

Conflict Update Day 382

March 12th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 159,090 (+1,090) soldiers killed, 3,46 (+8) enemy tanks, 6,769 (+7) armored combat vehicles, 2,487 (+4) artillery systems, 493 (0) MLRS systems, 259 (+2) air defense systems, 304 (+0) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,108 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 907 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,348 (+4) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 242 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

Hundreds killed in battle for Bakhmut - Ukraine says that 221 pro-Moscow soldiers have been killed and more than 300 wounded in 24 hours in the **front-line city of Bakhmut**. Russia's defence ministry says that up to 210 Ukrainian soldiers have died in clashes in the **broader Donetsk** part of the front line.

The Kremlin number does make sense from a ratio perspective, given 1,090:210 equals out to a 5.5:1 Ukrainian to Russian kill rate. This is more or less in line, perhaps lower from the Kievan side, with empirical data. We do know however that the Kremlin more often than not exaggerates and inflates its "victories" and/or results.

Irrespective, both sides are known to be suffering high rates of attrition, with Moscow planning to "run down the clock" in hammering away at Ukrainian positions in order to wear them out - purely from a numbers point of approach.

This is the name of the attrition game Moscow is playing and hoping will swing events their way, and is the typical and only way they fight. Bombard everything in a scorched earth policy, irrespective of civilian casualties and infrastructural damage, then throw every person capable of walking into the fray.

This is what Stalin did in June 1942 when attacked by Germany. In order to withstand the Nazi assault, he rounded up every man, woman and child capable of walking and threw them into trenches along the entire German front.

He callously sacrificed hundreds of thousands of Russians (not all Russian of course, as there were Belarusians, Ukrainians etc,) in order to pause the assault, catch his military breath, and move his Capital and factories further east and out of harm's way to fight another day, which is precisely what happened two to three years later.

He slowed the German invasion down so that General Winter came to his aid. In this case it has come to Ukraine's aid.

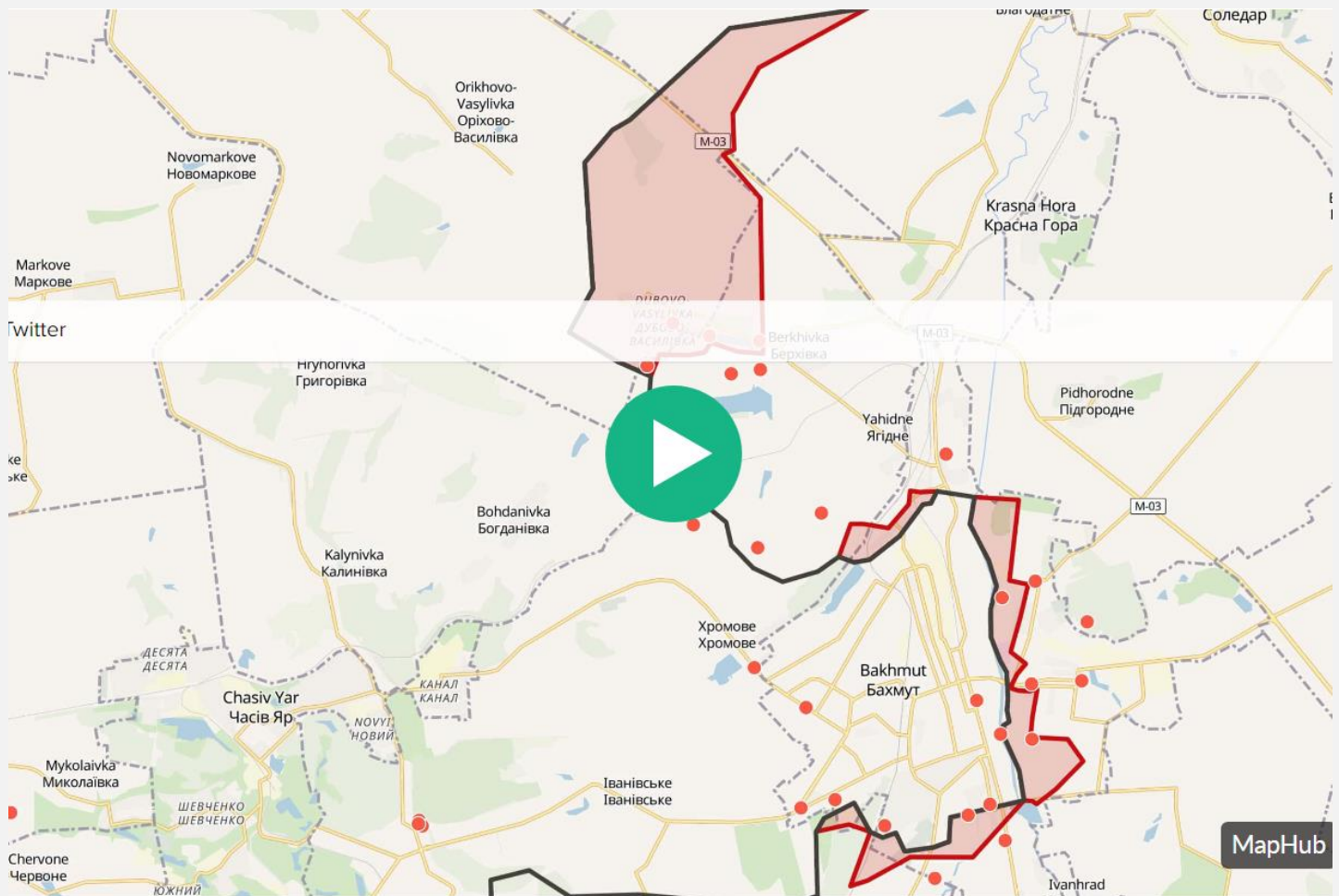
To the first point above, with extremely accurate weaponry, Ukraine is balancing out and bettering the superior Russian numerical advantage, killing 6 Russians for every Ukrainian loss of life.

