by Anton Gerashchenko, adviser to Ukraine's minister of internal affairs.

"Attention, Great Britain! Russian propagandists see the UK as the 'main instigator' and want to end the war by 'inflicting a critical defeat on Britain'" tweeted Gerashchenko on Thursday as he shared part of the TV segment showing Gurulyov, who is also a retired Russian military leader.

"... The first thing to do is to tear Britain down, to wipe it off the face of the earth. And in fact, after that, everything will be over. It will be over, because it's Britain that's the main bastard. And the territory behind the puddle [the U.S.] itself as its masters," Gurulyov said in the clip posted by Gerashchenko.

Russia is not planning to enter into a direct conflict with NATO and is interested in resolving the Ukraine crisis through talks, Medvedev said in an interview - Russian ex-President Medvedev said earlier today Russia was not planning to enter into a direct conflict with NATO and was interested in resolving the Ukraine crisis through talks, the Interfax news agency reported.

However, he warned that any Ukrainian attempt to take the Crimean peninsula - which Moscow annexed in 2014 - would be grounds for Russia to use "absolutely any weapon" against Kyiv in response.

Comment – Russia not planning to enter into any conflict with NATO speaks to a Moscow realization of its relative military incapacities against the western alliance more than anything else. As such, we can expect to see increasing Russian dialogue in and around nuclear threats and postulations.

Ukraine's army is now the best in the world, retired Australian general says - The Ukrainian army is currently the best in the world amid their ongoing war with Russia, Mick Ryan, a retired major general in the Australian army, said this week. While speaking with the Kyiv Post on Thursday, Ryan talked about the different aspects of Ukraine's armed forces and how they've used a number of capabilities, like missile defenses, drone defenses and frontline combat troops, in their war against Russia.

"And my view is that the Ukrainians are probably the best army in the world at the moment," Ryan said. "And it's not probably, they are. They are the best army in the world. They're the most experienced at the modern warfare, they've demonstrated that over the last 13 months.

After Iran détente, Saudi Arabia opens diplomatic talks with Syria - Saudi Arabia is in talks with Syria to reopen its embassy in the war-torn nation for the first time in a decade, state television in the kingdom reported late Thursday, the latest diplomatic reshuffling in the region.

The announcement on state TV comes after Chinese-mediated talks in Beijing saw Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to reopen embassies in one others' nations after years of tension. Syria's al-Assad has maintained his grip on power in the nation rocked by the 2011 Arab Spring only with the help of Iran and Russia.

The kingdom backed Syrian opposition against al-Assad during Syria's uprising-turned-civil war that began in 2011. However, in recent years, a regional rapprochement has been brewing.

The Middle East is a prime target for the Sino-Russo approach to their desired new global world order (or disorder).

Estonia says China's peace plan to end Ukraine's war is 'extremely unfair' - China's peace proposal to end the war in Ukraine is "extremely unfair," since the plan doesn't respect the territorial integrity of the country, said the permanent secretary of Estonia's Ministry of Defense.

Beijing issued a 12-point peace plan in February.

It is the duty of "the wider global community" to help Ukraine, said Kusti Salm. But China's plan hasn't been fair to Ukraine's people, he said.

"Whenever we measure ... the feasibility of any peace deal, it needs to be measured against the same principles. Are we outrooting the aggression as a tool?" he asked CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia" on Friday.

"Are we honoring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of independent nations?"

Those are the "key ingredients and elements missing" from China's peace proposal, he said. "That is something I would say [is] extremely unfair to Ukrainian people who have been fighting for their freedom."

Containment

Ukraine's scramble for "game-changer" drone fleet - At an unassuming industrial estate in northern Ukraine, two former Microsoft executives and a team of engineers are producing military drones that can travel over long distances and carry large payloads.

AeroDrone, which made crop-dusting drones prior to the war and now supplies Ukraine's armed forces, makes unmanned aircraft that can carry up to 300 kilograms or fly up to several thousand kilometres in certain configurations.

