

# Conflict Update # 48

May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

### Key Takeaways

**Russian forces resumed** air, artillery, and ground assaults on the Azovstal Steel Plant following the conclusion of the May 2 evacuation efforts.

**Russian forces continued** to regroup on the Donetsk-Luhansk axis in likely preparation for a westward advance in the direction of Lyman and Slovyansk.

**Ukrainian Armed Forces** conducted a counteroffensive that likely pushed Russian forces up to 40 km east of Kharkiv City.

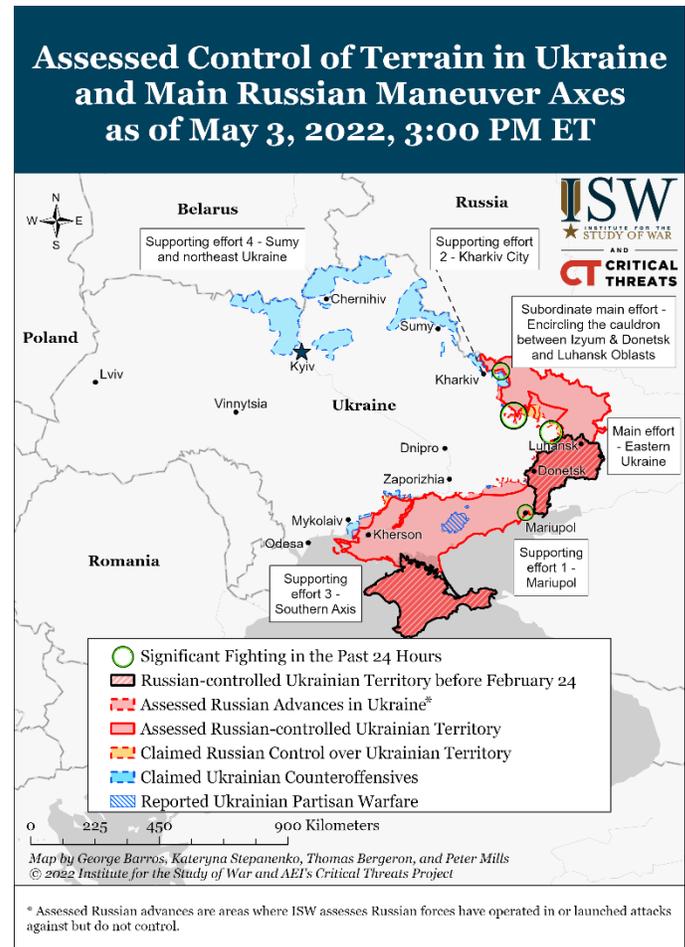
**Russian forces conducted** limited ground offensives in Zaporizhia Oblast in the vicinity of Huliapole and intensified reconnaissance operations in the vicinity of Odesa amid growing tensions in Transnistria.

**Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts** - Russian forces continued to conduct unspecified offensive operations southwestward from Izyum towards Barvinkove today. Ukrainian General Staff stated that elements of the Airborne Forces (VDV), 1st Tank Army, 20th, 29th, 35th, and 36th Combined Arms Armies, and 68th Army Corps are operating in the Barvinkove direction and suffering continuous losses.

Russian forces continued to fire along the Donetsk-Luhansk frontline and did not make any confirmed ground attacks on May 3. Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics), 8th, 58th, and 5th Combined Arms Armies, Pacific Fleet, 2nd and 41st Combined Arms Armies, 90th Tank Division, and unspecified VDV elements are regrouping to advance westward in the direction of Lyman and Slovyansk.

Remotely sensed NASA data for fires and heat anomalies observed significant high-temperature anomalies in Lyman between May 2 and 3 over the past 24 hours, indicating Russian indirect fire that was likely in preparation for such an advance. The large number of combined arms armies, divisions, and other organizations identified as contributing troops to this effort suggests that many if not most of the Russian units engaged on this axis are understrength and in ad-hoc organizations. That observation, if true, may help explain the slow and halting pace of the Russian advance.