Their higher killed to injured ratio – superior weapons accuracy kills more soldiers than it injures – shows in the 300:221 (1:1.35) ratio mentioned in their daily report above, whereas the conventional war ratio of killed to injured is 1:3.

To the second point above where Stalin sacrificed hundreds of thousands of people by throwing them into trenches against German armies, this is Russia's historical defensive policy.

To ensure that if and whenever again invaded, Moscow will be protected by a bung of surrounding countries insulating its invasion "gateways", absorbing the brunt of invading enemies, and allowing Russia to survive. Ukraine has saved Russia many times over preceding centuries in this manner, a primary driver in Russia needing Ukraine within its orbit.

The latest developments around Bakhmut – The red dots represent the latest skirmishes.



Ukraine's military claims to have repelled more than 92 Russian assaults over past day - Ukraine's military repelled more than 92 Russian assaults in five areas over the past day, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces claimed in its morning briefing on Sunday, the Kyiv Independent reports.

According to the general staff report, Russian forces are concentrating their efforts on conducting offensives toward Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Mariinka, and Shakhtarsk in Donetsk oblast.

Over the past 24 hours, Russia launched five missiles, targeting the city of Zaporizhzhia, 12 airstrikes, and 56 MLRS attacks against Ukraine, targeting the city of Kherson, which resulted in civilian casualties, it said.

Ukraine's air force carried out six strikes on temporary Russian bases, while Ukraine's rocket and artillery forces hit four Russian temporary bases, one ammunition depot and two electronic warfare stations, it added

The Ukrainian military warns about a continued high threat of missile attacks throughout Ukraine.

Avdiivka - The Russian military's renewed offensive against Avdiivka went almost unnoticed against the backdrop of Ukraine's dramatic defense of Bakhmut. Still, Avdiivka is a large suburb of Donetsk and one of Ukrainian Armed Forces' most important fortified areas. Since Russian forces occupied fortified areas in Pisky and near a runway at the Donetsk airport (the villages of Vodiane and Opytne), Avdiivka has been partially encircled.

Russian troops are now advancing toward Opytne and Vodiane from the north of Avdiivka. Their success has been limited, although they've reportedly made some progress near Krasnohorivka.

The main change in the situation, which could have far-reaching consequences, is that Russia's Air Force, for the first time in a year, is bombing the front lines and the nearest reinforcements. Russia has not carried out such attacks since April 2022, out of fear of losses from Ukraine's air defenses.

It's not entirely clear why Russia has returned to this tactic. It's possible that Russian command believes that Ukraine's air defenses are spread out and weakened from Russia's "strategic bombardment" of Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Kherson - Ukraine's Armed Forces seem to be winning the "boat battle" on the Dnipro, in which both sides launched small assault operations on the islands near Kherson. According to the latest footage, Ukraine's Armed Forces were able to land on Belogradivka Island, on the eastern bank of the Dnipro.

Ukraine's Armed Forces may try to build a small bridgehead on the left bank, if not for a future offensive into Crimea, then at least to draw Russian reserves in this direction.

Russia has bombarded Ukraine more than 40,500 times since its invasion in February 2022, according to the Ukrainian interior minister, Ihor Klymenko. The shelling had destroyed more than 152,000 residential buildings since the war began, Euromaidan reported Klymenko as saying.

Russian strikes destroyed 152,000 residences – It is estimated by Bloomberg that Moscow-directed assaults have destroyed some 152,000 Ukrainian residences since starting their illegal invasion in February last year.

Buying time for Spring – Ukraine is preparing for an upcoming counteroffensive, with a top commander saying his forces' ongoing defence of Bakhmut in the face of fierce and sustained Russian attacks is necessary to "buy time" for that push.

The remarks came as British intelligence said the frontline had shifted in the fight for Bakhmut – the longest and bloodiest battle of Moscow's year-long invasion – but that any further Russian advance in the devastated town would be "highly challenging."

Ukraine and Russia are both claiming that hundreds of each other's troops were killed over the previous 24 hours in the fight for Bakhmut, with a small river that bisects the town marking the new frontline. The exact number of casualties is difficult to independently verify, Reuters reports. Ukrainian soldiers are pictured to the right in Bakhmut.



Russian missile strikes targeted "critical infrastructure" in Zaporizhzhia, the Kyiv Independent reported. The strikes launched on Saturday were likely to have come from S-300 air defence missiles, the outlet reported the Zaporizhzhia oblast military administration as saying.

Low risk of Russia invading Ukraine from Belarus. The risk of Russian forces launching a renewed ground offensive from Belarus against Ukraine is "low" at the moment, Lieutenant General Serhiy Naiev said on March 12.

Belarus might be preparing to host additional forces from Russia. "Now there is information that tent camps were left in Belarus at four training grounds meant to host additional forces," said Naev.

Ukrainian M113 APCs having success already - A video shared on social media on Wednesday showed how Ukrainian forces are utilizing an M113 armored personnel carrier (APC) to drive back the Russian invader.

The 50-second clip provided a view from the inside of the Cold War vehicle.

It was unclear where the video was recorded, or where this particular APC might be deployed – but despite its age, the M113 proves to still

be a viable platform for the fighting in Ukraine.

To date, Ukraine has received United States, while and eleven have come

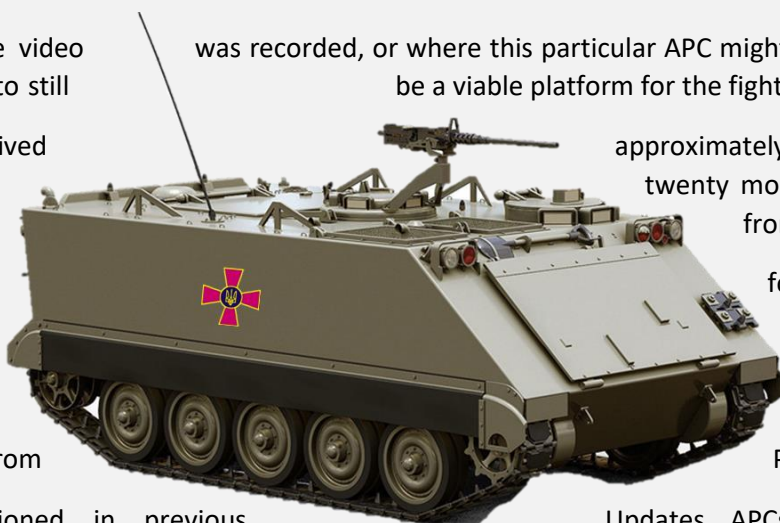
approximately 200 M113 APCs from the twenty more were provided by Spain from Germany.

