

# Conflict Update

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

The mayor of Irpin, near Kyiv, said Ukrainian forces had seized back control of the town - A senior U.S. official said the eastern town of Trostyanets, south of Sumy, was back in Ukrainian hands. Reuters could not confirm the reports.

**Foreigners being forced to enlist for service** - According to Tolkunbek Akmatov, head of the Kyrgyz diaspora organization Nookat in Moscow, some migrants are concerned about rumors that conscript-age men might be forcibly sent to war. As foreign workers lose their jobs because of business contraction, they fear being conscripted into the Russian military.

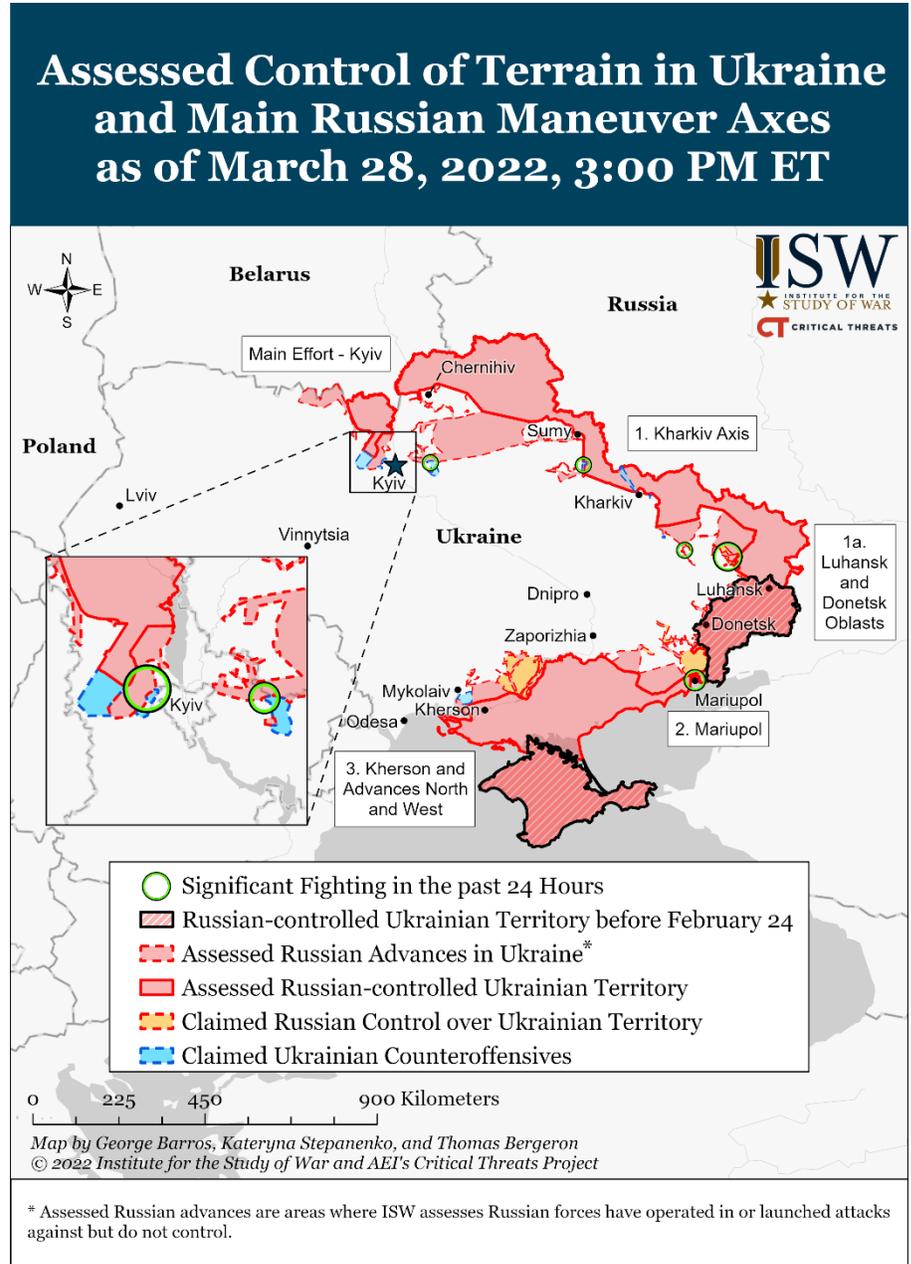
“They want to return to Kyrgyzstan, but the question is what to do in Kyrgyzstan, how to survive there without work,” Akmatov said. “Many migrants are distraught about the current situation.”