As Ukraine seeks to narrow the yawning gap between its own military capabilities and Russia's, Kyiv says it is expanding its drone program for both reconnaissance and attacking enemy targets over an increasing range. It is hoping that domestic drone makers like AeroDrone will help it meet its ambitious goals.

The government is now working with more than 80 Ukraine-based drone manufacturers, Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov told Reuters. He said Kyiv needs hundreds of thousands of drones, many of which it is looking to source from a rapidly-expanding domestic industry. Currently, the military operates dozens of models of domestic and foreign drones that fulfil a "wide spectrum" of roles, Reznikov said, in written responses to questions.

"Drones are a game-changer on the battlefield in the same way that precise Western MLRS became last year," Reznikov said, referring to Multiple Launch Rocket System weapons.

UAVs and other drones are only one element of a war that is currently dominated by artillery, infantry and missiles. Moscow has been able to pound targets across Ukraine with long-range missiles, which Kyiv lacks.

"It is not worth expecting parity in the near future," Reznikov said on closing the armament gap. He added: "Russia is also working on improving its UAVs."

Ramping up

Kyiv is hoping to use Western supplies of battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in the coming months to launch a counteroffensive to seize back swathes of occupied territory in the south and east.

For cash-strapped Ukraine, whose economy has been decimated and whose government is now reliant on international financing, drones represent a relatively inexpensive way to fight back against Russia's vast military.

Ukraine has said it will spend nearly \$550 million on drones in 2023 and has set up drone assault units within its armed forces.

The secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, told Reuters unmanned vehicles that crash into their target and detonate - so-called kamikaze drones - will be a particular focus for Ukraine in 2023.

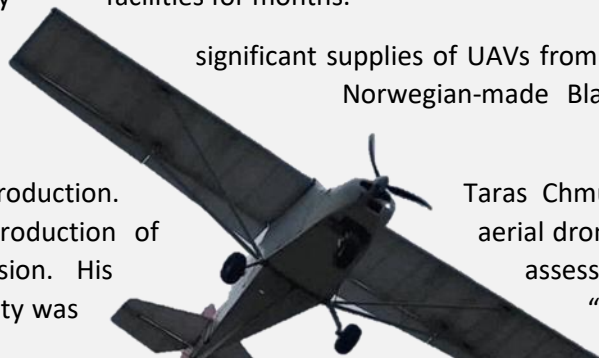
Drone warfare specialist James Rogers, a professor at the University of Southern Denmark, said Ukraine's UAV capability still lags behind Russia and its Iranian-made Shahed-136 kamikaze drones, which have been used by Moscow to target Ukrainian energy facilities for months.

Ukraine has received equipped Bayraktar TB2 to the which weighs less than 33 grams.

significant supplies of UAVs from its partners, from Turkey's missile-Norwegian-made Black Hornet reconnaissance drone,

Kyiv is now ramping up its own production. says the country's domestic production of the start of last year's invasion. His production of such drones capacity was and parts supplies are steady.

Taras Chmut, a Ukrainian defence specialist, aerial drones has grown by 3 or 4 times since assessment was that the country's "several thousand" a year if funding



Longer range

One area of focus is on developing airborne drones that can travel longer distances, said Reznikov. Kyiv has been seeking longer-range missiles from allies that could hit targets several hundred kilometres away, but has so far been rebuffed. AeroDrone says one of its models, called Enterprise and based on the frame of a light aircraft, can fly over 3,000 kilometres in certain circumstances.

During a visit to AeroDrone's workshop, engineers in blue coats bustled around the metal carcass of a light aircraft that forms the skeleton of the Enterprise drone. "It can carry 200 kg for 1200 km," Shymkiv said of the Enterprise.

Japan offers Poland special development aid for Ukraine - Japan will offer Poland financial development assistance to support in assisting the neighboring war-torn Ukraine, announced Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during a meeting with his Polish counterpart Mateusz Morawiecki.

