

# Conflict Update Day 392

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – **166,570** (+960) soldiers killed, 3,557 (+5) enemy tanks, 6,887 (+8) armored combat vehicles, 2,589 (+3) artillery systems, 509 (2) MLRS systems, 272 (+2) air defense systems, 305 (+0) warplanes, 290 (+0) helicopters, 2,183 (+16) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 909 (+2) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,434 (+6) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 270 (+4) units of equipment.

## Death Toll

The high Russian death toll continues with 920 soldiers killed in the past 24 hours with an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 injured.

Russian attack emphases have shifted further south from Bakhmut but still continue here as well.

Increased fatalities continue with the moving average of deaths and injuries incurred by Kremlin forces continuing unabated, as can be seen from the graph alongside.



## Key Takeaways

**Zelenskyy visits troops near front-line city of Bakhmut** - President Zelenskyy visited Ukrainian troops on Wednesday near the front-line city of Bakhmut, and handed out medals to soldiers he said were heroically defending their country's sovereignty.

Video footage posted on social media showed the Ukraine leader dressed in a dark sweatshirt and military khaki trousers, handing out awards to exhausted-looking soldiers in combat gear in what appeared to be a large warehouse

"I am honoured to be here today to give awards to our heroes. To shake hands and thank them for protecting the sovereignty of our country," Zelenskyy wrote on the Telegram messaging app under the video footage.

**UK talks of a realistic possibility that Russia's offensive in Bakhmut is losing momentum** - UK intelligence services have pointed to a "realistic possibility" that the Russian offensive against the Ukrainian town of Bakhmut, located in the Donetsk region (east), is "losing the limited momentum it had achieved", following a counterattack by Ukrainian forces in the area.

'There is a realistic possibility that the Russian assault on the town is losing the limited momentum it had achieved, in part because some Russian Ministry of Defense units have been redeployed to other sectors,' they said, according to a series of messages posted by the British Ministry of Defense through its account on the social network Twitter.

Thus, they have stated that "fighting continues around the city center" and have added that "the Ukrainian defense remains at risk of being surrounded from the north and south", although they have highlighted that "during the last few days, Ukrainian counter-attack west of Bakhmut." "It will probably reduce the pressure on the threatened H-32 supply route," they concluded.

This opinion is of ISW, who for positing similar Russian positions and Kremlin has also capture this town.



coincidental with that weeks have been interpretations of effect in this area. The shifted focus further clearer they will not

Pictured above is a Ukrainian artillery unit engaged in the battle for Bakhmut.



**Crimea explosions reported as Ukraine launches more drone attacks** - Ukraine has launched drone attacks near Sevastopol, according to the Crimean city's governor. They follow other strikes this week in the north of the peninsula, which Kyiv has insisted it must take back from Russian occupation.

Ukrainian naval drones had tried to strike coastal bays in Sevastopol. However, they had been stopped by Russia's Black Sea Fleet, the Moscow-backed Sevastopol Governor Mikhail Razvozhayev said on his Telegram channel.

Video of a fire near the entrance to the Sevastopol Bay is circulating on social media, although it was unclear exactly what was burning.

**Ukraine probably isn't going to accept anything less than retaking all its territory from Russia** – Ukraine knows it has Russia on the backfoot and will push its battlefield advantage fully in order to see Russia evacuate all territory illegally occupied, both in 2014 and last year.

It is highly improbable that Kyiv will agree to anything less than a full return of Ukrainian lands seized.

**"You can put us in jail!" Russians soldiers fed up with war filmed threatening rebellion** - A group of mobilized Russian soldiers sent to fight in Ukraine have threatened to rebel and turn their guns on their commanders according to videos released by the men.

The men in the video were mobilized from Kaliningrad, Murmansk, and Arkhangelsk and originally trained as territorial defense officers according to Ostorozhno Novosti.

The Daily Beast's Allison Quinn picked up the story and wrote that the angry soldiers "shamed top military brass by saying there appears to be no battlefield strategy."

The story of the mobilized soldiers wouldn't end there, however. In a rare follow-up to a Russian dissatisfaction video, Ostorozhno Novosti was able to obtain and release a second video that revealed the aftermath of the angry soldier's original plea to Putin.

"You can jail us all! How many years is it, 5, 7, 10? We don't give a F," one soldier said as the unit's commander attempted to get the men to obey their orders to assault a fortified Ukrainian position somewhere along the frontline in Eastern Ukraine.

"No one is going on this storm. You can F----g jail us all," a soldier said according to a translation provided by The Daily Beast.

**Ukraine's M-1A1 tanks have a special power: the ability to pinpoint targets 8,000 meters away** - To speed up deliveries of new tanks to Ukraine, the US has opted to send secondhand M-1A1s instead of newer M-1A2s that would take longer to produce (As we reported yesterday).

