

Weekly Commentary 9 – Mar 2023

Bakhmut – An Unlikely Place for the Closing of the Unipolar World.

The Battle of Bakhmut is over. The Russians say it is practically surrounded. The Ukrainians say they are still in the city but under extreme pressure, engaged in a “fighting withdrawal”. Comparing both sides’ propaganda, it is safe to say that Bakhmut has been captured by Russian forces.

Why should anyone care about this battle, or Bakhmut, even if this has been the bloodiest one in the war so far? The reason Bakhmut is important is because both sides have made it a big deal in their war propaganda. The Russians have been attacking it for at least a few months, since late August, and this lengthy campaign have been used by western propaganda to say that Russia’s army is a paper tiger as Ukrainian resistance is holding back the hordes. For months, the western media has denigrated Russian arms, saying they are worthless because it is only inching forward while taking heavy casualties capturing a strategically unimportant town.

On the other side, the fact that Zelensky keeps sending his best troops into the battle indicates that Kyiv has made Bakhmut the lynchpin of their defence, at least in the Donbass. As such, it will make a good propaganda story for the Russians when they finally capture the town or alternatively, for the Ukrainians when they successfully resist defeat. Bakhmut has been made out to be a mini-Stalingrad, and whether it falls or stands, there is the implication that it would mark a turning point in the war.

Now, Bakhmut is in the final stages of being mopped up by the Russians’ Wagner Private Military Company...

Whatever the psychological effects of Bakhmut being captured are going to be, there is one thing for sure. The battle has lasted so long that it has been an absolute blood bath. Both sides claim that they have inflicted horrific casualties on the enemy, but it is more likely that casualties are much greater on the Ukrainian side. At the start of the campaign, there were about 60,000 Kyiv troops in the garrison. The remnants of that army are said to be between 5-10,000 today. There has been a degradation of at least 70 percent of the fighting strength of the beleaguered Ukrainian army there over the last six months.

There is no disagreement that the Battle of Bakhmut is an artillery war of attrition, and that the Russians have 10 times more artillery than the Ukrainians, with unlimited ammunition, while the entire NATO have not been able to adequately supply Kyiv with enough of those resources. An artillery war is not hand-to-hand combat where casualties can be equalized across both sides. In a shelling contest, both sides sit behind artillery tubes firing them, and you cannot be suffering casualties that way. On the other hand, the poor souls on the other

end of the shelling are being blasted to smithereens even if they are hiding in trenches and bunkers. Clearly, 10 times more artillery, adequately supplied, on the Russian side must mean more casualties on the Ukrainians.

In fact, for the longest time since August, Bakhmut has been described as a “meat grinder”. There are periods of time in which there have been reports of up to a thousand casualties per day. Over the drawn-out battle, the 60,000 Ukrainian soldiers caught in the fray have, sadly, been decimated. It has been reported that the life expectancy of newly recruited soldiers sent into Bakhmut is just 4 hours. It is truly tragic, not because Russian soldiers fire their guns to kill people, but because Kyiv knowingly sent their men into the mincer knowing what will happen.

By Dec 2022, it has become obvious that the Ukrainian defence has been outgunned and outmaneuvered. The garrison is now surrounded on three sides, with the fourth (western side) sealed by artillery fire (ie, all roads are cut off). No supplies can get in, so a trap has been set. To break out is also dangerous because they have to brave artillery fire in that narrow corridor to the west.

By mid January, there was a desperate plea for weapons that resulted in Germany agreeing to send Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv. And there was a global search for artillery ammunition to provide to the beleaguered Ukrainian defenders. Zelensky himself said that if the western military aid does not arrive by August, the game would be over. It is only March, and with the fall of Bakhmut, it is almost over.

The killing has been so horrendous that it has been reported that there have been some Ukrainian units which would not obey orders to stand and fight. In other words, signs of desertion or mutiny are appearing. Over this weekend, larger units are being pulled out of the encirclement piecemeal, before the back-roads westwards are also closed. Withdrawal is disorganized, and reportedly to be in groups of five over soft country roads. All the heavy gear will have to be left behind. It is likely that in the next couple of days, there will be a complete collapse of Kyiv’s resistance in the surrounded and battered town.

It will be a huge psychological victory for the Russians. Zelensky has been proclaiming that he would never abandon Bakhmut and will fight to the last man. Remember Mariopol when the Ukrainian forces there were also fighting to the last until they didn’t? All those bombastic words sounded increasingly like Hitler’s frequent boasts in 1944 and 1945 about not surrendering a single inch, which as history records, became untenable. The same goes for Zelensky but it looks like his complete dependence on NATO makes his situation even worse, as European countries will soon declare it is not their war and America finds it cannot support Kyiv “as long as it takes”. The political elite who want to fight on are elected by a restive public and when Bakhmut falls, it will become obvious that the effort to fight Russia is futile. NATO will not be able to provide enough weapons for this proxy war because it is unsustainable. After about \$150 billion of aid to Kyiv, the collective west’s effort to bury

Russia has turned around to bite the west in the ass, exactly as happened in the sanctions war. There is an article in the Financial Times:

Ukraine asks EU for 250,000 artillery shells a month.

The article says it ain't coming because the EU plus America do not have 250,000 shells to give... that's why Bakhmut has fallen.

Of course, the Ukrainian war will not end with this campaign. But here are some easy conclusions to this military disaster which has shaken the global unipolar system to its foundations.