According to Russian government figures, there were more than 7.8 million registered migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in 2021.

### **Mariupol Mayor Cites 'Thousands' Dead, Says 'Complete Evacuation' Needed**

The mayor of the besieged strategic city of Mariupol has described a devastated city in which "thousands" have died and around 90 percent of 2,600 residential buildings have been destroyed or damaged in the month-old Russian invasion.

**Russian forces have not abandoned their objective** to encircle and capture Kyiv, despite Kremlin claims that Russian forces will concentrate on eastern Ukraine.



**Ukrainian forces recaptured the Kyiv suburb** of Irpin on March 28. Ukrainian forces will likely seek to take advantage of ongoing Russian force rotations to retake further territory northwest of Kyiv in the coming days.

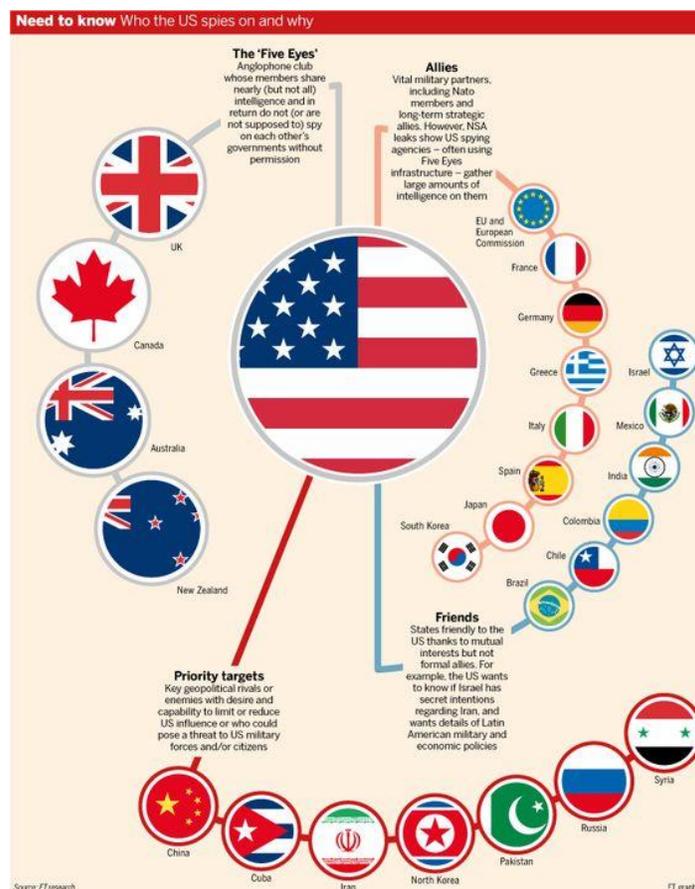
**Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks** toward Brovary and did not conduct offensive operations toward Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv. Russian operations in northeastern Ukraine remain stalled.

**The Ukrainian General Staff stated** that a battalion tactical group (BTG) of the 1st Guards Tank Army fully withdrew from Ukrainian territory near Sumy back to Russia for possible redeployment – the first Ukrainian report of a Russian unit fully withdrawing into Russia for redeployment to another axis of advance in this conflict.

**Russian forces continued** to steadily take territory in Mariupol.

**Ukrainian resistance around Kherson** continues to tie down Russian forces in the area. Russian forces did not conduct any offensive operations in the southern direction.

## Containment



**Royal Navy:** HMS Northumberland and HMS Richmond deliver supplies to NATO in Baltic Sea during Russia's Ukraine invasion. The Royal Navy vessels brought military vehicles and equipment to resupply the UK-led NATO battlegroup in Estonia, an area of 'geographical interest' in the conflict. They also conducted navigation patrols and exercises alongside ships and aircraft from six Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) nations.

The Baltic Sea is of vital strategic importance in ensuring stability and freedom of navigation in the area especially after the war broke out.

