

Weekly Commentary 5 – Feb 2023

A Sino-American War by 2025? Nah...

There is a highly rated movie in the theaters right now. It's called "Wandering Earth 2", starring Andy Lau, a HK artiste that is the Brad Pitt of Chinese cinema. The movie is a science fiction saga of how the entire planet is dislodged from its orbit around the sun, and propelled by 10,000 nuclear jet engines to find a new home in the universe. So it's no wonder it is wandering while searching. The story is a lot of fun and great for science fiction fans.

Over the last few days, there was also a wandering balloon over America, until it was shot down on Saturday.

The balloon was white in colour. But the Americans saw red, given its origins from China. Hmm... a red balloon, whatever it was doing there, caused consternation, panic, anguish, hand-wringing and a political battle between the Democrats and the Republicans wondering how long they should let balloons wander. The US got red-faced over it – some were red with embarrassment; others were just pissed. It also led to the cancellation of Secretary of State Blinken's postponement of his trip to Beijing, originally scheduled for 5 February. It was a storm over a tea cup that nevertheless rocked a whole nation!

Everyone knows this story by now, and there are endless memes, outraged cries as well as jokes over the incident. I have not much more to add to all this fiasco, except that when they did shoot it down, it cost a lot of money to do so (the AIM-9X Sidewinder missile cost US\$400,000 and the flights of three fighter jets cost about \$30,000 per hour). The balloon, according to Chinese media sources, cost China less than RMB70,000 or US\$10,000 to manufacture and to float into the sky. Let's estimate the Chinese cost to be \$10,000 and the American cost to be US\$600,000. That's a 60x difference.

If those numbers are somewhat close to being accurate, then it is easy to conclude that the Chinese version about what the wandering balloon was doing in the skies is most likely true. They say it was a weather balloon that drifted off-course. They probably knew it many days ago, watching it drift over their own territory and then the North Pacific. But if they were to use their air force to shoot it down, that cost would have made the exercise prohibitively costly and hence silly, since it was only a weather balloon, and they would not care less where it ends up. That economics alone tell me that the Chinese are telling the truth because if it were high tech spy stuff that can look into your bathroom from 60,000 feet, as the Americans claim, they would have spent the money to prevent it from falling into someone else's hands. And at least they would have painted it an undetectable sky-blue...

The Americans saw it differently, given that they feared it was a spy balloon. A sky balloon over Montana? Oh my god! It must be brought down! So the USAF would spend any amount of money to terminate its blissful flight, thinking it must be packed with the latest spying technology that cannot be allowed to fly over American skies. Injured pride, anger, outrage and various sentiments were exhibited in the highest reaches of government when violated by this Chinese blimp. What's a million dollars to take it down? No big deal. Just do it!

The different perception of what a blatantly white, wandering balloon really was, resulted in the different reactions. One side was nonchalant, knowing the full background, and the other side only saw red, and grew red-faced.

We all saw the video of the said wanderer shot down. It must have been a special version of the sidewinder missile – there was no explosion and therefore there could not have been a warhead. It was probably just equipped with a giant pin – poof - the blimp just got snuffed out and got limp like a used condom.

And maybe, just maybe, it was a malicious form of weather research. Could it be that the Chinese were researching what the air currents were like at 60,000 ft? Can these currents bring wandering balloons from central China to traverse through the entire north American continent, and then fly home to mommy? Once they know these stratospheric air flows, there could indeed be some plan at a time of actual conflict to float a million of those babies across the Arctic. Think about it. One \$10,000 balloon, and it took more than half a million bucks of an awesome arsenal to blow away. Float a million more of them, and the entire USAF will be tied up shooting balloons, and that may lop 100 billion dollars off the American war-chest. That cost may not be much, but it would certainly tie up the USAF's deployment at home rather than over the western Pacific.

That was a joke, of course, a facetious comment. But with that said, I think China has a similar strategy for a coming naval war in the Pacific – use swarms of drones or missiles, each costing thousands, against every carrier, each costing \$13 billion, sent against them. Same silly thought as the above strategy of floating a million wandering balloons, but instead of harmless balloons, they use armed drones, or even hypersonic missiles... You can defend against one, even a hundred, but you cannot ward off a thousand of them all at once. It's a strategy that will render the WW2 strategy of using aircraft carriers obsolete, just as WW2 made battleships sitting ducks with carrier-based planes. Aircraft carriers are relics of a bygone era, in the age of hypersonic missiles and armed drone swarms.