- 1) The western effort to contain Russia has failed miserably. Bakhmut represents an ultimate contest in which both sides put in their best, without limitations. When you put up your best efforts and it is found wanting, that's it. It demonstrates clearly that Russia is not "a gas station pretending to be a nation", a disparaging remark made by the late Senator John McCain and other American warmongers. It has now defeated the entire NATO even though there were no NATO boots on the ground. The Ukrainian army on its own, before the infusion of NATO arms was already destroyed on the battlefield long ago, by June of 2022, and had to be sustained by continuous support from the collective west, up to US\$150 billion over just a 12 month period, but even that has been found inadequate. Most importantly, after 12 months, the Russians by adopting an artillery attrition war in which they have an advantage, has dispelled the illusion that NATO is the stronger force consisting of 28 countries led by the largest military in the world, the United States. Now Poland, the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden will pee in their pants for instigating offensive intentions on the Russian bear, when they thought that the protection of the American Big Daddy would be good enough. Ukraine has not much of an army left, and it would not be surprising if after this, the Russians can drive unimpeded again to the gates of the Odessa, Kharkiv, Kyiv or Lviv.
- 2) And where the collective west has failed is to think that they can beat Russia by focusing on limited quantities of "better quality" hardware, when that "better quality" is now in doubt, and worse still, when the Russians has a better military industrial complex that outproduced all the profit-gorging defence contractors of the west who could not even produce something so fundamental as enough ammunition for a war that went on for just one year. America in particular is no longer the "arsenal of democracy" that it was in WW2. Self-declaration of superiority and underestimation of a foe have long been reasons for failure on the battlefield..
- 3) NATO's armies are not just deficient in equipment and ammunition, but also manpower. The volunteer armies of the west, no longer based on conscription, cannot find enough bodies to fill their ranks. They are in no position to go to war against Russia even if the political will is there. And there is none of that will because soldiering is no longer a national obligation of citizenship but simply a

professional career thought of as just a way to make a living. With the aid given to Ukraine, now destroyed or captured, the entire NATO has been demilitarized. Even if there are men, there are no weapons...

- 4) Zelensky bet the ranch on Bakhmut, and with its capture, he will be diminished. Not because his troops did not have the courage to take to the field but because he kept lying to the world and his own people what the true military position was. He is the one who was going to raise a million-man army to drive the Russians out of Crimea, and then march on Moscow. He was all chest-thumping loud about the state of his army, and he kept that up out to keep western money flowing to him and his blatantly corrupt government. Once he is proven to be a liar unable to deliver on the battlefield, he will soon be cast aside by his puppeteers. Look out for it – the Americans will pull an Afghanistan stunt on Ukraine soon.

- 5) The economic sanctions war on Russia, often called the mother of all sanctions war, has also been defeated by Russia. Biden publicly declared that Russia will fold in a couple of weeks when he announced the first sanction, and that the Ruble would become rubble. One year later, the man has to eat his words, when it is obvious that Russia has not crumbled. This was the same miscalculation made by Hitler in Jun 1941 when he boasted that the Soviet Union would collapse with one kick on the fence, only to see, four years later, Russian tanks rumbling into Berlin and his Third Reich pulverised. Americans and the west like to think they are always the good guys in any conflict, and that good will prevail over evil; but in this war against Russia, that view has been based on propaganda. Even the World Bank said that Russia would do economically better than the UK in terms of GDP growth, and on par with the US and most of the western countries. Ten rounds of sanctions levied to break Russia ended up like wisp in the wind. Even western companies found it hard to leave the Russian market and many continue to do business there. Finally, the countries that made a big deal out of not buying Russian energy are actually still doing so, paying lip service to the sanctions, by buying oil from India and China who resell what they get from Russia directly but at a price premium. Sanctions only create middlemen who get rich.

- 6) Finally there is the media war. Up until Bakhmut, the western mainstream media kept up the false impression that Russian arms are not what they are made out to be. From Feb 2022, the word put out was that Russia was imperialistic, with Putin trying to recreate the Soviet empire. Objective voices like John Mearsheimer and Jeffrey Sachs, as well as numerous logical voices in the alternative media were ignored, often branded as Russian shills. The western propaganda however did not persuade 85% of the planet. The message that has emerged from the alternative media is getting accepted. The causes of the conflict are not what the Americans anointed them to be. Most of the countries in the world have come to understand that it was the Americans who stirred up the shit, first expanding NATO over thirty years against promises made to the leaders of Russia, then organizing a colour revolution in Ukraine in 2014, followed by backing Ukrainians to ignore an UN-approved Minsk Agreement to stop

the fighting in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and then again in 2015, and finally jettisoning a Turkiye brokered peace agreement in June 2023. 85% of the world did not go along with the sanctions on Russia.

- 7) Then the western mainstream media turned to lying about the performance of Ukrainian and Russian forces on the battlefield – that Kyiv was holding its own against Russian forces and winning the war. Bakhmut was a Ukrainian bastion against which Russian penal soldiers in Wagner PMC were getting killed by the thousands. And that the Russians were making progress measured in inches and incurring human and material losses that would soon end the Russian efforts. The fall of Bakhmut has shown that the western media is just parroting the lies coming out of Kyiv and pulling wool over the eyes of those that need to be persuaded to sacrifice their tax dollars for an American attempt at containing Russia and destroying it. The lies were so big that even the governments and the media themselves believed them to be true. Now, the outcome of the war is turning out exactly as what has long been predicted in the alternative media – that Ukraine and the west are actually losing badly.