**Starstreak missiles for Ukraine** - Ukraine is poised to introduce a new ground-based air defense system to its war against Russia's invasion forces, with the announcement that the British-supplied Starstreak main-portable air defense system, or MANPADS, is "ready to be used imminently." The U.K. Ministry of Defense has confirmed that Ukraine is ready to use the high-velocity missiles in combat against Russian aircraft. The UK will provide an additional 6,000 missiles to Ukraine, in addition to the 4,000 NLAW's and Javelin missiles already supplied, said Boris Johnson, the UK Prime Minister.



The British noted that the missile has the ability to cause "catastrophic" damage to low-flying enemy fighter jets and helicopters, in particular, which have been the main Russian Aerospace Forces assets used in the conflict so far.

Once fielded in combat, the Starstreak will be the latest addition to a growing armory of similar systems used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which we examined in detail in this past feature. However, Starstreak — also known as the **High-Velocity Missile (HVM)** — incorporates several unique features for a weapon of its class and merits further examination.

It emerged earlier this month that the United Kingdom was going to provide Ukraine with an undisclosed number of Starstreaks, when the British Army's Col. Graham Taylor, the commander of 7 Air Defense Group, declared that British troops were being deployed to a secret location somewhere in Eastern Europe to teach Ukrainians how to operate the MANPADS.

While the British Army has stated that only the individual shoulder-launcher variant has been provided to Ukraine, The Times reports that both shoulder-launcher and LML types have been supplied. Either way, both offer characteristics of lightweight and portability that make them suitable for use in urban environments, too.

With invasion forces becoming steadily more bogged down, and with questions over the scope of the Kremlin's campaign, there are also already signs of increasingly desperate tactics employed by the Russian Aerospace Forces to counter Ukraine's existing air defenses. Adding Starstreak onto the battlefield will only make this an even more hazardous operating environment for Russian airpower.

## Peace Talks

**Abramovich Suffers Suspected Poisoning Along With Ukraine Peace Negotiators** - Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich has suffered suspected poisoning along with Ukraine peace negotiators earlier this month, according to reports. The Russian held talks with Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian leader Vladimir Putin in a mediator role, it was previously revealed. And now, according to Wall Street Journal's Max Colchester, Abramovich was showing symptoms of poisoning after a meeting in Kyiv earlier in the month.

Abramovich and at least two senior members of the Ukrainian team developed symptoms including red eyes, constant and painful tearing, and peeling skin on their faces and hands after a meeting in Kyiv earlier this month.

Their conditions have improved, and their lives aren't in danger, and it is unclear as to what caused the symptoms.

**Ukraine and Russia** are preparing for the first face-to-face peace talks in more than two weeks, but a senior U.S. official said Russian President Vladimir Putin does not appear ready to make compromises to end the war. There are no signs on the ground that Russia has given up a plan to surround Kyiv, Ukraine's defense ministry said.

Zelenskyy spoke with Russian media outlets, saying that his country is open to guaranteeing Ukraine's neutrality and its nuclear-free status, but its representatives will not sign any agreement until Russian troops withdraw from the country. The Ukrainian president also said that the entire process hinges on him personally meeting with Putin and the Ukrainian people agreeing to a referendum to change the Constitution – a referendum that cannot take place while Russian troops remain in Ukraine.

**Army boss raises partition fears:** Ukraine's military intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, has warned that Russia is trying to apply what he called the "Korean scenario" to Ukraine, having failed to take the capital and depose the legitimate government.

He said Russian President Vladimir Putin would try to impose a demarcation line separating the eastern and southern regions from the rest of Ukraine, since he would not be able to absorb the whole country.

Gen Budanov predicted this quasi-state would be unviable, given the resistance of the local population. He said that what he described as a "total Ukrainian guerrilla safari" was about to open.

**No one in Russia is thinking about using nuclear weapons, Kremlin spokesman says** - No one in Russia is considering the idea of using nuclear weapons, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told PBS.

The interviewer asked whether Russian President Vladimir Putin had suggested in his earlier statement that he would use nuclear weapons if a third party got involved in the conflict in Ukraine and Peskov said 'no.' "I don't think so. But he was quite bold in saying 'do not interfere, if you do, we have all the possibilities to prevent that and to punish all those who are going to interfere,'" he specified.