On Wednesday, Kishida visited Warsaw, one day after he made an unannounced visit to Kyiv, where he met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy,

"Bearing in mind the increasing burden on Poland due to the prolonged invasion of Ukraine," Japan would offer Poland financial development assistance and is looking to "vigorously build up" bilateral projects.

Poland's special role with regard to the war in Ukraine means Japan will make an exception to the aid it typically sends to developing countries, said Kishida.

Japan's decision "is a huge success by the Polish government and Prime Minister Morawiecki," ruling Law and Justice MEP Izabela Kloc (PiS, ECR) Izabela Kloc told EURACTIV.pl.

European Union leaders held talks with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy who called on the bloc to provide his forces with more modern weaponry, particularly jet fighters and long-range missiles. Zelenskyy told EU leaders that "delays" in sending fighter jets and long-range missiles would extend the war.

1 Million shells to Ukraine - EU leaders have confirmed a plan to supply 1 million artillery shells to Ukraine over the next year.

Bulgaria's Rose Valley hides a well-kept secret: The weapons it delivers to Ukraine - In a country where the pro-Russian movement is strong, arms factories are running at full speed, but are discreet about their deliveries to Kyiv.

Nestled in the center of Bulgaria, the Rose Valley likes to present itself as a hotspot for the production of fragrant essences. But behind this image, the reality of the local economy has earned it a completely different nickname, inspired by the American hard rock band: Guns N' Roses. In Kazanlak, the "capital" of this valley and a typical post-communist city, with its grayish apartment blocks, it doesn't take long to realize that the 50,000 inhabitants make their living much more from "guns," the weapons produced at Arsenal, the gigantic factory that occupies dozens of hectares on the outskirts, than from "roses," which had not yet budded this early spring.

But..... With its stockpile of Soviet-era weapons, Bulgaria, home to a thriving arms industry, could be a key ally of Ukraine, which is trained on and equipped with such arms, in its war against invading Russian forces.

But with parliament now dissolved ahead of elections on April 2, the fifth snap poll in two years amid political uncertainty, the caretaking government is in no mood to provide lethal aid to Kyiv, appointed as it was by President Rumen Radev, who is known for his pro-Kremlin leanings.

Sanctions

China, Russia face sanctions from US states now - Sanctions have become all the rage in international politics. The US and allies are imposing them on rivals with increasing frequency and severity. And those rivals are reciprocating where they can.

Now, American states, too, are increasingly getting in on the act. And that's bad news — for the world, and for US foreign policy. A much-publicized episode of a Chinese balloon entering US airspace seems to have created new energy for such restrictions and has led to legislation being proposed in at least 11 states.

On Wednesday, the South Carolina State Senate passed a bill barring ownership of land in the state by citizens of US geopolitical adversaries Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and Cuba. The bill's top sponsor even compared a planned purchase of South Carolina land by a Chinese biomedical firm with the Trojan Horse plot of Greek mythology.

Meanwhile, Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst has proposed a similar law that has drawn strong condemnation on human rights grounds but has been defended by Greg Abbott, the state's Republican governor.

Implementation of such language would impose new and unusual due diligence requirements on common land transactions. Meanwhile, creating special restrictions on various immigrant communities to own property poses human rights concerns.

Comment – What this does signal though is continuing support for Ukraine despite some localized voices dissenting from ongoing support.

Putin & Russia

New revelation on Putin's long plan to partition Ukraine - A new revelation about Putin's plan to partition Ukraine was way back in 2010. That was long before Zelensky was elected president of Ukraine in 2019. If accurate, and there's no good reason to doubt it, the report further underscores the utter absurdity of Putin's claim that he invaded in February 2022 to halt Zelensky and company's "Nazification" of Ukraine — an obviously ludicrous pretext strangely swallowed by American defenders of Putin.

Alexander Motyl, a professor of political science at Rutgers University and accomplished academic, specializes in the politics of Russia, Ukraine, and the former USSR. He has published 10 books on topics from empires to nationalism to the horrors of Holodomor, the infamous famine forced upon Ukraine in the 1930s by Stalin. Motyl writes for the publication appropriately titled 19FortyFive, a tumultuous year in history.