And even if the aircraft carriers can defend themselves against drone and missile swarms, such a strategy will exhaust America's industrial capacity to produce munitions, just as the Ukraine war has already proven. In the Donbass, the Ukrainian army has run out of artillery shells, and other weapons, since they use in a week what America produces in a year. Same thing would be expected of a naval war in the Pacific. Would generals understand industrial strategy?

You see, there was this American four star general, a Mike Milihan, who wrote a memo to predict that there would be a Sino-American war by 2025. All I can say is that generals love to fight yesterday's wars, especially the ones they won.

In spite of all the public posturing, the American government probably knew the Chinese were not lying about the wandering blimp, that it was a weather balloon, since there were no attempts to camouflage it, and didn't want to waste money shooting it down over Chinese or international waters. The hoopla has whimpered out, like the balloon itself, into just a mild diplomatic war of words, and simply showcased the mistrust and tensions between the two superpowers. The cancelation of the Blinken trip is no big deal, because he called Wang Yi personally, a sign according to the NYT, to be an effort to keep the communication going. The chain of events cannot be overlooked. The Americans wanted to send Blinken without an explicit invitation, and he called the Chinese to postpone. It's all initiated by Washington. The Chinese apparently couldn't care less.

The NYT's assessment is that when the US announced that the balloon posed no serious military or intelligence threat to the US, it was regarded as a symbolic flight, rendering the Sino-American relationship even more volatile than it has been. But that is not the end of the story...

All over Chinese language media today, the comment was that the cancellation of the Blinken trip to China reflects serious anxiety on the American side. The planned trip was unilateral in the first place. The Chinese did not invite him, although they did not turn it down. And now, after the wandering balloon, if he unilaterally cancels his own trip, there was no attempt to persuade the Americans for an alternative date. No regret was detected on the Chinese side regarding the cancellation; and the attitude seems to be if Blinken wishes to come later, please, "what's the agenda?" The Chinese side has not shown any signs they are keen to receive Blinken, certainly not with the recent US moves in the Philippines. All the alacrity and then indignation is entirely unilateral and makes him look like he is talking to himself...Spurned love? Ouch!

While the almost funny altercation over the balloon raged on, it took everyone's eyes off the hot war in the Ukraine. In the same period of time, the war in Ukraine intensified and this is how the Wall Street Journal reported it:

Russia Claims Gains in Battle for Bakhmut

Small advances allow Russian forces to narrow Ukraine's routes to resupply the city

By Ian Lovett

Feb. 2, 2023 2:21 pm ET

KYIV, Ukraine—Russian forces claimed new advances in their effort to encircle the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, while European leaders arrived in Kyiv to discuss further military aid.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary organization that is leading the assault in Ukraine's east, said Wednesday that his forces had seized the village of Sacco and Vanzetti, north of Bakhmut. Rybar, a Telegram channel linked to the Kremlin, said Thursday that Wagner was claiming territory on the contested east side of the city, expanding control around a sparkling-wine factory and a meat-processing plant.

Though the gains Wagner claimed are small, the Russians are slowly narrowing Ukraine's routes to resupply the city—or evacuate troops. Only one main road into Bakhmut, through Chasiv Yar to the west, remains entirely under Ukrainian control.

The Russian attempts to pinch the final artery into Bakhmut could leave Kyiv with a tough decision. Commanders say they don't want to give up territory lightly and want to sap Russian strength. At the same time, they don't want to risk thousands of their troops being cut off.

Last year, Ukraine repeatedly weathered Russian assaults on eastern cities such as Severodonetsk, hoping to wear down Moscow's forces as much as possible, but eventually withdrew.

“The enemy is trying to break our defense and surround our forces,” Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesman for Ukraine's eastern military command, told The Wall Street Journal this week. Though Ukrainian forces have managed to hold Bakhmut for months, he said the Russians had a major advantage in manpower. “They have superiority in troop numbers. And they don't calculate casualties. That's the main challenge.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the Russians were likely trying to secure some kind of tangible gains before the first anniversary of the full-scale invasion, on Feb. 24.

“There is a certain increase in the occupiers' offensive actions at the front—in the east of our country. The situation is becoming even more severe,” Mr. Zelensky said in his nightly video address on Wednesday. “The enemy is trying to gain at least something now to show on the anniversary of the invasion that Russia allegedly has some chances.”

Some Ukrainian soldiers are starting to question why they are being asked to fight for Bakhmut when the city is nearly surrounded and a retreat, at some point, appears inevitable.

One special forces soldier who recently fought in Bakhmut said the Ukrainians are taking heavy casualties, including some of their best and most experienced soldiers; morale is taking a hit as a result.

“The city is almost surrounded. It's incredibly hard to protect. Casualties are huge. What's the point?” he said. “For all soldiers who are holding these positions—at least the ones I spoke to—all of them say we have to withdraw. No one understands what so many troops are dying for.”

European officials arrived in Kyiv on Thursday to meet with Mr. Zelensky and discuss potential further aid for Ukraine.

Mr. Zelensky pressed European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to advance his country's accession to the bloc during a news briefing. Mr. Zelensky said progress in Ukraine's EU membership bid was helping motivate gains on the battlefield with Russia.

Ms. von der Leyen praised Ukraine's "stamina and determination" to join the bloc and welcomed the country's efforts to root out corruption. She has championed Ukraine's bid, but EU history shows that even countries at peace can take at least a decade to win membership in the bloc.

The EU said it would double the number of Ukrainian troops it trains to 30,000.

Late Wednesday night, a Russian missile hit an apartment building in the eastern city of Kramatorsk, about 25 miles northwest of Bakhmut. At least three people were killed and eight injured, according to the governor of the Donetsk region, where the city is located.

Mr. Zelensky said on Twitter on Thursday that people remained buried under the rubble, and again called for more weapons from the West. "The only way to stop Russian terrorism is to defeat it. By tanks. Fighter jets. Long-range missiles," he wrote.

The next round of military aid from the U.S. is expected to include the Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bomb, or GLSDB, which has a range of 94 miles, extending Ukraine's ability to strike inside Russian-held territory and disrupt supply lines.

—Ann M. Simmons and Laurence Norman contributed to this article.

And the following is the Financial Times' description of the same events. They essentially tell a similar story.

Battle of Bakhmut nears tipping point as Russia intensifies offensive

Kyiv insists eastern city has not been cut off but may soon face agonising choice over whether to withdraw

Christopher Miller in Kyiv FEBRUARY 2 2023 545

The battle of Bakhmut is approaching a tipping point, with Russia throwing waves of fresh troops into the fight as it tries to break Ukraine's grip on the eastern city and secure President Vladimir Putin's first significant battlefield victory since early summer.

After eight months of grinding combat, Russian forces are bearing down on the city from three directions, leaving Ukraine's main supply line under severe pressure and Kyiv facing an agonising choice over the cost of holding its ground.

While analysts say Bakhmut has little military significance, the city has become the focal point of both Ukrainian resistance and Moscow's drive to regain battlefield momentum.

Ukrainians have taken to referring to the city in recent months as “Fortress Bakhmut” because it has remained standing after incessant heavy fighting. And “Bakhmut holds” has become a battle cry used by soldiers and their supporters, as well as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his nightly addresses.

But with relentless shelling and first world war-style attacks, Russian forces have managed to capture several towns and villages around Bakhmut in recent weeks. Most notable among them was the salt mining town of Soledar, 15km to the north.

Fighters from the Wagner Group, a mercenary organisation founded by close Putin ally Evgeny Prigozhin, have been in the vanguard of the Russian assault. Many of its fighters were recruited from prison colonies in far-flung Russian regions. They were used as “cannon fodder”, Ukrainian soldiers told the Financial Times during a visit in December.

But Denys Yaroslavskyi, the commander of a Ukrainian unit operating in Bakhmut, said that well-trained Russian regular troops were now supporting the Wagner fighters in their attempt to encircle the city.

The Institute for the Study of War, a US-based think-tank, corroborated this. “The introduction of Russian conventional forces to the Bakhmut frontline has offset the culmination of the Wagner Group’s offensive and retained the initiative for Russian operations around the city,” it said in an assessment on Wednesday.

Their latest successes prompted Russian forces on Wednesday to say they had effectively surrounded the city.

“Bakhmut is now operationally encircled [and] our forces are closing the ring around the city,” said Yan Gagin, an official in the Russian puppet administration in the occupied regional capital of Donetsk.

If correct, this could prompt Kyiv to order the withdrawal of its forces from the city. But Ukrainian military officials denied that it was true and stressed that the Bakhmut-Kostyantynivka highway, a crucial supply route for the Ukrainian army and evacuation artery for civilians, remained under their control.

