

RUSSIA MONITOR

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SOURCE: STRUCTURE.MIL.RU

10 February 2022

RUSSIA RAMPS UP AMPHIBIOUS LANDING CAPACITIES IN BLACK SEA

A flotilla of Russian amphibious ships of the Northern Fleet and the Baltic Fleet passed to the Black Sea, which makes a navy operation against Ukraine quite likely. But it is just the beginning of Russia's massive navy buildup--by deploying some of its vessels, the Russian navy seems to plan a deterrence strategy against NATO forces.

Six Russian amphibious landing ships sailed to the Black Sea through the Turkish straits on February 8–9. On the evening of February 8, Russia sent its Project 775 Ropucha class amphibious warfare ships Kaliningrad, Korolev, and Minsk to the Black Sea. These

three had stayed in the Mediterranean Sea since early February. On February 4, the vessels stopped at the Russian Navy's base in Tartus, Syria. A day later, the Northern Fleet sent to the Black Sea three other vessels: Project 775 Ropucha, the Georgy Pobedonosets, and

the Olenegorsky Gornyak, along with the Project 11711 Ivan Gren class Pyotr Morgunov. The vessels will raise the number of troops that could be delivered in the first wave of an assault in the Black Sea. But there is more to that. On February 7, the Northern Fleet's missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, frigate Admiral Kasatonov, and warfare ship Vice Admiral Kulakov passed east through the Strait of Gibraltar and are likely to conduct exercises in the Mediterranean. Missile cruiser Varyag, destroyer Admiral Tributs, and tanker Butoma had already been deployed to the Mediterranean Sea after they had left Vladivostok last December. They

passed the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal. Perhaps Russia will keep some of its forces in the Black Sea--also in the event of its attack against Ukraine--to watch U.S. and NATO vessels. On January 20, the Russian defense ministry announced a surge of 140 warships and support vessels, 60 aircraft and a total of 10,000 personnel were participating in simultaneous naval exercises "in all places for which the Russian navy is accountable," so in the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the North Sea, the Okhotsk Sea, the Pacific, and the Atlantic Oceans. ■

14 February 2022

RUSSIA, UKRAINE STAGE PARALLEL MILITARY DRILLS

Russia and Belarus have begun joint military drills dubbed the Allied Resolve 2022, moving up 30,000 troops to the theater in the country's south near the Ukrainian border. At the same time, Ukraine kickstarted its Blizzard 2022 military exercise in the northern part of the country that borders Belarus. On February 13, Russia will start maneuvers in the south, close to Ukrainian waters.

In December 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko approved the Allied Resolve 2022 drills that the West saw as a potential threat to Ukraine. What fuels these concerns is the scale of the drills and the number of Russian troops deployed to Belarus. NATO says Russia could mobilize up to 30,000 troops, including some elite airborne forces. Most of the contingent comes from Russia's Far East. It is about both land and air forces. Russia has sent to Belarus two S-400 surface-to-air missile system battalions, a Pantsir missile system, Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, an Uragan missile artillery system, and Sukhoi Su-25SM

ground attack jets. The drills come as Western states warn that Russia, which has massed troops along Belarus's borders with Ukraine and Poland, is preparing an assault on its pro-Western neighbor. Many voice concerns that at least some of the Russian troops would stay in Belarus after the drills, which is scheduled for February 10-20, is over. Ukrainian training would also run from February 10 to February 20 to put the Ukrainian army at readiness in face of Russian-Belarusian drills. "We will hold simultaneous drills at the training areas of Rivne, Kovel, Ovruch, Oleshkivski Pisky, and near Odesa," Ukrainian defense minister Oleksii Reznikov told a few days before. The first three



SOURCE: FLICKR

are in northern Ukraine near the country's border with Belarus. The remaining two are in the country's south, where the army is seeking

to contain the Russian threat in Crimea and the Black Sea. On February 13, Russia will start navy drills, blocking access to Ukrainian ports. ■

14 February 2022

RUSSIA, CHINA EXTEND GAS COOPERATION

As Russian President Vladimir Putin went to China to attend the opening of the Winter Olympics, he signed a pile of economic deals with China, also on energy. A gas supply deal was inked, among other contracts.

Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a long-term agreement for natural gas to be supplied to China and grow by 10 billion cubic meters, totaling 48 billion cubic meters per year. China

will receive extra volumes from Russia's Far East. The contract was signed for 25 years. The deal is of strategic importance for Gazprom as the firm is hoping to see Chinese gas demand grow by 50 percent by 2030 while that in Europe,



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

Gazprom's biggest sales market so far, will decrease by more than 5 percent. No details were provided on what field could provide extra deliveries for China. Earlier it was said Gazprom may tap the Yuzhno-Kirinskoye, a field hit by U.S. sanctions, to provide China with gas under a recently signed deal. The field should launch in 2023. Gazprom said the field would see an output of 21 bcm per year. Russian-sourced liquefied natural gas will be delivered to China via the Power of Siberia gas pipeline, operational since 2019. Russia's Rosneft has signed an \$80 billion deal with China's state-owned CNPC to continue supplying 100 million tons of crude to China by 2033. These will be sent to refineries in northwest China, Rosneft said in a statement. In 2020, the oil firm's exports eastwards accounted for more than 50 percent of its total export figures. Russia's new long-term deals

with China corroborate the Kremlin's strategic goal of tightening cooperation with China in all domains possible, ranging from defense to the economy. Beijing is poised to become an alternative to the West as its relations with Russia have soured significantly. It was also about gas supply. Gazprom has for months sent modest gas supplies to Europe although its production stands at a considerable level while the company is increasing export quotas to China. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping met in Beijing ahead of the official start of the festivities. Chinese President Xi Jinping urged to step up coordination between Russia and China to protect the security interests of both countries more efficiently, Chinese media reported. The joint statement noted that "friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation." ■



SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

15 February 2022

OPEC+ DID NOT GIVE IN TO OUTPUT-INCREASING PRESSURE

In the shortest meeting in its history, OPEC+ decided to increase the collective production by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd). The ministers of the OPEC+ alliance, who met via video conference, agreed in just 16 minutes on the monthly production hike. The decision to keep the gradual output increase despite growing global demand made oil prices soar rapidly. The leaders of OPEC+, which are Saudi Arabia and Russia, will each have a quota of 10.331 million bpd in March.

In its shortest meeting ever, OPEC+ decided on February 2 to boost the production by 400,000 bpd in March, keeping unchanged the plan to boost output and pushing Brent above \$90 per barrel again with the per-usual modest production hike. Some analysts, and possibly traders, had expected a higher production increase, considering the recent rally in oil prices to \$90 that has surely frustrated major oil-consuming nations, including the United States. Ahead of the meeting, Goldman Sachs had expressed the view that OPEC+ might decide to announce a larger production increase for March than the usual 400,000 bpd, considering the oil price rally to \$90 and the potential for renewed discontent from major oil importers at these high price levels. While the nominal increase is modest, as in

the previous seven months, many producers within the OPEC+ group are struggling to pump to their quotas--last year, Russia achieved its maximum capacity. To raise production, it is compelled to open new fields. All this leaves an increasingly large gap between production increase on paper and actual growth in output, which leaves the market tighter than many analysts and forecasters had anticipated just a few months ago. Shortly, the market will be closely looking at how much of that increase OPEC+ can deliver, considering that half of its members have lagged in ramping up output to their quotas so far, while others--with few exceptions, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates--will be struggling to raise production. The next OPEC+ meeting is scheduled for March 2. ■

15 February 2022

RUSSIAN WARSHIPS SAIL TO BLACK SEA FOR DRILLS: BLOCKAGE OR POTENTIAL AGGRESSION?

A flotilla of Black Fleet vessels alongside some warships of the Baltic Fleet and the Pacific Fleet started drills in the Black Sea. What may raise concern is that the last of them are large amphibious vessels while such a military operation could be one of Russia's offensive options. Blocking a few seas is a serious obstacle to maritime trade with Ukraine.

The drills are scheduled from February 13 to 19. The Russian submarine Rostov on Don, which is capable of carrying Kalibr cruise missiles, passed the Bosphorus. The diesel-electric Project 636.3 vessel was laid

down in 2014. The submarine belongs to the Black Sea Fleet's 4th Independent Submarine Brigade. Earlier, more than thirty Black Sea Fleet vessels took to the sea from Sevastopol and Novorossiysk to hold navy drills to "defend



SOURCE: STRUCTURE.MIL.RU

the coast of Crimea.” But there are more Russian vessels that may intimidate Ukraine at sea. A flotilla of six Russian amphibious vessels—three of the Northern Fleet and three of the Baltic Fleet—arrived in Sevastopol a few days ago. Five of them are Ropucha-class vessels while the remaining one is an Ivan Gren-class warship. They will take part in joint drills, according to the Russian defense ministry. Ukraine’s foreign ministry strongly protested a decision by Russia to block parts of the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait “under the

pretext of holding regular naval exercises.” If Russia invades Ukraine, its vessels will play a supportive role. First, they will cut off Ukrainian sea ports in the Sea of Azov and west of Crimea. Secondly, they are capable of conducting artillery and missile firing at Ukrainian targets, without Kalibr able to reach any target on Ukrainian territory. Thirdly, the vessels could assist ground forces in some operations on land, by staging an amphibious attack on targets alongside Ukraine’s coast. ■



SOURCE: EN.KREMLIN.RU

16 February 2022

NOT ACCIDENTALLY, GERMANY'S SCHROEDER IS SET TO JOIN GAZPROM

Gazprom has nominated former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to join its board of directors. He already holds several posts related to the Russian energy sector: the former chancellor is chairman of Nord Stream. Schroeder, who was the head of the Social Democrat-led German government, is also a board member at Russia's top oil producer Rosneft.

The ex-chancellor is set to be admitted to the board when it holds its annual meeting on June 30 in St.Petersburg. He will be the only new member as the remaining ten candidates are already members of the board. Schroeder is set to replace Timur Kulibayev, the son-in-law of Kazakhstan's former long-serving president Nursultan Nazarbayev. In January, the government submitted his candidacy but he would lose after Kassym-Jomart Tokayev began to remove Nazarbayev's family and friends from power. Kulibayev was a member of the board since 2011. What cast the shadow on the reshuffles in Gazprom's board is two major events in the East: a palace coup in Kazakhstan and tensions running between Russia and the West whether Moscow is preparing to invade Ukraine. Schroeder is acting like the Kremlin's lobbyist. He is known to have met with leading SPD officials to present Moscow's

narrative to them. His new post is a signal for all Western politicians: they can be nominated to prominent jobs in Russia in exchange for their Moscow-friendly attitude. This is all the more if they prove useful for the Kremlin in such important moments as now. Schroeder is still an influential figure in the SPD, from which hail Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The former chancellor's trusted people work together with Manuela Schwesig (SPD), a proponent of Nord Stream 2 and the minister president of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where the undersea Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 gas links go ashore. His predecessor, Erwin Sellering, was awarded the Order of Friendship, a Russian state decoration. He now chairs two NGOs that got the financing from the company in charge of Nord Stream 2. ■

