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Andrei (The Saker) is taking time off for health reasons. The blog will function as normal.

Two months of Operation Z

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By Ljubiša Malenica for the Saker Blog

After two months of conflict, situation inside Ukraine is somewhat clearer. However, despite the fact that we can now, with more understanding, observe what is happening on the ground, media and propaganda sources, between which the border is often blurred, complicate and make it difficult to build a completely clear picture of the unfolding events. Moreover, certain media, especially the Western ones, have completely abandoned even an attempt at objective reporting and turned, simply put, into propaganda mouthpieces without any credibility.

This text will try, based on available data from numerous sources, to offer a possible explanation for the most important events of the Russian military operation in Ukraine and to point out its importance in the context of continental security in Europe.

To begin with, we will look at the number of soldiers that each side had at its disposal at the beginning of the conflict. Before any Russian soldiers crossed Ukrainian border, both sides grouped troops for an extended period of time. While Kiev was increasing the number of its units in the Donbas area, that is, in the operational zone of what Kiev authorities called the anti-terrorist operation, Moscow was deploying troops on the border with Ukraine. According to Russian sources, before the beginning of the conflict, Kiev deployed nearly 125.000 soldiers in eastern Ukraine, close to half of its regular military forces..^[1] During the current fighting in Ukraine, plans for offensive against Donbas republics were confirmed by captured Ukrainian soldiers..^[2] with additional documentation related to these preparations being revealed by Russian troops in territories previously controlled by Kiev..^[3]

All of the above can be dismissed as Russian propaganda, but it should be noted that according to Western sources, the military forces of the two Donbas republics, together, in 2021 numbered just over 40.000 soldiers..^[4] In general, total number of troops for Donbas republics varies, according to different sources, between forty and fifty thousand soldiers. One of the generally accepted, though blunt, rules of war points out that in case of an attack on fortified positions, it is desirable that the attacking side has three times number of soldiers in comparison to defenders, the well known 3:1 ratio..^[5]..^[6]

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As can be seen, before the Russian operation, the ratio of conflicting troops in Donbas roughly corresponded to this rule, so it can be concluded, with a dose of caution, that Kiev really intended to conduct in Donetsk and Lugansk something similar to the Croatian operation “Storm”.^[7]

In terms of numbers, at the very beginning of the Russian offensive, Ukrainian army had 245.000 active-duty soldiers,^[8] along with an additional 220.000 in reserve.^[9] According to some sources, Kiev had as many as 900,000 soldiers at its disposal in the reserve.^[10] The number of members in paramilitary formations ranged from fifty to one hundred thousand.^[11] After the start of the conflict, between six and ten thousand foreign mercenaries arrived in Ukraine, though numbers varie wildly depending on the source.

On the other hand, when talking about the number of Russian troops on the border, before beginning of the conflict, most of the Western media agreed in the estimate of one hundred thousand Russian soldiers.^[12]^[13] We have already pointed out that most often used figure for military forces of Donetsk and Lugansk is close to 50.000. Generally speaking, in terms of the total number of Russian forces in Ukraine at the moment, figures between one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand soldiers are used.

If we accept that 900.000 reservists is unrealistic, and consider only the lesser number, we see that at very beginning of the conflict, more than half a million soldiers^[14] were available to Kiev, as opposed to a maximum of 200.000 Russians and pro-Russians. According to Zelensky’s order, Ukraine mobilized its reserve units^[15]^[16] already on February 23, and on April 8, Zelensky ordered a new, third, wave of mobilization related to reserve officers.^[17]

Taking into account this information, it is clear that from the very beginning, balance of forces in terms of available manpower was, roughly speaking, 3:1 in favor of Ukraine. The romantic Western narrative that the conflict is between a weak but brave Ukraine and a strong but evil Russia has no basis in reality and serves exclusively as a propaganda construction.