“The highway to Bakhmut is not blocked,” Serhii Cherevatyi, the spokesman for Ukraine’s eastern command, said on state television on Tuesday. “Everything is being done to prevent [Russian forces] from blocking the traffic of our units. All the necessary equipment, ammunition, food etc are being delivered to Bakhmut.”

A Ukrainian soldier fighting in Bakhmut near the village of Ivanivske, where Russian forces have focused their attacks, said he and his men were confident that they could hold the line. He said that the fighting was “intense”.

“They are throwing everything they have at us.”

However, Konrad Muzyka, director of Rochan Consulting and a defence analyst tracking the war, wrote in a report on Wednesday that the “overall situation in the Bakhmut area is deteriorating for Ukrainians, mainly because Russian fire controls the main supply roads leading to the city”.

Cherevatyi said Bakhmut might be evacuated if generals felt it was necessary to minimise troop losses and take better positions.

Commanders cannot, however, withdraw troops “just like that”, he said. “The military leadership is considering various potential scenarios and closely observes the enemy,” he said, adding that attempts were being made to push back Russian forces.

There is no official death toll for the battle of Bakhmut, which began in May and has raged ever since. Both sides have at times claimed to have killed up to hundreds of enemy troops each day. Civilians have also been killed at an alarming rate.

Famous for its salt mines and sparkling-wine production, Bakhmut was home to more than 70,000 people before Russia’s full-scale invasion in February last year.

Oleksiy Reva, who has served as mayor of Bakhmut for 33 years, said on Wednesday that just 6,500 remained. More than 60 per cent of the city’s buildings had been damaged or destroyed by Russian air strikes and shelling, and there has been no electricity, heating or water for more than four months, he added.

Russian shelling on Tuesday killed a 70-year-old man and 12-year-old boy, and injured six others between the ages of 16 and 66, according to Reva. Pavlo Kyrylenko, the Donetsk region governor, shared images that he said were the aftermath of the attack. They showed a large hole in the brick wall of a pharmacy, the body of a boy dressed in a track suit splayed on the ground, and a large pool of blood.

When the FT visited in December, residents fetched water from streams, cooked food over open fires in the street, and queued for humanitarian aid near the destroyed Palace of Culture in the heart of the city. Explosions or automatic gunfire could be heard every few seconds.

Russia believes that capturing Bakhmut will open the door to its forces seizing the entire Donbas province. But while Bakhmut serves as a regional hub with several highways leading to strategic cities, such as Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, advancing beyond Bakhmut is unlikely to be any easier than the fight to take it. The terrain is a series of rolling hills, valleys and jagged white stone not easily traversed, even with all-terrain vehicles.

“Unless there is a collapse of Ukrainian defensive lines, Russians face hard battles moving forward,” Muzyka added.

These two stories were floating around with few people paying attention as they were all looking up for mysterious balloons that could spy on your toilet habits. (Keep your shades closed...). Then suddenly today, we get a sort of reckoning in yet another article reported in every major news outlet across the planet. I have chosen to cite the Reuters report below:

Ukraine to replace defence minister in wartime reshuffle, top lawmaker says

By [Tom Balmforth](#)

- *Summary*

- *Reznikov's reshuffle would be highest govt change in war*
- *Budanov, head of spy agence, said to replace Reznikov*
- *Reznikov instrumental in military aid to Kyiv - adviser*

- *Slew of resignations, sackings over corruption*

KYIV, Feb 5 (Reuters) - Ukraine is set to replace Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov with the chief of its military spy agency, a close ally of President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Sunday, in a reshuffle at the forefront of Ukraine's war campaign.

Reznikov would be transferred to another ministerial job and replaced by Kyrylo Budanov, head of the GUR military intelligence agency, said David Arakhamia, a senior lawmaker and chief of Servant of the People parliamentary bloc.

"War dictates changes in personnel policy," Arakhamia said on the Telegram messaging app.

Reznikov's reshuffle would be the highest profile government change in a slew of resignations and sackings following a corruption scandal late last month and Zelenskiy's pledge for Ukraine to meet Western standards of clean governance.

Arakhamia said that Ukraine's "force" agencies - like the defence ministry - should not be headed by politicians during wartime, but people with a background in defence or security.

He added that Reznikov would be made minister of strategic industries.

Reznikov, who had said earlier on Sunday that any decision on a reshuffle was up to Zelenskiy, told the Ukrainian Fakty ICTV online media later in the evening that the transfer to the new ministry was news to him.

"If I suddenly received such an offer from the president of Ukraine or the prime minister, I would refuse it, because I do not have the expertise," Reznikov was cited as saying.

There was no immediate statement from Zelenskiy on replacing Reznikov, a former lawyer who became defence minister in November 2021, a few months before Russia launched its full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

Arakhamia did not say when the move would be formalised.

Budanov, 37, is an enigmatic intelligence operative decorated for his role in classified operations who rapidly rose through the ranks to head up Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence.

The shakeup coincides with Ukrainian fears that Russia is planning a major new offensive this month. Ukraine is planning its own counter-offensive but is waiting on Western supplies of battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles.

MILITARY AID OVERSEER

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak, when asked on national television Sunday night how likely was a reshuffle, said: "Reznikov was extremely efficient in terms of communication with our partners. And this is a very important component in this case."

As a wartime defence minister, Reznikov, 56, fostered ties with Western defence officials and helped oversee the receipt of billions of dollars of military aid to help Kyiv fend off the Russian invasion.

Podolyak said that Reznikov's "wonderful" personal relations with allies have helped with the military supplies.

"Negotiations are not just mathematical formulae but also personal relationships. And trust. Unfortunately, today we are losing a measure of trust in us," Podolyak said.

Reznikov singled out Ukraine's "de facto" integration into the NATO military alliance as a top priority, even if joining the bloc was not immediately possible de jure.

During his tenure as defence minister, he spoke out strongly about wartime corruption, which he said was akin to "marauding".

But in recent weeks his own defence ministry became embroiled in a corruption scandal over an army food contract that envisaged paying vastly inflated prices. It caused a public outcry.

One of his deputy ministers has been fired, and two other senior officials have also since left their posts.

The scandal prompted Zelenskiy to embark on a major reshuffle that saw the exit of an array of regional governors, deputy ministers and other officials.

Reznikov hosted a news conference on Sunday afternoon, in which he said Ukraine expected a possible major Russian offensive this month, but that Kyiv had the resources at hand to hold them at bay.

He also said that his ministry's anti-corruption department needed to be overhauled and that it had not done what it was supposed to do.

Reporting by Ron Popeski, Tom Balmforth, Nick Starkov and Lidia Kelly; Writing by Tom Balmforth and Lidia Kelly; Editing by Grant McCool and Michael Perry

In the propaganda war, one has to learn how to read between the lines. When the WSJ and FT tell us that Bakhmut is near to being captured, it is probably already surrounded and an Ukrainian collapse is imminent. Otherwise, the western media would be boasting that the Ukrainians are marching on Moscow.

In the most important of the above three articles - about the removal of the Ukrainian Defense Minister - the word missing is "sacked". If the man was doing a good job, would you expect the Kyiv government to make changes midstream at a critical time like this? Developments at such high levels in the Ukrainian government, plus all the dismissals for corruption, are signs that the war is being lost and scapegoating is beginning.

This is quite different from the changes on the Russian side which provoked commentary from the western media when General Sergei Surovikin, once the supreme commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, was brought back under the command of his boss, the Chief of General Staff, Valery Gerasimov. There was no sacking. In Russia's case, the military

leadership was expanded, which is a sign of a bigger commitment to the war, while in the recent Ukrainian changes, you cannot avoid the sense that they are clearing out the trash.

If you ask me, my humble opinion is that the war is unequivocally being lost by the Ukrainian side and this is now grudgingly being accepted by the western media, while smothering it with a lot of euphemisms. The end is nigh. After the tank debate (Ukrainian pleas for tanks) ended, the F-16 debate (a similar plea for fighter jets) did not even start, as it was rejected almost immediately. The latest turn of events in the military aid package to the Ukrainians is stuck only with the result that there will once again be German tanks sent to fight on the steppes of Ukraine, all named, even after 80 years, after big cats, such as Tigers, Panthers (WW2) and now Leopard 2's. The symbolism which the west tried to evoke, that Russia should once again be afraid of these big cats, was not lost on the Russians who in their turn, reminded the world that Russia always had better tanks than the Germans, fielding as they did in WW2, the T34, the KV tanks and the IS series of tanks. If that history in tank warfare is repeated, there is no chance for western over-engineered behemoths to beat Russia's track record of fielding versatile and effective armoured vehicles in endless droves.

In any case, those western tanks would come too little too late for the Ukrainian war. The first tanks will only come after three months, while the American gas guzzler, the Abrams, in another year. I cannot imagine the current special military exercise will last until then. Even Zelensky said if they receive those tanks after August, it would be too late.

Here is an assessment from a military expert on the outcome of the Ukrainian war in the American Conservative.

This Time It's Different

By Douglas MacGregor

Until it decided to confront Moscow with an existential military threat in Ukraine, Washington confined the use of American military power to conflicts that Americans could afford to lose, wars with weak opponents the developing world from Saigon to Baghdad that did not present an existential threat to U.S. forces or American territory. This time—a proxy war with Russia—is different.

Contrary to early Beltway hopes and expectations, Russia neither collapsed internally nor capitulated to the collective West's demands for regime change in Moscow. Washington underestimated Russia's societal cohesion, its latent military potential, and its relative immunity to Western economic sanctions.

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As a result, Washington's proxy war against Russia is failing. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was unusually candid about the situation in Ukraine when he told the allies in Germany at Ramstein

Air Base on January 20, “We have a window of opportunity here, between now and the spring,” admitting, “That’s not a long time.”

Alexei Arestovich, President Zelensky’s recently fired advisor and unofficial “Spinmeister,” was more direct. He expressed his own doubts that Ukraine can win its war with Russia and he now questions whether Ukraine will even survive the war. Ukrainian losses—at least 150,000 dead including 35,000 missing in action and presumed dead—have fatally weakened Ukrainian forces resulting in a fragile Ukrainian defensive posture that will likely shatter under the crushing weight of attacking Russian forces in the next few weeks.

Ukraine’s materiel losses are equally severe. These include thousands of tanks and armored infantry fighting vehicles, artillery systems, air defense platforms, and weapons of all calibers. These totals include the equivalent of seven years of Javelin missile production. In a setting where Russian artillery systems can fire nearly 60,000 rounds of all types—rockets, missiles, drones, and hard-shell ammunition—a day, Ukrainian forces are hard-pressed to answer these Russian salvos with 6,000 rounds daily. New platform and ammunition packages for Ukraine may enrich the Washington community, but they cannot change these conditions.

Predictably, Washington’s frustration with the collective West’s failure to stem the tide of Ukrainian defeat is growing. In fact, the frustration is rapidly giving way to desperation.

*Michael Rubin, a former Bush appointee and avid supporter of America’s permanent conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, vented his frustration in an article asserting that, “if the world allows Russia to remain a unitary state, and if it allows Putinism to survive Putin, then, Ukraine should be allowed to maintain its own nuclear deterrence, whether it joins NATO or not.” On its face, the suggestion is reckless, but the statement does accurately reflect the anxiety in Washington circles that **Ukrainian defeat is inevitable.***

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NATO’s members were never strongly united behind Washington’s crusade to fatally weaken Russia. The governments of Hungary and Croatia are simply acknowledging the wider European public’s opposition to war with Russia and lack of support for Washington’s desire to postpone Ukraine’s foreseeable defeat.

Though sympathetic to the Ukrainian people, Berlin did not support all-out war with Russia on Ukraine’s behalf. Now, Germans are also uneasy with the catastrophic condition of the German armed forces.

Retired German Air Force General (four-star equivalent) Harald Kujat, former chairman of the NATO Military Committee, severely criticized Berlin for allowing Washington to railroad Germany into conflict with Russia, noting that several decades of German political leaders actively disarmed Germany and thus deprived Berlin of authority or credibility in Europe. Though actively suppressed by the German government and media, his comments are resonating strongly with the German electorate.

The blunt fact is that in its efforts to secure victory in its proxy war with Russia, Washington ignores historical reality. From the 13th century onward, Ukraine was a region dominated by larger, more powerful national powers, whether Lithuanian, Polish, Swedish, Austrian, or Russian.

In the aftermath of the First World War, abortive Polish designs for an independent Ukrainian State were conceived to weaken Bolshevik Russia. Today, Russia is not communist, nor does Moscow seek the destruction of the Polish State as Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, and their followers did in 1920.

So where is Washington headed with its proxy war against Russia? The question deserves an answer.

On Sunday December 7, 1941, U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman was with Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill having dinner at Churchill's home when the BBC broadcast the news that the Japanese had attacked the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. Harriman was visibly shocked. He simply repeated the words, "The Japanese have raided Pearl Harbor."

Harriman need not have been surprised. The Roosevelt administration had practically done everything in its power to goad Tokyo into attacking U.S. forces in the Pacific with a series of hostile policy decisions culminating in Washington's oil embargo during the summer of 1941.

In the Second World War, Washington was lucky with timing and allies. This time it's different. Washington and its NATO allies are advocating a full-blown war against Russia, the devastation and breakup of the Russian Federation, as well as the destruction of millions of lives in Russia and Ukraine.

Washington emotes. Washington does not think, and it is also overtly hostile to empiricism and truth. Neither we nor our allies are prepared to fight all-out war with Russia, regionally or globally. The point is, if war breaks out between Russia and the United States, Americans should not be surprised. The Biden administration and its bipartisan supporters in Washington are doing all they possibly can to make it happen.

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Douglas Macgregor, Col. (ret.) is a senior fellow with The American Conservative, the former advisor to the Secretary of Defense in the Trump administration, a decorated combat veteran, and the author of five books.

In all objective and competent analyses of the war in Ukraine outside of the mainstream media sprouting propaganda, the consensus is that the war is going badly for Ukraine. Once the Bakhmut front is broken, which is likely to happen shortly, all those fancy weapons promised will not be in time or in sufficient quantities to reverse the tide.

As a matter of fact, the Russians are succeeding not just to demilitarise Ukraine, but also the whole of NATO. Here is a report from a blog written by a former German army officer, in his website called Moon of Alabama, a popular reference point for those looking at the Ukrainian war objectively.

NATO Continues Its Disarmament

NATO is continuing its disarmament mission.

France to send an extra 12 powerful Caesar howitzers to Ukraine

French Defence Minister Sebatien Lecornu's announcement that France will send 12 additional Caesar howitzers to Kyiv is "clearly important for the Ukrainians, particularly the Caesar artillery system", said FRANCE 24 Chief Foreign Editor Robert Parsons.

"They've been very successful in Ukraine, so the Ukrainians will be delighted, I am sure, to get another 12. I think that brings that total to over 40 now, closing on 50 Caesars in Ukraine.

France has only 77 Caesar howitzers left. Others though are worse off.

Estonia Sending All Its 155-mm Howitzers to Ukraine

Estonia will donate all its 155-millimeter howitzers to Ukraine as part of its most extensive military assistance yet.

The package, previously reported to be worth 113 million euros (\$122 million) is expected to boost Kyiv's defense capabilities amid continuing Russian aggression.

Estonia currently operates 24 NATO standard FH-70 towed howitzers.

Apart from the howitzers, Tallinn will send thousands of 155-mm artillery shells and hundreds of Karl=Gustaf anti-tank grenade launchers.

We all know how that artillery will end.

Several weeks ago, Russia launched a special counter-artillery campaign. There are dedicated counter artillery radars, electronic warfare and airborne surveillance systems and long range artillery batteries with precision ammunition engaged in this.

So today, I did some staff work and summed up the claimed artillery destruction as listed in the daily "clobber list" provided by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

Here are the results:

Ukrainian Artillery Losses		Source: Russian Ministry of Defense - (https://eng.mil.ru/en/special_operations.htm)											
	Type	Report Date										Sum	Total
		24.01.23	25.01.23	26.01.23	27.01.23	28.01.23	29.01.23	30.01.23	31.01.23				
Truck pulled Howitzer	D-20 Howitzer	1	1	6	4	2	1	1	1			17	
	D-30 Howitzer	1			2	1	1	3				8	
	Hycint-B			1								1	
	M-777	1		4	3	3	2				1	14	
	FH-70												40
Selfpropelled Howitzer	MSTA-B	1	1		1	2					1	6	
	MSTA-S		1									1	
	PS-2000		3									3	
	Paladin			1	1							2	
	Caesar									1		1	
	Gyrodika		1	1		3			1	2		8	
	Alaksya							3	2			5	
	Nona-S							3				3	
	Pion						1					1	
	Gavril-B					1						1	
	Krab							1				1	32
MLRS	Grad	1		2	1	1	1					6	
	Oskan							1				1	
	Smerch							1				1	
	HIMARS											0	8
Radar	AN/TPQ 36							1				1	
	AN/TPQ 37	2		1	2	1	1					7	
	AN/TPQ 48							1				1	
	AN/TPQ 50	1		2	1			1	1			6	15
	Art Mun Depot	1	2	8	1	2	4	1	4			23	23
	Art Units Engage	64	79	83	79	86	103	73	84		651	651	
Interceptors	MLRS Rockets		4	7	14	8	16	4	3		56		
	HARM			1					2		3	59	

In the last seven days, Russia claimed to have destroyed a total of 40 truck pulled howitzers, 32 self-propelled, 8 Multiple Rocket Launcher Systems (MRLS), 15 counter-artillery radars, and 23 local artillery ammunition depots.

