

Conflict Update # 154

August 17th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 44,100 soldiers killed and 133,000 injured, 1,886(+6) enemy tanks, 4,162 (+10) armored combat vehicles, 993 (+4) artillery systems, 263 (+0) anti-aircraft missile systems, 136 (+0) air defense systems, 233 (+0) warplanes, 196 (+0) helicopters, 792 (+2) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 190 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,054 (+5) trucks and tankers, and 93 (+1) units of specialized equipment.

Russian troops suffer 'biggest and hardest losses since WW2' in Crimea

Putin was left red-faced as Russian forces in occupied Crimea are suffering massive losses not seen since World War 2, a Ukrainian official claims.

Ukrainian forces appeared to carry out a devastating blow to Vladimir Putin's forces in Crimea – a region annexed by Russia in 2014 – as they are making significant advances into the peninsula. A series of explosions and fires have turned the until now the relatively safe Crimean Peninsula into a new battleground. Nine Russian warplanes were reportedly obliterated at an air base and an ammunition depot blew up on Tuesday.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine



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

Note: Map shows control areas as of August 9, 2022.

Bloomberg

Ukraine admits it was behind three explosions in Crimea - Ukraine was behind three explosions rocked Russian military facilities in the annexed province of Crimea this past week, including an explosion at a Russian air base on the peninsula's west coast that wrecked several airplanes, according to a Ukrainian government report circulated internally and shared with CNN by a Ukrainian official.

The official requested anonymity because they were not authorized to share the information with the media.

The report describes the Saki airbase, which was rocked by explosions last Tuesday, as a hard but one time loss for Russian military infrastructure in the peninsula, with subsequent attacks as proof of Ukraine's systematic military capability in targeting Crimea.

In a potential sign of more attacks to come, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called on Ukrainians living in Crimea to steer clear of Russian military bases after three strikes were carried out in the past week.

"Do not approach the military objects of the Russian army," he said in his latest video address, adding that they might also explode because of "bungling".

"Russian commanders will highly likely be increasingly concerned with the apparent deterioration in security across Crimea, which functions as rear base area for the occupation," Britain's Defence Ministry wrote on Twitter.

Mr Honcharenko said it was important to "show that Russia is not able to defend the territory of Ukraine" to gain the upper hand in the region.



Ukraine braced for imminent 'enemy greeting' in form of massive Belarus missile strike - Air Force Command spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said Ukraine is constantly monitoring troop and ammunition movements in neighboring Belarus over fears of an attack. He warned the threat from Belarus has "not disappeared" amid reports Russian forces are massing missile launchers, particularly Iskander-type ballistic missiles, in the landlocked country.

Ihnat said Ukraine must be prepared for all circumstances and not "neglect" any signals.

He also pinpointed a day when Ukraine should be prepared for possible attacks.

He said: "We have Independence Day soon. "The enemy uses such dates for 'greetings,' so we should be ready for it, not neglect any signals. "The threat has not disappeared."

Ihnat added: "We constantly observe the movement of Russian troops in the territory of Belarus, as well as the transportation of ammunition, Iskander and other types of missiles.

Dramatic moment 'six of Putin's commanders and five soldiers are blown up in vehicle ambush' - in region where Russian female commander who 'enjoyed killing Ukrainians' was killed by missile.

Dramatic footage captured how a two-vehicle convoy - said to be carrying the Russian top brass back from a meeting - were struck by anti-tank missiles.

Footage, thought to have been captured on the Donbas frontline near Avdiivka, shows how the lead vehicle was blown to smithereens before the second rolled over.

The video was posted online Friday by Anatonly Shtefan, who is a colonel in the Ukrainian armed forces.

Shtefan, who goes by the online moniker 'Stirlitz', said the strike was carried out on an undisclosed date by troops from the 56th brigade - thought to refer to the 56th Motorized Brigade.

According to Ukraine's ministry of defence, the 56th Motor is currently in action around Avdiivka, located a few miles north of the Russian-held city of Donetsk.

The 56th used to be based in Mariupol until the city fell to Russian forces in May.

Shtefan wrote: 'The Russian commanders were on their way back from a meeting.

'This time, our glorious soldiers were waiting for them.

'Six Russian commanders and five soldiers were official de-Nazified and demilitarized [killed.] Glory to Ukraine!'

It comes after Lieutenant Colonel Olga 'Kursa' Kachura, 52, who was Ukrainian-born but fought for Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine's east, was reported killed.

