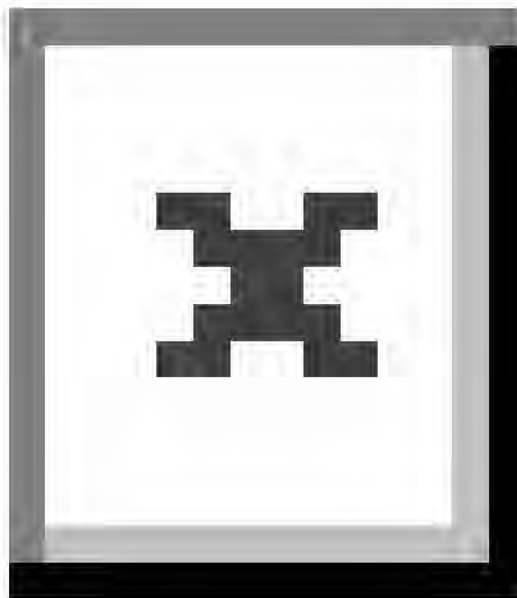


**From:** David S. Maxwell  
**Sent:** Sat, 25 Mar 2023 10:54:40 -0400 (EDT)  
**To:** (b)(6)@state.gov  
**Subject:** 3/25/23 National Security News and Commentary



## ***Informal Institute for National Security Thinkers and Practitioners***

### **Quote of the Day:**

***"Never try to argue with someone whose TV is bigger than their bookshelf."  
- Emilia Clarke***

***"Perhaps the best solution to these problems lies in creating the political warfare instrument on long-term premises, while retaining flexibility on when and how to use it. Policy content can be adjusted to changing circumstances and needs, so long as the basic capability remains in working order. Such an approach appears to underlie the sustained commitment since the 1940s to American military power.***

***No such commitment has existed for political warfare capability, where there has been a history of organizations created, used for a time, and then destroyed in fact if not in form. Psychological operations capabilities created in World War II were never used for more than tactical purposes. Others were created in the late 1940s, made operational in the 1950s, and disrupted in the 1960s: by the late 1970s they were in serious disarray. By the early 1980s US Army Psyop existed mostly in skeletal form. Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe, and related research capabilities, such as the Munich-based Institute for the Study of the USSR, existed, but in much different form: their sense of purpose and status had lost much of its original impetus. CIA support of operations around the world had been drastically reduced or abandoned.***

***America fared better in maintaining its public diplomacy capabilities. The Voice of America and most related USIA and State Department programming in other media remained as instruments of long-term cultural exchange and general service news programming. USIA's overseas presence, the US Information Service (USIS), under close State Department control, was often primarily concerned with the useful but limited task of providing public relations services for diplomatic missions. The 1980s brought a major expansion of VOA facilities, and the beginning of satellite TV programming***

*known as "Worldnet." The National Endowment for Democracy, funded by the Congress, with bipartisan backing was established in the late 1970s to give support at modest levels to democratic political and social activities in selected foreign countries: it offers a restrained potential for a systematic effort to propagate the principles of democracy abroad in cooperation with several similar organizations maintained for similar purposes by other Western democracies. Many believed these activities still lacked sufficient sense of strategic purpose but they clearly gave America a more effective voice at the country level. America by the beginning of the 1980s had begun to update and expand its public diplomacy capability; it had only remnants of a political warfare force.*

*America had also shifted part of its attention from Europe to Asia. The ambivalence was inherent in America's geography, and the alternation East or West was part of American history. The nature of the Asian involvement from the late 1960s to mid-1970s was unusually controversial, and for various reasons of an internal nature it was unusually self-destructive."*

*- Paul Smith, "On Political Warfare"*

*"Against a stupidity that is in fashion, no wisdom compensates."*

*- Jose Ortega y Gasset*

1. Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 24, 2023
2. Amid Pentagon Focus On China, Indo-Pacific Command Says It Has \$3.5B Budget Shortfall
3. Stolen Valor: The U.S. Volunteers in Ukraine Who Lie, Waste and Bicker
4. An Anxious Asia Arms for a War It Hopes to Prevent
5. Senators Urge Biden to Send Evidence of Russian War Crimes to the I.C.C.
6. Ukraine's army is now the best in the world, retired general says
7. What Big Shifts in East Asian Geopolitics Mean for the World
8. China's Strategic Support Force Brings Hybrid Warfare to Space, Cyber, Politics
9. U.S. Military, Spy Agencies Differ on Threat From Afghanistan Militants
10. Military Quietly Stops Buying Ospreys as Aircraft Faces an Uncertain Future
11. A look at the US military mission in Syria and its dangers
12. Finland opens airspace for NATO surveillance and intelligence flights
13. Why is China strengthening its military? It's not all about war.
14. Russian soldiers stop receiving salaries: complaints coming from all over Russia
15. Pentagon is pressed on worsening recruiting shortfalls
16. The Military Should Reject DEI and CRT
17. Why the War Crimes Charges Against Vladimir Putin Are So Significant
18. The National Institutes of Health's "China initiative" has upended hundreds of lives and destroyed scores of academic careers
19. Twelve Months of War in Ukraine Have Revealed Four Fundamental Lessons on Urban Warfare
20. FACT SHEET: President Biden Submits to Congress 10-Year Plans to Implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability

21. Letter from President Joe Biden on the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability
22. Pursuing Peace Through Partnerships, Local Engagement, and Learning
23. Uyghurs tell Congress of gang rape, shackles and sterilization
24. How to Defend Taiwan is a Political Problem
25. US bank trouble heralds end of dollar reserve system

### ***1. Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 24, 2023***

**Maps/graphics:** <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-24-2023>

#### **Key Takeaways**

- Prominent voices in the Russian information space are increasingly setting information conditions to prepare for a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive.
- Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov has reportedly formed a Wagner Group-affiliated private military company (PMC) in occupied Crimea.
- Some prominent Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian military command for continuing to impale Russian forces on Vuhledar with ineffective human-wave style frontal assaults.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with the Russian Security Council likely as part of his effort to portray himself as a present and effective wartime leader.
- Russian forces conducted limited attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line.
- Russian forces have made gains in and around Bakhmut and conducted ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area.
- The Ukrainian General Staff corrected its March 23 statement that Russian forces withdrew from Nova Kakhovka, occupied Kherson Oblast.
- Russian occupation authorities announced the creation of a pro-Russian militaristic youth movement aimed at brainwashing children.
- The Russian government is adopting new measures to revitalize and eliminate corruption, lethargy, and resistance in Russia's defense industrial base (DIB).
- The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported on March 24 that at least 1,000 Russian personnel training at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, redeployed to Russia.



# RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE CAMPAIGN ASSESSMENT, MARCH 24, 2023

Mar 24, 2023 - Press ISW

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Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 24, 2023  
Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Angela Howard, Nicole Wolkov, George  
Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan  
March 24, 4:30pm ET

[Click here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

[Click here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain maps that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Prominent voices in the Russian information space are increasingly setting information conditions to prepare for a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive. Russian Security Council Deputy Head Dmitry Medvedev emphasized on March 24 that the Russian General Staff is aware that Kyiv is preparing for offensive operations and that the Russian General Staff is considering its own decisions and responses to prepare for a Ukrainian offensive.[1] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian actors are disseminating disinformation about plans for a Ukrainian attack towards Belgorod Oblast, in order to draw Russian troops to border areas and allow Ukrainian troops to launch attacks on other sectors of the front, partially echoing Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's prior warnings about a Ukrainian push on Belgorod Oblast.[2] Another Russian milblogger warned that Ukrainian forces will likely try to launch a counteroffensive before the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) gains the capacity to increase production and bolster Russian defensive potential.[3] Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin similarly claimed on March 23 that he knows of plans for an extensive Ukrainian counteroffensive, as ISW previously reported.[4] The wider Russian spring offensive appears to be culminating, and the Russian information space appears to be responding to the slow-down of Russian operations and potential for Ukraine to regain the initiative with substantial anxiety.[5] Russian military command will need to commit a significant number of forces to the frontline to either prevent culmination or launch renewed offensive operations, and it is unlikely that such forces exist at sufficient scale to do either.

Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov has reportedly formed a Wagner Group-affiliated private military company (PMC) in occupied Crimea. Independent Russian investigative outlet Vazhnye Istorii (iStories) reported on March 23 that Aksyonov has publicly sided with Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin against the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and created PMC "Convoy" under the leadership of Prigozhin associate Konstantin Pikalov, who has led Wagner operations in Africa.[6] PMC "Convoy" is reportedly a BARS (combat reserve) unit, meaning that "Convoy" servicemembers sign two contracts—one with "Convoy" itself and one with the Russian MoD.[7] iStories reported that "Convoy" initially consisted of 300 people and has been

deployed to occupied Kherson Oblast.[8] The iStories report is particularly noteworthy against the backdrop of Wagner's and Prigozhin's continually declining influence in Russia and loss of access to convict recruits. Prigozhin and Prigozhin-affiliated elements may be trying to diffuse Wagner's remaining power by creating separate PMCs and other parallel military formations in addition to launching new recruitment efforts through traditional channels.[9] Aksyonov additionally appears to have affiliated himself and the Crimea occupation administration with Prigozhin, which may have important implications for the role of forces from occupied Crimea in subsequent phases of the war.

Some prominent Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian military command for continuing to impale Russian forces on Vuhledar with ineffective human-wave style frontal assaults. The milbloggers claimed that current Russian tactics against Vuhledar, which include an initial frontal assault followed by assaults against fortified Ukrainian flanks, result in high Russian combat losses resulting in no gains due to challenging terrain, lack of combat power, and failure to surprise Ukrainian forces.[10] The milbloggers called on Russian forces to cut Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) into Vuhledar both with strikes against rear GLOCs and by encircling the settlement for a multi-vector attack, but implied that Russian forces are unable to implement these suggestions due to munitions shortages and the failure to take many settlements surrounding Vuhledar.[11] Russian forces are unable to sustain any significant rate of advance anywhere on the front line using these human-wave style attacks, and the Vuhledar area once held informational significance to Russian milbloggers during the offensive for Pavlivka in in late October and early November 2022.[12] The Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade has been destroyed and reconstituted as many as eight times since the start of the war in large part due losses sustained during the prolonged effort against Vuhledar.[13] The re-emergence of vitriolic criticism about Russian failures near Vuhledar likely reflects the information space's ongoing frustration with the Russian military command amid deep-seated fear about a prospective future Ukrainian counteroffensive. It is possible that Russian forces are undertaking a renewed and inconsistent push to take Vuhledar in the style of limited and localized ground attacks, though it is also possible that the sources claiming as such are engaging in circular reporting or re-reporting old events.[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with the Russian Security Council likely as part of his effort to portray himself as a present and effective wartime leader. The meeting centered around Russia's effort to develop its electronics industry, though the Kremlin readout provides little detail about the meeting itself.[15] Russia has been seeking ways to mitigate the effect of Western sanctions on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB), which relies on electronics to produce advanced materiel and weaponry.[16] Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has notably claimed that Belarus can produce weapons for Russia given Belarus's access to electronics, and Russia and Belarus recently signed an agreement on furthering their respective electronics industries.[17] This meeting likely aimed to portray Putin as holding the Russian Security Council responsible for mobilizing the DIB to meet wartime demands while not providing evidence of any progress towards this goal.

#### Key Takeaways

- Prominent voices in the Russian information space are increasingly setting information conditions to prepare for a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive.
- Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov has reportedly formed a Wagner Group-affiliated private military company (PMC) in occupied Crimea.

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- The Ukrainian General Staff corrected its March 23 statement that Russian forces withdrew from Nova Kakhovka, occupied Kherson Oblast.
- Russian occupation authorities announced the creation of a pro-Russian militaristic youth movement aimed at brainwashing children.
- The Russian government is adopting new measures to revitalize and eliminate corruption, lethargy, and resistance in Russia's defense industrial base (DIB).
- The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported on March 24 that at least 1,000 Russian personnel training at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, redeployed to Russia.

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

#### Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

##### Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective:

Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces conducted limited attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Hryanykivka (17km northeast of Kupyansk), Bilohorivka (13km south of Kreminna), and the Serebrianska forest area (10km south of Kreminna).[18] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that positional battles continue in the Kupyansk area but the situation has not changed.[19] The milblogger also claimed

that Russian forces made marginal advances northwest of Kreminna towards the outskirts of Makiivka (22km northwest) and west of Ploshchanka (16km northwest).[20] This prominent Russian milblogger used old combat footage filmed no later than November 2022 to assert that Russian forces advanced near Makiivka in March 2023.[21]

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Bakhmut area and have made gains in and around the city as of March 24. Geolocated footage posted on March 24 shows that Russian forces have advanced towards the T0504 Kostyantynivka-Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut highway just south of Ivanivske, about 7km southwest of Bakhmut.[22] Geolocated footage posted on March 24 additionally confirms that Russian forces have advanced west of Zalizianske (11km northwest of Bakhmut) and within northern Bakhmut itself.[23] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty noted on March 24 that Russian Airborne (VDV) and other unspecified conventional Russian forces are reinforcing the Wagner Group around Bakhmut, supporting ISW's assessment that conventional Russian forces are likely increasingly supplanting Wagner operations in this area.[24] Cherevaty reported that there have been 32 combat clashes in the Bakhmut area over the past day.[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continue to fight northwest of Bakhmut in the Orikhovo-Vasylivka and Bohdaniivka areas and that Russian forces are approaching Ivanivske west of Bakhmut.[26] Several Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Wagner units are moving through the AZOM plant in northern Bakhmut and otherwise advancing in urban sectors of the city.[27] Ukrainian forces also appear to have retaken a segment of the E40 Bakhmut-Sloviansk highway north of Bakhmut, as indicated by geolocated footage posted on March 24.[28] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks on Bakhmut itself, northwest of Bakhmut near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest) and Bohdaniivka (6km northwest); west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west); and southwest of Bakhmut near Stupochky (11km southwest) and Predtechyne (14km southwest).[29]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on March 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted unsuccessful offensive operations towards Avdiivka itself; in the Avdiivka area near Keramik (12km north of Avdiivka), Stepove (7km northwest of Avdiivka), Severne (5km west of Avdiivka), Novokalynove (12km north of Avdiivka), and Novobakhmutivka (12km northwest of Avdiivka); on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Pervomaiske; and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka, Pobieda, and Novomykhailivka.[30] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 1st Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Army Corps advanced west of Novobakhmutivka and towards Novokalynove.[31] Russian sources continue to claim that Russian forces are advancing towards Avdiivka itself and getting closer to taking the settlement in a semi-encirclement.[32] Russian milbloggers posted footage of various 1st DNR Army Corps elements, including the 14th "Kalmius" artillery brigade and 5th Brigade, operating near Avdiivka and Marinka.[33]



Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on March 24. Combat footage geolocated on March 24 confirms that Russian forces are operating in the dacha area in southern Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City).[34] Russian milbloggers pessimistically discussed the prospect of future Russian offensives on Vuhledar and highlighted challenging terrain and poor Russian force capacity in the area.[35]

Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

The Ukrainian General Staff corrected its March 23 statement that Russian forces withdrew from Nova Kakhovka, occupied Kherson Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 23 that Russian forces are still "temporarily" in Nova Kakhovka and that prior reported information alleging Russian forces had withdrawn from Nova Kakhovka was published due to incorrect use of available data.[36] Russian occupation authorities in Kherson Oblast and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces remained in Nova Kakhovka.[37] Ukrainian military sources continue to suggest that Russian authorities are evacuating other parts of southern Ukraine, however. Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Representative Andriy Yusov reported that Russian occupation authorities in Crimea began warning Crimeans to evacuate over FM radio stations.[38] Yusov reported that the Russian authorities likely intended to warn Crimeans who cooperated with the Russian authorities and continue to tell rank-and-file soldiers that the situation is normal.[39]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces prepared to conduct counteroffensive operations in the Zaporizhia direction on March 24. Zaporizhia Occupation Administration Council Member Vladimir Rogov claimed that Ukrainian forces are concentrating forces and preparing to break through the front line near Orikhiv (50km southeast of Zaporizhzhia City) possibly in the coming days.[40] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army (Southern Military District) struck Ukrainian positions near Orikhiv before Ukrainian forces could launch a counteroffensive.[41] The milblogger also claimed that Russian forces attempt to prepare reconnaissance-in-force operations near Orikhiv and Polohy (88km southeast of Zaporizhzhia City).[42]

Russian forces conducted routine shelling in Mykolaiv, Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk on March 24.[43]

Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

The Russian government is adopting new measures to revitalize and eliminate corruption, lethargy, and resistance within Russia's defense industrial base (DIB). Independent Russian media outlet SOTA reported on March 23 that unspecified Russian authorities created a working group under the Collegium of the Military-Industrial Complex that will seize control over enterprises implementing state contracts "inefficiently," as justified by martial law.[44] SOTA posted a screenshot of the working group's alleged creation document and noted that the working group's power applies to all state contractors, not just those explicitly connected to Russia's DIB, however.[45] Russian authorities may use this power to crack down on political and

economic rivals or nationalize Russian businesses. Russian milbloggers continue to critique Russian defense-related production limitations and call for state intervention.[46] Russian authorities continue to promote contract and volunteer service aggressively while avoiding a major public wave of mobilization. Several Russian news sources reported on March 23 that Russian officials and military registration and enlistment offices use a variety of methods to coerce or intimidate Russian men into "volunteering" or "clarifying their data" - likely to support targeted recruitment campaigns or future covert mobilization.[47] Russian opposition news outlet Mediazona reported that Moscow City Disinfection Center stations told their employees that unspecified authorities gave the Moscow City Disinfection Center a recruitment quota of 100 men from each of the city's 11 stations. Disinfection stations with fewer than 100 male employees reportedly encouraged their workers to persuade their acquaintances and friends and give information on male connections to their employer.[48]

Russian authorities work to protect key specialists and insulate public servants from service on the front lines despite major personnel needs on the front lines. The Russian Ministry of Labor approved on March 24 a list of 149 professions - including 64 working professions and 65 civil servant positions - eligible for alternative civilian service during mobilization.[49]

Russian authorities continue to crack down harshly on limited domestic resistance to the war in Ukraine and mobilization. Russian independent media outlet OVD News reported on March 23 that Russian security services detained a student on suspicion of committing an arson attack on a building housing a military registration and enlistment office in Leningrad Oblast.[50] OVD News also noted on March 23 that the Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan district court sentenced a participant in September protests against mobilization to two years imprisonment.[51] OVD News cited a Russian human rights group "Zone of Solidarity" on March 23 report that a pre-trial detention center holding a Novosibirsk resident falsely accused of committing arson against a military registration office used a series of physical and psychological pressures to debase the detainee.[52] Russian news source People of Baikal claimed on March 22 that Russian authorities twice visited its editor and attempted to silence People of Baikal's coverage of repeated complaints about mobilization conditions from soldiers in Regiment 1439.[53] A regional branch of Radio Liberty reported on March 23 that a Tartarstan military commissariat fined a Bashkirian company 50,000 rubles (\$647) for advertising services aiding men in avoiding mobilization.[54]

Russian authorities continue use prosecution to deter deserters. Russian human rights activist Pavel Chikov stated on March 23 that Russian courts are considering around 500 cases of desertion.[55] Chikov critiqued the Russian Supreme Court's draft resolution which would greatly expand what qualifies as desertion or a "crime against military service," on which ISW reported on March 21.[56] A regional branch of Radio Liberty reported on March 23 that Russian authorities suspended the five-year sentence of a deserter from Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Khabarovsk Krai in favor of remobilizing the man.[57] Independent Russian news outlet Meduza amplified a report on March 20 that Russian authorities sentenced a major in the Federal Protective Service to 6.5 years in a penal colony and stripped him of his rank for allegedly fleeing to Kazakhstan after the start of mobilization.[58]

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian occupation authorities announced the creation of a pro-Russian militaristic youth movement aimed at brainwashing children. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration First Deputy Chairperson Alexey Lysov announced on March 21 that the first congress of the "Yug Molodoy" (Young South) youth movement occurred in occupied Melitopol.[59] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the movement provides assistance to occupation authorities and law enforcement to maintain public order and is designed to attract children to Russian propaganda centers.[60] Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov stated that the occupation administration has allocated over 18 billion rubles (\$232 million) to pro-Russian organizations to influence Ukrainian children in occupied territories.[61]

Russian occupation authorities continue to integrate occupied territories into the Russian electoral system in an effort assert legal control. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin visited a preliminary voting site for the United Russia ruling party and claimed that over 67 people registered to vote early at the single voting point.[62] United Russia Secretary Andrey Turchak claimed that the DNR voting point has one of the highest rates of early voting registration presumably in all of occupied Ukraine and Russia.[63]

Russian occupation officials continue efforts to exert bureaucratic control over occupied areas through the use of infrastructure development, social benefit schemes, and nationalization of Ukrainian resources. Kherson Oblast occupation officials praised ongoing Russian efforts for further economic, infrastructure, and social benefits in occupied Kherson Oblast, including efforts to develop the Arabat Spit and create a social maternity capital benefit system for children born or adopted after 2007.[64] Russian authorities reportedly registered over 1,500 companies, including agricultural holdings, bakeries, mining companies, factories, and the food industry, into Russian jurisdiction, and either nationalized or transferred many of these businesses to new owners to bypass sanctions and support the war effort.[65]

Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.)

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.

The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) reported on March 24 that at least 1,000 Russian personnel training at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, redeployed to Russia, supporting previous ISW assessments.[66] The UK MoD noted that it has not observed a new Russian force rotation in Belarus as of March 24 and noted that the Kremlin is likely using Belarusian trainers to augment Russia's degraded training capacity.[67]

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. A tank company of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises with T-72 tanks at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, on March 24.[68] The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announced on March 24 that elements of the Minsk-based Belarusian 120th Mechanized Brigade would remove



equipment from storage and deploy to an unspecified area to conduct unspecified tasks, likely exercises.[69]

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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**Tags**

Ukraine Project

File Attachments:

ISW Logo (thumbnails &amp; cover image).jpg

DraftUkraineCOTMarch24,2023.png

Kharkiv Battle Map Draft March 24,2023.png

Donetsk Battle Map Draft March 24,2023.png

Zaporizhia Battle Map Draft March 24,2023.png

Kherson-Mykolaiv Battle Map Draft March 24,2023.png

Bakhmut Battle Map Draft March 24,2023.png

**2. Amid Pentagon Focus On China, Indo-Pacific Command Says It Has \$3.5B Budget Shortfall**

Strategy includes prioritization of scarce resources but too often we develop strategy that is unconstrained by resources. Which I guess is why we have unfunded requirements. And if this shortfall in funding is for high priority requirements it theoretically must mean that everything that is already funded is of higher priority and cannot be cut from the budget.

### **Amid Pentagon Focus On China, Indo-Pacific Command Says It Has \$3.5B Budget Shortfall**

This "unfunded list" comes on top of the \$9.1 billion the Pentagon requested for "Pacific deterrence" in its 2024 spending proposal.

[defenseone.com](https://defenseone.com) · by Marcus Weisgerber

The U.S. military has made no secret in recent years that countering China in the Pacific is top priority. Despite that, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command submitted to Congress a list of 30 important projects totaling \$3.5 billion that did not make it into the Pentagon's \$842 billion fiscal 2024 budget request.

The list includes funding for high-profile projects, including defending Guam from Chinese or North Korean ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles. It also includes upgrades to missile interceptors, long-range artillery, space sensor, and offensive cyber effects.

These requests come on top of the \$9.1 billion the Pentagon asked Congress to approve for "Pacific deterrence" in its week-old spending proposal. Those funds would go toward "critical investments including resilient and distributed air basing, new missile warning and tracking architecture, construction to enable enhanced posture, funding for defense of Guam and Hawaii, and multinational information sharing, training, and experimentation." But items listed on the unfunded priority list go beyond weapons and technology; they also include military exercises to "better familiarize our forces with the challenges associated with" operating in the Pacific.

"This is not new golf courses in Hawaii...but this is hardcore, combat, warfighting networking stuff," said Bradley Bowman, senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a conservative Washington think tank.

"It's defending Guam from missile attack, it's hardening cyber network defenses, it's missile warning and tracking, it's space

sensors, it's undersea targeting, it's resilient warfighting architecture, it's a joint fires network, it's missiles," Bowman said. "These are exactly the things we need to make defense planners in Beijing think twice before they launch unprovoked aggression against Taiwan."

Bowman questioned why the money for such important projects was not included in the Pentagon's budget request. "What explains a \$3.5-billion unfunded priority list that consists of such fundamental combat capabilities?" he said.

The unfunded list includes \$147 million to help defend Guam from missiles. The list does not specify exactly how that money would be spent. Last week, the Missile Defense Agency asked Congress to approve \$801 million to boost missile defense on the western-Pacific U.S. territory.

"Current forces are capable of defending Guam against today's North Korean ballistic missile threats," Michele Atkinson, Missile Defense Agency operations director, told reporters during a briefing last week. "However, the regional threat to Guam, including those from [China], continues to rapidly evolve."

Other items on the list:

- \$493 million to accelerate "development of precision strike stand-off weapons for attacking long range, medium range, and tactical targets."
- \$357 million for the SM-6 Block 1B interceptor to increase "capability for ground-based and naval long-range weapons for extended range to target enemy anti-surface warfare capability. This capability is foundational to provide combat formations with precision-strike capabilities that are operationally decentralized and geographically distributed in theater."
- \$275 million for "the next generation of national defense space architecture to enable U.S. military operations and responses to emerging multi-domain threats and adversaries."
- \$151 million for the Precision Strike Missile.

It also includes \$511 million for transportation and support "to quickly mass forces multiple times a year as part of a persistent, synchronized set of operations, activities, and investments in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans."



There's an additional \$70 million for joint training.

"You can have the best weapons in the world, you can have the best networks in the world, but if you don't have the training [and] exercises and the know how, among the people operating those weapons and systems, knitting it all together, it's not going to be as effective as it could be," Bowman said. "And that's where the exercises and the training ranges come into play."

Overseas exercises and training tend to get the short straw in the budget requests because there is no Congressional constituency for them.

"A lot of this stuff is essential to deterring aggression and defeating aggression if it happens," Bowman said. "But because it's happening over there, and it's not necessarily stationed in a district or state, or it's not necessarily being built in a district or state, because it's something not necessarily related to a piece of equipment, then there's less of a political incentive for people to advocate for it."

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., has led a bipartisan effort to stop the practice of commanders and the heads of each service from submitting these lists, arguing they are de facto addendums to the budget requests. The lawmakers have argued that if the projects are of such priority, they should be part of the budget submissions. Military officials, particularly those in charge of regional commands, say the lists are valuable because it allows them to respond to urgent threats.

"I would call in the Pentagon and say: 'I want to go through every item on this list and I want to hear your argument, why you did not put this in the fiscal 2024 budget requests,'" Bowman said. "If the Pentagon cannot provide a persuasive answer, then it seems to me among the highest priorities in Congress for this session should be fixing those shortcomings, authorizing and appropriating the items on the unfunded list."

defenseone.com · by Marcus Weisgerber

### ***3. Stolen Valor: The U.S. Volunteers in Ukraine Who Lie, Waste and Bicker***

**A rogue's gallery of some of America's not so finest.**

## **Stolen Valor: The U.S. Volunteers in Ukraine Who Lie, Waste and Bicker**

By Justin Scheck and Thomas Gibbons-Neff

Justin Scheck, an international investigative reporter, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, the Ukraine correspondent, reported this article from Ukraine and around Europe.

The New York Times · by Thomas Gibbons-Neff · March 25, 2023

People who would not be allowed anywhere near the battlefield in a U.S.-led war are active on the Ukrainian front, with ready access to American weaponry.

- Send any friend a story
- As a subscriber, you have 10 gift articles to give each month. Anyone can read what you share.

Axel Vilhelmsen trained Ukrainian soldiers last year as part of the Mozart Group, which two former Marines established to help Ukraine. It disbanded after one founder sued the other, alleging theft and harassment. Credit...Laura Boushnak for The New York Times

By Justin Scheck and

Justin Scheck, an international investigative reporter, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, the Ukraine correspondent, reported this article from Ukraine and around Europe.

March 25, 2023, 12:01 a.m. ET

They rushed to Ukraine by the thousands, many of them Americans who promised to bring military experience, money or supplies to the battleground of a righteous war. Hometown newspapers hailed their commitment, and donors backed them with millions of dollars.

Now, after a year of combat, many of these homespun groups of volunteers are fighting with themselves and undermining the war effort. Some have wasted money or stolen valor. Others have cloaked themselves in charity while also trying to profit off the war, records show.

One retired Marine lieutenant colonel from Virginia is the focus of a U.S. federal investigation into the potentially illegal export of military technology. A former Army soldier arrived in Ukraine only to turn traitor and defect to Russia. A Connecticut man who lied



about his military service has posted live updates from the battlefield — including his exact location — and boasted about his easy access to American weaponry. A former construction worker is hatching a plan to use fake passports to smuggle in fighters from Pakistan and Iran.

And in one of the more curious entanglements, one of the largest volunteer groups is embroiled in a power struggle involving an Ohio man who falsely claimed to have been both a U.S. Marine and a LongHorn Steakhouse assistant manager. The dispute also involves a years-old incident on Australian reality TV.

Such characters have a place in Ukraine's defense because of the arms-length role the United States has taken: The Biden administration sends weapons and money but not professional troops. That means people who would not be allowed anywhere near the battlefield in a U.S.-led war are active on the Ukrainian front — often with unchecked access to weapons and military equipment.

Many of the volunteers who hurried to Ukraine did so selflessly and acted with heroism. Some have lost their lives. Foreigners have rescued civilians, aided the wounded and fought ferociously alongside Ukrainians. Others raised money for crucial supplies. But in Europe's largest land war since 1945, the do-it-yourself approach does not discriminate between trained volunteers and those who lack the skills or discipline to assist effectively.

Members of an experienced unit that included volunteers from the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia in Bakhmut in December. Foreigners have rescued civilians, aided the wounded, raised money and fought alongside

Ukrainians. Credit...Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

The New York Times reviewed more than 100 pages of documents from inside volunteer groups and interviewed more than 30 volunteers, fighters, fund-raisers, donors and American and Ukrainian officials. Some spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

The interviews and research reveal a series of deceptions, mistakes and squabbles that have hindered the volunteer drive that began after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, when President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called for help. "Every friend of Ukraine who wants to join Ukraine in defending

the country, please come over," he said. "We will give you weapons."

Thousands answered the call. Some joined military groups like the International Legion, which Ukraine formed for foreign fighters. Others took roles in support or fund-raising. With Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, under attack, there was little time for vetting arrivals. So people with problematic pasts, including checkered or fabricated military records, became entrenched in the Legion and a constellation of other volunteer groups.

Asked about these problems, the Ukrainian military did not address specific issues but did say it was on guard because Russian agents regularly tried to infiltrate volunteer groups. "We investigated such cases and handed them over to law enforcement agencies," said Andriy Cherniak, a representative for Ukrainian military intelligence.

### **'A Million Lies'**

One of the best-known Americans on the battlefield is James Vasquez. Days after the invasion, Mr. Vasquez, a Connecticut home-improvement contractor, announced he was leaving for Ukraine. His local newspaper told the tale of a former U.S. Army staff sergeant who left behind his job and family and picked up a rifle and a rucksack on the front line.

### **The State of the War**

- **A Morale-Boosting Trip:** Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, made a rare and defiant trip to the Bakhmut area, which has become a potent symbol of Ukrainian resistance.
- **Xi's Visit to Russia:** President Vladimir Putin of Russia welcomed Xi Jinping, China's top leader, in Moscow during a state visit carefully choreographed to project unity. The two leaders declared an enduring economic partnership, reinforcing their shared opposition to American dominance.
- **Crimea:** The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014, has become an increasingly attractive target for Kyiv.
- **A Crime in Progress:** The International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Putin over the forcible deportation of

Ukrainian children highlights a practice that the Kremlin has not concealed and says will continue.

Since then, he has posted battlefield videos online, at least once broadcasting his unit's precise location to everyone, including the enemy. He used his story to solicit donations. "I was in Kuwait during Desert Storm, and I was in Iraq after 9/11," Mr. Vasquez said in a fund-raising video. He added, "This is a whole different animal."

Mr. Vasquez, in fact, was never deployed to Kuwait, Iraq or anywhere else, a Pentagon spokeswoman said. He specialized in fuel and electrical repairs. And he left the Army Reserve not as a sergeant as he claimed, but as a private first class, one of the Army's lowest ranks.

A screen grab of a fund-raising video showing James Vasquez. Still, Mr. Vasquez had easy access to weapons, including American rifles. Where did they come from? "I'm not exactly sure," Mr. Vasquez said in a text message. The rifles, he added, were "brand-new, out of the box and we have plenty." He also tweeted that he should not have to worry about international rules of war while in Ukraine.

He fought alongside Da Vinci's Wolves, a Ukrainian far-right battalion, until this week, when The Times asked about his false military service claims. He immediately deactivated his Twitter account and said he might leave Ukraine because authorities discovered he was fighting without a required military contract. Mr. Vasquez said he had been misrepresenting his military record for decades. He acknowledged being kicked out of the Army but would not talk publicly about why. "I had to tell a million lies to get ahead," Mr. Vasquez said in an interview. "I didn't realize it was going to come to this."

### **Public Quarrels**

The International Legion, hastily formed by the Ukrainian government, spent 10 minutes or less checking each volunteer's background early in the war, one Legion official said. So a Polish fugitive who had been jailed in Ukraine for weapon violations got a position leading troops. Soldiers told The Kyiv Independent that he misappropriated supplies, harassed women and threatened his soldiers.

Ukrainian officials initially boasted of 20,000 potential Legion volunteers, but far fewer actually enlisted. Currently, there are around 1,500 members in the organization, say people with knowledge of the Legion.

Some are experienced fighters working as part of the Defense Intelligence of Ukraine.

But there have been high-profile problems. A former Army private first class, John McIntyre, was ejected from the Legion for bad behavior. Mr. McIntyre defected to Russia and recently appeared on state-run television, which said he provided military intelligence to Moscow.

Internal documents show that the Legion is struggling.

Recruitment has stagnated. The Washington-based Counter Extremism Project wrote in March that the Legion and affiliated groups "continue to feature individuals widely seen as unfit to perform their duties."

Malcolm Nance, a former Navy cryptologist and MSNBC commentator, arrived in Ukraine last year and made a plan to bring order and discipline to the Legion. Instead, he became enmeshed in the chaos.

Malcolm Nance in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv last year. He is a counterterrorism expert and former MSNBC analyst who joined Ukraine's legion of foreign fighters. Credit...Finbarr O'Reilly for The New York Times

Mr. Nance, whose TV appearances have made him one of the most visible Americans supporting Ukraine, was an experienced military operator. He drafted a code of honor for the organization and, by all accounts, donated equipment.

What we consider before using anonymous sources. Do the sources know the information? What's their motivation for telling us? Have they proved reliable in the past? Can we corroborate the information? Even with these questions satisfied, The Times uses anonymous sources as a last resort. The reporter and at least one editor know the identity of the source.

Learn more about our process.

Today, Mr. Nance is involved in a messy, distracting power struggle. Often, that plays out on Twitter, where Mr. Nance taunted one former ally as "fat" and an associate of "a verified con artist."



He accused a pro-Ukraine fund-raising group of fraud, providing no evidence. After arguing with two Legion administrators, Mr. Nance wrote a "counterintelligence" report trying to get them fired. Central to that report is an accusation that one Legion official, Emese Abigail Fayk, fraudulently tried to buy a house on an Australian reality TV show with money she didn't have. He labeled her "a potential Russian spy," offering no evidence. Ms. Fayk denied the accusations and remains with the Legion. Mr. Nance said that as a member of the Legion with an intelligence background, when he developed concerns, he "felt an obligation to report this to Ukrainian counterintelligence." The dispute goes to the heart of who can be trusted to speak for and raise money for the Legion.

Mr. Nance has left Ukraine but continues fund-raising with a new group of allies. One of them, Ben Lackey, is a former Legion member. He told his fellow volunteers that he was once a Marine and wrote on LinkedIn that he had most recently been an assistant manager at LongHorn Steakhouse. In fact, the Pentagon said he had no military experience (and he worked as a server, the steakhouse said).

In an interview, Mr. Lackey said that he lied about being a U.S. Marine so he could join the Legion.

With Legion growth stalling, Ryan Routh, a former construction worker from Greensboro, N.C., is seeking recruits from among Afghan soldiers who fled the Taliban. Mr. Routh, who spent several months in Ukraine last year, said he planned to move them, in some cases illegally, from Pakistan and Iran to Ukraine. He said dozens had expressed interest.

"We can probably purchase some passports through Pakistan since it's such a corrupt country," he said in an interview from Washington.

It is not clear if he has succeeded, but one former Afghan soldier said he had been contacted and was interested in fighting if it meant leaving Iran, where he was living illegally.

### **Misdirected Donations**

Grady Williams, a 65-year-old retired engineer with no military experience and a methamphetamine conviction from 2019, was a volunteer tour guide at Ronald Reagan's Santa Barbara ranch when he heard Mr. Zelensky's plea for volunteers.

"I shot rifles since I was 13," he said in an interview. "I had no excuse to say, 'Well, I shouldn't go.'"

He said he flew to Poland, hitchhiked to Ukraine and took a train to Kyiv. He bumped into two Americans in military-looking gear.

"They said 'Dude, come with us,'" he said.

The volunteers brought Mr. Williams to a base near the front and gave him a gun. Days later, he said, he was nearly blown up while fighting alongside Ukrainian soldiers from a trench near Bucha. Within a week, the military realized that he had not registered to fight and sent him back to Kyiv.

From there, he took a circuitous path that ended in raising money for volunteers from the Republic of Georgia. He raised about \$16,000, telling donors their money would buy electric motorcycles for fighters. But the Georgians kicked him out after he got into a conflict with another volunteer. He said he spent about \$6,900 of the contributions on down payments for motorbikes and the rest on his travel and other expenses.

Grady Williams in his garage in Santa Barbara, Calif., last month.

"I shot rifles since I was 13," he said of his decision to go to Ukraine. "I had no excuse to say, 'Well, I shouldn't go.'"

Credit...David Butow for The New York Times

He has since linked up with a new group, which he said promised him command of a motorcycle unit if he raised enough money. So he moved this month to Odesa, Ukraine, he said, and expects to deliver a single motorbike soon.

Examples of wasted money in the hands of well-intentioned people are common. Mriya Aid, a group led by an active-duty Canadian lieutenant colonel, spent around \$100,000 from donors on high-tech U.S.-style night-vision devices. They ended up being less-effective Chinese models, internal documents show.

"We experienced a problem with the night vision," said Lubomyr Chabursky, a volunteer on Mriya Aid's leadership team. But he said the purchase made up only 2 percent of the group's total expenditures.

Earlier this year, the Mozart Group, which two former Marines established to help Ukraine, disbanded after one sued the other, alleging theft and harassment.

### **Absent Paper Trail**

Last spring, a volunteer group called Ripley's Heroes said it spent approximately \$63,000 on night-vision and thermal optics. Some of the equipment was subject to American export restrictions because, in the wrong hands, it could give enemies a battlefield advantage.

Frontline volunteers said Ripley's delivered the equipment to Ukraine without required documentation listing the actual buyers and recipients. Recently, federal authorities began investigating the shipments, U.S. officials said.

In his defense, the group's founder, a retired U.S. Marine named Lt. Col. Hunter Ripley Rawlings IV, provided deal documents to The Times. But those records show that, just as the volunteers said, Ripley's was not disclosed to the State Department as the buyer.

A photograph of Lt. Col. Hunter Ripley Rawlings IV from his biography on the Marines' official website.

Ripley's says it has raised over \$1 million, some of it thanks to the former Connecticut contractor, Mr. Vasquez, who claimed to be the group's chief strategy officer and promoted Ripley's to his online audience.

Ripley's spent around \$25,000 on remote-control reconnaissance cars last year, but they never arrived, shipping records show. Colonel Rawlings said Polish authorities held them up over legal concerns.

Colonel Rawlings has said that his group is awaiting American nonprofit status. But he has not revealed his spending or proof of a nonprofit application to The Times or to donors who have asked. So it is not clear where the money is going. "I believed these guys," said Shaun Stants, who said he organized a fundraiser in October in Pittsburgh but was never shown the financial records he asked for. "And they took me for a fool."

Corporate records in Poland and the U.S. show that Colonel Rawlings also started a for-profit company called Iron Forge. In an interview, he said he expected his charity and others to pay Iron Forge for transportation, meaning donor money would be used to finance his private venture. But he said no conflict of interest existed because Iron Forge would ultimately send money back to the charities. Details are being worked out, he said.



In the days after The Times approached Mr. Vasquez and others, members of the squabbling groups — Ripley's, the Legion, the dissident Legion members and more — escalated their feud. They accused one another of misappropriating funds and lying about their credentials.

After a former ally turned on Mr. Vasquez, Mr. Nance came to his defense.

"James was NOT fake, he was troubled," Mr. Nance said on Twitter. "He did a lot for Ukraine but has challenges to face."

Najim Rahim contributed reporting from Berkeley, Calif., and Maria Varenikova and Daria Mitiuk from Kyiv, Ukraine.

The New York Times · by Thomas Gibbons-Neff · March 25, 2023

#### ***4. An Anxious Asia Arms for a War It Hopes to Prevent***

The actions of China and north Korea are driving military changes in Asia.

Japan's evolution of its military structure will be one of the most important developments resulting from "strategic competition" in Asia.

Photos at the link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/25/world/asia/asia-china-military-war.html>

### **An Anxious Asia Arms for a War It Hopes to Prevent**

**By Damien Cave** **Photographs and Video by Chang W. Lee**

Reporting from Tinian and Guam in the Northern Mariana Islands

• March 25, 2023

The New York Times · by Damien Cave · March 25, 2023

A plane departing Tinian Island during military exercises.

Doubts about both China and the United States are driving an arms race in the Indo-Pacific with echoes of World War II and new levels of risk.

A plane departing Tinian Island during military exercises. Credit...

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By

Photographs and Video by Chang W. Lee

Reporting from Tinian and Guam in the Northern Mariana Islands

• March 25, 2023

The tiny island of Tinian was the launch point for American planes carrying atomic bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Now a new runway is being carved from the jungle, just south of World War II ruins inked with mildew.

And on a blustery February morning a few hundred yards away at Tinian's civilian airport, American airmen refueled Japanese fighter jets during a military exercise using more airstrips, islands and Japanese planes than the two enemies-turned-allies have ever mustered for drills in the North Pacific.

"We're not concerned with the past, we are concerned with the future," said Col. Inadome Satoru, commander of Japan's 9th Air Wing Flight Group. "We can ensure stability by showing strength." Asia and the Pacific are steering into an anxious, well-armed moment with echoes of old conflicts and immediate risks. Rattled by China's military buildup and territorial threats — along with Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and doubts about U.S. resolve — nations across the region are bolstering defense budgets, joint training, weapons manufacturing and combat-ready infrastructure.

For decades, Asia's rise made it an economic engine for the world, tying China and other regional manufacturing hubs to Europe and America. The focus was trade. Now, fear is setting in, with China and the United States locked in a volatile strategic contest and with diplomatic relations at their worst point in 50 years.

This week's meeting in Moscow between China's leader, Xi Jinping, and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia pointed to the powerful forces lining up against the West. The appearance of Japan's prime minister, Fumio Kishida, in Ukraine's capital at the same time further emphasized that one deadly conflict can quickly become knotted up with power struggles thousands of miles away.

Japanese troops on Tinian during Cope North, a multilateral exercise that sent jets to Tinian using 10 airstrips on seven islands with Japanese, Australian and French partners. American airmen unloading equipment on one of Tinian's World War II-era runways.

Mr. Xi has made his intentions clear. He aims to achieve a "national rejuvenation" that would include displacing the United States as the dominant rule-setter in the region, controlling access to the South China Sea, and bringing Taiwan — a self-governing island that China sees as lost territory — under Beijing's control.

In response, many of China's neighbors — and the United States — are turning to hard power, accelerating the most significant arms race in Asia since World War II.

On March 13, North Korea launched cruise missiles from a submarine for the first time. The same day, Australia unveiled a \$200 billion plan to build nuclear-propelled submarines with America and Britain that would make it only the seventh nation to have them.

Japan, after decades of pacifism, is also gaining offensive capabilities unmatched since the 1940s with U.S. Tomahawk missiles. India has conducted training with Japan and Vietnam. Malaysia is buying South Korean combat aircraft. American officials are trying to amass a giant weapons stockpile in Taiwan to make it a bristling "porcupine" that could head off a Chinese invasion, and the Philippines is planning for expanded runways and ports to host its largest American military presence in decades.

None of this may be enough to match China. Its own surging arsenal now includes "monster" coast guard cutters along with a rapidly increasing supply of missiles and nuclear warheads.

**Better Understand the Relations Between China and the U.S. The two nations are jockeying for influence on the global stage, maneuvering for advantages on land, in the economy and in cyberspace.**

- Chinese Spy Balloon: An exclusive analysis of satellite imagery traces the journey of a spy balloon that triggered a

diplomatic crisis between Beijing and Washington in February.

- Submarine Deal: President Biden took his most aggressive step yet to counter China's military expansion in the Asia-Pacific region, formally unveiling plans with Britain and Australia to develop and deploy nuclear-powered attack submarines.
- Industrial Espionage: The downfall of a Chinese intelligence agent reveals the astonishing depth of Chinese efforts to steal American trade secrets and intellectual property.
- Support for Russia: As China sends Russia large volumes of goods that either civilians or the military could use, U.S. officials have vowed to crack down on such shipments, but that has proved hard to police.

In flashpoint after flashpoint over the past year, China's military has also engaged in provocative or dangerous behavior: deploying a record number of military aircraft to threaten Taiwan, and firing missiles into the waters of Japan's exclusive economic zone for the first time last August; sending soldiers with spiked batons to dislodge an Indian Army outpost in December, escalating battles over the 2,100-mile border between the two countries; and last month, temporarily blinding the crew of a Filipino patrol boat with a laser, and flying dangerously close to a U.S. Navy plane, part of its aggressive push to claim authority in the South China Sea.

Many countries hope that stronger militaries will discourage China from going any further, but the buildup also reflects declining confidence in the United States. The war in Ukraine has drawn down U.S. political capital and material support. In many Asian capitals, there are doubts about the American military's ability to adapt and stop China's advance, and worries about what U.S. politics might produce — the dreaded nightmare of an overreaction to Chinese provocations, or abandonment with a retreat.

Japanese pilots refueling a F-15 fighter jet at the Tinian airport.

A Japanese mechanic checking the jets between flights.

Asia's security calculations ultimately point to an unsettled and ill-tempered global order, shaped by one-man rule in a more militarized China with slowing economic growth, polarized politics

in a heavily indebted America, bolder aggression from Russia and North Korea, and demands for greater influence from the still-developing giants of Indonesia and India.

"The balance of power is shifting so rapidly, and it's not just China," said Shivshankar Menon, India's national security adviser from 2010 to 2014.

"There will be higher risks," he added, "in a time of change."

### **China's Military Transformation**

The Indo-Pacific holds 60 percent of Earth's population, covers two-thirds of the planet and accounts for around 65 percent of global gross domestic product.

In 2000, military spending in Asia and the Pacific accounted for 17.5 percent of worldwide defense expenditures, according to SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. In 2021, it accounted for 27.7 percent (with North Korea excluded, making it an undercount) and since then, spending has shot up further.

China's growth has been a major driver of that increase. It now spends about \$300 billion a year on its military, according to SIPRI, up from \$22 billion in 2000, adjusted for inflation — an expenditure second only to the \$800 billion defense budget of the United States. And while U.S. military spending covers a global network, China has focused on Asia, rolling out hardware to project power and intimidate its neighbors.

China's navy has already outstripped the U.S. Navy, reaching 360 battle force ships in 2020, compared with the U.S. total of 297, according to the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence. In 2021, China fired off 135 ballistic missiles for testing, more than the rest of the world combined outside war zones, according to the U.S. Defense Department.

Beijing's nuclear arsenal is smaller than those of the United States and Russia, but here, too, the gap is starting to narrow. By 2030, the Defense Department has estimated, China's supply of over 400 nuclear warheads is likely to expand to 1,000. It already has more land-based launchers than the United States, leading some to call for the Pentagon not just to modernize its own technology but also to add to its nuclear stockpile of 3,708 available warheads.



American and Japanese airmen training on runway repair with rapid-setting concrete.

The Guam Remote Ground Terminal at Andersen Air Force Base. The site does satellite surveillance in the region.

Though many of China's weapons are less advanced than America's, that is starting to shift with fighter jets and missiles.

The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency's chief scientist told Congress this month that China now appears to have the world's leading arsenal of hypersonic weapons, which can fly at several times the speed of sound and be maneuvered in flight, making them much harder to intercept with missile defense systems.

China's DF-41 missile circumnavigated the globe in 2021.

The Dong Feng-26 missile can be armed with a conventional or nuclear warhead, and it is called "the Guam Killer" by Chinese media because it can reach American military installations on the island.

Beyond raw capacity, Mr. Xi's willingness to brandish the People's Liberation Army on disputed borderlands from northern India to the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea has magnified anxieties, as has China's new naval base in Cambodia and recent security agreement with the Solomon Islands.

But more than anything else, growing hostilities with the United States have set the region on edge.

Raising the level of concern: recent statements from U.S. commanders suggesting that war could arrive by 2027, or even 2025, and the combative comments of China's leaders. Qin Gang, the Chinese foreign minister, warned this month that conflict between his nation and the United States was inevitable if Washington "continues to go down the wrong road."

Mr. Xi also called out what he described as a U.S.-led campaign to "contain, encircle and suppress" China, telling Chinese officials they must "have the courage to fight."

### **Defense Interdependence**

Many countries have concluded that to restrain the Chinese Communist Party and gain leverage with the United States or other nations, they must show they can and will counterattack if needed.

"In Australia, in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and now the Philippines has given the U.S. more access. Why?" said

Bilahari Kausikan, a former permanent secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Because China has been unnecessarily aggressive."

Japan and India were among the first to sound the alarm. In 2006, they started sharing security assessments over concerns about China's efforts to expand airstrips and ports across South and East Asia, an effort that would later include building military bases on islands and reefs that other nations claim as their own. India and Japan have since signed several agreements that typify the region's interlocking defense plans. One deal granted access to each other's bases for supplies and services; another eased regulations to encourage cooperation in military manufacturing. So far this year, the two countries have conducted naval training together and their first-ever joint fighter exercise.

Both countries are also expanding cooperation with the United States, while ensuring they are not too dependent. Mr. Menon, the former Indian diplomat, called it a natural "balancing reaction" — signaling resistance to China, stopping short of collective defense.

The United States is also seeking to upgrade how it might fight with a focus on coordinated interdependence.

American military personnel onboard a French CN-235 transport plane in the Northern Mariana Islands during Cope North.

Cope North used 10 runways on seven islands, the most ever. Now that many kinds of missiles from China and North Korea can hit big American bases both in nearby Japan and in Guam, every American service branch has begun aiming for a dispersed approach in the Indo-Pacific — "the priority theater" for global security, according to the Defense Department, which has stationed 300,000 troops in the region.

To minimize risk and maximize deterrence, U.S. officials have been hunting for real estate. The Philippines, Japan, Australia, Palau, Papua New Guinea and U.S. territories across the Pacific are all working with Defense Department officials on expanding military access and facilities, often with the U.S. proposing investments in shared infrastructure.

Cope North, the multilateral exercise that sent jets to Tinian, hinted at that more networked future, using 10 airstrips on seven islands with Japanese, Australian and French partners (from



Tahiti). It also included new dangers: When Japan's F-15s landed, the day's training included a simulated response to an enemy missile strike.

"Can the U.S. go it alone?" asked Col. Jared Paslay of the U.S. Air Force, the joint integration team leader for Pacific Air Forces. "I would prefer not to."

Interviewed at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, he described America's ability to make friends as an important "asymmetric advantage" that raises complex questions.

How much fuel and maintenance equipment should be pre-positioned in remote locations? Where else should the United States negotiate for airport access and the improvements needed for warplanes? How much sharing of weapons systems increases deterrence without adding to risks of conflict?

Many countries also worry that working with the United States could make them a target of Chinese military or economic punishment, and in exchange they are requesting more trade and training from Washington — demands that Congress has failed to address.

Colonel Paslay, a foreign affairs specialist who speaks Japanese, said the United States may soon find that Japan is moving faster to fill gaps and pull allies along. Japan is now the largest bilateral donor of aid in Asia. More significantly, the country's government is pushing to reinterpret the Constitution it adopted in 1947.

Japan embraced pacifism after terrorizing Asia and losing World War II, but now, like Germany, the country is rearming. Japan recently agreed to raise military spending to 2 percent of GDP, or by 60 percent, over the next five years, which would give it the third-largest defense budget in the world.

American, Australian and Japanese military medical teams during a drill at Andersen Air Force Base.

Teams from the three nations collaborating during a joint drill.

"We were an excessively pacifist nation for the past several decades," said Kuni Miyake, a former high-ranking Japanese diplomat. "Now we are becoming normal."

Some American analysts argue that Japan should do more, faster, but its assertiveness has already stirred up old animosities. China, North Korea and Russia have criticized its increased military spending. South Korea, which endured brutal

Japanese colonization from 1910 to 1945, has its own concerns, with some analysts in Seoul warning against allowing Japan to set the regional agenda even as the two countries' leaders have been seeking to repair relations.

Farther south, Australia's AUKUS deal with the United States and Britain to acquire nuclear-powered submarines has also angered Indonesia, which has concerns about proliferation, and has increased the closeness of its military ties to China.

American officials acknowledge that tensions across the region are rising alongside military budgets. But they say they believe the glue of shared distress about China will hold. And locations like Tinian are starting to play a bigger role as rallying points.

During a break from flying, Capt. Shotaro Iwamoto, 37, one of the Japanese F-15 pilots, said he had made a "meaningful visit" to where the atomic bombs that killed tens of thousands in Japan were loaded onto American planes. He came away determined to work harder on his English so he could communicate more quickly and easily with American allies in the air.

Senior commanders from the United States, Japan and Australia also made a shared trip to the area, where they touched the cracked tarmac and stared at the concrete pits where the giant atomic weapons were attached to B-29 Superfortress bombers. For many, the horror of the last world war and the threats of the present seemed to rise like heat from the island's ragged old runways.

"If we are not a credible force to deter aggressors, then potentially we'll end up in a circumstance where we might have to consider something like that again," said Group Capt. Robert Graham of the Royal Australian Air Force. "We hope never to be there."

One of the pits on Tinian where the atomic bombs were loaded onto American planes before being dropped on Japan during World War II.

Chris Buckley contributed reporting from Taipei, Taiwan.

The New York Times · by Damien Cave · March 25, 2023

##### ***5. Senators Urge Biden to Send Evidence of Russian War Crimes to the I.C.C.***

**Excerpts:**

Since the International Criminal Court was established a generation ago as a standing venue to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, the American government has had a distrustful relationship with it, fearing that it might be used to prosecute Americans.

Administrations of both parties have taken the position that the court should not exercise jurisdiction over citizens of countries that did not sign the treaty that created it — among them Russia and the United States — even if the alleged war crimes took place in countries that did sign, like Ukraine or Afghanistan. In the court's early days, Congress barred the U.S. government from helping its investigators in various ways. But the broad desire in Washington to hold Mr. Putin and others in his chain of command accountable has led to a thaw, and lawmakers included a provision in a large appropriations bill late last year that creates an exception, allowing the United States to assist the court's investigations arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to officials familiar with internal deliberations, however, the Pentagon has continued to object to sharing evidence with the court, arguing that doing so would create a precedent that could make it easier for the court to someday try to prosecute Americans.

### **Senators Urge Biden to Send Evidence of Russian War Crimes to the I.C.C.**

The New York Times · by Charlie Savage · March 24, 2023

Despite Pentagon resistance, a bipartisan group stressed that Congress had voted to legalize support for the court's Ukraine war investigations.

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Ukrainian security forces said this room, pictured in November, was used by Russian forces as a torture chamber in a makeshift prison in the city of Kherson, Ukraine. Credit...Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

By

- March 24, 2023

A bipartisan group of senators on Friday asked President Biden to direct the U.S. government to share evidence about Russian war crimes in Ukraine with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, despite the Pentagon's resistance to such a move.

In a letter to Mr. Biden obtained by The New York Times, the senators — including Richard Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, and Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, the chair and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, respectively — noted that in December, Congress had changed a law to allow greater cooperation with the court's investigations arising from Russia's war in Ukraine, and said it was time for the government to do so.

"Last year's bipartisan congressional action to enhance that support was done in collaboration with your administration to balance all perspectives on the U.S. relationship with the I.C.C.," the senators wrote. "Yet, months later, as the I.C.C. is working to build cases against Russian officials, including Putin himself, the United States reportedly has not yet shared key evidence that could aid in these prosecutions."

The letter came a week after the court issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and another top official in his administration, accusing them of orchestrating the abductions and deportations of thousands of children from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

The arrest warrants have heightened attention to an impasse inside the Biden administration, first reported by The Times, over whether the United States should transfer evidence gathered by intelligence agencies about the abductions and other alleged war crimes to the International Criminal Court.

### **The State of the War**

- A Morale-Boosting Trip: Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, made a rare and defiant trip to the Bakhmut area, which has become a potent symbol of Ukrainian resistance.
- Xi's Visit to Russia: President Vladimir Putin of Russia welcomed Xi Jinping, China's top leader, in Moscow during a state visit carefully choreographed to project unity. The two leaders declared an enduring economic



partnership, reinforcing their shared opposition to American dominance.

- **Crimea:** The Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014, has become an increasingly attractive target for Kyiv.
- **A Crime in Progress:** The International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Putin over the forcible deportation of Ukrainian children highlights a practice that the Kremlin has not concealed and says will continue.

"Despite the urgent need to hold the perpetrators of atrocities accountable, as evidenced by the I.C.C.'s arrest warrant for Putin, recent reporting suggests that your administration has not yet used this new authority to provide much-needed assistance to the I.C.C.'s efforts," the senators wrote.

The letter was also signed by Senators Robert Menendez, the New Jersey Democrat who chairs the Foreign Relations Committee; Sheldon Whitehouse, the Rhode Island Democrat who chairs the Budget Committee; Thom Tillis, Republican of North Carolina; and Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut.

Since the International Criminal Court was established a generation ago as a standing venue to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, the American government has had a distrustful relationship with it, fearing that it might be used to prosecute Americans.

Administrations of both parties have taken the position that the court should not exercise jurisdiction over citizens of countries that did not sign the treaty that created it — among them Russia and the United States — even if the alleged war crimes took place in countries that did sign, like Ukraine or Afghanistan.

In the court's early days, Congress barred the U.S. government from helping its investigators in various ways. But the broad desire in Washington to hold Mr. Putin and others in his chain of command accountable has led to a thaw, and lawmakers included a provision in a large appropriations bill late last year that creates an exception, allowing the United States to assist the court's investigations arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to officials familiar with internal deliberations, however, the Pentagon has continued to object to sharing



evidence with the court, arguing that doing so would create a precedent that could make it easier for the court to someday try to prosecute Americans.

Other parts of the government — like the State and Justice Departments — want to transfer the evidence, the officials said, and Mr. Biden has not acted to resolve the impasse.

The White House has emphasized that it supports efforts to hold Russia accountable for war crimes, including providing assistance to Ukrainian prosecutors, but has not publicly addressed the internal dispute over the war-crimes court at The Hague. A National Security Council spokesman declined to offer an additional comment this week.

"Knowing of your support for the important cause of accountability in Ukraine, we urge you to move forward expeditiously with support to the I.C.C.'s work so that Putin and others around him know in no uncertain terms that accountability and justice for their crimes are forthcoming," the senators wrote.

The New York Times · by Charlie Savage · March 24, 2023

#### ***6. Ukraine's army is now the best in the world, retired general says***

##### **Excerpt:**

"And my view is that the Ukrainians are probably the best army in the world at the moment," Ryan said. "And it's not probably, they are. They are the best army in the world. They're the most experienced at the modern warfare, they've demonstrated that over the last 13 months.

#### **Ukraine's army is now the best in the world, retired general says**

Newsweek · by Matthew Impelli · March 23, 2023

The Ukrainian army is currently the best in the world amid their ongoing war with Russia, Mick Ryan, a retired major general in the Australian army, said this week.

While speaking with the Kyiv Post on Thursday, Ryan talked about the different aspects of Ukraine's armed forces and how they've used a number of capabilities, like missile defenses, drone defenses and frontline combat troops, in their war against Russia.

"And my view is that the Ukrainians are probably the best army in the world at the moment," Ryan said. "And it's not probably, they are. They are the best army in the world. They're the most experienced at the modern warfare, they've demonstrated that over the last 13 months.

"Now they've shed a lot of blood and lost a lot of young men and women and older men and women, to be honest, to learn the many lessons they've learned, but they are the best army in the world. There is much that we can all learn from them."

A Ukrainian military member drives while sitting atop an armored vehicle on a dirt road on February 26, 2023, in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine. On March 23, 2023, retired Australian Army Major General Mick Ryan said that the Ukrainian army is the best in the world right now. Yan Dobronosov/Global Images Ukraine/Getty Images

The comments by Ryan come amid the ongoing war that began when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the "special military operation" in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Ryan told the Kyiv Post that there are several "elements" to the Ukrainian army.

"The territorial defense force, you've got the professional army which is made of the old soldiers and the newly mobilized soldiers," he said. "There appears to be a lot of independent units.

"You have foreign troops as well and bringing that all together is a pretty big challenge in an army that has expanded quickly. And even the very best generals would be challenged by that kind of undertaking and to do it during wartime even makes it harder."

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic & International Studies International Security Program, told Newsweek on Thursday that "Ryan is absolutely right in emphasizing the human elements in warfare, particularly training and leadership. And there's no doubt that the Ukrainians have more recent combat experience than any other country other than Russia. As Ryan points out several times, the Ukrainians are better than the Russians. However, that does not make them the best army in the world."

Cancian went on to cite different training that the U.S. military goes through compared to the Ukrainian military, which received only "two or three weeks of training before heading into combat."

"Every Marine recruit receives 22 weeks of training," he said.

"The Ukrainians are sending two battalions through combat training in Europe. In a typical year, the U.S. Army sends about 60 battalions to similar training [20 brigades to the combat training centers such as NTC and JRTC]. Most Ukrainian commanders have shown themselves to be highly skilled on the battlefield but likely lack the depth of training needed to execute complex joint maneuvers."

On Thursday, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine provided an update on battles near the Eastern border. According to the update, the Security Service of Ukraine special forces group "canceled" 22 Russian targets: 14 tanks, four BMP armored vehicles, "2 blindages with the opponent infantry," one mining machine and one warehouse with ammunition.

Another update from the General Staff calculated total Russian losses since the start of the war at more than 3,000 tanks, 6,898 armored vehicles, 305 planes and aircraft, 290 helicopters and 273 "anti-aircraft warfare systems."

Newsweek reached out to the ministry of foreign affairs in Russia and Ukraine via email for comment.

Newsweek · by Matthew Impelli · March 23, 2023

### ***7. What Big Shifts in East Asian Geopolitics Mean for the World***

#### **Conclusion:**

On the surface, all these stories might look like more of the same for a region in which it's becoming harder for powerful countries to balance their economic and security interests. But China has never before auditioned for such an ambitious role on the global stage. Russia is increasingly desperate for any form of Chinese support against the West. Japan's government is pursuing a much more assertive foreign policy than in the past. And South Korea and Japan are becoming much more concerned about China's intentions and North Korea's growing capabilities.

**What Big Shifts in East Asian Geopolitics Mean for the World**

TIME · by Ian Bremmer · March 24, 2023

The past two weeks have featured a remarkable series of events that highlight big shifts in the geopolitics of East Asia. Each of them casts light on the opportunities and risks shaping that region and the world.

**Xi in Moscow**

Most of the news coverage has gone to Xi Jinping's visit with Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Images of the Chinese and Russian presidents exchanging warm words, pledging to expand and deepen their commercial ties, and raising glasses together provided the embattled Putin with something he badly needs: the visible support of a powerful friend willing to embrace a man recently indicted by the International Criminal Court.

Beyond the show, Putin appears to have gotten little of substance from this meeting. We don't know what the two men said privately, but Xi made no public call for ceasefire or issue threats to back Russia's military if (when) a Chinese-sponsored compromise is not accepted by Kyiv and its NATO backers. The joint statement they agreed to made clear they were not establishing the "military-political alliance" that would quickly change the balance of power on the Ukrainian battlefield.

China benefits strongly from trade with Russia (and now with oil imports at a significant discount), but Xi is also deeply sympathetic with Putin's drive to challenge Western (especially U.S.) dominance of the international system. That's why the two leaders are closer than any time since they toasted a friendship without limits three weeks before the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—and why we must continue to watch Xi's evolving approach to Putin's war.

**Kishida in Kyiv**

The near-simultaneous visit by Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to Ukraine was also striking. Kishida had to make this trip. Japan will host a G7 summit in Hiroshima in May, and he was the only G7 leader who had yet to visit Ukraine. But there are several reasons why this stop was still a big deal. It was the first visit by a Japanese prime minister to any country at war since World War II, and Kishida didn't limit his trip to Kyiv; he also went to the site



of a mass grave in the city of Bucha to pay respects to Ukrainian victims of alleged Russian war crimes.

Most importantly, the timing of the visit, which coincided with Xi's trip to Moscow, made for a bold statement. His March 21 stop in Bucha, where he pronounced himself "outraged by the cruelty" of Russian soldiers, highlighted the formal charge that Putin is a war criminal within hours of Xi lifting a glass of champagne to toast his Russian friend.

It's a sign that Japan's prime minister intends to be more diplomatically assertive and outspoken than most of his predecessors. That said, given China's importance for Japan's economy, he will modulate his criticism and focus it mainly on Putin.

### **South Korea and Japan break new ground**

In another sign of Japan's more ambitious foreign policy, Kishida's trip to Ukraine followed an important new agreement with South Korea. On March 16, he met with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol in Tokyo to announce a diplomatic breakthrough between the two countries that will end Japanese export controls against South Korea and normalize their military and intelligence-sharing relations. They have also restored shuttle diplomacy, which was broken off in 2011.

To get there, the two governments had to finally resolve a long dispute over compensatory payments to Korean victims of forced labor during Japan's wartime occupation. That finally became possible because both sides decided they had more to fear from the expansion of China's influence in East Asia and from potential North Korean aggression than domestic political benefit from keeping this controversy alive.

### **North Korea shakes a nuclear fist**

Speaking of North Korea, the Japan-South Korea agreement was announced just hours after an increasingly belligerent DPRK launched yet another intercontinental ballistic missile to protest both the South Korea-Japan meeting in Tokyo and ongoing US-South Korean joint military exercises. Last weekend, North Korea staged what it called a nuclear counter-attack simulation against South Korea and the United States. Then on March 22, it fired multiple cruise missiles off its east coast toward Japan.

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On the surface, all these stories might look like more of the same for a region in which it's becoming harder for powerful countries to balance their economic and security interests. But China has never before auditioned for such an ambitious role on the global stage. Russia is increasingly desperate for any form of Chinese support against the West. Japan's government is pursuing a much more assertive foreign policy than in the past. And South Korea and Japan are becoming much more concerned about China's intentions and North Korea's growing capabilities.

TIME · by Ian Bremmer · March 24, 2023

***8. China's Strategic Support Force Brings Hybrid Warfare to Space, Cyber, Politics***

**Excerpts:**

The author of "Long-Distance Operations," Jiang Yamin, was a senior colonel assigned as a researcher at the Academy of Military Sciences, the PLA's preeminent military studies and strategy institution, Wortzel told VOA. He said Jiang later was promoted to major general and served as deputy director of the military academy's Combat Theory and Regulations Research Department.

"Long-distance operations" is increasingly seen by observers as a fitting description of how Chinese agents, including the SSF, are waging political warfare in faraway lands, attempting to shape the political environment in each country and society in their favor.

David Panuelo, president of the Pacific island nation of Micronesia, recently accused China of waging exactly this type of warfare against his nation. In a letter addressed to fellow politicians in his nation, Panuelo laid out what The Economist described as "engrossing details" on how Beijing engaged in spying, bribery and a personal attack against him to try to force his government to support Chinese interests.

## **China's Strategic Support Force Brings Hybrid Warfare to Space, Cyber, Politics**

March 21, 2023 9:16 PM

UPDATE March 22, 2023 11:12 AM

Natalie Liu

voanews.com

Washington —

The Chinese spy balloon that drifted over the United States early this year bore the earmarks of an operation by China's Strategic Support Force (SSF), a little-known hybrid branch of the People's Liberation Army that incorporates elements of cyber, electronic, space and psychological warfare.

Founded on the last day of 2015 as part of an armed forces restructuring introduced early in the rule of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, the SSF has no exact counterpart in any other country, said Dean Cheng, a senior adviser on China at the U.S. Institute of Peace and longtime watcher of China's military.

"The Strategic Support Force brought together China's electronic war forces, Chinese network war forces, which include but is not limited to cyber, and elements of China's space forces. These have been in different bins, if you will, within the PLA," Cheng told VOA in a recent phone interview.

"Interestingly, it also brings in Base 311, which is responsible for political warfare," Cheng added.

Taken together, he said, "what you have is a force dedicated to making sure that the enemy's information flow is obstructed, and, at the same time, China's own information flow is left relatively unimpeded."

SEE ALSO:

## **Spy Balloon Lifts Veil on China's 'Near Space' Military Program**

Larry Wortzel, an authority on China, is a senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council and a frequent contributor to the U.S. Army War College's publications. He witnessed firsthand how China waged combined cyber and information warfare even before the SSF was launched.

"I've actually had a computer completely blanked out when I was writing and researching their space warfare capability," Wortzel

recalled. "Just black screen, the whole computer was really destroyed with a cyberattack; I had to buy a new computer." Fortunately, he still had all of his research data "because I keep all of my data offline," he said.

While Wortzel believes the attack on his computer was intended to keep some Chinese capabilities away from public notice, he said that is not always the case. "Sometimes they do want the outside world to know what they're doing," he said. "Because they want to either deter or give a warning to the U.S. and other countries: 'Look, this is what we're capable of, be careful.'"

SEE ALSO:

## **White House Voices Support for Bipartisan Push to Ban TikTok**

Wortzel compares the SSF to U.S. Cyber Command, National Security Agency, U.S. Space Force and U.S. Strategic Command "sort of wrapped in[to] one organization."

The SSF, Wortzel said, is trained to execute systemic attacks, noting that these planned attacks often involve gray zone warfare, including penetration of U.S. and allies' organizational structure and operating systems, with the aim of weakening them or bringing them down.

"Their new term is systems destruction warfare, or systems confrontation warfare." In other words, he explained, instead of having one force trying to attack another, "they recognized that whether it's Japan or the United States, we tend to organize systematically, where we have a command and control, we have intelligence and reconnaissance systems."

SEE ALSO:

## **Head of US Army Pacific Names Challenges Posed by Beijing**

In a study on the SSF published by the U.S. military's National Defense University in 2018, John Costello and Joe McReynolds wrote that the SSF was launched as part of a PLA revamp as Chinese authorities sought to pivot from land-based territorial defense to extended power projection in emerging domains and beyond their borders.

