

Conflict Update # 344

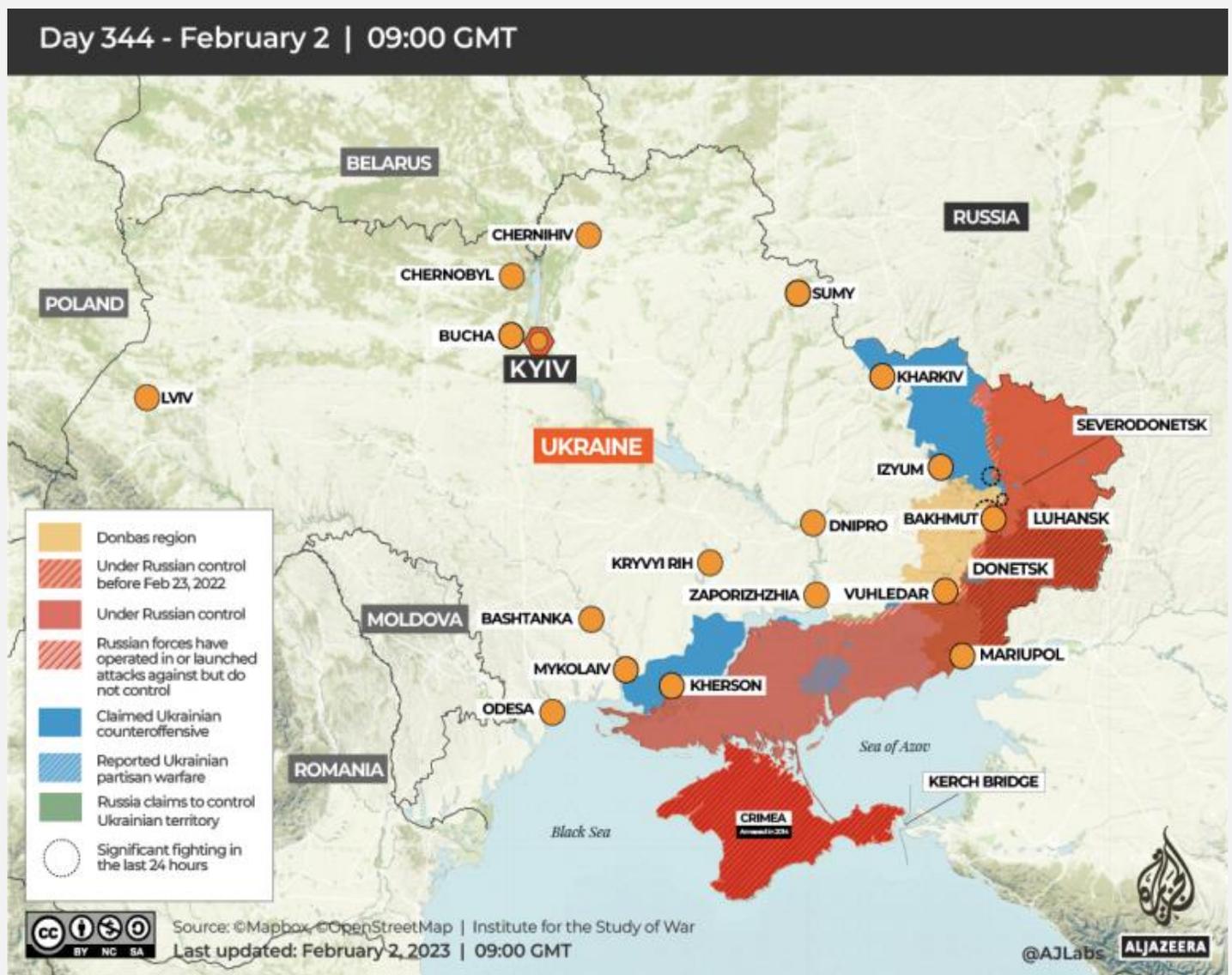
February 2nd, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses¹ – 129,030 (610) soldiers killed, 3,211 (+2) enemy tanks, 6,382 (+0) armored combat vehicles, 2,212 (+5) artillery systems, 458 (+0) MLRS systems, 222 (+1) air defense systems, 293 (+0) warplanes, 284 (+0) helicopters, 1,951 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 796 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,064 (+3) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 200 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Belarus, Russia complete 'defensive' military drills - Belarus's defence ministry says it has completed a two-week-long joint air force drill with Russian forces.