In his latest piece, Motyl writes:

“Some people still believe that Russian strongman Vladimir Putin had no intentions to conquer Ukraine when he invaded on February 24, 2022. Sorry to be a spoiler, folks, but there is now concrete evidence of his wanting to partition Ukraine after his puppet Viktor Yanukovych became Ukraine’s president thirteen years ago—in 2010.”

That evidence is a March 13 interview with Oleg Tsarev, who Motyl describes as “an authoritarian par excellence and “rabid admirer of Putin’s fascist regime.” When asked about a Russian scheme to partition Ukraine in 2014, Tsarev offered this information:

“This was discussed much earlier. I’ll tell you something that I’ve never told anyone before. I held in my hands a document developed by analysts of the Party of Regions, which considered the scenario of Yanukovych’s lifelong presidency. It was obvious that by building friendly relations with the Russian Federation it would be realistic to achieve economic growth and raise the standard of living. Two presidential terms, a change in the Constitution, two more terms.... And the only threat to the implementation of these plans was seen as Western Ukraine, which would always undermine the situation throughout the country and do everything to prevent such a scenario from being realized. And then a plan was drawn up according to which Tyahnybok, who received money, including from the cash desk of the Party of Regions, would begin to advocate for the separation of a number of western regions into an autonomous entity that did not support the central government. Well, the central government would have to “reluctantly” agree.”

This is quite a claim, the heart of which needs little elaboration. Professor Motyl adds these personal observations:

Several points need to be made.

“First, Tsarev knows what he is talking about. As a high-ranking member of the Party of Regions and leading advocate of Russia’s plans to seize Crimea and the Donbas, he had access to the kind of document he mentions.

Second, the Party of Regions would not have dared to embark on such a plan without Kremlin approval.

Third, the Party’s plan for dismembering Ukraine would have been Putin’s plan.

Fourth, Tsarev states that Oleh Tyahnybok, head of the right-wing Svoboda party and bogeyman of the Western left, was on the Party’s payroll. So much for Russian claims that Ukraine abounds with homegrown neo-Nazis.”

Of course, none of this is a surprise. Or at least it shouldn’t be.

In his April 2005 annual state of the nation address to the Russian Parliament, broadcast live on Russian television, Putin candidly declared: “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” That spoke volumes. It should continue to speak to those odd-bird Americans who once loathed the USSR but today are borderline Putinists, queerly sympathetic to this brute Russian authoritarian trained by the KGB.

Motyl likewise recalls Putin’s April 2005 speech, but goes a step further, with a disturbing warning:

“Finally, such elaborate plans aren’t developed overnight in the form of a Pauline conversion. Both Yanukovych and his henchmen and Putin and his surely began hatching their schemes many years earlier—no later than 2005, when Putin claimed that the fall of the Soviet Union was the “greatest catastrophe of the 20th century,” and possibly as early as 1999, when Putin assumed control of Russia.”

Is it unrealistic to believe that the Kremlin has prepared similar scenarios for Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan?

And perhaps even for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania?

Perhaps so. And of course, those Baltic states are NATO countries.

The Tsarev revelation dates Putin's partition plan to 2010. He moved against Ukraine in February 2014, seeking the annexation of Crimea. Again, that was long before Zelensky came to power.

Article by Paul Kengor in The American Spectator dated March 14th

A weakened Russia in China's orbit narrows India's geopolitical options in Asia - Chinese president Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow sent a message to the West that China will not abandon Russia and will, in fact, take the friendship to the next level. China turning Russia into its junior partner is bad news for India, which has depended long on the latter for military and diplomatic support.

The process of Russia becoming China's junior partner is well underway. This increasing and obvious Russian dependence on China has direct implications for India in that the political, diplomatic and military support that India was getting until now from Russia will either be diluted or eliminated. Cumulatively, these events and statements foreshadow an increasing Chinese belligerence towards India.