Australia has provided models, and Denmark M113G3DK variants.

fourteen of its M113AS4 has sent fifty-four

An additional seventy had Lithuania and fifteen from

been supplied by Portugal.



Comment – As mentioned in previous Updates, APCs are critical to offensive assaults. Ground troops can only advance so far per day, and even less when unprotected by armored carriers. These carriers will prove hugely advantageous to Kyiv when launching its counteroffensive, moving large numbers of Ukrainian troops across greater distances and allowing Kyiv to not only capture, but also retain and consolidate recovered territories.

Radar fuzes would turn Ukraine’s glide-bombs into urban wrecking balls - Thanks to a tiny radar or some other sensor, the fuze knows when it's a certain height above the ground--and detonates the bomb in mid-air.

"They have enough to do a couple of strikes," U.S. Air Force general James Hecker, head of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, told reporters including The War Zone’s Joseph Trevithick last week.

With their 45-mile maximum range, the bombs are a powerful new capability. Especially if the Ukrainians also are getting the best fuzes. Including the 1970s-vintage DSU-33, America’s classic proximity fuze.

Bombs aren’t created equal. The casing matters. The explosives mix matters. The fuze matters, too—a lot.

The basic fuze is an impact fuze with a firing pin or crush switches. When the bomb hits the ground, the impact presses the pin into a detonator or compacts the switches. Boom.

A delayed impact fuze waits a bit after impact so that the bomb buries itself into the ground before exploding. Just the thing to demolish a tunnel, cave or underground bunker.

Then there’s the proximity fuze. Thanks to a tiny radar or some other sensor, the fuze knows when it’s a certain height above the ground—and detonates the bomb in mid-air. A proximity-fuzed bomb is the best way to pepper exposed troops with lethal fragments, or widen a blast zone in order to flatten lightly-built structures.

No confirmed advances by Russian forces in Bakhmut. Yesterday, Serhiy Cherevaty, spokesperson for the eastern grouping of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, stated that Russian forces lost more than 500 troops over the past day in Bakhmut. The casualties included 221 killed and 314 wounded, according to Cherevaty.

Ukrainian firefighters on risky mission to save lives, homes - Thick grey smoke pours from the roof as the firefighters arrive at the brick house, one of several homes hit by Russian shelling in a residential neighborhood of Kostiantynivka.

The city in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province has come under intense bombardment amid a Russian push to capture nearby Bakhmut, where Ukrainian forces have held on during a grinding battle that started last summer.

Ukrainian authorities say Russian forces are attacking Kostiantynivka with cluster bombs and missiles. Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of Donetsk province, said one person was killed and at least three civilians wounded after several rounds of Russian shelling on Saturday.

An attack on the city a day earlier injured eight people and destroyed or damaged more than a dozen houses.

The barrages have overwhelmed local firefighters, who take great risks putting out fires in buildings and cars even as the shelling continues.



ISW: Defensive lines being built inside Russia are a 'waste of funds' - In their March 10 daily assessment of Russia's offensive campaign, analysts with the American think tank ISW discussed recent construction of fortified defensive lines in Russia's Belgorod and Kursk regions, as well as in Russian-annexed Crimea.

On March 9, Vyacheslav Gladkov, Governor of the Belgorod region, announced the completion of a fortified line along Belgorod's border with Ukraine. Its construction, according to Gladkov, cost 10 billion rubles (around \$132 million). The ISW report calls the expenditure "a likely waste of funds amid questions about Russia's ability to fund its war effort in Ukraine." The report also notes that manning defensive lines in Kursk and Belgorod, in areas not likely to see combat, will require more resources in terms of funds and personnel.

Similar defensive installations in Crimea "may suggest that Russian forces are unsure of their ability to hold occupied territories in southern Ukraine in the long term." But the fortifications in Belgorod and Kursk, the ISW report says, are more likely part of "information operations that aim to portray Ukraine as threatening Russian territory in order to frame the war in Ukraine as existential for Russia."

'Sent there to be meat' Why Russian draftees are suddenly publishing so many video pleas to Putin - Since the start of 2023, Russian draftees have released numerous public video statements in which they complain about being assigned to units based in the "Donetsk People's Republic" and sent into battle with inadequate training, insufficient supplies, and poor service conditions. According to military analysts, there's a reason these public appeals have suddenly become so frequent: it used to be Donbas local draftees who were sent on these missions, but now there are few left, so it's Russians' turn to go. The independent news outlet iStories looked into the situation. Meduza is publishing a lightly abridged translation of their report.

The structure of the Donbas 'people's militias'

After the occupation of eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Russian authorities created two military corps in the Donbas, military expert Kirill Mikhailov told iStories. The first corps included most of the units from the "Donetsk People's Republic," and the second included most of the units from the "Luhansk People's Republic." The primary difference between these units and the Russian army proper was that the Donbas corps were given outdated hand-me-down equipment, such as T-64 tanks.

According to Ukrainian intelligence, both corps answered directly to the 8th Army of Russia's Southern Military District, which is located just east of the Ukrainian border. After Russia's annexation of Ukraine's partially occupied regions in

September 2022, these corps were officially incorporated into the Russian army. Both are also referred to as “people’s militias”: the first corps is the “DNR” People’s Militia, and the second is the “LNR” People’s Militia.