17 February 2022

RUSSIA HOLDS NAVAL DRILLS FROM THE ARCTIC TO SYRIA

Russia is now seeing an array of drills that serve as a tool to pressure Ukraine and the West. What should arouse a particular interest is a navy exercise in the Black Sea. Its scale and flotilla, as the latter includes amphibious assault ships that sailed from the Baltic Sea and the North Sea, suggests that Russia's military showcase could play its role in Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

On February 15, more than twenty ships from Russia's Northern fleet have started drills in the Barents Sea. The exercises in the waters between Russia and Norway are part

of broader drills. The Russian fleet is also staging maneuvers in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. On the same day, Russia said it would start navy drills in the Mediterranean



SOURCE: STRUCTURE.MIL.RU

Sea. Russia has deployed MiG-31K fighter jets with hypersonic Kinzhal missiles and long-range Tupolev Tu-22M3 strategic bombers to its air base in Syria for naval exercises. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the Russian naval drills would take place in the eastern Mediterranean and involve 15 warships and 30 aircraft, including two missile cruisers: Varyag and Marshal Ustinov. What yet is of key importance is Black Sea drills (February 13–19) as they take place close to Ukraine that Russia could invade. Staging these exercises in this area could negatively affect trade with Ukrainian sea ports. “Due to joint efforts and

quick response, we have prevented the blocking of the Black Sea ports of Ukraine. The corridor determined by the research guarantees the ships safe passage through the Gulf of Odesa,” Ukraine’s infrastructure minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said on February 15. The Ukrainian infrastructure ministry is developing a safe maritime corridor for navigation of vessels in the Black Sea near the Dniester bank, the ministry reported on Facebook. Earlier, the country’s foreign ministry had protested a decision by Russia to block parts of the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait under the pretext of holding naval exercises. ■



SOURCE: GAZPROM.COM

21 February 2022

EU SAYS IT IS READY FOR POSSIBLE DISRUPTION OF RUSSIAN GAS FLOWS

The European Union would be able to cope with disruption to gas imports from Russia, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. The top EU official said infrastructure development, by adding new pipelines and interconnectors, and individual contingency plans in recent years meant Europe was better equipped to increase deliveries of liquefied natural gas. One example is Spain that boosted its LNG supplies in recent months, which could serve as a role model for the entire bloc.

Natural gas accounts for 24 percent of Europe's primary energy, of which 90 percent is imported while 40 percent comes from Russia's Gazprom. Thus the EU is vulnerable to any disruption in Russian gas flows if Moscow invaded Ukraine while Western nations imposed economic sanctions. Europe's gas storage levels are currently around 34 percent full but gas flows from Gazprom, which is the biggest supplier, are less than half of that. Gazprom is not supplying gas to the European spot market, which is now important. The European Commission is aware of some risks after cutting off Russian gas flows. The EU has spoken with the United States, Qatar, Egypt, Azerbaijan, and Nigeria about increasing gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) deliveries. The Commission talked to major buyers of LNG, including Japan and South Korea, to ask whether they could swap contracts in favor of the EU. European LNG imports hit a record high of around 10 bcm in January, when some 120 vessels took to European ports. "Our models now show that for partial disruption or further

decrease of gas deliveries by Gazprom, we are now rather on the safe side," von der Leyen was quoted as saying. Some EU nations have begun efforts to diversify gas supplies. Poland is contracting more LNG supplies and is now contracting the Baltic Pipe, a gas link carrying gas flows from Norway. Spain is seeking new gas opportunities amid a standoff between Algeria and Morocco. Algeria stopped supplying natural gas to the country through the Maghreb-Europe pipeline. For Madrid, being dependent on a second threat of the Medgaz pipeline from Algeria is not comfortable. So it is planned to build a Spain-France-Germany gas link to carry Algerian gas commodities to Spain and liquefied natural gas. From November 2021 and March 2022, Spain is planning to contract some 136 LNG-carrying vessels, which marks a 58 percent increase year-on-year. In November, which was just after the Maghreb-Europe pipeline was shut, Spain contracted 263 percent more of liquefied natural gas, mainly from the United States. ■

21 February 2022

PUTIN'S NUCLEAR SHOWCASE AMID POSSIBLE INVASION OF UKRAINE

Russia held its February 19 strategic nuclear drills to intimidate Western countries. Amid Russia's planned invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin is warning the United States against getting involved in the conflict. The drills served also a propaganda purpose in Russia to add up to the war atmosphere and convince people around the country about Moscow's military might and an alleged threat posed by Western nations.



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

Russia holds huge drills of its strategic nuclear forces in the fall, but this year it did so earlier at a time of soaring tensions with Western countries. Russia informed about the exercises just a day before—on February 18. They were personally overseen by Vladimir Putin. Ships and submarines of the Northern Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet launched Kalibr cruise missiles and Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles. One of the submarines in the Barents Sea fired a Sineva weapon. Air-launched cruise missiles were fired from Tu-95 long-range strategic bombers. The planes were flying with missiles that hit targets at the Pemboy and Kura ranges. To demonstrate the combat readiness of Russia's air-, land- and sea-based strategic nuclear forces, the Russian defense ministry

involved also its strategic nuclear forces, the Black and North Fleets, and some troops of the Southern Military District. Aircraft launched Kinzhal cruise missiles, Sineva ballistic missiles, Kalibr cruise missiles, and a Zircon hypersonic cruise missile at sea and ground targets. The strategic nuclear forces launched a Yars intercontinental ballistic missile while at the Kapustin Yar test site in the Astrakhan region, one Iskander short-range cruise missile was launched. The last may be interesting as Iskander missiles could be tipped with both conventional and nuclear warheads. Some of the drills were overseen by Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko. ■



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

21 February 2022

WHILE IN MOSCOW, GERMANY'S SCHOLZ "PROMPTED" PUTIN TO INVADE UKRAINE

The trip that the German chancellor paid to Kyiv and Moscow failed to ease tensions in eastern Europe. In fact, Scholz made Zelensky a kind of disservice by agreeing with the Kremlin on the need to fulfill all commitments under the Minsk agreements and by claiming the Ukrainian president would be prepared for potential concessions. Vladimir Putin felt empowered to attack Ukraine and blame Kyiv for not having implemented what is known as the Minsk agreements.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz traveled to Kyiv and Moscow on February 14 and 15 in a bid to “calm tensions” between NATO and Russia. He was the last of major Western officials to take action. And perhaps he did not do as poorly as France’s Emmanuel Macron, but he scored worse than Poland’s and UK’s chief diplomats. Scholz painted his trip to Moscow as an attempt to defuse tensions and “avoid a war in Europe.” High on the agenda of the Scholz-Putin meeting was whether Ukraine was committed to the Minsk protocol. Alongside this topic was an issue of keeping Ukraine outside NATO, in a formula to be refined, albeit according to Russian security demands. In a nutshell, Scholz had the meeting agenda imposed. Despite its allegedly peaceful character, it spoke about nothing but concessions Ukraine should make. Did Scholz travel to Kyiv and Moscow to calm tensions and save peace? It is possible. The official made it clear that Kyiv was the only one to sacrifice for peaceful resolutions. What Scholz said was

in tune with Putin’s view. The German official shared his urge to fulfill all commitments under the Minsk agreements. The chancellor provided some details of his meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a day before. Scholz said Zelensky “firmly promised” to prepare a draft bill about Donbas special status and amendments to the constitution as well as hold local elections in Donbas and apply what is known as the Steinmeier formula. The German chancellor also said the Ukrainian leader agreed to submit the draft legislation to the Trilateral Contact Group before they are discussed with the representatives of so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics. But neither did Zelensky say this during a joint press conference with Scholz in Kyiv on February 14 nor anytime later. The only time these were spoken publicly was after Scholz met with Putin. Interestingly, France’s Emmanuel Macron had also talked about offering concessions on the Minsk protocol, urging Ukraine to abide by them. ■

22 February 2022

WAR IN DONBAS IS MOST LIKELY SCENARIO

As shelling intensified in eastern Ukraine, Russia is accusing Ukraine of drafting an offensive plan and evacuating “civilians” from Donbas while it staging an “all-out mobilization” in what is known as “people’s republics,” a new chapter of the Russia-Ukraine war is just about to begin.

Tensions in the east of Ukraine have risen dramatically in mid-February after Russian-backed separatists launched an intense artillery barrage across the line of control with Ukrainian forces. At the same time, the Russian defense ministry said some troops massed near

Ukraine would begin returning to their bases following the completion of drills. The Kremlin is mounting tensions in Donbas to then say it had pulled out troops and had had no plans to attack Ukraine—according to what the West had claimed—while it was Ukraine that invaded



SOURCE: МУЛЬТИМЕДИА.МИНОБОРОНЫ.РФ

“the people’s republics” in Donbas. As many of its residents hold Russian passports, Moscow feels somewhat “obliged” to intervene. Last year, the Kremlin used Donbas as a tool in its war against Kyiv by simplifying the procedure for obtaining Russian passports. By amassing its troops alongside the border with Ukraine, Russia is seeking to catch Kyiv’s attention and intimidate its western neighbor with a possible all-out invasion. Russia is yet more likely to stage a military operation in Donbas to “protect” the Russian-speaking population of the two “people’s republics.” The Ukrainian military said two soldiers were killed and four wounded in shelling by pro-Russian separatists on February 19. Still that day, the OSCE mission to eastern Ukraine recorded roughly 2,000 ceasefire violations. Russian troops could make their way into Donbas through a plot to

mock up scenes of bloody attacks. Ukraine’s intelligence agency said the notoriously brutal Wagner group had arrived in Donetsk to carry out a series of terrorist attacks by demolishing residential buildings. The purpose of such provocations is to blame Ukraine for these activities. The Russian Army and special services are preparing a terrorist attack, the victims of which should be peaceful residents,” the commander of the Ukrainian armed forces, Valery Zaluzhny, warned in a statement. “The enemy is seeking to use this as justification to bring in the Russian Army as ‘peacekeepers,” he added. Possibly the “evacuation” is an excuse for carrying out a terrorist attack. Perhaps Russian troops seek to blow up highways and bridges as civilians are evacuated from eastern Ukraine to Russia. ■



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

24 February 2022

PUTIN GOES ALL IN: INVASION OF UKRAINE

The Russian president could have stopped at recognizing the so-called people's republics in occupied Donbas, saving his face and leaving the current crisis behind him. However, all indications are that the war with Ukraine was already planned last fall. Russia's absurd demands to NATO and the US were only an excuse to strike Ukraine.

Such a large-scale attack on Ukraine indicates that Vladimir Putin decided that it is not worthwhile to follow a strategy of small steps, for instance, to only recognize the so-called people's republics in Donbas. Time is counting against Putin. Firstly, recent years have seen the strengthening of the pro-Western forces in Ukraine. Secondly, Putin is getting older and sicker. Meanwhile, he still

has not achieved one of his most important goals – the re-subordination of Ukraine to Moscow. The Kremlin decided that there is no point in trying to make Kyiv implement the so-called Minsk agreements. Over the past years, Ukraine has been able to resist pressure not only from Moscow but also from the West in this matter. Putin came to a conclusion that negotiations with Kiev are pointless, that he

could only press Ukraine to make concessions by using brute force. Hence the full-scale operation, and, after several hours of shelling and land battles in several locations, the Kremlin's gracious declaration that it can now talk to Kyiv about Ukraine's neutrality status, abandonment of military cooperation with the West, and aspirations for NATO membership. The potential discussion points included even the relinquishment of independence by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was gained a few years ago, and giving it back to the Patriarch of Moscow. Such far-reaching military operation might result in a bloody and

lengthy armed conflict. Certainly, the Kremlin does not intend to stop after capturing Donbas. It is about subjugating the whole country, hence the air and missile attacks. The aim is to weaken Ukraine's military potential (hence the attacks on military bases, even those located in the west of the country), its anti-aircraft defense (to allow airborne landings in key locations, if needed), paralyze the infrastructure, as well as intimidate the population and the ruling elite. However, the first hours after the attack do not indicate that this has been achieved. Therefore, Putin will seek to terrorize Ukraine. ■

25 February 2022

PUTIN'S FAILED BLITZKRIEG: RUSSIAN FORCES ARE ADVANCING ON KYIV

Moscow did not achieve its goals on the first day of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian forces successfully slowed the Russian attack on land while the Russian air and rocket forces did not cripple Ukrainian command.

Surprisingly, Russia attacked Ukraine on land and simultaneously began airborne gunfire to target some key military facilities of the enemy. Perhaps Russia believed Ukrainian forces would mount weak resistance. Ukrainian forces successfully slowed the Russian offensive. Russian airborne troops failed to capture key targets. Russian forces lost more than 30 tanks, up to 130 armored vehicles, 800 troops, seven planes, and six helicopters, according to Ukrainian officials. As the full-scale attack enters a second day, Russia is advancing on four primary axes. Its forces made the greatest territorial gains in the south, conducting an assault from Crimea towards Kherson and Mykolaiv and crossing the Dnipro river. Russian

forces have reportedly penetrated to a depth of at least 60 kilometers. President Zelensky identified the attack from Crimea as the "most problematic situation." What is dangerous for Ukraine is striking Kyiv from the north, on both banks of the Dnipro river. The Russian forces advanced most west of the country's capital. This military operation shows how important it was for Moscow to team up with Belarus. Ukraine is notching up most successes in the country's east, where its best troops are deployed to. Ukrainian forces held back a frontal assault of the 1st Guards Tank Army on Kyiv for twenty-four hours. Russian forces likely seek to cut off Ukrainian troops from the rest of the country on the line of contact in Donbas. ■



SOURCE: FLICKR

28 February 2022

UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR: RUSSIAN VULNERABILITIES ON SOUTHEASTERN FRONT

The Russia-Ukraine war has in fact continued in Donbas since 2014. After the Kremlin officially recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in war-torn eastern Ukraine, it could have seemed that these two will turn into the military theater. Yet Putin decided otherwise. The military theatre in Donbas is fundamental for three reasons. Firstly, this is where Ukrainian forces have been for years now and are best prepared for defensive. Secondly, Russian forces could advance northwest, heading from Donbas towards Kharkiv to back soldiers that invade the city from the east. Thirdly, an assault group is advancing on Mariupol along the coast of the Sea of Azov to join troops moving forward from the Crimean peninsula.



SOURCE: [HTTPS://MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM/](https://media.gazprom-neft.com/)

A major challenge that Russia is now facing consists in coordinating air raids and an amphibious landing. While airborne forces could be dropped along the Dnepr River to seize crucial bridges, how long would they be able to hold out while armored forces try to reach them over winter roads? The same applies to amphibious forces attempting to outflank Ukrainian defenses near Mariupol or to seize Odesa. Black Sea hydrography and coastal topography provide few good landing sites for amphibious forces, and once landed, they would be hard to sustain. Without proper coordination and rapid advance of armored forces, any airborne or amphibious assault as part of the invasion could become a “bridge or beach too far” for Russian forces. Russian problems have become clear now as the country’s forces are continuing hostilities in southern and southeastern Ukraine. Let’s start with Donbas. Russia could carry out a military operation

locally in Donbas to extend the front and move deep into Ukraine before stopping there. Now it is clear that the Russian operation in Donbas played a supporting role. There is no frontal assault from the Donetsk region to Dnipro via the E50 road and/or to Zaporizhzhia via the N15 road (225 km). Speaking of the Donetsk section in Donbas, it was reported on February 25 that Russian forces attacked Mariupol. This suggests a thrust advancing along the Sea of Azov, across Mariupol and Berdyansk, to the Perekop isthmus that links mainland Ukraine and Crimea. But the biggest blow went north, from Luhansk. This could be a backup operation for Russian forces that advanced on Kharkiv. Therefore, the best course of action for Russian troops would be to bypass urban areas and mop them up later. However, Kharkiv is just over the border from Russia and is a major road and railroad junction. If Russian forces did not control Kharkiv, it would seriously diminish

their logistical capability to support a central thrust toward the Dnepr River and beyond. Furthermore, Kyiv poses a similar challenge and, as the nation's capital, possesses great symbolic value for whichever side holds it. Russia may be unable to avoid sustained urban combat in several major metropolitan areas (and the resulting high casualties) if it attempts more than a punitive incursion into Ukraine. Where is Russia most likely to advance across the eastern front? This route might include

an axis that moves through Belgorod, Russia; Kharkiv, Ukraine (E105 road); Poltava, Ukraine (M03 road); and finally to Kremenchuk, Ukraine (320 km). Another option, which is more to the south, is to move from Belgorod to Kharkiv, and possibly another thrust to Dnipro (E105 road), perhaps to cut off Ukrainian forces in Donbas. The Russian problem was that its troops failed to do it over the first three days as they got stuck in Kharkiv and in the northern part of the Luhansk region. ■

28 February 2022

UKRAINE–RUSSIA WAR: RUSSIAN VULNERABILITIES ON SOUTHERN FRONT

In the case of an invasion of Ukraine, Russia will be conducting its largest combined arms operation since the Battle of Berlin in 1945. As the first days of the war showed, the Russian army overestimated its capabilities while underestimating those of the enemy. This is not new for Russia. It was similar during the first war in Chechnya and also somewhat in Georgia.

After the first three days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces made their only territorial gains in the country's south, claimed by troops that earlier had been stationed in Crimea. After crossing the Dnipro river near the city of Kherson, Russian troops could head westward towards Mykolaiv, Ochakiv, and Odesa, and capture Melitopol in what could be a stage in an eastern-oriented offensive towards Mariupol and Donbas. Russia's somewhat gains in the south yet should not overshadow the army's vulnerabilities and the challenges it now faces. Russia's earlier military experience has nothing to do with its challenges now. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War saw just five days of combat and engaged

70,000 Russian soldiers. In Syria, the primary maneuver forces included Syrian ground units, with help from Lebanese Hezbollah, militia forces from neighboring countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Forces. Second, the Russian military also has limited experience in coordinating a large number of aircraft that will support the ground attack. Russian air operations in Syria and Chechnya do not compare with the number of sorties that could be required in Ukraine. This will be the first time since World War II that Russia's ground forces will face a modern mechanized opponent, and its air forces will face an opponent with a modern air force



SOURCE: FLICKR

and air defense system. Thirdly, there is the question of logistics. However, once combat units expend their initial stores of ammunition, fuel, and food, the real test of Russian military strength will begin—including Russia’s ability to sustain the advance of a massive mechanized force over hundreds of miles of territory. Kyiv and the Dnepr River crossings are at least 240 to 320 km from the Russian border, and its army will require at least several days of fighting to reach them. Before that, they will undoubtedly have to resupply, refuel, and replace combat losses of men and material at least once, which will require an operational pause. Now it is clear that Russian forces find it challenging,

especially while advancing on Kyiv from the northeast. However, Russia may have trouble with a sustained ground offensive far beyond Russian railroads without a major logistical halt or a massive mobilization of reserves (Ukrainian troops blew up the railway junctions connecting the Ukrainian railway system with its Russian counterpart on February 26). As the operational depth in Ukraine is gigantic, a Russian invasion of Ukraine could be a longer affair than the Kremlin had anticipated due to the time and distance to bring up supplies. If the invasion is not concluded quickly due to a combination of weather, logistics, and Ukrainian resistance, how might this impact Russian morale? ■



SOURCE: NAFTOGAZ.COM

28 February 2022

GAZPROM SAYS RUSSIAN GAS EXPORTS VIA UKRAINE CONTINUE NORMALLY

Kremlin-controlled energy giant Gazprom said on February 27 that Russian gas exports via Ukraine to Europe continued normally, in line with requests from customers. Ukraine's gas pipeline operator also said the transit of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine ran safely. The war, which broke out on February 24, has not affected Ukraine's nuclear power plants.

Gazprom said requests for gas via the route stand at 107.5 million cubic meters as of Sunday, February 27. Earlier, Russian forces were reported to have blown up a gas pipeline near Kharkiv. This did not harm the gas

transit via Ukraine as what was damaged was probably a local gas link. Ukraine's state-owned gas grid operator GTSOU could not confirm the explosion was linked to the Ukrainian gas transit system. Now Russia has no other

choice but to send gas flows through Ukraine as Germany halted the Nord Stream 2 Baltic Sea gas pipeline project. Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared his country would curb gas imports from Russia while speaking about the Russian invasion in the Bundestag on February 27. Even those who were lobbying for Nord Stream 2 in Germany said the country might quit the project. Gas transit via Ukraine is continuing to

function and the country's nuclear power plants are running safely. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a statement on February 26 that Ukraine informed that its nuclear power plants remained stable and in normal operation. Ukraine has four nuclear power sites with a total of 15 reactors, providing roughly half of its electricity. ■

28 February 2022

UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR: RUSSIAN VULNERABILITIES ON NORTHEASTERN FRONT

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not moving as fast as Putin had assumed. It is not known whether the army was not sufficiently prepared or whether Russian top military brass did not want to tell the president they were unfit for the invasion. Perhaps the Russian offensive potential is not as impressive as many would think, also in Moscow. Invading a vast European country, inhabited by millions and priding itself with a high-morale army, is not the same as ruthless raids on civilians in Syria.

During the first three days of the war, Russia found itself unprepared for the invasion and ignored the potential of its enemy, believing in its own propaganda on a weak Ukrainian army, as was the case in 2014. By the end of Saturday, Russian troops made some territorial gains in southern Ukraine, where an offensive came from the Crimean peninsula. After some heavy fighting, Russian forces captured the crossing on the Dnipro river and made some progress in the east, towards Mariupol (according to reports, the city of Melitopol was to fall after an hours-long fight). In the north, Russian sabotage and assault groups made

two failed attempts to capture Kyiv. Armored forces got stuck near Kharkiv while an offensive heading from Donbas is moving slowly. What does impact the slow advancing of the Russian army? Now most of the fighting takes place on the left bank of the Dnipro river (except for an assault on the northwestern outskirts of Kyiv from Belarus). While much of the terrain east of the Dnepr River includes rural fields and forests, there are several major urban areas that a Russian mechanized force would have to either take or bypass and besiege. Kharkiv has roughly 1.5 million inhabitants, Odesa has 1 million, Dnipro has almost 1 million, Zaporizhia



SOURCE: FLICKR

has 750,000, and even Mariupol has almost 500,000. If defended, these large urban areas could take considerable time and casualties to clear and occupy. In the First Chechen War, it took Russian forces from December 31, 1994, to February 9, 1995, to wrestle control of Grozny, then a city of less than 400,000, from a few thousand Chechen fighters. In the Second Chechen War, the siege of Grozny also took six weeks. Therefore, the best course of action for Russian troops would be to bypass urban areas and mop them up later. There is a logistics problem, though. The operation does not look good, one example being an assault on Kyiv

from Russia. Russia could advance toward Kyiv along two routes. The first would be 240 km by road (P13) to Chernihiv, Ukraine, and into Kyiv (via E95 expressway). The second would be a 320-kilometer thrust north of Konotop and Nizhyn (via two expressways: E391 and E101) to E95, some 25 km south of Chernihiv. Then they would head southward. As the invasion started, Russian forces bypassed large cities on their way to Kyiv. Having passed Konop, Russian tanks and vehicles have run out of fuel, though. And in the rear is where guerrilla fighters attack the enemy's supply routes. ■



SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

28 February 2022

GAZPROM, ROSNEFT LOSE WESTERN INVESTORS

Oil giants Shell and BP are quitting joint projects with the biggest Russian energy companies, marking the most significant move yet by a Western company in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, Gazprom and Rosneft are losing billions after the prices of their shares collapsed and the Russian financial market plummeted amid Western sanctions.

Dutch-British energy company Shell announced on February 28 it will exit its joint ventures with Russian gas giant Gazprom. Shell will quit the Sakhalin 2 liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in which it holds a 27.5 percent stake, and which is 50 percent owned and operated by Gazprom. The oil firm will also pull out of the Salym Petroleum Development in Siberia, another joint venture with the

Russian gas giant. Shell also intends to end its involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. The value of Shell's joint ventures in the country is approximately \$3 billion. It seems that the rapid retreat of BP will affect Moscow more than that of Shell. BP warned that it could take a writedown of as much as \$25 billion as a result of quitting joint ventures with Russian businesses. BP, Russia's biggest foreign investor,

abruptly announced the move to quit Russian energy projects on February 27. “It has caused us to fundamentally rethink bp’s position with Rosneft,” the CEO of BP Bernard Looney said. The other BP-nominated director, Bob Dudley, BP’s former chief executive, will also step down from Rosneft’s board, whose member he was since 2013. BP has a 19.75 percent stake in Rosneft, a package reportedly worth some \$14 billion in late 2021. State-controlled

Gazprom and Rosneft have been run by two close associates of Vladimir Putin. Gazprom is headed by Aleksei Miller while Rosneft—by Igor Sechin. Both companies account for mass revenues to the federal budget. They are also a tool for Russian foreign policy, including Gazprom’s export policy in recent months or Sechin’s missions in allied countries—like Venezuela or Belarus. ■

28 February 2022

AS FIGHT MOVES INTO ITS FIFTH DAY, RUSSIA MAKES SURPRISINGLY SLOW INVASION PROGRESS

During the first days of the invasion, Russian forces failed to capture any major cities. In fact, they are bypassing them while seeking to capture Ukraine’s two biggest cities, albeit each for a different reason. Russia is seeking to besiege the eastern city of Kharkiv because its forces cannot leave it behind while advancing on central Ukraine. The invading country is also trying to seize Kyiv to damage the morale of the Ukrainian army. According to the Pentagon, Russia has committed 75 percent of its amassed forces inside Ukraine. It is yet likely that Belarus will join Russian war efforts.

An attack from Belarusian forces would be of major significance on the northern front, to take a grip on Kyiv and possibly cut off western Ukraine from the rest of the country. This would impede weapon supplies from elsewhere in Europe while running a high risk for the country’s major military facilities that date back to the Soviet Union. Now Russian forces are attempting to seize the outskirts of

Kyiv, which resulted in heavy fighting and air raids northwest and northeast of the Ukrainian capital. An assault group targeting Kyiv will be soon joined by forces marching from Chernihiv and Sumy. Russian forces are now stuck near Kyiv. On Sunday morning, they seemed close to success as their vehicles and tanks entered the city, but it was the Ukrainian tactic to let them enter before inflicting some heavy losses