When asked if he could rule out the use of nuclear weapons in the conflict on behalf of Russia, the Kremlin spokesman said: "No one is thinking about using... even about the idea of using nuclear weapons." (As reported by TASS).

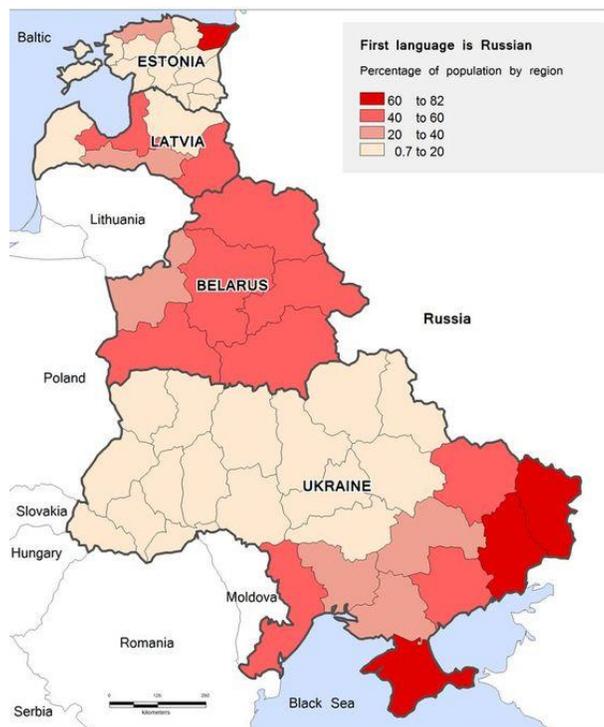
**Putin Taking Over Donbas From Ukraine Could Cost Russia Over \$20 Billion** - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Sunday his country would be willing to declare neutrality and compromise on the status of the contested Donbas region to achieve peace with Russia. Should the offer play out, though, Russian President Vladimir Putin may find rebuilding the region could cost him up to \$20 billion or more.

## Widening of Conflict

As mentioned in yesterday's Update, language and culture is uppermost in Putin and his hard-liners' minds.

Viewing the map alongside, one can see the ripe terrain for a Russian intrusion and interference in neighboring countries' internal affairs.

When Ukrainian politicians and spokespeople talk about Putin not



stopping at Ukraine's borders, but venturing further afield, one can see the attraction for Russia to adopt a similar vein of attack as witnessed in the Dombas area on south-eastern Ukraine.

Belarus is already within Russia's orbit, but Latvia is not and has a high density of Russian-speaking folk in the south-east of its terrain.

Lithuania appears safe in this respect having a higher density of Poles than Russians.

These countries formed part of the historical Prussian Empire as few centuries ago.

**Russia will have to retaliate to expulsion of diplomats from North Macedonia — diplomat** - The expulsion of five diplomats of the Russian Embassy to North Macedonia continues an unfriendly policy of this country's leadership, that once again confirmed Skopje's readiness to sacrifice its sovereignty and national interests. Russia will have to retaliate, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova wrote in a commentary on Monday. (TASS).

**Transnistria** - Talks on the Transnistrian settlement are at a standstill because Moldova's authorities are not ready for a constructive dialogue, Vitaly Ignatyev, Foreign Minister of the unrecognized republic of Transnistria, said on Monday after his last week's meeting with OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau.

"The Moldovan side should revise its attitude to the talks and to the relations with Transnistria. It should stop blocking actions, stop incurring damage on Transnistria's economic agents and citizens and become a responsible participant in the talks. If Chisinau finally sees it, the situation will change for the better," Ignatyev, who leads the Transnistrian delegation to the talks, said in an interview with the First Transnistrian television channel.

The Moldovan side "is not ready settle problems in a constructive way," he said, adding that this is why the process has made no progress over 32 years. "To reach the result, it is necessary to work out actions that will make it possible to really resolve problems rather than indulge in dialogue for 32 years more," he stressed. (TASS).