The question is what is India's redundancy plan and can it realistically do anything to stop Russia becoming a Chinese client state? That eventuality would be a geopolitical disaster for India, given the primary aim of its foreign policy since Independence has been to avoid the emergence of a bloc that monopolizes the resources of Asia.

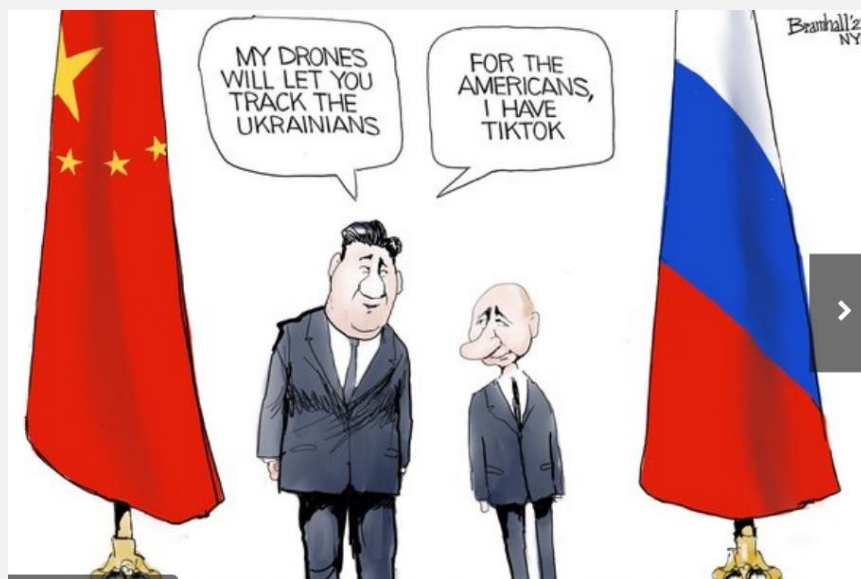
Comment – Should geopolitical implications of the above be adverse to Indian interest, then it is of cardinal interest as to the future of the BRICS Alliance (**B**razil, **R**ussia, **I**ndia, **C**hina, **S**outh Africa).

Of further import and interest is the burgeoning flexing of geopolitical muscle by Saudi Arabia. Is there a clandestine world order move by the Middle Eastern State in line with a narrowing of relations with Russia and China? Is there a move afoot to include the Saudi's in an expanded BRICS – or even a re-configured Alliance, sans India?

Having India fully and completely in the NATO camp obviously bodes well for the west and not so well for BRICS.

China

Update from the latest meeting between Putin and Xi.



Xi just bought himself a headache in Moscow - Xi Jinping's powwow with his Russian counterpart Putin this week was no summit of equals. The Chinese leader returns home in a clearly dominant position, assured that a Russia

weakened by its war of aggression in Ukraine will have to rely on China for trade, technology and diplomatic support for years to come.

Yet, those fretting that Russia's dependence on its autocratic neighbor will strengthen China's efforts to challenge the US-led West should not panic. Chinese leaders will soon discover that keeping their strategic partnership viable and strong will be harder than it looks.

Those prophesying an enduring Sino-Russian alliance should first consider their rocky history, and the factors of discord inherent in asymmetrical relations between two great powers.

Despite today's vastly different circumstances, the geopolitical interests of China and Russia are nearly identical to those of China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s. Then, as now, both powers were bound by their shared fear and resentment of American dominance.

In fact, as formal treaty allies, China and the Soviet Union had deeper and far more extensive security ties than they do today. In February 1950, they signed the "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance."

A decade later, the alliance collapsed in spectacular fashion, with Beijing denouncing Moscow for betraying communism and the Soviet Union reciprocating by ending all economic assistance to China.

To be sure, a key factor responsible for the split - the bad chemistry between Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and China's Mao Zedong - is missing today. The Xi-Putin bromance is often cited as an extra layer of strength in their nations' partnership. While this may be true, an obvious question is what happens to an alliance so reliant on the relationship of two men who might not be around in 10 or 15 years.