A flurry of joint military activity in Belarus has prompted fears in Kyiv and the West that Moscow could prepare to involve Minsk in the conflict.

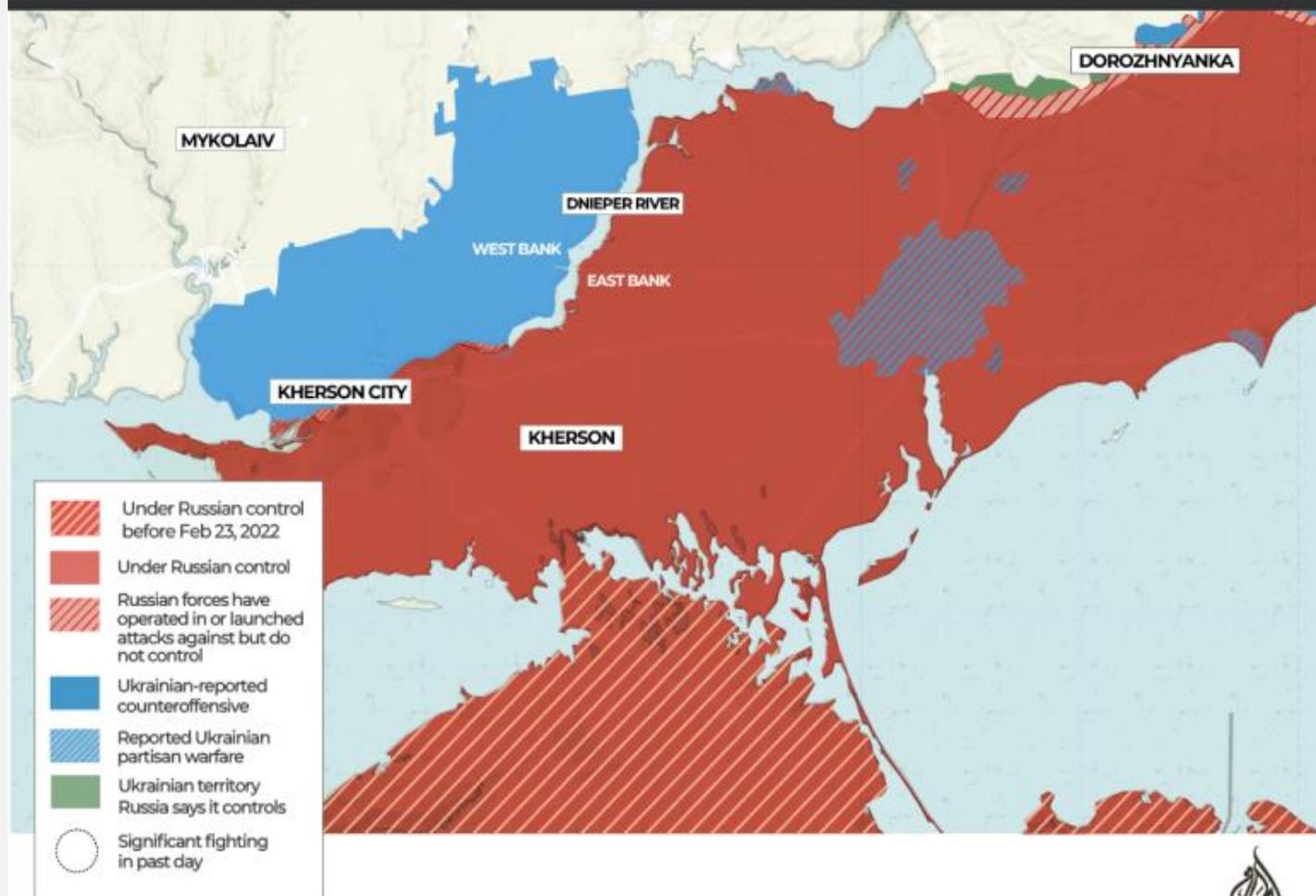
The ministry said a wide range of tasks had been completed during the drills, which it added were "exclusively defensive in nature."

Comment – Russia is too depleted a force to squander military resources in Belarus without reason. We should watch very carefully Russian and Belarussian movements and cumulations north of the Ukrainian border.

Who controls what in southern Ukraine?

Russian forces are carrying out unsuccessful disruption missions on islands in the Dnieper river delta in the Kherson region, in an effort to prevent Ukrainian troops from gaining ground, the Institute for the Study of War says.

Day 344 - February 2 | 09:00 GMT



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Source: Institute for the Study of War | Last updated: February 2, 2023 | 09:00 GMT



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Russia may need weeks to recover in Bakhmut as Ukraine 'bleeds them white' - While it is unknown if Russia can capture Bakhmut in Ukraine, Russian forces will need a period of time to recover from the grinding fight if it ultimately seizes the long-embattled city, according to an expert.

Russia has conducted a months-long and unsuccessful effort to capture Bakhmut in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Russian and Ukrainian forces have reportedly suffered heavy losses in the fight. Additionally, the city has experienced enormous damage, according to Ukraine. Zelensky said in December that Russian forces had "actually destroyed" Bakhmut in the fighting.

Dan Soller, a former U.S. Army intelligence colonel, told Newsweek that it's still an "open question" as to whether Russia can secure Bakhmut.

"Ukraine appears to valiantly defend Bakhmut to prevent giving up more terrain to Russia and also to inflict heavy losses on Russian troops, a.k.a. attempting to bleed them white," Soller said. "However, both sides have suffered heavy casualties over the past month."

If Russia does take Bakhmut, it would make sense geographically to continue to attack toward the Donetsk cities of Sloviansk or Kramatorsk, "but it seems unlikely the Russians would have the operational strength in the near term after such a bloody fight in and around Bakhmut this winter," Soller said.

"Most likely, the Russian forces will have operationally culminated after the Bakhmut fight and it may take weeks before they can effectively continue the offensive," he added.

While Bakhmut remains beyond Russia's control, it has claimed to make marginal gains around the city in recent weeks. In January, Russia claimed control of the salt-mining town of Soledar, just a few miles from Bakhmut. Ukraine acknowledged later in the month that its forces had pulled back from Soledar.

"While I'm wary of prediction, one might think of Bakhmut as the end of a phase in this war," William Reno, professor and chair of the political science department at Northwestern University, added. "Ukraine wants to move to quality over quantity, leaving the Russians to count artillery ammunition stocks, replacement rates for artillery barrels, etc. Western backers want to exhaust the wood chipper and fight it more on terms of Ukraine's choosing."

Comment – Ukraine has successfully countered all Russian maneuvers through the winter period and contained them in virtually the same areas where they were pre-winter. The Ukrainian approach now needs to include both longer-range weaponry and modern tanks in sufficient number in order to punch strategic holes through Russian front lines.

Watch their current assaults against Russian multitudes of untrained "fodder" recruits that Moscow is stuffing into trenches along the southeastern Ukrainian border.

Ukraine is containing them and bleeding them, albeit at great Ukrainian cost as well. But they are targeting Russian supply lines across southern conflict zones from Kherson and Crimea all the way to the Russian border up north.

A concern continues to be the northern front around Belarus.

Ukraine's new weapon will force a Russian shift - The US has answered President Zelenskiy's plea for rockets that can strike deep behind the front lines of the nearly year-long conflict with Russia.

Now Russian forces will need to adapt or face potentially catastrophic losses.

The new weapon, the Ground Launched Small Diameter Bomb (GLSDB), allows Ukraine's military to hit targets at twice the distance of rockets it now fires from the U.S.-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS). If included

as expected in an upcoming weapons-aid package first reported by Reuters, the 151 km (94 mile) GLSDB will put all of Russia's supply lines in the east of the country within reach, as well as part of Russian-occupied Crimea.

This will force Russia to move its supplies even farther from the front lines, making its soldiers more vulnerable and greatly complicating plans for any new offensive.

"This could slow down [a Russian assault] significantly," said Andriy Zagorodnyuk, Ukraine's former defence minister. "Just as HIMARS significantly influenced the course of events, these rockets will influence events even more."

GLSDB is a GPS-guided glide bomb that can manoeuvre to hit hard-to-reach targets such as command centres. Made jointly by SAAB AB and Boeing Co, it combines the GBU-39 Small Diameter Bomb (SDB) with the M26 rocket motor, both of which are common in U.S. inventories.

It is not yet compatible with HIMARS, but the United States will provide Ukraine new launchers for the rockets, said sources. GLSDB could be delivered as early as spring 2023, according to a document reviewed by Reuters.

No ATACMS - yet

For the Biden administration, the decision to send GLSDB to Ukraine represents a step toward meeting Ukraine's demand for the 185-mile (297km) range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) missile, which the administration has so far declined to provide, fearing a further escalation of the conflict.

The glide bombs, while not as powerful, are much cheaper, smaller and easier to deploy than ATACMS, well suited for much of what Ukraine hopes to accomplish: disrupting Russian operations and creating a tactical advantage.

Still, said Karako, it is possible the Ukrainians could end up receiving an even longer range weapon in the future.

Putin amassing 500,000 troops for major new offensive, says minister - Putin has mobilised nearly 500,000 troops to attack Ukraine in a renewed offensive marking the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine war, Ukrainian defence minister Oleksii Reznikov said.

He asked for 300,000 Russian men to be enrolled in a general mobilisation in September, but Reznikov told the French BFM network last night that the actual number of conscripts deployed to fight in Ukraine could be much more.

Zelensky further asserted this claim and said that Ukraine is seeing "a certain increase in the occupier's offensive actions at the front — in the east of our country."

The situation is becoming even more severe, he said in his nightly address yesterday.

Russian forces have now surrounded the embattled eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, a Moscow-backed leader in the Donetsk region has claimed.

Bakhmut and villages on its southern approaches in Donetsk are coming under renewed heavy Russian fire, Ukrainian army chiefs said late on Tuesday.

Russian army officer defects, describes widespread torture including threats to castrate a Ukrainian and send his wife the video - A Russian former senior lieutenant has defected and admitted the army tortures Ukrainians. Konstantin Yefremov told the BBC of horrific abuses, including threats of rape and castration.

He is the most senior officer to publicly denounce his former army's abuses, per the BBC.

A former Russian army officer has described horrifying interrogations and the use of torture on Ukrainian war prisoners, speaking as the highest-ranking recruit to defect from his country so far.

Konstantin Yefremov, formerly a senior lieutenant, told the BBC how he initially tried to resign his post but was sent into war, where he says he saw stunning abuses of power.

He was eventually dismissed, and fled Russia after President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a second mobilization in the fall of 2022, he said.

But during his time serving in occupied Zaporizhzhia, in southern Ukraine, he said he saw Russian soldiers looting everything from lawnmowers to bicycles, and threatening prisoners with rape and castration.

At one site, interrogations and torture would go on every night, "sometimes twice a day," he said. Insider was unable to verify his claims. The BBC verified his identity as a soldier, and that he had served in the places he described.

In one instance, Yefremov said, a captured sniper was threatened with castration by a colonel regarded as "crazy."