HIMARS - Ukrainian defence minister Oleksii Reznikov has said that, contrary to Russian claims, Ukraine has not lost any of the HIMARS rocket launchers provided to it by the US. Since the start of the conflict, Ukraine has received at least 20 of the US-made launchers, and has used them to attack Russian ammunition depots, command posts, and air defences. Russia has repeatedly claimed to have destroyed a number of the systems.

At least 12 Russians killed in strike on Nova Kakhovka base, says Ukraine - At least 12 Russians have been killed in a strike on a base in the occupied city of Nova Kakhovka, according to the Ukrainian military.

Ukrainian President Zelenskiy has told Ukrainians living in Crimea to avoid Russia military bases following the strikes. "Do not approach the military objects of the Russian army," he said in his latest video address, adding that they might also explode because of "bungling."

Russia's Black Sea fleet falters - Russia's Black Sea fleet is "struggling to exercise effective sea control," the British Defense Ministry said in an assessment released Tuesday. The fleet continues to use long-range cruise missiles to support ground offensives but has been less effective because of the loss of its flagship – the now-sunken Moskva – a significant portion of its naval aviation combat jets and control of Snake Island, the assessment says.

The losses undermine Russia's overall invasion strategy, in part because the amphibious threat to the crucial Ukraine port of Odesa has now been largely neutralized, the assessment says: "This means Ukraine can divert resources to press Russian ground forces elsewhere."

Russia blames sabotage for 'state of emergency' in Crimea, sees 'no need' for nuclear weapons in Ukraine: Live updates - Massive explosions and fires ripped through Crimea on Tuesday, forcing 3,000 residents to flee their homes as the war in Ukraine appears to be spreading to the peninsula occupied by Russia since 2014. Officials said two people were injured.

The Russian Defense Ministry blamed "sabotage" for explosions at a military warehouse near Dzhankoya. Power lines, a power plant, a railway track and several residential buildings were damaged, the ministry said in a statement obtained by the Russian news outlet Kommersant. The explosions were described as a diversion.

Another fire was reported at a power substation, but officials did not indicate whether it was related to the ammunition blasts. "We are in a state of emergency," said Sergey Aksenov, the Russian leader of the Crimean administration.

Ukraine presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak did not say the country claimed responsibility for the blasts but tweeted: "Crimea of normal country is about the Black Sea, mountains, recreation and tourism, but Crimea occupied by Russians is about warehouses explosions and high risk of death for invaders and thieves."

Putin has described Crimea as a "sacred place." The deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, warned last month that attacks on the peninsula could result in a "doomsday, very quick and tough, immediately."

Russia doesn't need to rely on nuclear weapons to achieve its objectives in Ukraine, said Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, contending that his country's battlefield progress has dispelled the notion that the West can supply Ukraine with "superweapons" capable of radically altering the war's outcome.

"From a military point of view, there is no need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine to achieve the set goals," Shoigu said. "Claims that chemical weapons could be used in Ukraine are also absurd."

In occupied southern Ukraine, the mayor of the city of Melitopol said explosions were heard near a Russian command centre. Ivan Fedorov said that a "loud explosion rang out near the enemy's lair" in the centre of the city.

Ukraine aiming to create chaos within Russian forces, Zelenskiy adviser says - Ukraine is engaged in a counteroffensive aimed at creating "chaos within Russian forces" by striking at the invaders' supply lines deep into occupied territories, according to a key adviser to the president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Mykhailo Podolyak told the Guardian there could be more attacks in the "next two or three months" similar to Tuesday's mysterious strikes on a railway junction and an airbase in Crimea, as well as last week's hit on Russian warplanes at the peninsula's Saky aerodrome.

Russia said a fire on Tuesday had set off explosions at a munitions depot in the Dzhankoi district of Crimea – an incident that Podolyak said was a reminder that "Crimea occupied by Russians is about warehouse explosions and high risk of death for invaders and thieves."

Ukraine has not claimed responsibility for the attacks. They have prompted Russian tourists to flee Crimea in panic. There were queues on Tuesday outside the railway station at the regional capital, Simferopol.

The defence ministry in Moscow said it was dealing with cases of sabotage and taking "necessary measures" to prevent further episodes.

Speaking from the presidential offices in Kyiv, Podolyak said: "Our strategy is to destroy the logistics, the supply lines and the ammunition depots and other objects of military infrastructure. It's creating a chaos within their own forces."

The adviser, often described as the country's third most powerful figure, said Kyiv's approach ran counter to Moscow's use of blunt artillery power to gain territory in the Donbas region to the east, which has seen Russian troops destroy cities such as Mariupol and Sievierodonetsk in order to gain territory.

