



News Brief Update 38

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Russia's war with Ukraine

Russia's campaign of airstrikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure has continued over recent weeks and largely consisted of air- and maritime-launched cruise missiles but has almost certainly also included [Iranian-provided drones](#). Two of the largest bombardments since the war began occurred on 16 and 29 December, with over [70](#) and [120](#) missiles fired respectively. Ukrainian air defences were reportedly successful in downing some of the incoming missiles. In the second wave of strikes, for example, Ukraine's air force claimed it shot down 54 Russian winged cruise missiles out of 69 launched into Ukraine from Rostov in Russia, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. There were widespread reports of power outages in cities across Ukraine, with the city of Lviv reported to be 90% without electricity as a result of the latter attacks. The attacks were criticised by the British ambassador to Ukraine, Melinda Simmons, who [said](#) Russia's actions showed "Russia does not want peace with Ukraine, Russia wants the subjugation of Ukraine".

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky [said](#) Ukrainians would create their own miracle this Christmas by showing they remain unbowed despite Russian attacks that have plunged millions into darkness. The president made his remarks in a [video address](#) to Ukrainians who celebrate Christmas in December. Most Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians and mark the occasion in early January. In his [address](#) on 26 December Zelensky said power shortages were persisting, with nearly nine million people remaining without electricity, "but the numbers and the length of the blackouts are gradually decreasing" he added. Russia

[claimed](#) its mass strikes against Ukraine were part of preventing foreign weapons being delivered to Ukraine. The Russian Defence Ministry said in its daily briefing that "military command systems, the military-industrial complex and their supporting energy facilities of Ukraine were hit with a mass strike with high-precision weapons". The attacks prompted accusations from Ukraine's allies of war crimes.

Heavy fighting continuing in the east and south of the country

Heavy fighting continued in the east and south of the country amid no sign of imminent peace talks (see below). Ukrainian forces appeared to have edged closer to [recapturing](#) the key-Russian controlled city of Kremynna in Luhansk province. The regional governor of Luhansk, Serhiy Haidai, said fighters in part of the city controlled by Russian command were forced to retreat to Rubizhne, a town a few miles to the south-east, as a result of Ukrainian military pressure. Recapturing Kremynna and nearby Svatove could open the way for Kyiv to launch an offensive on Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, two cities Ukraine lost in the summer.

Meanwhile, Russian troops ([reportedly](#) supported by Wagner fighters) continued to focus their efforts on capturing the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. As of late 2022, the Bakhmut front became the epicentre of the war, being one of the few front lines in Ukraine where Russia remained on the offensive. President Zelensky said in a Telegram [post](#) that "only a few" civilians remain in Bakhmut, adding "there is no place

that is not covered with blood” in the city. Russian forces have also stepped-up mortar and artillery attacks on the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson, which was recently liberated. For example, at least ten people were [killed](#) and an estimated 58 wounded on 24 December in Russian shelling of the city.

President Zelensky goes to Washington

President Zelensky received a warm reception in Washington on 21 December on his first trip outside the country since Russia’s invasion on 24 February. At a White House meeting, US President Joe Biden [affirmed](#) Washington’s continued support for Kyiv and [told](#) Zelensky that “it’s an honour to be by your side” and promised he “will never stand alone”. The US President pledged continued financial, military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, including a further \$1.85 billion in aid, which for the first time included [Patriot](#) air defence missiles, and reiterated that the US would back Ukraine in the war for “as long as it takes”. Zelensky told a White House news conference that the Patriots were “the only way that we can deprive the terrorist state of its main instrument of terror – the possibility to hit our cities, our energy”. “Next year will be a turning point, the point when Ukrainian courage and American resolve will guarantee Ukrainian freedom, the freedom of people who stand for their values,” Zelensky said. “The Russian tyranny has lost control over us,” he added. “Against all odds and doom and gloom, Ukraine didn’t fall. Ukraine is alive and kicking”. Zelensky also sought to persuade Republican lawmakers to continue to fund his country’s defence against Russia. “Your money is not charity. It’s an investment in the global security and democracy that we handle in the most responsible way,” he said.

In his first [video message](#) after meeting with Joe Biden and addressing the US Congress, Zelensky said he was returning to Ukraine “with good results” and he thanked the president “for his help, his international leadership and his determination to win”. The Ukrainian leader’s most senior adviser Andriy Yermak [said](#) Zelensky’s visit to the White House confirmed that Ukraine and the US are

“strategic partners” for the first time in history, adding that the trip had cemented Zelensky’s bond with the US president, Joe Biden, and senior US Republicans.

Russian President Vladimir Putin [told](#) reporters in Moscow that the “The Patriot air defence is an outdated system”, adding that Russia’s S-300 system outperformed it. Meanwhile, Russia’s ambassador to the US, Anatoly Antonov, [warned](#) on 23 December that the risk of a clash between the United States and Russia was “high” and compared US-Russia relations to an “ice age”. The Kremlin has regularly accused the US of fighting a proxy war against Russia. More controversially, some Western analysts also [claim](#) that the CIA and other agencies may be involved in such a proxy war, including supporting sabotage attacks inside Russia.

Attacks on Russian territory

Moscow [accused](#) Ukraine of another attack on Engels airbase located about 300 miles away from the Ukrainian border that killed three Russian servicemen on 26 December. Russia’s Defence Ministry claimed a Ukrainian drone was [shot down](#) on the approach to the airbase but falling debris killed three service personnel. The Ukrainian Government made no comment on the reported attacks. Earlier in the month three Russian air bases were attacked (see NATO Watch [Update 37](#)) indicating that the war may be moving towards a more expansive and dangerous level.

Belarus and Russia

Rumours were circulating at the end of the year of a [wider Russian counteroffensive](#) in early 2023, including the [possibility](#) of Russian troops invading via Belarus, on Ukraine’s northern border, in a [renewed attempt](#) at capturing the capital, Kyiv. President Putin met his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, twice over a 24 hour period to “finalise many issues”, Belarusian state-owned Belta news agency [reported](#) on 27 December. The meetings took place at the Russian Museum in St Petersburg, as well as at an informal [summit](#) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 26 December.

President Putin [hosted](#) the traditional informal meeting of the leaders of the CIS on 26-27 December in St. Petersburg. In televised remarks Putin said threats to the security and stability of the Eurasian region were increasing. “Unfortunately challenges and threats in this area, especially from the outside, are only growing each year”, he said. “We also have to acknowledge unfortunately that disagreements also arise between member states of the commonwealth”.

Weeks of [military manoeuvres and inspections](#) have raised fears in Kyiv that Belarus, which acted as a staging post for Russia to launch its invasion of Ukraine in February, could be preparing to take a more active role in the conflict once again. In addition to the meetings noted above, President Putin travelled to Belarus to meet Alexander Lukashenko on 19 December, and Putin [described the talks](#) as “very productive”. In his first visit to Minsk since 2019, Putin also insisted that Russia has no interest in “absorbing” anyone, adding that unspecified “enemies” wanted to stop Russia’s integration with Belarus. Lukashenko said high level Belarusian-Russian negotiations covered “the entire range of matters concerning Belarusian-Russian relations”. In addition, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks with his Belarusian counterpart, Sergei Aleinik, in Minsk ahead of Putin’s visit. The foreign ministers discussed “specific topical issues, the efforts to counter the illegal sanctions of the West, as well as interaction on international platforms”, Belarusian state media cited Belarus’s Foreign Ministry as saying, as well as having “touched upon trade and economic cooperation matters and the implementation of joint projects”.

President Zelensky said Ukraine was ready for “all possible defence scenarios” against Moscow and its ally. “Protecting our border, both with Russia and Belarus, is our constant priority,” Zelensky [said](#) on 18 December after a meeting with Ukraine’s military commanders. “We are preparing for all possible defence scenarios”. The exiled Belarus opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, warned that Kyiv was “right to prepare” for Minsk to join Moscow’s new offensive because the

probability “might increase in coming weeks”, Tsikhanouskaya said in an [interview](#) with the Kyiv Post on the 19 December.

Meanwhile, the head of Moldova’s security service, Alexandru Musteata, [warned](#) of a “very high” risk of a new Russian offensive towards his country’s east. Russia still aims to secure a land corridor through Ukraine to the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria, Musteata said, adding that his agency believed Moscow was looking at several scenarios to reach Moldova and that it was possible an offensive would be launched in January-February or later in March-April.

Stalled diplomacy

Both President Zelensky and President Putin have expressed a willingness to negotiate an end to the war, but their positions remain so far apart that there are no real hopes of peace talks in the near future. The UN Secretary General António Guterres said he believed the war “will go on” and does not see a prospect for “serious” peace talks in the immediate future. Speaking to reporters during his [annual end-of-year press conference](#) in New York, Guterres said he “strongly hoped that peace could be reached in 2023, citing the “consequences” for Ukraine’s people, Russian society and the global economy if a deal is not found.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) on 26 December that Kyiv is aiming to have a peace summit by the end of February. Kuleba suggested that the António Guterres could be the possible mediator for peace talks with Russia, although he added that Russia could only be invited if the country faced a war crimes tribunal first. “The United Nations could be the best venue for holding this summit, because this is not about making a favour to a certain country. This is really about bringing everyone on board”, he said. President Zelensky has previously suggested convening a special global peace summit that would focus on the implementation of Kyiv’s [10-point peace plan](#), which includes the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the

aggression and security guarantees for Ukraine.

Zelenskyy had asked the Group of 20 (G20) last month to adopt the plan to end the war. India holds the G20 presidency for a year, and in a [phone call](#) with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 26 December Zelensky reiterated his request for help with the peace effort. “I had a phone call with PM Narendra Modi and wished a successful G20 presidency,” Zelensky wrote on Twitter. “It was on this platform that I announced the peace formula and now I count on India’s participation in its implementation”. The Indian government said in statement that Modi “strongly reiterated” his call for an immediate end to hostilities in Ukraine and conveyed India’s support for any peace efforts.

However, Russia shows no signs of being ready to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and pre-war borders. In a regular [briefing](#) with reporters on 28 December, for example, the Kremlin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, dismissed Zelensky’s 10-point peace plan, and insisted that any proposals to end the conflict must take into account what he called “today’s realities” of four Ukrainian regions Moscow has unilaterally declared part of Russia. Similarly, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [said](#) in an interview broadcast on national television the same day, “I am convinced that thanks to our perseverance, patience and determination, we will defend the noble goals that are vital for our people and our country”. A few days earlier, state news agency Tass [quoted](#) Lavrov as saying, “Our proposals for the demilitarisation and denazification of the territories controlled by the regime, the elimination of threats to Russia’s security emanating from there, including our new lands, are well known to the enemy. The point is simple: fulfil them for your own good. Otherwise, the issue will be decided by the Russian army”.

Nonetheless, in addition to Putin and Zelensky’s tacit openness to peace talks to end the fighting, Western leaders and thinkers have also expressed support for negotiations. For example, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of

Canterbury, and Pope Francis used their Christmas [addresses](#) to call for an end to the war in Ukraine. Condemning the use of food as a weapon of war, the Pope said the war in Ukraine and conflict in other countries had put millions at risk of famine. Eager to play the role of neutral mediator between the warring parties in Ukraine, Pope Francis has [reportedly](#) entertained the idea of hosting negotiations at the Vatican which could be facilitated by the French President Emmanuel Macron, who has continued to keep [lines of communication](#) open with Moscow.

Veteran US diplomat Henry Kissinger also believes the time is approaching for a negotiated peace in Ukraine. “The time is approaching to build on the strategic changes which have already been accomplished and to integrate them into a new structure towards achieving peace through negotiation”, Kissinger [wrote](#) in The Spectator on 17 December. “A peace process should link Ukraine to NATO, however expressed. The alternative of neutrality is no longer meaningful”, he added. Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak [dismissed](#) the comments as amounting to “appeasing the aggressor” and said there could be no deal involving ceding territory. “Any agreement with the devil – a bad peace at the expense of Ukrainian territories – will be a victory for Putin and a recipe for success for autocrats around the world,” he said in a [statement](#) on Telegram.

Meanwhile, a [new poll](#) conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Moscow-based Levada Center in late November found that 53% of Russians favoured starting negotiations with Ukraine to end the war. That number jumped to 62% when respondents were provided with costs Russia has endured. Regarding specific outcomes of any future talks, the survey found that 78% of Russians said that returning Crimea to Ukraine would be unacceptable and 66% said the same for the eastern Donbas region. However, according to [analysis](#) by the US think tank, Institute for the Study of War, Putin’s comments that he was “ready to negotiate with all parties” involved in the conflict in

Ukraine are part of a deliberate information campaign aimed at misleading the West into making concessions. And the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak [said](#) that the west should reject unilateral calls by the Kremlin for a ceasefire in Ukraine and focus on “degrading Russia’s capability to regroup and to resupply” at a meeting of European leaders in Latvia on 19 December. He was speaking at a summit of the 10-country [Joint Expeditionary Force](#) in the Latvian capital.

There have been some negotiations on key issues, such as the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, getting grain out of Ukraine and in organising prisoner swaps, but no Ukrainian-Russian negotiations since March on the big issues. Notably, a grain deal brokered by the UN and Turkey in July aimed at easing global food shortages was [extended](#) for four months on 17 November, although Russia said its own demands were yet to be fully addressed. And Russia and Ukraine have carried out numerous prisoner of war exchanges. Speaking in an [annual address](#) to the Ukrainian parliament on 28 December President Zelensky said Ukraine had secured the release of 1,456 prisoners of war since Russia invaded in February.

For options of what a possible settlement for Ukraine might look like, see Cambridge University’s [Ukraine Peace Settlement Project](#).

Military and financial assistance to Ukraine and Russia

Ukraine continues to rely heavily on international military and financial support from Western states. Most of the military assistance has come in the form of bilateral arms transfers, training and other support, which is being coordinated by the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which meets on an ad hoc basis and involves Ministers of Defence and senior military officials from Western-aligned states from around the world. The most recent meeting took [place](#) on 16 November. In addition, NATO agreed at its June [Madrid Summit](#) to strengthen a 2016 [Comprehensive Assistance Package](#) for Ukraine. The additional elements to the

package include both short-term assistance (ranging from fuel, protective equipment to portable anti-drone systems and secure communications) and longer-term support (to help modernize the Ukrainian armed forces to NATO interoperability standards and strengthen its defence and security institutions).

The United States is the [largest](#) provider of military assistance to Ukraine, having committed roughly \$20 billion since the start of the Biden administration, with \$19.3 billion being provided since February 2022. In comparison, the top recipient in other years, Israel, received between \$3 and \$4 billion. Congress is readying a massive spending bill that includes another \$20 billion for arming and equipping Ukrainian forces as part of a larger [\\$45 billion assistance package](#). This in turn is part of a huge [\\$858 billion military spending bill](#) that includes more than \$30 billion for the Navy to build 12 ships, over \$10 billion for the F-35 fighter jet programme, and more than \$2 billion for space weaponry. In addition, the US military [announced](#) on 15 December that it would expand training in Germany of Ukrainian military personnel. Starting in January, 500 troops a month would be trained, building on more than 15,000 Ukrainians trained by the US and its allies since April.

As the second largest source of arms, the UK has [committed £2.3 billion](#) in military assistance to Ukraine so far and has pledged to match that assistance in 2023. The UK is also hosting a training programme (Operation Interflex), which is supported by several allies, with the aim of training 10,000 new and existing Ukrainian personnel within 120 days. On the 19 December, the UK [announced](#) a major new artillery package for Ukraine to supply “hundreds of thousands of rounds of artillery ammunition next year under a £250 million contract that will ensure a constant flow of critical artillery ammunition to Ukraine throughout 2023”.

European and other partners have [pledged](#) about \$12 billion in military support to Ukraine, with more to come. The Netherlands,

for example, has pledged €2.5 billion to help Ukraine in 2023, with most of the money earmarked for military aid. [The EU](#) is also providing non-lethal and lethal arms through its European Peace Facility (EPF). This is the first time the EU has approved the supply of lethal weapons to a third country. To date, the EU has committed €3.1 billion in assistance, and in October 2022, the EU also approved a new training mission for the Ukrainian armed forces. Jiří Šedivý, chief executive of the European Defence Agency, [said](#) on 16 December that EU states should buy arms jointly to replenish stocks after supplying Ukraine, and warned that the United States may not always be able to shield Europe from threats. “The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrates our capability shortfalls”, said Šedivý, adding that the agency was in talks with European arms firms about boosting production, as well as with countries about clubbing together to buy equipment and ammunition.

External military support to Russia so far has been limited to a handful of states, principally [Iran](#) and [North Korea](#). Iran is seeking to expand the supply of advanced weapons to Russia, the head of Israel’s Mossad spy agency David Barnea [said](#) on 22 December. The warning came after the United States earlier this month expressed alarm over a “full-scale defence partnership” between Tehran and Moscow. Dismissing US concerns Iran’s Foreign Ministry [said](#) on 18 December that it would not “seek permission from anyone” to expand relations with Russia. Iran has been accused of supplying drones to Russia, allegedly used to attack Ukraine. CIA chief William Burns said the military cooperation between Iran and Russia “poses real threats” to US allies in the Middle East. Nasser Kanani, spokesperson for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, called the comments “baseless” adding that Tehran “acts independently in regulating its foreign relations and does not seek permission from anyone”.

Meanwhile, North Korea’s Foreign Ministry on 23 December [denied](#) a media report it supplied munitions to Russia, calling it “groundless”, and denounced the United States for providing

lethal weapons to Ukraine. Japan’s Tokyo Shimbun reported earlier that North Korea had shipped munitions, including artillery shells, to Russia via train through their border last month and that additional shipments were expected in coming weeks. The UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly [condemned](#) North Korea and said Putin’s turning to Pyongyang for weapons “is a sign of Russia’s desperation and isolation”.

For further details on arms transfers to Ukraine, see, the [Forum on the Arms Trade](#). And for a timeline of every US arms shipment to Ukraine that has been announced since the war began, see [here](#).

Humanitarian consequences of the war

Exact figures for the number of war fatalities, both military and civilian, are difficult to verify and confirm. [Undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in war. America’s most senior general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, [estimated](#) in November that Russia’s military had seen more than 100,000 of its soldiers killed and wounded in Ukraine, adding Kyiv’s armed forces have “probably” suffered a similar level of casualties in the war. Milley also suggested that around 40,000 civilians had died after being caught up in the conflict. In September Russia [acknowledged](#) nearly 6,000 war dead, while Ukraine [claims](#) to have killed more than 105,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date. Speaking on Ukrainian tv on 2 December, Kyiv’s presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak [said](#) up to 13,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since Russia invaded in February, apparently based on official figures from Ukraine’s general staff. However, at certain points in the war, Ukraine [said](#) that between 100 and 200 of its forces were dying each day on the battlefield, making Podolyak’s estimate seem conservative. In April, Russia [said](#) it had killed about 23,000 Ukrainian troops.

According to [data](#) collected by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as at 27 December, 6,884 civilians have died since Russia invaded Ukraine in

February, including 429 children. The actual civilian casualty figures are likely to be considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration. According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of civilian casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 9,611 people by 2 December. From this number, 3,492 were killed and 6,119 were injured. Ninety-four per cent (9,030) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas.

As of 27 December, there were 7,896, 825 [refugees](#) from Ukraine recorded across Europe, 4,885,650 of whom were registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. This gives them the right to live and work in any EU country and benefit from housing and schooling assistance. The UN will allocate an additional \$20 million from the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund to support more than 300 civil society organisations and volunteer groups. "These groups have always been the backbone of the humanitarian response in Ukraine and even more since the war started in late February", [said](#) Denise Brown, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine on 20 December.

Further reading:

On outcomes and consequences of the war

[NATO's Stoltenberg calls for more weapons for Ukraine – DPA](#), Reuters, 30 December 2022

Peter Mitchell, [Patriot missiles, NATO, and Ukraine: Tactical weapons with strategic impacts](#), Modern War Institute, 29 December 2022

Benjamin H. Friedman and Natalie Armbruster, [When courting quasi-allies like Ukraine becomes a moral hazard](#), Responsible Statecraft, 28 December 2022

Craig Hooper, [If NATO Won't Give Ukraine Offensive Weapons, "Defensive Tanks" Will Do](#), Forbes, 28 December 2022

Lesia Dubenko, [Macron's NATO Emulation Attempt is Dangerous](#), Kyiv Post, 28 December 2022

[US, NATO want victory on Ukraine battlefield to destroy Russia: Lavrov](#), Anadolu Agency, 27 December 2022

Lise Howard and Michael O'Hanlon, [What should Eurasian security look like after the Russia-Ukraine war?](#) The Hill, 26 December 2022

Daniel Larison, [Macron ruffles feathers with talk of autonomy, Russian security](#), Responsible Statecraft, 26 December 2022

Michael Brenes, [The future of restraint after Ukraine](#), Responsible Statecraft, 26 December 2022

Vladimir Kozin, [Sergey Shoigu: The military capabilities of NATO – against Russia](#), Modern Diplomacy, 23 December 2022

Connor Echols, [Diplomacy Watch: Sketching the uncomfortable path to peace](#), Responsible Statecraft, 23 December 2022

Ben Freeman and William Hartung, [New Ukraine aid is a go — and it's more than most states get in a year](#), Responsible Statecraft, 23 December 2022

[Russian diplomat says NATO instructors must leave Ukraine before talks can start](#), Reuters, 23 December 2022

Connor Echols, [Zelensky addresses Congress, makes push for advanced weapons](#), Responsible Statecraft, 21 December 2022

Jack Watling, [Providing US Patriot missiles could transform Ukraine's defences. But it's a move with risks](#), The Guardian, 20 December 2022

[Send the Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bomb to Ukraine](#), Breaking Defense, 19 December 2022

Julia Gledhill, [Beware arms makers exploiting Ukraine war to profit, avoid oversight](#), Responsible Statecraft, 19 December 2022

[Putin and Lukashenko dwell on cooperation, not Ukraine war, after summit](#), Reuters, 19 December 2022

Cerys Warwick, [Ukraine, Russia and Nato: a conundrum inherited from the Cold War](#), Palatinat, 18 December 2022

Ben Armbruster, [Diplomacy Watch: Is the Overton window of the Ukraine war's end game shifting?](#) Responsible Statecraft, 16 December 2022

[Israel Gives Ukraine Intelligence on Iran via NATO](#), Haaretz, 15 December 2022

James Byrne, Jack Watling, Justin Bronk, Gary Somerville, Joe Byrne, Jack Crawford and Jane Baker, [The Orlan Complex: Tracking the Supply Chains of Russia's Most Successful UAV](#), RUSI Report, 15 December 2022

George M. Moore, [Why the world must protect nuclear reactors from military attacks. Now](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 15 December 2022

Peter Jones, [European Security Architecture: Against Russia, or With It?](#) RUSI Commentary, 14 December 2022

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, [Reports: Biden making plans to send Patriot missiles to Ukraine](#), Responsible Statecraft, 14 December 2022

Bruno Tertrais, [The Fall of Russia](#), Institut Montaigne, 14 December 2022

Pope courts Macron to mediate negotiations with Moscow and Kyiv, Intelligence Online, 12 December 2022 (paywall)

Iuliia Osmolovska and Hennadiy Maksak, [Five Security Scenarios on Russian War in Ukraine for 2022–2023: Implications and Policy Recommendations to Western Partners](#), Globsec, November 2022

On the risk of nuclear war

There have been concerns for several months that the war in Ukraine might be approaching “a moment of [maximum danger](#)”. In particular, there are worries that a cornered, desperate Vladimir Putin may resort to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

François Diaz-Maurin, [The 2022 nuclear year in review: A global nuclear order in shambles](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 26 December 2022

Vladislav Zubok, [Sixty years on from the Cuban missile crisis, the US has learned its lessons – but Putin has not](#), The Guardian, 22 December 2022

On investigations of war crimes in Ukraine

Russian forces have been demolishing a theatre in occupied Mariupol in southern Ukraine that was the site of a deadly airstrike believed to have killed hundreds of civilians, [according](#) to an aide to the city's exiled Ukrainian mayor. Ukraine's culture minister, Oleksandr Tkachenko, [said](#) the move was an “attempt to hide forever the evidence of the deliberate killing of Ukrainians by Russians”. Video posted on Ukrainian and Russian websites on 23 December showed heavy equipment taking down much of the building. An Amnesty International investigation [concluded](#) in June that Russian forces committed a war crime by deliberately targeting the building. Meanwhile, a group of 90 Ukrainian judges will undergo [training](#), provided by the UK, to carry out war crimes trials for Russian soldiers. As a part of a £2.5 million investment, Ukrainian judges are being trained in a secret location to ensure perpetrators of war crimes can be prosecuted during the conflict. Already 43,000 reported crimes are registered.

International fact-finding missions and investigations have identified clear patterns of violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022. The violations are wide-ranging, including the conduct of fighting as well as treatment of prisoners of war, forced abductions, torture, restriction of civil and human rights, and denial of essential services. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Court of Human Rights, the ICC and Ukrainian national courts have all been active in attempting to hold criminals accountable. The ICC, for example, opened an [investigation](#) into possible war crimes in Ukraine just days after Moscow's forces invaded and it dispatched dozens of investigators to the country to gather evidence. A substantial ICC investigative team [appears](#) to be working in Ukraine on a near permanent basis. Similarly, within the OSCE the Moscow Mechanism was activated to establish two expert missions to investigate

violations and abuses committed in the war (see the subsequent [April](#) and [June](#) reports). On 14 July, 45 countries [agreed](#) at a conference in the Hague to coordinate investigations into suspected war crimes in Ukraine. In October, a [report](#) published by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found reasonable grounds to conclude that an array of war crimes, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been committed in Ukraine. Russian armed forces are responsible for the vast majority of the violations identified. Finally, a [report](#) published on 7 December the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said Russian forces killed at least 441 civilians in the early days of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The report documents attacks in dozens of towns and summary executions that it said might be war crimes. The actual number of victims in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions was likely to be much higher, the UN human rights office added. The report covers the period from the invasion's start on 24 February until early April, when Russian forces withdrew from those three areas.

On sanctions against Russia and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine galvanized the US, UK and EU, and a handful of other Western-aligned countries, to unleash a series of [sanctions](#) meant to punish Vladimir Putin's government and pressure him to pull his forces back. While the sanctions lists are sometimes difficult to interpret, the EU has [sanctioned](#) 1,236 individuals and 115 entities—an approximate doubling of its entire sanctions portfolio across the dozens of sanctions regimes it implements; the UK Government has [frozen](#) more than £18bn of assets belonging to oligarchs and other Russians and UK [sanctions](#) have been imposed on 1,271 people according to [the annual review](#) of the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), published on 10 November; and the US has [sanctioned](#) more than 1,000 individuals or organizations since the invasion. The numbers, and the pace of the rollout, dwarf the sanctions lists for the likes of Iran, North Korea, Libya, the

thematic counterterrorism lists, and all others. However, rather than dissuading the Kremlin as intended, the penalties appear instead to be exacerbating inflation, worsening food insecurity and punishing ordinary Russians more than Putin or his allies. Moreover, Russia has claimed (see NATO Watch [Update 17](#) and [Update 18](#)) that it is getting more revenue from its fossil fuel sales now than before its invasion of Ukraine, despite (or partly because of) Western sanctions.

Nonetheless, new rounds of sanctions continue to be applied. On 22 December the US [imposed](#) fresh sanctions on 10 Russian naval entities over Russian operations against Ukrainian ports. Six of the entities targeted in the latest sanctions were designated for operating or having operated in both the defence and related material sector and the marine sector of the Russian economy, the US State Department said. A day earlier, the Biden Administration [unveiled](#) new curbs on technology exports to Russia's Wagner military group. The group, a private military contractor with close ties to the Kremlin, will now be labelled a military end-user and face tough new curbs on access to technology made anywhere in the world with US equipment. The US Under-Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security, Alan Estevez, said the group was "actively committing atrocities and human rights abuses across Ukraine".

Meanwhile, EU leaders [agreed](#) on 16 December a ninth package of sanctions, which will designate nearly 200 more people and bar investment in Russia's mining industry, among other steps. The Kremlin [said](#) it would study the latest package of EU sanctions and then formulate its response. The Canadian Government [announced](#) on 19 December plans to seize \$26 million in sanctioned assets from the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, with the proceeds from the forfeiture to go towards reconstruction in Ukraine and compensation of victims of the Russian invasion. The move marked the first case of the Canadian Government using new powers to pursue the seizure of assets belonging to sanctioned individuals, it said in a statement.

Finally, President Putin [signed](#) a decree that bans the supply of oil and oil products to nations participating in an imposed cap from 1 February 2023 for five months. The G7, the EU and Australia agreed on 2 December to a \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian seaborne crude oil effective from 5 December (see NATO Watch [Update 37](#)).

Rebecca Crootof, [The Case for War Torts—for Ukraine and Beyond](#), Lawfare, 14 December 2022

On international food security and Ukrainian grain exports

Ukraine estimates its grain harvest fell by about 40% year-on-year due to the Russian invasion, a representative for the country's industry [said](#) on 23 December. "We expect a grain harvest of 65-66 million tonnes" by the end of the year, the head of the Ukrainian Grain Association, Sergiy Ivashchenko, said, after a record harvest of 106m tonnes last year. "The main reason is the war," which immediately led to fuel shortages and hindered sowing, he said. A [grain deal](#) between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the UN was agreed on 22 July and is considered to be crucial for Ukraine's economy as well as global food security (on international food security and Ukrainian grain exports, see NATO Watch [Update 17](#), [Update 18](#), [Update 20](#) and [Update 21](#)). The grain exports are being overseen by a [Joint Coordination Centre](#) (JCC) in Istanbul where Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and UN personnel are working. It had allowed Ukraine to transport more than 9 million tonnes of grain and oilseed commodities, while Russia was allowed to export food and fertiliser, [helping to bring down food prices](#) by 15% from their March peak after the war made the route treacherous.

Meanwhile, President Zelensky [announced](#) on 23 December that Ukraine [plans](#) to open new embassies in 10 African countries with the aim of increasing Kyiv's presence in Africa and strengthening trade ties. There were also plans to develop a "Ukraine-Africa trade house" with offices in the capitals of "the most promising countries" on the African continent, he added.

On energy security in Europe

Europe is striving to diversify its energy supply sources to curb its dependence on Russia. Gas shortages have been occurring across Europe and governments have been pushing to develop alternative supplies. The West accuses Russia of restricting energy supplies to boost prices in retaliation for sanctions imposed after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Russia denies it is to blame, and instead attributes responsibility to Western sanctions and various technical problems.

On 19 December EU ministers [agreed](#) a plan to cap the price of gas, ending months of argument over how to handle the cost of soaring energy prices after Russia cut gas supplies to Europe. A gas price cap will kick in if prices on the main European gas exchange, the Dutch Title Transfer Facility, exceed €180 a megawatt-hour for three consecutive working days, far lower than the European Commission's [original proposal](#) of €275 a MWh. In the meantime, however, European [gas prices](#) have dipped to a level last seen before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February, after warmer weather across the continent eased concerns over shortages. The current level is 30% higher than the same period last year, when Europe had unusually low levels of storage, and about 10% higher than the average of the previous five years. In addition, Moscow is [reportedly](#) ready to resume gas supplies to Europe through the Yamal-Europe pipeline. "The European market remains relevant, as the gas shortage persists, and we have every opportunity to resume supplies," Russian state media outlet Tass cited Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak as saying on 25 December.

Dan Goodin, [Kremlin-backed hackers targeted a "large" petroleum refinery in a NATO nation](#), Ars Technica, 20 December 2022

On developments in Ukraine

On 26 December, Ukraine [called](#) for Russia to be removed as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The Foreign Ministry said Russia had illegally occupied "the seat of the USSR in the UN Security Council" since the

break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, and that its three-decade presence in the UN has been “marked by wars and seizures of other countries’ territories”.

Ukraine is accelerating efforts to erase the vestiges of Soviet and Russian influence from its [public spaces](#) by pulling down monuments and renaming hundreds of streets to honour its own artists, poets, soldiers, independence leaders and others – including heroes of this year’s war. Since the war began, Ukraine’s leaders have shifted a campaign that once focused on dismantling its communist past into one of “de-Russification”. On 28 December, for example, authorities in the Ukrainian city of Odesa began [dismantling](#) a monument to Catherine the Great, the Russian empress who founded the city in the late 18th century. Last month, the local parliament [voted](#) to dismantle the statue, as well as another to the Tsarist general Alexander Suvorov.

On China’s position on the war

Despite widespread Western criticism of China’s position on the war in Ukraine, and the claim in NATO’s new [Strategic Concept](#) of a “deepening strategic partnership” between China and Russia, an unnamed senior US official [confirmed](#) on 30 June that China has not been giving material support for Russia’s war in Ukraine. However, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi indicated in a video address on 25 December that Beijing will deepen ties with Moscow in the coming year. China will “deepen strategic mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation” with Russia, Yi [said](#). To these ends, Chinese-Russian naval drills began on 21 December to “further deepen” cooperation between the two countries, [according](#) to Chinese officials. The military exercises were due to be held off the coast of Zhejiang province south of Shanghai until 27 December, according to a brief notice posted by China’s eastern theatre command under the ruling Communist party’s military wing, the People’s Liberation Army.

On developments within Russia

The UK’s armed forces chief, Adm Sir Tony Radakin, [told](#) an audience at the Royal United Services Institute on 14 December that Russia faces a “critical shortage” of artillery shells and Moscow’s ability to conduct ground operations in Ukraine is “rapidly diminishing” as a result. Hence it was hardly surprising that on 23 December President Putin ordered Russia’s defence industry chiefs to ensure its army gets all the weapons, equipment and military hardware it needs “in the shortest possible timeframes” to fight in Ukraine. His comments in the city of Tula, a centre for Russian arms manufacturing, came just days after he [pledged](#) to give his army anything it asked for in a meeting with Russia’s top military officials. Speaking in Moscow after the meeting, Putin said there were no “funding restrictions” for the military. “The country, the government will give everything that the army asks for. Everything”.

Putin also gave his backing to a plan by his Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu to boost the size of the armed forces by more than 30% to 1.5 million combat personnel, up from 1.15 million. Shoigu told Putin at the televised event that 695,000 of the fighters should be professional contracted soldiers – as opposed to conscripts serving mandatory military service. Putin had signed a decree only this summer ordering troop numbers to be increased by 137,000 from 1 January 2023 to reach the 1.15 million level, and has also drafted more than 300,000 reservists in a controversial mobilisation drive to support Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Putin also [acknowledged](#) that the call-up of 300,000 reservists he ordered in September had not gone smoothly, the latest in a series of recent comments in which he has admitted the challenges his army is facing. “The partial mobilisation that was carried out revealed certain problems, as everyone well knows, which should be promptly addressed”, he said. The call-up drew strong criticism as new recruits were deemed to be physically unfit or too old and lacking basic equipment. In addition, on 22 December President Putin

publicly [acknowledged](#) the situation in Ukraine as a “war” for the first time since the February invasion, previously calling his campaign a “special military operation”. A US State Department spokesperson said: “Finally, after 300 days, Putin called the war what it is”. A Russian opposition politician, Nikita Yuferev, filed a legal challenge over Putin’s use of the word “war”, accusing him of breaking his own law.

President Putin on 19 December [ordered](#) the Federal Security Services to step up surveillance of Russian society and the country’s borders to prevent the “emergence of new threats” from abroad and “traitors” at home. Meanwhile, Russia’s parliament is preparing to [introduce](#) a higher taxation rate for people who have left the country, with as many as 700,000 having fled after the announcement of a mobilisation drive to call up new troops to join the fight in September. The Russian Government rejected that figure at the time.

Finally, individuals [critical](#) of Putin’s government continue to die in violent or mysterious circumstances. Most recently, a Russian sausage tycoon Pavel Antov who reportedly criticised the war in Ukraine [died](#) after falling from the third-floor window of a luxury hotel in India. Antov’s body was discovered just two days after his friend and another local Russian politician, Vladimir Bidenov, was found dead in the same hotel after an apparent heart attack.

[Putin proposes 30% increase in size of armed forces](#), Euractiv, 22 December 2022

[Putin orders FSB to step up surveillance of Russians and borders](#), Reuters, 20 December 2022

[‘Everybody has weapons’: Russia’s balkanized military sparks civil unrest concerns](#), Breaking Defense, 19 December 2022

On developments within NATO

Kosovo tensions with Serbia

A fragile peace has been preserved in Kosovo since it declared independence from Serbia in 2008 following the 1998-99 war in which NATO

intervened to protect Kosovo’s Albanian majority. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo’s independence, and many people living in majority Serb areas of the north of Kosovo refuse to recognise Kosovan institutions. Serbia on 26 December [placed](#) its security troops on the border with Kosovo on “the full state of combat readiness,” ignoring NATO’s calls for calming down of tensions. Serbia’s Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic said he “ordered the full combat readiness” of police and other security units and that they be placed under the command of the army chief of staff according to “their operational plan”. He said in a statement that he acted on the orders of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic so that “all measures be taken to protect the Serbian people in Kosovo”. Meanwhile, the EU-led negotiations aimed at normalising the Belgrade-Pristina relationship and securing autonomy for Serb-majority areas in Kosovo continue.

Turkey says Greece ‘interfered’ in joint Turkish-NATO drill

Greek aircraft “tried to prevent” a Turkish-NATO mission in the Aegean, and Turkish combat aircraft gave a “necessary response”, the Turkish Defence Ministry said on 17 December. “Combat and support aircraft of our Air Force and the AWACS aircraft commissioned by NATO performed a NATO-coordinated NEXUS ACE training mission in the international airspace of the Aegean Sea for mutual training purposes”, the statement said. The two NATO member states are often at odds over their overlapping claims of air space and territorial waters in the Aegean and Mediterranean. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg had previously initiated a deconfliction mechanism for Greece and Turkey at NATO.

Tim Martin, [European defense spending no longer a laughing matter: 2023 Preview](#), Breaking Defense, 29 December 2022

[NATO to Solicit Bids for Future Land Command and Control System](#), GovCon Wire, 29 December 2022

[Serbs in northern Kosovo to start removing barricades from Thursday](#), Reuters, 28 December 2022

[Working Group for BiH expresses Concern over the Omission of NATO from the Coalition Document](#), Sarajevo Times, 28 December 2022

[EU, US, NATO urge dialogue to ease tensions at Serbia-Kosovo border](#), Euractiv, 28 December 2022

[Serbia places its troops on Kosovo border on combat alert](#), Associated Press, 27 December 2022

[AI cyber attacks are a 'critical threat'. This is how NATO is countering them](#), Euro News, 26 December 2022

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Jack Murphy, [The CIA is using a European NATO ally's spy service to conduct a covert sabotage campaign inside Russia under the agency's direction, according to former U.S. intelligence and military officials](#), Blog, 24 December 2022

[Kosovo asks NATO to airlift a Serb detainee as tensions rise](#), Reuters, 22 December 2022

[NATO Headquarters goes dark in solidarity with Ukraine](#), NATO News Release, 21 December 2022

[NATO approves 2023 strategic direction for new innovation accelerator](#), NATO News Release, 21 December 2022

Mohamed Amersi, [Article 5 for the next decade of NATO](#), Foreign Policy Research Institute, 20 December 2022

[China and Russia 'Sharing a Toolkit' to Dismantle the West—NATO Ambassador](#), Newsweek, 20 December 2022

[Turkish jets respond to Greek intervention on joint NATO drill](#), Daily Sabah, 17 December 2022

[NATO urges parties in Kosovo to contribute to security](#), Anadolu Agency, 17 December 2022

[Serbia to formally seek NATO's permission for return of its troops to Kosovo](#), Anadolu Agency, 16 December 2022

[Serbia has right to address NATO to send troops to Kosovo: US](#), Anadolu Agency, 15 December 2022

[NATO Holds First-Ever Roundtable On Climate Change And Security](#), Eurasia Review, 15 December 2022

Joshua Tallis, [NATO'S maritime vigilance: optimizing the standing naval force for the future](#), War on the Rocks, 15 December 2022

[NATO's multinational battlegroup in Bulgaria reaches full capability](#), NATO News Release, 14 December 2022

[NATO agrees 2023 budgets, reflecting higher ambitions for the new security reality](#), NATO News Release, 2022

[Summit prepares ground for 'NATOisation of Europe' and continues collision course with China and high levels of military spending](#), NATO Watch Briefing No.96, 6 July 2022

On Finland and Sweden joining NATO

Finland and Sweden were invited to join NATO, after a [trilateral memorandum](#) with Turkey agreed on the eve of the NATO Madrid Summit assuaged Ankara's previous objections. The two Nordic countries will become NATO members after the Accession Protocol is ratified by all 30 member states. The invitation to Finland and Sweden represents a major geopolitical shift in Europe as the two countries move away from neutrality. To date, 28 NATO member states have ratified the decision. Hungary and Turkey are the two member states where parliaments have not yet been asked to vote on the issue. Hungary will ratify the bids early next year, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [announced](#) on 24 November. The assumption is that Turkey is likely to wait until after a general election in June 2023, but ratification by Turkey is still by no means certain.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu [said](#) on 22 December that Sweden has not yet acted to extradite or freeze the assets of people that his country believes are linked to terrorism. He added that Sweden was not even "halfway" through fulfilling commitments made to secure Ankara's support for its NATO membership, despite appreciation for the steps thus far taken. Cavusoglu was speaking at



a news conference in Ankara alongside his Swedish counterpart Tobias Billstrom, who said Stockholm had taken concrete steps on all elements of the trilateral agreement signed in June.

Meanwhile, Sweden's Supreme Court blocked the extradition of an exiled Turkish journalist, which was a key demand by Ankara to [ratify Stockholm's Nato membership](#). The court said on 19 December there were "several hindrances" to sending back Bülent Keneş, a former editor-in-chief of the Zaman daily, who Turkey accuses of being involved in a 2016 attempt to topple President Erdoğan. Some of the accusations against Keneş are not crimes in Sweden, which along with the political nature of the case and his refugee status made extradition impossible, the court added. Keneş is the only person Erdoğan has identified by name among dozens of people Ankara wants extradited in exchange for approving Sweden's NATO membership.

Filippa Ronquist, [Why Sweden's Social Democrats U-Turned on NATO](#), Jacobin, 28 December 2022

[Nato's Stoltenberg expects 'timely' membership for Sweden, Finland in new year](#), South China Morning Post, 26 December 2022

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[Turkey says Sweden 'not even halfway' to NATO candidacy](#), Deutsche Welle, 22 December 2022

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[Swedish court blocks extradition of journalist sought by Turkey in Nato deal](#), The Guardian, 19 December 2022

Matti Pesu and Tuomas Iso-Markku, [Finland as a NATO ally: First insights into Finnish alliance policy](#), Finnish Institute of International Relations, 15 December 2022

[NATO for nappies as Finland's defence minister goes on paternity leave](#), Euronews, 15 December 2022

For further details see:

[Murky trilateral agreement results in Turkey lifting objections to Finland and Sweden's NATO application](#), NATO Watch News Brief, 29 June 2022

[Should Finland and Sweden hold a referendum on NATO membership?](#) NATO Watch Briefing no. 93, 6 May 2022

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