The M-1A1s are ex-U.S. Marine Corps tanks the Corps retired starting in 2019. While lacking the sophisticated commander's sights that are the main feature of the M-1A2, the USMC M-1A1 Firepower Enhancement Package was the first American tank with a piece of equipment the Ukrainian army might find really useful: a Far Target Locator.

With the press of a button, an M-1A1 FEP's FTL calculates the GPS coordinates of a target as far away as 8,000 meters. The tank's four-person crew can relay—via voice radio or a digital network—these same coordinates to an artillery battery, which then can lob guided or unguided shells at the target. All in the span of a few minutes.

This way the tank functions as a forward-observer—spotting targets too far away for the tank itself to hit, but close enough for an artillery fire mission. A Far Target Locator combines a compass, gyros and a processor that takes input from the platform's GPS and laser rangefinder.

**It works like this:** the gunner spots a target through their long-range optics, fires a laser at it to determine its range, then activates the FTL. The FTL knows where the tank is, thanks to the vehicle's GPS unit. With the range data from the laser and orientation from the compass, it then calculates the target's GPS coordinates.

These days a host of U.S. military systems have FTLs. Even the command units of shoulder-fired Javelin anti-tank missiles. But in 2004, when the Marines began upgrading their 450 M-1A1s to FEP standard, the locators weren't yet standard equipment on American tanks.

"The FTL provides tank crews with accurate target location out to 8,000 [meters] with less than 35 meters [of] Circular Error Probability," US Marine Corps captain C.S. Roos explained. "This means that an accurate grid location to within 35 meters of the target will be provided for situational awareness and/or subsequent engagement by artillery or air."

**Russia's mistakes in Ukraine have destroyed its military forces** - In February, Britain's Defence Ministry estimated that Russia had likely lost 200,000 troops since the start of the war, a number which revealed the true weakness of Russian forces today.

All of Russia's losses in Ukraine, combined with the fact that the country has also lost roughly 50% of the initial Ukrainian territory that has been taken since the war began, has led many journalists and analysts to question how things have gone so wrong.

The blame for Putin's failing army should be laid squarely on the early missteps of the war according to Wasiura, who interviewed ISW's George Barros to better understand how Russia's military forces got to where they are today.

Barros' initial insight was that the Russian Armed Forces did not begin the war fighting in the capacity in which its war planners believed it could, and should, fight.

"Based on Russian military doctrine," Barros told Newsweek, "we were expecting them to wage an unrelenting, 72-hour air campaign aimed at crippling critical infrastructure and destroying as much of the conventional Ukrainian military as possible."

"Instead, the air and missile campaign lasted for only around six or seven hours, and they didn't really destroy anything of consequence before sending in ground troops, who in a lot of cases didn't seem to be expecting to meet actual resistance," Barro added.

Other major blunders according to Barros included Putin's political influence over the war and his risk-averse attitude, which did "tangible harm to the Russian war effort."

"They resorted to ineffective half-measures like trying to get by with volunteers, and the result was the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv " Barros added.

"It seems more and more that Russian military officers aren't correcting the mistakes they made in the early phases of the war against Ukraine—and that they may be incapable of doing so," Kaplan wrote.

This doesn't mean Russia is defeated according to George Barros. "They've shown that they can take losses, both in manpower and in territory, and continue to fight."

"Even if they can't take any more territory, there's every indication that they are going to continue fighting," Barros added, which means we shouldn't expect the conflict to end even if Russian forces are ground down even further while fighting in Ukraine.

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*Article from The Daily Digest earlier today*



**A shrinking reservoir signals Ukraine and Russia are waging a dangerous water war** - At the massive Kakhovka Reservoir in southern Ukraine, water levels should be rapidly rising. As winter snowmelt and rain flow into the Dnipro River, the reservoir fills so it can be used later in the year by farmers in the region's hot, dry summer.

But this spring, water levels at Kakhovka remain far below normal. The cause is a Russian-controlled hydroelectric power plant at the lower end of the reservoir. Since November, sluice gates at the plant have been left open, and water levels at Kakhovka have plunged to lows not seen in decades.