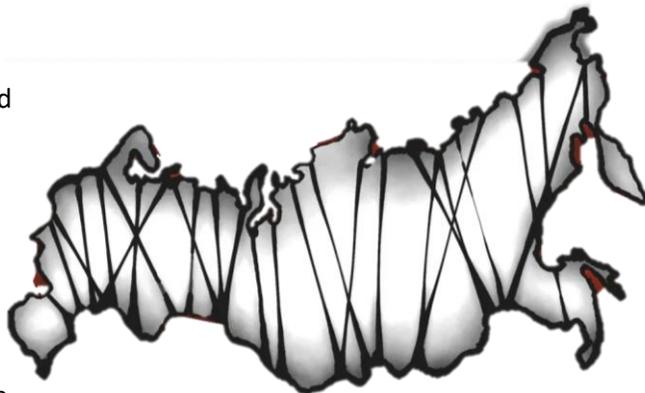
Watch this space, we reported on the Moldovan attraction for Putin regarding the Russian-speaking population of Transnistria, Moldova's eastern border territory where Russian "peacekeepers" have been present since 1992.

### **Vladimir Pastukhov. Operation "Russian Chromosome" - Three sources, three components of Putinism**

Nothing comes out of nowhere. The new paranormality is not a product of Putin's imagination. The mythology of the "special operation" is not a creative product of either Putin himself or his administration. It came to the Kremlin from outside, was reflected in the looking glass of Russian post-communist power, and returned back to the external environment, from where it came, as a concept of the "Russian world," similar to sturgeon, not even of the second, but of the third freshness.

This rather flat world still stands on three Russian pillars:

- Orthodox fundamentalism,
- Slavophilism
- Stalinism (a radical version of Russian Bolshevism).



We are by no means the first generation that is puzzled by the question of what is going on in the skull of the Kremlin elders. (As translated from Russian in Nezavisimaya Gazeta).

**Russia outlines four reasons it would use nuclear weapons** - Dmitry Medvedev, the ex-Russian prime minister and president who is now deputy chairman of the country's security council, warned this weekend that Russia could turn to its nuclear arsenal against a country which used conventional weapons.

Medvedev told the Guardian that Russia's nuclear doctrine would not require an enemy state to fire first and listed four scenarios in which Russia would launch their nuclear arsenal:

- If Russia was struck by a nuclear missile.
- If any other nuclear weapons were used against Russia or its allies.
- An attack on "critical infrastructure" which paralyses its nuclear deterrents.
- If an act of aggression is committed against Russia and its allies that jeopardizes the existence of the country itself.

## Sanctions

**UIC suspends cooperation with Russian and Belarusian members** - The international rail association UIC has suspended cooperation with its Russian and Belarusian (Belarusian) members. The organization says this suspension will remain in force until peace is restored in Ukraine.

**Brewing giants Carlsberg and Heineken** said they would quit Russia, joining an exodus of Western companies.

## Financial

**Steel prices increase against backdrop of Russia's war in Ukraine** - While the price of gold and oil have been on the rise since Russia invaded Ukraine, so too has steel, a commodity that is used in almost every facet of manufacturing.

**Russia** is working out methods for accepting payments for its gas exports in rubles and it will take decisions in due course should European countries refuse to pay in the Russian currency, the Kremlin said.

**Ukrainian infrastructural damage** - Russia's invasion has so far cost Ukraine \$564.9 billion in terms of damage to infrastructure, lost economic growth and other factors, Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

**Russian stocks slide as trading resumes for all companies** - Russian shares slumped as its stock market resumed trading of all companies Monday after a monthlong halt following the invasion of Ukraine.

The benchmark MOEX index slid 2.2% after the Moscow Exchange reopened for all of its several hundred listed companies, but with restrictions still in place to limit volatility. State-owned energy giant Gazprom fell 3.7%, while airline Aeroflot was up 3%.

## Impacts

**NATO involvement in Russian invasion of Ukraine could trigger cyberattack against US healthcare industry**

The healthcare industry could become the target of Russian cyberattacks if NATO becomes involved in the war in Ukraine, Politico reported March 27.

**Aussies launch Space Command, space strategy; upgrade northern base** - Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton today announced the formal creation of the country's Defense Space Command, the formal launch of a new

Space Strategy, and millions of dollars of investment in an aging military base — the next wave in a flurry of announcements from the incumbent Liberal party as it gets closer to election day.