In other words, the collective west have lost on all three fronts – military, economic and media.

Here is an article published in the Spectator magazine, a British publication, to discuss what is really going on in the Ukraine war:’

Is Putin winning? The world order is changing in his favour

By: [Peter Frankopan](#)

From magazine issue: [04 March 2023](#)

‘This is not about Ukraine at all, but the world order,’ said Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, a month after the invasion. ‘The unipolar world is irretrievably receding into the past ... A multi-polar world is being born.’ The US is no longer the world’s policeman, in other words – a message that resonates in countries that have long been suspicious of American power. The West’s core coalition may remain solid, but it has failed to win over many of the countries that refused to pick sides. Moscow’s diplomatic mission to build ties and hone a narrative over the past decade has paid dividends.

Look at Africa. In March last year, 25 African states out of 54 abstained or didn’t vote in a UN motion condemning the invasion, despite huge pressure from western powers. Their refusal to side clearly with Ukraine was testament to Russia’s ongoing diplomatic efforts in the developing world.

A year ago, Naledi Pandor, South Africa’s foreign minister, urged Russia to withdraw. After Lavrov’s visit a few weeks ago, Pandor was asked if she had repeated this sentiment to her Russian counterpart. It had been ‘appropriate’ last year, she said, but to repeat it now ‘would make me appear quite simplistic and infantile’. Pandor then lauded the ‘growing economic bilateral relationship’ between Pretoria and Moscow, and the two countries marked the war’s anniversary with joint military exercises.

Then there are the North African countries, which have helped Russia offset the economic effect of western sanctions. Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt have all, in the past year, imported Russian diesel and other refined oils, as well as chemicals.

Vladimir Putin is quite deliberately cultivating this alliance of nations who feel victims of western imperialism, and putting Russia at its head. The West wants to see Russia 'as a colony', he said in September. 'They don't want equal cooperation, they want to rob us.'

This message goes down equally well in large parts of Asia, where more than a third of countries declined to condemn Russia in the initial UN vote, as well as in Central and South America, where waves of anti-western and anti-capitalist sentiment continue to swell.

As India's former ambassador to Russia, Venkatesh Varma, put it last week: 'We have not accepted the western framing of the conflict. In fact there are very few takers for it in the Global South.' He doesn't speak for India's government. But still India, along with China and South Africa, abstained from another UN resolution last week demanding Russia withdraw from Ukraine. Of 193 members, 141 voted in favour and 32 abstained. Seven voted against, with Russia joined by Belarus, Eritrea, Mali, North Korea, Nicaragua and Syria.

The idea that it's America and its allies who are the sources of global disruption and instability holds sway. The setbacks in Afghanistan and the idea that the Ukrainian war happened because of Nato's expansion have fuelled a narrative, and even sympathy, for the idea that Putin is simply standing up to the West (which explains why North Korea has shipped artillery shells and Iran has provided kamikaze drones).

Putin is a master of whipping up anti-American sentiment. In his address to the Federal Assembly last week, he referenced western military interventions in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya and Syria. These showed the West acting 'shamelessly and duplicitously... They will never be able to wash off this shame'.

Look at how Ukraine has been supported, he added, while others have been abandoned. More than \$150 billion has been spent helping and arming Kyiv, he said, while the world's poorest countries have only received \$60 billion in aid. 'What about all this talk of fighting poverty, sustainable development and protection of the environment?' he asked.

Putin's Russia even audaciously claims the high ground on racial discrimination. In a speech six months ago, Putin stated: 'The Russophobia articulated today across the entire world is nothing but racism.' Russia thus neatly taps into western guilt at its colonial past, while pitching itself as the leading voice for what Lavrov calls 'the international majority'. 'Over the long centuries of colonialism, diktat and hegemony,' Putin said last week, the West 'got used to being allowed everything, got used to spitting on the whole world.'

At the same time, the Russian President appeals to the world's social conservatism. That's why last week he pointed to the Anglican Communion's contortions over gay marriage and a 'gender-neutral' God, calling it 'a spiritual catastrophe'. Such talk goes down well among the planet's more devout populations, which tend to regard LGBTQ debates as evidence of western depravity and decadence. There's a reason why RT, the Kremlin's news channel, spent years stirring up the culture wars.

Moscow thus presents itself as a bastion of stability in a world gone mad, even as it seeks to destabilise the world and make it even madder. Its cultural propaganda is backed up by realpolitik and trade, with oil, gas, metals and crops used as diplomatic enticements to play Russia's game. Arms were another inducement.

Then there is China, which half-heartedly called last week for peace talks, and this week is hosting Putin's ally the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. The relationship between Russia and China will always be complicated, yet the invasion of Ukraine and the West's response have created enormous opportunities for Sino-Russian cooperation. China has been buying record amounts of cheap Russian oil and gas, for instance, while exporting far more machinery and semiconductors to Russia.

What unites them is a shared emphasis on the importance of stability and spreading the idea that it is the West which is disruptive, unpredictable and volatile.

'We need to work together to maintain peace and stability in the world,' said Xi Jinping in his most recent speech at the Boao Forum, 'and oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions.' Just as Lavrov's comments about empowering other nations are aimed at countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America – all of which have been recipients of Chinese diplomatic cultivation in the past decade – so too are these Chinese calls for 'international solidarity'.