More importantly, as illustrated by the Sino-Soviet split, the biggest risk to an alliance of unequal partners is not personality - it's the very unequal nature of the relationship. That imbalance gives the weaker partner surprisingly strong leverage over its supposed patron.

The first area where differences are likely to spill into the open is deciding how confrontational they should be toward the West. Like Mao in the 1950s, Putin has adopted far more aggressive and dangerous tactics than his counterpart. Constrained by China's economic ties to the West and convinced that time is on its side, Xi prefers a longer game.

A weaker partner engaged in direct military confrontation with the West understandably seeks to get the stronger party involved. In 1958, Mao invited Khrushchev to Beijing three weeks before the People's Liberation Army unleashed artillery barrages against offshore islands held by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist troops, creating a military crisis that threatened to embroil the Soviets in a direct conflict with the US.

Mao's sly invitation made it appear that he had the backing of the Soviet Union. Although Khrushchev begrudgingly gave his support after the fact, he was very upset with Mao's recklessness because it undermined his incipient efforts to seek "peaceful co-existence" with the West, a proposition unacceptable to the radical Maoist regime.

Resentment over what each party is contributing to the relationship can also quickly erode ties. Generous Soviet economic assistance helped China build its military-industrial base, while Khrushchev provided China the technologies crucial to its nuclear weapons program.

Still, Mao wanted more (he asked Khrushchev for a prototype nuclear bomb) - and would do little to reciprocate. He rejected Khrushchev's requests to form a joint naval fleet and to set up Soviet communications facilities in China. As today's China and Russia deepen their partnership, similar frictions will surely arise.

A final challenge may be the feeding and care of national egos. Both China and Russia are great powers that jealously guard their sovereignty and self-image. Both are quick to take offense. The more dire Russia's straits, the more sensitive and solicitous Beijing must be to avoid slighting ordinary Russians, many of whom may not have fully

absorbed how much richer and more powerful China has become. Unfortunately, stroking the national egos of weaker powers is not something for which China has shown notable talent.

As Russia is progressively weakened by the war and Western sanctions, Xi can expect requests for help. A partnership of unequal parties can only work if the stronger party is truly willing to support the weaker one with "no limits," as Xi has ostensibly pledged. China need only look to its own troubled ties with North Korea, which has depended on Chinese support for survival since the Korean War, to appreciate how little leverage it will have over Russia.

We do not know if Xi is committed to this course of action. But the meagerness of the economic deals signed during his visit to Moscow - which glaringly omitted the second gas pipeline from Russia to China - indicates that China is not ready to go all in, at least for now. This portends trouble - not bliss - even for this marriage of geopolitical necessity.

Article by Minxin Pei in the New Nation, scheduled for release tomorrow.

Xi snubbed Putin after their summit, calling a meeting of Central Asian countries as part of an audacious power play - China's Xi Jinping has called a meeting of ex-Soviet Central Asian countries, in an audacious power play in Russia's back yard the week of his summit with Russia's President Vladimir Putin.

Xi invited the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the first China-Central Asia summit Wednesday, the AFP news agency reported. (It remains unclear if the reclusive state of Turkmenistan has been invited.)

The states are all former members of the Soviet Union, and Moscow has long regarded them as being in its sphere of influence after the then Russian Empire conquered them in the 19th century.

The move came as Xi was visiting Putin in Moscow as part of a 3-day-summit which concluded Wednesday, in which the nations pledged to deepen and extend their cooperation, and Xi signaled continued Chinese backing for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine.

Analysts say that China has secured significant leverage over Russia in return for its diplomatic and economic support, and that in calling the meeting of Central Asian nations it is seeking to exploit that advantage.

"I'm not sure this China initiative is greeted with enthusiasm in the Kremlin," tweeted Carl Bildt, the co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"I'm also not sure the Kremlin has much they can do about it," replied Ian Bremmer, a political scientist and founder of the Eurasia Group."