Both sides have, on several occasions so far, presented results of their military actions, with information about their own and opponents’ losses. Apart from Russia and Ukraine, other indirect participants in this conflict, such as the United States and its NATO satellites, have published their own estimates, but, interestingly enough, only of Russian losses. According to Ukrainian sources, more than 20.000 Russian soldiers have been killed so far.^[18] On the other hand, Moscow claims that the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed in the conflict so far surpasses 25.000. According to NATO sources, after a month of fighting, total Russian losses, killed together with the wounded, missing and captured, amounted to more than 40.000 men.^[19] United States used similar figures in early April, as US authorities claimed at the time that number of killed Russian soldiers exceeded more than ten thousand.^[20] During an interview for the American CNN, on April 14, Zelensky pointed out that number of killed Ukrainian soldiers is close to 3.000.^[21]

Here Mariupol comes into play. In addition to its strategic and moral significance, Mariupol is important because it provides an opportunity to try and see more clearly the number of KIAs from the Ukrainian side. Namely, according to Russian sources, at the beginning of the siege, there was slightly more than 8.000.^[22] Ukrainian soldiers inside Mariupol. On the other hand, Kiev claims that Mariupol garrison did not number more than 3.500 people, in total.^[23] So far we know two facts. During siege, between 1.200 and 1.500 Ukrainian soldiers surrendered to Russian troops.^[24] We also know that there are up to two thousand Ukrainian fighters in the underground corridors of Azovstal, both ordinary soldiers and those from the Azov Battalion.^[25] If we accept the Ukrainian version, we come to a paradoxical situation. Namely, during the heavy siege of Mariupol, characterized by daily battles, almost no soldier of the Ukrainian garrison died!

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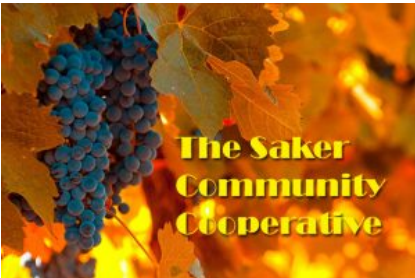
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The math is quite simple and clear. If close to 1.500 Ukrainians surrendered, and close to 2.000 of them are still inside Azovstal, it can be concluded that the number of Ukrainian dead in Mariupol ranges from a few dozen to a maximum of a few hundred soldiers. From the initial garrison of 3.500 soldiers, almost all survived the full siege that began on March 2, that is, the siege that lasts a little more than sixty days at the time of writing. Statistically, this situation is impossible given that it tries to reconcile the fact that Russian troops occupied Mariupol completely, except for Azovstal itself, and assumption that very few Ukrainian soldiers were killed during this conquest, perhaps only a few.

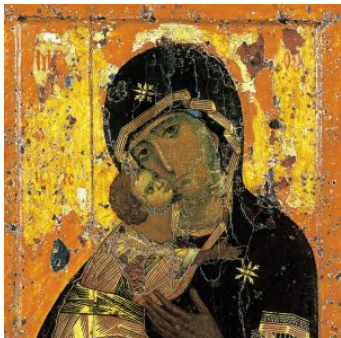
Things look markedly different if Russian figures are taken into account. According to Moscow, the initial garrison numbered more than 8.000 soldiers. The two previously mentioned facts we know remain unchanged. The logical conclusion is the assumption that more than 4.000 Ukrainian soldiers died during the siege of Mariupol. If we accept this as a reasonable argument, then it further must be accepted that number of dead with which Zelensky appears before the public are nothing but propaganda. The case of Mariupol shows that more Ukrainian soldiers were killed in this city alone than Kiev claims to have died during the entire conflict.

It will be necessary to wait until end of the conflict for true information, but for purposes of this text and consideration regarding the number of soldiers killed on both sides, we can use two military statistical rules. It must be immediately pointed out that, although generally accepted, they do not represent highly precision tools but more of a general picture statistical aids. We have already pointed out the first, and it refers to the necessity of the attacking troops to be three times larger in number than the units which are defending fortified positions.^[26] The second rule refers to ratio of dead and wounded soldiers.^[27] within the same army. This rule points out that number of wounded soldiers in relation to the number of killed ones, roughly speaking, usually corresponds to a ratio of 3:1. The lowest ratio of wounded to dead soldiers, which author encountered, was 2.5:1. According to US sources, troops of the United States, during their wars in the last three decades, were able to achieve a ratio of 10:1 and sometimes even 17:1. Such a high number of wounded in relation to number of killed soldiers is mostly attributed to progress of medical science, medical care on the battle lines, and the improvement in quality of personal protection for soldiers. At the same time, the fact that American troops fought against far, technologically speaking, inferior opponents must also be taken into account.

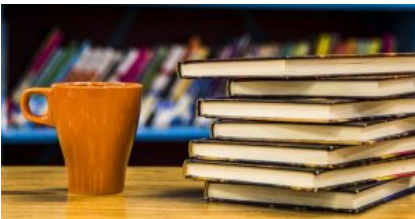
For purposes of this paper, we will be guided by a ratio of 3:1, since this is the accepted average ratio in both cases. Although it would be wisest for a person watching this conflict from the sidelines to approach each source with a certain amount of reserve, Ukraine's statements regarding military losses, both its own and Russia's, must be taken with a high dose of skepticism. This is a natural product of the fact that Kiev official channels have served as just another amplifier of propaganda announcements since very beginning of the Russian military operation. It is quite understandable that civilian population, especially in the modern world, decides on its own to get involved in propaganda war that accompanies every conflict, through false footage and staged images. It is understandable when state information warfare agencies construct various forms of propaganda pieces behind the scenes. What should be inadmissible is that official representatives of the Ukrainian authorities take part in this type of conflict, if preservation of trust in the same representatives is a goal.

So far, top Ukrainian officials, including Zelensky, have willingly participated in spreading illusions about the existence of "Ghost of Kiev",^[28] the real events on Snake Island and the fate of Ukrainian soldiers there, the alleged Russian bombing of nuclear power plants, and clearly staged "massacres" in Bucha and Kramatorsk,^[29] on the number of foreign mercenaries in Ukraine and the like. Given the long list of violations of this kind by regime in Kiev, the statements of Ukrainian authorities must be taken with suspicion.

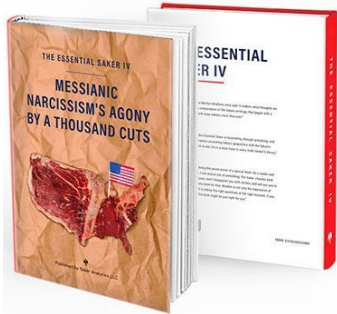
In accordance with this, our attitude towards the number of killed Russian soldiers, according to the sources of the Ukrainian army, must be guided by suspicion as well.



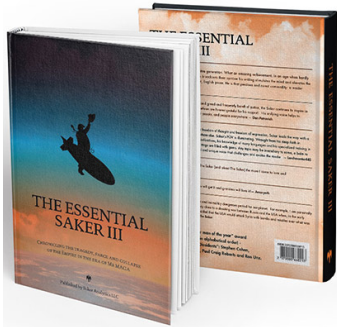
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According to Kiev, more than 25.000 Russian fighters have died on the territory of Ukraine so far.^[30] When we take into account the previously mentioned ratio of dead to wounded soldiers, the total number of Russian soldiers unavailable for further combat operations, in under seventy days of fighting, is close to catastrophic one hundred thousand. Let's compare this with the initial estimates of the total number of Russian troops participating in the conflict. If we accept the maximum scenario, of 200.000 soldiers, Russian side lost squarely 50% of its manpower in Ukraine in roughly two and a half months. To the author, who has no military experience, such losses seem catastrophic, but more importantly, such losses would, logically, in major part, prevent further offensive actions of the Russian infantry, given that this level of losses leads to a conclusion that Ukrainian soldiers are not only more numerous but are qualitatively better than Russians. On the other hand, if we take a more conservative scenario of total number of Russian troops in Ukraine, that is, some 150.000, picture on the ground becomes even grimmer and indicates the inevitable collapse of Russian military operations.

However, when you look at the current situation, Russian military formations have retained their offensive capabilities and are currently showing initiative in the Donbas area. Moreover, judging by available data from the field, advance of Russian troops is slow but constant. Opposite to this, no large-scale Ukrainian offensive has been observed for the entire duration of the conflict. Certainly, at the start of the military operation Ukrainian units at local level were able to organize counterattacks or small-scale offensive actions, certain villages and smaller settlements swapped hands several times but the overall situation, translated into lines on the map, has shown a remarkably high degree of stability in terms of territory possession and control.

There is no doubt that in the first days and weeks of the conflict, Ukrainian forces offered strong resistance, which was accompanied by saturation of social networks with videos and pictures of destroyed Russian, or allegedly Russian, equipment and captured Russian soldiers. Turkish Bayraktar, which almost took on mythological qualities after the conflict in Artsakh, also played a significant role in this period. Foreign portable systems, such as Javelin, Stinger and NLAW, have further strengthened the offensive capabilities of Ukrainian troops against both Russian armor and aviation. Despite all of this, in a period of several weeks, Russian units managed to take, roughly speaking, one quarter of Ukraine. The only great achievement of the Ukrainian troops was reflected in "recovery" of territories that were previously controlled by Russian units deployed on the Northern and Kiev fronts. And this success, if we can call it that, stemmed from the fact that Ukrainian forces took control of the areas from which Russian troops had previously willingly withdrawn.

This observation opens the question of both Kiev and Northern front, that is, their true purposes. Depending on the source, one encounters variations of three different scenarios. The first scenario, represented by Kiev itself and a large number of Western media, sees Russian withdrawal as a defeat, caused by inability to capture the Ukrainian capital and marked with high material and human losses. Bear in mind that this is the Western interpretation of Russian intentions, given that Moscow has never mentioned capture of Kiev as one of its goals. If we accept the narrative that Ukrainian units defeated Russians near Kiev, we must assume the existence of technical capacities for such an endeavor, that is, use of appropriate air and armored forces, and other means of war. If we further assume that Ukraine had such technical capacities after thirty days of war, then we must logically ask why those same capacities were not used to destroy a huge Russian column, 60 kilometers long, that was stationed not far from Kiev for days.^[31] The Western media incessantly droned about this concentration of Russian forces and showed satellite images of trucks and other techniques stretching along the highway. For a country that enjoys air superiority, such a sluggish column is a gift from heaven, and it represents extremely attractive target even for ground units. Everyone is free to draw their own conclusions, however, during the entire period of existence of this column, not a single air strike or armored and infantry attack was organized by Ukraine.^[32]



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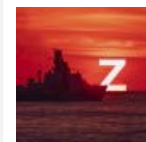
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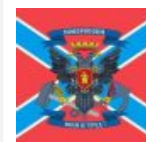
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Second scenario represents a kind of compromise between first and the third. This rationale for Russia's behavior presupposes that Northern and Kiev fronts were in fact opportunistic attempts to seize the capital and several other major cities while forcing the Ukrainian General Staff to redeploy its available forces from their initial positions on a nearly 3.000-kilometer long line of contact.^[33]^[34]

The final possibility is that both of these fronts were in fact, from the very beginning, feint fronts.^[35] whose main purpose was to attract and keep in place a significant part of Ukrainian forces in the north and northwest of the country so as to ensure easier maneuvering and advance for Russian troops on the Southern and Eastern fronts, while simultaneously hampering attempts to replace losses and provide logistical support to Ukrainian troops in Donbas. Led by the assumed number of Russian troops in Ukraine, each front could field maximum of thirty-five to fifty thousand Russian soldiers at the beginning of the operation. DPR and LPR troops are included here. Personal opinion of author is that with this number of soldiers, it was not possible to take Kiev, a city of 2.5 million inhabitants, under any circumstances. If we presume Kiev had a garrison of only 30.000, then Russians would need to have at least 100.000 soldiers besieging just the capital, not to mention need to control all those territories which were under Russian control while North and Kiev fronts were active. Also bear in mind many larger cities remained under Ukrainian control, which would require even more Russian troops. Even some Western sources, after Moscow announced its withdrawal from the Northern and Kiev fronts, warned that this was not a defeat for Russia but a regrouping of Russian troops so they could be redeployed in Donbas proper.^[36]^[37]^[38]^[39]

We have already mentioned that Maria Zakharova placed number of Ukrainian soldiers in the east close to 120.000, before Russian troops entered Ukraine. Western sources currently estimate that there are between 40.000 and 60.000.^[40] Ukrainian troops in Donbas, roughly the equal number to that before conflict escalated in 2021.^[41] Assuming that these figures are correct, or at least approximately true, it can be concluded that Northern and Kiev fronts attracted close to 50% of Ukrainian forces from Donbas area.

As in the previous phase, it is now clear that Ukrainian forces currently do not have the ability to organize a major military operation that would critically jeopardize the results of Russian advances so far. The air superiority of Russian Federation is unquestionable at this point, and can be easily noticed by the daily campaigns of bombing raids by Aerospace forces of the Russian Federation, complemented by often use of cruise missiles. Russian helicopter units continue their operations, as well as armored and motorized forces, but we see very limited activity of these branches from the Ukrainian force, unlike in the first weeks of conflict. The agony of Ukrainian and Nazi troops captured in Azovstal continues, especially in the light of the fact that Zelensky himself recently pointed out it was impossible to relieve the besieged troops through a military operation.^[42] If it is already impossible to organize a large-scale military operation to regain Mariupol, then the same can be assumed regarding a possible operation aimed at supporting Ukrainian troops in Donbas.

At the time of writing, transfer of main operations to the Donbass theatre is noticeable. This front is important for both Russia and Ukraine. One of main reasons is the fact that, according to various estimates, the most capable.^[43] Ukrainian troops are situated in Donbas. From Moscow's perspective, eliminating this group would mean removing the best Ukrainian units from the battlefield. From Kiev's perspective, these troops have the best chance of blunting and eventually stopping Russia's advance, especially given the fact that Ukraine has been fortifying the area of current operations for eight years.

In everyday events, a special aspect of this conflict has remained largely neglected. Main reason for this is the constant propaganda work of the Western media, which managed from the very beginning, to create a romanticized image of the Ukrainian army. When main Western media talk about Ukrainian troops, in most cases positive terms are used, and even when they refer to well-known neo-Nazi units. Overnight,

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they all became “brave Ukrainian defenders”, “fighters against Putin’s aggression”, “protectors of Europe from tyranny”, gaining these and many other positive characteristics. On the other hand, the narrative about Russians is diametrically opposed, and terms like “aggressors”, “murderers”, “rapists of Ukrainian women and children”, “Putin’s war machine” and similar are in plentiful supply.

When an individual encounters this Hollywood-made portrayal of conflicting parties again and again, certain mental image of Ukrainians and Russians inevitably begins to emerge. Hyperhumanized, Ukrainian forces are waging a just war, their struggle is also our struggle, they are the guys from the neighborhood, factory workers, teachers, musicians, everyday good people. Opposite them are the Russians, faceless “orcs” emerging from the dark Asian steppe, not even people, but only cogs in the great mechanism of Putin’s war machine that will destroy the whole of Europe as soon as it ends with Ukraine. The dehumanization of the enemy is not foreign to any war, but in this case it has a secondary goal, and that is to present Ukraine as a weaker party, in every sense.

As we have already pointed out, only in terms of available manpower, Ukraine had an advantage of at least 3:1 at the beginning of the conflict, when we compare maximum assumptions about the number of soldiers on both sides. Additionally, often overlooked is the fact that Russian soldiers are currently in conflict with soldiers trained according to NATO standards. Moreover, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed this when he pointed out that the alliance countries had trained “tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers in previous years, provided modern equipment and supported reforms. Ukraine’s forces are now larger, better equipped, better trained and better led than ever before”^{[44][45]}. According to Western sources, within Yavoriv base alone, five Ukrainian battalions were trained during a single year.^[46]

Military assistance of the United States, which amounted to more than 2.7 billion dollars in the period from 2014 to 2021, depended on military reforms within Ukraine. One of these reforms focused on Ukraine’s ability to integrate its logistical support with other NATO units during joint operations.^[47] Back in 2016, Poroshenko himself sought and obtained experienced military advisers from United States, Canada, Great Britain, Lithuania and Germany, whose purpose was to modernize Ukrainian units and reach NATO standards by 2020, thus achieving a high degree of compatibility with units from other alliance countries.^{[48][49]} Ukraine maybe never would officially become a member of NATO, but judging by the mentioned sources, most of the military institutions in the country are already organized in accordance with NATO procedures and that is telling.

From the author’s perspective, what is currently happening in Ukraine is a conflict between the Russian and Western concepts of war, that is, the concept of war as conceived by NATO. Among other things, this conflict is also a question of the prestige for the West, which has so far seen itself as the most militarily capable bloc on the planet. Having trained Ukrainian ground army^[50] to NATO standards and equipped it with anti-tank and anti-aircraft portable systems, the West is now observing performance of these forces against Russian troops. This is, as well, one of reasons for the omnipresent Western propaganda campaign. Moreover, within this conflict, it is necessary to view Ukrainian media and propaganda sources as organic offshoots of Western intelligence agencies and public relations firms, of which at least 150 have participated in creating and spreading propaganda for Kiev since the beginning of hostilities.^{[51][52]} Likewise, make no mistake, majority if not all intelligence at disposal of Kiev is of NATO origin.

In an event that Ukrainian troops are defeated by Russian units, it will be clear that equipping and training army in accordance with NATO standards does not guarantee the highest level of combat capability. At the same time, the possible defeat of Ukraine will shake the reputation of NATO itself, especially the United States, whose last year’s debacle in Afghanistan is still fresh in memory. Russia’s eventual victory would be the second major case in modern times where forces equipped and trained by the West have been defeated by non-Western armies.

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In this context, one should also observe the huge military aid that has been pouring into Kiev for two months now by countries of the West and European Union. As US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin recently pointed out, the United States wants “to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.”^[53] This only confirms what many analysts have already pointed out, that Kiev and Moscow are not at war in Ukraine, but Russia against the collective West led by Washington. The United States needs, both for domestic and foreign policy, Russian defeat in Ukraine.

This is the only way to explain the fabulous sums of money which have, in form of military equipment and financial support, flooded into Kiev from both the United States and European Union. A spokeswoman for the US president, Jen Psaki, told a news conference on April 28 that “as you know, we had \$3.5 billion in military security assistance. We have about \$250 million of that left in drawdown. So, obviously, we will work to expedite that and provide that to the Ukrainians”^[54]. For reference sake, US Congress approved this aid package on March 10^[55]^[56]. A new package of American aid for Ukraine,^[57] more than 30 billion dollars, is already prepared, according to the lend-lease principle that was used during the Second World War. Under this new tranche of aid, more than fifteen billion dollars will be spent for military purposes. Moreover, if you follow the process of creating this act, you can see that it was introduced into the Senate procedure^[58] on January 19, 2022, that is, 15 billion dollars for Kiev in the form of American military equipment was planned at least a month before the Russian operation.

At the same time, most countries within NATO and the collective West provide military assistance to Ukraine. However, some countries, such as Bulgaria,^[59] have refused to provide military assistance to Kiev from the outset for reasons of their own political stability, while others, such as Canada^[60] and Greece, have ended shipments of military equipment due to depletion of reserves which jeopardize their own security.^[61] In a recent address to Bundestag, German Minister of Defense, Kristina Lambrecht, pointed out Berlin’s limitation on further arming Ukraine comes due to problems facing Bundeswehr itself. According to Lambrecht, Germany has on paper 350 Puma infantry fighting vehicles, but in reality, only 150 of them are combat capable. The situation with Tiger combat helicopters is no different – only 9 out of 51 can take off.^[62]^[63] On April 28, Stoltenberg pointed out that NATO allies had sent military aid worth eight billion dollars to Ukraine since start of the conflict.^[64]

As we can see, the lion’s share^[65] of this burden has been taken over by Washington, but when you consider that West mostly procures its weapons from the United States, it is clear that this “aid” is actually a kind of financial incentive for the US military-industrial complex.^[66] According to American sources, by April 22, Washington had delivered more than 11.000 portable anti-tank systems to Kiev, including 4.500 Javelins. In the same period, Ukrainian troops received close to 1.400 Stinger systems. So far, these deliveries also included personal protective equipment, Humvee off-road vehicles, helicopters, huge amounts of ammunition, UAVs, radar systems, patrol boats and more.^[67]

Thanks to this feverish pace of weapons delivery to Kiev, people connected with US army warn of reduction to their own stockpiles of weapons. The head of Raytheon pointed out that it will be possible to replenish Stinger reserves, not just in United States but also in other NATO countries, only in 2023 and 2024 due to lack of components and production capacities.^[68] The situation regarding Javelin reserves is no better. According to sources from the American administration, number of Javelin systems in US reserves has been reduced by one third, and their replacement can be expected in just under three years.^[69]^[70]^[71]

It is important to keep in mind that all portable systems that arrive in Ukraine end up in three categories. Some of them reach end users at the front, some are captured by Russian troops, while some, apparently, end up on the black market and are sold to unknown actors.



Free, and therefore questionable, author's estimate is that Russian units have so far captured at least several thousand different portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems. Washington and its allies do not seem to be worried about the undoubted fact that specimens of their vaunted systems have probably already ended up in hands of Russian engineers.^[72] At the same time, the West seems unconcerned about the possibility that advanced military equipment will fall into hands of various other groups, with special emphasis on criminals and terrorists, given that United States loses the ability to track delivered equipment as soon as it crosses the Ukrainian border.^[73] Proliferation of this weapons among current opponents of the West, Russian Federation and CPR, certainly does not exclude possibility of its spread among various militias and terrorist organizations in the Middle East and elsewhere in the future. On the contrary, Moscow and Beijing might be more than willing to create problems for US in the same manner Washington is creating for them in Ukraine and Taiwan. With everything mentioned above, question of the efficiency for all these Western systems delivered to Ukraine must be raised.

A little over a month ago, during one of his speeches, Zelensky pointed out that Kiev needs 500 Javelins and the same number of Stingers, on a daily basis.^[74] We can assume with some certainty that this is an exaggeration, but what if we reduce the number of these systems to 100 Javelins and Stingers per day? The legitimate question is where and why so many of these systems are consumed on a daily basis. The two answers that arise, although they may not be the only ones possible, are that the capabilities of the Russian armor and aviation were underestimated or that the capabilities of the delivered systems were overestimated.

A common feature of all Western systems, in which we will include Turkish Bayraktar, was a status of "miraculous" weapons that should drastically change the balance of power in conflict by its very presence. The Stingers were praised as an unsurpassed tool against planes and helicopters, Javelins against tanks and armored vehicles, while Bayraktars were presented as a danger against any type of unit found on the battlefield. Many analysts and amateur cheerleaders have missed that even some research institutions in the West have questioned the ability of these systems to influence the overall outcome of the conflict.^[75]

However, what we see in the field at the moment is far from the image that was built through the media. In the first few weeks of conflict, we really had the opportunity to watch in action all of these Western systems against Russian troops, although it is necessary to point out that even then propaganda activities often smuggled videos from previous wars as events from conflict in Ukraine. After the first three to four weeks, all those who have been following this conflict since its beginning have seen a sharp decline in number of publications and videos showing either captured Russian soldiers or use of foreign weapons against Russian units. In that same period, a significant increase in material could be noticed from Russian sources, which showed destroyed or captured Ukrainian equipment and downed drones, with special emphasis on Bayraktars. In his recent address to the public, Zelensky himself, referring to Turkish drones, pointed out that "with all due respect, Bayraktar and other drones can help, but it won't affect the result".^[76]^[77]^[78] This is far from the earlier euphoric rhetoric.^[79] which accompanied Bayraktar, but also other drones such as Switchblade, Phoenix Ghost and Punisher.

Almost from very beginning of the conflict, Zelensky appealed^[80] to Western governments for delivery of heavy weapons, which would include fighters, tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, air defense systems, infantry transporters and helicopters, in addition to already presumed shipments of light weapons and equipment. According to the Kiev wish list, which has been circulating on Russian side of the internet for some time, Ukraine needs more than 200 planes, more than 350 air defense systems, more than 400 tanks and other heavy weapons, which also number in the hundreds.^[81]^[82] One Western analyst noted with irony that these quantities of weapons are not needed by a winning army but by military forces starting from zero. According to data of the Russian Ministry of Defense, the heaviest losses so far have been suffered by the units of Ukrainian infantry and armored forces, which to a certain extent coincides



with Zelensky's requests. The Ukrainian navy and aviation, as factors capable of influencing outcome of the conflict, have not existed since the first week of Russian operations.

According to current information, Zelensky's appeals bore fruit, but only partially. European Union countries are indeed sending heavy weapons to Kiev, but in a significant number of cases they are non-modernized combat systems more than four decades old. Poland sends 200 T-72^[83] tanks to Kiev, Germany is ready to sell 50 Leopard 1 tanks, last time modernized in the end of the eighties.^[84]^[85] United States will deliver its M113 armored personnel carriers from Vietnam War, which are largely obsolete today.^[86] The United Kingdom, Norway, Australia and other countries have also promised, and some have already delivered, combat vehicles and other heavy weapons to Kiev. Observing the rate of the conflict escalation, one wonders how long will they be able to finance Kiev, especially when we take into consideration current unenviable economic situation in the West coupled with negative forecasts of economic trends in the future.^[87]^[88]^[89]

While heavy fighting continues in Donbas, the inability of Ukrainian troops to organize an effective counter-offensive, both quantitatively and qualitatively, raises the question of what will happen to Ukraine when/if Russian units fulfill their task and completely defeat enemies in Donbas. If this scenario unfolds, it is doubtful that another similar Ukrainian force exists, capable of taking on burden of fighting Russian troops. The defeat in Donbas, that is, the destruction or surrender of more than 50.000 Ukrainian soldiers, most likely represents an end to Kiev's hopes for a positive outcome in the conflict and imposes capitulation as the only option. On the other hand, defeat of Russian troops entails the possibility of crisis and internal instability within Russian Federation together with impression of external weakness. Even the heavy weapons that Zelensky demands do not have to affect the course of the fight at all, considering that Russia has initiated more frequent attacks on transport hubs, bridges, electric network and presumed ammunition and equipment warehouses. Attacks with cruise missiles on energy infrastructure and oil depots have been going on for several weeks, and the lack of this energy source is starting to be felt across Ukraine itself.^[90]^[91]

At the same time, Ukraine has become a hole in which foreign weapons are disappearing and, most likely, finding buyers on the black market. Some certainly reach Ukrainian units, but some also fall into the hands of Russian troops. It is almost impossible to expect that this massive infusion of weapons will not jeopardize the security of both the Middle East and Europe itself, which, apparently driven by desire for economic suicide, could overnight find itself in a much worse situation, socially and economically, than the one it is in presently.^[92] As prices of basic foodstuffs, utilities and fuel rise, governments across EU will have trouble explaining to their citizens why fabulous sums are being set aside for Ukraine and the new militarization of the continent. On the other hand, we should not forget the problems of Taiwan and China. Can the collective West afford to spend precious military reserves on Ukraine after Washington showed its intention to turn Taiwan into an Asian copy of Ukraine?

Russia's central bank pointed out that full stabilization of country's economy is expected in 2024. The ruble has already recovered and is stronger as a currency now than before the military operation began, while inflation has returned to the level recorded before Russian troops entered Ukraine.^[93]^[94] Reorientation and restructuring of Russian economy is expected as a logical product of economic attacks, with special emphasis on opening up to Asian countries and developing its own capacities in order to replace imports from abroad. Russian Federation will reorient itself towards Asia, which will certainly be accompanied by difficulties and challenges, but where will Europe turn if it really cuts itself off from Russian energy sources.

One certain consequence from all these events will be a decline in the level of security and economic stability in Europe. The decline in living standards is almost inevitable, which will, in turn, lead to progressive radicalization or demoralization of the population. The internal cohesion of the Union, already on shaky ground, will only decrease. Political dependence on imperial policy of Washington will undermine the



sovereignty of European Union and its prestige on the global level. All of this will be presented as a result of Vladimir Putin's evil genius and despotic aspirations. As usual, this will not be the truth. The only culprit for the current situation is the NATO alliance and political elite of its leading country, United States. Negative economic and social trends within the collective West will provoke a backlash from their populations, characterized by violence. No matter what form of instability it takes, Europe will be far more exposed to the crisis, given that Washington will use every instrument at its disposal, for sake of its own survival, to transfer the negative consequences of its current moves onto its European satellites in the future.

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149 COMMENTS

mario2 on May 12, 2022 · at 1:29 pm EST/EDT

How is this possible (South fornt)?

Ukrainian Armed Forces reached the borders of the Russia’s Belgorod region near the village of Nekhoteevka. According to local reports, the AFU also took control of the village of Ternovka located near the border. The joint forces of the Russian Federation and the Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics continue their resistance. Ukrainian forces are pushing Russian troops out of the village of Cossack Lopan. Fighting continues north of Stary Saltov.

Reply

Dmitri Karamozov on May 12, 2022 · at 2:22 pm EST/EDT

This is being spun as a “counter offensive” by Ukrainian forces, but there is not much actual fighting going on in these villages. Russia may be withdrawing in order to draw Ukraine forces out of urban areas to avoid high civilian casualties. Also keep in mind, the more Ukrainian forces move and maneuver,