"So Russia has kind of taught everybody that a counteroffensive requires huge amounts of manpower like a giant fist and just go in one direction," he said, but "a Ukrainian counteroffensive looks very different. We don't use the tactics of the 60s and 70s of the last century."

Russia pounds Kharkiv region with fresh air and artillery strikes - Russian forces pounded civilian settlements in the Kharkiv area while attempting to advance in the eastern Donetsk region, Ukraine's military said on August 17, as Russia blamed sabotage for explosions at one of its military bases in Moscow-annexed Crimea amid hints by Kyiv that it was responsible for the incident.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said Russian forces carried out air and artillery strikes near Stariy Saltiv and Mospanove in the Kharkiv region, adding that the Russians were conducting an offensive near Lebyazhe and Bazaliyivka, where the fighting continues.

Humanitarian

More than 1,350 bodies of Ukrainian civilians killed by Russian occupiers have been found in the Kyiv region, regional Police Chief Andrii Niebytov said.

Sanctions

European Coal Prices Jump to Record - European coal prices, which have risen more than threefold this year, surged to a record as Russian cuts in gas supply boost demand to help prevent blackouts. Benchmark futures for next year rose as much as 4.9% to \$307 per metric ton on the ICE Futures Europe exchange.

While coal's revival is hampering efforts to cut pollution, it underscores the critical energy situation in Europe, with limited gas supplies, France's nuclear plants operating at half capacity, rivers running dry and a lack of wind.

Russia Struggles to Ship Record Harvest - Analysts have progressively raised estimates for Russia's wheat harvest as yields were buoyed by good weather, with the crop expected to reach an all-time high, but sales so far are running well behind the norm.

Russian wheat exports in July and August are estimated at 5.8 million tons, a "painfully slow" rate and 28% behind last year, according to research firm SovEcon. The invasion of Ukraine hasn't triggered sanctions on food and agriculture, but has fostered logistical and financial constraints, with some banks and shipping companies opting to shun the region.

NATO

Scholz confident Sweden's NATO membership 'will now progress very quickly' - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Tuesday that he expected rapid progress on Finland and Sweden's NATO accession bids.

Asked in Sweden whether he expected continued resistance from Turkey on Stockholm's bid to join NATO, Scholz said "I have great confidence that it will now progress very quickly."

He said he expected every NATO member still to ratify the Nordic countries' bids "to do so soon, including Turkey."

"In Finland and Sweden, we are gaining two valued allies, who will strengthen NATO's defensive capabilities and therefore our collective security," Scholz said in Stockholm alongside the country's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson.

China

China to join Russia military exercises as US rivals deepen ties - China's People's Liberation Army said it is set to join military exercises led by Russia in the latest demonstration of partnership between the two U.S. rivals.

Building on a “no limits” pact their presidents signed this year, the Russian and Chinese militaries are expected to drill side-by-side starting later this month in the Russian Far East, according to China’s Ministry of Defense. The exercises will mark their second joint show of force in the region this year after bombers from each country in May conducted a 13-hour drill close enough to Japan and South Korea that those nations scrambled jet fighters, at a time when President Biden was visiting Tokyo.

A Russia specialist at Georgetown University, Angela Stent, said the exercises are likely to be scrutinized for signs of Russia’s fighting capability considering its troubles prosecuting the Ukraine war. “The message will be, we have been criticized and sanctioned by the West, but we have a range of other countries that are partners. We are not isolated,” she said, noting that position will be enhanced by the participation of both China and India.

Putin

Putin’s next miscalculation: Russia’s readiness for a long war - As Russian aggression against Ukraine approaches the half-year mark and combat operations appear to be at a standstill, a new calculus has been developed in the Kremlin: A long war suits Moscow’s interests and can eventually be won. This self-serving proposition follows the failure of two previous war plans: a quick and total victory by several offensives of armored columns and a conquest of Donbas and southern Ukraine by an irresistible push of replenished battalions behind massive artillery barrages. A fiasco with the long-war vision might take more time to become apparent, but it will be shaped by the same basic miscalculations of Ukraine’s capacity for withstanding brutal attacks, Western commitment to support this costly struggle, the strength of Russia’s sanctions-resilient economy and the irreducible public readiness to follow the course set by Putin.