Wortzel said the new posture and strategy were foreshadowed in writings published by some of China's military strategists, including authors of a book published in the late 1990s titled "Unrestricted Warfare" and a later volume titled "Long-Distance Operations." One of the key ideas advanced in "Long-Distance Operations," Wortzel wrote in an analysis published by the U.S. Army War College, "is the need to target an adversary's homeland and bring the threat to an enemy's civilian population." SEE ALSO:

## **US Army Secretary Lays Out Strategy for War with China**

The author of "Long-Distance Operations," Jiang Yamin, was a senior colonel assigned as a researcher at the Academy of Military Sciences, the PLA's preeminent military studies and strategy institution, Wortzel told VOA. He said Jiang later was promoted to major general and served as deputy director of the military academy's Combat Theory and Regulations Research Department.

"Long-distance operations" is increasingly seen by observers as a fitting description of how Chinese agents, including the SSF, are waging political warfare in faraway lands, attempting to shape the political environment in each country and society in their favor.

David Panuelo, president of the Pacific island nation of Micronesia, recently accused China of waging exactly this type of warfare against his nation. In a letter addressed to fellow politicians in his nation, Panuelo laid out what The Economist described as "engrossing details" on how Beijing engaged in spying, bribery and a personal attack against him to try to force his government to support Chinese interests.

SEE ALSO:

## **Micronesia President Accuses China of 'Political Warfare'**

Most recently, Canadian security officials were reported to have warned the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that the Chinese government was seeking to influence the 2019 and 2021 general elections against parliamentary candidates it

did not like, including through disinformation campaigns in cities with large ethnic Chinese populations.

SEE ALSO:

## Canadian Official to Examine Chinese Election Interference

Political warfare is often referred to by the Chinese as intense but smokeless wars. The lyrics of a song presented with great fanfare on the 70th anniversary of the Communist takeover in China speak to the force's combined mission in space, as well as in stealth theaters:

If we must fight with our fist, then let us show them our iron fist  
If knives have to be pulled out, then we will be the tip of the knife  
Let our moves be those of the lethal and unexpected  
Let the barbarians be vanquished at the sight of our war banner  
Chasing dreams in the sky and beyond, and on stealth fronts  
Strategic Support Force - its mission is weighty as the mountain  
We are the tip of the knife, we are that iron fist  
Fighting decisive battles on frontiers of high altitude, seizing  
strategic vantage points  
On the road of building a strong military, heroes we are  
Who fight to win

SEE ALSO:

## US General Warns China Biggest Threat in Space

In a sign that the party is committed to expanding the SSF, state media played up a short recruitment film in January, highlighting 5,000 "civil" positions that needed to be filled with the SSF, among them engineering positions and posts in a special medical science center within the SSF, according to information later released by the PLA recruitment center.

McReynolds, who's been tracking the SSF, told VOA that he believed the ad was designed to better attract civilian technical talent to work with the PLA.

John Costello, a cyber and Asian security expert, wrote in an essay published by the Jamestown Foundation, that China "is committing itself completely to information warfare, foreign nations should take note and act accordingly."



SEE ALSO:

## US Experts Urge More Efforts to Thwart China's Acquisition of US Military Technology

It is also worth noting that China's newly appointed defense minister, Li Shangfu, served as the deputy commander of SSF when the force was first launched.

An earlier version of this article incorrectly attributed a quote from cyber and Asian security expert John Costello.

voanews.com

### *9. U.S. Military, Spy Agencies Differ on Threat From Afghanistan Militants*

## U.S. Military, Spy Agencies Differ on Threat From Afghanistan Militants

### Top general sees danger from ISIS-K within six months as others recognize only intent

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-spy-agencies-differ-on-threat-from-afghanistan-militants-d1a2635d>

By Gordon LuboldFollow

in Washington and Saeed ShahFollow  
in Pakistan

March 24, 2023 10:00 am ET

WASHINGTON—A top U.S. military commander says Islamic State groups operating inside Afghanistan could pose a threat to the West within six months, but U.S. intelligence agencies don't see the danger with the same urgency.

A classified intelligence assessment in December concluded that the threat from Islamic State's affiliate in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State-Khorasan, was growing, according to U.S. officials, nearly 18 months after President Biden ordered the complete withdrawal of all American troops from the country in August 2021. Gen. Erik Kurilla, the head of U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. troops in the region, says the Islamic State-Khorasan could pose a threat to American interests. The group seeks to expand its ranks and develop the capability to attack the West, and could act in concert with remnants of al Qaeda, he said.

"It is my commander's estimate that they can do an external operation against U.S. or Western interests abroad in under six months, with little or no warning," Gen. Kurilla said in a hearing last week.

Gen. Kurilla added that he believed an attack on the U.S. homeland would be much harder to do but remained an ultimate goal of the group. He named the particular strain of the group, the al-Sadiqi office, as the primary concern.

Gen. Erik Kurilla says the Islamic State-Khorasan operating inside Afghanistan aims to grow its ranks and develop the capability to attack the West.

PHOTO: ANDREA NOTTE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gen. Kurilla estimates about 2,000 ISIS-K fighters operate inside Afghanistan. In his March 16 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he said the U.S. had limited intelligence on Afghanistan. Most of that is gleaned through drones and limited networks of informants on the ground, other officials have said. U.S. military officials see a range of threats from ISIS-K, which could simply inspire attacks or fund and actively direct them. When U.S. troops left Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said publicly that terrorist groups inside Afghanistan could pose a threat within two years, so Gen. Kurilla's assessment, based in part on the new intelligence, appears to be in keeping with the assessment at the time.

According to an analysis by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, ISIS-K is expected to maintain its campaign against the Taliban while eyeing other targets.

"ISIS-Khorasan almost certainly retains the intent to conduct operations in the West and will continue efforts to attack outside Afghanistan," ODNI said in its annual global threat assessment, released in early March.

A hotel building in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the aftermath of an attack by Islamic State-Khorasan in December.

PHOTO: ALI KHARA/REUTERS

But other U.S. officials say no consensus has emerged within the intelligence and military communities about the urgency of the threat emanating from Afghanistan.

"We assess that there's not a credible threat to the homeland that's imminent," Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, the head of the Defense

Intelligence Agency, told reporters Wednesday. "There's probably intent there, but no credible threat that we can put our finger on that would be executable here in the near term."

Gen. Berrier said the threat was more to Europe than to the U.S. He didn't speak to whether there was a lack of consensus within the intelligence community or not.

A senior defense official said this week that ISIS-K "has its hands full with the Taliban," distracting it from mounting a significant attack in the West.

The Taliban inspect the scene of an operation against the ISIS-K militants in the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan.

PHOTO: STRINGER/SHUTTERSTOCK

"They could potentially generate capacity, maybe working with other ISIS affiliates to carry out limited attacks further afield," the official said. "But I do not think that ISIS has the capacity to carry out a large-scale attack against the United States and that they are not likely to have that capacity anytime soon."

The Taliban control Afghanistan and is the sworn enemy of ISIS-K. But U.S. military officials said the Taliban lack the ability to conduct strikes against ISIS-K leaders or other operatives with any precision, which has enabled the group to grow in strength.

The Taliban carries out frequent operations to find and eliminate ISIS-K cells, keeping the group on the run. This week, the Taliban said its fighters had killed three ISIS-K operatives in a raid in Kabul, saying the men had planned to carry out attacks during the holy month of Ramadan. The Taliban has killed hundreds of suspected ISIS-K operatives, many in and around Kabul and the east of the country since taking over in August 2021.

When the U.S. military pulled out of Afghanistan, some Biden administration officials expressed hope the U.S. could establish a drone base near Afghanistan, perhaps in Central Asia. Gen. Kurilla toured the region last year to strengthen relationships with Central Asian nations, but a base, for now, appears to be out of the question. At present, U.S. drones spend 80% of their flying time in transit between their bases and Afghanistan, Gen. Kurilla said. That leaves about 20% of the drone's flying time spent surveilling terrorist networks.

The U.S. hasn't launched any known strikes inside Afghanistan since the attack that killed al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in August 2022, officials said.

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#### ***10. Military Quietly Stops Buying Ospreys as Aircraft Faces an Uncertain Future***

People are more important than hardware, but if we cannot get people to the fight ...

#### **Excerpts:**

While the Department of the Air Force said it is not searching for a replacement, Special Operations Command told Military.com in an emailed statement it is not planning on buying any more variants of the Osprey through 2028, but it's open to bringing on new technology.

"USSOCOM is actively assessing capabilities for next-generation mobility in support of the National Defense Strategy but is not planning a direct replacement of the CV-22," Thompson told Military.com.

#### **Military Quietly Stops Buying Ospreys as Aircraft Faces an Uncertain Future**

military.com · by Konstantin Toropin, Thomas Novelly · March 24, 2023

New budget documents for the three military branches that fly the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft show that none has plans to buy any additional airframes, a sign that the Pentagon isn't prioritizing growing the fleet.

While the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force all say that they don't need any new aircraft and that the end of the buy is simply the end of the contract for the services, the news comes at a time when the Osprey is under intense scrutiny over major issues with its gearbox that have caused at least 15 incidents over the life of the aircraft. Concerns over the Osprey led to groundings and now threaten to cost millions in repairs and maintenance.

The office that oversees the Osprey program confirmed to Military.com that there are no plans for new purchases, saying that the office "will complete the MV-22 and CMV-22 programs of record, with deliveries through 2025."



Liz Mildenstein, a spokeswoman for the office, went on to add in an email Friday that the military expects the Ospreys to continue to serve "through the 2050s" and the program office will continue to support the aircraft "for decades to come."

Additionally, Ann Stefanek, a spokeswoman for the Department of the Air Force, told Military.com the last purchase was congressionally mandated in fiscal 2021 and that there are no plans to purchase more.

"We aren't buying more CV-22s because we are at our program of record (54 aircraft) and are meeting requirements," Stefanek told Military.com.

The latest budget documents, released in March by the Navy, say that the military services ultimately want 464 aircraft -- 360 for the Marines, 48 for the Navy, and 56 for Special Operations Command and the Air Force.

Plans to fly the aircraft for another few decades mean that the services will have to solve the "hard clutch engagement" problem -- a situation where a failure by the aircraft's complicated system of gearboxes and clutches to balance the power produced by its twin engines causes dramatic and dangerous issues. Thus far, military officials have indicated the problem seems to be tied to flight hours and wear and tear.

The issue has impacted Marine Corps and Air Force aircraft. The two services officially started flying the Osprey in 2007 and 2009, respectively. The Navy got its first operational aircraft more recently, in 2021, according to fact sheets from all the services. In February, a defense official, who spoke with reporters on the condition of anonymity, revealed that the military now suspects the "input quill assembly" -- a part that connects the aircraft engines to its gearbox -- wears out more quickly than previously thought, and the current solution is replacing the part while a complete redesign is underway.

More worryingly, the same official noted that this fix came after "a progressive increase in hard clutch engagement events."

The military has not gone into how much money the repairs or new fixes to the gearbox would cost, but Military.com reported on a 2017 incident involving an Air Force Osprey when the failure occurred mid-flight over Arizona and the aircraft had to make an emergency landing in Flagstaff on one engine.



That incident, which damaged both engines and five gearboxes, as well as nearly a dozen other components, took a team of six, working 12-hour days, 45 days to repair the aircraft and cost more than \$5 million, according to an incident report reviewed by Military.com.

To date, no crashes or fatalities have been attributed to the problem, although the cause of a deadly crash that claimed the lives of five Marines in June near Glamis, California, is still under investigation.

Last August, the V-22 Joint Program Office announced more than 24 different initiatives the services were undertaking to remedy and identify the hard clutch engagement issues. Those efforts included data mining, laboratory testing and hardware redesign, according to a Department of Defense spokesperson.

Earlier this month, the Pentagon also announced it had awarded Bell-Boeing a \$53.6 million contract to come up with a gearbox vibration monitoring safety system that would help in "providing earlier detection of degrading gearbox components to allow proactive maintenance and potential mitigation of drive system failure modes across all V-22 Osprey variants."

A spokesman for Bell did not return a request for comment on the future of the V-22 program in time for publication.

Despite the safety concerns a clutch issues can cause, Navy and Special Operations Command officials said they're still confident in the aircraft.

"USSOCOM is supporting and closely monitoring the V-22 Joint Program Office efforts as they work to mitigate and develop a solution for the Hard Clutch Engagement problem," Lt. Cassandra Thompson, a spokeswoman with Special Operations Command, told Military.com. "We are confident that the risk mitigation controls and aircrew training programs will continue to keep our crews safe"

Meanwhile, the Navy's budget boss, Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, told reporters earlier this month that "there's no connection" between the end of the contract buy and the gearbox issues.

Jeremiah Gertler, a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington, D.C., who specializes in aviation, told Military.com in an interview Friday that he believes the lack of new purchases for the V-22 program

in the near future is not tied to the safety issue but is a case where the military likely believes it has all the aircraft it wants and needs.

"Congress tends to keep programs going longer than the department necessarily asks for," Gertler said.

And while there are plans to maintain the fleet of V-22s through the 2050s, Gertler said the services are eyeing what developments in future technology might be around the corner.

"They're not prioritizing V-22," Gertler said. "The Army is the leader on developing new rotorcraft, and they've got this whole program of Future Vertical Lift. The Navy and Marine Corps are basically saying, 'We've got enough of today's technology, and we know how to keep it running long enough that we'll see what the Army comes up with [and] what Future Vertical Lift technologies might offer us in the future to replace these.'"

The Air Force's fleet of CV-22s is primarily used for special operations missions and covers very different needs than the modern fighter jets and bombers the service is looking to bring on amid rising tensions with China.

While the Department of the Air Force said it is not searching for a replacement, Special Operations Command told Military.com in an emailed statement it is not planning on buying any more variants of the Osprey through 2028, but it's open to bringing on new technology.

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military.com · by Konstantin Toropin, Thomas Novelty · March 24, 2023

#### ***11. A look at the US military mission in Syria and its dangers***

**Excerpts:**

On any given day there are at least 900 U.S. forces in Syria, along with an undisclosed number of contractors. U.S. special operations forces also move in and out of the country, but are usually in small teams and are not included in the official count. They are trying to prevent any comeback by the Islamic State group, which swept through Iraq and Syria in 2014, taking control of large swaths of territory.

...

Tehran's political influence and militia strength throughout the region have created a security concern for the U.S. Since the defeat of the Islamic State group, Iran-backed fighters have expanded their influence in the region.

The presence of American forces in Syria makes it more difficult for Iran to move weapons into Lebanon, for use by its proxies, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, against Israel.

For example, the al-Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria is located on a vital road that can link Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon — and Israel's doorstep. So troops at the U.S. garrison can disrupt what could be an uncontested land bridge for Iran to the eastern Mediterranean.

The oil-rich Deir el-Zour province in eastern Syria, where some of the latest U.S. strikes hit, sits along that strategic route. Syrian government forces and allied Iran-backed groups are deployed on the west bank of the Euphrates River in Deir el-Zour, while American troops support their allies, the SDF, largely along the east bank.

**A look at the US military mission in Syria and its dangers**

AP · by LOLITA C. BALDOR · March 24, 2023

WASHINGTON (AP) — When an Iranian drone struck a U.S. base in northeastern Syria, killing a contractor and wounding several U.S. troops, it was just the latest in a growing number of attacks on American forces in Syria. But its lethality was rare. In most recent cases, no U.S. forces have been hurt in such attacks.

The strike on Thursday — by a small, suicide drone — set off a series of retaliatory bombings, and the top U.S. commander for the Middle East, Gen. Erik Kurilla, quickly warned that the U.S. was prepared to launch more attacks if needed.

American troops have been in Syria since 2015, but the latest casualties highlight what has been a consistent, but often quiet, U.S. counterterrorism mission, aimed at countering Iranian-backed militias and preventing the resurgence of the Islamic State group.

A look at the U.S. troop presence in Syria.

#### IT ALL BEGAN WITH THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP

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#### Iran

Iran-backed fighters on alert in east Syria after US strikes

Biden: US will 'forcefully' protect personnel in Syria

US retaliates after death of contractor in Syria

Rare anti-Houthi protests in Yemen after activist's death

For years, the U.S. and its coalition allies battled IS in Iraq and Syria, partnering with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. By 2019, the U.S. declared the Islamic State caliphate destroyed, but remnants of the group remain a threat, including about 10,000 fighters held in detention facilities in Syria and tens of thousands of their family members living in refugee camps.

U.S. forces advise and assist the SDF, including in securing the detention facilities, and they also conduct counterterror missions against the Islamic State group and other al-Qaida-affiliated militants, and carry out strikes on Iran-backed militias that have attacked U.S. facilities.

Russia, an ally of the Syrian government, is also active in the country, but Washington and Moscow have used a deconfliction phone line in an effort to avoid conflict there.

IRAN IS ANOTHER REASON THE U.S. REMAINS IN SYRIA



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#### =WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LATEST ATTACK?

A small suicide — sometimes called a kamikazi — drone flew low over fencing into the base and struck a maintenance facility where U.S. troops and contractors were working. It did not fire a weapon, but exploded when it hit.

One American contractor was killed, and five U.S. service members and another contractor were wounded. One service member returned to duty and the other wounded taken out of Syria for medical treatment. Contractors often are used to help with maintenance and logistical support.

U.S. officials blame Iran, pointing to remnants of the drone, multiple intelligence threat streams and the fact that the attack was so similar to previous ones by the militants. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations. In retaliation, U.S. F-15 fighter jets from al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar struck locations near Deir el-Zour, targeting the Iran-backed militias believed responsible for the attack. The number of reported casualties varied, and the U.S. would not confirm any numbers.

In an apparent response to those U.S. airstrikes, 10 rockets were fired Friday at a U.S. base known as Green Village. No one was

injured. Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, said the rockets were fired by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, but he stopped short of blaming Tehran for the U.S. deaths and injuries.

#### AREN'T U.S. TROOPS PROTECTED?

The U.S. maintains security at all of its bases but steadfastly declines to provide much detail. Reporters traveling in Syria, including from The Associated Press, have frequently seen a range of security measures, ranging from fencing and other barricades to more high-tech radars and other sensors.

Asked about information that one of the radars at the base was not working, Ryder said there was not a total gap in radar capabilities: "There was a complete sight picture in terms of radar."

But Iranian drones represent a serious — and expanding — threat in Syria. Kurilla told Congress that Tehran is building increasingly sophisticated drones, and now has an arsenal that ranges from small, short-range systems "to long-range one-way attack platforms."

Iran has also provided drones to Russia for use in its ongoing war in Ukraine.

#### PREVIOUS SKIRMISHES

One of the deadliest flare-ups between the U.S. and Iran-backed groups occurred in December 2019, when U.S. military strikes in Iraq and Syria killed 25 fighters and wounded others from the Iran-backed Kataeb Hezbollah Iraqi militia. The U.S. said the strike was in retaliation for the killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it blamed on the group.

In August 2022, the U.S. carried out strikes targeting Iran-backed militias in Deir el-Zour province. The Pentagon said the attacks were meant to send a message to Iran, which the U.S. blamed for a number of drone attacks, including one that targeted the al-Tanf garrison. That base was also hit in January, when three suicide drones struck, wounding two Syrian opposition fighters. The U.S. again said Iran-backed groups were responsible.

Israel has also struck Iranian targets in eastern Syria, although it rarely claims responsibility. In November 2022, airstrikes targeted tanker trucks that crossed from Iraq into eastern Syria. The

convoy was reportedly carrying fuel and weapons to militias in Deir el-Zour. The U.S. denied involvement, and an Israeli military official later strongly suggested that Israel was behind the strike.

Associated Press writers Bassem Mroue, Kareem Chehayeb and Abby Sewell in Beirut and Tara Copp in Washington contributed to this report.

AP · by LOLITA C. BALDOR · March 24, 2023

#### *12. Finland opens airspace for NATO surveillance and intelligence flights*

### **Finland opens airspace for NATO surveillance and intelligence flights | DefenceToday.com**

[defencetoday.com](https://defencetoday.com)

In a historic move, Finland has opened its airspace for NATO surveillance and intelligence missions, allowing the alliance to monitor Russian activities more closely in the region.

The first surveillance flight in Finnish airspace was conducted in cooperation with the United States on Thursday 23 March 2023. The flight involved both manned and unmanned aircraft that operated under national direction and supervision, in accordance with Finnish national laws and regulations. The details of the flight were not disclosed for operational security reasons. Similar flights in Finnish airspace will be carried out in the future as well with different types of aircraft, both unmanned and manned.

This decision comes after Finland and Sweden joined a new initiative launched by 16 NATO Allies in February 2023, called Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space (APSS).

APSS is a virtual constellation of both national and commercial space assets, such as satellites, that leverages the latest advances in commercial space technology. It aims to streamline data collection, sharing and analysis among NATO Allies and with the NATO command structure, while generating cost savings. It also provides a powerful asset for civil-military cooperation and innovation.

According to NATO's Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană, APSS will significantly improve NATO's intelligence and

surveillance, and provide essential support to NATO's military missions and operations. He also praised Luxembourg's early contribution of 16.5 million euros that laid the groundwork for this transformative initiative.

Finland's participation in APSS reflects its deepening cooperation with NATO on security issues, especially in light of Russia's growing assertiveness and military modernization. Finland is not a member of NATO but has been a partner since 1994 and participates in many NATO-led operations and exercises. Finland also hosts the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, which works closely with NATO.

By opening its airspace for NATO surveillance and intelligence missions, Finland hopes to enhance its situational awareness and deterrence posture in the Baltic Sea region. It also hopes to contribute to regional stability and security by sharing information with other partners. Finland's decision has been welcomed by other Nordic countries as well as by the United States.

In May 2022, Finland applied to join NATO along with Sweden, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the escalation of tensions in Eastern Europe. Finland's decision was supported by most of its political parties and public opinion, as well as by NATO itself.

defencetoday.com

***13. Why is China strengthening its military? It's not all about war.***

**Excerpts:**

In conclusion, China's military buildup owes to a variety of political and security drivers. The buildup does not by itself indicate a drive to war. Indeed, there currently remains no evidence China plans to attack Taiwan any time soon. To best protect U.S. interests, decision-makers could maintain a balanced view of China's military buildup and regard the technological, economic and diplomatic dimensions of U.S.-China competition as of equal or greater importance to the military dimension.



Defense News by Timothy R. Heath March 24, 2023

China's rapid military modernization has spurred considerable fear that the country could provoke a war with the United States. Such fear may owe to an exaggerated view of the importance of war preparation as a driver of the People's Liberation Army's buildup.

In fact, a broad variety of political and security drivers underpin the military's modernization, many of which have nothing to do with waging war. U.S. interests could benefit from a more accurate understanding of the reasons for China's military buildup and from a perspective that balances attention to the military with a greater appreciation of the nonmilitary aspects of U.S.-China competition.

China's military has experienced a dramatic buildup in recent years, owing in part to soaring defense budgets. From 2000 to 2016, China's military budget increased annually by about 10%, although this growth subsequently slowed to about 5-7% per year. According to People's Republic of China government sources, China's defense budget was \$230 billion in 2022, second only to the United States. The budget understates the amount of resources committed to the military. Western experts suggest that the difference could amount to \$60 billion per year. Surging defense budgets have yielded an increasingly lethal and capable PLA. U.S. officials have steadily warned of an eroding military advantage in the face of rapid PLA gains. During his service, U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Cameron Holt stated that China was acquiring weapons at "five to six times" the rate of the United States.

For some, the buildup alone provides reasons to fear conflict. Observers point to the rapid modernization as unambiguous evidence that China is preparing for war with the United States. In March 2021, Adm. Philip Davidson, then-head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, warned that China could take military action against Taiwan by 2027. Adm. Michael Gilday, the chief of naval operations, added that he can't rule out a Chinese attempt to invade as early as 2023.

Preparation for war is one possibility for the PLA's buildup, but it is not the only one. The military's modernization goals serve a variety of political and military purposes, none of which imply any intent to actually start a war. A grasp of the myriad drivers could help observers more accurately assess the danger posed by the PLA's modernization.

A first major reason Chinese leaders seek a powerful military owes to basic security. History matters greatly here: Chinese leaders are acutely aware of the downfall of past dynasties when a weak military permitted adversaries to bring the empire to its knees. Chinese leaders routinely invoke past humiliations, such as the Opium Wars, to remind the population of the dangers that weakness might pose. Maintaining a strong deterrence, including through a large nuclear arsenal, is a fundamental reason that China seeks a powerful military.

Second, a growing China requires a more capable military to handle a growing range of missions, including the possibility of a conflict with Taiwan. China faces a difficult geography, with many hostile and suspicious powers along its periphery. Defense whitepapers highlight a multitude of threats, including the dangers of Taiwan separatism, disputes in the East and South China seas, border disputes, and the dangers of great power rivalry with the United States.

Accordingly, the PLA has organized five theaters of command to better align resources with designated missions. The PLA is also charged with a wide range of non-war missions, including humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, maritime patrols and noncombatant evacuation. These are small in scale but important. Indeed, every Chinese military intervention since the 2000s has consisted of non-war missions.

A third, widely underappreciated reason owes to national prestige. Like autocrats elsewhere, Chinese leaders regard a powerful military as a sign of national status and as a way of whipping up patriotic enthusiasm. This explains in part the government's pursuit of high-profile status symbols such as aircraft carriers. Underscoring this point, China holds many lavish military parades and exercises, all of which receive extensive coverage in Chinese media.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is seen on a screen showing the evening news in 2020 in Beijing. (Kevin Frayer/Getty Images)

Building a powerful military is also an important source of political power for the country's supreme leader. Xi Jinping's power hinges, in part, on his command of the military, which helps explain why he is often photographed in military uniforms or settings. Yet like his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Xi recognizes that generous defense budgets are the price he must pay to ensure the military's loyalty.

A fifth reason lies in keeping the military focused on its responsibilities and resisting tendencies of slipping into corruption and lethargy. Xi's instructions to remain focused on military duties takes place within the context of a broader effort to improve the overall modernization, competence and effectiveness of the government, which authorities regard as critical to realizing the country's goals of national revival.

Consistent with this broader imperative, Xi has repeatedly paired a crackdown on the rampant corruption with calls on the military to improve its combat readiness, which is another way of saying the military should become more competent at its job.

In conclusion, China's military buildup owes to a variety of political and security drivers. The buildup does not by itself indicate a drive to war. Indeed, there currently remains no evidence China plans to attack Taiwan any time soon. To best protect U.S. interests, decision-makers could maintain a balanced view of China's military buildup and regard the technological, economic and diplomatic dimensions of U.S.-China competition as of equal or greater importance to the military dimension.

*Timothy R. Heath is a senior international defense researcher at the think tank Rand.*

**14. Russian soldiers stop receiving salaries: complaints coming from all over Russia**

### **Russian soldiers stop receiving salaries: complaints coming from all over Russia**

news.yahoo.com · by Ukrainska Pravda March 22, 2023, 8:53 AM · 2 min read

The conscripts and contract soldiers in Russia are not paid promised salaries, allowances and social benefits.

Source: Vyorstka, a Russian news outlet

Details: According to the calculations of the news outlet, since the beginning of March 2023, the salaries of the servicemen have been delayed or not paid at all in 52 regions of Russia and in occupied Crimea.

Instead of the promised 195,000 roubles [approx. USD\$2,530 - ed.] per month, their accounts receive much smaller amounts. Judging by the stories of the Russian servicemen themselves and their relatives, frequent problems with payments began in January, but at the same time, individual cases of withholding and non-payment of salaries, allowances and social benefits have been reported at least since November 2022. It is noted that both conscripts and volunteer and contract soldiers face this problem.

Since the beginning of March, dozens of messages about the non-payment have been posted in groups devoted to payments to conscripts on the Russian social network VKontakte.

In the comments, the authors of the complaints are often told that the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation officially transfers salaries from the 10th to the 20th of each month and that delays may be related to the transfer of the serviceman himself to another unit. In these cases, some admit that they received payments later. Others publish payslips from the personal online accounts of servicemen on the website of the Ministry of Defence, in which there are zeros in place of payments.

According to Dmytro Loboyko, the Head of the Regional Studies Centre, people from the Russian hinterland associated "the hope of qualitatively changing their lives, but they had to face reality" with payment for participation in hostilities.

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### ***15. Pentagon is pressed on worsening recruiting shortfalls***

#### **Excerpts:**

Sullivan asked whether there is any evidence that such discussions have undermined recruiting, and Camarillo, the Army undersecretary, said there is not.

Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.), the committee chairman, defended the military's work to promote diversity and said that allegations from some conservatives that the institution has become too "woke" do not appear to have resonated with prospective recruits. In a recent Army survey, he said, "only a small fraction, 5 percent of respondents, said they felt the military places too much emphasis on 'wokeness.'"

"Let me be clear: Diversity and inclusion strengthens our military," Reed said. "By every measure, America's military is more lethal and ready than it has ever been. It is also more diverse and inclusive than ever before. This is not a coincidence."

### **Pentagon is pressed on worsening recruiting shortfalls**

The problem is particularly acute in the Army, which set a lofty goal of a half-million active-duty soldiers a few years ago

By Dan Lamothe

**March 22, 2023 at 7:42 p.m. EDT**

The Washington Post · by Dan Lamothe · March 22, 2023

Lawmakers urged the Pentagon on Wednesday to get aggressive and creative in confronting what they warned were dangerous shortfalls in military recruiting, agreeing broadly that the issue threatens national security even as Republicans and Democrats argued over what's to blame for the deepening crisis.

The issue came before the Senate Armed Services Committee as U.S. defense officials face the bleakest recruiting environment since the aftermath of the Vietnam War, with less than a quarter of Americans ages 17 to 24 years old eligible to serve — and just 9 percent willing to do so. The situation probably will take years to correct, they told the senators, forecasting that the Army, Air Force and Navy all will fall short of their goals this year, possibly by thousands of recruits.

The Pentagon has attributed its difficulties to a variety of factors, including the nation's low unemployment rate, school closings during the coronavirus pandemic that limited recruiters' access to high school students and faculty, and a shifting culture in which more teens gravitate to jobs with work-life balance.

The military services have taken a varied approach to the challenge, which is the most serious in the Army. It fell about 15,000 recruits short of its goal of 60,000 active-duty recruits last year, and has set a goal of 65,000 this year that it also anticipates missing. In response, the service has invested heavily in marketing, even bringing back an updated "Be All You Can Be" advertising campaign that draws on Army recruiting pitches from the 1980s.

Army Undersecretary Gabe O. Camarillo told senators that research shows that "most" of today's young adults are unaware of what it means to serve in the military, with 75 percent possessing little to no knowledge about the service. The Army, he said, "faces a knowledge gap, a relatability gap, a trust gap and a culture gap," with the most significant barriers to service including fears of death or injury, suffering psychological harm, and leaving behind friends and family.

A few years ago, the Army set out to grow to more than 500,000 active-duty soldiers, but it has since revised those numbers downward several times. By next year, it could have fewer than 450,000, officials have said.

The problem is less serious in the Navy and Air Force but still trending in the wrong direction. Senior Air Force officials said this month that they expect to miss their recruiting goal of about 30,000 by roughly 10 percent. Navy officials met their enlisted recruiting goal of about 33,000 last year, but fell about 200 people short for new officers and have now extended eligibility to thousands who the service previously would have rejected for inadequate performance on required aptitude tests.

The Marine Corps has continued to meet its goals, but "never before have we been as challenged to recruit and retain sailors and Marines as we are today," Navy Undersecretary Erik K. Raven told senators. (The Navy Department oversees both military services.) He cited the impact of the pandemic, the tight labor market, the shrinking numbers of eligible candidates and

people willing to serve, and a fragmented media environment that has made advertising more complicated.

Senators on the committee found common ground on a number of issues Wednesday, including that senior military officials need to look for ways to broaden the population who are eligible to serve.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), a former Army officer, said he was worried that the percentage of youths eligible to serve in the military has dropped in the past 10 years from 29 percent to 23 percent. While some senior military officers have cited those numbers "almost as a point of pride," Cotton said, he urged the Pentagon to "fish in a bigger pool" and look for ways to expand eligibility.

"I and almost everyone else on this committee could tell you a story about what we had to do to help some outstanding young man or woman overcome some supposedly disqualifying injury or condition," Cotton said.

A waiver process exists to allow people to enlist who are initially disqualified from joining the military. But Cotton said it often takes too long, citing as examples a teenager who temporarily takes antidepressants after his parents' divorce, or a high school football player who injures a knee and has surgery but struggles to get approval to join the military even after returning to the playing field.

Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) agreed with Cotton, noting that the length of time it takes to get approval can be a barrier.

"Somebody might just say, 'The heck with it. I've got a good offer over here in the private sector,'" King said.

Republicans and Democrats were sharply split, however, on whether the Biden administration's efforts to address extremism, diversity and equity in the military have driven away recruits.

Sen. Roger Wicker (Miss.), the committee's top Republican, said the Pentagon spent "a lot of hours" researching extremism when the administration first took office, declining to note that dozens of veterans were among those arrested for actions during the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol. The Pentagon documented 100 cases of extremism across the entire force, Wicker said, concluding that a problem there "doesn't exist."

Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) questioned whether the national media, including The Washington Post, and some administration officials were at fault for shortages in military recruiting because they "trotted out this narrative that we have all these extremists" in the ranks. There are "knuckleheads" in every organization, Sullivan said, but the vast majority of people who serve in the military to do so with honor and distinction.

The 100 cases of extremism, identified in a study directed by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin soon after taking office, represent less than 1 percent of the more than 2 million personnel who serve in the military, the senator said. "There's probably more extremists in the Congress than that," he said. Sullivan asked whether there is any evidence that such discussions have undermined recruiting, and Camarillo, the Army undersecretary, said there is not.

Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.), the committee chairman, defended the military's work to promote diversity and said that allegations from some conservatives that the institution has become too "woke" do not appear to have resonated with prospective recruits. In a recent Army survey, he said, "only a small fraction, 5 percent of respondents, said they felt the military places too much emphasis on 'wokeness.'"

"Let me be clear: Diversity and inclusion strengthens our military," Reed said. "By every measure, America's military is more lethal and ready than it has ever been. It is also more diverse and inclusive than ever before. This is not a coincidence."

The Washington Post · by Dan Lamothe · March 22, 2023

#### ***16. The Military Should Reject DEI and CRT***

Is this really the problem? Are we focusing on the right issues?

#### **The Military Should Reject DEI and CRT**

**The Pentagon's relentless focus on racial differences endangers our readiness to deter, fight and win wars.**

By Patrick H. Brady and Mike Waltz

March 24, 2023 6:23 pm ET



<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-military-should-stay-colorblind-race-dod-army-navy-air-force-racial-preferences-dei-e64ead41>

The U.S. military faces a self-inflicted threat to its preparedness to deter, fight and win wars. An essential, battle-tested element of military culture—colorblindness—is being undermined. Unless the trend is reversed, our national security will be at increased risk. The reversal could be done at no cost, requiring only a policy decision and the reorientation of relevant training.

Selflessness, which has been vital to the warrior ethos for generations, requires subordination of self and subgroup identity and the ability to regard teammates' racial and ethnic differences as inconsequential. In the Army and Marines, sayings such as "We're all green" or "We all bleed red" were part of training that transformed millions of diverse civilians into war fighters.

Selflessness is needed to assemble military teams that can survive violent combat. Effective teams are built on committing one's life to the mission and to all teammates, regardless of racial differences. Trust that such commitment is reciprocal binds war fighters together. But that ethic is under attack.

At the Air Force Academy, cadets have been taught that the term "colorblind" is offensive and that it's preferable to be "color conscious." Rather than teach future military leaders that "colorblindness" is a cultural imperative, the Pentagon unnecessarily focuses on, and even elevates, race and maintains an obsessive focus on racial demographics. Worse, it uses racial preferences in officer accession programs and sometimes in command, promotion and schooling selections. Such practices aren't merely antithetical to true selflessness and the law; they also threaten military cultural norms like unit cohesion and the forces' "selfless servant warrior ethos."

Training that in earlier years was intended to ensure equal opportunity and dignity and respect for all has been displaced by diversity, equity and inclusion curricula with often vague language that emphasizes differences. Under the guise of inclusion, preferences have evolved to "balance" racial demographics—despite such balancing's dubious constitutionality—at the expense of selflessness.

Viewpoint diversity can be beneficial even in an autocratic organization such as the military. What's harmful is the Defense

Department's uncritical focus, through DEI, on racial differences that has weakened the colorblind warrior culture, eroded morale, undermined unit cohesion, and compromised combat effectiveness. This fixation also diminishes trust and confidence in the chain of command. Because of preferences' questionable legality, commanders deny their use or try to camouflage them under the label of "inclusion." War fighters aren't fooled. Depriving them of the best-qualified leaders of any race has potentially disastrous consequences.

This cultural shift isn't obvious to those outside the military, in part because it isn't immediately measurable. The harm becomes clear only when a unit is subjected to stress and performs less effectively—and then only if an observer is there and knows what to look for.

We are two of the many American war fighters trained to be selfless and colorblind. On the battlefield, we saw that culture save lives and accomplish missions. We served with many outstanding minority officers and enlisted war fighters who embraced this culture. Their race, and ours, was inconsequential to the mission and our commitments to each other. Never was either of us concerned with the race of a bomber pilot called in for close air support, the racial mix of a quick-reaction platoon coming to our rescue, or the race of a copilot when taking enemy fire during a medevac mission. We wanted the best because our lives and mission depended on it. Military leaders should reverse course and abandon their hyperfocus on race. Instead, they should embrace colorblindness—the cultural imperative that has helped make our forces indomitable. Mr. Brady is a retired U.S. Army major general who served in Vietnam. Mr. Waltz, a Republican, represents Florida's Sixth Congressional District. He is a colonel in the Army National Guard and served in Afghanistan.

#### *17. Why the War Crimes Charges Against Vladimir Putin Are So Significant*

##### **Excerpts:**

At the beginning of March, a historic conference took place in Lviv, the Ukrainian city where two of the greatest international lawyers of the last century studied: Raphael Lemkin (who coined the term genocide in the aftermath of the Holocaust) and Hersch

Lauterpact (who became an important adviser to the prosecution at the Nuremberg trials). The gathering was chaired by Andriy Kostin, Ukraine's prosecutor general, and was attended by many from the European and American legal elite who are steeped in the arcana of wartime atrocity. I attended as a representative of the Reckoning Project. And it was the first time in many years of reporting war crimes that I felt there was real commitment and political will to catch the bad guys. Europe is fiercely united toward accountability and the Biden administration, whose ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice is the extremely impressive former Stanford professor Dr. Beth Van Schaack, has done extraordinary work to support Ukraine.

As positive as the news is, however, I cannot help but feel tremendous sadness when I get messages from my Syrian friends who see Assad parading around in sharp suits, being feted in Middle East capitals. Sadder still are my Bosnian friends, who endured a cruel and debilitating war at the tail end of the 20th century, and feel they did not receive the justice they deserve. "I'm happy for the Ukrainian people," one said to me. "But why couldn't this have happened for us?"

### **Why the War Crimes Charges Against Vladimir Putin Are So Significant**

The Hague's decision to issue an arrest warrant for the Russian leader reverberates far beyond Moscow and Ukraine.

BY

MARCH 23, 2023

Vanity Fair · by Condé Nast · March 23, 2023

This is not an April Fool's joke.

On April 1, Vladimir Putin's hand-picked ambassador to the United Nations will take over as president of the UN Security Council. This is a position that rotates among the member states of the council. Ironically, Russia also held the same position in February 2022—the same month Putin gave the orders for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a sovereign country.

That same Vladimir Putin is now wanted by The Hague. On March 17, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the Russian president and his henchwoman Maria

Lvova-Belova, a key figure in an initiative to ship Ukrainian children to Russia.

It's hard to take that much hypocrisy in one go. The validity of the Russian Federation's place on the Security Council is open to debate; there are many in diplomatic circles who believe the RF resides there illegally. But the federation bulldozed its way into its position on the council in December 1991, once the former Soviet Union—which had held a permanent seat as a result of the 1945 United Nations Charter—vaporized.

Back then, there was no debate and no constitutional ruling. In this case, as in many, Russia got what Russia wanted. Still, the news from The Hague on St. Patrick's Day was more than "an important moment"—the words of Piotr Hofmański, the International Criminal Court's president. It was monumental. According to respected international legal scholars like Dr. Claus Kress, from the University of Cologne—a special adviser to Karim Khan, King's Counsel, the ICC's prosecutor—the slate of charges against Putin "marks a historic encounter between power and law. At a moment in time when Russia continues with the execution of its war of aggression against Ukraine, the World Criminal Court's decision to issue an arrest warrant against Russia's supreme leader sends out a message of particular symbolic force."

It is more than symbolic, though. First off, since the news has broken, one can presume that there have been many war criminals rethinking their own strategies. They're going to feel less comfortable on the lam. Indeed, there is a history of many of them fading into the background, yet eventually getting caught. Take Paul Touvier, "The Hangman of Lyon," who hid in a monastery and on occasion was seen dressed as a priest. Or Radovan Karadžić, who, when he was arrested in Belgrade, was living as an alternative-medicine guru under the alias Dragan Dabic. Or one of the world's worst war criminals—Liberia's Charles Taylor—who despite having a \$2 million bounty on his head, brazenly drove a Land Rover loaded with drugs and cash over the Nigeria-Cameroon border before being caught. They were all nabbed and brought to face justice. Even despots like Muammar al-Qaddafi and Saddam Hussien could not evade capture: each was discovered hiding underground—Qaddafi, in a



drainage pipe; Hussein in a bunker, with a supply of hot dogs, 7 UP, and Bounty Bars.

Second, these new charges suggest that the International Criminal Court, in the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion, now has a renewed sense of mission and momentum. Personally, I can't think of The Hague without a certain amount of bitterness, given its history of missed opportunities and pulled punches. And yet this decision has made me rethink international justice. Experts in international law, such as Kress, feel tribunals like the ICTY (the criminal court that prosecuted war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia) were vital—the first of its kind since Nuremberg. The ICTY managed to get Slobodan Milošević, Ratko Mladić, and Radovan Karadžić all in the dock. And for those of us who witnessed the burning villages in Bosnia, who saw the mass graves, who heard the testimonies of victims of rape and concentration camps—and, ultimately, the genocide at Srebrenica—Hague-style justice was delivered far too slowly. But that might be changing. A top EU official, Josep Borrell Fontelles, wrote in a tweet on Friday that the ICC's arrest warrant for Putin represented "the start of the process of accountability." If Fontelles is correct, we may well be ending a long, drawn out period of impunity that started in the 1990s with Bosnia and Rwanda and has continued to the present day, with horrific wars in places such as Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Syria, the latter conflict having been almost completely shelved and forgotten by the international community. Considering Syria, it's hard to see why its president, Bashar al-Assad, has not been issued an arrest warrant after launching and continuing a war (with help from his friend Putin) that has claimed more than 500,000 lives and displaced an estimated 13 million people, including 5.6 million refugees. Assad literally burned down much of his own country. Instead, he and his wife, Asma, were given the red-carpet treatment this past week when they traveled to the United Arab Emirates. In the same week that we saw one war criminal facing a roster of charges, another was virtually lauded as royalty.

In a column for the Hive last month, I outlined how Putin's atrocities and crimes against humanity go back more than two decades, beginning with his decision in the early months of his

presidency to effectively wipe Grozny off the face of the earth. But the current arrest warrants do not focus on the wholesale slaughter that has been a hallmark of the Russian leader's military campaigns in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine. Instead, these accusations are extremely specific. They center on a Russian program that is difficult to fathom without revulsion: the alleged war crimes of abduction and deportation of children, which is a violation of the Geneva Convention.

Also named in the indictment is Maria Lvova-Belova, Putin's so-called children's rights commissioner. A musician who studied conducting—and was once a guitar teacher before being elevated to senator and then commissioner—she is the architect of an inhumane and hard-hearted policy of transporting Ukrainian children across national borders to be adopted by Russian families. The government claims it is rescuing orphans to protect them from harm or repatriating children who have been separated from their guardians. Some of the children, however, are taken coercively; the parents of others have been strong-armed into sending them away to "camps" in Russia for their "safety." (The gentler precedent: many London parents during World War II placed their kids on trains bound for the countryside during the Blitz to protect them from Germany's relentless bombings. But those kids were allowed to go home when the bombs stopped. Many of these children are adopted by Russian families.)

Most human rights experts believe this Russian "program" is an appalling violation of international law. Many Ukrainian parents who let their sons and daughters go have come to learn that their children have reportedly been caught up in intense indoctrination classes and become part of a Russification process that has echoes of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and China's Cultural Revolution. In some cases, the children's Ukrainian names have been erased. In a camp in Chechnya, as described in one recent study, boys have allegedly been schooled in military tactics and appear to be handling firearms and learning war studies.

The Yale School of Public Health's Conflict Observatory program recently issued a groundbreaking report estimating that there are some 6,000 children in 43 different centers throughout the Russian Federation who have been "forcibly transferred" from their Ukrainian families. (Ukrainian leader Volodymyr

Zelenskyy puts the number at 16,000 or more.) The Russians, meanwhile, far from having denied that such an effort exists, have gone to great lengths to tout the humanitarian nature of the endeavor. Lvova-Belova herself claims to have proudly “adopted” a 15-year-old boy from Mariupol last year; she reportedly has at least 10 other children.

Last year, Vanity Fair and the Reckoning Project, where I serve as executive director, collaborated on a story chronicling the harrowing saga of one such “divided family.” Reporter-researcher Iryna Lopatina tracked the journey of three children who were separated from their father in Mariupol and sent to Russia. By sheer determination, the eldest child, Matvii, managed to track down his father and urge him to rescue Matvii and his siblings before they could be assigned to Russian families. This was one case of a Ukrainian family being reunited; most are not so fortunate.

There are international observers who have argued that the arrest warrants are merely a symbolic move. Russia, for its part, has issued statements noting that its government (like that of the United States) is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, which recognizes the legitimacy of the ICC. For many of us tracking these crimes, however, the criminal court’s decision is an unqualified milestone. Some are even calling it a potential turning point in the Ukraine War.

“Never before,” notes Kress, “had proceedings before an international criminal court been instituted against a figure as powerful as Vladimir Putin. It only adds to the extraordinary significance of this instance of international criminal justice that the victims of the alleged international crimes are children, the weakest and hence most vulnerable members of the human society.”

Even if Putin never gets to The Hague, credibility is important to him. And this month his international standing has been trampled. He cannot be sitting comfortably in Moscow, with his Chinese visitors as his only friends. A field trip to Mariupol to see the buildings he wasted—which Putin took great pains to choreograph this past week—won’t satisfy his Peter the Great expansion fantasies. Not when he finds himself trapped inside the Russian Federation, knowing that if he sets foot in certain

countries he could be arrested and spirited off to a holding cell in the Netherlands.

At the same time, his chief diplomatic emissary, Sergei Lavrov, the minister of foreign affairs, has to get on a plane and travel to interact with his counterparts on the world stage. But he will surely find an inescapable iciness when he returns to Manhattan's Turtle Bay, the United Nations headquarters, or to Geneva, where the Human Rights Council sits.

That said, Putin and company are continuing their chilling strategy, even as the ink dries on the arrest warrants. According to a statement released last week by the Ukrainian National Resistance Center, the government agency that monitors events in occupied Ukraine: "The Russians are deporting more and more people from the temporarily occupied districts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson."