The colonel in charge "hit him, he pulled the Ukrainian's trousers down and asked if he was married," he said.

"'Yes,' the prisoner replied. 'Then someone bring me a mop,' said the colonel. 'We'll turn you into a girl and send your wife the video.'"

He also said that at the same post — in a town near Melitopol called Bilmak — a prisoner had his teeth knocked out. He was then blindfolded and told he would be shot in the head — but instead the colonel shot just on either side of his head, deafening him, he said.

It's a matter of who attacks first - The biggest question hovering over the battlefield in Ukraine for the first three or four months of this year is whether the Russian invaders or Ukraine's defenders will launch a major, and likely premature, offensive. Both belligerents are under different kinds of pressure to do so.

Militarily, Russia would probably benefit from going slow. It is the bigger country with large but often untapped internal resources. It needs time to boost military output, source the electronics necessary for modern weaponry, train and properly equip the hundreds of thousands of troops mobilized since last September — and to fix the chaos in its mobilization system, an issue that General Valery Gerasimov, the Russian invasion's overall commander, has acknowledged in a rare interview. It also requires time to straighten out its unsettled propaganda narratives: Many Russians are still unclear about what they're supposed to fight for in Ukraine and what the end goals of the war are. While the initial propaganda line — that Ukrainians are "fascists" — appears to have fizzled, no new one appears to have generated mass enthusiasm.

One of the most coherent emerging propaganda lines is meant to prepare Russians for a long-haul conflict.

Russia advances in eastern Ukraine, strike on apartments kills civilians - Zelenskiy and a senior defence official issued dire accounts of Russian forces shelling and advancing in Ukraine's eastern province of Donetsk, the main focal point of the 11-month-long war.

Fierce fighting was unabated in eastern Ukraine, where Russian troops are trying to gain ground near the strategic logistics hub of Lyman, Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar said on Wednesday evening.

Bakhmut town and 10 communities around it came under Russian artillery and tank fire, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces said in a statement on Wednesday night. Bakhmut has suffered relentless bombardment for months by Russian troops.

Comment — The Russian manner of engagement through scorched earth policies and killing of civilians en masse is something soldiers grow familiar with as they progress through their years of service. They see it, they understand it to

be a regular means of warfare and they copy it – throughout their careers. No small wonder then that they continue to replicate tactics around such policies when they ascend to positions of authority within the Kremlin. No wonder at all.

Russia sending Ukrainian civilians into minefields to find a safe path through, Kyiv claims - Russian commanders are forcing Ukrainian civilians to wade through minefields to determine safe routes for their troops, a new report has claimed.

Ukraine's National Resistance Centre - an online resource curated by the nation's armed forces to inform civilian resistance groups - declared on Monday it had received reports that citizens in parts of the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia region were instructed to walk through mine-littered fields.

It claimed Russian troops would observe the terrified civilians and trace their steps to find a path through the lethal maze, though did not cite the source of the information which is yet to be verified.

Comments, Developments & Reports

Even North Korea just noticed Russia's war in Ukraine 'isn't going so well' – Less than a week after North Korea promised to “always stand in the same trench” with Russia, it seems even it is losing faith in Putin's war machine.

After promising to help Russia rebuild bombed out parts of occupied eastern Ukraine, NK authorities picked out laborers to send and then even recruited some more—but now thought better of sending them, according to Daily NK.

“This is because they were going to rush the workers over if Russia quickly ended the war and expanded its liberated zones, but the war isn't going as well as they thought,” a source in North Korea was quoted telling the newspaper.

“I think even our country can't make its people run around a danger zone to earn money, no matter how important the cash is,” the source added, noting that the situation “isn't good enough now” to invest human capital.

Instead, Pyongyang has reportedly decided to appease Russia by sending military and security personnel to eastern Ukraine. A source cited by Daily NK on Thursday said the North Korean government on Jan. 20 ordered several of its trading companies located in Russia to pick out personnel to be sent to the occupied territories.

Between 300 and 500 Korean men aged 19 to 27 are expected to be tossed into eastern Ukraine, though the tasks they will be assigned are not entirely clear.

EU Sees legal grounds to use seized Russian central bank assets - European Union member states have been told the bloc has the legal authority to temporarily leverage at least €33.8 billion (\$36.8 billion) of Russian central bank assets to help pay for the reconstruction of Ukraine, according to people familiar with the matter.

The bloc's Council Legal Service told diplomats that such a plan is legally feasible, as long as the assets aren't expropriated and certain conditions are met, the people said. Those include a termination date, a focus on liquid assets and clarity that the principal and interest would be returned to Russia at some point, the people said.

The EU has been exploring options to use frozen Russian assets following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but the proposal is controversial and discussions are at a very preliminary stage. EU officials and some member states have been worried about the legal justifications for such a move and the precedent that could be set, particularly for the use of frozen Russian central bank assets.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has said that she wants to make Russia pay for the destruction from its invasion “with the frozen funds of oligarchs and assets of its central bank.”

Group of Seven and EU officials have said that there don't appear to be clear legal grounds for simply seizing Russian bank assets and redirecting them to Ukraine.

Instead, as a first step, the EU is considering pooling together the assets at the EU or international level in order to generate returns that could be used to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine — a task the World Bank has estimated could cost at least \$350 billion.

Putin & Russia

Putin says military must stop Ukrainian shelling of Russian regions - Putin said yesterday that Russia's military must stop the shelling of Russian regions from Ukrainian territory, which he said had left many people homeless or without power.

Putin was addressing a government meeting about restoring destroyed housing and infrastructure in regions of southwest Russia that border Ukraine.

"Of course, the priority task is to eliminate the very possibility of shelling. But this is the business of the military department," Putin said in remarks published on the Kremlin website.

Ukraine does not claim responsibility for strikes inside Russian territory but has described them as "karma" for Moscow's invasion, which has razed Ukrainian cities and systematically targeted the country's energy infrastructure, leaving people frequently without power and water in the depths of winter.

Putin cited the Russian regions of Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk, as well as Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine and annexed in 2014, as areas where housing had been damaged or destroyed.

People were facing "very acute" problems, and repairs and compensation were needed, he said.

"Many people found themselves in a difficult situation, lost their homes, were forced to move to relatives or to temporary places of residence, faced interruptions in the supply of water, heat, and electricity," he said.

His comments signalled Moscow's frustration at the frequency of attacks in southern Russia, which have included strikes on sites such as electricity sub-stations and depots for weapons and fuel.

Comment – He is more than likely being pressured by negative commentaries on Russian TV and from regional commanders about the damage being incurred in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine and inside some Russian oblasts.

Putin expected to rally Russians during Stalingrad tribute - President Vladimir Putin is expected to use an event to mark the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany to rally Russians around his military campaign in Ukraine later on Thursday.

Putin is due to give a speech in Volgograd, a city in the south of Russia, which until 1961 was called Stalingrad and the site of the bloodiest battle of World War II when the Soviet Red Army broke advancing German forces.

Remembering and paying tribute to those who fought is sacred in Russia, where the authorities have long cast it as an enduring symbol of selfless patriotism and heroic resilience.

Russian officials have often drawn parallels between defeating the Nazis in World War II and the invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow does not need help from ex-Soviet allies, says Lavrov - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says Moscow does not need any help from its ex-Soviet allies for its military campaign in Ukraine.

Lavrov said Russia had everything it needed for the conflict and had not asked members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to support its war efforts.

The CSTO is a Moscow-led alliance that includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Comment – Now why at this point in time is Lavrov making comments of excuse such as these? Perhaps because they are not rallying to the Russian cause and instead distancing themselves from the previous Soviet-era arrangement?

Lavrov says US was involved in Nord Stream explosions - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has accused the United States of direct involvement in the explosions that severely damaged the Nord Stream gas pipelines linking Russia and Germany via the Baltic Sea in September.

Lavrov provided no evidence for his claim during an interview on state TV. President Vladimir Putin has previously accused the UK of blowing up the pipelines, which London denied.

Swedish prosecutors found traces of explosives at the site of the damaged pipelines, confirming that gross sabotage had taken place.

Containment

Norway to increase spending to send aid to Ukraine - Norway will increase spending from its sovereign wealth fund in the coming years to fund military and civilian aid to Ukraine, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere told parliament.

The Nordic country's \$1.3 trillion wealth fund has seen a sharp rise in revenue inflows as the price of Norwegian oil and gas exports soared following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Stoere did not specify how much money would be spent on aid but said it would be a multiyear commitment.

"This will lead to a temporary increase in spending from the sovereign wealth fund," he said.

Russians sending 'significant amounts of money' to help Ukraine via crypto - Russians who are incensed by president Vladimir Putin's invasion are sending "significant amounts of money" through cryptocurrency back channels to help Ukraine, according to its deputy digital minister.

Two days after Putin's troops and tanks crossed the international border between Russia and Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian government's Twitter accounts posted requests for cryptocurrency donations.

Blockchains are transparent publicly distributed ledgers, and since then Ukraine has been analysing where in the world that crypto-donations are being sent from.

The war-torn country has been able to identify that more than 100,000 people have sent aid to Ukraine via cryptocurrency channels.

"Donations to Ukraine has varied from one dollar to millions of dollars," Ukraine's deputy digital minister Alex Bornyakov told Yahoo Finance's The Crypto Mile.

"Crypto, in certain cases, offers an anonymous way to transfer money. We saw that some Russians were donating to us a significant sum," Bornyakov added.

"The Russian people who have donated have sent significant amounts of money. "I understand that from within Russia there is no other way for them to do this other than through crypto."

Ukraine is using Palantir's software for 'targeting,' CEO says - Data analytics company Palantir is "responsible for most of the targeting in Ukraine," Chief Executive Alex Karp said Wednesday, elaborating on the U.S. company's work with Kyiv since Russia's invasion last year.

Its software helps Ukraine target, for instance, tanks and artillery, a Palantir spokesperson said.

The remarks are some of Karp's most direct yet on how Palantir, which got its start two decades ago supporting U.S. intelligence services, is aiding Ukraine's war effort.

Karp was the first head of a global business to meet President Zelenskiy following Russia's February 2022 invasion of the country. The company, whose co-founders include Karp and investor Peter Thiel, has opened an office in Ukraine.

Last month, at an event Palantir hosted in Davos, Switzerland, Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said technology allowed real-time tracking of the war's developments.

Ukraine has compiled information on enemy troop movements in a situational awareness system such as Palantir's, based on which its military decides a course of action, Fedorov said.

Palantir has marketed its software as a way to quickly determine resources to deploy, taking in feeds from satellites and social media to visualize an army's positions, or making expansive data files easier to query.

Asked about artificial intelligence (AI) that can generate content on its own, technology that has been the talk of Silicon Valley, Karp said that ethics needed to be considered before deploying software that could take independent action.

Drones for Ukraine, made in Germany - Ukraine's army has put in an order for drones from Quantum-Systems. The German government is funding the deal with the Bavarian start-up, whose investors include the likes of PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel.

Ukraine will soon receive battle reconnaissance drones from decisions were announced on week — but news tanks will finally be Ukrainian army drones. The involved a young Systems, which has follow-up order from the Ukrainian Germany.



tanks as well as Germany. Both the same day last that Leopard 2 battle delivered to the eclipsed that of the announcement company, Quantum-received a large its Vector drones MoD — paid for by

German taxpayers to foot €20 million bill to provide drones for Ukraine.

The Vector reconnaissance drone has proven to be a true asset in the war in Ukraine. Kyiv ordered 33 of them early last August and has ordered another 105 since. But practical field tests predated that. Last spring, Quantum-Systems CEO and co-founder Florian Seibel (pictured below) told the German media that a Ukrainian billionaire had approached him to buy drones for his country's army, and that several other oligarchs followed his example.

Vector drones were already in use in Ukraine at a time when many politicians in Germany still had serious doubts about the advisability of supplying weapons to Kyiv. Drones, however, are not weapons as such, which explains the rapid export approval granted by the German Ministry of Economic Affairs at the time. The electric vertical takeoff unmanned aerial vehicle (eVTOL UAV) in the shape of a propeller aircraft has a length of 1.63 meters (64 inches), a

wingspan of 2.8 meters (110 inches), and is used for aerial reconnaissance. It has a flight duration of 120 minutes and can transmit video footage and data from a distance of up to 30 kilometers (18.6 miles), which is the range of many artillery weapons.



that Israeli and significantly more technology built in: infrared cameras, tap-software involves decades of control and navigation.

The drones cost €180,000 (\$195,600) each, which means the German government will be shelling out almost €20 million for the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's follow-up order. When asked why the Vector is so expensive, Seibel told DW that it is actually in the lower price segment — and US military reconnaissance drones are expensive. "There is simply a lot of military special antennas, night vision devices, proof data links," he said, adding the development work, for instance concerning

Star tech investor Peter Thiel gets involved.

Quantum-Systems is responsible to the investors who entrusted the young company with tens of millions of euros, Seibel said, adding that they include Bayern Kapital, the German state of Bavaria's investment company, which promotes the aerospace industry — in particular in the greater Munich area, where Quantum-Systems is located.

Boris Johnson calls on US to give Ukraine fighter planes - Boris Johnson has confronted US Republicans' skepticism about providing more arms to Ukraine, saying it was time to give Kyiv the tools — including F16 aircrafts — to reclaim land taken by Vladimir Putin since the 24 February invasion.

He also said he now supported ending the ambiguity by allowing Ukraine to join Nato.

With support for Ukraine slipping in US opinion polls, Johnson has used a speech to the Atlantic Council thinktank, TV appearances, an article in the Washington Post and meetings with senior Republican senators to try to stiffen US resolve. His visit was understood to be a freelance operation and not on behalf of Number 10.

He said: "Give them the deep fire artillery systems, give them the tanks, give them the planes, because they have a plan. They know what they need to do."

He dismissed claims that the Ukrainians would be unable to fly sophisticated US planes, saying Ukraine had already shown their ability to use modern Nato technology. Referring to the repeated debates inside Europe about the risk of escalation if a specific weapon was provided, he said that these debates had all ended with agreement to provide the weapons. "Let us do it now and end this delay because that is the humane thing to do."

Comment — Sounds like Churchill in his pre-war days outside government.

Arctic

Putin discusses Russia's claim to giant chunk of Arctic Ocean seabed - Putin held talks with top security officials about the status of Russia's efforts to legally expand outer boundaries of its continental shelf in the Arctic.

Russia in 2021 filed a submission to the United Nations seeking to redefine its continental shelf, which is believed to contain vast untapped reservoirs of oil and gas. Moscow said at the time it wanted much more Arctic seabed, a move that has implications for Canada and Denmark who have their own claims.

A continental shelf is defined under international law as an area of typically shallow water bordering a country's shoreline that is considered an extension of its territory, allowing the country to exploit its natural resources.

"We have several important issues today, colleagues, concerning both the domestic agenda and the issue of the outer limit of Russia's continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean. Let's get to work," the Kremlin website cited Putin as saying.

The Kremlin did not immediately provide further details about the meeting, which was attended by several high-ranking officials, including Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Sergei Naryshkin, the foreign intelligence chief.

Russia's neighbours in the Arctic have become increasingly concerned about Moscow's ambitions in the strategically important region since it sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February last year.

NATO member states have ramped up Arctic military exercises in recent years, as Russia has expanded and renewed its military infrastructure in the region.