**Supporting Effort #1—Mariupol** - Russian forces resumed air, artillery, and ground attacks on the Azovstal Steel Plant on May 3 after the conclusion of preliminary evacuation efforts. Deputy Commander of the Azov Regiment Sviatoslav Palamar stated that Russian forces conducted a ground assault to attempt entry of Azovstal under the cover of airstrikes that killed two civilians inside the plant.



**Supporting Effort #2—Kharkiv City** - Ukrainian Armed Forces yesterday conducted a large-scale counteroffensive east of Kharkiv City which could unhinge Russian positions to the northeast. A US senior defense official reported that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces about 40 km east, and social media reports corroborate that report by showing Ukrainian forces liberating the settlement of Staryi Saltiv.

Russian forces reportedly retreated in the direction of Volchansk near the Russian state border. Ukraine's Advisor to the Internal Affairs Minister Anton Herashchenko said that Ukrainian forces liberated the village of Molodova near Staryi Saltiv on May 3.

Ukrainian forces likely liberated more settlements along the T2104 highway based on May 1 reports that fighting occurred in highway adjacent settlements of Khotomlya, Shestakove, Staryi Saltiv, Molodova, and Peremoha. Russian forces maintained artillery positions in Tsyrkuny, approximately 20 km from downtown Kharkiv City, and will likely seek to retain their remaining settlements in Kharkiv's vicinity to continue daily artillery fire and pin Ukrainian units in the area but may have to reinforce their positions in this area to do so.

**Supporting Effort #3—Southern Axis** - Russian forces today conducted limited ground offensives in Zaporizhia Oblast but confined themselves to shelling elsewhere in southern Ukraine. Zaporizhia Oblast Administration Head Oleksandr Staruch reported that Russian forces launched an assault on the outskirts of Huliapole and on the area east of the settlement but did not seize any new territories. Russian forces shelled the settlement of Zaluznychne around 8 km from Huliapole, likely to break the Ukrainian defenses and secure the northbound T0401 highway.

The Russian Defense Ministry released a video of Bastion coastal defense complexes firing Oniks anti-ship cruise missiles at land targets, claiming that Russian forces today struck a Ukrainian logistics center in Odesa Oblast. The use of the Oniks anti-ship missile in a ground-attack role may suggest that Russian forces are experiencing shortages of the other types of long-range precision-guided munitions necessary to disrupt Ukrainian logistics.

**Supporting Effort #4—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine** - There were no significant activities on this axis in the past 24 hours.

### **Immediate items to watch**

- Russian forces will likely continue to merge offensive efforts southward of Izyum with westward advances from Donetsk in order to encircle Ukrainian troops in southern Kharkiv Oblast and Western Donetsk.
- Russia may change the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, possibly by merging them into a single "Donbas Republic" and/or by annexing them directly to Russia.
- Russian forces will likely attempt to starve out the remaining defenders of the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol and continue to mount air, artillery, and ground attacks
- Ukrainian counteroffensives around Kharkiv City may unhinge Russian positions northeast of the city, possibly forcing the Russians to choose between reinforcing those positions or abandoning them if the Ukrainians continue to press their counterattack.
- Russian forces may be preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.

**Donbas Russian offensive isn't going exactly as anticipated** - The bluntest assessment of how the Russian military offensive in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region is going came from someone in a very good position to know.

"The general conclusion, unfortunately, is bleak," said Igor Girkin, a notorious Russian military commander and former intelligence officer who played an instrumental role when war first erupted in the Donbas in 2014.

“In the best-case scenario, the enemy will be slowly ‘pushed out’ of the Donbas with large losses (for both sides, of course) across many weeks and possibly many months,” he wrote in a post on his Telegram channel on April 28. “Overall, the enemy is defending competently, fiercely, it controls the situation and its troops.”

So how is it going? By all accounts, slower than anticipated. Why? That’s a more complicated question.

“It’s not so clear that the offensive has faltered, that it’s not going to deliver results,” said Konrad Muzyka, a defense analyst and director of the Polish-based Rochan Consulting.

“My sources in Ukraine are very much concerned about Russian capabilities around Izyum,” he said, referring to a strategically located city in eastern Ukraine and adding that “it’s way too early to say” the Donbas offensive has faltered.

Overall, the Russian military’s failures have surprised many experts, who had predicted its larger and better equipped armed forces would quickly seize major objectives, like Kyiv and port cities such as Mariupol.

Instead, Ukraine’s dogged defenders have inflicted unusually high casualties on Russian troops, as well as taking a severe toll on Russian weapons and equipment -- a fact due in large part to the massive supplies of weaponry being shipped from the West.

“Russia is struggling with their pace of operations, it’s obvious, they have large losses, their tactics have proven unsuccessful, they’re facing a more determined defense,” said Kostas Tigkos, an expert on the Russian military at Janes Group in London. “It wasn’t that they wanted this to be a slow movement in the Donbas.”

Johan Norberg, a senior military analyst at the Swedish Defense Research Agency, a government-funded research organization, said “The vast majority of Russian power has been consumed by now -- after two months, they’ve taken a pretty heavy beating in terms of fatalities, and they’ve lost lots of equipment,” Norberg told RFE/RL. “They have very little choice but to do it more slowly and methodically.” “They aren’t dragging out this for fun,” he said.

In the Donbas, Russian commanders are “gluing together” units, some heavily damaged, from the previous fronts near Kyiv, said Michael Kofman, a military analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses in Arlington, Virginia. “They want basically to take their [best] shot at this, because the truth is after this offensive, the Russian military is a spent force when it comes to their potential for future offensives,” he said. “However this offensive plays out...they do not have the capacity for another major offensive in Ukraine.”

As for larger systemic issues, Norberg said Russia was nearing a major inflection point in the war: A decision on whether to commit more soldiers to the fight, which could entail declaring general mobilization.

“It’s the fog of war and all, but I think there are fewer soldiers in the Russian armed forces than we knew,” Norberg said. “If the pre-war figures were true, if you had more [soldiers], you would add them now.

“But the Russians have not, they don’t have the force to make a decisive move against the Ukrainians,” he said. “Russia doesn’t have the conventional force to make a major move.”

To bring in a major new influx of soldiers, experts said, would potentially require Putin declaring all-out war on Ukraine, possibly framing the fight as one against NATO, and general mobilization -- a major escalation.

“There can be no larger movement of troops, or fresh troops in the next week or two, given simply the available troops on the ground,” Tigkos told RFE/RL. “It is unlikely there will be an intensification of operations, simply because there are not enough troops to cover that entire front.” (Radio Liberty).

**Putin’s Elite Units Are Refusing to Fight in Ukraine** - Even Putin’s elite units are abandoning the fight in Ukraine and heading home, according to new audio released by Ukrainian intelligence on Tuesday. In a 50-second audio clip

that Ukraine's Security Service says is an intercepted communication between a Russian soldier and his friend, the soldier complains of more losses in Ukraine "than in four years in Chechnya." His comrade admits that he doesn't even know the real death toll, as "they don't voice [the numbers] here." He then asks if it's true that members of the RosGvardia, Putin's National Guard, have been leaving Ukraine along with the special police known as the Omonovtsy. The soldier erupts with fury: "We don't f..... need them. They're returning [home] because they're staging revolts, they don't want to go any further. All these f..... special forces, our fighters, dammit, backtracked... and they refuse to go further." Ukrainian authorities did not specify where the purported soldier in the recording was based in Ukraine, and it was not clear when the call was intercepted.

## Putin

**War in Ukraine Coming Home to Russia, Making It Harder for Moscow to Fill the Ranks** - As Russian losses in Ukraine mount and resistance in the Russian army to being deployed there increases, Moscow faces growing difficulties with mobilizing soldiers to fill the gaps. This problem is especially acute in places where the funerals of those who have died in combat are an ever more familiar part of life —such as in small non-Russian republics like Buryatia and Dagestan and smaller but predominantly ethnic-Russian areas far from Moscow. In those regions, no amount of state propaganda can hide the true costs of President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine, which can depress locals' willingness to take part. For now, no reliable figures exist on just how many potential soldiers are refusing to serve when drafted, but there are already clear indications that Moscow has been forced to shift to the vastly more expensive method of hiring "contract" soldiers, who can be dispatched somewhat more easily to Ukraine.

The most dramatic form of draft resistance so far has taken the form of violent attacks on as many as five military commissariats responsible for carrying out the draft in Russia. The latest of these attacks, in the Middle Volga Republic of Mordovia, forced officials there to suspend the military call-up across that region. Whether that has happened anywhere else is unknown, but what is certain is that the fighting in Ukraine has now come home to Russia. And some Russian citizens, often far removed from the capitals, are expressing their anger at Putin's policies in ways that are increasingly leaving the entire country on edge.

Aleksey Izhak, a security analyst at Kyiv's National Institute for Strategic Research, said that "Russians have been mobilized for victory," but only on television and not in real life, "when it is necessary to really die." A major reason for the Kremlin's decision to avoid a general mobilization is the memory of 1917 in the minds of the Russian leadership. They know that first, Russians were enthusiastic about the war, but then they turned the guns they received back on their leaders and overthrew two governments that supported the war against the will of the people. Putin and his entourage do not want to take that risk by dramatically increasing the size of the army or even officially declaring war, Izhak suggested.

But if losses mount and resistance both to the draft and to service in Ukraine increase, Izhak argued, Moscow will have little choice but to make a change. So far, it is trying to conduct "a hidden mobilization" by calling up reserves. But that only calls attention to just how serious the problem has become. And if the Kremlin is forced to begin a more general mobilization, Izhak said, it will have to "somehow sell it to the population." According to him, Russia's government is preparing to do that with the fires that had broken out in Bryansk and Belgorod—something, he contended, Moscow can and likely will use to justify general mobilization. But even that will not make things easy for the Kremlin: the government has talked so long about its victories that many Russians will view full mobilization as an acknowledgement of defeat (Apostrophe.ua, April 27).

Women, mothers, wives and children of draftees, and their friends have taken the lead in organizing anti-war protests. Indeed, what has come to be known as the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (better known under its Russian acronym FAS) now has more subscribers to its internet platforms than any other Russian anti-war groups (Semnasem.org, April 19). Not surprisingly, women in these republics and ones from there who are now forced to live abroad are among the most fearful about losses among men of their nationalities in Ukraine; therefore, they are also the most understanding and

even supportive of those who seek not to serve there. Some openly call Russia the aggressor and even say what is going on is “a second Chechnya” that they want nothing to do with. Such views both reflect and help shape the attitudes of the men in those regions. And to judge from what they are now saying, Moscow is going to have far more trouble filling its draft this spring than ever before. (The Moscow Times, April 27; Baikal-journal.ru, April 28; New Times, April 29; Daptar.ru, Kasporav.ru, April 30).

**Ukraine intelligence says Russia's war may end in September** - Russia may be looking to conclude its war in Ukraine within four months' time, according to Kyiv's Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense, which said Tuesday it believes September is Moscow's intended deadline.

"There is information among the occupier's military that ... the so-called 'special military operation' is set for September 2022," the ministry said.

## Nuclear

**Propaganda in Russia arguing for nuclear weapons use** - Russian journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov decried Tuesday Russian propaganda arguing for using nuclear weapons in the Ukraine conflict, warning that would signal "the end of humanity".

"I would not rule out the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used," Muratov told journalists in Geneva, speaking through a translator. The Kremlin said it had placed Russian nuclear forces on high alert shortly after its invasion of Ukraine began February 24.

And amid increasing Western support to Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made thinly veiled threats hinting at a willingness to deploy Russia's tactical nuclear weapons, which Russian military doctrine holds can be used to force an adversary to retreat.

Speaking at an event marking the World Press Freedom Day, Muratov, whose own Novaya Gazeta newspaper has been forced to suspend publication amid Moscow's military intervention, warned that the Kremlin's "propaganda warriors" were striving to make nuclear weapons use more palatable to the Russian public.

**Finland and Sweden 'can count' on Germany for protection and NATO membership support** - Finland and Sweden “can count” on Germany's support should they decide to join the NATO alliance, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday, adding that both countries were already benefitting from EU military protection in case of an attack.

Speaking at Schloss Meseberg, the chancellor's retreat north of Berlin, Scholz said that Russia's invasion of Ukraine violated “all legal agreements and understandings which we had found in Europe in the last decades ... and therefore nobody can be sure that the Russian president and the Russian government will not break international law and our agreements by force on another occasion.”

Scholz, who was addressing reporters alongside Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and her Swedish counterpart Magdalena Andersson, said that Germany was “following very closely” the debate in both countries about their potential accession to NATO, and added: “For us it is clear: If these two countries decide that they want to be part of the NATO alliance, then they can count on our support.”

## Sanctions

**Chinese tech firms may follow DJI to cut Russia and Ukraine exposure to minimize political, sanctions risk, experts say** - Chinese companies are expected to follow drone maker DJI in halting operations in Russia and Ukraine,

in a bid to appear neutral and shake off mounting political pressure from both Beijing and Washington amid the Ukraine war, experts say.

Unlike their Western counterparts, few tech Chinese companies have stepped up to make their positions clear on their Russian businesses partly because the Chinese government officially opposes sanctions imposed by Western countries on Moscow. At the same time, Chinese companies are quietly assessing the risk of “secondary sanctions” if they keep supplying Russia with products that may involve US technologies.

Last week, Shenzhen-based DJI said that it would temporarily suspend all businesses in Russia and Ukraine, after being accused that its products were used for military activities in the Ukraine war.

**Applying Lessons from Sanctions on Russia to China** - The United States and its allies have imposed a series of coordinated economic sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. They are the most comprehensive sanctions aimed at a major economy—previously the 11th-largest in the world—in more than 70 years. Their use has raised questions in Western capitals and Beijing about what similar sanctions could do if aimed at the second-largest economy, China, particularly during a crisis over Taiwan. But an equally important question is whether Washington and its allies would use similar sanctions against China, including as a deterrent. Judging from Western actions and preferences during the Ukraine crisis, the answer appears to be no.

The sanctions targeting Russia cover finance, imports, exports, travel, and individuals. In the China context, the discussion has focused on what equivalent financial sanctions would do to China and global finance and trade. There is no doubt that banning major Chinese banks from the SWIFT messaging network, severing their U.S. dollar correspondent banking links, or freezing the central bank’s foreign exchange reserves would be massively disruptive.

The scenarios are complex, but a few comparisons of China with Russia give us an idea how much more impactful such sanctions could be if aimed at Beijing. In 2021, China’s GDP was roughly 10 times larger than Russia’s, Chinese banks had more than 30 times as many assets as Russian banks, and cumulative foreign direct and portfolio investment in China was more than six times the amount that had flowed into Russia. China is the world’s top trading economy and the number one exporter of manufactured goods by a wide margin. Despite its economic heft, China continues to rely on the U.S. dollar for most of its international financing, including for trade, making it vulnerable to U.S. financial sanctions, especially if—as with the Russia sanctions—these sanctions are conducted with other advanced economies.

However, it is also worth considering the conditions under which Washington and its allies might consider such sanctions on China, rather than focusing solely on their potential economic implications. The course of the actual sanctions on Russia offers some useful insights into this hypothetical question. The Russia sanctions have proceeded under a sequence of three goals: to deter, to destabilize, and to degrade.

First, the United States and its allies sought to deter Moscow by threatening to impose sanctions if Russian forces invaded Ukraine. This failed. But that failure deserves an important caveat—the sanctions Western governments threatened before the invasion were less severe than the sanctions they imposed after the invasion. While we will never know the counterfactual, it is at least plausible that a stronger threat of sanctions could have affected President Vladimir Putin’s thinking before the invasion.

Next, Western allies sought to use sanctions to destabilize Russia’s financial system and economy in the hopes of triggering a political backlash from Russian oligarchs and perhaps from the public. While the financial sanctions—especially those on the Russian central bank—did have a significant impact on the Russian ruble and banking system early on, deft financial management, capital controls, and continued energy exports have since stabilized the Russian ruble and banking sector. Those who argue that there is still hope that economic sanctions could somehow compel a quick end to the war often focus on the potential to hit Russia’s economy even harder with new sanctions preventing it from continuing energy exports.

Finally, the sanctions narrative has shifted toward degrading Russia's ability to sustain military operations, perhaps over the long term. For this, Western export controls on technology and industrial components are particularly important. There is evidence that in this regard the sanctions are working. For example, Russia is reportedly struggling to produce tanks due to a lack of imported components.

Compare the strategic conditions Ukraine faces today with what Taiwan might face in the event of Chinese actions to forcefully compel unification with Taiwan. The latter two sanctions goals—destabilization and degradation—depend in large part on Ukraine's ability to sustain its military operations with ground lines of communication linking it directly to the West. The skill and bravery of Ukrainian forces are clear, but their ability to counter Russian forces also relies on a steady inflow of foreign weapons and munitions. In the event of full-scale Chinese military actions against Taiwan, equivalent Western flows of military and nonmilitary aid to Taiwan would be far more difficult—perhaps impossible—as Chinese naval and air forces would seek to blockade the island even short of a full-scale amphibious invasion. Resupplying Taiwan under those conditions would be more analogous to resupplying Ukraine, now only via the Black Sea.

Chinese leaders, perhaps even more so than Putin, are likely to fully commit to achieving their military goals once forces are engaged. Chinese military planners are likely to learn from Russia's errors in Ukraine, and Chinese leaders are unlikely to order military actions against Taiwan if they believe sanctions, including export controls, would jeopardize their ability to sustain operations. Indeed, much of Chinese economic planning—including the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)—centers on achieving technological and material self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Beijing will learn from Russia's errors, including by stockpiling supplies and munitions and thinking through logistics in the context of a potentially prolonged campaign.

The implication is that an equivalent Western strategy of sanctioning the aggressor and resupplying the resister—to fight the aggressor alone—would not be viable in a Taiwan scenario. As such, the latter two sanctions goals—destabilization and degradation—would be less feasible unless Western leaders believed that China's war effort would collapse from sanctions alone, which is implausible.

Instead, only the first goal—economic deterrence—would make sense. And that is the goal that sanctions clearly failed to achieve against Russia.

Why did Western leaders impose stronger sanctions than they threatened before the invasion? This seems to defy the logic of deterrence. This “under warning” probably occurred for several reasons. First, some Western governments—excluding the United States and United Kingdom—did not believe that Putin would invade Ukraine. Second, they probably did not expect the strength and effectiveness of Ukrainian resistance, perhaps then believing that imposing large costs would be in pursuit of a hopeless goal. Third, they did not anticipate the degree of moral outrage that would emerge among their politicians and populations upon witnessing a level of violent national aggression that many—especially in Europe—previously thought unthinkable.

Finally, Western leaders were—and largely remain—reluctant to enact sanctions that might substantially harm their own economies, especially by stopping Russian energy exports. From the perspective of economic deterrence, this is troubling. One can debate whether such sanctions would meaningfully affect the course of the war; whether they are worth the pain they would inflict globally, including on developing countries; and whether domestic electoral concerns should outweigh international strategic goals. These are all reasonable questions, and responsible political leaders need to weigh such tradeoffs seriously.

But the fact remains that Western leaders—including in the White House—appear worried about inflation and other kinds of economic blowback. What does that suggest about future Western economic threats aimed at a far more important economy—China?

There are at least four implications for U.S. policymakers wishing to maintain credible economic deterrence against China.

- Plan for the unthinkable. Putin's actions are a reminder that nationalist objectives can trump economic logic. Do not assume that economic integration will prevent conflict.
- Coordinate with allies in advance. Candidly discuss high-impact, low-probability scenarios. Understand priorities, including gauging the likely differences in allied reactions to a Taiwan crisis compared to their reactions to the Ukraine crisis. Consider how allies would be likely to assign blame for crisis scenarios with varying triggers. Establish redlines for those scenarios and planned courses of action in response. An apparently united international coalition in opposition to China's actions could be crucial in shaping Beijing's perceptions early in a crisis.
- In the event of a crisis, communicate those redlines and be clear about the economic consequences. Do not undersell. But also make sure there are offramps well in advance of the start of potential military actions, after which full political and military commitment is likely despite sanctions.
- If redlines are crossed, impose the threatened sanctions in full. Ideally, this would entail sanctions that are severe enough and employed early enough to signal resolve, including by backing up military deterrence. The perceived difficulty of cross-Strait military operations might make Beijing more sensitive to early signals of U.S. resolve. Conversely, weak economic sanctions that do not impose serious costs—realistically, also on the United States and its allies—will demonstrate the opposite.

If economic deterrence were to fail in a crisis, there is the potential that U.S. forces might be engaged directly in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. For political reasons, Washington might impose sanctions to destabilize or degrade the Chinese economy irrespective of their chances of success. But in that scenario, the direct impact of severe sanctions on China might be far less important economically than the physical disruptions to Asian maritime trade and the course of the war itself.

More broadly, policymakers should not be complacent or assume too much about economic deterrence. Even with such planning, Western leaders should not delude themselves into believing that economic deterrence is a substitute for credible military deterrence.

**In a landmark victory for the United States**, authorities can now seize the \$300 million megayacht *Amadea* from Russian oligarch Suleiman Kerimov. Built for entertaining guests, the vessel has ceilings painted with Michelangelo clouds and has a cinema hall with a popcorn machine.

**US relieved as China appears to heed warnings on Russia** - Two months after warning that Beijing appeared poised to help Russia in its fight against Ukraine, senior US officials say they have not detected overt Chinese military and economic support, a welcome development in the tense US-China relationship.

US officials told Reuters in recent days they remain wary about China's long-standing support for Russia in general, but that the military and economic support that they worried about has not come to pass, at least for now. The relief comes at a pivotal time.

President Joe Biden is preparing for a trip to Asia later this month dominated by how to deal with the rise of China and his administration is soon to release his first national security strategy about the emergence of China as a great power.

"We have not seen the PRC provide direct military support to Russia's war on Ukraine or engage in systematic efforts to help Russia evade our sanctions," a Biden administration official told Reuters, referring to the People's Republic of China.

## Containment

**Ukraine's Online Volunteers Go After Russian Targets** - "Today we'll attack fiscal data operators," proclaimed the official Telegram channel of Ukraine's IT Army on April 20. Attached was a list of websites of Russian and Belarusian financial services companies, complete with critical information about their website configurations.

Within 24 hours, a raft of those websites were knocked offline. "You did a great job," the Telegram channel reported. Attached was a new list of targets. Within hours they, too, were offline.

Ukraine's massive cyberarmy, which includes both workers from the country's burgeoning technology sector and volunteers from around the world, has turned the tables on Russia in a way that experts never expected.

"Before the full-scale Russian aggression, even though we were exposed to numerous cyberattacks, what we did was clearly defensive in nature," said Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine's deputy prime minister and minister of digital transformation. "That drastically changed since the Russian tanks started rolling."

Just as many analysts expected an easy military victory for Russia when it began its invasion of Ukraine in late February, so too were there many predictions that Moscow would destroy Ukraine's technology infrastructure with its much-fabled offensive cyber-capabilities.

That didn't happen.

Instead, Ukraine has actively fought off a deluge of attempted cyberattacks on its critical infrastructure, while bringing the fight to Russia.

"We started actually counterattacking," Fedorov said.

While government officials express their appreciation for the work, the IT Army is not part of Kyiv's command structure.

**Private jumbo jets fly US weapons for Ukraine to Europe** - At least three commercial cargo airlines are ferrying lethal U.S. military equipment to Ukraine as part of a massive logistics operation to get weapons to front-line fighters and push back Russian invaders.

Operating under existing contracts with the Defense Department, the three all-cargo airlines are carrying ammunition for 155mm howitzers, Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft systems, pistols, body armor and other equipment, according to NBC and the Pentagon.

A 747 can fit about 42 pallets of artillery shells or about 3,000 rounds, NBC said. Unmarked tractor trailers are delivering explosives to Dover Air Force Base, the hub of the Ukraine resupply effort, from ammunition depots across the country.

**Fire trucks from Italy headed to Ukraine by rail** - A Mercitalia train bound for Veľká Ida, Slovakia, left Cervignano del Friuli in Italy on Monday to transport 45 fire trucks donated by the Italian Fire Brigade to their Ukrainian colleagues. It is the second train carrying aid from Italy to Ukraine.

**To maximize Ukraine coverage, BlackSky shifted orbits for its newest satellites** - When Russia invaded Ukraine in February, remote sensing firm BlackSky made a "business decision" to change the planned orbits of its two newest satellites to better keep tabs on the war — even though they were scheduled to blast off just about a month later, CEO Brian O'Toole told Breaking Defense.

"It is a big deal because multiple processes are involved," he said. "It's pretty significant, in the time at which we were able to make this pivot and then actually deploy it and make it happen."

The move including acquiring a revised license from the US government, O'Toole explained, no easy feat as that process usually takes months or even years. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is in charge of remote sensing licensing and regulation for the Department of Commerce.

O'Toole said BlackSky uses artificial intelligence (AI) to fuse its satellite data with other sensor data, such as that from synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellites that can "see" through clouds — an important capability over Ukraine in the winter.

## Impacts

**Delivery of US Howitzers to Taiwan delayed due to Ukraine crisis** - An arms contract between the United States and Taiwan is facing severe delays due to "crowded production lines" caused by the war in Ukraine, prompting Taipei to look for alternatives, the island's Ministry of National Defense has confirmed.

The first batch of M109A6 "Paladin" self-propelled howitzers will not be delivered in 2023 as planned as the production capacity of the U.S. arms industry has been affected by the ongoing Ukrainian war, Taiwan has been notified.

Instead, the U.S. has offered some alternative long-range precision strike weapon systems such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, adding that officials are currently evaluating the proposal before making a final decision.

Last August, Washington approved the sale of 40 M109A6 "Paladin" self-propelled howitzers and related equipment at an estimated cost of U.S. \$750 million to Taiwan. It was part of the first arms sale to Taiwan approved by President Joe Biden since taking office that also included 20 M992A2 Field Artillery Ammunition Support Vehicles, 1,698 multi-option Precision Guidance Kits, and other related equipment and logistical support.

The first eight units were due to be delivered next year, with another 16 each in 2024 and 2025, but U.S. manufacturers have now said it would be 2026 at the earliest.

**Russia reroutes internet traffic in occupied Ukraine to its infrastructure** - Russia has rerouted internet traffic in the occupied Ukrainian region of Kherson through Russian communications infrastructure, the internet service disruption monitor NetBlocks said on Monday.

The move appeared aimed at tightening Moscow's grip on a region where it claims it has taken full control. Russia-appointed authorities in parts of Kherson have said the region would start using the Russian ruble on May 1.

London-based NetBlocks said it had tracked a near-total internet blackout across Kherson region on Saturday that affected various Ukrainian providers. Connection was restored after several hours, but various metrics showed traffic was now going through Russia.

"Connectivity on the network has been routed via Russia's internet instead of Ukrainian telecoms infrastructure and is hence likely now subject to Russian internet regulations, surveillance, and censorship," NetBlocks said on its website.

Britain's Ministry of Defense said on Sunday that Russian moves in the region are "likely indicative of Russian intent to exert strong political and economic influence in Kherson over the long term".

**A study of the Russian propaganda** that flooded Donbas for years reveals a failure to build pro-Russian "in-group" identities in region, despite Putin's claims of support - A study of thousands of stories from media outlets churning out propaganda in Ukraine's Donbas in the years after Russia's first invasion suggests that the Kremlin's disinformation campaign has long neglected any coherent or convincing messaging to foster support for Russia in the war-torn region.

After 2014, when news media in the so-called “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk that make up much of Donbas were forcibly taken over by Russian-backed insurgents, efforts to instill a pro-Russian “identity” were lazy and half-baked, and dwindled to nothing within months.

“Eight years of Russian propaganda have failed to provide a convincing alternative to Ukrainian nationhood in eastern Ukraine,” said University of Cambridge researcher Dr Jon Rozenbeek.

## **Widening of conflict and war**

**US military tracking mysterious Russian ship near Hawaii** - The U.S. military is monitoring a Russian surface vessel of an unspecified type that’s been operating near Hawaii in recent days. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) told Hawaii’s KHON2 news channel on Sunday that “we are monitoring a Russian surface vessel operating in international waters in the vicinity of Hawaii.”