At the beginning of March, a historic conference took place in Lviv, the Ukrainian city where two of the greatest international lawyers of the last century studied: Raphael Lemkin (who coined the term genocide in the aftermath of the Holocaust) and Hersch Lauterpact (who became an important adviser to the prosecution at the Nuremberg trials). The gathering was chaired by Andriy Kostin, Ukraine's prosecutor general, and was attended by many from the European and American legal elite who are steeped in the arcana of wartime atrocity. I attended as a representative of the Reckoning Project. And it was the first time in many years of reporting war crimes that I felt there was real commitment and political will to catch the bad guys. Europe is fiercely united toward accountability and the Biden administration, whose ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice is the extremely impressive former Stanford professor Dr. Beth Van Schaack, has done extraordinary work to support Ukraine.

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Janine di Giovanni, a Vanity Fair contributor, is the executive director of the Reckoning Project.

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Vanity Fair · by Condé Nast · March 23, 2023

***18. The National Institutes of Health's "China initiative" has upended hundreds of lives and destroyed scores of academic careers***

### **Excerpts:**

BESIDES CONDUCTING flawed investigations, some universities seem to have cracked down even harder than NIH demanded. That was the case for UCSD neuroscientist Xiang-Dong Fu.

Fu, who studies neurodegenerative diseases including Parkinson's, was hired by UCSD in 1992 and earned tenure in 1998. That was also the year colleagues at Wuhan University, where Fu did his undergraduate studies, solicited his help in building up their research programs.

"You are already coming [to Wuhan] to visit your parents, so maybe you can provide some advice to our young faculty and work with their students?" Fu recalls being asked at dinner during one of those visits home. "If you have someone with similar research interests and some students, then I'd be happy to help out," he says he replied.

Five years later such an opportunity arose, and Fu began to tack on 2 or 3 days at Wuhan every few months after spending a weekend with his parents. In 2005 his hosts formalized his role by naming him a visiting professor, and over the next 3

years he was paid \$1000 a month for 2 months' work with funds from a government program for domestic scholars.

From 2012 to 2016, Fu was again supported by Wuhan through China's Thousand Talents program, which was created to lure back Chinese-born scientists working abroad. Those who agreed to spend at least 9 months a year in China received generous salaries and lavish research funding. Given his full-time faculty position at UCSD, Fu chose the much less lucrative second tier, which came with a modest monthly stipend. In return, he spent several weeks a year at Wuhan and the Institute for Biophysics at Peking University, where one of his former Wuhan students was now a faculty member.

### **The National Institutes of Health's "China initiative" has upended hundreds of lives and destroyed scores of academic careers**

• 23 MAR 2023 BY JEFFREY MERVIS

[https://www.science.org/content/article/pall-suspicion-nihs-secretive-china-initiative-destroyed-scores-academic-careers?et\\_cid=4648070&et\\_rid=776198218](https://www.science.org/content/article/pall-suspicion-nihs-secretive-china-initiative-destroyed-scores-academic-careers?et_cid=4648070&et_rid=776198218)

For decades, Chinese-born U.S. faculty members were applauded for working with colleagues in China, and their universities cited the rich payoff from closer ties to the emerging scientific giant. But those institutions did an about-face after they began to receive emails in late 2018 from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The emails asked some 100 institutions to investigate allegations that one or more of their faculty had violated NIH policies designed to ensure federal funds were being spent properly. Most commonly, NIH claimed a researcher was using part of a grant to do work in China through an undisclosed affiliation with a Chinese institution. Four years later, 103 of those scientists—some 42% of the 246 targeted in the letters, most of them tenured faculty members—had lost their jobs.

In contrast to the very public criminal prosecutions of academic scientists under the China Initiative launched in 2018 by then-President Donald Trump to thwart Chinese espionage, NIH's version has been conducted behind closed doors. Michael Lauer, head of NIH's extramural research, says that secrecy is necessary to protect the privacy of individual scientists, who are not government employees. Universities consider the NIH-

prompted investigations to be a personnel matter, and thus off-limits to queries from reporters. And the targeted scientists have been extremely reticent to talk about their ordeal.

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Only one of the five scientists whose cases are described in this article has previously gone public with their story. And only one has pushed back successfully, winning a large settlement against her university for terminating her.

But a running tally kept by the agency shows the staggering human toll of NIH's campaign. Besides the dismissals and forced retirements, more than one in five of the 246 scientists targeted were banned from applying for new NIH funding for as long as 4 years—a career-ending setback for most academic researchers. And almost two-thirds were removed from existing NIH grants.

NIH's data also make clear who has been most affected. Some 81% of the scientists cited in the NIH letters identify as Asian, and 91% of the collaborations under scrutiny were with colleagues in China.

In only 14 of the 246 cases—a scant 6%—did the institution fail to find any evidence to back up NIH's suspicions. Lauer, who oversees NIH's \$30 billion grants portfolio, regards that high success rate as proof NIH only contacted institutions when there were compelling reasons to believe the targeted scientists were guilty of "scientific, budgetary, or commitment overlap" with NIH-funded projects.

"The fact that more than 60% of these cases have resulted in an employment separation, or a university taking the step of excluding a scientist from [seeking an NIH grant] for a significant period of time, means that something really, really serious has occurred," Lauer told *Science*.

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### Eroding trust and collaboration

BY H. HOLDEN THORP SCIENCE 24 MAR 2023

But others, including some of the scientists targeted and the university administrators involved in investigating them, say the tremendous power differential between NIH and its grantees may be a better explanation for why so many scientists have been axed.

NIH is by far the largest funder of academic biomedical research in the United States, and some medical centers receive hundreds

of millions of dollars annually from the agency. So when senior administrators heard Lauer say a targeted scientist "was not welcome in the NIH ecosystem," they understood immediately what he meant—and that he was expecting action.

"If NIH says there's a conflict, then there's a conflict, because NIH is always right," says David Brenner, who was vice chancellor for health sciences at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), in November 2018 when the institution received a letter from Lauer asking it to investigate five medical school faculty members, all born in China. "We were told we have a problem and that it was up to us to fix it."

THERE WAS A NOTE OF URGENCY in the first email that Wuyuan Lu, a tenured professor at University of Maryland's Institute of Human Virology (IHV), got from a senior university research administrator.

"We have received an official communication from the National Institutes of Health," Dennis Paffrath wrote to Lu on 20 December 2018. "It concerns the failure by you and the University to disclose outside research support, relevant affiliations and foreign components" of Lu's existing NIH grants.

The NIH letter listed Lu's ties to Xi'an Jiaotong University and Fudan University, including grants NIH said Lu had received from Chinese research agencies. The letter also alleged that his NIH grant had supported work done in China. "I need to know if [this] is true," Paffrath wrote to Lu. "If not, we will need to work with NIH to help them understand that this is not the case."

Lu replied the next day, confident that his explanation would clear up what he assumed was a simple misunderstanding. Some of NIH's allegations, he wrote, appeared to be based on the acknowledgement section of papers with Chinese co-authors in which Lu noted their contributions to the research and the Chinese institutions that had funded them. But those references were a courtesy, Lu explained, and didn't mean his NIH grants were supporting any of their efforts.

103 jobs lost

42% of 246 targeted scientists were terminated by their institution or resigned.

A. MASTIN/SCIENCE

In fact, he wrote, the opposite was true: His Chinese collaborations multiplied the payoff from the research that NIH had funded at IHV for more than 2 decades. Lu highlighted the intellectual property his lab generated for the university, telling Paffrath that "none of it would have been possible without" the



talented Chinese students working at IHV through these collaborations. IHV had not only approved his interactions with Xi'an Jiaotong University, Lu added, but had touted them in its newsletters.

Lu accepted some blame. "It can be argued that I should have done a better job disclosing these past activities," he wrote to Paffrath. "But the truth of the matter is that I did not think they presented any conflict of interest."

Nor was it clear what he could have done differently, Lu continued. "Even if I had thought [those interactions] should be disclosed," he wrote, "I wouldn't have known where, how, and what to disclose due to lack of clear guidelines."

Lu expected his letter to allay NIH's concerns and allow him to continue research that contributed to the institute's search for new therapies to treat cancer and infectious diseases. His boss, renowned virologist Robert Gallo, told *Science* a prominent colleague once called Lu "the most gifted protein chemist in America," and Gallo says Lu was a valued member of his management team.

But after hearing nothing for 15 months, Lu was told that NIH wanted more information. In his next reply, Lu included lengthy descriptions of each of his research projects with Chinese collaborators and explanations of how they did not conflict or overlap with his NIH funding.

That response was also insufficient, Paffrath told Lu in his next email. NIH wanted still more documents, Paffrath wrote, "and as quickly as possible."

A few weeks later came what Lu interpreted as "a veiled threat" from NIH. "NIH will not continue to be patient in receiving these documents,"

Paffrath wrote, "and may pursue other remedies if we do not comply with their request."

### 53 banned

21% of 246 targeted scientists were banned from applying for National Institutes of Health grants.

A. MASTIN/SCIENCE

By then Lu's patience was also wearing thin. For example, NIH had requested English and Mandarin copies of any contracts that Lu had signed with Chinese institutions. "I can't generate something that doesn't exist," Lu wrote Paffrath regarding an affiliation with Fudan that Lu says was "purely honorary ... and with no contractual obligations."

Lu says he had recurring thoughts of returning to China to care for aging parents. Each time, Gallo told him he could do more to

help the world by staying at IHV. But the increasingly bitter exchanges with NIH pushed him over the edge. In August 2020, Lu resigned his tenured position. He is now a professor at Fudan's medical school in Shanghai.

"NIH was acting like a bully," he tells *Science*, "and I decided that I'm not going to waste any more time on this witch hunt."

Lu doesn't blame the university, which through a spokesperson declined comment on the case, for his forced relocation. "The university never judged me, never put any pressure on me," he says. "They were simply the middleman, the messenger."

**LU AND OTHER TARGETED SCIENTISTS** interviewed say they had no idea their jobs were on the line when university officials first contacted them. None retained a lawyer at that point. After their initial replies, they often heard nothing for months. And once that silence was broken, most were told their only option was to resign or be fired.

Senior university administrators say they were surprised by the tone of the NIH letters. "It came out of nowhere, and the accusations were pretty ugly," says Robin Cyr, who was responsible for research compliance at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC), when the institution received its email in December 2018. "A Lauer letter meant that somebody at NIH thinks your faculty has wrongfully and willfully divulged intellectual property."

UCSD officials were so alarmed by the accusations in the NIH email they received that they circumvented a committee Brenner created years earlier to work with faculty members to avoid conflicts of commitment. (Research universities, including UCSD, typically allow their faculty to spend 1 day a week on outside activities, including foreign collaborations.) Instead, Brenner says, "the matter went straight to the chancellor's office."

The letters also forced administrators to recalibrate their understanding of what types of collaborations needed to be disclosed. "This is the way it works in academia; you collaborate with people," Brenner explains. "The money [a faculty member] received from NIH was always used in their lab, and then they would collaborate with other people using other funds. And we always thought that was a good thing until we were re-educated and told that it wasn't."

**NIH'S SUDDEN SHIFT** also surprised UNC biochemist Yue Xiong, who had assumed his ties to China benefited all parties, including NIH. Xiong, who studies protein degradation, had come to the United States in 1983 thanks to a prestigious state-backed graduate scholarship program that allowed China's most promising young scientists to finish their training in the West. A decade later, he landed at UNC and quickly established himself as a rising star.

"Yue is one of our most important scientists, a rock star, and a model of what we want our faculty to be," says Brian Strahl, chair of the medical school's department of biochemistry and biophysics, where Xiong spent 27 years on the faculty.

In 2003, Xiong set up a joint lab at Fudan with a friend and fellow alumnus of that scholarship program: biochemist Kun-Liang Guan, then a professor at the University of Michigan (UM), Ann Arbor. Fudan had reached out to Guan to seek his help in building up its graduate program in the life sciences, and Guan asked Xiong to join him so the work didn't interfere with his duties at UM.

Guan says the duo made sure the research it carried out in China was different from the work NIH was funding, and they hoped the Fudan students might wind up as postdocs in their U.S. labs. (Xiong declined to talk with *Science* but gave approval for colleagues to speak about his case.)

NIH contended Xiong's NIH grant had been comingled—in what Lauer calls "overlap"—with funding from Chinese entities. "NIH considers the work that was inappropriately disclosed [from foreign sources] to be part of their ecosystem, that is, work that they had funded," says Cyr, now executive vice chancellor for research at Northeastern University. "So the university had to disprove that, or we had to say it's inconclusive."

156 removed

63% of 246 targeted scientists were taken off their NIH grants.

A. MASTIN/SCIENCE

Cyr says NIH would not accept the latter response. "They just kept saying that we needed to dig deeper," she recalls. "But the faculty's stories didn't change. The narrative was what it was." Another sticking point was whether Xiong had a contract with Fudan and had not disclosed it. Strahl and Leslie Parise, his department chair when the investigation was launched, say they were told the alleged contract contained language about intellectual property rights that UNC would never have accepted. But Xiong "kept saying he didn't remember signing any contract," recalls Parise, now dean of the University of Vermont's college of agriculture and life sciences.

Strahl says he was told repeatedly that UNC's entire portfolio of NIH grants—which was approaching \$1 billion—was at risk if Xiong wasn't removed and that anything short of termination wasn't an option. Cyr also felt that pressure.

"When you have Mike Lauer saying that certain individuals are not welcomed in the NIH ecosystem, that's a powerful message,"

Cyr says. "I get that Congress holds NIH accountable and that NIH felt it was in the hot seat. But in dealing with the problem, you shouldn't compromise human beings."

Xiong never saw a list of specific allegations, nor did UNC ever give him any report of its findings. Instead, on 27 May 2020, Xiong was told at a face-to-face meeting with the medical school's head of human resources that he had 48 hours to decide whether to resign or be fired.

"He wasn't given any other options," recalls Strahl, who attended the meeting as Xiong's new boss. "If you want to resign, that would be fine," Strahl recalls Xiong being told. "But if you fight this, things won't end well for you."

They were both in shock, Strahl says. "All I could say was, 'I'm so sorry.' [Xiong] never expected to be let go. He thought that the truth would prevail."

Several of Xiong's colleagues tried to intervene. "We all wrote letters to the chancellor asking him to reverse the decision, but we never even got an answer," says biochemist William Marzluff, who had recruited Xiong to UNC. A UNC spokesperson declined to comment on the case.

Xiong retired quietly from UNC in July 2020 and is now chief scientific officer of Cullgene, a biotech startup in San Diego he co-founded fueled by some of his work at UNC. Six months after his retirement, a university press release touted a paper Xiong and others had published in a leading journal—but did not mention his departure.

**LI WANG IS THE ONLY RESEARCHER** *Science* spoke with who was able to overturn her termination, thanks to her union's collective bargaining agreement. But that isn't to say she emerged unscathed. Within a week of receiving an email from Lauer on 6 November 2018, University of Connecticut (UConn), Storrs, officials had removed Wang, a tenured professor of physiology and neurobiology, from her NIH grant and denied her access to the mice she used to study liver metabolism. But senior administrators soon decided NIH's claims that Wang held a position at Wenzhou Medical University and had received a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China did not hold up. "There is sufficient evidence to show that Dr. Wang is not formally affiliated" with Wenzhou, UConn's then-vice president for research, Radenka Maric, wrote Lauer on 21 November, and that the grant "was in fact awarded to a different Li Wang."



Lauer wasn't willing to accept those results, according to emails obtained by *Science* from UConn through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. On 28 November, Lauer wrote Maric, now UConn's president, that there were "at least four publications" that listed "Dr. Wang-UConn as affiliated with Wenzhou" and reminded Maric "to consider those publications as part of your ongoing reviews." Lauer also told Maric that "NIH thought a reasonable person would consider it more likely than not that Dr. Wang-UConn received financial support for her research" from the Chinese grant.

Lauer suggested UConn officials contact the FBI, and in a subsequent email Maric told Lauer it had given UConn "additional information regarding Chinese talent programs, foreign affiliations, and key search terms." UConn used FBI techniques to search Wang's emails, she told Lauer, and obtained "a forensic image of [Wang's] laptop ... that appear to contradict her denials."

UConn then changed its mind about Wang's innocence. "We cannot certify Dr. Wang as being honest, trustworthy and forthright," Maric told Lauer on 19 February 2019.

91% China

For 225 of the cases China was the country of concern.

85% male

199 of the targeted scientists are men.

81% Asian

182 of the targeted scientists self-reported as Asian.

One month later, UConn banned Wang, who at one point held five NIH grants, from applying for NIH funding for 3 years, and in July the university decided to fire her. Wang resigned on 19 September 2019, 1 day before her termination went into effect. Wang had already filed a grievance, which was rejected. But she had another way to fight back: A collective bargaining agreement gives UConn faculty the right to seek outside, binding arbitration in employment disputes.

Wang took advantage of that mechanism, in which an independent arbitrator conducts its own inquiry and issues a ruling that both parties have agreed to accept. The quasi-judicial process, which includes testimony from both sides, was conducted by the American Arbitration Association (AAA), and in November 2021 its arbitrator ruled in Wang's favor. In a 56-page decision, AAA's Peter Adomeit ordered UConn to pay Wang \$1.4 million in compensation for being suspended and terminated "without just cause."

Wang declined to speak with *Science*, and her lawyer said a nondisclosure agreement prevents him or Wang from discussing the case. UConn officials also declined comment.

Adomeit's ruling, which *Science* obtained from UConn through its FOIA request, excoriated UConn officials for an investigation it characterized as deeply flawed.

"[Interim Provost John] Elliott's claim that the University 'has lost confidence' in Dr. Wang is true," Adomeit wrote. "But it was their fault, not hers. They relied on false evidence. [Wang] tried to correct them, but they wouldn't listen."

"They 'lost confidence' because they only listened to one side of the story," the decision continued. "Their minds were closed. They had no interest in contrary evidence."

Adomeit found the university's use of the results from its audit of Wang's computer to be especially egregious, criticizing lead investigator Michelle Williams's analysis. "Dr. Williams reached her conclusions without conducting metadata analysis on whether Dr. Wang wrote, modified, or accessed the computer data," Adomeit wrote. Williams, he explained, "became convinced, after visually inspecting the forensic image of Dr. Wang's computer, that Dr. Wang was lying, despite website evidence to the contrary."

**BESIDES CONDUCTING** flawed investigations, some universities seem to have cracked down even harder than NIH demanded. That was the case for UCSD neuroscientist Xiang-Dong Fu.

Fu, who studies neurodegenerative diseases including Parkinson's, was hired by UCSD in 1992 and earned tenure in 1998. That was also the year colleagues at Wuhan University, where Fu did his undergraduate studies, solicited his help in building up their research programs.

"You are already coming [to Wuhan] to visit your parents, so maybe you can provide some advice to our young faculty and work with their students?" Fu recalls being asked at dinner during one of those visits home. "If you have someone with similar research interests and some students, then I'd be happy to help out," he says he replied.

Five years later such an opportunity arose, and Fu began to tack on 2 or 3 days at Wuhan every few months after spending a weekend with his parents. In 2005 his hosts formalized his role by naming him a visiting professor, and over the next 3 years he was paid \$1000 a month for 2 months' work with funds from a government program for domestic scholars.

From 2012 to 2016, Fu was again supported by Wuhan through China's Thousand Talents program, which was created to lure back Chinese-born scientists working abroad. Those who agreed to spend at least 9 months a year in China received generous salaries and lavish research funding.

Given his full-time faculty position at UCSD, Fu chose the much less lucrative second tier, which came with a modest monthly stipend. In return, he spent several weeks a year at Wuhan and the Institute for Biophysics at Peking University, where one of his former Wuhan students was now a faculty member.

**I probably failed in many different ways. ... But I still have a dream to chase.**

• XIANG-DONG FU WESTLAKE UNIVERSITY

XIANG-DONG FU

Although Fu says his superiors knew about and had approved his activities, UCSD officials concluded that Fu had violated NIH's disclosure rules. In February 2020, UCSD banned him from applying for NIH funding for 4 years.

"They said that I did not follow certain procedures. OK, that's fair," Fu says. "I probably failed in many different ways." A UCSD spokesperson says the university "will not comment" on his case. Such a ban would have been professionally fatal for most academic biomedical researchers. But a \$9 million grant from a philanthropic initiative, Aligning Science Across Parkinson's, and patient donations allowed Fu to keep his lab going.

NIH told UCSD it regarded Fu's penalty to be sufficient punishment, according to multiple sources. *Science* has also learned that Brenner, now head of the neighboring Sanford Burnham Prebys research institute, told top UCSD officials he opposed any further sanctions. But UCSD continued to investigate Fu's ties to China. In a May 2021 report it concluded Fu had repeatedly violated UCSD's code of conduct for faculty pertaining to conflicts of commitment.

14 no violations

In 6% of 246 cases, the National Institutes of Health agreed with institutions that NIH policies had not been violated.

A. MASTIN/SCIENCE

Fu didn't learn about the second investigation until July 2021 and didn't receive a copy of it until 6 months after that. In the interim he was invited to reply to the report, sight unseen, but told he "could not dispute the investigator's findings."

In January 2022, Fu was given the choice of either resigning or accepting a 4-year, unpaid suspension from the university that would ban him from campus and his lab. In March Executive Vice

Chancellor Elizabeth Simmons submitted an official request that Fu be terminated, and in late April a faculty disciplinary committee recommended he be suspended without pay for 2 years.

Fu filed a grievance, contending that many of the report's findings were incorrect and that the university had failed to follow its own procedures. More than 100 UCSD faculty members petitioned to lighten Fu's penalty, saying the continued prosecution of Fu "appeared rigged to assure the University lawyers would win their case rather than have justice be served."

UCSD officials never replied, says Christopher Glass, a professor of cellular medicine at UCSD who organized the petition, nor did Fu get a response to his grievance. On 5 December 2022, Fu "reluctantly resigned" after being told his 2-year campus suspension would go into effect on 1 January 2023.

Last month he accepted a position with the fledgling Westlake University, China's first private research university. There he hopes to spend the next few years refining a technique to convert brain cells called astrocytes into new neurons. His goal is to validate the controversial approach and use it to develop possible treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. "I don't need a huge lab, and I don't need 10 years," 66-year-old Fu says. "But I still have a dream to chase."

His move to China represents a huge loss for U.S. science, says Glass, who occupied an office next to Fu for 30 years. "He's an amazing scientist, incredibly productive," Glass says. "You couldn't ask for a better next-door neighbor."

**EVEN FOR SCIENTISTS** who keep their U.S. jobs after surviving NIH scrutiny, the experience can take a heavy toll. Guan had rocketed up the academic ladder after joining UM's biological chemistry department in 1992. A 1999 profile in its alumni magazine that marked his MacArthur genius award the previous year called him "one of the great scientific minds of his generation."

His success in elucidating the cell signaling pathways involved in organ development and cancer attracted Fudan's attention, leading to the joint lab he set up with Xiong. The collaboration was no secret.

"My [then-]dean even offered to install a video conference link so it would be easier for me to communicate with people at Fudan," Guan recalls. And when Guan joined the UCSD faculty in 2007, he says his new bosses "were fully aware and very supportive of the collaboration."



Once Lauer's letter arrived in late 2018, Guan says, he cooperated fully with UCSD's investigation. "Whatever they asked for, I gave it to them," he says. "Passwords. My passport. All my travel records. I had a contract with Fudan University, and I gave them a copy of that." He also relinquished his existing NIH grants.

In 2019, the university concluded he had violated its code of conduct by failing to disclose research support from foreign sources and banned him from applying for NIH funding for 2 years. Guan says his work in China "was totally irrelevant" to what NIH was funding him to do, although he acknowledges he was "inconsistent" in reporting income from Fudan. Guan says he never received a letter describing the allegations he was facing or a report on the outcome of the university's investigation. But, "UCSD did what it could" to keep his lab afloat, he says, and he was able to win new NIH awards once the suspension ended in 2021. Even so, his lab has shrunk dramatically, and he's no longer taking on new graduate students for fear that he won't be able to support them for the duration of their training.

His love of science has also suffered.

"I used to work very hard," he says. "Now, sometimes, I wonder what was the point of all the effort I made."

"And I'm one of the lucky ones," he continues. "I don't know how many people that NIH wanted to stop are able to start again. Maybe none."