That matters because Australia, long one of the **Five Eyes** countries that share and use the most sensitive intelligence with the **US, Canada, UK and New Zealand**, has apparently been granted even closer access to US intelligence, namely with the builder and operator of America's spy satellites, the National Reconnaissance Office.

**Finland suspends rail freight traffic with Russia** - VR Transpoint, the logistics branch of VR Group, suspended rail freight traffic to and from Russia on Sunday, 27 March. VR Group is Finland's government-owned railway company. The stoppage is in force since Sunday noon and is a result of the sanctions on Russia.

**Central Asian Migrants Losing Work As Russian Businesses Downsize Or Close** – many Asian migrant laborers in Russia are being sent home as businesses close of contract and they fear that it will only get worse for migrants, because many newly unemployed Russians “might soon start looking for jobs they didn't want before, the jobs that were too low or too [labor intensive] for them.”

“If the war goes on for a few more months, Russians will have no choice; they'll be less picky and take any job to survive,.” “There will be even less work left for us migrants.” Many domestic companies had to scale back their business, with airports being hit the hardest.

Sheremetyevo -- Russia's busiest airport -- saw its passenger traffic decrease significantly, forcing the company to close two of its four international terminals and suspend one of its runways in mid-March, state media said.

**Nigeria exploits anti-Moscow sentiment** as oil giant offers to replace Russian gas in UK and Europe - Nigeria has said it is ready and prepared to provide the UK and Europe with much more gas than it currently does in order to offer an alternative to Russian gas, according to a government minister.

Nigeria's Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, told various media across Africa his country is ready to offer its services as an alternative gas supplier to Britain and Europe.

Sylva urged the European Union to increase investments in gas and hydrocarbon in Nigeria so the country will be able to meet Europe's energy needs.

**SA gets cold shoulder over efforts to mediate in Ukraine** - President Cyril Ramaphosa is still awaiting an official phone call from his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, more than 10 days after sending a request to the war-torn country to speak about SA's possible mediation efforts.

The apparent snub by the Ukrainian leader seems to raise fresh questions about SA's rationale for its controversial abstention on the March 3 UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. SA said it wanted to stay neutral because it had been asked by a third country to assist in mediating the conflict.

**Russia says US declared 'total war' on it** - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday that the U.S. and other western nations have declared “total war” against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. “A real hybrid war, total war was declared on us,” Lavrov said, as the Associated Press reported.

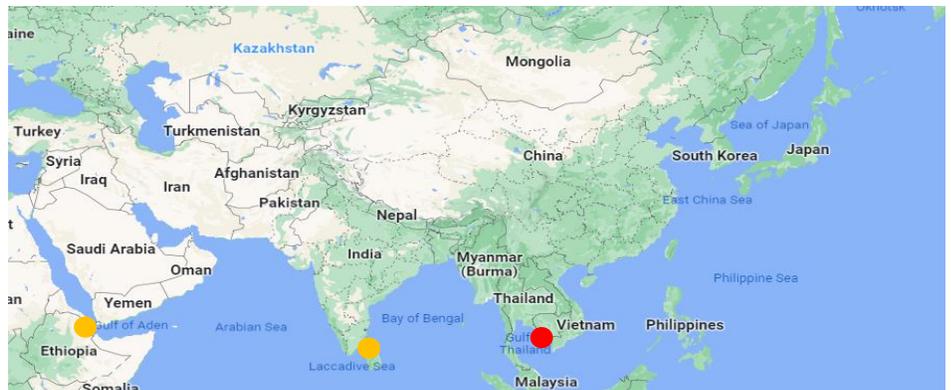
Hybrid warfare refers to the use of both conventional and unconventional means of attacking an opponent, for example attacking an opponent with traditional weapons like missiles and artillery as well as hacking an opponent's communications. Total warfare refers to warfare that treats the entirety of an opponent state, including its civilian population, as legitimate targets of military action. Lavrov's remarks raise concerns Russia might lash out if it feels war has been inflicted on it. Lavrov and other Russian officials have previously warned that Russia would treat suspected shipments of weapons to Ukraine as legitimate targets for its forces to attack.