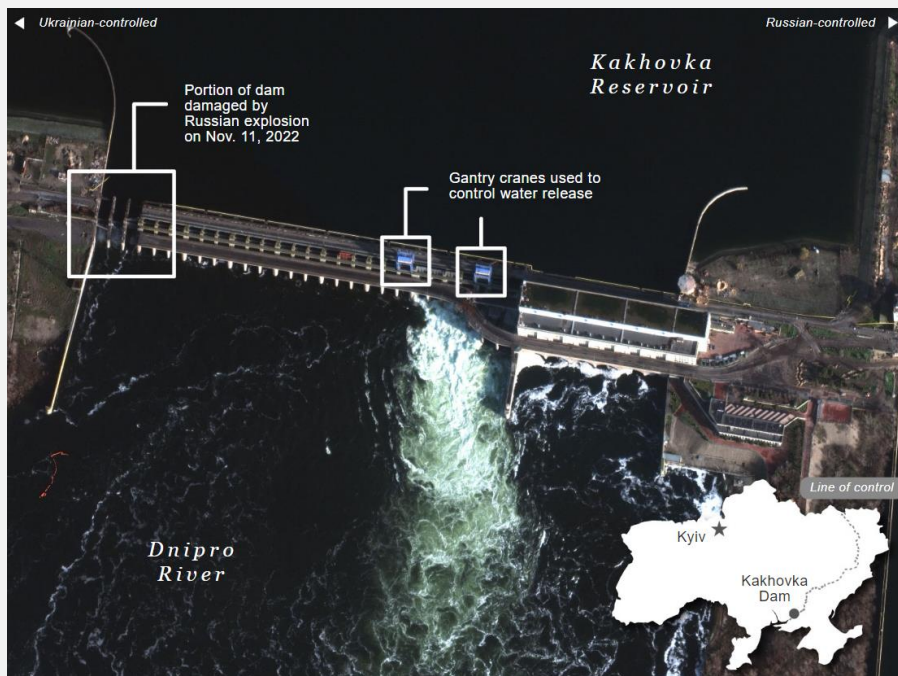
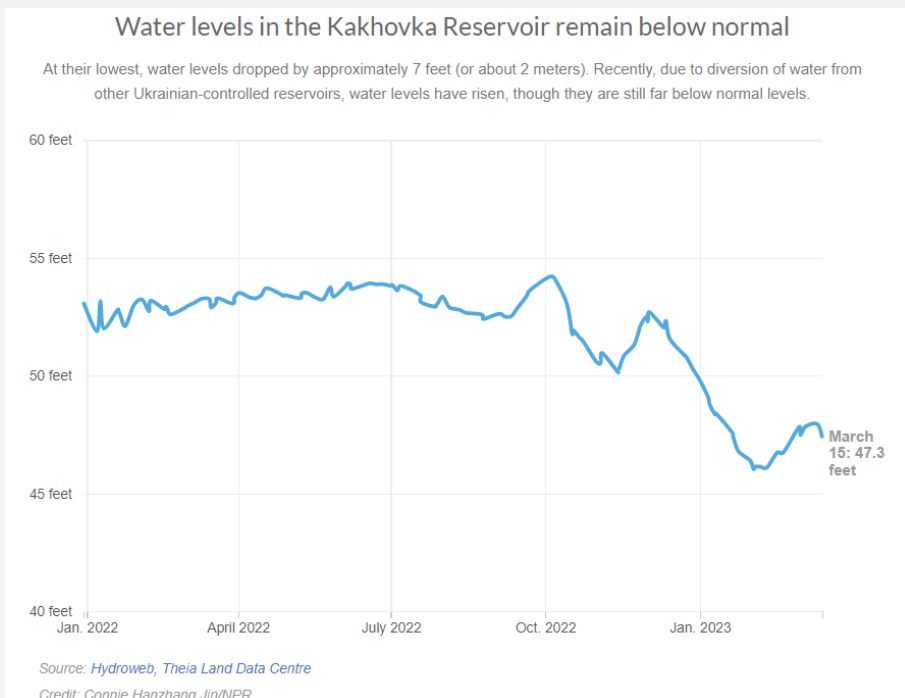
The reservoir is critical to southern Ukraine. It supplies water for villages and towns in the region and irrigates around half-a-million acres of farmland that's used to grow grains and vegetables. The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant also relies on it for cooling water.

The Ukrainian government has tried to stem the flow by releasing water from other Ukrainian-controlled reservoirs along the Dnipro River to refill Kakhovka, but it's at best a temporary solution.

Experts say that the situation at the reservoir highlights the growing impact of Russia's war on Ukraine's water supply.

"The attacks on electricity systems have been very explicitly covered, because they've been relentless," says Peter Gleick, a senior fellow at the Pacific Institute in Oakland, Calif. "But there have also been intentional attacks on water treatment systems and wastewater service systems, and that has cut off safe water for literally millions of Ukrainians."

In a paper out earlier this month, Gleick and his co-authors chart dozens of ways the war has impacted water throughout the country. Wastewater facilities have lost power, fouling their treatment pools, pumping stations have been bombed, cutting off towns from fresh water, and dams demolished, flooding nearby homes.



And the ongoing problems at Kakhovka are a high-profile reminder that the war's impact on Ukraine's water supply is far from over. At the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, some of the dam's sluice gates have been damaged in explosions and attacks, while others appear to be deliberately left open, allowing a torrent of water to drain from the

reservoir. After dropping to just 46 feet (14 meters), the reservoir's water level has begun rising again, because the Ukrainian government is filling it with water from other reservoirs on the Dnipro River, where the Kakhovka Reservoir is located. But to fill Kakhovka, the government warns, it is necessarily taking water from elsewhere in Ukraine.

"All of this poses a threat of lowering the water level to a critical level throughout the whole cascade of Dnipro reservoirs in Ukraine," Ukraine's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources told NPR in a statement. "As a result, 70% of the population of Ukraine, who consume water from Dnipro, may be deprived of water."

**'I don't know how i survived': an inside look into Russia's grinding campaign in eastern Ukraine** - At the end of February, Ivan, who lives in the settlement of Volchikha in Siberia's Altai region, got a phone call from his best friend, a mobilized soldier named Andrei who was serving in Ukraine. Although the two had been in regular contact since Andrei was called up, it had been more than a week since they had last spoken.

"I'll never forget that phone call," Ivan told RFE/RL. "It was the first time I'd heard his voice trembling: 'Man, I don't know how I survived. I'm the only one of my group still alive.' A grown man sobbed for nearly 10 minutes while he told how his comrades were killed before his eyes, including some who were just 20 years old."

For several months, Russia and Ukraine have been locked in intense trench warfare along a front line of more than 120 kilometers in Ukraine's Donbas region, including cities whose names have become globally known, such as Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Maryinka.

The fighting, which has involved waves of mobilized Russian soldiers and mercenaries from the ostensibly private Wagner military company being hurled against hardened Ukrainian fortifications, has been likened to the brutal, grinding engagements on the western front in World War I.

Even Wagner's founder, the Kremlin-connected businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, has called the Bakhmut offensive a "meat grinder."

"He saw them die and could do nothing to help," Ivan said of his friend, Andrei. "He survived that meat grinder by some miracle. In fact, it was announced he won a medal, but he was only thinking about one thing -- how to get out of there."

The Russian government has strictly limited reporting and information from the war zone. However, some accounts by mobilized Russian soldiers and their friends and relations back in Russia have begun trickling out, painting a picture of ill-trained and poorly equipped soldiers taking high casualties while storming Ukrainian positions. Because of the Russian government's track record of prosecuting those who have spoken out about the war, RFE/RL has concealed the identities of the persons in this report.

## Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

**Zelensky will soon expose China and Russia's phony Ukraine peace talks for what they really are** - Putin practically rolled over when Xi Jinping arrived in Moscow on Monday.

The 10-yard desk used to humiliate Kremlin officials was replaced by an intimate coffee table as the Russian and Chinese leaders fondly looked upon one another.

The fact that Xi has no qualms about sipping tea with a man just accused of war crimes involving mass abduction of children says all that is needed to know about his scruples of – or lack thereof. Given China's treatment of one million Uighurs in internment camps we shouldn't be surprised.

Xi isn't fussy about who he speaks to, as long as it serves the purpose of promoting Chinese power as an alternative to Washington. Earlier this month he managed to get Middle-East foes Saudi Arabia and Iran talking again.

For Xi Jinping it was another step in his grand plan to dismantle US-western hegemony.

Xi has made a point of restating China's partnership with Russia, which he sees as a useful ally in plans to disrupt the West's global power. In private, Chinese officials might be critical of Russia's invasion; however some observers think Xi admires the ruthlessness of his opposite number in the Kremlin.

But as the West seeks to isolate Russia, there's no doubt China's leverage over Moscow has grown. It already gets dirt-cheap Russian oil. Chinese ports in the Russian Arctic might be next.

But if or when Xi finally speaks to the other party in the Ukraine conflict, he shouldn't expect it to be smooth sailing.

In a smart move, PR-savvy President Zelenskyy has called on Xi to talk to him, too.

If the Chinese leader fails to accept his invitation, all his diplomatic efforts on the world stage will appear utterly hollow.

The WSJ predicted a Zoom call soon after Xi's trip to Russia. Ukrainian press reports suggest a phone call has already been scheduled.

Xi may have had an easy ride in Moscow; hopefully, his conversations with Kyiv will be far less comfortable.

The Chinese leader might hope to portray a direct conversation with Zelenskyy as a significant step in Beijing's efforts to bring peace. Xi will certainly want to promote his Ukraine Peace Plan and sell his recent Global Security Initiative (GSI), both of which seek to shift blame onto the US and West, and turn non-aligned countries against them.

Zelenskyy should tell Xi what he really thinks about the plan. It calls on combatants to "cease hostilities," "protect civilians," and "resume peace talks," which are of course, vapid and utterly dishonest demands in the context of the more powerful country, Russia, trying to erase its victim, Ukraine, from the map. A ceasefire now would cement Russia's land grab.

Zelenskyy will find it difficult not to point out the cant in the Chinese peace documents, most notably "core principle number two" in the GSI, which calls the world (apart, it would seem, from Russia) to "stay committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries."