Even before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these “people’s militias” had significant personnel shortages, according to Mikhailov; some units were only 50% staffed. To address this problem, occupation authorities declared a general mobilization on February 23, 2022, and created several additional motorized rifle regiments. After the invasion, the units were supplemented with convicts from prisons from occupied territories. Weapons were scarce; some draftees were given Mosin–Nagant rifles, which were officially removed from service after World War II.

The ‘people’s militias’ at war

At the start of the war, the Donbas “people’s militias” were more combat-ready than the Russian army, according to Mikhailov. In addition to being more experienced than their Russian counterparts, soldiers in the “people’s militias” were more motivated on average; while their salaries had always been lower than those of the rest of the Russian military, Mikhailov said, they were driven to fight by their convictions, not by money.

One of the “LNR” and “DNR” armies’ tasks is to attack the Ukrainian military’s positions constantly along the “old” line of contact in order to tie down Ukraine’s forces there. This often requires advancing without support from artillery and armored vehicles, both of which are in short supply, leading to heavy losses.

When manpower from the occupied territories eventually ran out, the Russian military began replacing it with draftees from Russia. The result is that their combat capability is now as low as the other units of the Russian army that are being supplemented with draftees, according to Mikhailov. (**Comment** – We have on many prior occasions reported on this factor – calling it the “*Mobilization genie coming out of the Kremlin bottle*” – commenting that once these newly-enlisted and drafted “Russian” soldiers started dying and returning in body bags, the outcry would see immediate uptick. This article speaks to what we were saying some four to five months ago).

“Previously, Donetsk and Luhansk draftees were being used as expendable materials; now it’s Russian ones. They can’t fight any other way. If they don’t fundamentally change their approach, which I doubt they will, then the Russian draftees will continue to die like this,” he told iStories.

Matveyev agrees: Russia’s military command will likely continue using Russian draftees to launch assaults on Ukraine’s positions in the Donbas.

Russian draftees speak out

The most high-profile instance of soldiers in the Donbas corps complaining about combat conditions came from draftees from the Irkutsk region. Here’s how it unfolded.

January 24 — The draftees’ first video statement

Draftees from Russia’s Regiment 1439 say that they were trained to serve as territorial defense but were then “thrown into an assault group” on the territory of the “DNR.” According to the soldiers, two men from their ranks were killed and 19 were injured in just two days. They claim they don’t belong to any military unit, they buy their own food, and pay for their own medical treatment.

February 25 — The draftees’ second video statement

Draftees say they’ve been transferred to the “DNR’s” First Slavic Brigade, which is a part of the “People’s Militia.” In a single day, they say, they were divided into “assault brigades” and sent “to the slaughter” — to storm Ukrainian positions in Avdiivka. Anyone who refuses to join the “assault brigades,” the draftees claim, is “shot from assault rifles

and BMPs [infantry fighting vehicle].” They say that one of the battalions from their regiment has been “practically completely destroyed.”

February 26 — Irkutsk Governor Igor Kobzev responds

In a Telegram post, Irkutsk Governor Igor Kobzev says that the draftees will soon be transferred “to a new duty station.” (**Comment** – These far-flung Russian Federation republics and oblasts cannot refuse to draft their young folk for the Kremlin, as they are totally dependent on Moscow for funding and sustenance. They have little to no home-grown sources of revenue, so the Kremlin plays the coercion game – “*send me your boys and I’ll send you money, send me no boys and you get nothing from Moscow.* The vast majority of these areas and local governments will not survive sans this central funding mechanism).

February 27 — The draftees’ third video statement

Soldiers complain again that they’re being sent to launch assaults with no training and that their superiors have threatened to charge them with desertion or send them on offensives that are suicide missions. A deputy commander who tried to intercede on their behalf, they say, was detained and taken away.

March 3 — Relatives say Regiment 1439 has been ‘destroyed’

The regiment is reported to have been almost completely wiped out. The draftees’ relatives tell the news outlet Siber.Realii that the regiment was “practically destroyed” after launching an assault on Ukrainian fortifications in Avdiivka. “We only know of two injured soldiers; the rest were either killed or were left there in dire positions,” one woman says.

That same day, a delegation of representatives of the Irkutsk regional government and veterans of the Soviet–Afghan War and the Chechen Wars visit the “DNR.” According to Irkutsk Governor Igor Kobzev, their goal is to “establish cooperation” with the regiment.

March 5 — Authorities deny the reports

The head of the delegation, Yakov Mindrulev, says the reports of heavy losses in the regiment are false. “A large number of our guys are alive and in good health,” he writes on Telegram.

However, draftees from other regions who have been sent to serve in “DNR” units have complained about their commanders and service conditions as well.

On March 4, draftees from Russia’s Orenburg region said that “People’s Militia” commanders are using them as “cannon fodder.”

On February 18, draftees from the Tomsk region say their commanders began retraining them from artillery gunners into infantrymen after they were sent to join the “DNR army.” “After several trips [to the training center], they started demanding money for gas. If we refused, it would mean that we didn’t need training and that we were ready for combat on the front lines,” said one.

"They drink - out of fear." What happens in a closed military settlement where mobilized people die -

In a military camp in the Sverdlovsk region, where mobilized people from all over the Urals are brought, they tried to fight drunkenness for several months. But the ban on the sale of alcohol did not stop the men going to war: they, according to locals, live "as if on their last day." Why the mobilized in the Yelan military garrison drink to death.”

In December, an officer of the military camp told the media that those mobilized from the military registration and enlistment offices came to Yelan already drunk and brought whole bags and backpacks of vodka with them.

Russian replacement dilemma – When the 155th Russian Naval Brigade, one of Moscow’s “elite” units, was wiped out in Vuhledar a week and a bit ago, the Kremlin replaced them with the 192nd Brigade – who then refused to advance because of what they saw remained of the 155th and stories they were getting from the few survivors. And then they were advised to take their shovels with them for fighting because ammunition was in very short supply.

Containment

An American B-52 bomber capable of carrying nuclear weapons conducted planned maneuvers over the Baltic Sea

- An American B-52 Stratofortress strategic bomber with the call sign NOBLE61 conducted a maneuver over the Baltic Sea, 200 kilometers (around 125 miles) from St. Petersburg, reports Russian state broadcaster RBC, citing data from FlightRadar24.

According to the real-time flight tracking service, the aircraft, which is capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons, flew out of Polish territory and over the Baltic Sea, where it turned toward St. Petersburg near the Estonian island of Saaremaa. Near the Russian island of Gogland, the bomber changed course, flying over Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania before heading toward the U.K.

Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak commented on the maneuver, posting on Twitter that the B-52 was escorted by Polish fighter jets and that the flight was “an important part of the interoperability exercise.”

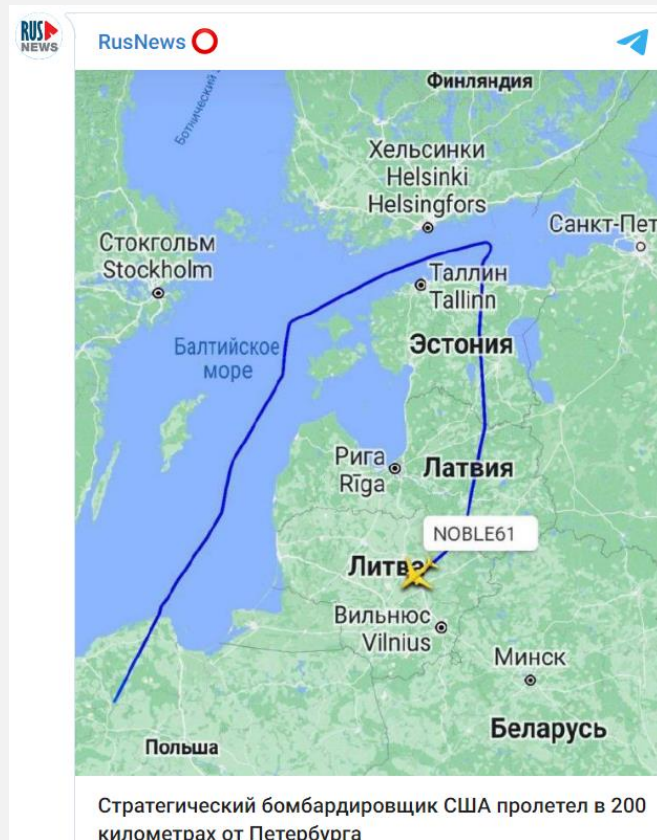
Leopard 1 tanks will arrive this spring - One of NATO’s legacy Cold War tanks will soon be on the way to Ukrainian units, with the Danish Ministry of Defense announcing the first of its Leopard 1A5DK tanks will be delivered by spring.

Acting Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, along with German Defense Ministry State Secretary Thomas Hitschler, visited Flensburger Fahrzeugbau Gesellschaft (FFG) to speak on the planned transfer. FFG is renovating the formerly Danish, Dutch, and German Leopard 1A5s before their delivery.

The Danish version of the Leopard 1A5 features the welded 1A3 turret in lieu of the German 1A5’s cast turret, but still features the venerable 105mm L7 Royal Ordnance main gun. Danish 1A5DK tanks saw combat in what’s now known as “Operation Bøllebank,” Danish for “hooligan bashing,” as part of the United Nations Protection Force’s Nordic Battalion 2 in Bosnia.

F-16s will 'eventually' be sent to Ukraine, former U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff chair says – A former top soldier in the United States says he expects that Western countries will eventually furnish Ukraine with fighter jets, fulfilling one of the embattled country’s top requests.

"I think the F-16s will be provided, it's hard to know exactly when but I think they're coming," said Mike Mullen, a retired admiral and former chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.



Ukraine's foreign minister urges Germany to speed up supplies of ammunition - In an interview published on Sunday, Ukraine's foreign minister has urged Germany to speed up supplies of ammunition and to start training Ukrainian pilots on western fighter jets.

Dmytro Kuleba told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that ammunition shortages were the "number one" problem in Ukraine's attempt to repel Russia's invasion.

He said German weapons manufacturers told him at the Munich Security Conference last month that they were ready to deliver but were waiting for the government to sign contracts. "So the problem lies with the government," Kuleba was quoted as saying.

Kuleba made clear he did not expect western allies to give Ukraine the fighter jets it has been asking for any time soon.

But Ukrainian pilots should be trained anyway, so they would be ready once that decision was taken, the paper wrote.

If Germany were to train Ukrainian pilots, that would be a "clear message of its political engagement," he said.

Switzerland - The Swiss president, Alain Berset, has defended the controversial ban on transferring Swiss-made arms to Ukraine, saying: "Swiss weapons must not be used in wars."

Switzerland, which is not an EU member, has followed the bloc's lead on sanctions targeting Moscow, but it has so far shown less flexibility on its military neutrality.

Comment – But it was OK to assist Nazi's in escaping justice after WWII, and it is OK to still fail to disclose property stolen by Nazi's from Jewish families and held in Swiss vaults and banks? Hypercritical.

Russia 'running out' of decades-old weapons stockpile – A key Ukrainian security official said Russia is running out of a decades-old weapons stockpile as its invasion of Ukraine continues to stagnate.

Putin launched his "special military operation" and although he initially aimed for a quick military victory, Ukraine responded with a stronger-than-expected defense effort, bolstered by Western military aid, blunting Russia's gains. After more than a year of the conflict, Russia continues to struggle to make progress, with combat remaining concentrated in eastern Ukraine.

Following Ukraine's counteroffensive last fall, which saw its military retake thousands of square miles of formerly occupied territory, Russia began launching missile strikes against Ukrainian civilian areas and critical infrastructure, including energy facilities, in an effort to add pressure to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to agree to an end to the war.

Amid these ongoing strikes, Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, tweeted yesterday that Russia is running low on a stockpile of weapons its military has maintained for decades.

"Russia is running out of prepared stockpiles of weapons," Danilov wrote. "Missiles and military equipment have been accumulating for decades. The calculations called for blitzkrieg, not blitzutilization."

He explained that Russia's "corrupt economy" is unable to sustain the production of new weapons, making foreign aid for Russia "a matter of primary importance." Although Russia's invasion has been widely condemned, some allies have provided it with assistance. Iran, for instance, has provided the Kremlin with Shahed drones that have been used against Ukrainian infrastructure.

Danilov's remarks are not the first indication that Putin's troops' stockpile of weapons could be dwindling. Estonia's Intelligence Chief Margo Grosberg said in late January that Russia may only have the capacity to launch missile strikes for three to four months, though a "more pessimistic" projection found that they could continue for up to nine months.

British intelligence indicated in December that Russia had been forced to scale back missile strikes due to a shortage of cruise missiles. Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Mark Hertling also said during a December CNN appearance that Russian efforts to gain partners stemmed from Putin "realizing that he's quickly running out of the kinds of munitions he needs to continue this fight."

Throughout the combat, Russia has reportedly suffered substantial military losses. Ukraine has claimed to have destroyed thousands of Russian tanks and many other military equipment including aircraft and missiles, according to its defense ministry—though other counts remain lower, with Russia not confirming Ukraine's estimates.

Luxembourg sends 14 armored ambulances to Ukraine. Luxembourg has sent 14 armored ambulances to Ukraine, and they will soon arrive on the front line, Ukraine's embassy in Belgium said on March 12 in a Facebook post.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Russian Patriarch appeals to the Pope for help - The Russian Orthodox church head asked the Pope and other religious leaders to persuade Ukraine to stop a crackdown against a historically Russian-aligned wing of the church.

Kyiv on Friday ordered the Ukrainian Orthodox church (UOC) to leave a monastery complex where it is based, the latest move against a denomination that the government says is pro-Russian and collaborating with Moscow.

Patriarch Kirill yesterday urged religious leaders and international organisations to "make every effort to prevent the forced closure of the monastery, which will lead to a violation of the rights of millions of Ukrainian believers", said a statement posted on the church's website.

Kirill strongly backed Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The UOC says it has severed its ties with Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate, and is the victim of a political witch-hunt.

Since October, the Security Service of Ukraine has regularly carried out searches at UOC churches, imposed sanctions on its bishops and financial backers, and opened criminal cases against dozens of its clergymen.

Most Britons think housing Ukrainian refugees is a good thing, a study shows – People who took in Ukrainians fleeing the war said they had a positive experience of hosting refugees, while most of the public think the UK should continue to take in people from war zones, according to a study.

Detailed polling from More in Common, a civil society organisation, found that 88% of people who took in refugees from Ukraine would do so again, compared with 3% who would not.

It also found that 68% of Britons believe the fact that the UK has taken in more than 150,000 refugees from Ukraine is a good thing and only 17% think it is a bad thing.

The findings come amid controversy over Rishi Sunak's policy of detaining and deporting refugees who flee to the UK across the Channel in small boats, prompting outrage among human rights campaigners and the UN refugee agency.

Putin & Russia

Medvedev warns Ukraine arms shipments could lead to nuclear disaster - Medvedev again warns Ukraine arms shipments could lead to nuclear disaster.

"Our enemies are doing just that, not wanting to understand that their goals will certainly lead to a total fiasco. Loss for everyone. A collapse. Apocalypse. Where you forget for centuries about your former life, until the rubble ceases to emit radiation," Medvedev added.

Comment – Read between the lines here. “Loss for everyone” means Russia has losses, and is trying to project on to its enemies or perceived enemies, that they too will suffer losses. But the bottom-line message is they are suffering losses.

Also that, if pushed into a battle for survival, they will resort to nuclear defensive tactics, or what they term “defensive,” despite them being the aggressor.

Things are not going well when your spokesman makes such-like statements and projections.

Why Putin cannot end his war against Ukraine - Among the many terrible consequences of Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine launched by Putin a year ago, one should be singled out—that is, the Russian president’s inability to end the conflict as currently constituted.

Several primary factors underline this fact. The war has caused an unusually high level of support among the Russian public for the Russian authorities and Putin personally; in recent years, before the invasion, this rating had been steadily declining. Realizing this, Moscow is not only dragging out the war but also trying to draw the entire Russian society into the conflict.

Despite all these efforts, even pro-Kremlin sociologists state that the majority of Russian society remains apolitical and the level of involvement in the military effort is steadily declining. Overall, the number of radical patriots who actively support the war, though they represent a smaller part of society, is nevertheless steadily growing. This is facilitated by massive propaganda, mobilization and an active policy of involving the population in the military effort, starting with the teaching of mandatory war propaganda in schools.

Today, public ratings of not only federal but also regional as well as local authorities depend on their degree of involvement in the war. One can envision the emergence of a future conflict between the apolitical part of society and the aggressive “patriots” returning from the front. Corrupted by impunity and the propaganda cult around them, these people may begin to demand too much from the rest of the population. However, the real paradox lies in the fact that the Kremlin, even realizing this, sees only one way to delay the social upheaval: continuing its war against Ukraine.

Private military groups will 'contribute to chaos' in Russia: ex-General - Former U.S. Army Lieutenant General Mark Hertling warned yesterday private military groups in Russia will "contribute to chaos" should Putin's government "collapse."

Hertling posted his observation to Twitter while responding to Sergej Sumlenny, an Eastern European expert, who tweeted, "Reports in Russian social media appear, that companies like Gazprom, Rosneft and other start their own private military companies. The Russian elites prepare for a scenario of military defeat of Russia and vacuum of power after that."

The possibility of Russia collapsing as a consequence of Putin's invasion has been discussed regularly by some, amid debates of what constitutes a Ukrainian victory as Western countries continue to provide military aid to the war-torn country. Last June, French President Macron said the West should not "humiliate" Putin to preserve the chance of a potential diplomatic solution while speaking to regional media. He also suggested last month while speaking to French media that Russia should be "defeated, but not crushed."

Former adviser to Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, Oleksii Arestovych, said in late February during a YouTube interview with Mark Feygin, a former deputy in the State Duma, that Putin has even discussed the collapse of Russia over the last few months with former Russian President Medvedev.

Russia’s fake refugee haven – Russian government is lying about the number of Ukrainian refugees in the country.

According to the latest report by the UN, the number of Ukrainian refugees worldwide has reached 8 million people.

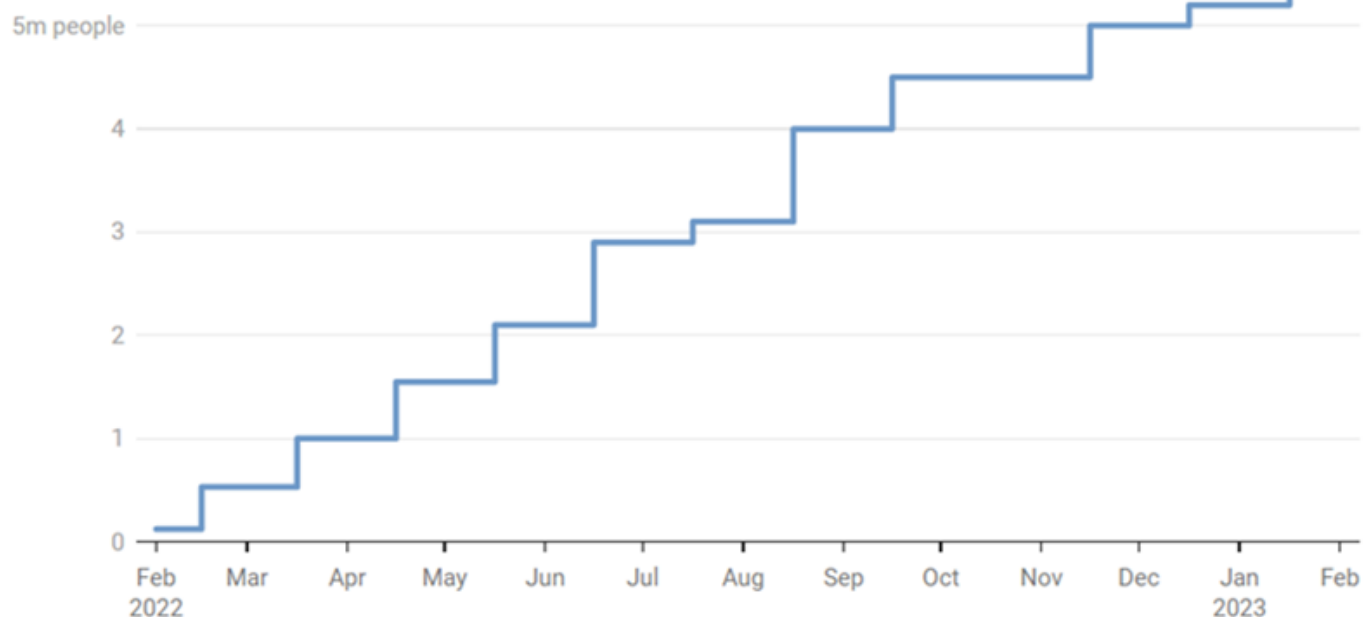
Most have ended up in Russia — 2.8 million people. This is more than the number of Ukrainian refugees Poland and Germany are housing collectively. Furthermore, Russian authorities claim that, in fact, 5.3 million Ukrainian refugees are in the country. However, this number could have been greatly exaggerated, according to a report by the UN. Novaya Gazeta Europe explains how Russian officials are manipulating the Ukrainian refugee statistics.

In October 2022, Secretary of Russia’s Security Council Patrushev said that “about 5 million residents of Donbass and southeast Ukraine found refuge in Russia”. Deputy Head of Russia’s Ministry of Emergency Situations Anatoly Suprunovsky named a similar number; according to him, there are about 4.8 million Ukrainian refugees in Russia. In February 2023, Russia’s state news agency TASS reported that the number of refugees had reached 5.3 million.

The main source of information about Ukrainian refugees’ arrival in Russia is the TASS state news agency. By April 2022, according to TASS, 500,000 people arrived in the country, by June it was 2 million, by August 3 million, by September 4 million, and by December 5 million. All of this data was reported by the news agency based on an unnamed law enforcement source.

The data used by TASS is, most likely, taken from the Federal Security Service’s open statistics on border crossings, the report’s author speculates. However, these statistics include not only internally displaced people and refugees but also everyone who crosses the border, which some did more than once.

TASS regularly reports on Ukrainian refugees arriving in Russia



Source: Russia’s state news agency TASS

“Reliable statistics on refugees do not exist in Russia. This is directly related to the fact that Russian authorities destroyed the refugee institution (in 2022, temporary asylum was granted only to 97,500 people, while only five people received the official refugee status — editor’s note). We spent a long time pondering whether we can indicate an approximate number of refugees from Ukraine, but we decided that we can only say that the actual number is several times lower than the one declared by TASS and Russian officials,” the reports’ author, analytic for the Civic Assistance Committee Konstantin Troitsky says.

One can estimate the number of refugees indirectly by the amount of aid allocated. For example, the government allocated 12.3 billion rubles (€160 million) on one-time financial assistance to refugees arriving from Ukraine. The assistance amounts to 10,000 rubles per person (€130). Another 10.5 billion rubles (€136.5 million) were spent to support pensioners, disabled persons, and families with children. Based on corresponding calculations, about 1.2 million citizens of Ukraine could currently be in Russia. However, even this number is only an estimate.

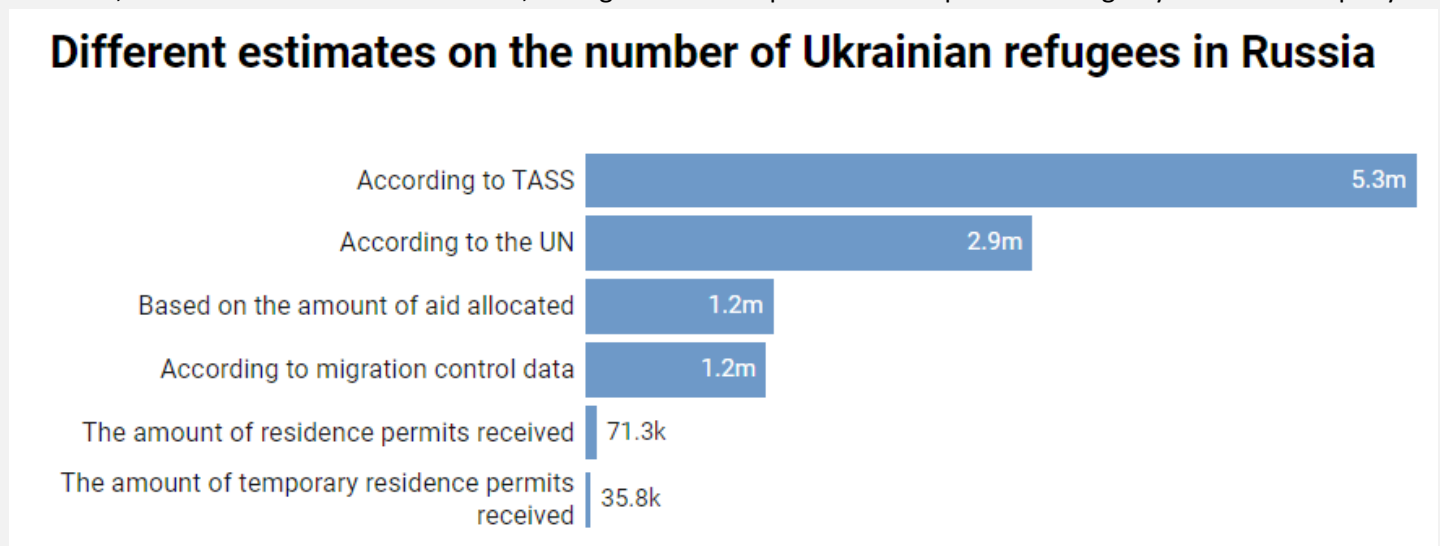
“One-time pay-outs have been carried out by the Russian government for over a year, thus, many people who received them in Russia could have left for other countries or gone back to Ukraine, while a part of them could have received Russian citizenship.

Besides, there’s a high probability that these pay-outs were also received by people who aren’t refugees, while some refugees never received them at all. How many cases of both took place is impossible to establish, in my opinion, because the legal mechanism of being recognised as a refugee doesn’t function in Russia,” Troitsky explains.

Migration statistics also prove that there are no 5.3 million refugees from Ukraine in Russia.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, over 1 million people from Ukraine were added to the migration registry in 2022, almost 84,500 of them from the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk “people’s republics”.

However, this number is also not a definite, seeing as the same person can be put on the registry several times per year



or depart for another country after having been added to it.

The same statistics demonstrate that 35,800 people from Ukraine received temporary residence permits in 2022. That is 21% less than in 2021. It is probable that some refugees preferred to not be put on the registry at all.

“The Ministry of Internal Affairs compiles statistics on the number of those who were granted temporary asylum, but many Ukrainian refugees don’t see the point of getting this incomplete and short-term status. Besides, Russian authorities, guided by their aggressive and crazy geopolitical initiatives, have committed to assimilation of Ukrainians, so they persuade [Ukrainians] to apply for Russian citizenship instead of the temporary asylum status (303,000 Ukrainians received Russian citizenship in 2022 — editor’s note),” Troitsky believes.

The committee’s report also mentions the Ministry of Emergency Situations’ data on temporary accommodation. In November 2022, Deputy Head of the ministry Anatoly Suprunovsky said that over 850 temporary accommodation locations were being put to use. In total, there are 1,444 such locations in all of Russia. About 42,000 people were living

there in 2022. In January, TASS reported that the number of refugees put in accommodation centres decreased to about 40,000 and that even the locations put to use were not at full capacity.

Not one of these numbers proves that millions of refugees could be in Russia.

Moldova

Thousands of people gathered in the Moldovan capital Chişinău for a protest organised by a pro-Russia party, where demonstrators criticized the pro-European government for a steep rise in the cost of living.

As Russia has reduced gas supplies to Moldova over the past year, bills have risen up to six-fold in the country of 2.6 million. The energy crisis and the war in neighboring Ukraine have also contributed to a 30% rise in inflation.

With western economic help, the government has subsidized energy bills but many are still struggling.

“What can we live off?” said Tamara, 70, who took part in the protest.

Ivan Vasile, 85, said his pension was the equivalent of £100 a month. “Can I afford to buy myself cheese? I cannot,” he said. “I eat little more than bread. Before, electricity and gas were cheaper. Democracy is for the rich.”

Moldovan police claim to have foiled a plot by Russia-backed groups **trained to** cause mass unrest during a protest against the government.

An undercover agent infiltrated groups of “diversionists,” among them Russian citizens, who had been promised \$10,000 (£8,300) to create “mass disorder” to destabilize Moldova, the head of its police force told a news conference.

Viorel Cernauteanu said seven people had been detained. Police also said 54 protesters had been arrested and four bomb threats registered.

The protest on Sunday was one in a series held against the new pro-EU government, organised by a group called Movement for the People.

The group is backed by the Russia-friendly Shor party, which holds six seats in Moldova’s legislature and is led by a UK-sanctioned oligarch, according to Sky News.

Comment – The typical Russian way of subverting democratic processes. Unless stopped, once and for all, they will continue as they have done for centuries.