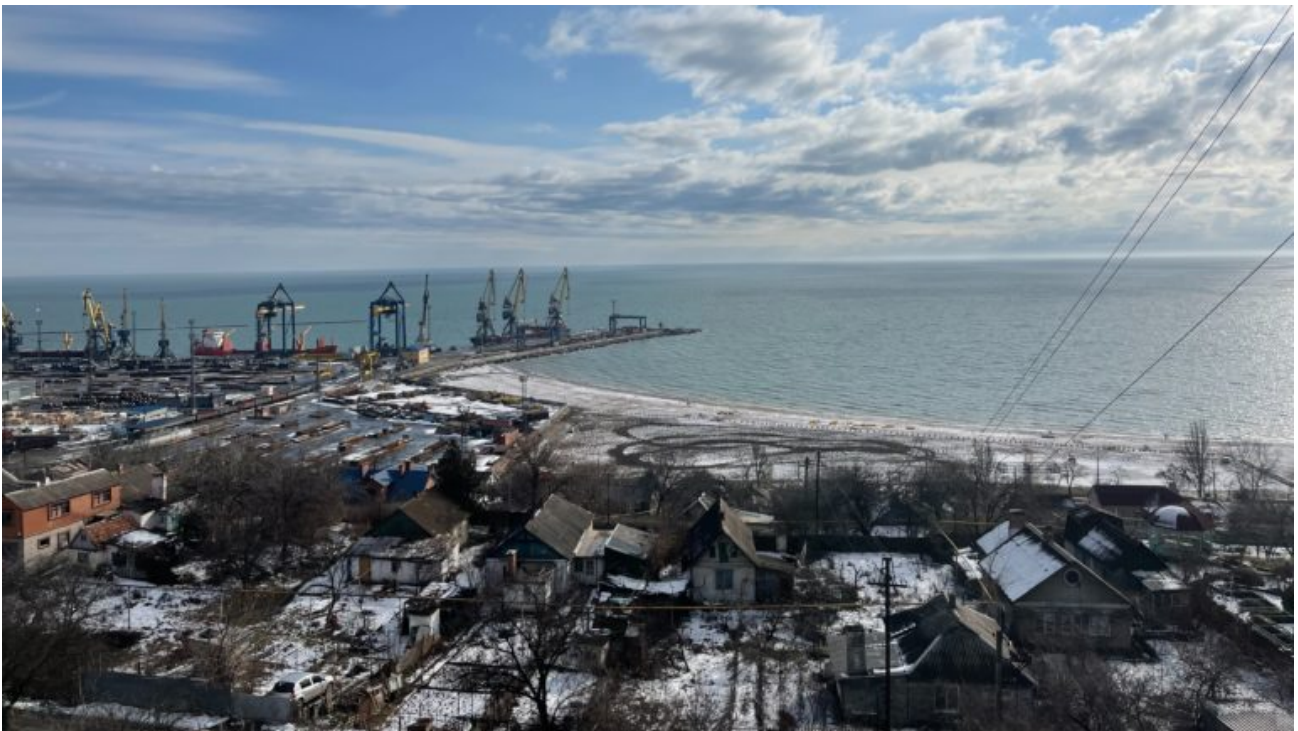


# INDIAN PUNCHLINE

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## Russian forces double down to complete operation



***Turning point: Russian special forces have entered the strategic industrial port city of Mariupol on the Black Sea coast***

After substantially degrading Ukraine's military capabilities, Russia is poised to escalate the special operation leading to the victory lap. Moscow has given signals in this direction.

The most significant signal came from the Kremlin spokesmen Dmitry Medvedev, who said on Monday, "Russia has a sufficient potential for conducting the special military operation in Ukraine. The operation is proceeding in accordance with the original plan and will be completed on time and in full."

As I had written more than once previously, Russian military strategy is on course, contrary to what the hyped up western disinformation has conveyed, namely, that the

special operation has “failed”. Peskov hinted that there is no question of stopping the operation prematurely. He spoke amidst western calls for “ceasefire.”

Peskov disclosed that President Vladimir Putin had specifically ordered the armed forces to refrain from an immediate assault on the cities, including Kiev, so as to prevent heavy civilian casualty. The operation, therefore, took into account the ground reality that the extremist Neo-Nazi groups had deployed weapons in densely-populated residential areas.

This meant that the tactic narrowed down to “working with modern high-precision weapons, hitting only military and information infrastructure facilities.” Clearly, this also explained the slow pace and low intensity of the operations interspersed with lulls in the fighting and the tactic of encircling large settlements instead of attacking them frontally.

However, Peskov said, now that the large settlements have been surrounded, the military forces “do not exclude” taking Ukrainian cities under their “full control.” By the way, Defense Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov said on Sunday, “Overall, 3,736 facilities of Ukrainian military infrastructure have been disabled, 100 aircraft and 139 UAVs were destroyed, as well as 1,234 tanks and other armoured vehicles, 122 multiple-launch rocket systems, 452 weapons of field artillery and mortars, and 1,013 units of special military hardware.

Peskov of course denied the western propaganda reports, also denied by Beijing, that Moscow requested Chinese military assistance. Considering that the US-led coalition of 177,194 troops backed by massive airpower took over forty days to take Iraq in 2003, Russians have drawn up a brilliant strategy.

Even Russia’s worst detractors in the West would admit that the Russian force level in Ukraine is much less and also that Saddam Hussein’s army was systematically degraded by the US through a period of one decade before the invasion took place in 2003.

From the Ukrainian perspective, the really hard part is just about to begin. The southern port city of Mariupol cannot hold out any longer. Practically all fire emplacements the neo-Nazis had created in Mariupol’s suburbs have been destroyed. Russian special forces have eliminated the neo-Nazis’ main forces entrenched in the residential areas of the city’s perimeters.

The fall of Mariupol will be a turning point. It will release the Russian forces to drive on to Zaporizhya City and Dnipro, the lynchpin on the Dnieper river that controls the southern approaches to Kiev. Equally, Russian attacks from Kherson toward Mykolayiv may resume in the south with a view to surround Odessa, the jewel in the crown on the Black Sea coast.

Meanwhile, the western mercenaries got a taste of what is to come during the pre-dawn cruise missile attack Sunday at a Ukrainian military base less than 20 kms from the Polish border. (Russian account said 180 foreign mercenaries were killed.

The Russian MOD spokesman Maj-Gen. Konashenkov said later, “We know all locations of foreign mercenaries in Ukraine. More surgical strikes will continue to be delivered against them.” The western countries, especially the US, which embarked on this misadventure to despatch mercenaries, may have second thoughts.

Suffice to say, all this adds up as a growing realisation in the Western capitals, including Washington, that the Russian operation can no longer be thwarted and is destined to run its course. This is evident from the latest remarks by French President Emmanuel Macron on French TV on Monday:

“Europe cannot be safe if it doesn’t engage in a dialogue with Russia. This is our history, our geography. Therefore I intend to talk with President Putin in the upcoming hours... It is necessary to prepare conditions for peace now already, because the war will end when everybody sits down at the table and time will come to determine who is ready to promise what. Therefore, in order to be ready, we must get ready now already.”

Succinctly put, Macron is looking ahead at the scenario after the Russian operations conclude “when everybody sits down at the table... to determine who is ready to promise what.” Significantly, Macron was speaking a few hours after a phone call from the US president Joe Biden.

Even more significantly, Bloomberg has reported that the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has sought a call with his Russian counterpart Nikolai Patrushev, one of Putin’s closest political associates in the Kremlin. This is the first such high-level contact by Washington since the Russian operation began on February 24.

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