On top of that it engaged Ukrainian artillery positions with normal counter fire on 651 occasions. This will have caused additional damage and losses.

Additionally, 55 MLRS rockets and HARM anti-radar missiles were intercepted by Russian air defenses.

*If you think that the field reports the ministry receives are exaggerating the numbers, which is likely, simply **divide them by half**.*

In just one week, it was still more than Estonia and France promise to deliver.

Yesterday, I explained why a NATO or US intervention with ground troops is unlikely. We can add the acute lack of NATO artillery and artillery ammunition to the reasons.

NATO has disarmed its ground forces and is not longer combat capable.”

Posted on Moon Of Alabama by Bernhard on January 31 2023.

What do I conclude in all of this week's coverage?

- 1) I do believe that the wandering balloon is what China says it is – a weather monitoring device that was blown off course. Logical deduction based on circumstantial evidence.
- 2) But it has inadvertently provided insights into China's capabilities. It has used a sub-\$10,000 device to reveal a lot about the embarrassing weaknesses in the defences of the greatest military power on earth in its own country. What more sending a strike force to protect Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack across the expansive Pacific Ocean within days of an outbreak of hostilities? There was a recent furore when a USAF general, a General Mike Milihan, who wrote a memo that a war with China would be inevitable by 2025 and telling his soldiers to prepare for it. This fella is a shithead and seriously underestimates Chinese capabilities. Just one balloon and they have to use an expensive missile to knock it down after it traversed the whole country from coast to coast, variously scaring or angering all American citizens who saw, not a white balloon but a red one.
- 3) The foreign policy of the US is in tatters. They want to go to China to negotiate a number of things while pushing the boundaries of polite diplomatic behaviour at the same time, and expect the Chinese to respond in a positive way. Then they are forced to postpone the trip and gestured that they will reschedule. The Chinese were nonchalant through the whole exercise. It reminds me of unrequited love. It is also a display of quiet confidence on the Chinese side.
- 4) The Ukraine war is clearly being lost by the west. For all the propaganda in the mainstream western media, it does not hide the actual situation that is being followed closely by a throng of competent and objective alternative media analysts who can see through what is really going on. The constant pleas for rushed aid as well as the reshuffle of senior government officials clearly indicate the desperate plight of the Kyiv government, and for all the bravery of its soldiers, a crassly corrupt government is leading the country to complete ruin.
- 5) And it is not just a Ukrainian defeat. NATO, in having taken on the proxy war, is also being demilitarized by the attrition tactics of a superior Russian army, even though the western media is badmouthing its capabilities. Stocks of ammunition are being sought all over the world by the Americans, even when the Ukrainians are using ammunition at 1/10th the rate of the Russians. There is just not enough to supply to Ukraine to hold off the Russians. Those much-vaunted tanks will end up like all the previous “game changers” already

supplied and then found wanting once the Russians work out, quite quickly, how to defeat them.

- 6) This will lead to the US being tied up in Ukraine for a while, because it cannot just get out with a huge loss of political face and military credibility. Think about it, it cannot even send its M1A1 Abrams tank to Kyiv without manufacturing them first (without the secretive armour that they themselves use). That will be after another year. How to fight a war like that?
- 7) The industrial capacity of America as the "arsenal of democracy" of WW2 is no longer there. That fact is being proven every day on the battlefields of the Donbass. That industrial capacity now rests with China, and to a smaller extent Russia. What does a general (that Milihan fella) know about these things?
- 8) The wandering balloon plus the evident loss of the war in Ukraine will wake up the Taiwanese to the fact that the Americans cannot protect them. On their own, they are too smart to want to fight the PLA without help. And without an ability to have Taiwanese fight to the last man on their behalf in yet another proxy war, there is no political justification to take on the PLA, not with the prospect of swarm drones and hypersonic missiles attacking their prized but obsolete aircraft carriers.
- 9) The silliness of the notion that there will be a Sino-American war by 2025 knows no bounds.

And I will just leave it at that.

By:

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Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris