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Drexel GPS: One Year of War in Ukraine

02/22/23

This week's recap will focus on the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the onset of the invasion last February, it was widely accepted that the Russian army would overwhelm Ukraine's military forces in relatively short order. Instead, what was displayed to the world was a well-trained Ukrainian defense that has been able to hold its ground and gain some territory back. More notably, the world has witnessed a Russian military full of glaring inefficiencies, poor training, and ineffective leadership on the battlefield which has resulted in a failure to achieve the tactical military and strategic political goals outlined by Russian President Putin at the onset of the invasion.

The most salient ramification of these failures is the loss of any mystique that Russia's conventional military forces were a well-run, formidable juggernaut on par with the U.S. military. This carefully crafted image has often been used by Putin as political leverage on the world stage. The Russian army still has a suite of capabilities and can inflict a great deal of damage, however, its cache as one of the "10-foot-tall giants" from a military standpoint has been erased due to the hollowness exposed by its performance in Ukraine. The poor performance of Russia's conventional forces to date has caused Putin to repeatedly threaten the use of Russia's nuclear forces as a hedge.

Ukraine is by no means out of the woods with respect to the threat from Russia. The U.S.-led coalition's support for Ukraine has been a critical aspect of the country's successful defense against Russia and Ukraine will need even more support if it is to achieve a decisive victory. The image of what that decisive victory looks like is still debatable, however, there is currently no indication that the Zelensky government will be interested in any type of peace plan that does not, at a minimum, entail a pre-February 2022 disposition of forces. In fact, it is highly probable that Ukraine intends to reclaim territory in Crimea which has been under Russian control since 2014. Fighting has reached a virtual stalemate in most of Ukraine, and it is expected that the tempo of offensive operations will increase by both sides in the spring and summer months. While the stated intent for the U.S.-led coalition has been to contain the fighting within Ukraine's borders, it appears that Belarus, acting in its puppet role to Putin, could be poised to enter the conflict.

Both Ukraine and Russia have been burning through ammunition supplies at a rapid pace since the conflict began. Both sides are facing challenges procuring the requisite amount of supplies to press their offensives.

Ukraine is almost entirely dependent on the continued support of the U.S.-led western coalition, and it needs the range and scope of the equipment and aid it receives to increase. The pledge of U.S. and German battle tanks only came after a great deal of negotiations and concessions. The potential for waning support among coalition members as the war drags on is an issue to be monitored closely.

For Russia, much of what transpires in the next few months is dependent on China. China's support of Putin leading up to the invasion was due to the premise that Russia would overwhelm Ukraine and achieve its goals in a matter of weeks. Now that the war has lasted a year, the lens of geopolitics shifts to China to see what approach it will take. Will President Xi provide the weapons and ammunition that Putin desperately needs to mount an effective spring offensive with a regrouped and remobilized army? By doing so, China would undoubtedly face some form of sanctions by the U.S. at a time when China's economy is not in the best shape to absorb it. Does China use its leverage to insert itself as a true player in peace negotiations?

Or does China throw its full political weight behind Putin and forcefully reaffirm its alignment with Russia by announcing a renewed political and military alliance? In the wake of the recent U.S./China political relations after the shoot-down of the Chinese surveillance balloon, China may be more inclined to provide material support to Russia to hedge against a U.S.-led global order; a status-quo that China and Russia have a mutual interest in disrupting.

On the other side of the globe, the U.S. is engaging in a renewed series of alliances to counter China's increased aggressions in the South China Sea and towards Taiwan. North Korea is again engaging in a renewed series of missile test launches; the most recent one on Saturday took a trajectory over Japan and landed in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Seen largely as a response to the recent U.S. military agreements in the Philippines and South Pacific, it is expected that North Korea will also engage in a nuclear test in the coming months.

Statistics: One year of the Ukraine/Russian war

The numbers for both sides are inaccurately reported for operational security and propaganda purposes. However, the figures below are the best available independent estimates of the current totals.

- Russian troop casualties are estimated to be greater than 200,000 with more than 60,000 killed.
- Ukraine troop casualties are estimated to be greater than 100,000 with more than 40,000 killed.

- Ukrainian civilian casualties are estimated to be 11,756 with 7,199 killed as of 02/12/23, according to the OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights).
- Russia has deployed 97% of its Army in Ukraine and is suffering from massive attrition rates. A national mobilization for military service was enacted.
- Russia has likely lost more than 2,000 tanks in Ukraine, more than half of its operational tank fleet.

Biden makes historic visit to Kyiv

- President Biden's first trip to Ukraine as president came days before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (February 24, 2022).
- The visit is the first time in recent history that a U.S. President has visited a country during a live war in which American soldiers are not fighting. Additionally, the U.S. military did not provide security which usually entails full control of the skies in the form of air-superiority and definitive control of the ground via the presence of large numbers of troops. There were no U.S. troops on the ground in Ukraine for the duration of the visit.
- The symbolism of the visit at this point in the conflict strongly reaffirms the U.S.'s commitment to support Ukraine through the entirety of the conflict. It also contradicts Putin's attempts to portray to his domestic and global audience a characterization that he is winning the war. Images of Zelensky and Biden walking through Kyiv one year after the invasion highlight Russia's failure to achieve a swift victory. Biden's visit also contradicts Putin's narrative that Russian soldiers would be greeted in the streets of Kyiv with "open arms" as liberators after a brief "special military operation."
- The visit was conducted with a great deal of secrecy including a 10-hour train ride from Poland to Ukraine. State department officials have confirmed that the Russian government was informed of the President's trip and destination hours prior to him arriving. This was done for what has been termed "deconfliction purposes".....if the area Biden visited in Kyiv had been subject to any missile attack during his visit, this notification removed any potential Russian attempt at plausible deniability for what would have in effect been the targeting of a sitting U.S. President.

- Poland was the official destination for this trip, as publicly released. There is a shift occurring within the NATO alliance as Poland is becoming the epicenter of NATO's efforts in Europe due to the invasion of Ukraine, as opposed to Germany which has long held this position.

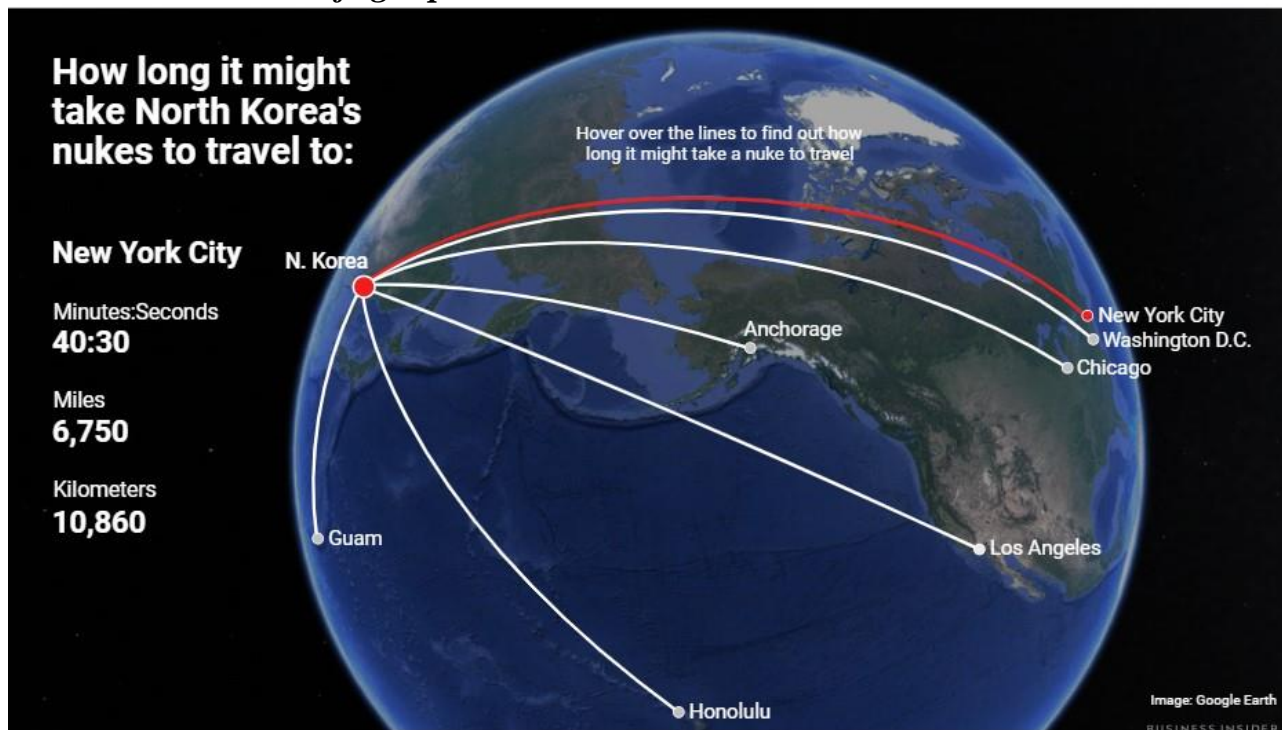
Biden makes surprise visit to Kyiv



North Korea test fires ICBM

- The missile was fired at a high angle and reached a maximum altitude of about 5,770 kilometers (3,585 miles), flying a distance of about 990 kilometers (615 miles) for 67 minutes before accurately hitting a pre-set area in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The Hwansong-15 is theoretically capable of reaching the mainland U.S. if fired at a standard trajectory.
- North Korea having a functional nuclear-tipped ICBM is still a source of debate. Some experts say they have not mastered a way to protect warheads from the conditions of atmospheric re-entry, however, North Korea says it has acquired such technology.
- The United States responded by flying long-range supersonic bombers in a show of force later Sunday for separate joint exercises with South Korean and Japanese warplanes.

North Korean ICBM flight paths



Turkey continues to block new NATO membership

- As discussed in previous GPS articles, Turkey is continuing to block the ascension of Sweden and Finland to NATO.
- The three nations reached an agreement on how to proceed in Madrid last June, but Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has said Sweden, in particular, is not keeping its side of the bargain.
- The importance of the addition to NATO is that both Sweden and Finland would be an additional hedge against any continued designs that Putin and Russia have towards westward expansion. In fact, it was last year's invasion of Ukraine which triggered the push and application for NATO membership by both countries. Prior to then both Sweden and Finland did not apply for NATO membership as a de-escalation tactic designed to make Putin feel more secure and not incite and support his theory of NATO's expansion threatening the Russian homeland. Subsequent to Putin's invasion both countries applied for NATO membership.
- Both countries ascension to NATO membership have been widely viewed to be a package deal. In an ideal situation, although separate applications were submitted, it was largely intended that both would come on board simultaneously. However as

Turkish President Erdogan has postponed accession talks indefinitely largely based on his issues with Sweden- there is increasing talk in political circles to have a vote for Finland membership alone without Sweden. Finland shares an 800-mile border with Russia.

- While Turkey is a NATO member, many of Erdogan's actions appear to be increasingly based solely on his tendencies to lean towards a more authoritarian based government and set of unilateral interests for Turkey.

Internal disagreements stall new NATO membership



NATO allies face supply challenges in and out of Ukraine

- As the war in Ukraine approaches the end of its first year, NATO allies face a challenge to keep the Ukrainian army supplied with weapons and ammunition as their own stocks dwindle.
- Based on public data, the Ukrainian army is firing 155 mm artillery shells so quickly that it would consume Britain's entire stock in just eight days.
- The abundance of ammunition being used is the result of many contributing factors including improper training and fire discipline at the unit level for both the Ukrainian and Russian armies.
- As allies and coalition partners have been supplying Ukraine, they also must backfill the ammunition and weapons used to maintain their stocks for contingency operations and other conflicts which may occur. The U.S., for example, must maintain operational

readiness for a possible expansion of the war in Europe, continuing tensions in the Middle East, an increasingly aggressive China, and hotspots in Africa.

- Germany's ambassador to NATO says his country's warehouses are almost empty. He is worried Ukraine could run short of critical weapons - in particular, surface-to-air missiles, which are crucial for shooting down Russian missiles and drones.
- Dwindling NATO stocks are driving a lot of purchases. Norway's military has placed a \$260 million order for artillery shells.
- Lack of an industrial manufacturing base geared for large-scale warfare is a very real issue and could trigger its own set of geopolitical consequences. For example, if China perceives that the U.S. and its allies lack the necessary industrial base to replace war stocks, this could shift China's calculus when contemplating actions toward Taiwan.
- Evidence of the need to shore up the industrial base can be seen in the surge of the three largest Aerospace and Defense ETFs over the past year. The situation on the ground in Ukraine causing depletion of ammunition and the current push among NATO countries to replace defense stores can be correlated with this surge.

Defense ETF's spanning one year of war in Ukraine



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

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