Nothing offered by Beijing so far supports Ukraine's demand that all Russian troops retreat from its territory. Beijing has yet to condemn the invasion.

Even Zelenskyy's considerable powers of persuasion are unlikely to sway the Chinese's leader's underlying views or ambitions. But hopefully he will deny China and Russia a propaganda victory which the pair would use as they seek to undermine the case for Western sanctions.

Zelenskyy could go even further, and relay to the world exactly what was discussed, instead of a jargon-filled statement that China can use to back its tacit support of Moscow's invasion.

To undermine Xi's phony charm offensive, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who is to chair the G7 summit in May, made a surprise visit to Kyiv today. He visited a church in Bucha, the town outside Kyiv that became a symbol of Russian atrocities against civilians, "to show solidarity and unwavering support for Ukraine as head of Japan and chairman of G7." Presumably no Chinese official will be making a similar visit.

It is Zelenskyy himself, however, who can do the most to show China's hollow and hypocritical stance for what it is.

Zelenskyy can be a pawn in Xi's "pro-peace" PR campaign or give him both barrels over his tacit support for the brutalization of his country. All Zelenskyy's actions so far in this horrible war suggest he'll opt, quite rightly, for the latter.

*Article Michael Day, Chief Foreign Commentator from inews.co.uk yesterday.*

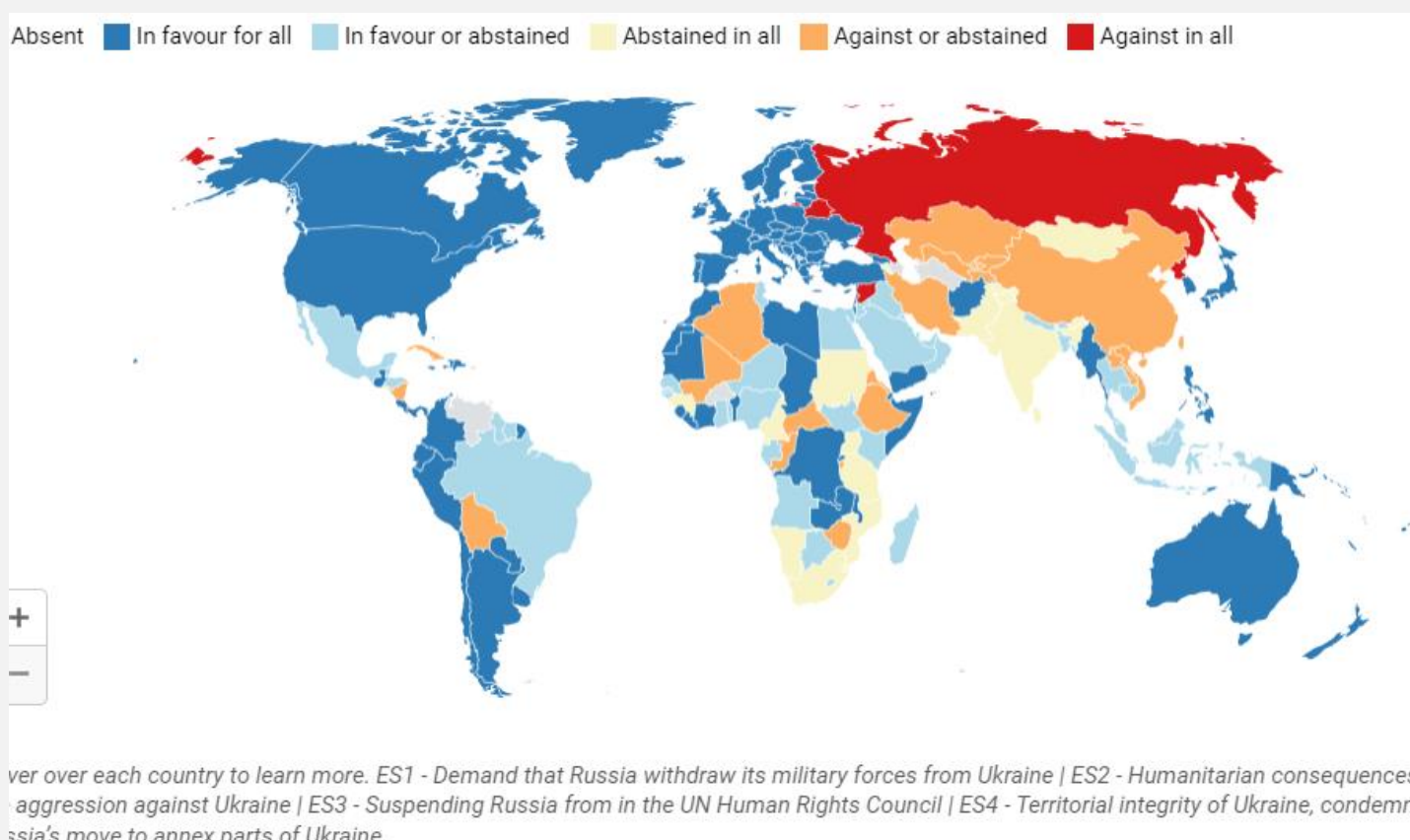
**Comment** – Both Putin and Xi have stepped on a rake in their pursuit of greater gains in their desired bi-polar global world order. Zelenskyy has, wittingly or unwittingly, as espoused in the above article, called the Chinese leader to account in Putin’s illegal invasion. Xi cannot escape the reality of this fact.