SOURCE: TWITTER

on them. Seeking to intimidate inhabitants, Russian forces on Monday launched multiple rocket strikes, hitting residential buildings and killing dozens of civilians. Heavy fighting was reported in southern Donbas, Mariupol, and Volnovakha. It is just a matter of time before Russian forces from Donbas join forces with those from Crimea. Russian forces seized the port of Berdyansk on the Sea of Azov. They are also advancing on to the north, towards the city of Zaporizhia. Russia might be planning to close Ukrainian forces, mostly those fighting in Donbas, in the southeastern part of the country. From Zaporizhia, it is not far to Dnipro, which is more to the north. The city will be targeted by the Russian military units heading from the northwest—but first, they need to capture Kharkiv. The defenders of the city are obstructing Russia's plan to join their forces attacking from the south and north somewhere by the Dnipro river. The ever-stretching front line and the ever-longer supply lines for the

forces going at the head of the advance are causing trouble, which is particularly evident in the south. As long as large groups of Russian troops passed through the Perekop isthmus, the pace of the Russian attack could be impressive. But the forces had to be split up. Some of them are heading towards Donbas while others are advancing on the north or the west. Already the heavy fighting for the crossing of the Dnipro river near Kherson showed that it would be very difficult for the Russians on this front, mostly due to geography. While marching towards Odesa, Russian forces would encounter the rivers that flow into the Black Sea and lagoon-like estuaries, where the well-defended Ukrainian cities are located. But the Russian forces have been slowed down at several points by the Ukrainian army that blew up bridges and launched drone raids and by some basic mistakes the Russian military has made. Russia failed to damage the Ukrainian air forces, air defense, or the command in the first two days

of the invasion. Those that are fighting are usually conscripts or the columns of Rosgvardia, both unfit for front-line military operations. A mass missile fire did not destroy the morale of the Ukrainian army. Morale among Russian troops is now eroding while Moscow is losing

on the information battlefield. In addition, the whole free world is showing solidarity with Ukraine and has harshly condemned Putin's invasion that is badly affected not only by Russian oligarchs, but the entire nation. ■

28 February 2022

EQUINOR QUILS RUSSIA, JOINING OTHER OIL GIANTS

Norway's state-owned energy company Equinor announced on February 28 it would "start the process of exiting its Russian joint ventures." Equinor has followed BP and Shell in announcing plans to withdraw from Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM



Equinor (formerly Statoil) also stops new investments in Russia and start the process of exiting its existing joint ventures, the company said in a statement. It has had operations in Russia for more than 30 years. The Norwegian company owns 49 percent in the joint venture with Rosneft Krasgeonats, the same stake in the project with Rosneft on the exploration of the Domanic deposit reserves in the Samara region. Also, Equinor holds a 33.33 percent stake in Severo-Komsomolskoye, a field located in Western Siberia, and a 30 percent stake in the production-sharing agreement in the northern Timan-Pechora

basin. Norway's Equinor is another company to have exited its joint ventures with Russian businesses. Earlier, BP had offloaded its stake in Russian state-owned oil firm Rosneft after Russia's act of aggression in Ukraine. BP is exiting a 19.75 percent in the Russian oil giant while its managers quit jobs in the firm run by Igor Sechin, a close associate of Vladimir Putin. Rosneft blamed BP's decision on "unprecedented political pressure," saying "thirty years of collaboration had been ruined." In addition to losing Western stakeholders, Rosneft will suffer from losing modern technologies they had offered. ■

Programs

Romania Monitor - the first platform that would bring together think tanks and analysts from both countries, interested in geopolitics, energy security and military cooperation between Poland and Romania.

Disinformation Program - this program involve carrying out professional analyses on the identification and creation of methods for combating organised disinformation and training against disinformation threats.

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Baltic Rim Monitor - this program offers the analysis of the newest events concerning Baltic basin countries.



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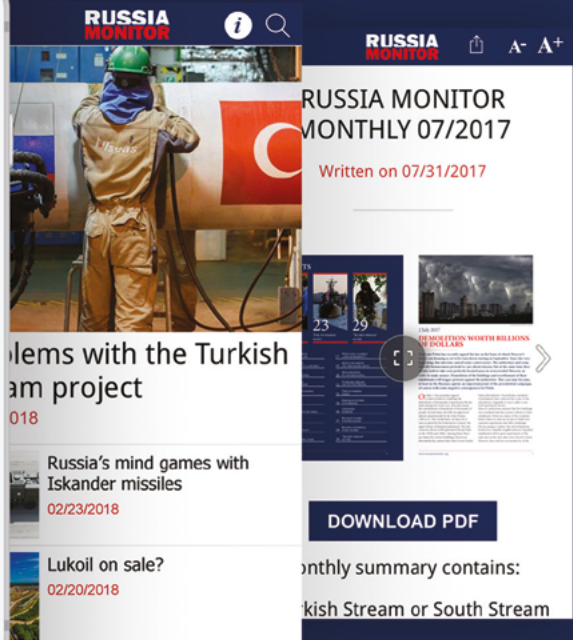
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Russia Monitor is a review of the most important events relating to Russian security. Warsaw Institute experts monitor and analyze the activities of the Kremlin and its subordinate services to anticipate the short-term and long-term consequences not only for Russia, but also for neighboring countries and the Western world. Therefore, the subjects of our analyses are both events and phenomena closely related to the internal situation in Russia, as well as its foreign policy. We are interested in Russian politics behind the scenes, changes in security forces and special forces, and the driving factors behind offensive activities, including military operations. Our analytical experience, including the ability to form in-depth assessments and forecasts, is here to serve you. Our experts, who have been monitoring the situation in Russia for years, provide an unmatched quality and depth of analysis. We want Russia Monitor to help politicians and businessmen in making decisions, while bringing the attention of all concerned to the reality of Putin's Russia.

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