Ukraine comes first in Putin’s compendium of delusions, and it is certainly not interested in a protracted war that prolongs the suffering of its people. As such, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy’s war plan aims to liberate the occupied territories in the shortest amount of time possible. Still, he is not rushing his generals, and the promised counteroffensive has been carefully prepared by targeted strikes on Russian ammunition depots and command centers, as well as by the US-supplied M142 HIMARS artillery rocket system, which has been used far more effectively than most Western experts and Russian command had expected (RussianCouncil.ru, August 5). The Russian General Staff has used the relative lull in battles for moving reinforcements to the south, following Putin’s order to ensure control over Kherson. However, this redeployment leaves more battalions trapped on the west side of the Dnipro River, with three bridges under constant missile strikes (Novayagazeta.eu, August 11). Several explosions at the Saki airbase in Crimea on August 9 were officially declared an accidental detonation, and the Russian media only reports this implausible version. Nevertheless, it is clear that the damage to Russian troops’ spirit and public morale was perhaps greater than the reportedly dozen of destroyed combat planes (Meduza, August 11).

The Kremlin’s hopes about the erosion of Western solidarity with Ukraine have been rekindled by the spike in the US-China conflict centered on Taiwan, but, in reality, these sentiments are primarily pinned on the reluctance of European allies to pay the costs of a long war (Svoboda.org, August 10). The cuts in Russian gas supplies to Europe are aimed at fueling this discontent, but Moscow has been ignorant to the acceleration of the “green” energy transition in the European Union caused by the urgent need to manage the unfolding economic crisis (The Insider, August 12). Germany remains the main target of Russian gas pressure and political maneuvering, but Putin’s understanding of this major European power is badly out of date, as Berlin’s resolve to stand with Ukraine against cruel aggression has been seriously underestimated in Moscow (Kommersant FM, August 11). Russian diplomacy aims at weakening this resolve by feigning readiness for peace talks and had expected the grain deal negotiated by Turkey to restore the Kremlin’s trustworthiness, but provocations at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant produce far more convincing evidence to the contrary (Svoboda.org, August 12).

Government experts are careful not to offend the misperceptions of the strength of Russia's economy prevalent in the Kremlin, thus their multivariate forecasts outline only moderate recessions in 2022 and 2023, promising a strong rebound later (Kommersant, August 12; Rosbalt, August 11). Publication of official statistics has been severely curtailed, but one bit of data that was observed last week covered the large expansion of the state budget deficit caused by a sharp decline in income, even from the oil-and-gas sector, and a massive increase in state expenditures, clearly caused by the war, which have been duly hidden (Rbc.ru, August 12; Bfm.ru, August 12). Russian oil exports are sustained only by heavy discounts on the Urals reserves, and the progressing decline of production makes it quite impossible to deliver the agreed upon quota with Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members (Kommersant, August 10). Putin's instructions on reorienting energy exports to the East are not disputed, but it is abundantly clear for practitioners that China will not finance the construction of new pipelines (The Bell, August 8).

Russia has been gradually transformed and increasingly traumatized by what it still officially describes as a "special military operation," which no amount of propaganda can paint as proceeding according to Putin's plans. Yet, he cannot possibly admit the flaws in the grand vision of Russia's rise under his leadership but has to concede that even he has realized that it will take more time for Ukraine to collapse and for the West to crumble. Time, however, is not on the Russian premier's side, and Ukraine is set to prove it, despite the terrible price it pays for resisting and rolling back Russian aggression. The ultimate proof of folly of autocratic self-delusion can, nevertheless, only come from inside Russia, which needs to reinvent and reconstitute itself as a responsible state. It is so patently unprepared for a long war that an inevitable defeat looms large. Indeed, defeat could create space for much-needed reforms, but it might also sap the energy necessary for them. A defeated Russia will have a chance to emerge victorious in self-revival, but the road will be difficult, and the risks will be grave.

Russia's panicked confession: this is what scares us most - In a recent interview with Russian state media outlet TASS, the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's North American Department, Aleksandr Darichev, said that in the event the U.S. designates Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, it would represent "a point of no return" in relations between the two countries. Speaking on behalf of the country that ruthlessly invaded its smaller neighbor and is continually being accused of human rights violations and serious war crimes, Darichev shamelessly claimed on Saturday that the West, led by the United States, "has trampled upon international law and absolute taboos in diplomatic practice."

Appearing on the state TV show Sunday Evening With Vladimir Solovyov a day later, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova raged against the possibility of such a designation, claiming that these plans were caused by failure on the part of the U.S. to isolate Russia from the rest of the world. Zakharova derided the level of competency of the US officials, questioning whether they even know how to read, since Moscow has repeatedly warned Washington of the "consequences" should the U.S. label Russia a sponsor of terror.

Two weeks ago, Andrey Sidorov, deputy dean of world politics at Moscow State University, explained why Moscow is so apoplectic about being labeled the sponsor of terrorism: "Regarding the declaration of Russia as a sponsor of terrorism—they will most likely pass this legislation. Unquestionably, all the sanctions they can impose against us are already in place. That's not the scary part. What's going to hurt is that the families harmed by the country that is a sponsor of terrorism have the right to file claims in American courts. Masses of Ukrainian citizens will be able to file suits. Where will the resources come from to pay out these claims?"

Referring to \$300 billion out of the \$640 billion that Russia had in its gold and forex reserves, which have been frozen by Western sanctions, host Vladimir Solovyov opined: "They're looking for the way to grab our \$300 billion." Sidorov agreed: "They'll take that \$300 billion pursuant to court orders."

Russian experts openly cherish the idea of taking Ukraine's vast mineral and energy resources, which they predict will boost Russia's failing economy. In addition to stealing Ukraine's riches, pro-Putin propagandists have been openly hoping

to get their seized funds and properties back—even threatening nuclear strikes in order to secure their release. The prospect of losing these billions for good is infinitely more worrisome than any label Putin’s regime so richly deserves.

Solovyov, twice honored by President Vladimir Putin for his services to the Fatherland, proposed a solution: forcefully turning all Ukrainians into Russian citizens after taking over Ukraine in its entirety. While Russia’s genocidal objectives with respect to the neighboring country were obvious from the start, Moscow’s mouthpieces are now attempting to blame the West for their destruction of Ukraine.

Speaking of Ukrainian victims of Russian aggression, Solovyov said: “These families should not have the opportunity to file lawsuits in a court of law. They should become Russian citizens and the nation of Ukraine should completely disappear.” Earlier in August, appearing on the state TV show 60 Minutes, military expert Igor Korotchenko conceded that Russia wants to erase Ukraine off the map, because “it never really existed in the first place,” is perceived to be “anti-Russia” and therefore has no right to exist.

Putin claims Russia's weapons are 'decades ahead' of Western counterparts - Putin has boasted of Russia's "high-precision weapons", saying Moscow is ready to sell them to global allies as the war in Ukraine stretches into its sixth month. The Russian president spoke at an arms show just outside of Moscow, using the appearance to insist Moscow's weaponry is ahead of their enemies.

Putin said Russia is "is ready to offer partners and allies the most modern types of weapons - from small arms to armored vehicles and artillery, combat aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles".

Putin added Russia could offer new models and systems, saying: "We are talking about high-precision weapons and robotics, about combat systems based on new physical principles.

"Many of them are years, or maybe decades ahead of their foreign counterparts, and in terms of tactical and technical characteristics they are significantly superior to them."

Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, and despite Western intelligence suggesting he expected a swift victory, his army has been pushed back from Ukraine's largest cities.

Instead they have been forced to concentrate their forces on the eastern Donbas region, where cities have been reduced to rubble and slow progress has been made in taking control of the region.

Ukrainian authorities have claimed almost 44,000 Russian soldiers have so far been killed in the offensive.

Western military analysts say the poor performance of Russian troops and weaponry could make its arms exports less attractive to potential buyers, such as India, which have heavily relied on its technology in the past.

Despite this, Putin has insisted Russia's army and its supporters in the east of Ukraine were fulfilling their objectives.

He needs to do so, because anything else will be viewed as an admission of failure. And Russia never makes such statements.

Why is Crimea so important to Putin? - Crimea is home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is based at Sevastopol. The peninsula has acted as a launching pad for the February invasion, with Russian troops pouring into Ukraine's south from the annexed region.

Control of Crimea assures Russia continuing access to the Sevastopol naval base, which it previously operated under a leasing deal with Ukraine that was scrapped after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Surrounded by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, ships and submarines based in Crimea are just north of Turkey and can reach the Mediterranean to influence the Middle East and the Balkans.

Crimea was forcibly seized by Russia in 2014 -- soon after Ukrainian protesters helped topple pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich -- when thousands of Russian special-operations troops wearing unmarked uniforms deployed around the peninsula in early March that year.

Two weeks later, Russia completed its annexation of Crimea in a referendum, slammed by Ukraine and most of the world as illegitimate, and at the time considered the biggest land-grab on Europe since World War II.

"In our hearts, we know Crimea has always been an inalienable part of Russia," Putin told Russian lawmakers as he announced the annexation in 2014.

Crimea has long been a popular spot for Russian vacationers and for the Soviet elite. In 1991, the Soviet Union's last leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, was vacationing in the region when hardliners launched a coup against him.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia has affected tourism in the region. Sergei Aksyonov, the head of the Russian-controlled Crimean administration, acknowledged last month that a 40% decline in the tourism industry was expected over the summer. The Russian Tourism Association made a similar prediction in June.

Despite Moscow's claims, domestic politics may have played a part in Putin's decision to annex the region. Despite an economic crisis in Russia, nationalistic rhetoric and Crimea's invasion saw Putin's approval ratings climb in 2014

GeoMilitary

Moldova's bizarre neutrality: no obstacle to Western security assistance - Russia resorted to military interventions repeatedly to stop Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014, 2022) from drawing closer to the Euro-Atlantic system. Those interventions aimed, in effect, to coerce Tbilisi and Kyiv into a nonaligned or neutral posture, without international recognition or guarantees, vulnerable to Russian manipulation and threats, akin to Moldova's situation. In Chisinau's case, however, Moscow never needed to enforce neutrality with military threats since "permanent neutrality" became Moldova's own supine option. A state deficient in national identity turned permanent neutrality into an element of state identity.

On the one hand, Chisinau never seriously attempted to deal its permanent neutrality in exchange for Russia's withdrawal from Transnistria and treaty guarantees, following the example of the 1955 Austrian State Treaty. Instead, Moldova has adhered to neutrality preemptively and unconditionally, thus forfeiting this bargaining card. Western powers certainly have not shown an interest in that kind of trade-off or in any particular solution to the Transnistria conflict. Moldova's former Russophile president (2016–2020), Igor Dodon, campaigned for international recognition of Moldova's permanent neutrality but found no support in the West or Russia.

On the other hand, neutrality (even if unrecognized) has served Chisinau well as an argument to avoid military and security relationships with Russia or the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In this particular respect, Russia has not contested Moldova's neutrality argument. Given its limited interests in Moldova, the Kremlin never sought to bring this country directly into its orbit until now. Russia may, however, attempt to do so if it wins the war against Ukraine and if this happens in conjunction with Russophile parties winning elections in Moldova (see EDM, August 4, 8, 9). To hedge against such prospects (and in deference to Moldovan public opinion), Chisinau and its Western partners need to continue paying verbal homage to Moldova's status of neutrality.

NATO Forces 'ready' if Kosovo-Serbia tensions boil over - NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says the alliance's peacekeeping troops are ready to step in if tensions between Kosovo and Serbia rise as the two Balkan neighbors prepare for further European Union-facilitated talks to normalize relations.

"While the situation on the ground has improved, it is the responsibility of all parties -- particularly officials from Belgrade and Pristina -- to prevent escalation again," Stoltenberg told a joint news conference with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in Brussels on August 17, the eve of a new round of talks between the two countries.

"I call on all sides to show restraint and to avoid violence. NATO continues to monitor closely the situation on the ground. Our KFOR peacekeeping mission remains focused on its UN mandate. Should stability be jeopardized, KFOR stands ready to intervene," he said.

Kosovo and Serbia have engaged in the EU-led dialogue since 2011, aiming to reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement on the normalization of relations.

Vucic said he expected "difficult" talks with his Kosovar counterpart, Albin Kurti, as the two "do not agree almost on anything."

How Russia's nuclear double cross of Ukraine teaches dangerous lessons - After the collapse of the Soviet Union, nuclear weapons that had been staged in Warsaw Pact states, including Ukraine, were transferred to Russian territory. This was done as part of a straightforward deal: The former Soviet states would voluntarily adopt a non-nuclear status in exchange for security guarantees that they would not be threatened with nuclear weapons in the future.

In Ukraine's case, the transfer of custodianship of the nuclear weapons also was contingent upon the assurances of Russia, the US, and the UK to Kyiv that its sovereignty and territorial integrity would be respected. Territorial integrity has been among Kyiv's main concerns, expressed repeatedly during the post-Cold War negotiations and afterward. These commitments were officially professed in the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in 1994. As one of the signatories, Russia assumed an obligation to serve as a guarantor of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Ukraine has abided by all its commitments not to pursue nuclear capabilities, but Russia violated the agreement by invading its western neighbor and threatening to use nuclear weapons against anyone who would intervene into its so-called "special military operation."

Beyond the terrible human toll, by breaking its commitment, Russia seriously damaged the nuclear nonproliferation treaty structure in several ways and may have taught other nations dangerous lessons when it comes to nuclear policy.

First, the biggest nuclear state has invaded the state that officially gave up nuclear weapons. It might serve as a lesson on why countries should not give up these capabilities if they possess them. North Korea has already justified its nuclear weapons development by the experience of Iraq and Libya. These countries' regimes collapsed before they realized their nuclear ambitions. Despite the pressure, Kim's regime sees nuclear weapons as an insurance policy, which makes the country even more resistant to the efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula.

The invasion can be treated as an even more vivid lesson by the states, which neither have nuclear weapons arsenals nor are protected by the great powers' nuclear shield. Countries that have not pursued nuclear weapons may do so now to ensure no nuclear-armed state will ever invade them. Iran has reached the breakout time, or the time required to enrich enough weapons-grade uranium to produce one nuclear weapon, which is an essential step in acquiring nuclear capabilities. Despite the tremendous pressure from the international community to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which curbed its nuclear capabilities, Iran is even more reluctant to give them up. Based on Ukraine's experience, this country may treat its nuclear status as a pathway to secure its position in the Middle East.

Second, it is one of those few times in history that a nuclear power practiced so-called "offensive deterrence" when nuclear capabilities are used not to deter the enemy's attack on one's or allies' territories, but to support its own invasion of a sovereign state through the threat of nuclear weapons use. Russia's 2020 nuclear doctrine, highly debated even among Russian experts, allows for nuclear weapons use to prevent the escalation of an armed conflict and ensure favorable terms of conflict termination for Russia. The regime sends ambiguous messages with President Vladimir Putin

calling nuclear war unacceptable, the foreign minister Lavrov saying that Russia does not plan to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, but the state propagandists frequently and explicitly considering the nuclear escalation as an option.

Third, any state with a nuclear weapons program and offensive plans could be inspired by Russia's war on Ukraine. While not demonstrating expected military superiority in many domains and not being able to achieve its objectives, Moscow repeatedly reminded the West about its nuclear capabilities. Gradual and limited support of western countries, especially in the first months of the war, has demonstrated that nuclear weapons carry strong coercive power. Nuclear capabilities can allow the state to use conventional aggression to maintain control of its sphere of influence, while any intervention by outsiders is deterred by the threat of nuclear escalation. China might attempt to find a way to use nuclear coercion and Russia's experience in a similar way to deal with the Taiwan issue.

GeoPolitics

Eyeing Russia, Lithuania prepped for energy 'Independence' years ago - As Europe scrambles to defend itself against Russian aggressions, tiny Lithuania is reaping the benefit of cleareyed moves made more than a decade ago. That was when it commissioned the Independence, a massive floating vessel and processing terminal for liquefied natural gas.

Linas Kilda was the Lithuanian project manager tasked with overseeing ground-to-sea pipeline connections for the Independence. It was the early 2010s, and public sentiment was sharply divided. Yet success would mean Lithuania could eventually pick and choose among energy suppliers. At that time, Russia supplied the vast majority of Lithuania's energy needs while playing politics with prices.

"We were paying the highest prices in the EU," says Mr. Kilda, recalling the years just before the terminal opened in 2014. "My grandparents survived the deportation to Siberia during Soviet times, and they always dreamed of an independent Lithuania."

Indeed, long before the West woke up to Russian President Vladimir Putin as a threat, 3 million-strong Lithuania had always had eyes on its gargantuan neighbor. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Lithuanian leaders boldly declared that Mr. Putin had already started waging war on Europe, a claim that pacifist ears in Germany and the West didn't hear.

Today, a series of policy decisions made over decades, based on the principles of preserving and promoting democratic freedoms – including commissioning the Independence, but also the recognition of Belarusian pro-democracy opposition and Taiwan's representative office – looks prescient. While Western Europe might have previously reacted to those decisions with laughter, skepticism, or frustration, Lithuania is now able to start driving select parts of the EU agenda with its approach.

"We always are fighting for spread of democracy and human rights because of our neighbor," says Andrius Kubilius, who served as prime minister when the Independence was ordered in 2011.

"Thirty kilometers [18 miles] from Vilnius is a border where the democratic continent ends and you have Russia and Belarus – totalitarians. We understand it in a very simple way: If autocracies are not stopped in the very beginning, then they become international aggressors, like what happened with Putin."

Singapore joins over 100 countries in voicing support for One-China - The responsibility of the tension across the Taiwan Straits completely rests with the United States; China's responses on US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan are legitimate and justified, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Thursday.

He made the remarks when meeting with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on the sidelines of ASEAN-plus foreign ministers' meeting in Cambodian capital Phnom Penh.

Wang comprehensively elaborated on the historical ins and outs and the real status quo of the Taiwan question. "Taiwan question bears on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and China has no room for compromise on the question concerning its core interests."

The US' farce under the pretext of the so-called democracy cannot affect the process of China's reunification, Wang said, adding the noose around the neck of "Taiwan independence" forces would only get tighter and tighter.

Wang underlined that countries should deeply understand and stay highly vigilant of the seriousness and harm of Pelosi's visit.

He cautioned that if countries connive at the violation of the one-China principle and the damage of the norm of international relations of non-interference in the internal affairs, their self-security and long term interests will be undermined, and regional peace and stability will be endangered.

He urged countries to resolutely prevent the unlawful and unilateral bullying and not allow the world to relapse into the law of the jungle, to jointly defend international fairness and justice.

Over 100 countries have stated the commitment to the one-China principle in the wake of Pelosi's visit and the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made it clear on Wednesday that the UN abides by General Assembly Resolution 2758 and affirmed the world body's one-China policy.

Balakrishnan said it is Singapore's consistent and clear-cut stance to abide by the one-China principle, while pledging the country would not deviate from this position.

Singapore unequivocally and consistently opposes "Taiwan independence" and hopes avoid misjudgments and accidents as well as maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits, he added.

GeoEconomics

The US is revisiting its trade relations with African countries: key issues on the table - In July 2021, the Biden-Harris administration launched the Prosper Africa Build Together Campaign.

The idea was to elevate and energize the US's commitment to trade and investment with countries across the African continent.

The revamped Trump strategy includes a targeted, long-term effort to connect American and African businesses with new trade and investment opportunities.

Key sectors being targeted are clean energy and climate smart solutions, health, and digital technology.

Through the initiative, the US is promising to help drive billions of dollars of investment to Africa and to work towards equitable access to the benefits of trade and investment. It also envisages harnessing the power of small businesses, especially those led by women and members of the African Diaspora.

This is a difficult question to answer, given the many possible configurations of a potential trade pact.

Nevertheless, we offer two key elements of such a trade pact.

First, it should be truly multilateral unlike, for example, the prevailing US-Africa trade agreement, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) – which is a unilateral US government policy. A truly multilateral pact would recognize African leaders as equal partners and ensure that they have an opportunity to properly engage in US-Africa trade negotiations.

Anything short of this would be counter-productive for one or both parties. For instance, a bad trade pact could worsen US trade deficits while for Africa, it would amount to a missed opportunity for badly needed structural economic transformation. In addition, it would force African countries to compete head-to-head with the much stronger US economy, to the disadvantage of their local businesses and industries.

Second, whatever agreement is reached needs to increase the capacity of African countries to trade with the US. While a US-Africa free trade agreement would be ideal, it would be unlikely to work well for many African countries. Countries with technological and economic weaknesses would easily be overwhelmed by the powerful US export machine.

So, instead of a free trade agreement, a beneficial pact for Africa should be designed to boost trade and investment between the US and Africa while also gradually increasing the capacity of African countries to compete globally in the production of nontraditional high-value products.

Although the exact details of the Prosper Africa Build Together Campaign are yet to be worked out, we are cautiously optimistic that it can live up to its promise. Unlike AGOA, it has a holistic and long-term focus. And because of the need to counteract the influence of Europe, Russia, and China, the US is likely to be more motivated to engage Africa both economically and geopolitically.

Africa can only get good trade pacts if it negotiates for them. African countries must therefore invest in capacity building and training for their trade negotiators as well as hiring, keeping, and empowering the right people for these roles.

Greece bracing for Turkish drilling announcements - Athens was on standby in view of the imminent announcements by Ankara regarding new exploratory drilling by the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) as to where the Abdulhamid Han drilling vessel will move in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, both Greece and Turkey have issued navigational telexes (Navtex) over the same areas. More specifically, on Tuesday night, the hydrographic station of Antalya issued a Navtex to counter that issued by the Hellenic Navy reserving an area south and west of the Greek island of Kastellorizo.

Last week the Israeli Navy had requested and received permission from Athens to carry out naval drills in two areas south of Crete until Friday. One area was clearly outside the zones of the illegal Turkish-Libyan memorandum, while part of the second area includes part of this area.