**Prince William makes surprise visit to troops near Ukrainian-Polish border** - Prince William made a rare, unannounced trip to Poland on Wednesday, meeting British and Polish troops stationed near the Ukrainian-Polish border and praising their “cooperation in support of the people of Ukraine and their freedom.”

**Russia boosts defences near Japan** - Russia announced a division of its Bastion coastal defence missile systems had been deployed to Paramushir, one of the Kuril islands in the north Pacific, some Japan claims as its territory.

The move is part of a wider strengthening of Russian defences in its vast far eastern regions, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said, partly in response to what he called US efforts to “contain” Russia and China.

### Where every country stands on the Russia-Ukraine war



**Sweden passes NATO accession bill as it waits on ratification** - Sweden's parliament on Wednesday formally approved a bill to allow the country to join NATO when its application has been ratified by all 30 members of the alliance, a process where it remains waiting on the final endorsements.

## Containment

**UK, Russia spar over depleted uranium shells to Ukraine** - Britain’s foreign secretary says there was no nuclear escalation in the Ukraine war after Russia criticized the United Kingdom for supplying depleted uranium tank munitions to Ukrainian forces.



Russia has warned of a "serious" escalation of the Ukraine crisis if the United Kingdom were to give Kyiv armour-piercing ammunition that contains depleted uranium. "This is a step towards a further escalation, and a serious one at that," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

Putin warned the United Kingdom over the provision of depleted-uranium tank shells to Ukraine, saying Moscow would be "forced to react" if these were delivered.

**The United States has inaugurated its first permanent army base in Poland.** More than 10,000 US soldiers are currently stationed in Poland, which has become the main transit country for international aid and equipment to neighboring Ukraine.

**How depleted uranium shells will be used by Ukraine against Russia** - "Highly effective" depleted uranium munitions provided by the UK will be used by Ukrainian forces against Russian tanks.

On Monday this week, British Minister of State for Defense, Annabel Goldie, said the UK would provide Ukraine with depleted uranium armor-piercing rounds for donated Challenger 2 main battle tanks. The U.K. pledged 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine back in January.

Depleted uranium rounds are "highly effective in defeating modern tanks and armored vehicles," Goldie said.

But Putin hit back at the promised munitions delivery, saying there was a "nuclear" element to which Russia was obliged to respond. Moscow has repeatedly threatened and alluded to the use of nuclear weapons over the course of the full-scale war in Ukraine.

"If all this happens, Russia will have to respond accordingly, given that the West collectively is already beginning to use weapons with a nuclear component," he said, during a summit with Chinese leader, Xi Jinping.

"Alongside our granting of a squadron of Challenger 2 main battle tanks to Ukraine we will be providing ammunition, including armor-piercing rounds which contain depleted uranium," a UK defense ministry spokesperson said. "Such rounds are highly effective in defeating modern tanks and armored vehicles."

Its armed forces have "used depleted uranium in its armor-piercing shells for decades" and a "standard component."

"Russia knows this, but is deliberately trying to disinform," the spokesperson added. Research has indicated that environmental and health risks from depleted uranium munitions is "likely to be low," the spokesperson said.

The UK government previously said it would be "wrong to deny our armed forces a legitimate and effective capability," such as depleted uranium munitions, "that can help them achieve their objectives as quickly and safely as possible."

The heavy metal rounds are 70 percent more dense than lead and self-sharpen on impact with armor. They also allow forces to engage enemies at greater distances, the government evaluated.

Russian defense minister, Sergey Shoigu, said the use of the depleted uranium munitions brought "serious health conditions," in remarks reported by Russian state media.

The health and environmental implications of depleted uranium munitions attract mixed conclusions. The International Atomic Energy Agency said depleted uranium is "considerably less radioactive than natural uranium," and there is a risk of people developing cancer from exposure to radiation emitted by natural and depleted uranium.

**Marcos says new military bases with US to be 'scattered' around the Philippines** - President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said today four new military bases under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US would be located in various parts of the Philippines, including in a province facing the South China Sea.

Last month, Marcos granted the United States access to four sites, on top of five existing locations under the 2014 EDCA, which comes amid China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and towards self-ruled Taiwan.

"There are four extra sites scattered around the Philippines – some in the north, some around Palawan, some further south," Marcos told reporters at the sidelines of the Philippine army's founding anniversary.

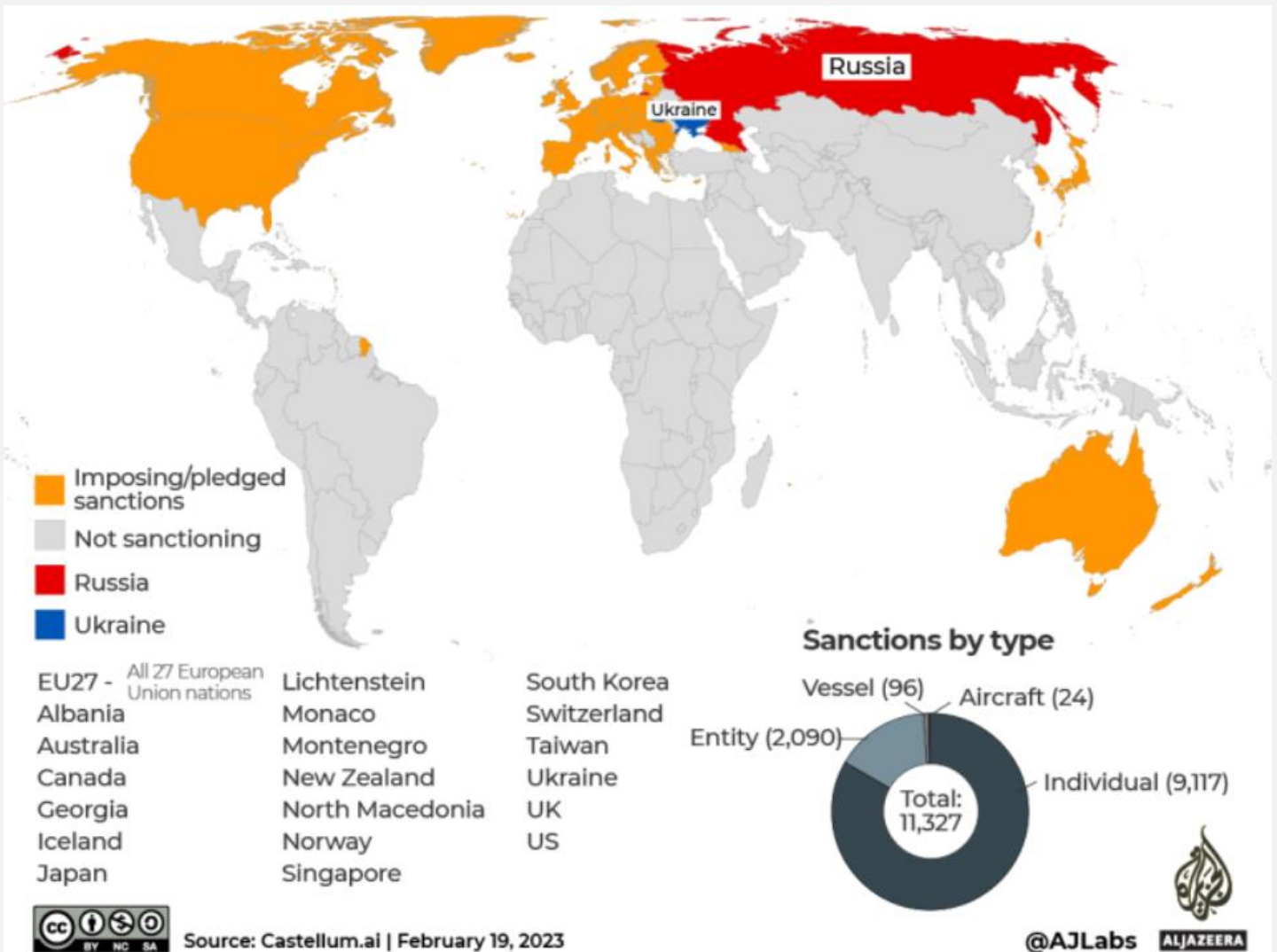
EDCA allows US access to Philippine bases for joint training, pre-positioning of equipment and building of facilities such as runways, fuel storage and military housing, but it is not a permanent presence.

The Philippines and the United States would announce the locations of the bases soon, Marcos said, adding the sites would boost the country's ability to defend the "eastern side" of its largest island, Luzon. Luzon is the closest main Philippine island to Taiwan.

## Sanctions

**Russia, Belarus barred from next season's ice hockey worlds** - Russia and Belarus teams were excluded by the International Ice Hockey Federation on Wednesday from all its world championships next season, including the women's event in the United States.

### Which countries have sanctioned Russia?



## Putin & Russia

**Putin should 'shut up' after comments showed weakness—former commander** - Prominent military blogger and former Russian commander Igor Girkin has again disparaged Vladimir Putin, saying that the president should "shut up" about aspects of his full-scale invasion.

In a video uploaded to his Telegram social media channel, the former FSB officer, who led Moscow-backed forces in the Donbas region from 2014, said that Putin does not act like he is the president "of a huge country with over 1,000 years of history."

Girkin mocked the reason that Putin gave state TV at the Ulan-Ude Aviation Plant last week about why Russia did not invade Ukraine in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea when Kyiv's army was "rotten and weak."

"The advice I can give him—or rather his speechwriters—is keep quiet. He should not open his mouth," said Girkin, who believed this would be better than "mumbling the most stupid of excuses which you can only laugh at."

Girkin said that "everyone knows" how in 2014, when Moscow annexed Crimea, Russian forces could probably have been able to "walk from Kharkiv to Odessa without firing a single shot."

After eight years of the "hypothetical presence" of hypersonic weapons that Putin frequently boasts about, Girkin said, "not only is it impossible to walk to Odesa, but we could not even properly enter Kharkiv," referring the eastern city which Ukrainian forces pushed Russia out of.

"Shut up. Vladimir Vladimirovich, shut up, it would be better to stay quiet," said Girkin, adding that "instead of accepting the leadership of the state's defense committee, he is flying helicopter simulators."

**Putin/Xi meeting** - Putin hosted his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for two days – on Monday and Tuesday.

On the second day of talks, Putin and Xi signed an agreement bringing relations into a "new era of cooperation," with the two leaders calling for "responsible dialogue" to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

Putin said a Chinese proposal to end the conflict could be used as the basis of a peace settlement but that the West and Ukraine were not yet ready.

The declaration signed by Putin and Xi said the two countries were concerned by NATO's growing presence in Asia and accused Washington of "undermining" global security.

Moscow and Beijing said they will regularly conduct joint military exercises and ramp up cooperation between their armed forces.

Putin said an agreement had been reached on the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, which would send Russian natural gas to China via Mongolia.

**Putin, Xi pledge friendship but talks yield no Ukraine breakthrough** - Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin emerged from two days of talks on Tuesday (21 March) with warm words of friendship between China and Russia and joint criticism of the West, but no sign of a diplomatic breakthrough over Ukraine.

Xi's visit to Moscow – long touted by the Kremlin as a show of support from its most powerful friend – featured plenty of demonstrative bonhomie. The two leaders referred to each other as dear friends, promised economic cooperation and described their countries' relations as the best they have ever been.

A joint statement included familiar accusations against the West – that Washington was undermining global stability and NATO barging into the Asia-Pacific region.

On Ukraine, Putin praised Xi for a peace plan he proposed last month, and blamed Kyiv and the West for rejecting it.

**China's Xi tells Putin of 'changes not seen for 100 years'** - President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin were filmed saying warm goodbyes as their two-day meeting ended with China's leader saying they were driving geopolitical change around the world.

The two leaders called for "responsible dialogue" to resolve the Ukraine crisis, with Xi acknowledging Beijing and Moscow had signed an agreement bringing their ties into a "new era" of cooperation.

"Right now there are changes – the likes of which we haven't seen for 100 years – and we are the ones driving these changes together," Xi told Putin as he stood at the door of the Kremlin to bid him farewell.

The Russian president responded: "I agree."

Xi then put out his hand to shake Putin's and said: "Take care please, dear friend." Putin responded by holding Xi's hand with both of his and saying, "Have a safe trip."

**Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be setting conditions to weaponize the UNSC** as a method of Russian power projection in advance of Russia's accession to the rotating UNSC presidency in April. Russian UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya stated during a press conference on March 21 that Russia plans to hold an informal UNSC meeting in early April to discuss the "real situation" of "Ukrainian children taken to Russia."

ISW says Nebenzya claimed Russia planned to hold the meeting before the announcement of the ICC arrest warrants for Putin and Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Nebenzya's announcement, as well as vitriolic denials of the ICC's accusations by Russian officials, come as Kremlin-appointed occupation officials continue to facilitate the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia under a variety of schemes and guises.

Putin additionally made a number of notable comments proclaiming Russia's commitment to the UN, UNSC, and the UN charter during his press conference with Chinese President Xi Jinping on March 21. Taken in tandem, Nebenzya's and Putin's comments suggest that Russia continues to use its position on the UNSC as a base of power projection as the UNSC prepares for Russia to take the UNSC presidency in April. By setting information conditions to posture about Russia's supposed commitment to the UNSC, Putin is positioning himself to continue to weaponize and exploit Russia's UNSC veto power in the coming months.

## China

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had suggested to China** that it participate in Ukraine's peace formula to bring an end to the war but had not yet received a response.

**Washington said that if China truly was interested in seeing peace in Ukraine,** Xi should urge Moscow to withdraw from Ukraine and bring an end to the invasion.