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Drexel GPS: Geopolitical Weekly Recap

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This week's GPS recap focuses on a pivotal juncture in the Ukrainian/Russian conflict. Almost exactly one month from today will mark one-year since Russian forces came across the Ukraine border and moved on Kyiv. In the ensuing months, the conflict has claimed enormous casualties on both sides. Ukraine has by all accounts performed extraordinarily well against what at the onset of hostilities was seen as an unstoppable foe for them in the form of the behemoth "10-foot giant" Russian army Vladimir Putin purported it to be.

Now eleven months in, the inefficiencies and inadequate equipment and training of the Russian Army has been exposed for the world to see. And while the Russian conventional army is certainly no longer viewed by the world at large as the aforementioned "10-foot giant" it is still a formidable enough force as it pertains to its current opponent Ukraine to present not only a clear and present danger, but one which given the proper realignment and organizational changes could still defeat the Ukrainian forces if Ukraine is not provided the western military aid it desperately needs to counter the threat and drive Russian forces out.

If we were to use boxing as an analogy for the current situation- Ukraine has absorbed all of Russia's initial body blows and delivered a few of its own and while damaged is still standing; Russia on the other hand has punched itself out with its initial flurry and has tired arms and needs to regroup. The current stalemate militarily has both sides looking for a knockout in the next round. For Ukraine that will come in the form of enough offensive military aid to do more than clever defenses and limited tactical surprises, they are looking for the equipment to drive Russian forces out of the country possibly out of Crimea also, but at a minimum back to pre-invasion borders. 2022, positions.

Russia on the other hand is looking to regroup with its second mobilization of troops and muddy the waters to engage Ukraine in a drawn-out war of attrition in the hopes that western support will eventually wane to the point where Ukraine simply does not possess the military capability to mount an effective defense. The likelihood of Russia ever being able to occupy Ukraine at this point is slim to none, however Putin has moved away from the initial narrative (justification for the invasion) and now pushes to occupy as much territory in Ukraine as possible to await a better set of circumstances through a breakdown in western support and the

use of his nuclear-rhetoric as a negotiation tool to allow him to keep some, if not all of his ill-acquired territory and provide him with face-saving gains to showcase to an increasingly skeptical Russian audience. Putin's goal is now a stalled conflict, not a static one.

The U.S. and the Western coalition are now looking to provide Ukraine the proper weaponry to allow Ukraine to move decisively and fast enough to push Russia out before Putin has a chance to regroup. An ideal situation for the Ukrainians would be not having to wait until the spring, however even the accelerated training programs on the new weapons systems being provided to them may dictate they do so.

CIA chief briefs Zelensky in-person on U.S. intel assessment

- The meeting between Director Burns and President Zelensky took place last week and was not publicly reported due to security concerns. The exact details of the meeting have not been disclosed. An official U.S. statement reads, “ the Director met with Ukrainian intelligence counterparts as well as President Zelensky and reinforced our continued support for Ukraine.”
- Reporting suggests that Director Burns discussed the U.S. intelligence community's assessment on what is widely believed to be an upcoming Russian spring offensive.
- The timing of the meeting coincides with today's meeting at Ramstein Airbase in Germany between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin with NATO allies to discuss issues related to the upgraded offensive military aid packages to be provided to Ukraine from the western coalition nations.
- A major sticking point is German reluctance to providing and authorizing the export of its domestically produced Leopard tanks.

German Leopard 2 Tanks



Why Germany is averse to sending tanks?

- The negative memory of images during WWII of Nazi Germany's tank divisions rolling across Europe is still very much at the forefront of German politics and sensitivities when it comes to the export and use of its domestically produced weaponry. Perhaps more than any other country, Germany imposes strict controls on such exports and has long refused to send its most potent weapons to countries in conflict.
- This policy affects the current conflict in Ukraine because countries such as Poland which have already agreed to send Ukraine its own Leopard 2 tanks which were acquired from Germany are unable to do so without permission of the German government by way of export controls included in the original purchase agreements with Germany.
- The German government has requested that for it to agree to lift the export limitations on its Leopard tanks, the U.S. must also supply its main battle tank the M-1 Abrams to Ukraine as well. Germany feels this will give them the political and diplomatic cover to not be seen as acting unilaterally by providing such a capable and potentially tide-turning offensive weapon system to Ukraine.

- Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany has repeatedly said he would not “go it alone” when it comes to sending weapons into Ukraine, and would only act in concert with allies.
- The U.S. has announced an additional new \$2.5 billion military aid package to Ukraine which consists of 90 Stryker combat vehicles (**General Dynamics**), 59 Bradley fighting vehicles (**BAE systems**) , 53 MRAPS(Mine-resistant ambush protected, **OshKosh Defense**) trucks, along with 8 avenger air-defense systems along with thousands of rounds of ammunition and rockets.
- The U.S. contends that the M-1 is not a suitable platform for the Ukrainians for a variety of reasons. Discussions with some of our contacts within and outside of the DoD agree with this assessment for the following reasons:
 1. The M-1 tank while highly effective requires a very sophisticated logistical system to properly support its functions. Providing the M-1 to Ukraine may put them into a position where they simply can't keep up with the required maintenance requirements of the tank possibly rendering it mission-incapable at key moments in what is expected to be a ramped up offensive operations tempo.
 2. Fuel: The U.K.'s Challenger, The German Leopard, and the refurbished T-72's that Ukraine would be receiving from the coalition all use diesel engines. The M-1 has a turbine engine with a much higher fuel consumption rate. The U.S. M-1 uses a particular fuel mix for optimal performance and while it may be capable of using regular diesel it may not perform at an optimal level. This requirement for fuel would potentially provide further stress to supply chains which are already operating in a dynamic combat environment. This leaves the potential for the M-1 to be relegated to a role further back from the front due to fuel concerns.
 3. Training: The M-1 is an awesome platform, however what makes it so effective in the hands of the U.S. military is our training standards. It's unlikely that the learning curve of how to best take advantage of the characteristics of the M-1 in the same fashion as the United States military does is extremely expensive and that time consuming. This time may best be used on a system which does not require as much maintenance so that the Ukrainians can focus on the fight itself.

While the 14 M-1 tanks (one company) that Germany wants the U.S. to send are formidable fighting vehicles that number is not going to decide the outcome of this war. If that becomes the main sticking point and the Germans refuse to budge in negotiations with the U.S. and prevent the rest of the tanks in question from being supplied, it would probably be prudent for

the U.S. to concede in the interest of shoring up the Western coalitions solidarity and not waste time that could perhaps be better utilized training the Ukrainians for the next phase of the conflict.

U.S. manufactured M-1 Abrams Tank



Drexel Hamilton will continue to monitor these situations as they develop.

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