

# Conflict Update # 18

*March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022*

## Conflict Assessment

**Russia loses its EIGHTH colonel** – An 8<sup>th</sup> Russian colonel has been killed in Ukraine in another devastating blow to Vladimir Putin's faltering invasion which has seen the loss of many high-ranking officers.

Kyiv said it had 'eliminated' Colonel Denis Kurilo, commander of the 200th separate motorized rifle brigade, who led Russia's bloody assault in Kharkiv where he was killed in battle. The brigade had suffered massive losses in the fierce fighting, the Ukrainian army's press office said. Two battalion groups in the 200th brigade were destroyed, with a staggering loss of 1,500 servicemen, Ukraine has claimed.

It has also been revealed today that Lieutenant Colonel Dmitry Dormidontov was killed last week as his funeral was held in Russia today. Known Russian general staff fatalities are,

- General Magomed Tushaev, of the Chechen Special Forces
- Vladimir Zhonga: Leader of neo-Nazi Sparta Battalion
- Lieutenant General Yakov Rezanstev, commander of Russia's 49th Combined Arms Army
- Major-General Oleg Mityaev, commander of the army's 150th motorized rifle division
- Major General Vitaly Gerasimov, First deputy commander of Russia's 41st army
- Major-General Andrey Kolesnikov, Commander Guards Tank Kantemirovskaya Division
- Major-General Andrei Sukhovetsky, Deputy commander of the 41st Combined Arms Army
- Georgy Dudorov: Deputy commander of the reconnaissance company for the 137th regiment
- Colonel Nikolay Ovcharenko, chief of the Western Military District engineer troops
- Colonel Denis Kurilo, commander 200th separate motorized rifle brigade
- Colonel Alexei Sharov, commander 810th Guards Separate Order of Zhukov Brigade in the Russian Marines
- Colonel Sergei Sukharev, commander 331st Guards Parachute Assault Regiment from Kostroma
- Colonel Andrei Zakharov
- Colonel Konstantin Zizevsky, Leader of air assault troops
- Colonel Yuri Medvedev, Russian brigade commander
- Lieutenant Colonel Denis Glebov: Leader of air assault troops
- Lieutenant Colonel Dmitry Safronov: Leader of marine brigade Colonel Sergei Porokhyna
- Lieutenant Colonel Dmitry Dormidontov, Commander of the rocket artillery division
- Lieutenant Colonel Igor Zharov
- Major Sergei Krylov, Colonel Sukharev's deputy, was killed alongside him
- Captain Alexey Glushchak, GRU intelligence service
- Aleksey Aleshko, Paratroop intelligence officer

The vast majority of these officers were killed in Eastern Ukraine, some of whom led battalions shelling civilian areas. Ukrainian snipers and combat troops tracked them down and "eliminated" them, according to Ukrainian sources.

**Serbian female sniper** – a Serbian female sniper, fighting alongside Russian commander positions, was captured by Ukrainian forces. She is reported to have 42 "kills" and also previously operated in Chechnya and Crimea.

**Russian pull back dismissed** - Ukraine and its Western allies dismissed a Russian military pullback from near Kyiv as a ploy to refit troops after heavy losses, even as invading forces bombard cities elsewhere and press on with the obliteration of besieged Mariupol.

**Red Cross building damaged** - Ukrainian ombudswoman Lyudmyla Denisova says the Red Cross building in the besieged city of Mariupol has been hit by Russian air strikes and artillery.

**Incredible Russian losses** - Russia has been sustaining "incredible" losses since the start of its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, a senior U.S. State Department official says, putting the figure at more than 10,000 killed since the attack was launched just over a month ago.

"I think that, unfortunately, the Russians have not yet fully learned how tough the Ukrainian military is," U.S. Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said in an interview with Current Time on March 29.

**Chernobyl** - Ukraine Tells Russia To Pull Back From Chernobyl As Munitions Could Explode. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk says Russian forces occupying the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power station must pull out of the area after Ukraine's armed forces warned there is a danger of ammunition exploding at the site.

**Putin demands Mariupol surrender to end shelling** - Mr Putin made the comments during an hour long phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday night, the Kremlin said in a statement.

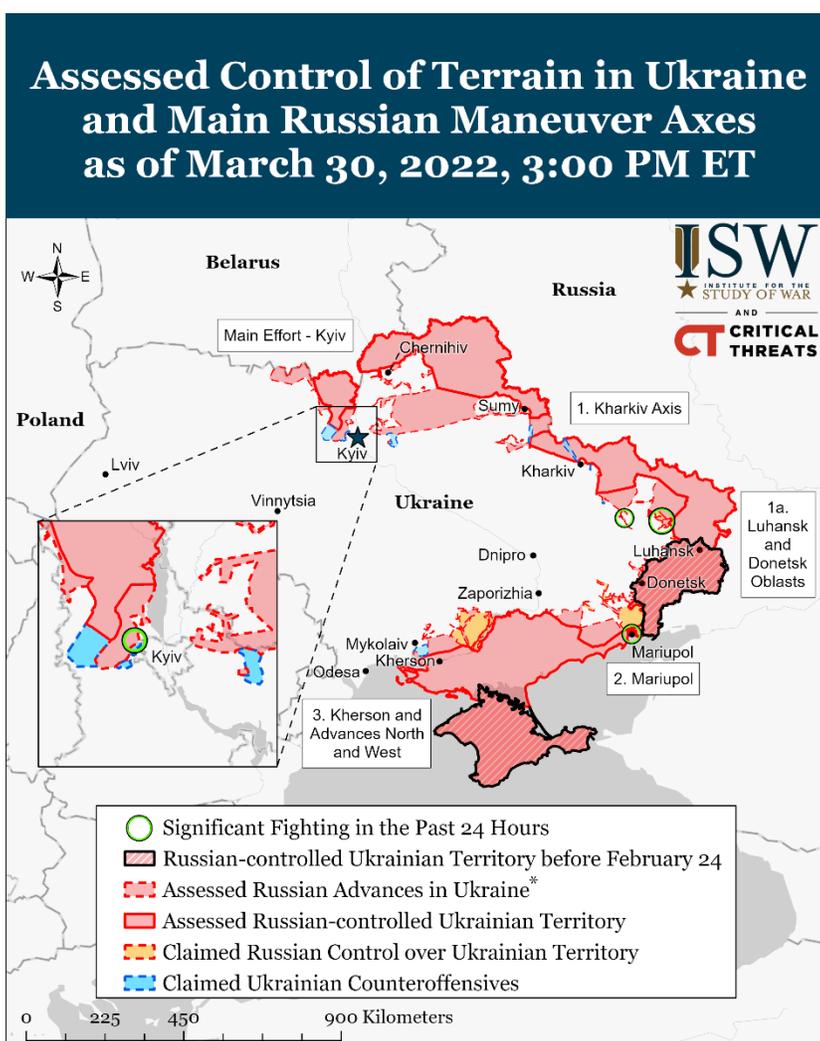
But French officials said the Russian leader had agreed to consider plans to evacuate civilians from the city.

Russia has since announced a one-day ceasefire for Thursday.

The very fact that Putin has made such a demand indicated culpability in a war crime trial. By making it conditional that **shelling** ends upon a surrender of the city, is a direct admission by Putin that the city is **being shelled** and that he is **personally aware thereof**. That makes him **personally culpable for fatalities, injuries and infrastructural damage** to the area of bombing.

**Biden, Zelenskyy Discuss More Support As Russia's Declared Pullback Dismissed** - U.S. President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy have discussed specific defensive support, a new package of sanctions against Russia, and financial and humanitarian aid in an hourlong call.

The call came as Russian forces continued bombardments near Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv one day after promising to scale down operations, a pledge that Western countries dismissed as a ploy to regroup.



**Russia continues bombing civilian targets** - Ukrainian officials reported on March 30 that Russian shelling hit homes, stores, libraries, and other civilian sites in and around Chernihiv and on the outskirts of Kyiv.

**Ukrainians Seize Russian Tanks After Retaking Village** - Ukrainian forces showed off three tanks they captured after retaking control of Lukyanivka, a village 60 kilometers east of Kyiv, from the Russian Army. RFE/RL journalists visited the village on March 27, three days after what a resident said was fierce fighting. This now brings to around 140 tanks seized by Ukraine since the war began.

**Ukrainian Forces Use Drones To Hunt For Russian Columns West Of Kyiv** - Ukrainian forces have regained control of the frontline town of Makariv in the Kyiv region, but Russian troops have not stopped trying to retake it. Makariv may be small in size, but it has big strategic value as it blocks Russia's armed forces from encircling the capital. As RFE/RL's Levko Stek reports, Ukrainian volunteer fighters use drones in the area for reconnaissance that can be used by Ukrainian artillery units to strike back.

**Russian reserve forces running low** - Russia is reportedly increasingly deploying support personnel and auxiliary units to replace combat losses in Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russia is deploying servicemen from military support units, including educational institutions, to replace combat losses. Russian officer casualties and the decision to strip Russian training units of personnel will further impede the Russian military's ability to train new conscripts and replacements. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that three battalion tactical groups (BTGs) including up to 2,000 Russian and South Ossetian personnel from Russia's 4th and 7th Military Bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, respectively, deployed to unspecified locations in Ukraine. Social media users observed South Ossetian forces in the Donbas region on March 29, but ISW cannot independently confirm if the entirety of these reinforcements were deployed to Donbas.

**Russian military base bombarded** – it is reported that a Russian military base inside Russia has come under rocket fire, assumed to be a Ukrainian attack.

**Luhansk and Donetsk** - Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian assaults throughout Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the last 24 hours. The Ukrainian General Staff reported at 6:00 am local time on March 30 that Ukrainian forces repelled four Russian attacks in the area in the past 24 hours and destroyed seven tanks, seven armored vehicles, and two other vehicles. Local Ukrainian officials in Donetsk Oblast reported Russian shelling and airstrikes continued along the entire line of contact. Donetsk People's Republic Head Denis Pushilin said on March 30 that Russian and proxy forces main task is to "reach the constitutional borders" claimed by the DNR and LNR—the entirety of their respective oblasts.

**Ukrainian Forces Recapture Eastern Town Near Russian Border** - Ukrainian forces recaptured the town of Trostyanets in eastern Ukraine, located just 40 kilometers from the border with Russia. Two days after the battle on March 26, RFE/RL correspondent Roman Pahulych visited the town to speak to Ukrainian soldiers, residents, and to survey damaged Russian military equipment.

**Russia bombards areas where it pledged to scale back** - Russian forces bombarded areas around Kyiv and another city just hours after pledging to scale back operations in those zones to promote trust between the two sides, Ukrainian authorities said Wednesday.

**Putin's Culmination Point reached** - Putin has reached a 'culminating point' in war with Ukraine, Russian forces have lost 'morale,' American military expert Ryan says. One military expert believes Russian President Vladimir Putin is running out of steam in his war against Ukraine and said Russian forces are quickly losing morale.

Ukraine's government believes the amount of equipment lost by Russian forces is much higher and estimates that more than 400 Russian tanks have been destroyed, according to the report.

He says a culminating point is when an army runs out of supplies, saying "it just reaches the limit."

"Most military observers and very senior American army generals believe that the Russian army reached a culminating point. A significant aspect of that is the losses that they've sustained," Ryan said.

Ryan says that, at conservative estimates, Russia has lost 10% of its **overall** force in Ukraine, while some estimates suggest a much higher amount, which he argues has a significant effect on Russian troop morale.

Russian troops are out in the field, low food supplies, freezing as they have no insulated kit to wear, left alone for weeks on end and seeing their ranks catastrophically decimated by snipers, rockets and anti-tank missiles. Their replenishment channels are being blown apart by anti-helicopter missiles and they have no alternative resort to extricating themselves from the battle as Russia had deployed enforcement regiments to ensure no "deserters" escape back to Russia or Belarus.

When one examines the calamitous and devastating damage to Russian armored vehicles, it is easy to understand a conscript's mindset that he or she is about to die. When receiving no moral support from senior Russian staff officers, one can understand the rise in fragging.

## Peace Talks

**Ukraine and security guarantee sought** - Ukraine has abandoned its aspiration to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and is seeking, instead, some form of neutrality under international guarantees. Kyiv aims to achieve this goal after the end of the ongoing war with Russia, but it is already at work on it, looking toward the post-war period. The results of this effort will, however, depend on the post-war political settlement, the shape and timeframe of which are currently unpredictable.

The goal of joining NATO commanded strong support in Ukraine at both the popular and the elite level, from the first Russian invasion in 2014 to date. The shift from NATO aspirations to neutrality has been forced upon the country. It is, in part, a result of influential NATO member countries firmly closing the purported "Open Door" to Ukrainian membership.

By Moscow's definition, Ukrainian neutrality or nonalignment means staying out of any alliance, not only NATO. In the current war, moreover, Russia pursues the twin objectives of neutralizing and "demilitarizing" Ukraine—demilitarization implying strict limitations to be imposed on Ukraine's own forces. Kyiv, therefore, attempts to mitigate and to some extent circumvent Russia's conception of Ukraine's neutralization and demilitarization by searching, instead, for international guarantees of Ukraine's security in the post-war period.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Ukrainians "are not naive" as fighting continued to rage around Mariupol and other hot spots.

**Kremlin response** - The Kremlin welcomed the fact that Kyiv has set out its demands for an end to the conflict in written form but said there was no sign of a breakthrough yet.

The Kremlin has also downplayed signs of progress in peace talks, saying there was nothing "too promising" in the most recent round of discussions in Istanbul.

**US State Department statement** - "Diplomatic resolutions to conflicts should generally come after an agreed cease-fire, not in the middle of the fighting. And the Russians have been absolutely unwilling to have a full cease-fire so that negotiations can get serious," U.S. Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland noted, adding that any negotiated end to the conflict should ensure that Ukraine will be able in future to deter a repeat of the aggression.

## Financial

**China's private firms see Russia as land of opportunity, up for grabs amid West's exodus** - From car parts to food and household cleaners, smaller private firms in China are seeking ways to capitalize on the "void" left by a mass exodus of high-profile Western brands from the Russian market. But the outlook for state-owned companies and banks is a little foggier.

Western sanctions over the war in Ukraine have sent the likes of Ford, Coca-Cola and other iconic brands heading for the exit in Russia. This has created opportunities for Chinese firms, despite warnings from the United States and its allies over providing assistance to help circumvent the various bans and restrictions imposed on Russia.

China's ambassador to Russia has already urged Chinese traders in Moscow to seize the business opportunities arising from the crisis, and to restructure their businesses to "fill the void in the Russian market," according to a Russia Confucius Culture Promotion Association post on its official WeChat account.

We will explore ways to work with Russian companies under the backdrop of the belt and road strategic development said Wang Chuanbao, Federation of Overseas Chinese in Moscow.

**China's yuan under pressure amid 'unprecedented' capital outflows following Russian invasion of Ukraine** – Investors have pulled money out of China on a huge scale even as flows to other emerging markets held up, the Institute of International Finance says. Analysts expect fund outflows in yuan-denominated assets to remain volatile in coming weeks, raising concerns about how authorities will manage the yuan.

Global investors have withdrawn money out of China on an "unprecedented" scale since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, according to a report by the Institute of International Finance (IIF), with the yuan likely to face more pressure in coming months.

High-frequency data detected large portfolio outflows from Chinese stocks and bonds, even as flows to other emerging markets held up, the IIF wrote in a report on Thursday.

"Outflows from China on the scale and intensity we are seeing are unprecedented, especially since we are not seeing similar outflows from the rest of emerging markets," said the IIF report.

"The timing of outflows – which built after Russia's invasion of Ukraine – suggests foreign investors may be looking at China in a new light, though it is premature to draw any definitive conclusions in this regard."

**Russia Accused of Causing 'Global Food Crisis' at UN** - Russia was accused before the UN Security Council on Tuesday of having caused a "global food crisis" and putting people at risk of "famine" by starting the war in Ukraine, which serves as a breadbasket for Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin "started this war. Vladimir Putin created this global food crisis. And he is the one who can stop it," U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said during a Security Council meeting devoted to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

**Chinese strategic mineral interests** - In recent years, both Chinese overseas investment and hydropower development have been topics of increasing interest and research, with Chinese actors acting as financiers, developers, builders and sub-contractors.

In striving to achieve a foothold in 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries rich in mineral deposits, China approaches these regions and governments with offers of assistance and finance in other projects, such as hydroelectrical plants as seen below.



"There is no Ukraine Relations Act between the U.S. and Ukraine, but it still intervened to such a degree," Chen said. "Now the Biden administration puts the Taiwan Relations Act [TRA] first. Some call it a domestic law. Whatever you want to call it, it gives [the U.S.] a legal basis to act."

## Containment

**Slovakia Tells Russia To Cut 35 Staff From Bratislava Embassy** - Slovakia has told Russia it must cut 35 staff members at its embassy in Bratislava because of the actions of another Russian diplomat.

"This step is a necessary response to the continuation of activities of Russian Embassy staff that conflict with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the interests of the Slovak Republic and efforts to develop partnerships with the Russian Federation," the Slovak Foreign Ministry said in a statement on March 30.

**UN - Over 4 million refugees have fled Ukraine since Russian invasion began** - The U.N. refugee agency has labeled the exodus the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

Some 6.5 million people are internally displaced, the UN migration agency said last week.

"Among the responsibilities of those who wage war, everywhere in the world, is the suffering inflicted on civilians who are forced to flee their homes," tweeted U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

"The war in Ukraine is so devastating that 10 million have fled — either displaced inside the country, or as refugees abroad."

**Note** – as mentioned above regarding personal culpability for Putin, this development – refugees – will similarly be held as his **personal liability and culpability**.

**Putin Nixes Greece, France, Turkey Humanitarian Mission to Mariupol** - Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected on Tuesday the initiative by Greece, France and Turkey to send a humanitarian mission to the besieged city of Mariupol in Ukraine.

The office of French President Emmanuel Macron said that the operation was not possible "at this stage," after a telephone conversation with Putin.

**Note** – Another element of **culpability for Putin personally**. As an ex-prosecutor, I would love to handle the framing of these charges and prosecution of the defendant.

## Sanctions

**'Not Business As Usual': EU Prepares For Tense China Summit Amid Ukraine War** - When European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, president of the European Council, meet for a virtual summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping on April 1, they plan to warn Beijing that there will be consequences if it provides aid to Russia amid its invasion of Ukraine.

The high-stakes summit comes as ties between China and the European Union are more delicate than ever, as Beijing's alignment with Russia during its war in Ukraine has undercut its strained relations with Brussels, which were already rattled by a series of escalating trade and geopolitical tensions.

"At the China summit, there is a big agreement among EU representatives that this is not business as usual and Brussels should not be naive," a senior European diplomat told RFE/RL

**China Fears Russia's Collapse, Taiwan Foreign Minister Says** - China fears President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine could lead to Russia's collapse—a scenario that would leave Beijing alone in facing the West's increasing scrutiny, Taiwan's top diplomat has said.

Foreign Minister Joseph Wu believes the U.S. is pressuring the Chinese leadership to distance itself from the Kremlin's actions. But Beijing's considerations about its own fate and legitimacy mean it has so far failed to act, a decision Wu sees as likely to further undermine the already fraught U.S.-China relationship.

"The U.S. believes that, to stop Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, China needs to stand with other democratic countries and draw a line between itself and Russia. This is putting China under great pressure," Wu said in an interview that aired in Taipei on Wednesday. "This pressure is being ramped up by the deputy secretary of state, the secretary of state, the national security adviser and now the president himself. It puts direct pressure on China's leader."

"We can think about it this way: if China sees Russia collapse, is that good or bad for them? I believe the Chinese government, and many Chinese people, might find that hard to take. If Russia collapses, China would be alone in facing Western scrutiny of its expansionism," he said. "Even if the Chinese government doesn't approve of Russia's actions, it is difficult for them to put any sort of pressure on Russia. They are afraid Russia will collapse."

At the same time, Wu said, China understands that tying itself too closely to Russia could result in undesirable spillover effects for its own economy. "So, they face a difficult situation."

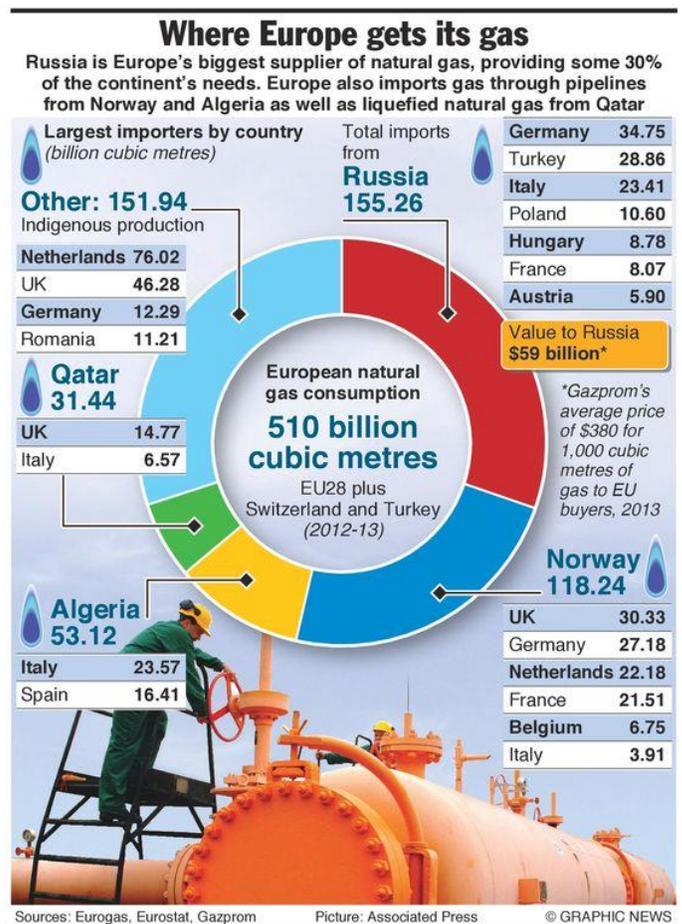
## Impacts

**Germany Gas Emergency Plan** - Germany triggered an emergency plan to manage gas supplies in Europe's largest economy, an unprecedented move that could see the government ration power if there is a disruption or halt in gas supplies from Russia.

**European Court Rejects RT Request To Lift Broadcasting Suspension** - The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has rejected a request by Russian state-controlled news outlet RT to temporarily remove the broadcasting suspension imposed on its French-language unit after Moscow launched its unprovoked attack on Ukraine.

**Uzbekistan** - Days After Publicly Supporting Ukraine's Sovereignty, Uzbek Foreign Minister Leaves Country With Illness. Two days after publicly supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov is reported to have fallen "ill" and is being treated abroad.

The report comes after Komilov told lawmakers in a speech on March 17 that Uzbekistan does not recognize the pro-Russia separatist-controlled districts in Ukraine's Donbas, known as the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. He also called for a "peaceful solution" to end Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine.



**Germany, Austria and Poland - oil imports** - Germany and Austria activated early warning plans today amid concerns that Moscow could cut natural gas deliveries, while Poland announced steps to end all Russian oil imports by year's end, in fresh signs of how Russia's war in Ukraine is affecting Europe's energy security.

**Vietnam - why Vietnam should worry more than Taiwan** - In Asia, it is Vietnam, rather than Taiwan that faces the same kind of strategic isolation as Ukraine, given its 'three no's doctrine of geopolitical neutrality.

Worse, as sweeping sanctions hit Russia, Hanoi may no longer be able to rely on Moscow as a source of military hardware and strategic investment. Facing maritime and border disputes with a resurgent China, Vietnam could struggle to solicit military assistance from either an isolated Russia or a lukewarm US in the event of a major conflict in the future.

Since its emergence as an independent state, Vietnam has had a roller-coaster relationship with China. For over 1,000 years, imperial dynasties in China tried to exercise suzerainty over northern Vietnam, culminating in wars in the 13th, 15th and 18th centuries.

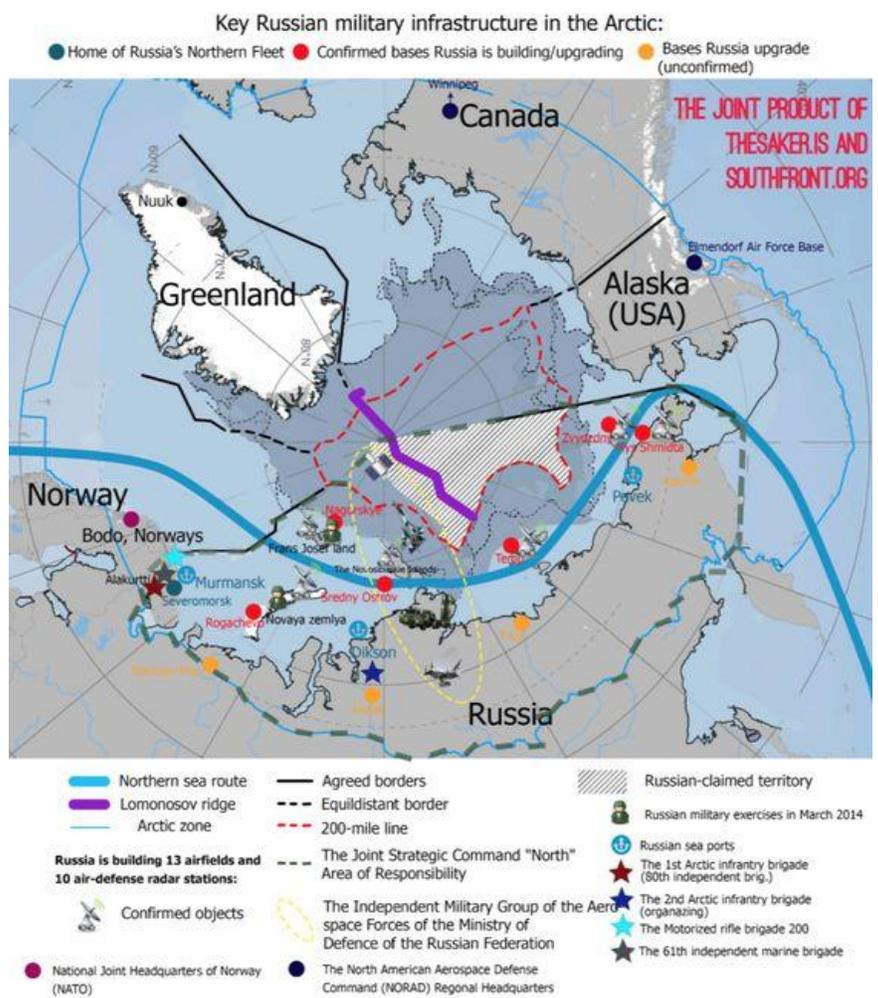
**Arctic** – in 2021 it was noted that Russia has amassed unprecedented military might in the Arctic and has been testing its newest weapons in a region freshly ice-free due to the climate emergency, in a bid to secure its northern coast and open up a key shipping route from Asia to Europe.

Weapons experts and Western officials expressed particular concern about one Russian 'super-weapon,' the Poseidon 2M39 torpedo. Development of the torpedo is moving fast with Russian President Vladimir Putin requesting an update on a "key stage" of the tests in February from his defense minister Sergei Shoigu, with further tests planned this year, according to multiple reports in state media.

This unmanned stealth torpedo is powered by a nuclear reactor and intended by Russian designers to sneak past coastal defenses -- like those of the US -- on the sea floor.

The device is intended to deliver a warhead of multiple megatons, according to Russian officials, causing radioactive waves that would render swathes of the target coastline uninhabitable for decades.

The Russian build-up has been matched by NATO and US troop and equipment movements. American B-1 Lancer bombers stationed in Norway's Ørland air base have recently completed missions in the eastern Barents Sea, for example. The US military's stealth Seawolf submarine was acknowledged by US officials in August as being in the area.



Of further and salient import in this area is the number of nuclear-powered ice breaking ships in the Russian Arctic fleet. Russia has more of these vessels than the rest of the world combined.

Lt. Col. Thomas Campbell, a Pentagon spokesman, also noted the recent creation of a Quick Reaction Alert force at two Arctic airfields -- Rogachevo and Anadyr -- and the trial of one at Nagurskoye airfield last year. Satellite imagery from March 16 shows probable MiG31BMs at Nagurskoye for what is thought to be the first time, bringing a new capability of Russian stealth air power to the far north.

High-tech weapons are also being regularly tested in the Arctic area, according to Russian officials quoted in state media and Western officials.

Campbell added that in November, Russia claimed the successful test of the 'Tsirkon' anti-ship hypersonic cruise missile.

Perhaps another reason for curtailing Russian ambitions around the globe.

The US last year deployed B1-B Lancer bombers to Norway in preparation for an Arctic defense strategy.