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Jeffrey Mervis**

mail

Author

Jeff Mervis tries to explain how government works to readers of *Science*.

#### ***19. Twelve Months of War in Ukraine Have Revealed Four Fundamental Lessons on Urban Warfare***

**The four lessons:**

1. In war, cities are important—even the ones with no military value.
2. The foundational task of urban warfare is not clearing.
3. In cities, armies must be able to defend and attack—and switch between the two rapidly.

4. An army that cannot execute combined arms maneuver will suffer.

**Conclusion:**

Ukraine is a vast country of almost a quarter of a million square miles. And yet it is the small percentage of Ukrainian territory covered by cities that has disproportionately characterized the conduct of the war over the past year. For those searching for lessons on the future of warfare, this fact is telling. The lessons offered up by the past twelve months of the war in Ukraine must be identified, and they must inform the ways the US military conceives of, plans and prepares for, and conducts urban warfare.

**Twelve Months of War in Ukraine Have Revealed Four Fundamental Lessons on Urban Warfare - Modern War Institute**

[mwi.usma.edu](https://mwi.usma.edu) · by John Spencer, Liam Collins · February 23, 2023

This week marks one year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine kicked off a war that has offered up a wide range of lessons on the conduct of large-scale combat operations in the twenty-first century. In those twelve months, the war has touched all corners of Ukraine and yet its most defining features have been fights for control of cities. But while urban areas may be the war's most important environment, at least to this point, no two urban battles have been the same. The battles in Kyiv, Mariupol, and Kherson, and the ongoing battle in Bakhmut have taken very different forms. This fact offers a valuable opportunity: by searching for elements common to each of these battles, despite the different contexts in which they occurred, we can illuminate fundamental lessons on urban warfare.

Four particular lessons stand out. Most of them are not new. Rather, they have been on display in previous wars, but too often ignored or forgotten. This is a mistake we should not make again. The US military must learn from the current war in Ukraine to avoid paying the penalty, in blood and treasure, when it finds itself in its own urban battles in the future.

1. In war, cities are important—even the ones with no military value.

Russia's war in Ukraine demonstrates that cities often present strategic, operational, and tactical objectives in major land wars. Since the start of this war, urban areas have been the focal points—the places where much of the most intense fighting has occurred. When asked to identify one of the war's major battles, most observers are likely to name one of the urban fights listed above—Kyiv, Mariupol, or Kherson. Others who have watched the conflict especially closely may even name Severodonetsk or Lysychansk, which Russia seized earlier in the war. In fact, most would be hard-pressed to name a major battle that did not occur in, or for, a city. Neither side has been able to avoid or bypass urban areas because they are tactically, operationally, and sometimes strategically important.

Kyiv, for example, is the most strategically important terrain in the country. As the capital city, it houses Ukraine's national government, giving it obvious political significance. Ukraine successfully defended its capital in the opening month of the war and achieved its vital goal: survival of the nation and its government. Russia, by contrast, failed to achieve its strategic goal: the rapid overthrow the Ukrainian government and the installation of a Russian proxy in its place.

Kherson is an operationally important city (and arguably a strategically significant one, as well). It is a critical Black Sea port and a gateway to Crimea. Controlling this provincial capital means controlling Ukraine's south. Russia seized the city in the opening days of the war but was forced to withdraw in October. By liberating Kherson city, Ukraine prevented Russia from achieving its stated strategic objective of annexing the entire Kherson region as Russian territory.

Yet not all cities are strategically or operationally significant; many, in fact, do not even offer much tactical value from a strictly military perspective. Cities such as Severodonetsk, which Russia seized in June, and Bakhmut, where the fighting continues today, represent little military value on their own. Controlling them does not offer either side a marked military advantage. Yet the fighting for both was—and in the case of Bakhmut, remains—extremely intense.

Why are the militaries of each nation fighting so hard for seemingly insignificant terrain? It is because they are symbolically important, and their control consequently has political value. Ukraine does not want a city of seventy thousand (Bakhmut) or one hundred thousand (Severodonetsk) to fall into Russian hands. Likewise, Russia wants to seize these cities to demonstrate progress in a war that has not gone well. Seizing thousands of rural square miles in the Zaporizhzhia region simply does not have the same political effect. Because war is inherently political, these seemingly insignificant pieces of terrain become tactically and operationally important and yet another reason why fighting in urban areas cannot be avoided.

2. The foundational task of urban warfare is not clearing.

The many urban battles of Ukraine consistently show that the foundational task of high-intensity warfare against a peer enemy in dense urban terrain is not clearing—not clearing rooms, not clearing buildings, and not clearing cities. While very limited methodical clearing operations have been observed, conducting them has not been the dominant requirement for either side.

The more crucial tasks in these battles were placing either the defender or attacker at a disadvantage through fire and maneuver: finding, fixing, and destroying a hidden or embedded enemy; holding or seizing key urban terrain features such as strongpoints, bridge and river crossing, streets, and high ground; or, as was the case for Ukrainian forces in Kherson, placing the adversary in such an untenable position that they were forced to flee the city without even attempting to defend it.

During the Battle of Kyiv, Ukrainian defenders, both military and civilian, emplaced barriers, flooded rivers, and employed other techniques to canalize mounted Russian formations into narrow, dense urban avenues of approach where they were ambushed and defeated in detail. In the battles of Severodonetsk and Kherson, whichever side controlled or influenced the river crossings—something present in most major cities—had the advantage by cutting off one side of the river from resupply or reinforcements.

The vital task of modern urban warfare is the ability to combine arms—fires (rocket, artillery, and mortars), armor, infantry, engineers, aerial strike and reconnaissance platforms, as well as



cyber, space, and other capabilities—at a precise time and location to achieve key tasks like identifying and destroying enemy personnel or their critical capabilities to hold or attack urban terrain. A military force, like Russia, that attempts to deploy individual arms independently and without mutual support—first artillery, then armor, followed by infantry, for instance—will continue to pay extremely high costs in casualties and will fail to achieve its military mission in urban terrain.

3. In cities, armies must be able to defend and attack—and switch between the two rapidly.

As this war has shown, cities cannot be bypassed. As such, one side must defend and the other attack. But wars and battles are fluid, so militaries must be capable of doing both and of moving between offense and defense seamlessly and quickly. In the opening days of the war, the Ukrainians were largely defending and the Russians attacking. But even on the war's very first day, Ukraine conducted at least one counterattack against which the Russians defended poorly: the battle of Hostomel Airport. It is but one example that demonstrates how militaries must be capable of not just defending and attacking in urban terrain, but also switching between the two more quickly than the adversary.

In the opening hours of the war, Russia sent at least thirty helicopters carrying up to three hundred Russian airborne soldiers to seize the airport, located on the outskirts of Kyiv, and establish an airbridge to support the assault on the capital. Within hours, the Russian forces' attack had secured the airport—but they failed to defend it. That evening, a force consisting of Ukraine's 4th Rapid Reaction Brigade and other units counterattacked and seized the airfield because the Russian airborne troops had failed to establish an effective defense and lacked the capabilities necessary to hold it.

Ukrainian forces recognized that they were in an untenable position and withdrew that same night, but the damage they sought to inflict had been done. They had cratered the runway, thwarting Russia's plan to use it as a key bridge to rapidly bring in the forces needed to take the city.

In September, Ukrainian forces liberated the towns of Izyum and Kupiansk, both of which had been captured during the war's first two months. These urban areas were key to Russian forces in the

region because they were both vital logistical hubs, as urban areas often are because they sit along transportation and rail lines that military forces need to resupply forward troops and project power. Russia had fought a bitter battle to seize Izyum, and like the Hostomel Airport, failed to defend it.

At the battle of Mariupol, just a few thousand Ukrainian defenders held the city, which had a prewar population of five hundred thousand, for over eighty days against a Russian force five to eight times larger. The Ukrainians varied their defenses and how they used the complex, dense urban terrain to hold off the larger force. They leveraged the city's heavy-clad, industrial buildings and its subterranean network very effectively. The tactical battle for Mariupol had important operational impacts: by holding out as long as they did, Ukrainian defenders prevented up to forty thousand Russian forces from fighting on other fronts where they may have shifted the tide of the war.

4. An army that cannot execute combined arms maneuver will suffer.

This war is being fought by two very different militaries using very different strategies. After committing itself to a massive reform in 2016, Ukraine's military entered the war very different from the one Russia and Russian-led separatists had faced in 2014–15. Ukraine's military had the doctrine, leadership, training, culture, and morale necessary to effectively employ combined arms maneuver at scale. While combined arms maneuver is important for any environment, it is especially important in cities.

Urban warfare is the ultimate test of combined arms maneuver. The side that can better integrate fires, armor, infantry, engineers, and intelligence has an advantage. The history of urban warfare consistently proves this to be a fundamental reality. Over twelve months of war, Ukrainian forces have simply been better at conducting combined arms maneuver than their Russian counterparts.

Russia's military, by contrast, underwent its own reforms over the past decade, but has proven itself to be poorly led, poorly trained, poorly motivated, even lacking adequate arms like infantry in its base formations. Unsurprisingly, as a result, Russian forces have often proven themselves incapable of executing complex maneuvers on the battlefield. Lacking the ability to effectively

employ combined arms maneuver, Russia's primary method to attack cities is to leverage its one advantage: mass. In Mariupol, Severodonetsk, Bakhmut, and other cities, Russia's approach has been a crude one: conduct large artillery barrages and throw thousands of soldiers into the city to dislodge a much smaller Ukrainian force. At times, this has been effective—but even these successes have come at a great cost, forcing Russia to tie up manpower, accept large numbers of casualties, and expend huge numbers of munitions for only incremental territorial gains of seemingly little military value. Given the sheer size of Russia's military, it is safe to say that if Russia was employing effective combined arms maneuver in Ukraine's cities, it would be having much greater success.

Ukraine is a vast country of almost a quarter of a million square miles. And yet it is the small percentage of Ukrainian territory covered by cities that has disproportionately characterized the conduct of the war over the past year. For those searching for lessons on the future of warfare, this fact is telling. The lessons offered up by the past twelve months of the war in Ukraine must be identified, and they must inform the ways the US military conceives of, plans and prepares for, and conducts urban warfare.

John Spencer is chair of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute, codirector of MWI's Urban Warfare Project, and host of the Urban Warfare Project Podcast. He served twenty-five years as an infantry soldier, which included two combat tours in Iraq. In June 2022, he and Liam Collins traveled independently to Ukraine to research the defense of Kyiv. He is the author of the book *Connected Soldiers: Life, Leadership, and Social Connection in Modern War* and coauthor of *Understanding Urban Warfare*.

Liam Collins, PhD was the founding director of the Modern War Institute at West Point and served as a defense advisor to Ukraine from 2016 to 2018. He is a retired Special Forces colonel with deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, the Horn of Africa, and South America. He is coauthor of the book *Understanding Urban Warfare*.

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the United States Military Academy, Department of the Army, or Department of Defense.

mwi.usma.edu · by John Spencer, Liam Collins · February 23, 2023

***20. FACT SHEET: President Biden Submits to Congress 10-Year Plans to Implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability***

Here is the link to the website at State for this initiative. <https://www.state.gov/stability-strategy/>

**FACT SHEET: President Biden Submits to Congress 10-Year Plans to Implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability | The White House**

whitehouse.gov · by The White House · March 25, 2023

The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability is a long-term initiative to redefine how the United States prevents violence and advances stability in areas vulnerable to conflict. Under the bipartisan Global Fragility Act, the U.S. government is implementing this Strategy through 10-year plans developed with extensive consultations with local stakeholders in our priority partner countries and region: Haiti, Libya, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and the Coastal West Africa countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo. The U.S. government is investing resources, including through the Prevention and Stabilization Fund, to bolster these country and region-specific plans.

In line with the vision and goals of this landmark Act, the Strategy and resulting plans seek to break the costly cycle of instability and promote peaceful, resilient nations that become strong economic and security partners. The work ahead focuses on four goals: prevention, stabilization, partnerships, and management. These plans embody an integrated, whole-of-government approach that seeks to harness the full range of U.S. tools across new and existing diplomatic, defense, and development programs. Through partnerships, analysis, and adaptive learning,



the Strategy and these plans aim to address drivers of conflict with a long-term view to support partner countries' efforts to forge a more peaceful future.

- **Partnerships:** The Strategy and these plans reflect a commitment to innovate how the U.S. government works with partners to advance shared interests in conflict prevention and stabilization. They were developed through leadership from the field and emphasize forging partnerships at the national and local levels.
- **Analysis:** In the development of these plans, the United States recognized and assessed a diverse set of resiliencies and challenges. The plans outline an initial assessment of complex and multifaceted drivers of violence and instability and will rely on data-informed analysis throughout their implementation.
- **Learning:** Over the long term, the United States will utilize rigorous monitoring and evaluation to document lessons learned and guide decisions. The tools used will provide information to further assess progress towards key milestones while informing programmatic changes and strategic pivots.

#### Country and Region Partnerships

The United States is advancing this Strategy through increased engagement and partnerships in the priority partner countries and region. U.S. government interagency teams conducted broad-ranging consultations with national and local leaders, including women, youth, and civil society members, to guide these planned partnerships. On March 24, 2023, President Biden transmitted to Congress 10-year plans for advancing our joint efforts, including by aligning and expanding resources for conflict prevention and stabilization. Specifically:

- In Coastal West Africa, the United States aims to work with partners at all levels to prevent the destabilizing expansion of terrorism and violent extremism. The United States is pursuing an integrated approach to governance and security in support of African-led initiatives and aligning our efforts with the plans of national governments, which take a holistic approach to mitigating conflict risks and vulnerabilities and strengthening social cohesion.

- In Haiti, the United States aims to foster stabilization in communities impacted by violence while systematically addressing underlying drivers of conflict over time and mitigating the impact of future climate shocks. The United States aims to build on mechanisms for consultations with a broad range of Haitian stakeholders to support locally driven peace and stability.
- In Libya, the United States is focusing on laying the groundwork for an elected national government capable of governing, providing services, and maintaining security throughout the country. The United States is pursuing a flexible, adaptive approach focused on community-level programs that can be scaled up as opportunities arise to support national elections; access to security, justice, accountability, and reconciliation; and pre-disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts.
- In Mozambique, the United States supports the national government's plans to promote reconciliation, inclusive and sustainable development, and resilience in historically marginalized and conflict-affected areas. This includes efforts to counter vulnerabilities to terrorism, bolster recovery from its impacts, and address the root causes of instability in the north. The United States aims to help the government and local partners foster pathways for inclusive economic growth to increase employment, especially among young Mozambicans.
- In Papua New Guinea, U.S. efforts will reinforce our growing Pacific partnerships with a key country of the Pacific Islands. We will seek to strengthen communities' capacity to prevent and respond to chronic violence and conflict; support inclusive, sustainable, and equitable economic growth; improve justice systems; and professionalize the security forces. This includes a focus on helping Papua New Guinean partners advance gender equity and equality, prevent and respond to gender-based violence, and elevate women peacebuilders.

Across these efforts, the U.S. government is investing heavily in monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptation. U.S. government departments and agencies are better integrating U.S.

diplomatic, development, and defense tools and enabling more effective, accountable partnerships. Through these plans, the U.S. government will deepen engagement with key stakeholders in partner countries, as well as with civil society, multilateral and regional organizations, the private sector, and likeminded countries that are also engaged in addressing drivers of conflict in these priority countries and region.

For more information on our work to implement the Strategy, please visit this dedicated website.

"These plans represent a meaningful, long-term commitment by the United States to building the political and economic resilience of partner societies by making strategic investments in prevention to mitigate the underlying vulnerabilities that can lead to conflict and violence and are critical to achieving lasting peace."

– President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

###

whitehouse.gov · by The White House · March 25, 2023

***21. Letter from President Joe Biden on the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability***

**Letter from President Joe Biden on the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability | The White House**

whitehouse.gov · by The White House · March 25, 2023

In our interconnected world, instability anywhere can have global repercussions. The security and prosperity of Americans here at home is directly connected to the security and economic health of people everywhere. Strife spills across borders. Violence and deprivation are driving a record number of people from their homes. The horrors of war unfolding in Ukraine, where Russian forces are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as in Yemen and Syria, remind us every day of the terrible human costs of conflict. And, as we have all experienced these past few years living through the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerating impacts of the climate crisis, no nation can wall itself off from the shared challenges that are shaping our world.

Sadly, and all too often, the nations that are hit the hardest are also the ones that have the fewest resources to recover. American leadership and American commitment are critical to rallying the world to respond in times of crisis and to mitigate the impacts on communities around the world. At the same time, we recognize that the best strategy to save lives, build lasting stability, and disrupt the cycle of violence is to prevent conflicts before they happen. We must both continue to address the urgent demands of today, while also looking ahead to the investments we can make now that will deliver a more peaceful tomorrow for people everywhere—including in the United States.

That is the goal of the Global Fragility Act, which Congress passed in 2019 with strong bipartisan support. Last year, my Administration announced our priority partner countries and an updated vision to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in line with the goals of the Global Fragility Act. And today, I am submitting to Congress the 10-year plans for implementing our strategy working together with our priority partners: Haiti, Libya, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and Coastal West Africa, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo.

These plans represent a meaningful, long-term commitment by the United States to building the political and economic resilience of partner societies by making strategic investments in prevention to mitigate the underlying vulnerabilities that can lead to conflict and violence and are critical to achieving lasting peace. The plans are a statement of our values, deeply rooted in America's commitment to upholding human rights and strengthening democracy and good governance, and amplify the unsung work of prevention and capacity building, which often reflects the dedication of decades of dialogue and diplomacy. And, critically, they are built around local partnerships, elevating diverse voices, including the voices of women and young people, in recognition of the fact that those who are the closest to the challenges know best what is needed to bring about peace and progress.



Each plan emphasizes collaboration and coordination across the U.S. Government and between the U.S. government and local and international partners, and leverages the full range of our diplomatic, development, and defense toolkit, while also being tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of each country and region. These investments in peace and prosperity will not only deliver returns for our priority partner nations in the decades ahead—they will foster greater stability, success, and security for nations everywhere and help advance progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. As my Administration works to translate these plans from roadmaps into results, I look forward to continuing to work closely with Congress and with the civil society stakeholders who are driving this effort at all levels.

We stand at an inflection point in history—where the choices we make today will determine the shape of the world for generations to come. By bringing together long-term planning, locally-owned solutions, and vital American leadership now, I believe we will create a more peaceful and prosperous future for everyone.

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

###

whitehouse.gov · by The White House · March 25, 2023

## *22. Pursuing Peace Through Partnerships, Local Engagement, and Learning*

### **Pursuing Peace Through Partnerships, Local Engagement, and Learning - United States Department of State**

state.gov · by Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

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## **Pursuing Peace Through Partnerships, Local Engagement, and Learning**

Press Statement

March 25, 2023

Yesterday President Biden transmitted to Congress new 10-year plans to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability with our priority partner countries and region. The plans represent an important step in advancing efforts to bring stability to conflict-affected areas and are a move toward greater global peace. They acknowledge that the most pressing challenges of our time do not confine themselves within national borders. Through cooperation and collaboration, we can address the underlying causes of violence and instability before conflicts can break out or escalate.

Taken together, these plans also represent a commitment to reform how the United States engages with partners; utilizes data and evidence to inform policymaking; and integrates diplomatic, development, and security sector engagement. To advance these plans, the Department of State is collaborating across the U.S. government and marshaling diplomatic efforts alongside foreign assistance, including development programs and security assistance.

I am grateful for Congress's continued bipartisan engagement on this effort and the steadfast commitment of government partners, local leaders, civil society, the private sector, and expert communities at home and abroad who remain dedicated to realizing the full potential of the Global Fragility Act's long-term vision.

state.gov · by Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

### ***23. Uyghurs tell Congress of gang rape, shackles and sterilization***

Another tragic report of what is happening to the Uyghur people.

### **Uyghurs tell Congress of gang rape, shackles and sterilization**

Two survivors of Chinese concentration camps describe torture and dehumanization at heart of genocide.

Alex Willemyns for RFA

2023.03.24

Washington

rfa.org

Schoolteacher Qelbinur Sidik had taught the Mandarin language at an elementary school in Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang region, for 28 years when people started disappearing.

"At the end of 2016, students in my classroom started to ask, 'Teacher, why are my parents being taken? Why was my uncle taken?'" Sidik said in translated testimony to the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party during a Thursday night hearing.

"I was unable to answer, as it was very painful," she said. "I would tell them, 'You know what, your parents had to learn the national language – that's why they were taken.' But the kids weren't satisfied by that."

Her students were too smart.

"They said if they had to learn the language, why would they not learn the language at the school we are at right now?" she recounted.

The truth, as Sidik already knew but would later experience first-hand, was that adult members of the majority-Muslim ethnic minority in far-western China were being taken to concentration camps to be tortured, raped, subjected to psychological warfare and sterilized.

Their only crime: practicing a religion and possessing a cultural identity that did not place the Chinese Communist Party in the ultimate position of authority.

The apparent goal of the internment was to break down that identity, and bring the population of about 12 million Uyghurs to heel.

Then the children's camps started to open.

"The name," Sidik told Congress on Thursday, "was 'kindergarten' or 'boarding school,' but, in reality, it was camps for the children."

Tiger chairs

Eventually, Sidik, an ethnic Uzbek but longtime member of the Uyghur community, was herself taken away and forced to teach Mandarin in the compounds, which she described during her

testimony as hulking high-security prisons that would have cost millions to build.

Another former camp prisoner, Gulbahar Haitiwaji, the author of "How I Survived a Chinese 'Re-Education' Camp," told the committee hearing she only managed to escape thanks to a long-running diplomatic effort by the French government, pressured by her daughter in France.

Gulbahar Haitiwaji, a Uyghur who wrote a book about the experience of being held in two Chinese "re-education" camps and police stations for more than two years and is Uyghur, testifies at a hearing of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Thursday, March 23, 2023, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Associated Press)

There she witnessed her fellow Uyghurs with shaved heads in jump suits with numbers clearly printed on the front. The prisoners were regularly kept shackled at their legs, severely beaten for minor infractions and only allowed to be referred to by their number.

The daily 11-hour study lessons included Chinese history and law and patriotic songs. For some prisoners, lessons would be immediately followed by a trip to an interrogation room in the room next door.

"Each time they interrogated us, they put black hoods on our heads and they shackled our feet, and they handcuffed us," Haitiwaji said, before locking them into a contraption known as a "tiger chair," a constrictive metal seat that does not allow its victim to move.

If prisoners were ever caught speaking Uyghur, they were locked in a tiger chair for up to 72 hours, she added, "and they kept us until we said we were never again going to speak in the Uyghur language."

Gang rape and sterilization

Sidik said the experience was clearly intended to dehumanize. She told the hearing that before eating – usually a single Chinese "bao" bun each day – the Uyghur prisoners were also forced to praise the Chinese motherland, the Chinese Communist Party and President Xi Jinping, replacing the customary Islamic grace before a meal.

But it was through torture that the most damage was done.



Sidik said there were four types of torture used by the Chinese prison guards – “electric baton, electric helmet, electric glove and the tiger chair” – and that after a prisoner was called for an interrogation, “those prisoners were unable to come to class for weeks or months.”

“The interrogation rooms are located just next to the classrooms,” she said. “So 30 minutes after the prisoners were taken, you would hear horrible screaming sounds because they were being tortured.”

The torture also included extreme sexual violence.

“The horrible thing is when these female prisoners were taken for interrogation, they faced gang rape by the guards,” Sidik recounted in tears. “And the worst thing is they – the guards or police – use electric batons to insert their private parts to rape and torture them.”

A teenage girl imprisoned alongside Sidik bled from her genitals for two months, she said, before she watched her pass away. She also said she was imprisoned alongside what she estimated was 10,000 other women, mostly between the ages of 17 and 40, who she said were injected with an unknown “medicine” every Monday.

“After they took that medicine, their period would stop,” she said. “Even some women who were breastfeeding, the breast milk will stop.”

Qelbinur Sidik holds up images as she testifies at a hearing of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Thursday, March 23, 2023, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Associated Press)

In May 2019, she said, she was herself sterilized in an operation. At least 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities are believed to have been held in a network of detention camps in Xinjiang since 2017.

Beijing has said that the camps are vocational training centers. The government has denied widespread allegations that it has tortured people in the camps or mistreated other Muslims living in Xinjiang.

Sidik said she eventually escaped the terror thanks to her daughter who lived in the Netherlands. But she said she was left scarred by the experience and still feared for her husband, whom

she was forced to divorce by Chinese authorities and had since lost contact with.

Once she left China, she said, a Chinese policeman video-called her from her husband's phone and tried to convince her to "come work" for the government.

She held up a screengrab of the man grinning.

Expert testimony

Thursday night's hearing represented the second sitting of the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, which was set up by the new Republican-led majority in the House of Representatives and aims to build a bipartisan consensus on "the threat posed by" Beijing.

After the testimony of the former prisoners, three experts on the Uyghur genocide also gave testimony, with Adrian Zenz, a German anthropologist and director in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, telling the committee that the genocide was driven by a "paranoia" among China's leaders.

He said Beijing's fears about Uyghurs in the far-west resisting their rule was due to "an exaggerated threat perception that genocide scholars have linked to all major atrocities in the past 100 years."

Dr. Adrian Zenz, a German anthropologist and director in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, at a hearing of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, Thursday, March 23, 2023, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Associated Press)

"These witness statements we've heard do not speak of isolated incidents. They reflect a systematic policy. Classified documents outlined Beijing's secret plan to subjugate the region," Zenz said, noting that Xi had asked former Tibet party chief Chen Quanguo "experienced with crushing dissent in Tibet" to move to Xinjiang.

Zenz said an estimated 2 million Uyghurs were detained in the five years from 2017, when the program of official "mass internments" began in earnest, with Chen implementing "measures to prevent births, leading to unprecedented declines in Uyghur birth rates."

"The presumed goal of these measures, and the intent behind them, was to optimize the ethnic population structure, diluting Uyghur populations with Han," Zenz said, "because concentrated Uyghur populations were considered a national security threat." Lawmakers from both parties asked what tangible steps the U.S. government could take to help end the Uyghur genocide.

Nury Turkel, a Uyghur-American who chairs the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, said U.S.

officials needed to investigate mutual fund providers like Vanguard, BlackRock, HSBC and Fidelity, which he accused of investing in the repression.

He said China's repression of the Uyghurs – and the associated forced labor – had become a big business, and had taken on a life of its own given the large sums of money Beijing was throwing at it.

"They invested zillions of dollars, and now this has become a political economy. This is why they've been aggressively exporting their digital surveillance," he said. "We're talking about more than 80 countries around the world, and that includes some democratic nations."

'Never Again'

Rep. Jake Auchincloss, a Democrat from Massachusetts, said his great grandparents escaped Jewish pogroms in Poland and Soviet Ukraine, and praised Radio Free Asia for its role in informing the world about the Uyghurs, which he likened to Radio Free Europe's role in a past era.

"Radio Free Asia, also developed and funded by the United States Agency for Global Media, is providing these services of independent journalism in the Indo-Pacific region," Auchincloss said. "They were the first media outlet to publish reporting about the CCP's internment, forced separation, slave labor and sterilization of the Uyghur people."

Uyghur camp survivor and author Gulbahar Haitiwaji [right] speaks next to her daughter, Gulhumar Haitiwaji, who successfully campaigned for her mother's release, in Washington, D.C., Wednesday, March 22, 2023. (Gemuun Amarasinghe/RFA)

Naomi Kikoler, director of the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,

replied that it was important for RFA to continue broadcasting such stories, because Beijing “wants you to think that there is no evidence” of a genocide.

“The role of Radio Free Asia has been incredibly important, and the role of the independent press is essential to telling the story of the Uyghur people,” Kikoler said. “Many of the journalists themselves are Uyghur, and they’re telling the stories of their own communities.”

“I can’t even imagine the weight that sits on their shoulders as they do that – at great risk to their own personal families,” she added. “Often they’re able to do so in the Uyghur language, which the Chinese government is intent on also trying to erase and eliminate.”

Kikoler appealed for people to take action and do for the Uyghurs “what was not done for the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust.” “This is our ‘Never again’ moment,” she said. “The words ‘Never again’ were meant to be a lasting commitment, no matter how challenging, including when a superpower like China is perpetrating the crimes.”

*Edited by Malcolm Foster.*

rfa.org

#### ***24. How to Defend Taiwan is a Political Problem***

##### **Excerpts:**

What we need to focus on is how to prevent Taiwan's isolation, and how we can do that realistically given the political diseases that affect US policy makers when it comes to China. Dumping weapons into Taiwan, even if we had them to dump, doesn't fix the isolation problem. The isolation problem is key, because it is precisely China's strategic objective to isolate Taiwan.

China is emphasizing Taiwan's isolation politically and militarily. Flying fighter jets, bombers and surveillance aircraft around Taiwan, forcing constant air defense response drills, is an effective measure that wears out Taiwan's old F-16s



and CK1 fighter jets. Adding more and more aircraft to the mix, and running aggressive naval drills around the island, add to the pressure felt by Taiwan's military. At the same time, running well publicized invasion exercises makes it clear to Taiwan's decision makers that, on any day, China can shift from drills, to the real thing.

**Conclusion:**

US policy makers, of course, prefer to kick the can down the road, as they have been doing for over forty years. But the world has changed. China has now buttressed its power with a strategic deal with Russia. We don't know what mutual commitments were made by the pair, but it can't be good. The US has overcommitted to Ukraine, weakened the defense of Europe, and is having trouble shoring up its Pacific military capabilities. The latest decision to pull front line fighters from the Middle East and replace them with old A-10s, is illustrative of the shortage of equipment. Similarly, non-deliveries of ordered munitions and weapons for Taiwan is another. Washington is increasingly out of sorts. It is high time for Washington to get its act together and sensibly strengthen deterrence globally.

**How to Defend Taiwan is a Political Problem**

**Washington Needs to get its Act Together**

<https://weapons.substack.com/p/how-to-defend-taiwan-is-a-political>

Stephen Bryen

20 hr ago

2

There is a debate in Washington on whether or not the US can "defend" Taiwan from a Chinese invasion. No matter what your expertise is in military operations, my view is that the debate misses the main point. The issue is not whether

the United States can defend Taiwan --that is, strictly speaking a military question based on the balance of forces and their deployment, but instead the issue is about the political character of deterring a Chinese military operation against Taiwan.

The actual situation is not so much military as it is political, and the political impacts the strategic game. China's strategy has been clear for many years and it has not markedly changed. China seeks to isolate Taiwan and to discourage Taiwan's defenders, the United States most of all, from considering coming to Taiwan's defense.

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The context is, of course, that while there is Congressional support for Taiwan in the United States, that support has been lacking from the Executive Branch of government. Even under more Taiwan-friendly governments, Donald Trump's for example, the overall calculus has remained about the same. (The fact that Taiwan's President, Tsai Ing-wen, in her trip to the United States cannot meet with any Executive Branch officials, is illustrative. It has been that way for decades.)

President Tsai speaks at the Republic of China (Taiwan) Military Academy

That's because Washington needs to maintain good relations with China, protect the American economy which is, today, increasingly shaky, and keep enough freedom of action to not be tied down solely in the Pacific. Keep in mind that most US military assets are in Europe, not in Japan or Okinawa, or even in Australia. Complicating things further is the tremendous amount of equipment and operational support that has been poured into Ukraine, weakening the defense of Europe and stiffing Taiwan, which is not getting vital arms deliveries because US industrial capacity is being soaked up by the Ukraine war.

There are also systemic structural problems on the US military side which anyone with common sense in the Pentagon has to understand. The US Navy, with the possible exception of nuclear submarines, is in serious decline, with out of date ships and poorly trained crews. The US Air Force, which is primarily dependent on the unproven F-35, has a lot of old, worn out jet fighters, old F-16's and F-15s. Even the US bomber fleet is made up of ancient B-52s and B1 bombers. The B1 bombers keep experiencing serious technical and aging problems. The B2s are still good, but how any of them, even stealth bombers, would fare on really long range missions against modern air defense systems remains open to question. Meanwhile America, which usually used the US Marines as the point of the sword, has voluntarily destroyed that service: the latest obscenity was to take away the Marine's main battle tanks and change the Marine's mission to something approximating helping the Navy to load its obsolete guns.

The last tanks assigned to 1st Tank Battalion depart Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, July 6, 2020. Sgt. Courtney White/Marine Corps)

There is a lot more that is discouraging, such as wasting money on the worthless Littoral Combat Ship, which can do things but not combat, or retiring Ticonderoga class cruisers to save money. Ticonderoga's, as worn and clunky as they are, enhance US air defenses at sea, mainly Arleigh Burke class destroyers, the sort of air cover needed if a war really did break out in the Pacific. Both Ticonderoga cruisers and Arleigh Burke class cruisers have AEGIS air defense systems. But never mind.

Ticonderoga class cruiser with AEGIS

Thus from the purely military side, the US is not in tip top shape against a growing threat from China. But even that is not the critical issue.

What we need to focus on is how to prevent Taiwan's isolation, and how we can do that realistically given the

political diseases that affect US policy makers when it comes to China. Dumping weapons into Taiwan, even if we had them to dump, doesn't fix the isolation problem. The isolation problem is key, because it is precisely China's strategic objective to isolate Taiwan.

China is emphasizing Taiwan's isolation politically and militarily. Flying fighter jets, bombers and surveillance aircraft around Taiwan, forcing constant air defense response drills, is an effective measure that wears out Taiwan's old F-16s and CK1 fighter jets. Adding more and more aircraft to the mix, and running aggressive naval drills around the island, add to the pressure felt by Taiwan's military. At the same time, running well publicized invasion exercises makes it clear to Taiwan's decision makers that, on any day, China can shift from drills, to the real thing.

#### Taiwan Air Force Pilots Scrambling

China's military operations beyond Taiwan, for example in the South China sea, is meant to extend the pressure on the United States. Chasing US carriers and warships and aircraft away from China's South China sea islands and reefs, almost all militarized, is an example of how messages can be sent to Washington. China also gets a free propaganda victory even when not supported by the facts, as the message about stopping US so-called "freedom of navigation" exercises is a warning to Japan and other littoral states in the region.

The US will continue to be victimized this way by China so long as it is an uncommitted actor. While the US has tried to compensate by carrying out military exercises with allies and friends in the region (not including Taiwan), such measures don't solve the Taiwan isolation problem, which is acute.

The basic problem is that the US, since the Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, also known as the Shanghai Communiqué (1972), does not diplomatically recognize Taiwan and has no military bases or military



agreements with Taiwan. While Taiwan gets arms, largely thanks to the Taiwan Relations Act (1979-1980) passed by the US Congress, even that act did not actually change Taiwan's isolation. While the US has mutual defense and security agreements with Japan and with South Korea, there are no security agreements of any kind with Taiwan.

If there is no willingness to ameliorate Taiwan's isolation, the result will be a steady erosion of Taiwan's operational independence and, at the end of the day, the takeover of Taiwan by China. Taiwan's leaders, who have a lot of fortitude, can be expected to skate on increasingly thin ice for only so long.

Washington could find a way to improve the situation by setting up a common defense system in the region, without officially recognizing Taiwan. The means to do this would be a Common Command Structure between the US, Japan, Korea and Taiwan which would include mutual defense commitments. A Common Command Structure would be between military organizations, and while China may say that Taiwan's participation in a Common Command Structure would signal US support for Taiwan's independence and violate the terms of the Shanghai Communiqué, the US could say that it still backs the Communiqué and seeks a peaceful resolution of the dispute between China and Taiwan. In effect, if we can support Taiwan with armaments, we can demand that those armaments be part of a Common Command Structure in the region.

Obviously Taiwan would be a beneficiary of a Common Command Structure because it would be a collective defense agreement at the military level, something Taiwan needs for its survival. But it would have two other effects. First it would send a message to China that their attempts to isolate Taiwan will not work and that other acceptable political solutions could, if China was willing to shift away from its all or nothing approach towards Taiwan. China has to be convinced to change its political approach,

and to shift away from military pressure tactics or dangerously forcing a confrontation with the United States. A Common Command Structure might be just the ticket to bring about such change.

A Common Command Structure also benefits the United States in tangible ways. By organizing defenses with our regional allies we take a critical step in offsetting the defense burden by sharing it. The time has come, as even Japan is grasping, that either we are all in this together or we all will lose. It also sends a clear message to China that picking apart our alliances is off the agenda.

The A-10 Thunderbolt II piloted by Captain Kim Campbell suffered extensive damage during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Campbell flew it safely back to base on manual reversion mode after taking damage to the hydraulic system. (U.S. Air Force photo)

US policy makers, of course, prefer to kick the can down the road, as they have been doing for over forty years. But the world has changed. China has now buttressed its power with a strategic deal with Russia. We don't know what mutual commitments were made by the pair, but it can't be good. The US has overcommitted to Ukraine, weakened the defense of Europe, and is having trouble shoring up its Pacific military capabilities. The latest decision to pull front line fighters from the Middle East and replace them with old A-10s, is illustrative of the shortage of equipment. Similarly, non-deliveries of ordered munitions and weapons for Taiwan is another. Washington is increasingly out of sorts. It is high time for Washington to get its act together and sensibly strengthen deterrence globally.

(For those interested, I suggest having a look at "Stopping a Taiwan Invasion" written by myself and retired Marine General Earl Hailston. You can get it exclusively on Amazon.)

## ***25. US bank trouble heralds end of dollar reserve system***

REM is singing: "It is the end of the world as we know it..."

This means the end of our superpower status and it will likely be impossible to sustain a military capable of defending US interests around the world.

### **US bank trouble heralds end of dollar reserve system**

Bank crisis not a credit quality problem but stems instead from now-impossible task of financing America's ever-expanding foreign debt

asiatimes.com · by David P. Goldman · March 25, 2023

NEW YORK – The US banking system is broken. That doesn't portend more high-profile failures like Credit Suisse. The central banks will keep moribund institutions on life support.

But the era of dollar-based reserves and floating exchange rates that began on August 15, 1971, when the US severed the link between the dollar and gold, is coming to an end. The pain will be transferred from the banks to the real economy, which will starve for credit.

And the geopolitical consequences will be enormous. The seizure-up of dollar credit will accelerate the shift to a multipolar reserve system, with advantage to China's RMB as a competitor to the dollar.

Gold, the "barbarous relic" abhorred by John Maynard Keynes, will play a bigger role because the dollar banking system is dysfunctional, and no other currency—surely not the tightly-controlled RMB—can replace it. Now at an all-time record price of US\$2,000 an ounce, gold is likely to rise further.

The greatest danger to dollar hegemony and the strategic power that it imparts to Washington is not China's ambition to expand the international role of the RMB. The danger comes from the exhaustion of the financial mechanism that made it possible for the US to run up a negative \$18 trillion net foreign asset position during the past 30 years.

Germany's flagship institution, Deutsche Bank, hit an all-time low of 8 euros on the morning of March 24, before recovering to 8.69 euros at the end of that day's trading, and its credit default swap

premium—the cost of insurance on its subordinated debt—spiked to about 380 basis points above LIBOR, or 3.8%.

That's as much as during the 2008 banking crisis and the 2015 European financial crisis, although not quite as much as during the March 2020 Covid lockdown, when the premium exceeded 5%. Deutsche Bank won't fail, but it may need official support. It may have received such support already.

This crisis is utterly unlike 2008, when banks levered up trillions of dollars of dodgy assets based on "liar's loans" to homeowners. Fifteen years ago, the credit quality of the banking system was rotten and leverage was out of control. Bank credit quality today is the best in a generation. The crisis stems from the now-impossible task of financing America's ever-expanding foreign debt.

It's also the most anticipated financial crisis in history. In 2018, the Bank for International Settlements (a sort of central bank for central banks) warned that \$14 trillion of short-term dollar borrowings of European and Japanese banks used to hedge foreign exchange risk were a time bomb waiting to explode ("Has the derivatives volcano already begun to erupt?", October 9, 2018).

In March 2020, dollar credit seized up in a run for liquidity when the Covid lockdowns began, provoking a sudden dearth of bank financing. The Federal Reserve put out the fire by opening multi-billion-dollar swap lines to foreign central banks. It expanded those swap lines on March 19.

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bank for International Settlements

Correspondingly, the dollar balance sheet of the world banking system exploded, as gauged by the volume of overseas claims in the global banking system. This opened up a new vulnerability, namely counterparty risk, or the exposure of banks to enormous amounts of short-term loans to other banks.

Source: Bank for International Settlements

America's chronic current account deficits of the past 30 years amount to an exchange of goods for paper: America buys more goods than it sells, and sells assets (stocks, bonds, real estate, and so on) to foreigners to make up the difference.



America now owes a net \$18 trillion to foreigners, roughly equal to the cumulative sum of these deficits over 30 years. The trouble is that the foreigners who own US assets receive cash flows in dollars, but need to spend money in their own currencies.

With floating exchange rates, the value of dollar cash flows in euro, Japanese yen or Chinese RMB is uncertain. Foreign investors need to hedge their dollar income, that is, sell US dollars short against their own currencies.

That's why the size of the foreign exchange derivatives market ballooned along with America's liabilities to foreigners. The mechanism is simple: If you are receiving dollars but pay in euros, you sell dollars against euros to hedge your foreign exchange risk.

But your bank has to borrow the dollars and lend them to you before you can sell them. Foreign banks borrowed perhaps \$18 trillion from US banks to fund these hedges. That creates a gigantic vulnerability: If a bank looks dodgy, as did Credit Suisse earlier this month, banks will pull credit lines in a global run. Before 1971, when central banks maintained exchange rates at a fixed level and the United States covered its relatively small current account deficit by transferring gold to foreign central banks at a fixed price of \$35 an ounce, none of this was necessary.

The end of the gold link to the dollar and the new regime of floating exchange rates allowed the United States to run massive current account deficits by selling its assets to the world. The population of Europe and Japan was aging faster than the US, and had a correspondingly greater need for retirement assets. That arrangement is now coming to a messy end.

One failsafe gauge of global systemic risk is the price of gold, and especially the price of gold relative to alternative hedges against unexpected inflation. Between 2007 and 2021, the price of gold tracked inflation-indexed US Treasury securities ("TIPS") with a correlation of about 90%.

Starting in 2022, however, gold rose while the price of TIPS fell. Something like this happened in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, but the past year's move has been far more

extreme. Shown below is the residual of the regression of the gold price against 5- and 10-year maturity TIPS.

Graphic: Asia Times

If we look at the same data in a scatter plot, it's clear that the linear relationship between gold and TIPS remains in place, but it has shifted both its baseline and steepened its slope.

In effect, the market worries that buying inflation protection from the US government is like passengers on the Titanic buying shipwreck insurance from the captain. The gold market is too big and diverse to manipulate. No one has a lot of confidence in the US Consumer Price Index, the gauge against which the payout of TIPS is determined.

The dollar reserve system will go out not with a bang, but a whimper. The central banks will step in to prevent any dramatic failures. But bank balance sheets will shrink, credit to the real economy will diminish and international lending in particular will evaporate.

At the margin, local currency financing will replace dollar credit. We have already seen this happen in Turkey, whose currency imploded during 2019-2021 as the country lost access to dollar and euro financing.

To an important extent, Chinese trade financing replaced the dollar, and supported Turkey's remarkable economic turnaround of the past year. Southeast Asia will rely more on its own currencies and the RMB. The dollar frog will boil by slow increments.

It's fortuitous that Western sanctions on Russia during the past year prompted China, Russia, India and the Persian Gulf states to find alternative financing arrangements. These are not a monetary phenomenon, but an expensive, inefficient and cumbersome way to work around the US dollar banking system. As dollar credit diminishes, though, these alternative arrangements will turn into permanent features of the monetary landscape, and other currencies will continue to gain ground against the dollar.

Follow David P Goldman on Twitter at @davidpgoldman

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***De Oppresso Liber,***  
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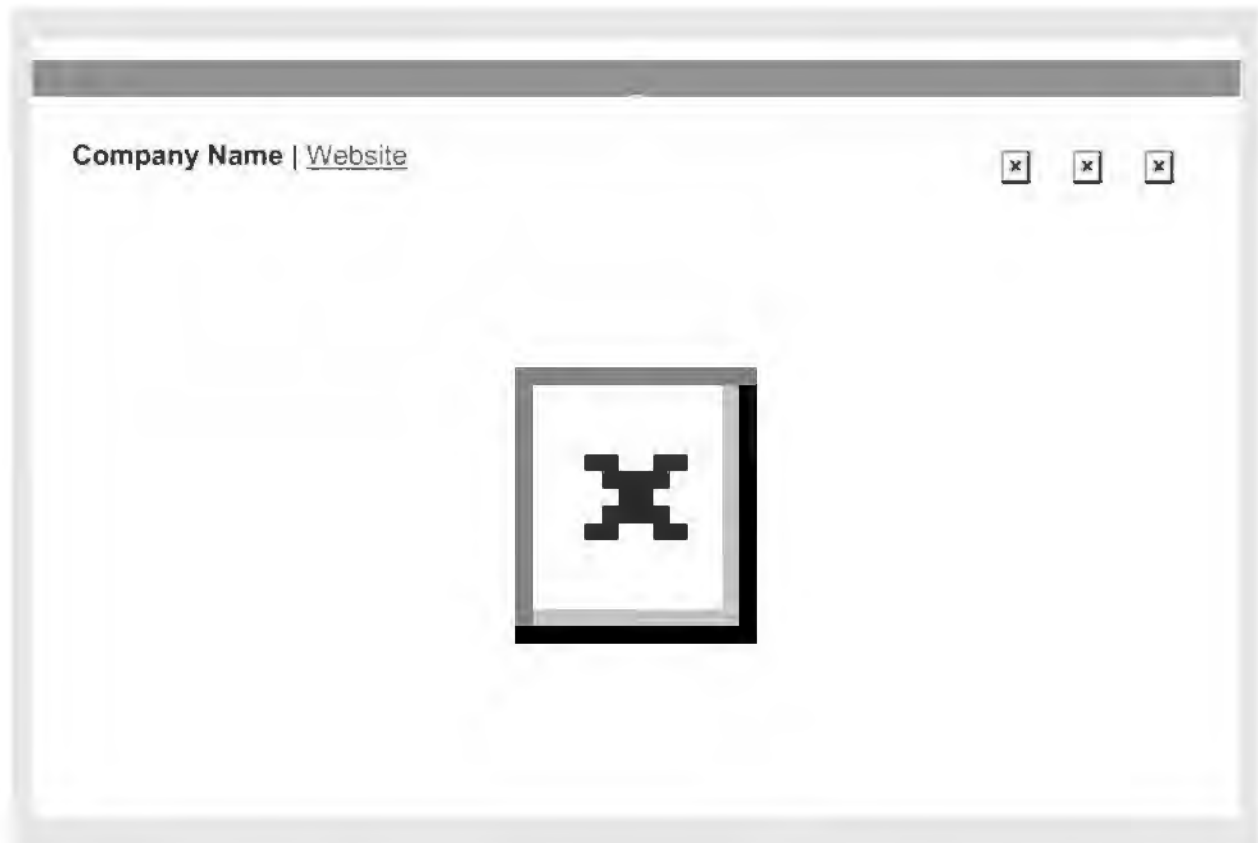
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**If you do not read anything else in the 2017 National Security Strategy read this on page 14:**

**"A democracy is only as resilient as its people. An informed and engaged citizenry is the fundamental requirement for a free and resilient nation. For generations, our society has protected free press, free speech, and free thought. Today, actors such as Russia are using information tools in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of democracies. Adversaries target media, political processes, financial networks, and personal data. The American public and private sectors must recognize this and work together to defend our way of life. No external threat can be allowed to shake our shared commitment to our values, undermine our system of government, or divide our Nation."**

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