## Future Alignments

**Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida must see an opportunity.** In his visits, first to India and later to Cambodia, Kishida has played the role of relationship builder and norm enforcer, asking both Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to heel on both demanding an end to Russian aggression in Ukraine, and asking Cambodia to support Ukrainian sovereignty as well.

Tokyo's diplomacy over the past week has put Cambodia, which holds the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN this year, center stage. And it worked. Japan's pleas to Cambodia resulted in a joint statement condemning Russian aggression, calling for "an immediate stop of the use of force and the withdrawal of the military forces from the territory of Ukraine."

But Ukraine, arguably, wasn't Kishida's biggest concern. It's always been about China for Japan, whose aggression in the Indo-Pacific region has rattled Quad allies and regional partners, (QUAD is US/Japan/Australia/India). Japan and the United States have worried about the ongoing construction at Ream Naval Base at Sihanoukville. Concerns center around the construction of facilities that aid a permanent Chinese military presence in Cambodia. In 2019, Cambodia allegedly signed a secret treaty that granted the Chinese navy the use of the Ream base for as long as 30 years. The United States last year imposed sanctions on Cambodian senior military officials for supposed corruption involving Chinese companies, claiming they conspired to "inflate the cost of facilities [at Ream Naval Base] and personally benefit from the proceeds." Washington has raised alarms about Chinese activities at Ream for many months.



In the past, Cambodia has acted as a proxy for China within ASEAN, blocking agreements on maritime disputes in the South China Sea, and defending Beijing as a reliable regional partner. Japanese concerns, however, seem to have been heard. Referring to the map above, the **red** dot indicates the Sihanoukville, the two **orange** dots indicating existing Chinese ports in Sri Lanka and Djibouti.

**A weakened Russia is China's windfall** - Taiwan can wait. So too, the South China Sea and Central Asia.

China could be looking at a much bigger, unexpected prize in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's disastrous decision to invade Ukraine on February 24.

While politicians and analysts worry that China might take advantage of the Ukraine war to seize Taiwan, they should consider Beijing's potential windfall from the political and economic collapse of its closest international partner.

Already, China has been served up a rich offering of Russia's distressed companies and trade-sanctioned oil, gas, coal, gold, industrial metals, and food commodities suddenly made illegal to most other countries on the world markets.

At a time of record food prices, US\$100 oil, and raging global inflation, China has been gifted access to this bounty of discounted resources, courtesy of Russia's self-inflicted crisis and the unprecedented level of sanctions imposed on its economy by the West. (India, the other major beneficiary, has already picked up a cargo of Russia's Urals crude at a discount of 20% in defiance of Western sentiments and sanctions.)

The Russians are also pumping hard cash into China's slowing economy. Cut off from the global banking system, desperate Russian companies and individuals are rushing to open accounts with Chinese financial institutions. The capital flight and transfer of wealth from Russia into the world's second-largest economy are likely to be substantial and possibly sustained.

But why stop at appetizers? On the horizon are the prospects for China to try to "reclaim" vast disputed resource-rich territories from a crumbling Russia, expand its regional influence at Moscow's expense, repair frayed ties (on its own terms) with the West, and even reshape the global financial system by establishing new mechanisms to blunt the economic and financial threats of US sanctions. These are far better than anything Beijing could have imagined just weeks ago.

The longer the war drags on, the greater Beijing's influence will likely be on the world stage. China's role as a mediator will eventually come into focus given its position as the only major power now with friendly access to an isolated nuclear-armed Russia.

As feared by the United States and the European Union, China will not rule out helping Russia, especially if Moscow needs fresh supplies of weaponry and other essentials to ward off defeat on the battlefield. At the same time, Beijing will want to limit the damage, specifically to prevent Putin from resorting to nuclear, chemical or biological warfare to claim any sort of victory.

China will not want either a Russia vanquished by the West or one that will be emboldened by victory in Ukraine.

In Beijing's calculus, a protracted, stalemated conflict will weaken Russia, paralyze Europe, lock down the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and expose America's lack of options and confidence while enhancing its own leverage against both Moscow and the West.

Just as the United States' "global war on terror" preoccupied the Bush and Barack Obama presidencies, China will want the conflict to bog down President Joe Biden's administration on European soil. If it turns into a dangerous stalemate, the US and NATO will struggle to affect their intended pivot to Asia.