It suits Beijing to echo Russia's narrative about uneven playing fields, victimisation and pressure – not least since China has watched the war unfold in order to draw lessons that can shape its approach to Taiwan.

On his visit to Moscow last week, senior diplomat Wang Yi spoke of 'new frontiers' in the relationship between China and Russia and called for joint resistance to pressure from the 'international community' – an apparent rebuke to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's threat of 'consequences' if China supplies military support to Russia.

The fallout from the pandemic has in some ways played into Russia and China's hands. As a report by the Carnegie Foundation said, without the resources available in the West, in economically vulnerable countries the crisis has 'reversed decades of progress on poverty, healthcare and education'.

Western countries bought up stocks of vaccines – far greater than needed – and then refused to release patent waivers for medicines, vaccines and diagnostics, pushing up prices and resulting in higher mortality levels. By contrast, energetic vaccine diplomacy by Russia and China boosted their standing, especially in Africa and Latin America. Despite the inefficacy of China's Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines, health officials in South Africa stopped giving the British-Swedish AstraZeneca vaccine, believing it didn't work. Last year, a survey of ASEAN countries in south-east Asia found the EU had a positive perception score of 2.6 per cent when it came to vaccine support – compared with almost 60 per cent for China.

As for the war, is Russia really losing? The Ukrainians have fought astonishingly well, but have suffered huge losses. Western leaders speak of giving Kyiv the tools to 'finish the job', but what the coming weeks, months and even years have to offer looks bleak, as the setbacks in Bakhmut suggest.

Russia's economy appears strong enough to keep the war going: the IMF predicts its economy will grow by 0.3 per cent this year. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Russian conscripts are still being called up. As the historian Stephen Kotkin has noted, democracies fight wars differently to autocracies. Russia will keep throwing untrained recruits into the 'meat grinder', in which three-quarters of them die. What do their leaders do next, asks Kotkin: 'Do they go to church on Sunday and ask forgiveness from God? They just do it again.'

That equation is different for Ukraine, regardless of what the West supplies – because Kyiv is being armed for a defensive, rather than offensive, war. Over time that tips the balance in favour of whoever can take pain for longer, in this case Russia. Wars of attrition are expensive and hard to sustain.

If procurement issues are one thing, replacing stock is another. The head of the British Army, General Sir Patrick Sanders, has said providing materials from the UK has left the army 'weakened'. Unsurprisingly, the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace is seeking £10 billion for his department – at a time when the government is trying to fill the 'fiscal black hole' in its coffers.

Commentators on Russian TV gleefully make this point. Kremlin talking heads often claim Europeans are freezing to death because of high energy prices or have been forced to eat grasshoppers because of a lack of Russian wheat imports. Behind such sensationalism lies the hope that Ukraine's supporters are exhausting themselves and that cracks will soon appear in the West's wall of solidarity. Will Germany's new-found commitment to Ukraine survive a colder winter? Russian propagandists are also aware that, come 2025, a new US administration might provide fresh options for Moscow, especially if there is a Republican president who is isolationist, impatient or both.

In Europe, Russia's weaponisation of its energy resources caused widespread difficulties. Faced with shortages, European countries, including the UK, raced to replace capacity, above all through imports of liquid natural gas (LNG). This caused inflation in the West, a problem that refuses to come down even as the energy markets adapt.

There have been big winners, such as shareholders in the five oil giants – BP, Shell, Exxon, Chevron and Total Energies – who reported combined profits of \$200 billion last year. The fossil fuel-producing states of OPEC also had eye-watering revenues, reaching \$850 billion last year. But the price rise of LNG has meant countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh have suffered blackouts, which in turn cut productivity. This has paved the way for social unrest and political volatility – as well as increasing a global sense of resentment towards the West.

In its most blunt terms, the war has served as a moment of one of the greatest transfers of wealth in history, with energy-rich states harvesting giant cash bonuses that, in turn, have further accelerated the changing of the world order.

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And here is the Wall Street Journal's version of the fall of Bakhmut.

CHASIV YAR, Ukraine—Shielded by a small hill from Russian positions a half-mile away, a Ukrainian soldier spotted via drone feed a new foxhole that appeared overnight northwest of the [embattled city of Bakhmut](#).

Three troopers of Russia's [Wagner paramilitary organization](#) had crawled through no man's land to establish a firing position, likely for a grenade launcher. The drone's camera zoomed to [Russian trenches](#) behind.

"Corpses, corpses, corpses one atop another," said Oleksiy, a soldier with Ukraine's Third Storm Brigade who watched the footage and coordinated the response. "And now, look, these brave lads have come out our way."

"They don't even have their body armor on," he shouted to a fellow trooper operating an American-made MK-19 grenade launcher above the staccato exchange of machine-gun fire. One of the bullets whizzed overhead. "Let's hit them now."

With a series of clinks, a volley of grenades flew to the Russian trench. "Done," said Oleksiy.

These Wagner men, too, joined [a long list of casualties](#) that the group, which now relies mostly on convicts [recruited in Russian prisons](#), has incurred in the monthslong [battle for Bakhmut](#).

Ukraine has suffered a high rate of casualties in the fight for Bakhmut that could sap its ability to mount a spring offensive.

With their policy of executing on the spot troopers who attempt to retreat or surrender, and a [disregard for losses](#) that is shocking for modern warfare, Wagner's disposable penal battalions have emerged as a unique threat to Ukrainian defenders, advancing at the time when the regular Russian military [remains largely stalled](#).

No military in a democratic society can keep sending wave after wave of soldiers to near-certain death to gain another few hundred yards. Even Russia's regular armed forces, known for their high tolerance of casualties, shy away from dispatching troops on clearly suicidal missions. Yet it is precisely such an approach that has allowed Wagner to come to the verge of capturing Bakhmut, at a cost that Ukrainian and Western officials estimate at tens of thousands of Russian casualties.

On Sunday, Wagner's forces pushed toward central Bakhmut from the east and the north, as remaining Ukrainian defenders retreated west of the Bakhmutka river that runs through the city. Ukrainian forces battled to retain control over the two remaining supply routes into Bakhmut, with heavy artillery exchanges ringing across the frontline.

Ukraine has also suffered large casualties during the eight months of battling for Bakhmut, losing some of the troops that it needs to mount a spring offensive with new weapons [supplied by the U.S.](#) and allies. President Volodymyr Zelensky has come under growing pressure to pull back from the eastern city, home to 70,000 people before the war, in what would be Kyiv's first such significant retreat since last summer.

Founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, President [Vladimir Putin](#)'s former caterer and confidant who spent a decade in Soviet prisons for robbery and other offenses, Wagner started off around 2014 as a private-military company that relied on experienced Russian military veterans and operated in Syria, Libya, [the Central African Republic](#) and Mali.

Wagner loosened its once-strict recruitment standards as it created new forces for the Ukrainian war, achieving critical successes that allowed Russia to capture Ukrainian-held parts of the Luhansk region between May and July. After the losses of that campaign, Mr. Prigozhin secured Mr. Putin's permission to start recruiting in Russian prison camps.

Wagner's goal, Mr. Prigozhin has said, wasn't so much to take Bakhmut but to grind down Ukraine's military. To an extent, this plan worked: As Ukraine poured some of its best brigades in to defend the city in recent months, even a lopsided casualty ratio in the Ukrainian favor ultimately worked to Moscow's advantage given Russia's larger population—and the fact that Russia was trading ill-trained prisoners for the lives of Ukrainian troops.

Such losses in the Bakhmut area are threatening Kyiv's ability to mount a strategic counteroffensive once the current mud season ends in the spring and unpaved roads become passable again.

“The war is won not by the party that gains territory, but by the party that destroys the armed forces of the adversary,” said Sr. Lt. Horbatenko, the Third Storm Brigade battalion commander. “Here, we are using up too much of the offensive potential that we'll need for a breakthrough once Ukraine's black earth dries up.”

Ukrainian combat casualties are classified. Officers in some other brigades say that several units—including some of the best-prepared ones—have been routed by fighting in the Bakhmut area in recent months.

There you go. The lies are being punctured by facts and the scorn against the alternative analysts and commentators who saw through the propaganda by the western mainstream media have now ended. The alternative media have been truthful and have gained the trust of people who have to revisit the notions of what media should represent.

The fall of Bakhmut, in revealing what is the true picture of the war in Ukraine, is now spurring people in Europe to take to the streets to protest against the actions of the political elite, which have been in support of American foreign policy in Ukraine. A million people marched in multiple cities last week, which were anti-NATO and anti-war. That sentiment has even spread to Switzerland and Australia, non-NATO countries, where thousands demonstrated over the last weekend in various cities to oppose their governments from sending arms to Ukraine or to support the war. This peace movement seems to have legs, simply because when people find out that they have been lied to, they get angry. Especially since the people their governments are supporting turn out to be completely corrupt who feed off their hard-earned money.

Of course, the anti-war movement will have to get much louder before they get the attention they deserve from the political elite. Be that as it may, the mood in the collective west is no longer as it was one year ago, when ordinary citizens who believe the crap about Russia being the aggressor in the war planted blue and yellow Ukrainian flags on their lawns and hung them from their houses. All that is largely gone now, as the truth begins to emerge and naivety overcome. There will be fresh impetus for diplomacy as a solution to the conflict even as the Biden and Boris attempts to prevent peace talks wane, when the fighting shows no signs of a defeated Russia.

And even though the collective west did not put boots on the ground formally (there are actually many ex-servicemen who don Ukrainian uniforms to fight the Russians), the entire military establishment in NATO is found wanting. This is what a NYT article reported:

Scrounging for Tanks for Ukraine, Europe's Armies Come Up Short

The struggle to deliver on promises to provide Leopard 2 tanks for use against Russian forces has exposed just how unprepared European militaries are.

By Erika Solomon, Steven Erlanger and Christopher F. Schuetze
Feb. 28, 2023

BERLIN — Nearly a month after Berlin gave European allies permission to send German-made tanks to Ukraine, the flow of tanks so many leaders vowed would follow seems more like a trickle.

Some nations have discovered that the tanks in their armory don't actually work or lack spare parts. Political leaders have encountered unanticipated resistance within their own coalitions, and even from their defense ministries. And some armies had to pull trainers out of retirement to teach Ukrainian soldiers how to use old-model tanks.

The struggle to provide Leopard tanks to an embattled Ukraine is just the most glaring manifestation of a reality Europe has long ignored: Believing that large-scale land war was a thing of the past and basking in the thaw of the Cold War, nations chronically underfunded their militaries. When Russia launched the largest land war on the continent since World War II, they were woefully unprepared.

Hints of the problem have surfaced repeatedly since Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago, through shortages of weapons and ammunition. But now, as Germany and its allies struggled for weeks to scrape together enough Leopard 2s to fill two battalions of tanks — 62 vehicles in total — the extent of their quandary has become even clearer.

The irony of this situation is not lost on Germany.

For weeks, Chancellor Olaf Scholz resisted an intense public pressure campaign from Ukraine's leaders, European politicians and security experts to supply Kyiv with tanks, and to permit other nations to send some of their own Leopards, despite German concerns that it could be perceived by Russia as a NATO escalation. Many goaded Mr. Scholz with a social media campaign: #Freetheleopards.

The Leopards may be free now, but they are scarce on the ground. And some countries that clamored for permission to send them to Ukraine are having difficulties doing so, or second thoughts of their own.

Despite Europe having an estimated 2,000 Leopard 2 tanks of different models — they are among the most commonly used main battle tanks across the continent — pledges for Ukraine are still short of the hundreds it says it needs.

Germany has offered 18, and Poland another 14, but the numbers drop from there. And once the currently pledged tanks go into battle and get hit or break down, it is not clear which Leopards — or which country — will replace them.

“Of course some nations have delivered, or at least announced that they will,” Germany's defense minister, Boris Pistorius, said at the Munich Security Conference this month. “But others have not done that.”

“That is what I'm a bit shocked about,” he added. “Clearly there were some nations — and I will never name names here — but we had some nations that preferred to hide behind Germany. To say: We would love to, if we were allowed. But when we allowed it, they didn't do anything.”

Privately, many German and European officials involved in the negotiations over tank deliveries say the situation is more complicated. It is not so much that nations are unwilling to make good on their promises but rather that they have faced a rude awakening as to just how difficult it is.

Finland, where many outspoken members of Parliament led the calls for Germany to allow Leopard deliveries, announced on Thursday that it would supply three Leopard mine-clearing vehicles — but none of its estimated 200 Leopard main battle tanks.

Some German officials expressed sympathy for Finland, which is not yet a NATO member and has Europe's longest border with Russia, some 830 miles. It does not want to weaken its defenses now that Russia has shown a willingness to attack a sovereign neighbor.

But some European officials were hoping for a larger contribution from Finland, given promises from the United States and Britain to come to its defense if necessary, even before NATO accession.

Nordic countries such as Sweden, which had long pushed for Leopard deliveries but on Friday offered only “up to” 10, are facing another unexpected problem, several German officials said: While their politicians and members of the public appear keen to offer tanks to Ukraine, their militaries are not.

For decades, European countries enjoying a post-Cold War “peace dividend” had seen war as almost a thing of the past, regularly cutting military support. Now, the shrunken armies tend to be protective of what they still have. At NATO, European militaries are sometimes called “bonsai armies,” after the miniature trees.

For years, the United States has been nagging Europe to increase military spending, and in 2014, after Russia grabbed Crimea, NATO members agreed to spend 2 percent of GDP by 2024. Yet even today, by current NATO estimates, only nine of the alliance’s 30 members are spending that much, while a 10th is close. Thirteen countries, including Germany, were spending around 1.5 percent of their G.D.P. or even less.

In Germany, which for years clung to a foreign policy that emphasized aid and development more than hard power, some saw the problem as uniquely German. Yearly military reports to Parliament offered sometimes comical glimpses of the shortages. Commandos conducted water training at local public pools, because their own facilities were shut down. Planes could not fly. Soldiers trained with broomsticks instead of rifles. Even newer Puma infantry fighting vehicles recently broke down en masse.

But other European nations are now realizing their own militaries may have similar troubles.

“The trend across the board in European armies has been cutting, cutting, cutting,” said Christian Mölling, a defense expert at the German Council on Foreign Relations. “But at the end of the day, many were on the same track as Germany: War is a theoretical thing. So we have theoretical tanks.”

Spain, which has 108 Leopard 2A4 tanks, early on sought German permission to offer some of its vehicles to Ukraine. Now it has discovered that many of them are in poor condition and need refurbishment that could take weeks or months. On top of that, one of the prime minister’s coalition partners, the leftist Podemos party, is closer to Russia and has been resistant to offering more support for Ukraine.

Nevertheless, as Germany turned the pressure back on its allies for their shortcomings, Spain’s prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, on Friday improved on his promise to send six Leopards and said Spain would now send 10.

Ulrike Franke, a defense analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said the struggle to find tank numbers raises questions as to where else European militaries face similar shortages and maintenance problems.

“Is it just bad luck that Spain has an issue with their Leopard tanks, but everything else works?” she said. “Or do they have the same issues elsewhere?”

“Does 10 percent of their equipment not work, or is it 50 percent?” Ms. Franke asked. “It would be a good idea for Europeans to look at this more closely.”

Poland, which has difficult relations with Germany, was foremost in pressing Mr. Scholz and Berlin on the Leopards, and even threatened to send some to Ukraine without the necessary German permission. Like Berlin, Warsaw has some 200 Leopard 2 tanks — but it says it will provide just 14. It

sent the first of the tanks to Ukraine on the anniversary of the invasion, Feb. 24, although Poland has yet to finish training Ukrainian soldiers how to use them.

Warsaw may be holding off on deliveries of Leopards until it receives new Hyundai-made K2 tanks from South Korea, meant to replace the German model, some analysts said. Poland has sent many upgraded Soviet-era T-72 tanks to Ukraine.

But some European officials think Warsaw should be offering more Leopards, and some policymakers are planning meetings with Polish officials this week to better understand the situation. Even when it comes to the tanks that are in large supply — namely, the older Leopard 1 models — there are complications.

The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark have launched a joint initiative to refurbish and send 150 Leopard 1 models to Ukraine by the end of the year. But at a training session for Ukrainian soldiers in Germany earlier this week, one general said militaries had been forced to seek out retired Leopard 1 tank drivers to come back and help train Ukrainian forces. The old model is too unfamiliar to current militaries.

As politicized as the Leopard issue has become, Gustav Gressel, a security analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations, argued that there were plenty of solutions if European nations worked together.

The Dutch, for instance, lease 18 Leopards from Germany. Officials are discussing whether it would be possible for Germany to take some of them to use in place of its own Leopards in Lithuania and then send those to Ukraine.

Switzerland, sticking to its constitutional neutrality, refuses to send any of its 134 Leopard tanks to Ukraine. But it is willing to give the tanks to European Union members, Mr. Gressel said. Countries like Finland or Poland, he said, could request the Swiss tanks and send their own to Ukraine.

Another option would be for countries to simply buy more Leopards, made by the German companies Rheinmetall and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, and send their current models to Ukraine. But European governments and the defense industry are currently in a standoff over production.

State leaders want industry to move first, while weapons makers want longer-term government orders before they step up production. If more government orders are made, analysts say, the more capacity may increase, thus speeding up production of weapons like tanks.

At current rates, militaries would face a serious tank shortage for the two to three years it would take the industry to make the new vehicles, security experts say — a long waiting period politicians across Europe are learning their armies are fiercely resistant to accept.

The defeat of western arms in the Battle of Bakhmut has huge implications for the unipolar world. It has demonstrated that:

- 1) The exercise of western military and economic warfare to take on Russia has been shown to be not easy at all, as Hitler discovered eighty years ago. All it did was to push Russia and China, treated just as badly by the US, together to help each other. Therefore, there will be greater impetus for Russia and China to work together to form a new center in the multipolar

world, and for India to do the same. The west has shown that it is no longer that all-powerful center of the universe and the other powers will strike out to complete the process of making the world multipolar.

One view on this process of China and Russia coming together is articulated by the former editor of Global Times, a state owned mouthpiece:

US gets anxious as Russia has survived war of attrition against entire NATO

By

Hu Xijin

Published: Mar 01, 2023 07:50 PM

The US has recently repeatedly claimed that China is preparing to provide "lethal military aid" to Russia in the ongoing Ukraine conflict, which is to incite the Western public opinion to pile pressure on China. China has firmly denied the allegations made by the US. What is the US meant to do?

I believe the US is engaging in a "preemptive accusation" to prevent China from weighing in the conflict. Ukraine war has been going on for more than a year. According to the West's previous calculation, Russia should have already collapsed by now. They didn't expect that Russia can still sustain now, and in recent days, it is advancing the encirclement of Bakhmut, a key hub for the supply route of the Ukrainian troops.

This war can no longer be viewed as a Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has evolved into a war of attrition between Russia and the West. Ukraine provides troops, it is receiving all of its military supplies, including ammunition, from NATO. While NATO is supposed to be much stronger than Russia, the situation on the ground doesn't appear so, which is causing anxiety in the West.

For example, last year, the Russian military consumed about 50,000 various types of shells per day, while Ukraine was only able to fire 5,000 shells per day. By the end of the year, the Russian military was firing more than 20,000 shells per day, while Ukraine was still firing 5,000-7,000 shells per day, much lower than Russian troops.

This is a clear indication of the industrial nature of the war: the result depends on which side can produce more tanks and artilleries. Both sides are using artillery as machine guns. One hundred shells may not be enough to eliminate one enemy soldier.

Furthermore, Ukraine's own arsenal factories have been destroyed by Russia, and Ukraine's daily firing of 5,000 shells is equivalent to the annual supply of a small NATO country. The United States originally purchased 15,000 shells per month, but the outbreak of the Ukraine war led to a sharp increase in purchases for aid. Western media have exclaimed that the sum of all NATO countries' shells is not enough to meet the needs of the Ukraine in the battlefield. Even if the Russian military was firing 20,000 shells per day, their ability to supply was still shocking to the West. Where are these shells coming from? The West believes that Russia has purchased some "low-quality shells" from North Korea, but North Korea could not produce so many shells. Therefore, Russia cannot be underestimated. Although its economy is not large and it is seen as poor in the eyes of the West, its military-industrial mobilization capabilities are obviously stronger and more effective than those of the West. The military-industrial foundation left over from World War II and the Cold War has at least been partially activated at critical moments to supply ammunition to the front-line troops. In addition, Russia has air superiority in Ukraine and long-range missile strike capabilities, which can more effectively destroy Ukrainian ammunition depots, causing many weapons provided by the West to Ukraine to be destroyed before they can be used.

The US and the West have found it much more difficult than expected to defeat Russia. They know that China has not provided military aid to Russia, and the question that haunts them is: if Russia alone is already so difficult to deal with, what if China really starts to provide military aid to Russia, using its massive industrial capabilities for the Russian military? Would the situation on the Ukrainian battlefield fundamentally change? Furthermore, Russia alone can already confront the entire West in Ukraine. If they really force China and Russia to join hands, what changes will there be in the world's military situation?

Recently, Russian President Putin stated that it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield. The current tactic of the West is problematic. They want to keep dragging on until Russia collapses on its own. But what if the Russian military launches a spring offensive and succeeds in completely pushing the Ukrainian troops out of the Donbas region? It would not be just Ukraine's failure anymore, but also a humiliation for the United States and the West. If the military aid of the US and the West catches up and helps the Ukrainian troops repel the Russian military, are they not afraid that Putin will use nuclear weapon when he gets impatient? If nuclear weapon is used, the battlefield pattern previously created by artillery shells could be completely reset and rewritten. Many Westerners are actually worried about this, and the US government is also concerned, but they seem incapable of balancing everything and forget that helping the Ukrainian troop win is just a comma, not a period.

So it's better to listen to China. While the situation is deadlocked, but there is still room for maneuver, negotiations should be carried out to end the war earlier for the benefit of everyone.

2) The military balance in the world will obviously change, with NATO, ostensibly getting more united but as a matter of fact, becoming less so, because no NATO country wants to be pulled into a war with Russia (and for that matter less so with China).

3) The failure of a provocative American foreign policy in Ukraine targeted to destroy Russia will be seen to be repeated in the same way in the South China Sea over Taiwan.

Washington's neo-con policies are even more blatant in the American attitudes towards the PRC and if 85% of the planet did not become adherents to the US line on Russian aggression, there will be even less in the case of that same American policy of confrontation with China. After all, only 6-7 countries recognize Taiwan as an independent country; the others regard Taiwan to be a province of China.

4) The political elite in the US, without an off-ramp to get out of a disaster they did not anticipate, and unwilling to suffer the embarrassment of losing a war waged on Russia, will have to double down and keep supplying weapons to the Kyiv regime. But this is extremely costly and none of the Europeans want to spend the kind of money that has already been spent (about US\$150 billion in just a year), especially since the economic sanctions have boomeranged to hurt their economies, rather than Russia, very badly. And in the US, the Biden White House talks big, but they are facing the problem of having an ever-growing national debt, now at US\$31 trillion with interest rates above 4 percent across all sectors of the treasury yield curve, and has to send its finance minister, Janet Yellen, around the world, basically to sell bonds. It cannot afford a long war, and if it were to divert resources away from social programs, the tent cities of the homeless in America will explode in size and social unrest in the country will upend its foreign policy.

I mean, let's consider the double talk on the supply of weapons to other countries from the two headlines below. This blog is getting too long for me to cite the contents but the titles tell enough of the story:

1. US warns China not to send weapons to Russia for Ukraine war

2. U.S. Approves Potential Taiwan Arms Sale Worth \$619 Million Amid China Tension

So it's okay for the US to sell weapons to Taiwan but not ok for China to sell weapons to Russia? Isn't that the height of hypocrisy? This is the arrogance of American hegemonism, which 85% of the world now do not like. That is why the defeat of western arms in Ukraine, as prefaced by the rout in Bakhmut, is an important and unavoidable outcome that should encourage anti-war sentiment throughout the countries which are being pulled into the fray.

The above factors are going to change the global economy which is something all investors have to watch. In a multipolar world, the way companies used to leverage off low costs and cheap resources in global value chains will become a thing of the past. The collective west and Russia/China as well as India may want to have their own independent value chains based on so-called security concerns. Corporate profits will likely fall and equity returns will be affected. That's one outcome of the multipolar world. Secondly, when China does not want to buy US treasuries, there are not that many countries in the world to replace them and buy into a 31 trillion American debt. This will mean rising US bond yields. The problem of worsening American government debt will be with the global financial system for another generation. And that will keep the US Dollar high.

In addition, in the multipolar world, there will be other reserve currencies, including the Euro the Yen and the RMB. The USD is indeed slated to begin a long-term decline in its role as a reserve currency but this should not be mixed up with a fall in the value of the dollar. Russia and China are now leading the BRICS countries to set up an alternative reserve currency based on gold, precious metals and even rare earths. This will take a long time, but having witnessed the debacle with the economic sanctions on Russia and the freezing of Russia's reserves, it is motivating all countries not in the collective west to begin a movement away from the USD.

But the US economy will not disappear. It will still be one of the top two or three economies in the world and its currency cannot go to zero. Its movements will not need to be boosted by a demand for it to serve as reserve currency and its dynamics will eventually be more governed by its domestic economy and interest rates as well as its share of international trade. It will still remain as 40% of the global portfolio of currencies that trading organizations need. Besides, 98% of all transactions in FX are speculative and this dubious

glory will remain US Dollar based. There will not be a crash of the dollar, at least not in the next ten to twenty years due to its losing its status as a reserve currency.

And Bakhmut will acquire the fame of Stalingrad, just as Stalingrad in 1943 was never thought to be a frontline city that would change the course of the Second War World. Bakhmut is an even more obscure place but in the new global order, it will be perceived in history as a spark for change.

There will, in this brave new world, a regular demand for safe haven currencies. Brinksmanship in diplomacy will trigger scares that will drive demand for the US Dollar. It will get more volatile and things will get uncomfortable. Get used to it.

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Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris