

**An Assessment of the *Initial Period of War:*
Russia-Ukraine 2022
Part Two**

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Executive Summary

- This study describes how Russian military theorists think about the initial period of war (IPW) concept and its relation to strategic operations, and posits that due to the nature of the *special military operation*, the IPW concept was likely in no way a part of the operational planning process. While there were likely political motivations for the use of the term “special military operation” instead of “war,” the term “war” was not used for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, because it was not envisioned to meet the criteria for “war” as understood by Russian military theorists;
- As of the drafting of this report in August 2022, it is obvious that the nature of the conflict and Moscow’s plan for concluding it have changed. This study finds that Moscow’s failure to successfully conclude the special military operation as initially envisioned has caused Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine to now be considered at least a “local war” as understood by Russian military theorists. The Kremlin’s insistence on the continued use of the term has almost certainly been promoted to conceal its failure as originally conceived — a single combined arms operation that achieves a deceive result. This said, however, the invasion came to be categorized in the weeks and months following the first day of the hostilities is unimportant in regard to IPW, and therefore the focus of this study. This study’s focus is on the relationship (or lack thereof) between the Russian concepts of war, IPW, and *special military operation*, which are explained in detail;
- The differences between the Russian definitions of the terms “war” and “special military operation” mean little to those in the West, who often consider the latter to be a euphemism for the former, but these terms have great significance for the Russians. Russia’s decision to approach its 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a *special military operation* instead of war would have many ramifications for the invasion’s planning and conduct. This decision was most likely taken at the highest political levels, and almost certainly altered the General Staff’s planning process. The results of which became painfully apparent for the Russians during the critical and formative early days of the invasion;
- Perhaps the most important consequence of this decision, would be the Russian’s forgoance of the application of the tenets of the IPW concept. From the perspective of Russian military theory, a *special military operation* is a military conflict below the level of war, therefore the IPW concept would not apply. Russia has invested a great deal of effort in understanding how to conduct offensive and defensive strategic operations during the IPW to destroy (or maintain) air defense and command and control capabilities by way coordinated of massed air and missile strikes and EW/cyber operations, but Russia’s nonemployment of the IPW concept meant that this effort would bear no fruit during Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Thus, Russia’s Armed Forces were effectively inhibited by its political leadership from unleashing the full conventional combat power that would have been the case in the application of the IPW concept;
- This means that Russia’s failure to rapidly achieve success during the initial invasion should not be put at the feet of the military planners for not correctly applying the tenets of the IPW to the Ukraine invasion. Instead, the fault lies with the top senior political-military military decision makers who opted to pursue the *special military operation* as the means to achieve Russia’s political-military objectives of “demilitarizing and denazifying.” This report posits that if Russia properly respected Ukrainian military capabilities and resolve — avoiding underestimating enemy forces and willingness to fight — perhaps Russia would have treated Ukraine as a peer-level adversary warranting the application of IPW, and found success in the early days of the invasion, instead of embarrassment. In short, Moscow likely would have had far greater success pursuing a Russian version of the IPW concept against Ukraine, than was had with the *special military operation*;
- While the *special military operation* — as conceived and implemented in the opening days of the invasion of Ukraine — clearly differs conceptually from the IPW as an approach to operations on a lower scale, this in no way implies how the Russian military would attack or prosecute operations against a peer adversary. Consequently, Russia’s General Staff will doubtless draw lessons in the future from the multiple flaws and problems revealed in the country’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, yet little of this is applicable to how the Russian military might fight NATO forces. As such, this study also outlines the likely component features of possible Russian conventional operations against NATO and its application of the IPW;

- This study also posits that President Putin, by way of his treatise on the nature of Ukraine published in July 2021, bears some responsibility for the invasion's problems. Once Putin had published his treatise, it was likely very difficult for Russian military planners to propose any plans that dealt with contingencies that were contrary to Putin's political views, such as encountering an unwelcoming civilian population and a well-motivated military with a stingy defense. In addition, the errors in Putin's treatise may well have led to the initial misreading of the operational environment which proffered that a single decisive, special military operation capable of rapidly achieving the goals to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine was even possible.

Relationship of the Initial Period of War to the Special Military Operation

In order to explain the relationship of the initial period of war (IPW) to the “special military operation” (*spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya*) it is first necessary to digress, and provide an understanding of how the IPW is understood in terms of Russian military thought.¹ At the top of Russia's hierarchy of military terms is “military affairs” (*voyennoye delo*). This is an all-encompassing term that covers all aspects of military theory and practice related to the construction, preparation and actions of the armed forces of the state in peacetime and war, as well as the preparation of the economy, population and the country as a whole for war.² A subset of military affairs is “military science” (*voyennaya nauka*), which is a system of knowledge about the laws of war, military-political nature of war, how to prepare the armed forces for war, and methods for the conduct of armed confrontation.³ A major branch of military science is “military art” (*voyennoye iskusstvo*). Military art is the theory and practice (strategy, operations, and tactics) of preparing and conducting combat operations in all domains.⁴ The highest form of military art is military strategy (*voyennaya strategiya*), which is the process of planning, organization, and conduct of defense, war, campaigns and strategic operations.⁵ It is important to note that the Russian concept of military strategy is a substantially more limited variety, as explained in the following;

In Euro-Atlantic terms, *strategy* has become very broadly defined; its meanings range from Grand Strategy as a state-level activity to create power, to long-term plans and goals. But in the Russian approach, *military strategy* is much more clearly defined as being below the level of state policy and having very specific functions. (Similarly, *doctrine* means different things in the US and in Russia. In the US, military doctrine is developed by the military to win wars. Russian military doctrine is of a higher theoretical level and is defined as ‘establishing the essence, aims and character of possible wars,’ and as ‘encompassing economic, technical, legal and other essential aspects of military politics relevant to the state for the preparation of war.’)⁶

The implication of this difference between Western and Russian systems of strategy is that while uniformed Western strategists are concerned with employing all means of state power (diplomatic, information, military, economic), uniformed Russian (military) strategists are primarily concerned with just the military aspects of state power. Other,

¹Russian military terminology regarding military affairs is constantly evolving, and so their meaning can have different connotations to Russian military theorists of different generations. The following definitions of these terms are summarizations at best, and only provided to understand how IPW is nested in Russian military thought. Although the definitions have citations to reputable Russian military libraries and encyclopedias, those looking for a more detailed account will find CNA's ‘Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts’ of immense value. This publication not only provides commonly accepted English language definitions of these terms, but also explains how they are related.

Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, Dmitry Gorenburg, Mary Chesnut, Jeffrey Edmonds, and Julian Waller, ‘Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts,’ Research Memorandum, CNA: Arlington, Va, August 2021, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/pdf/Russian-Military-Strategy-Core-Tenets-and-Operational-Concepts.pdf.

² Sergey Konstantinovich Leontiev, Dmitry Vladimirovich Loskutov, Alexey Dmitrievich Rogozin, Oleg Konstantinovich Rogozin, Dmitry Olegovich Rogozin, Valery Vitalievich Semin, Sergei Vasilievich Yagolnikov, *Voyna i mir v terminakh i opredeleniyakh: Voyenno-politicheskiy slovar* (War and Peace in Terms and Definitions: A Military-Political Dictionary), (Dmitry Olegovich Rogozin Ed.), Veche, 2017, Volume I, pp. 111.

³ *Ibid*, pp.111-112.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp.123-124.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.83.

⁶ Andrew Monaghan, ‘How Moscow Understands War and Military Strategy,’ Research Memorandum, CNA: Arlington, Va, November 2020, pp.7, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2020-U-028629-Final.pdf.

nonmilitary means of state power, are considered, but only in the context of providing and establishing the conditions for effective use of military force.⁷

According to the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Army-General Gerasimov, Russia now employs a military strategy of active defense (*strategiya aktivnoy oborony*).⁸ This term can be described as “as strategic concept integrating preemptive measures to prevent conflict, and wartime concepts of operations that seek to deny an opponent a decisive victory in the initial period of war, degrading and disorganizing their effort, while setting the conditions for a counteroffensive or attaining war termination. The strategy privileges a permanent standing force, arrayed as high readiness operational formations in each strategic direction, prepared to execute operations jointly.”⁹ The “active” component of the defense involves demonstrations or limited use of force, to discourage adversaries from unfavorable courses of action, such as invasions. An implication of this strategy is that the offense and defense become less distinct as the military’s focus from large strategic ground offensives to noncontact warfare, aerospace domain, and maneuver defense.

Active defense as a military strategy in wartime denotes operations premised on defensive maneuver, and a sustained counterattack throughout the depth of the theater of military action. It places strong emphasis on defensive and offensive strategic operations during the initial period of war. This envisions degrading an opponent’s forces via fires and strike systems, while parrying their initial offensive operations. It is not a theory of war that emphasizes positional defense at the outset. The means and ways of Russian military strategy are to inflict disorganization on the opponent via long-range strikes against critically important objects at operational depths and beyond...¹⁰

Russia’s military strategy is defensive in nature, oriented towards employing strategic operations to deter and adversary from attacking and/or ensuring that an adversary does not achieve decisive effects during the initial period of war that determine the war’s outcome, such as the coalition airstrikes and missile attacks that debilitated the Iraqi Army in the 1991 Gulf War.¹¹ A strategic operation (*strategicheskaya operatsiya*) is defined as a series of operations linked by a common purpose and organization, and is the highest form of operational art in the Russian military. Its objectives are strategic in nature, forming a bridge between operations and the goals of Russian military strategy.¹² There are now four generally accepted types of strategic operations: strategic operation in the theater of military operations (SOTMO), a strategic aerospace

⁷ Michael Kofman *et al.*, p. 27.

⁸ Valeriy Gerasimov, ‘*Mir na granyakh voyny* (World on the brink of war),’ *Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 13 March 2017. <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/35591>, Accessed, May 17, 2022.

⁹ Michael Kofman *et al.*, p.3; A detailed discussion of current Russian military thought regarding strategy is well beyond the scope of this report, but for a concise explanation (as possible) see: Andrew Monaghan, ‘How Moscow Understands War and Military Strategy,’ Research Memorandum, CNA: Arlington, Va, November 2020, pp.7, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2020-U-028629-Final.pdf.

¹⁰ Michael Kofman *et al.*, pp.13-14.

¹¹ Although Russia has a strategy of active defense, this does not preclude a first strike. In fact, this strategy promotes the idea of striking first, at some point after an adversary has made a decision to attack/invoke, but before the adversary has amassed sufficient resources to conduct such an attack/invasion.

¹² *Strategicheskaya operatsiya* (Strategic operation), Encyclopedia of the Russian Ministry of Defense (online), https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details_rvsn.htm?id=14374@morfDictionary Accessed, May 17, 2022.

operation (SAO), a strategic operation of nuclear forces (SONF), and a strategic operation for the destruction of critically important targets (SODCIT).

This means, from the context of Russian military art, that discussions of IPW are at the level of military strategy, and are understood to be implemented by strategic operations that can achieve a military-political goal, such as deterrence. As will be explained in the following section, despite the fact that the *special military operation* was intended to achieve a military-political goal, the consensus of Russian military theorists opinions would likely be that the *special military operation* was conceptually not envisioned to be strategic in nature, and therefore IPW was not a consideration in its planning. Although IPW was probably not a factor in the planning of the *special military operation*, there is still value in studying the early days of the invasion, as some of Russia's military activities during this time — such as massive air and missile strikes and EW/cyber operations— may provide clues about what Russian activities during IPW in a conflict with NATO might look like.

The “Special Military Operation” in the Russian Concept of Military Art

As previously discussed, actions involving IPW are primarily envisaged to be of a strategic nature. But, as will be described, Russia's classification of its 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a *special military operation* would have a major impact on how the invasion was conducted, being much more tactically focused, and hence unlikely to employ an IPW concept. Understanding exactly what the term *special military operation* means in the context of Russian military art will not only explain why the IPW concept was not employed, but may also reveal some of the causes of the debacle that occurred during the first few days of the invasion.¹³

Confusion about what exactly a Russian *special military operation* consists of is understandable.¹⁴ Russian defense scholars and officers have invested much time and effort in defining explicitly what exactly military terms mean for the Russian military and security communities.¹⁵ So it was somewhat surprising that the Russians began using this relatively obscure term to describe the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Given the circumstances, little thought was given in the West about what exactly the term meant, with most of the opinion in Western mass media and governments being that the term was simply a euphemism for military invasion. Perhaps this idea was best encapsulated by the humor website *Urban Dictionary*, which provides the following definition for the term. “An Invasion. Especially one conducted by an authoritarian regime”; and

¹³ Since February 2022, the term special military operation (*spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya*) has been used or referred to in professional military journals without clarifying its meaning. For example, in *Vestnik* (the official journal of the Academy of Military Sciences), the political scientist Igor Bocharnikov, head of the Moscow-based Research Center for National Security Problems, authored an analysis of the renewed Ukraine crisis. Although the term features in the article's keywords, the author did not use of detail the term in his article. I.V. Bocharnikov, ‘*Ukrainskiy krizis v usloviyakh sovremennykh geopoliticheskikh transformatsiy*,’ (*The Ukrainian crisis in the context of modern geopolitical transformations*), *Vestnik*, No. 1 (78), 2022, pp.4-12.

¹⁴ In the context of both colloquial and context of official and Russian military art, Russians appear to use the term *spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya* ‘special military operation’ and *spetsoperatsiya* ‘special operation’ interchangeably. For the purposes of this report the ‘special military operation’ is used, but the latter term is used when directly quoted from Russian sources.

¹⁵ Charles K. Bartles, Review of *Defining Russian Military Science*, *Russian Studies Series* (NATO Defense College), <https://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=705n>, July 20, 2021.

example “This isn’t an Invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine. It is a Special Military Operation” somewhat in jest.¹⁶

Kvachkov’s Definition of “Special Military Operation”

To be fair, most Russians were, and arguably still are, as confused about the term as their Western counterparts. As there was no formal standing definition, or commonly accepted meaning, for the term, Russians were also attempting to understand what exactly it meant. Colonel (retired) Vladimir Kvachkov, an officer with a dubious reputation, was one of the first to provide a working definition of the term.¹⁷ On March 28, 2022, Kvachkov published an open letter to the Russian General Staff and command of the special operation. Despite the letter’s addressees, the letter focuses on justifying Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine and seems directed not at a military audience but to influence the Russian civilian populace. Despite the letter’s intended audience and Kvachkov’s colorful background, some insight may be gleaned from his description of the term:

What is the difference between a special military operation, its goals and objectives, and other operations of the Armed Forces and other troops of the Russian Federation? The main difference is that the course and outcome of a special operation are directly related to military-political goals and objectives, in contrast to the combined-arms offensive and defensive operations of operational and operational-strategic formations (during the Great Patriotic War — armies and fronts), as well as other independent and joint operations of branches of the Armed Forces and combat arms. This statement is also true for the strategic actions of the Armed Forces. True, in some cases military-strategic and military-political goals may partially coincide. As an example of such exceptions, one can cite the operations to liberate Bulgaria by the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and the liberation of Romania by the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front in September 1944 and the change of power in these states. Thus, military-political goals and tasks in special operations are lowered to the level of tactical actions of formations, units and even battalions (battalion tactical groups).

The officially declared goal of the ongoing special military operation is the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine. The negotiations that took place during the month showed the fundamental impossibility of reaching any agreement with the existing Ukrainian leadership.¹⁸

¹⁶ Definition and example as provided by Urban Dictionary, 26 February 2022.

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=special+military+operation>, Accessed, May 15, 2022.

¹⁷ Vladimir Kvachkov is a retired GRU Colonel and GRU Spetsnaz brigade commander who is a Frunze (combined arms) academy graduate and veteran of several conflicts to include Afghanistan (1983), Azerbaijan (1990), Tajikistan (1992). Despite Kvachkov’s impressive service record, his notoriety comes not from his military service, but from his post retirement activities. These activities have included some dabbling in politics, he is an ardent Russian nationalist and strong proponent of Russian Orthodox Christianity. But his most notable actions have been his criminal activities. In 2005, Kvachkov was allegedly involved with an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Anatoly Chubais, a Russian politician who led Russia’s privatization program in the 1990s. Chubais resigned from the Putin administration in early 2022, allegedly to protest Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Kvachkov was tried and convicted for involvement in the plot, but the conviction was eventually overturned on appeal in 2010. Subsequently, Kvachkov has been arrested, tried, and convicted for several different crimes related to armed sedition and terrorism. On February 19, 2019, Kvachkov was released from prison by court decision, and has since avowed to resume his political activities and run for office.

¹⁸ Colonel (retired) Vladimir Kvachkov, *Otkrytoye pis'mo polkovnika V.V. Kvachkova ofitseram General'nogo shtaba i Komandovaniya spetsial'nykh operatsiy* (An Open Letter from V. V. Kvachkov to the General Staff Officers and Command of the Special Operation), March 28, 2022. http://www.ooc.su/news/otkrytoe_pismo_polkovnika_v_v_kvachkova_ofitseram_generalnogo_shtaba_i_komandovaniya_spetsialnykh_operatsij/2022-03-31-111, Accessed, May 17, 2022.

Kvachkov's account is interesting as it notes that a *special military operation* is different from other combined arms operations of the Armed Forces. Essentially, the way a *special military operation* differs is the way military force is used to achieve military-political goals. Perhaps this is most easily explained to a Western audience by way of the US/NATO concept of center of gravity (CoG) analysis through the use of ends/ways/means. In a standard military operation, the overall military-political goal (end or end state) is the state achieving a specific task, such as a territorial concession from a neighboring state. This military-political goal is accomplished by the successful completion of a goal (way) that defeats a center of gravity. An example of this is an aggressor state using its military (means) to execute a successive and/or simultaneous operations to defeat (way/military-strategic goal) the defending states military (CoG) in order to force the political leadership to make a territorial concession (end or end state/military-political goal). In US/NATO parlance ends/ways/means is strategy, with the "end" being the desired outcome of a given strategy.

Kvachkov proposes that the "ends" of a *special military operation* are achieved in a different manner. Instead of combined arms formations accomplishing a military-strategic goal to further a military-political goal, a more direct approach is employed, the strategic aim (end or end state) is accomplished solely through the combined arms formations accomplishment of a military-strategic goal. This is not a revolutionary idea, when considering how Russian military theorists categorize military conflicts, which will be explained in greater detail in the following section. But in short, achieving victory in what the Russians call "war" can require military, economic, and/or social mobilization, deep battle, physical encirclements, multiple operations, etc., and these have military-strategic goals such as the total destruction of the enemy forces, occupation of the enemy's homeland, eventually leading to the military-political goal of political capitulation. Achieving victory in lesser types of military conflicts is somewhat less formulaic, and must be achieved through the application of a varying mixture of military and non-military (indirect) methods to coerce the enemy's political-military leadership to accept unfavorable terms.¹⁹

In relation to the *special military operation*, one of the most important differences between the scales of these conflicts is that the former requires multiple operations for strategic success, while strategic success for the latter can (in certain circumstances) be achieved by a single decisive operation. Since the term "operation" is often used, its precise meaning in a Russian military context merits some explanation:

6.6. OPERATION — a set of coordinated and interrelated missions in terms of goals, tasks, place and time of simultaneous and successive battles, strikes and maneuver of troops (naval forces), carried out according to a single plan to achieve strategic, operational or operational-tactical goals in a theater (theaters) of military operations, strategic (operational) direction or in a certain area (zone) in a specified period of time...

Based on these criteria, they can be categorized as global strategic operations, strategic operations in a theater of operations, strategic operations in one or more strategic directions, operations and formations of the armed forces (fleets, flotillas, army corps, air and air defense armies) in one or more operational directions.

¹⁹ Charles K. Bartles, Review of *Preparation and Conduct of Military Actions in Local Wars and Armed Conflicts*, *Russian Studies Series* (NATO Defense College), <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=564>, November 2018.

The types of operations include combined arms (naval), independent and joint operations of types of the Air Force. Combined-arms operations are the activities of fronts, combined-arms armies, and army corps.

Each operation is characterized by indicators of spatial scope, duration and intensity (tempo) of hostilities. The nature of operations depends on the general nature of the war, the goals and objectives set, the troops, forces and means used, the morale and psychological state and training of personnel, the level of command and control, the characteristics of the theater of operations (the area of operations), and other conditions of the situation...²⁰

The Russian definition of “operation” is essentially a set of coordinated and interrelated missions conducted to achieve strategic, operational or operational-tactical tasks in a theater of military operations (*teatr voyennykh deystviy*), strategic (operational) direction or in a certain area (zone) in a specified period. Operations can be categorized as global strategic operations, strategic operations in a theater of operations, strategic operations in one or more strategic directions, operations and formations of the armed forces (fleets, flotillas, army corps, air and air defense armies) in one or more operational directions. It should be noted that in relation to the “special military operation,” Kvachkov is referring specifically to operations conducted by combined arms formations, not strategic operations. And that in certain circumstances, a single operation can not only be decisive in terms of a political-military goal, but also of a relatively short duration:

An ‘operation’ is the highest form of the application of the Ground Forces combat power in local wars and armed conflicts. The operation is a combination of coordinated and interrelated missions to fulfill a particular objective in furtherance of strategic, operational or operational-tactical tasks in a certain area within a specified period of time... An important feature of operations in local wars and armed conflicts is the fact that unlike large-scale wars, one successful operation may determine the outcome of the entire conflict... the duration of the entire operation can be from 30 to 60 days, and the phase of active military operations of 10-15 days.²¹

In sum, Kvachkov’s understanding is that the *special military operation* differs from other combined arms operations due to the more direct way that the political-military goal is achieved. This said, Kvachkov does have a nuanced view of the term, stating that “military-strategic and military-political goals may partially coincide,” and then citing specific examples from the Second World War.²² In regard to how Kvachkov understands the *special military operation* applied to Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine— he believes that it was a combined arms operation intended to rapidly achieve the military-political goal of “denazification and demilitarization.” Although there has been much coverage of the *special military operation* in the Russian mass media, there was no other discussion of its theoretical aspects until Summer of 2022, when a prominent Russian military theorist Colonel (retired) Viktor Litvinenko published an article about his understanding of the term.

Russian Military Terminology

²⁰ Leontiev, *et al*, pp. 171-172.

²¹ Sergey Batyushkin, *Podgotovka i vedenie boevykh deystviy v lokalnykh voinakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh* (Preparation and Conduct of Military Actions in Local Wars and Armed Conflicts), KnoRus, 2017, p. 20.

²² Kvachkov, *Op.Cit.*

Before discussion of how Litvinenko defines and understands the nature of the *special military operation*, it is first important to understand how Russian military theorists use and think about military terminology. In general, “armed confrontation” is an all-encompassing term that describes any use of armed force to achieve political and/or military goals at any scale.²³ A subset of armed confrontation is “military conflict,” which describes the use of armed force to resolve international and internal conflicts. International conflicts are typically related to state-on-state conflicts including: resolving border disputes, the seizure or defense of an area of economic or strategic importance, obtaining economic and political advantages, protecting national interests; provocations to unleash larger-scale hostilities; destroying a military capability of a potential enemy or the defense against such an activity, military actions taken to redirect the domestic populations’ attention of from an unpopular or unsuccessful domestic policy. Internal conflicts usually involve the use of armed force between a state and irregular armed formations concerning social, ethnic and/or religious issues. Typical internal conflicts include: the creation of an independent state; suppression of the national liberation movement or separatism; and grievances regarding social and economic rights. Military conflict includes warfare at all scales and all physical environments (ground, air, water, under water, space). In addition to military means, military conflict also involves the application of political, diplomatic, economic, informational and other measures of non-military character. Since military conflicts are at their root always political conflicts, it follows that military conflicts do not arise spontaneously, but are the manifestation of tensions that arise to various (economic, social, political, spiritual, etc.) social issues.²⁴

It is especially important to understand how Russian military theorists use and think about the terms “war” and “armed conflict,” in order to better understand these in the Russian context. Thus, “war,” “armed conflict,” and various types of warfare emerge in this spectrum of discussion reflecting a Russian military and strategic culture. Awareness of these distinctions is not merely theoretical, it guides and influences state defense planning and is reflected in Russian Federation national security documents. In western military academies the work of Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831) is considered strongly influential in terms of developing ideas and conceptions around the theme of defining war. In the Soviet period, Clausewitz was read and respected in many areas of Soviet military science, but still regarded with skepticism and considered controversial, as were other works that did not fit official Marxist-Leninist ideology.²⁵ The modern transformation of the Russian Armed Forces, freed domestic military science from its Soviet ideological past, which also surfaces in efforts to define war. To illustrate the point, war is defined differently in the *Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya* (Soviet Military Encyclopedia) in 1976 compared to the *Voyennaya Entsiklopediya* (Military Encyclopedia) in 1994.

²³ Nikolay Nikolaevich Tyutyunnikov, *Voyennaya mysl' v terminakh i opredeleniyakh: v trekh tomakh* (Military Thought in Terms and Definitions: In Three Volumes), Pero, 2018, Volume I, pp. 25-28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

²⁵ Although it is well documented that Georg Hegel (1770-1831) was a strong influence on Karl Marx (1818-1883), his influence on Clausewitz is still a matter of academic debate. What can be said, is that aspects of Hegel’s dialectic are apparent in both Clausewitz and Soviet military theorists. However, these traditions have significant differences due to developments of the philosophy (dialectical materialism) proffered by Marx and Engels, which heavily influenced Soviet military theorists. Youri Cormier, ‘Hegel and Clausewitz: Convergence on Method, Divergence on Ethics,’ *The International History Review*, 36 (3), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2013.859166>, January 2014.

In the 1976 version war is defined as “a sociopolitical phenomenon, a continuation of politics with violent means [...] In order to achieve the political objectives in the war the armed forces are used as the main and decisive asset, along with economic, diplomatic, ideological, and other means of struggle.”²⁶ In contrast the 1994 encyclopedia defines war as “a sociopolitical phenomenon constituting one of the forms of settling sociopolitical, economic, ideological, and also ethnic, religious, territorial, etc., contradictions between states, peoples, nations, classes, and social groups, by means of military violence.... War appeared as the result of social differentiation in society and emergence of states as a violent method of settling the contradictions that occur between those.”²⁷ One definition has political intent as its goal portraying war only as its means, while the other definition is cast as an “armed struggle” which has the property of reciprocal effect on politics.

Moreover, the Soviet Military Encyclopedia defines the state as: “The state is the organization of the ruling class, the chief weapon of its political power. In exploitative society it is intended for ensuring the rule of the owners of the main means of production over the masses of the laboring population.” While in the 1994 Russian Military Encyclopedia the state is defined as: “the nucleus of the political organization of society, which, along with the functions of administration and direction of the life of society, devises and implements policies in the area of military security provision for the country or military policies. Its vector is determined by the military-political concept of the state, which is concentrated in its military doctrine and is based on military ideology.” The state has the primary role and one of its functions is to work out and translate into reality its military policies, which is embodied in the military doctrine.²⁸

The *Voyennyi Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* (Military Encyclopedic Dictionary) provides a broader definition: “War is an extreme form of conflict resolution, characterized by a sharp change in relations between states, nations, and other political subjects and the transition to the use of armed and other types of violence to achieve social — political, economic, ideological, territorial, national, ethnic, religious and other goals.”²⁹ War, in addition to military violence, absorbed “other types of violence.” Even such a veiled phrase about the possibility of the existence of other types of violence besides military violence, marks a significant step in Russian domestic military science. An important point was the fact that in the new definition the obligatory function of goal-setting was linked to the concept of war. However, contemporary Russian military science does not question that “the main content of war is armed struggle.” This thesis is consonant with the general spirit of the teachings of Clausewitz, but is not equivalent to it. The Prussian military thinker admitted that under certain conditions a war could be limited only to a “demonstration of force,” “If we allow ... the influence of a political goal on the war, and it is necessary to allow it, then it is impossible to establish the boundaries of this influence, and we will have to reach recognition of such wars, which consist only in threatening the enemy and are waged in support of negotiations.”³⁰

²⁶ *Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya*, Voenizdat Publishers, Moscow, 1976, Vol. 2, p. 305.

²⁷ *Voyennaya Entsiklopediya*, Voenizdat Publishers, Moscow, 1994, Vol. 2, p. 468.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ N.V. Ogarkov (Ed), *Voyennyi entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983.

³⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *O Voyne (On War)*, A. Rachinskogo (Russian translation), Moscow: Rimis, 2009.

However, the distinction on “war” and “armed conflict” is enshrined in Russia’s Military Doctrine, and present in other state security documents. This is aptly demonstrated in a February 2022 article in the General Staff journal *Voyennaya Mysl’* (Military Thought): Major-General (reserve) Aleksandr Malyshev, Colonel (reserve) Yury Pivovarov, Colonel Vladimir Khakhalev, ‘*Kategorii ‘voyna’ i ‘vooruzhennyi konflikt:’ skhodstvo i razlicheye,*’ (The Categories of War and Armed Conflict: Similarities and Differences).³¹ The authors refer to the Constitution of the Russian Federation of December 12, 1993; Military Doctrine 2014; Federal Law No. 390-FZ “On Security,” December 28, 2010; Federal constitutional law “On martial law” January 30, 2002; Federal Law May 31, 1996 No. 61-FZ “On Defense” among other documents. They assert that “domestic military-political views determine the fact that the general concept in resolving interstate conflicts with the use of military force is a military conflict.” (figure 1)³²

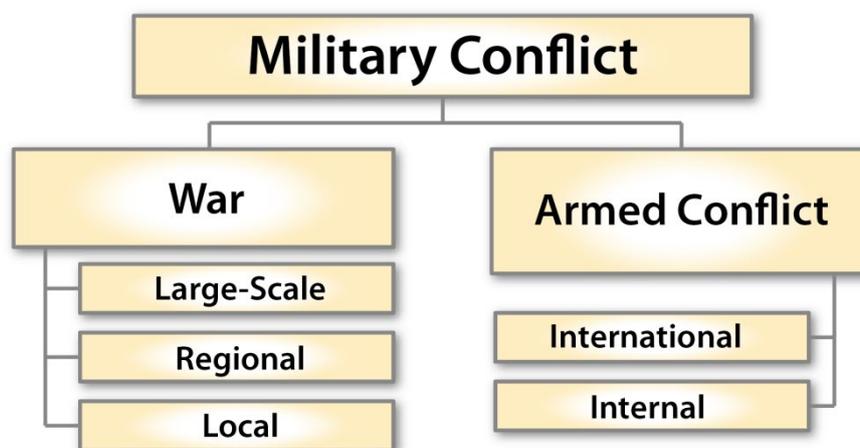


Figure 1: Domestic Classification of Military Conflicts³³

In terms of categorization, military conflicts can be categorized in different ways, but are usually categorized in terms of scale. The most intense form of military conflict is large-scale war. This term is understood to employ all or most of a state’s means, with the intent to subordinate the enemy to the states’ political will. This level of military conflict involves a large number of states from different regions of the world, a relatively long period of time, and national mobilization. This type of military conflict can be thought of as “total war”, such as occurred during the World War I, World War II, and was expected during the Cold War. A large-scale war can be the result of an escalation of regional war, local war, or armed conflict.³⁴ A regional war is a military conflict of several nations or coalition of nations pursuing military-political goals with regular and/or irregular forces in a specific region. A regional war can be the result of

³¹ Malyshev is senior researcher at the History of Military Politics and Military Doctrines of Foreign Countries Research Section of the Foreign Military History Research Directorate at the Military History Research Institute of the General Staff Military Academy (Moscow). Pivovarov and Khakhalev are professor and associate professor respectively in the same department of the academy.

³² A.I. Malyshev, Yu.F. Pivovarov, V.Yu. Khakhalev, ‘*Kategorii ‘voyna’ i ‘vooruzhennyi konflikt:’ skhodstvo i razlicheye* (The categories of ‘war’ and ‘armed conflict:’ Similarities and differences),’ *Voyennaya Mysl’*, No.2, 2022, pp.21-30.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Leontiev, *et al.*, pp. 86-87.

an escalation of a local war or armed conflict.³⁵ A local war is a war in which limited military-political goals are pursued, with military operations typically being conducted within the borders of the opposing states. This level of military conflict primarily affects only the interests (territorial, economic, political, etc.) of the states involved. Such wars can be of varying duration, and may come about by the escalation of an armed conflict.³⁶ The least intense type of military conflict is armed conflict, which is a military conflict of limited scale between states (international) or between opposing parties in the territory of one state (internal).³⁷ In practice, Russian military theorists often refer to “local wars” and “armed conflicts” collectively as “local wars and armed conflicts.”

Litvinenko’s Definition of “Special Military Operation”

In the July 2022 edition of *Armeyskiy Sbornik* (Army Digest), the monthly journal of the Russian Armed Forces that covers a wide range military issues primarily at the tactical and operational levels, provided an exact definition for the term *special military operation* and its place in the Russian concept of military art. The author, Colonel (retired) Viktor Litvinenko, has a lengthy publication record and a well-respected member of the military-scientific community.³⁸ Given Litvinenko’s background, current position, and well-known severe penalties for criticizing Russia’s military or spreading ‘fake news’ in Russia, it can safely be assumed that Litvinenko’s definition and understanding of the *special military operation* is similar, if not identical, to other Russian military theorists and the Russian governments view on the matter. Litvinenko explains the term in a slightly different way than Kvachkov, but for the most part, they seem to have the same understanding. Litvinenko explains this by noting that terms such as “armed confrontation” (*vooruzhennaya bor'ba*), “military conflict” (*voyennyy konflikt*), “armed conflict” (*vooruzhenny konflikt*), and “war” (*voyna*) are often used as synonyms, but in the context of Russian military art, these terms are related, but have very different meanings.

Given the definitions previously discussed, Litvinenko posits that the *special military operation* in Ukraine has distinct features, which make it a *new category of military conflict*. Litvinenko states that the Russian Ministry of Defense definition of the term is as follows “a special operation of troops (forces) that involves the special actions of troops (forces) coordinated in objectives, tasks, place and time, carried out according to a single plan to achieve specified goals.”³⁹ He further elaborates that this definition is closer to the Russian Ministry of Defense’s concept of “military operation,” than its concept of “war.” The main difference between the two is that the goal of the special operations of the Russian Armed Forces is to defeat only the enemy’s military.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 87-88.

³⁶ Tyutyunnikov, p. 88.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

³⁸ Viktor Ivanovich Litvinenko is a retired artillery colonel, candidate of military sciences, and associate professor (docent) of the Missile and Artillery faculty in the Military Educational and Scientific Center of the Ground Forces of the Combined Arms Academy of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. He is a veteran of Afghanistan, and commanded the 1074th artillery regiment of the 201st motorized rifle division. Litvinenko has an impressive publication record consisting of 8 monographs, over 300 articles, and 12 textbooks and manuals. Litvinenko’s textbooks and manuals are staples for many cadets studying at various Russian military academies.

³⁹ Viktor Litvinenko, ‘*Sushchnost’ kategoriy «voyna» i «spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya»* (The essence of the categories ‘war’ and ‘special military operation’),’ *Armeyskiy Sbornik*, <https://army.ric.mil.ru/upload/site175/6vojPF4GiH.pdf>, July 2022, Accessed, May 17, 2022.

Therefore, the actions of the operation (strikes, battles, etc.) were carried out specifically to achieve this end within a specified period of time. This form of military action, is more focused, and limited in nature, than the concept of war. Litvinenko believes that the criteria for a *special military operation* might also apply to past military operations have been carried out by the United States, NATO, Russia, and others countries over the years. Such operations include Russia's 2015 military operation in Syria and US operations in Yemen.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the article had nothing to do with the definition of the term "special military operation." But Litvinenko's later admission that the character of the conflict did change, alluding to the idea that Russian military theorists may believe that despite the initial declaration of *special military operation*, the military conflict has since evolved into something different, perhaps a local war, or even, as some Russian pundits have argued, a regional war.⁴⁰ Litvinenko points out a number of reasons for this change relating to the various types of military aid being provided to Ukraine. His comments further the Russian narrative that Russia is not just fighting Ukraine, but is fighting the US/NATO by proxy: "The Ukrainian soldier is used as cannon fodder, while western diplomats convince the world that the West upholds peace and democracy, while at the same time supplying combat equipment and weapons to the Ukrainians, advancing their own interests by selling weapons."⁴¹ Litvinenko blames the West for the escalation of the conflict, but this is specious reasoning. If the *special military operation* achieved its objectives in the (presumed) initial timeframe, much of the military aid that he complains about likely would never have been delivered. Furthermore, Ukraine would not have had enough time to conduct a national mobilization compounding Russia's difficulty of achieving conquest. Due to the current political climate in Russia, any criticism of the *special military operation* is harshly punished. But after hostilities cease and prohibitions on its discussion end, it is highly likely that Russian military theorists and pundits will likely much discuss the reasons of this initial failure.

Kvachkov and Litvinenko: Similarities and Differences

From a layman's perspective, the Russian's use of the term *special military operation* is simply a euphemism for "war." Indeed, this was unquestioningly repeated in western media coverage of the early stage of the war, with reporters and war correspondents referring to Moscow's instance on using the phrase *special military operation* as simply a smokescreen for having launched a war against Ukraine. But this is not the understanding of Russian military theorists. Kvachkov and Litvinenko, as many other Russian military theorists, understand "war" to be the highest level of military conflict as seen in the past world wars. Any type of military conflict that does not meet the criteria of "war" is a lesser form of military conflict. Although both Kvachkov and Litvinenko perceive themselves to be Russian patriots and further support dubious Russian claims about the "true" causes of the conflict ranging from a Nazi-led government to US-sponsored biological weapons facilities in Ukraine. The terms and definitions that they use were not proffered to whitewash Russian activities regarding

⁴⁰ Aleksandr Stepanov, 'Posledneye interv'yu Ol'gi Kachury: Fashistov budem bit', nikogo ne sprashivaya (Olga Kachura's last interview: We will beat the Nazis without asking anyone),' *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, official Russian Government daily newspaper, <https://rg.ru/2022/08/03/poslednee-interviu-olgi-kachury-fashistov-budem-bit-nikogo-ne-sprashivaia.html>, August 3, 2022.

⁴¹ Litvinenko, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 17

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, they are simply using terms and definitions that have long been staples of Russian military theory.

Furthering this confusion about the muddling of terms, is that fact that the definitions of US/NATO terms are rarely fully congruent with the definitions of similar Russian terms. This issue comes into focus when considering the US/NATO concept of large-scale combat operations' (LSCO) which the US Army defines as follows: "Large-scale combat operations are extensive joint combat operations in terms of scope and size of forces committed, conducted as a campaign aimed at achieving operational and strategic objectives."⁴² Considering that the Russian term "local wars and armed conflicts" includes the Korean War (1950-1953); the five Arab-Israeli Wars (1948-1982); the Vietnam War (1964-1973); the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1987); Persian Gulf Wars (1990-1991, 2003 onwards); Afghanistan Wars (1979-1989, 2001-2021) and Chechen Wars (1994-1996, 1999-2005), LSCO can occur in what Russian perceive to be 'war' as well as lesser military conflicts. In short, from the perspective of Russian military theory, there is no reason why a *special military operation* would not include activities that the US/West would deem as large-scale combat operations.

The use of the word "operation" is key for both Kvachkov and Litvinenko. In general, they believe that "war" and some other military conflicts require multiple combined arms operations for strategic success, and that the *special military operation* was special because it was intended to be a single combined arms operation to achieve strategic success. Given this understanding of the nature of a military operation, Putin's declaration about its purpose, and the general debacle (for the Russians) that was the early days of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it appears the Russians genuinely envisioned a single, large-scale operation to achieve the political-military goals of "demilitarization and denazification" in a relatively short period of time.

In hindsight, this concept of the operation was obviously flawed, but given the Russian penchant to study historical trends, Moscow's belief that it could employ a single decisive operation to achieve its military-political goals is not without some merit. Aside from Russia's great success with the Crimea invasion and annexation in 2014, Moscow may have believed that the political leadership in Kyiv was particularly weak, creating favorable conditions for a single decisive combined-arms operation. Considering President Zelenskiy's background as an actor and comedian, mediocre performance as president before the invasion, and the historical pattern of Ukrainian political leadership fleeing the country in times of duress, the Russian failure to foresee Zelenskiy remaining in Kyiv and becoming an internationally renowned and respected wartime leader can be understood. Although there is no way to know, it is possible that if Zelenskiy and other senior political leaders did flee the country resulting in the government losing continuity, organized Ukrainian resistance may have rapidly collapsed resulting in an outcome more closely related to the one that Russian planners initially envisioned.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Kvachkov and Litvinenko is their understanding if there is anything particularly new about a *special military operation*. Kvachkov's view on the matter is quite clear. He does not see anything new with this term, for him the *special military operation* was simply just a less common way of

⁴² Army Doctrine Publication No. 3-0, Department of the Army, file:///C:/Users/chuck/Desktop/VVV/ARN18010-ADP_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf, July 31, 2019, pp. 1-5.

employing military force to achieve a desired end state. Litvinenko posits that the *special military operation* is in fact a new category on the spectrum of military conflict, citing Russia's 2015 military operation in Syria and US operations in Yemen as other examples. Although Litvinenko has the strongest *bona fides* and far more reputable, in this instance it appears Kvachkov has a stronger argument. Given the Russian Ministry of Defense's definition of the term, as "a special operation of troops (forces) that involves the special actions of troops (forces) coordinated in objectives, tasks, place and time, carried out according to a single plan to achieve specified goals."⁴³ In terms of Russian military art, there does not appear to be much "new" about the *special military operation*, and it certainly does not appear to be a new type of military conflict, but perhaps more likely a subcategory of armed conflict.

Components of the Russian IPW Against NATO

Moscow's military modernization envisages greater force integration and adoption of C4ISR capability, with an array of related capabilities including PGW, cyber and EW, the question arises as to what form a Russian ground forces grouping might look like were operations to commence in Europe. Russia's General Staff has factored into the annual operational-strategic military exercises the concept of fighting large-scale inter-state war. But this differs from the Soviet approach involving multiple echeloned armies and fronts. In 2017, Major-General Sergey Batyushkin (retired) published *Podgotovka i vedeniye boyevykh deystviy v lokal'nykh voynakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh* *Podgotovka i vedenie boevykh deistvii v lokalnikh voynakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh*, (Preparation and Conduct of Military Actions in Local Wars and Armed Conflicts).⁴⁴

This lengthy work details Russian approaches to military planning and is especially important for explaining the distinction between large-scale warfare and "local wars and armed conflicts" (*lokal'nykh voynakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh*).⁴⁵ Batyushkin reminds his readers that the Soviet Armed Forces were trained and prepared to fight a conventional war in Europe using means and methods including mass mobilization that will never happen. He distinguishes, in terms of definition, "local wars and armed conflicts" from large-scale inter-state warfare, and in this regard Batyushkin's work is also important in showing how Russia's Armed Forces approach operations other than large-scale conflict.

Bridging this gap into how the General Staff thinks about modern or future ground forces combat operations in the European theater in the course of a large-scale conflict is problematic. Not least because it is not openly written about nor discussed publicly.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Major-General (retired) Sergey Batyushkin graduated from the Frunze Military Academy (now called the Combined Arms Academy of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation) with a prestigious 'gold medal' for academic excellence and was later an instructor at the institution. He is also a Doctor of Military Sciences, and a member of the Russian Academy of Military Science. Batyushkin's impressive credentials make him a suitable authority on these issues.

⁴⁵ Sergey Batyushkin, *Podgotovka i vedeniye boyevykh deystviy v lokal'nykh voynakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh* *Podgotovka i vedenie boevykh deistvii v lokalnikh voynakh i vooruzhennykh konfliktakh*, (Preparation and Conduct of Military Actions in Local Wars and Armed Conflicts), Moscow: KnoRus, 2017, pp. 438.

⁴⁶ Oleg Salyukov, Oleg Falichev, 'Vozvrashcheniye diviziy (The return of the division),' *Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/29096>, February 10, 2016, Accessed, May 17, 2022; 'Chislo batal'onnykh grupp, sostoyashchikh iz kontraktnikov, v rossiyskoy armii cherez dva goda dostignet 125 – nachal'nik Genshtaba (The number of battalion groups consisting of contract soldiers in the Russian army will reach 125 in two years - chief of the General Staff of the RF Armed Forces),'

In an address to the Academy of Military Sciences in January 2016, the then Commander of Southern Military District (MD)/Joint Strategic Command (*Obyedinennyye Strategicheskoye Komandovanie* — OSK) Colonel-General A.V. Galkin discussed the challenges of C2 of integrated force groupings in a theater of military operations. He referred to the US DoD concept of “joint force,” forming forces along with allies and civilian organizations to conduct operations on the ground, air, sea and in the information space. Noting the term “global integrated operation,” he also told his audience that a practical example of this approach began in August 2014 when the US and coalition partners deployed forces to the Middle East to combat the Islamic State (ISIL/ISIS). Galkin explained, “The basis for C2 systems is the global information network of the US Department of Defense, which supports all types of communications. Characteristically, due to this advanced communication system, the command and control points were deployed at a significant distance from each other on the territories of various states (Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar).” He said that such developments compelled revisions to approaches to conducting operations on the part of Russia’s General Staff. In passing, referring to NATO operations in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya he said that “now the application of military force is preceded by a long period of political, economic, and informational pressure with a gradual escalation to military conflict.”⁴⁷

During the same conference similar C2 themes were addressed by Major-General I.A. Fedotov, senior researcher of the Center for Military-Strategic Studies of the General Staff Academy (*Tsentr Voyenno-Strategicheskikh Issledovaniy Generalnogo Shtaba Vooruzhennykh Sil* — TsVSI VAGSh). He prefaced his lecture by referring to “defense sufficiency” and its impact on forming force groupings: “In the new military-political and military-strategic conditions the demands of the principle of defense sufficiency (*oboronnaya dostatochnost*) apply not to the Armed Forces in general, but only to the combat strength of the functional components, including force groupings (*gruppировка voysk*) that are deployed along strategic axes to repel an attack and eventually destroy the enemy with the required level of effectiveness.” Despite the enormous progress made in restructuring C2 and introducing automated C2 since the reform of the Armed Forces initiated in late 2008, General Fedotov questioned the limited nature of actual integration and castigated the persistence of stove piping:

In our view, one of the main reasons for the unsustainability of the current command and control system is the retention of stereotypes in the structural elements of command, which at one time were designed to conduct strictly defined tasks and consisted of four functional command stovepipes: joint force *obyedineniya* [i.e. Army Groups, Fronts, Strategic High Command], *soyedineniya* [i.e. army, division, or brigade] and combat units; *soyedineniya*-level units of the branches of arms [i.e. motor rifle, tank, artillery, air defense] and specialty branches [i.e. reconnaissance, signals, EW, engineers, NBC, logistics/supply] of the Ground Forces; branches of operational and combat support; and comprehensive support branches.

Interfax-AVN, <http://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=425709>, September 14, 2016, Accessed, May 17, 2022; Aleksei Ramm, ‘*Proverka Ukrainoy* (Verification by Ukraine),’ *Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/25027>, April 29, 2015, Accessed, May 17, 2022; Igor Popov, ‘*Divizii protiv brigad, brigady protiv diviziy* (Divisions against brigades, brigades against divisions),’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, <http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/34809412>, July 12, 2013, Accessed, May 17, 2022;

⁴⁷ General-Colonel A.V. Galkin [Commander of the Southern Military District 2010-2016], ‘Forms of the Application of Military Force and the Organization of Command and Control of Integrated Armed Force Groupings in the Theater of Military Activity,’ *Vestnik*, Academy of Military Sciences 2, (55) 2016, pp. 51-54.

In accordance with the approaches of that time to the forms of employing the Armed Forces, the system of front command and control was necessarily built up with command and control stovepipes (Air Force, Air Defense Forces, Navy in coastal or greater maritime areas) that carried out, in general, supporting roles in the interests of the Ground Force groupings.

The command and control system was oriented toward detailed planning and control of a Ground Force grouping. Planning for the employment of, and command and control of force groupings of other branches (Air Force and Navy) was carried out by relevant commanders from their own command and control locations.

Modern approaches to the forms of employing the Armed Forces are critical for the employment of a force grouping. The significant increase in the number of tasks that are required of the command and control of joint actions of a force grouping in the theater of military activity along a strategic axis demands a correction of the structural levels of command and control.⁴⁸

Despite Fedotov highlighting ongoing issues and challenges related to more fully integrating C2 to avoid the type of stove piping still present within the overall C2 structures, he inadvertently highlights the approximate layout of a force grouping (*gruppyrovka voysk*) that could be formed in any strategic direction. Therefore, the large-scale inter-state conflict involving Russia's Ground Forces acting in concert with support from other branches and arms of service in the European theater of operations against the US/NATO would involve: "joint force *obyedineniya* (i.e. Army Groups, Fronts, Strategic High Command), *soyedineniya* (i.e. army, division, or brigade) and combat units; *soyedineniya*-level units of the branches of arms (i.e. motor rifle, tank, artillery, air defense) and specialty branches."⁴⁹ Combined with Galkin's observation that the *initial period of war* includes a build-up and preparation phase, a rough picture emerges as to how the Russian General Staff would plan and form a *gruppyrovka voysk*, to include ground forces, against the US/NATO in the European theater.

This seems to provide as close as the authors could find to support anecdotal evidence supplied by the theoretical model in use to frame Ground Forces' large-scale operations against NATO. The primarily brigade-based structure of the Armed Forces raises the question as to how the General Staff perceives the underlying theory of operations against US or NATO ground forces—which presumably became a more pressing issue in recent years following the Ukraine crisis in 2014. The question was resolved by the General Staff at the theoretical level by revising the World War II concept of the front operation (*frontovaya operatsiya*). Here the term *front* is used to denote the key battle units or grouping, the *obyedineniya*, as noted above. It involves Ground Forces, but includes air and air defense operations, and modern features such as C4ISR, EW, cyber and at the theoretical level also draws on an advanced theory of enemy C2 disorganization.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Major-General I.A. Fedotov [senior researcher of the Center for Military-Strategic Studies of the General Staff Academy (TsVSI VAGSh)], 'Trends in the Development of the Operational-Strategic Command of the Military District at the Present Stage of Developing the Structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,' *Vestnik*, 4 (57), 2016, pp. 65-69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ On Russian C2 disorganization theory, see: D.V. Kholuyenko, V.A. Anokhin, and N.M. Gromyko, 'Uchyot effektivnosti sistem razvedki i upravleniya pri raschyotakh boyevykh potentsialov voinskikh formirovaniy (Accounting for the effectiveness of reconnaissance and control systems when calculating the combat potentials of military formations),' *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 63-69; I.I. Korolyov, V.N. Pavlov, and A.V. Ganin, 'Radioelektronno-informatsionnaya blokada - perspektivniy sposob primeneniya raznorodnykh sil i sredstv REB (Electronic-information blockade - a promising way to use heterogeneous forces and means of electronic warfare),' *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No. 3, 2013; *Voyenniy*

Russia's military strategic-operational and tactical decision-making system is in no way comparable to the US or NATO structures. They have a form of "joint operations," but it is also distinctive.⁵¹ These distinctions and differences are key. But it leads to a training advantage that Russia's Armed forces will retain in the long term over the US military; namely, Russia's General Staff calibrate and plan operational-strategic exercises and shape combat training based upon *threat*, or likely threats, and not rooted in capability (despite these exercises being heavily scripted). Whereas the US military does train to fight against specific threats at state level, this inhibition is not present in the Russian military training system. Moreover, the Russian General Staff system trains, educates and prepares officers as specialist and not generalists; these are in effect specialists in combating the US/NATO forces at the level of high-intensity inter-state war. Additionally, given Russia's strategic advantages of operating close to its borders, in a conflict with the US/NATO in the European theater of operations, the General Staff do not take seriously the issue of "follow-on" forces. This is not only due to the evolving conventional military capability, which is likely to further increase as more PGW systems enter service, as well as the development and introduction of new hypersonic missiles and cruise missile systems, but the idea that Moscow would sit back and allow a massive build-up of US/NATO forces as follow-on forces is not only absurd in Russian military theoretical terms it is also ignoring the fact that conflict escalation is highly likely to result in these forces being targeted by an array of fires.⁵²

Another "work in progress," is the fuller integration of C4ISR and automated C2 to produce a more joined-up approach to planning and coordinating operations. Here a significant role is assigned to the *Natsionalnogo Tsentra Upravleniya Oboronoy* – NTsUO (National Defense Management Center), which as more technologies are introduced and flaws in the "stove piping" are resolved, will play an enhance role in overseeing operations in real time. The interface between the national political leadership, General Staff, defense ministry and OSKs down to temporary mobile HQs during operation would be facilitated by the NTsUO. Next in the chain is the OSK leadership, which means that during wartime the OSK commander has overall control of military forces in his OSK, including non-defense ministry forces, except for some strategic assets under General Staff control (such as the Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN), Airborne (VDV), and GRU Spetsnaz units). Then, in the order of command would be the assets under the command of the OSK, in this case, in terms of Western MD/OSK this is the 6th and 20th Combined Arms Army and the 1st Tank Army. This

entsiklopedicheskiy slovar, Voenizdat Publishers, Moscow, 2007, p. 634; A.S. Korobeynikov, D.V. Kholuyenko, and S.I. Pasichnik, 'Effektivnost' gruppировки voysk radioelektronnoy bor'by v khode kompleksnogo porazheniya informatsionnoupravlyayushchey sistemy protivnika (The effectiveness of the grouping of electronic warfare troops in the course of a complex defeat of the enemy's information and control system),' *Voyennaya Mysl*', No. 8, 2015, pp. 30-34.

⁵¹ Aleksei Nikolskiy, 'Moscow Moves Staffers Up to the Front Line,' *Vedomosti*,

<http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/05/12/640715-shtabistov-peredovuyu>, May 12, 2016.

⁵² Korchmit-Matyushov V.I, *Teoriya voyn*, Moscow: BFRGTZ, Slovo, 2001; Parshin S.A., Gorbachov Yu.Ye., Kozhanov Yu.A, *Sovremennyye tendentsii razvitiya teorii i praktiki upravleniya v vooruzhennykh silakh SShA*, Moscow: Lenand, 2009; Slipchenko V. I., *Voyny novogo pokoleniya: distantionnyye i beskontaktnyye*, Moscow, Olma-Press obrazovaniye, 2004; Gareev M.A., Slipchenko V.I, *Budushchaya voyna*, Moscow, OGI, 2005; *Setetsentricheskaya voyna. Daydzhest po materialam otkrytykh izdaniy i SMI*, – Moscow: VAGSH VS RF, 2010; Sergey Osipov, Aleksandr Kolesnichenko, Vitaly Cheplyaev, 'Nam est chem gorditsya,' *Argumenty i Fakty*,

http://www.aif.ru/society/army/nam_est_chem_gorditsya_na_parade_pobedy_pokazali_novinki_voennoy_tehniki, May 13, 2015.

can easily be reinforced by pulling other units from Southern OSK, or even Eastern OSK, while Central OSK appears to function as a type of strategic reserve. During a crisis period, the force buildup in Western MD/OSK would be tailored to meet the needs of the likely planned operational environment.⁵³

It is clear from the recent history of Russia's operational-strategic exercises that great emphasis is placed upon internal strategic mobility, and so it is highly likely that units would move from other OSKs in the pre-conflict phase. The operational environment would differ as the adversary (NATO) also differs in scope and capability, and the use of Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs), which Russia's General Staff associates with usually the most appropriate means for local wars and armed conflicts, but would not be suitable for-war against an adversary with a large conventional force. That is to say, the structure would be: OSKs-Army Groups-divisions/regiments and brigades. BTGs would be employed, but they primarily would function as subordinate elements to brigades/regiments. In short, a kluge of BTGs is not viewed as a good way of conducting war against an adversary with a large conventional force.⁵⁴ The flexible Army Groups with their tactical maneuver assets (divisions and brigades) would be the main constituent parts of the *obyedineniya*.

This is illustrated by a command-staff exercise following Vostok 2018, in October 2018 in Southern OSK featuring large-scale force-on-force maneuvers. The exercise featured elements from the 8th, 49th, and 58th Combined Arms Armies, the 22nd Army Corps, the Caspian Flotilla, the Black Sea Fleet, the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army, military units subordinate to the Southern OSK as well as some Spetsnaz units. Colonel-General Aleksandr Dvornikov, the Commander of Southern MD/OSK stated: "For the first time in exercises of this level, the opposed forces principle was implemented, in which troops in two operational directions conducted combat operations against each other....Prior to the command staff exercise the troops of the military district conducted just company and battalion tactical exercises." The exercise, as a rehearsal for large-scale force-on-force warfare did not feature the use of any BTGs, but instead rehearsed operations using divisions/regiments and brigades on opposed sides. The General Staff also decided to use units to oppose each other rather than forming an opposing force (OPFOR) to represent the adversary.⁵⁵

2. The Russian Military in the IPW in Ukraine: Chronology, February 24-28

As previously discussed, IPW preparations are primarily discussed in conjunction with strategic operations and war. So due to the nature of the *special military operation*, the

⁵³ Galkin [Commander of the Southern Military District 2010-2016], 'Forms of the Application of Military Force,' *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁴ Colonel-General V.I. Popov, 'Faktor mobil'nosti v sisteme boyevoy gotovnosti Vooruzhennykh Sil,' *Voyennaya Mysl'* (Mobility factor in the combat readiness system of the Armed Forces), No. 12, December 2007, pp. 44-49.

⁵⁵ 'Soyedineniya armii Yuzhnogo voyennogo okruga (YuVO), dislotsirovannyye v Volgogradskoy i Rostovskoy oblastiakh primimayut uchastiye v dvukhstoronnem komandno-shtabnom uchenii,' *Ministry of Defense*, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201810011602-mil-ruj6tgf.html>, October 1, 2018; 'Chetyre divizionnykh i brigadnykh takticheskikh ucheniya proyduť v ramkakh KSHU sgruppirovkami voysk YuVO (Four divisional and brigade tactical exercises will be held within the framework of the KSHU by groupings of troops of the Southern Military District),' *Ministry of Defense*, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12195952@egNews, September 18, 2018.

IPW concept was likely in no way a part of the planning process. Although the IPW concept was not employed in the *special military operation*, examining the first few days of the operation is valuable, as it provides some clues about what IPW against the US/NATO might look like and how it differed in Ukraine.

Russia's IPW in Ukraine in 2022 marked its first experience of conducting an invasion of a country on this scale since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The IPW that began on February 24, 2022, occurred over a five day period with operations on several axes simultaneously. Five days of the Russian IPW in Ukraine was not arrived at arbitrarily. At the end of the first weekend of the war Russia's Armed Forces transitioned away from an apparent effort to instigate a *coup de main* and force a regime change in Kyiv to an operational design which included targeting civilian infrastructure to terrorize the local civilian population.

In order to establish a sense of the unfolding dynamics and timings of the Russian military operations within the first two days, the sources used primarily drawn upon social media reporting. Days three to five then utilize observations and chronology developed by a small group of retired United States Army Eurasian Foreign Area Officers (FAOs). These started out on the first day of the war to collectively produce an aggregate of open source materials on the war. Originally the team consisted of three retired FAOs, but this later expanded. Thus, these open source materials were distributed as "Troika Observations." For the first 89 days of the war these reports could be disseminated, but were later considered controlled unclassified information (CUI) from day 90 onwards.⁵⁶

February 24

Reporting on the war within the Russian media was under tight state control from the very outset. Official defense ministry statements and state media appeared limited to offering a sanitized version of the conflict, essentially denying it represented the opening period in a war against Ukraine, following its official designation as a *special military operation*. Rather than providing endless examples of how this unfolded on February 24, 2022 within Russian state media, an insight into character of official statements is afforded by some of the coverage in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (Independent Military Review) — which essentially synthesized the state narrative. This is also illustrative by way of comparison to reporting within Ukraine, as well as the change in content and tone in such Russian media coverage only three days later.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The word *Troika* has several connotations. It translates from Russian into English as 'Triumvirate' or 'set of three.' In Tsarist Russia, the word became synonymous with the three horses that would pull Russian carriages and sleighs. It is also the name of a traditional Russian dance, ostensibly also named after the three prancing horses. In politics it was used to describe a political regime ruled or dominated by three powerful individuals and/or institutions (sometimes more than three). Stalin was replaced by a Troika, consisting of Khrushchev, Malenkov, and Beria. That Troika was short-lived, as Khrushchev managed to wrest sole control from the others. That did not last long either, as Khrushchev was deposed by another Troika led by Brezhnev. The Russian Way of War (RWOW) Troika refers to a group of retired US Army Eurasian Foreign Area Officers assembled by US Army Europe and Africa to develop and teach a series of courses on the RWOW.

⁵⁷ 'Voyna. Prichiny i posledstviya, predskazuyemye i ne ochen' Rossiya protiv 'imperii lzhi:' ekzistentsial'nyy vyzov (War. Causes and consequences, predictable and not very 'Russia against the empire of lies:' an existential challenge),' *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2022-02-24/2_8379_editorial.html, February 24, 2022.

Thus, these reports tended to reflect the official defense ministry announcements through its spokesman Major-General Igor Konashenkov. Clearly calibrated for domestic consumption, the Moscow-spun narrative asserted that only military targets were struck; “air defense facilities, military airfields” and Ukrainian military aviation were “disabled” by “massive strikes” using “high-precision missile systems.” Konashenkov announced that “as a result of strikes by the Russian Armed Forces, 74 ground facilities of Ukraine’s military infrastructure were put out of action. Including 11 airfields of the air force, three command posts, a base for the naval forces of Ukraine, as well as 18 radar stations of the S-300 and Buk-M1 anti-aircraft missile systems.” In addition, “a combat helicopter and four Bayraktar TB-2 attack unmanned aerial vehicles were shot down.”⁵⁸

One report in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* was emphatic: “the Russian military does not shell settlements and cities.” The underlying message was that the Ukrainian civilian population had nothing to fear and would not be targeted.⁵⁹ Moreover, such reports also portrayed the Russian military involvement as primarily geared to a supporting role for the forces of the newly recognized Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), which had launched operations to “liberate” these territories. There was also emphasis placed on Putin’s televised address to the nation on February 24 in which he exhorted Ukrainian military personnel to lay down their weapons. Additionally, citing the press service of Ukraine’s Border Service, Russian attacks on border checkpoints using artillery, heavy equipment and small arms fire had occurred “within the Luhansk, Sumy, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Zhytomyr regions.” A force grouping of the DPR advanced on Volnovakha, up to 3 km, and the grouping of the LPR advancing in the direction of the settlement of Shchastia, crossed the Seversky Donets and advanced 1.5 km. It was also alleged that “individual units and servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are massively leaving their positions, abandoning their weapons.” These reports also contained data on US supplied weapons being used by Ukrainian forces such as the Javelin ATGM.⁶⁰

Another report in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* repeated Putin’s claims to justify the attack on Ukraine, namely that the “operation” resulted from an appeal by the authorities of the DPR/LPR to “protect people who have been subjected to abuse, genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years, and for this we will strive to *demilitarize* and *denazify* Ukraine, as well as bring to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.”⁶¹

An optimistic overview was also provided concerning the balance of forces in Ukraine “the grouping of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border exceeds 150,000: 120 battalion groups, 1,700 tanks, 4,300 armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles, 2,300 artillery pieces, 375 aircraft, 240 helicopters, 80 warships and six submarines.”

⁵⁸ Vladimir Mukhin, ‘*Eto vsego lish’ spetsoperatsiya* (It’s just a special operation),’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, https://www.ng.ru/armies/2022-02-24/7_8379_variant.html, February 24, 2022.

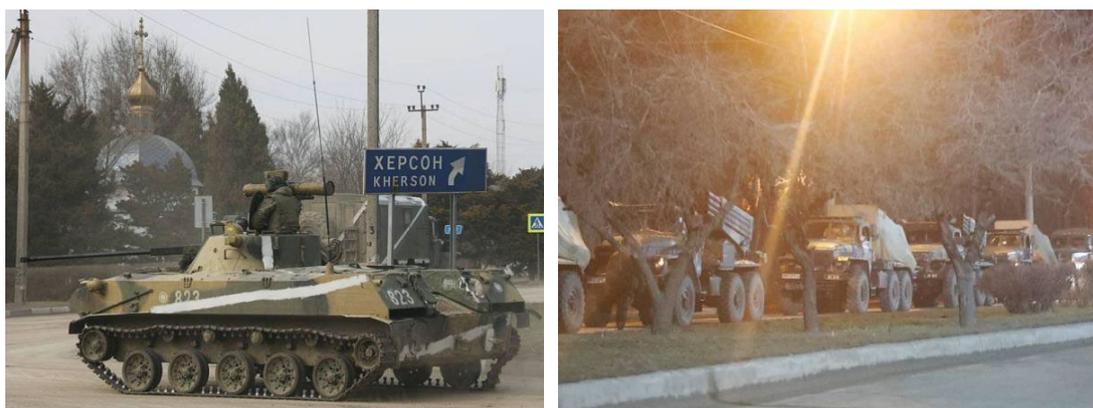
⁵⁹ Dmitry Litovkin, ‘*Nam obeshchali, chto dal’she territorii Donbassa voyennyye deystviya vestis’ ne budut*,’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (We were promised that military operations would not be conducted on the territory of Donbass),’ https://www.ng.ru/armies/2022-02-24/1_8379_territory.html, February 24, 2022,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Vladimir Ivanov, Vladimir Karnozov, ‘*Prinuzhdeniye k miru* (Peace enforcement),’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2022-02-24/1_1178_problem.html, February 24, 2022.

These figures were also broadcast by the TV channel *Ukraine 24*. Moreover, Russian media sources had cited Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu addressing the Russian Security Council on February 21, 2022 stating Ukraine’s Armed Forces had “59,300 military personnel, 345 tanks, 2,160 armored combat vehicles, 820 artillery pieces and mortars, 160 multiple rocket launchers.”⁶²

According to Russian state controlled media, therefore, the narrative crafted for as part of Moscow’s information operations (IO) cast the war as a *special military operation* avoiding targeting civilian infrastructure and resulting from the appeal for Russian military assistance made by the leadership of the DPR/LPR rather than a deliberate unprovoked Russian attack on Ukraine. The narrative also had the forces of the DPR/LPR spearheading efforts to “liberate” Donbas, with the Russian Armed Forces playing only a support role; admissions of missile strikes and use of the Russian Aerospace Forces (*Vozdushno Kosmicheskikh Sil –VKS*) against targets throughout Ukraine were subordinate to these claims — though they were mentioned in some reporting. This heavily sanitized Russian version of the very first hours of the war — as illustrated in the typical images below — contrasted sharply with reporting both in western and Ukrainian media broadly portraying a significantly different and Russian dominated act of aggression against its neighbor.



Images of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, February 24, 2022⁶³

There were a number of warning signs in the early hours of February 24, 2022 that Moscow was poised to launch an imminent attack on Ukraine. At 0106 in Kyiv, the government announced a state of emergency. In Moscow at 0106 a NOTAM (Notice to Air missions) was issued for Ukrainian airspace. In Kyiv at 0256 President Volodymyr Zelenskiy addressed the nation concerning the state of emergency and likely Russian attack, while at 0219 reportedly a cyber attack was launched against the Security Service of Ukraine (*Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrayiny –SBU*). At 0229 local time, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said in Washington DC that Russia would attack Ukraine “tonight.” Within the hour reports appeared on TikTok of internal Russian troops movements in Crimea.⁶⁴

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Litovkin, ‘*Nam obeshchali, chto dal’she territorii Donbassa voyennyye deystviya vestis’ ne budut,*’ *Op.Cit.*

⁶⁴ UNIANET, February 24, 2022.

Border Crossings/Attacks: At 0435 a Russian border crossing and attack was reported on a border post in Velika Pisarivka, Sumy Oblast. Similar crossings and attacks began at 0505 in Goptivka, Kharkiv Oblast, and minutes later in Bachivsk, Sumy Oblast. Ukraine's Border Service reported at 0730 border crossings and attacks on at unspecified points on the Belarus-Ukraine border. From 0744 and for several hours afterwards Russian units flowed across the Belarus-Ukraine border at Senkivka, Chernigov Oblast. In southern Ukraine at 0856, Russian Ground Forces units were reported moving from Crimea crossing into Preobrazhenka, Kherson Oblast. At 1256 in northern Ukraine, Reports indicated Russian Ground Forces crossing into Vilcha, Kyiv Oblast conducting grad strikes during their advances.⁶⁵

Non-Contact Strikes: At 0457, non-contact strikes were reported in Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast. At 0500 non-contact strikes were conducted against Ukrainian airbases in Ozerne, Zhytomyr Oblast, Kulbakino, Mykolaiv Oblast, Chuguev, Kharkiv Oblast, Chernobaevka, Kherson Oblast. The airport in Odessa, Odessa Oblast was targeted by a non-contact strike at 0506, with non-contact strikes occurring within several minutes against unspecified targets in Kyiv and Kharkiv. At 0515 the international airport at Boryspil, Kyiv was struck by a non-contact strike. In southern Ukraine non-contact strikes took place within several minutes from 0540 against targets in Berdyansk, Zaporizhya Oblast and Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast. A non-contact strike at 0551 targeted the Vasilkiv airbase in Kyiv.⁶⁶

In southeastern Ukraine at 0601 and 0605 non-contact strikes hit an airbase at Myrhorod, Poltava Oblast and a target in Svatovo, Luhansk Oblast. At 0721, a non-contact strike hit a target in Lutsk, Volyn Oblast and minutes later a military base was reportedly on fire following a Russian non-contact strike. At 0803 Kyiv was again targeted by Russian non-contact strikes involving either missiles or UAVs. Over the following hour non-contact strikes hit targets in Mykolaiv, Mykolaiv Oblast, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, Vinnytsia, Vinnytsia Oblast, Podilsk, Odessa Oblast, Uman, Cherkassy Oblast,

⁶⁵<https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live/page4>,

<https://mobile.twitter.com/sternenko/status/1496697897429127173>,

<https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1496719103054483456>,

<https://twitter.com/lukaszargonski/status/1496723825576325130>,

https://twitter.com/DPSU_ua/status/1496746931112058880,

<https://www.facebook.com/DPSUkraine/posts/283474263891451>, February 24, 2022.

⁶⁶ <https://twitter.com/brycewilsonAU/status/1496680568540565505>,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=257860163193736&set=a.229159252730494&type=3>,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=257860163193736&set=a.229159252730494&type=3>,

<https://twitter.com/miladvisor/status/1496715257728970755>,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=257860163193736&set=a.229159252730494&type=3>,

<https://twitter.com/NotWoofers/status/1496682840506916867>,

<https://twitter.com/NeilPHauer/status/1496683182334357507>,

<https://twitter.com/daanverdant/status/1496683977163558912>,

https://twitter.com/AircraftSpots/status/1496685199987335170?s=20&t=KRPNTd2ahCYEsx3X_XKong,

<https://twitter.com/olyocean/status/1496688126156324864>,

<https://twitter.com/Ch1caqOCSGO/status/1496691475068985348>,

https://twitter.com/gt_lozt/status/1496692518007808004,

<https://mobile.twitter.com/sternenko/status/1496697897429127173>,

https://twitter.com/ua_industrial/status/1496694167879262210?s=21, February 24, 2022.

Nizhyn airbase, Chernigov Oblast and Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast. Similar attacks struck targets in Kryvyi Rih, Dnepropetrovsk Oblast and the port of Odessa: the former involved three UAV strikes against 17 Ukrainian MBTs and the latter was again struck at 1248. At 1009 a non-contact strike destroyed an arms depot at Kalynivka, Vinnytsia Oblast. A Ukrainian airbase was struck by non-contact strikes in Melitopol, Zaporozhia Oblast (1453). An additional non-contact strike on the first day of the war involved targets in Buyalyk, Odessa Oblast, at 2151.⁶⁷

Ground-Based Strikes: Most of the Russian fires on the opening day of the war were ground based; what follows is illustrative of how this unfolded. At 0500 and 0505 ground-based strikes hit targets in Milove, Luhansk Oblast and Novaya Sloboda, Sumy Oblast, which included firing from Russian territory. Attacks on border posts in Grabovske, Sumy Oblast at 0513 involved artillery shelling. Within minutes Ukrainian air defense units were shelled in Vesele, Vovchansk and Dergachi in Kharkiv Oblast, and in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast grad barrages were launched against a range of targets. At 0838 fresh grad barrages were reported in Mariupol. At 0926 Smerch MLRS was used in the suburbs of Kharkiv. Russian helicopters attacked targets in Slavutych, Chernigov Oblast at 0940. At 1039 the airport in Mariupol was shelled, accompanied by grad strikes on the city throughout the day. At 1954, Russian ground-based fires destroyed a bridge over the River Bucha in Irpin, Kyiv Oblast. A bridge was also destroyed by Russian ground fires at 2212 in Senkove, Kharkiv Oblast.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ https://twitter.com/wiskas_pumius/status/1496696835741663236,
<https://twitter.com/Neringa285/status/1496697845914779649>,
<https://twitter.com/donrailwaymen/status/1496700333418033154>,
<https://twitter.com/dlepeska/status/1496716968229052416>, <https://liveuamap.com/en/2022/24-february-military-unit-on-fire-near-brovary>, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/photo/v-mvd-pokazali-posledstviya-obstreli-kieva-ostatki-bespilotnika-ili-krylatoy-rakety-foto>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496728984356368384>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496737147235311617>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496742828290060290>,
<https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/v-podolske-i-mariupole-est-pogibshie-i-ranenyje-geraschenko>,
https://twitter.com/ua_industrial/status/1496737212217667590,
<https://twitter.com/ChristopherJM/status/1496739927568048128>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496740875753435144>,
<https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/v-podolske-i-mariupole-est-pogibshie-i-ranenyje-geraschenko>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496746291153543169>,
<https://twitter.com/KyivIndependent/status/1496759279633711108>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496799080806334467>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496830739035439109>, February 24, 2022.

⁶⁸<https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rt-protiv-ukrainy-live/page4>,
<https://mobile.twitter.com/sternenko/status/1496697897429127173>,
<https://twitter.com/Caucasuswar/status/1496686726802288640>,
<https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/v-podolske-i-mariupole-est-pogibshie-i-ranenyje-geraschenko>,
https://t.me/Pravda_Gerashchenko/193,
<https://twitter.com/TadeuszGiczak/status/1496765251194347526>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496766713987166208>,
<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mariupol-obstril-z-hradiv/31720701.html>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496832425497968640>,
<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2022/02/24/russia-ukraine-invasion-rockets-tanks-pleitgen->

Air Strikes/Air Assaults: The first reported Russian VKS activity was at 0516, with the VKS attacking Ukrainian border guards on Zmini Island, Black Sea (Odessa Oblast). At 0553, Russian aircraft were sighted over Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast. At 0616 a Russian air strike was carried out against a ground target in Bakhmut, Donetsk Oblast. At 1224 Ukraine's defense ministry reported shooting down a seventh aircraft of the day, this incident occurred over Luhansk Oblast. However, although a limited VKS operation albeit sporadic, was underway at 1303 the Russians mounted an air assault on Hostomel, Kyiv Oblast, involving the loss of three helicopters during the early stages of the attack. At 1415, a Ukrainian MiG-29 intercepted a VKS Su-34 over Kyiv; the Russian aircraft appeared to be operating alone. At 1446, the VKS shot down an unidentified Ukrainian fighter jet over Trypillia, Kyiv Oblast, while four minutes later a Russian helicopter was downed over Vyshhorod, Kyiv Oblast. Later in the day, at 1908, a VKS grouping of fighters was sighted over Kyiv. Although local reporting of VKS and Ground Forces aviation on the first day of the war was relatively scarce, it appears that the Russian air war was, in fact, quite light and not consistent with a large-scale war effort. Its most outstanding feature was the air assault conducted by the VDV in an effort to secure the Hostomel airport southwest of Kyiv.⁶⁹

It needs to be stressed that in terms of the use of airpower on the first day, the VKS operation was piecemeal and entirely out of sync with the scale of the war. Reported sightings of VKS aircraft were predominantly individual platforms, or flying in pairs; there were no consistently reported sightings of larger VKS air groupings. Also, on the first day of the war, possibly due to the lack of attempting a SEAD operation, the VKS did not fly fixed or rotary wing aircraft at night. This is surprising by itself, yet more so since two air assaults were conducted at dawn on the next day.

Fighting/Troop Movements: At 0850 during engagements in Shchastya, Luhansk Oblast, up to 50 Russian KIAs were reported. Across media reporting on the first day, Russian Ground Forces and auxiliaries such as *Rosgvardia* (National Guard) met with unexpected and fierce resistance from Ukrainian military forces. As the invasion progressed over the course of the first day, Russian advances continued in multiple vectors. For example, at 0833 Russian Ground Forces units were advancing in the area of Stanitsa Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast. Following fighting at Chuguev, Kharkov Oblast, Ukrainian civilian casualties were reported. By 0901, Ukrainian Ground Forces were under heavy fire and fighting Russian forces in Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast and within the

newday-vpx.cnn, <https://twitter.com/RichardEngel/status/1496859233370918915>,
<https://t.me/irpininteresting/3719>, <https://t.me/liganet/13671>, February 24, 2022.

⁶⁹ <https://twitter.com/AJABreaking/status/1496694827936849925>,
<https://twitter.com/danriversitv/status/1496700442813808646>,
<https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rt-protiv-ukrainy-live/page2>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496811350445678592>,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496821171119079430>, https://t.me/mvs_ukraine/8792,
<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496829872383135749>,
<https://twitter.com/markmackinnon/status/1496894822950526979>, February 24, 2022.

hours reports emerged of heavy fighting in Ukraine's second major city of Kharkiv.⁷⁰

At 1002, Ukraine's General Staff stated that heavy fighting was in progress in Skadovsk, Kherson Oblast. Similar statements were issued at 1400 on fighting in Henichesk and Chaplynka in Kherson Oblast with a claim that Ukrainian forces were holding the line. Around 1500 reports of fierce engagements in Donbas confirmed early efforts to push forces through Starobilsk, Luhansk Oblast and Pishchevik, Donetsk Oblast, which reportedly encountered resistance. At 1633 the first reports emerged of Russian units arriving from across the Belarus-Ukraine border driving through the Pirpet marches with fighting around the radioactive waste storage facility at Chernobyl, Kyiv Oblast. However, by 1733 Ukrainian forces had stopped a Russian advance in Okhtyrka, Sumy Oblast, with such reporting appearing to confirm the broader picture of the first day of fighting and Russian forces suffering heavy losses and fierce Ukrainian resistance.⁷¹

Confirming this pattern of Russian failings, at 1733 a video was published online showing burned out Russian hardware in Sumy, Sumy Oblast. At 1800 an attempted Russian breakthrough was stopped by Ukrainian forces in Pischevy, Donetsk Oblast. Around 1800, Russian Ground Forces units were advancing towards Melitopol, Zaporozhia Oblast, and at 1858 the Ukrainian government admitted the fall of the Chernobyl Nuclear Plant. At 2151 fighting was underway on the outskirts of Kherson, Kherson Oblast as Russian forces tried to circumvent the city on the way to Mykolaiv. In late evening on February 24, heavy fighting was reported in the Kharkiv area, with online videos circulating in social media of destroyed Russian tanks and AFVs in all invasion vectors.⁷² The first day of the war also involved instances of maritime and irregular warfare. At 1611 at Zminiy Island, Black Sea (Odessa Oblast) the Moskva cruiser and 609 Vasilii Bykov fired artillery against island. And, reportedly, at 2151 Russian irregulars attempted to enter the Military Academy in Odessa.⁷³

⁷⁰ <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1496728317969539076>, https://t.me/narazi_media/1558, https://t.me/rian_ru/147917, <https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496741446430384133>, <https://twitter.com/ChristopherJM/status/1496741994609135627>, <https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1496750078945550336>, February 24, 2022.

⁷¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3168879256730716>, <https://www.facebook.com/pressjfo.news/posts/318934990261818>, https://twitter.com/13Hellis_13/status/1496856539117887490, <https://twitter.com/AlexKhrebet/status/1496864693226463235>, https://twitter.com/ian_tanya/status/1496870892168699911, February 24, 2022.

⁷² https://twitter.com/ua_industrial/status/1496874232118140929, https://twitter.com/mil_in_ua/status/1496880538661142536, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=900361373993279>, <https://twitter.com/shcherbinainn/status/1496967439824965638?s=21>, February 24, 2022.

⁷³ https://t.me/mvs_ukraine/8798, <https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live>, February 24, 2022.



Map One: Russian Invasion of Ukraine: February 24, 2022⁷⁴

February 25

DRGs: On February 25, Russian Ground Forces units augmented by VDV in an infantry role, Special Forces, Naval Infantry, *Rosgvardia*, and irregulars from Chechnya continued to cross the border into Ukraine from Belarus, Russia and Crimea. However, one of the main departures from activities on the opening day of the invasion was the introduction of GRU/GU Spetsnaz Reconnaissance-Sabotage Teams (*Razvedyvatel'no-Dversionnyye Gruppy* – DRG). These DRGs were deployed in various parts of Ukraine, including in Kyiv, in support of the Russian effort to instigate a coup de main and use the wider invasion to cause strategic shock and implode the Ukrainian government: the DRGs were used by Moscow as a critical element in the attempt to achieve regime change in Kyiv. At 0700 over-night DRGs were reportedly repelled in Bilovodsk, Lobacheve, Shchastya, Stanitsa Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast. At 0859, a report emerged claiming that DRGs were captured in Chornomorsk, Odessa Oblast, these were in the process of planting explosives. At 2133, DRGs were captured in Kyiv attempting to form a fake territorial defense unit. At 0942, DRG activity was reported in Obolon, Kyiv with DRGs allegedly switching to Ukrainian military uniforms to infiltrate the city. And, at 2053, DRG activity in Troieshchyna, Kyiv resulted in explosions at the TETs-6 energy plant. In southern Ukraine at 1333 and 1414 DRGs were infiltrating Mariupol.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Rick Westera, 'Russian Invasion of Ukraine,' April 20, 2022, <https://omniatlas.com/blogs/stray-maps/russian-invasion-ukraine/>.

⁷⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/pressjfo.news/posts/319480196873964>, <https://www.dsnews.ua/society/v-odesskoy-oblasti-sbu-zaderzhala-diversanta-risovavshego-specialnye-metki-orientiry-foto-25022022-452612>, <https://novynarnia.com/2022/02/25/rosiany-zahopyly/>, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/pod-mariupolem-idut-boi-v-gorode-rabotayut->

Non-Contact Strikes: Russia's Armed Forces continued to carry out non-contact strikes on the second day of the invasion, using platforms in the air, land and sea. At 0617, a number of missile strikes were reported striking targets in Kyiv. Around midday non-contact strikes occurred in Belaya Tserkov, Vasylkiv, Kyiv Oblast, with additional details suggesting this had involved Kalibr cruise missiles. At 1625 a non-contact strike was reported against a target in Primorskiy, Zaporzhye Oblast. Additional non-contact strikes took place later in the day, with strikes against Starokonstantinov, Khmelnytskyi Oblast reported at 2109 and minutes afterwards in Myrhorod, Poltava Oblast. Non-contact strikes were conducted against an airbase and rail storage depot in Mykolaiv, Mykolaiv Oblast at 2217. At 2309, an airport was struck by a non-contact strike in Starokonstantinov, Khmelnytskyi Oblast.⁷⁶

Ground-Based Strikes: Russian ground-based strikes continued overnight with a Ukrainian military base in Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast reportedly on fire at 0005 as a result of strikes. Shortly after 0400 the capital was also under ground-based strikes, these involved rocket attacks and a separate strike on an underground car park in Osokorkiy Raion, Kyiv. At 0742, as a result of Russian ground-based strikes a bridge was destroyed in Irpin, Kyiv Oblast. Similarly, another bridge was downed at 0722 in Vyshhorod, Kyiv Oblast. At 1252, a grad strike was reported in Vorzel, Kyiv Oblast. Strikes were conducted across Ukraine throughout the morning of the second day in the invasion vectors, with attacks reported against targets in Ushomyr, Zhytomyr Oblast and Kharkiv. At 1309, a military base was targeted by Russian Ground forces artillery in Ushomyr, Zhytomyr Oblast. In the afternoon urban strikes were conducted against Akhtyrka, Sumy Oblast and an SBU facility was shelled in Chernigov, Chernigov Oblast. Attacks were taking place against airbases, military bases, rail storage depots, oil depots, as well as fires against enemy forces. However, the targeting went well beyond military targets.⁷⁷

diversanty-povrejdeny-doma-mer, <https://t.me/liganet/13790>, https://t.me/vitaliy_klitschko/1193, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=278189474435353&set=a.250397253881242>, February 25, 2022.

⁷⁶ https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=284051180500426&id=100066866381279, <https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live/page3>, <https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live/page2>, <https://twitter.com/IvanGonta72/status/1497287745663913993>, https://twitter.com/ua_industrial/status/1497289791423012869, <https://twitter.com/ELINTNews/status/1497304757047803905>, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/u-voennogo-aeroporta-starokonstantinova-proizoshlo-shest-vzryvov>, February 25, 2022.

⁷⁷ <https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live/page4>, <https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-rf-protiv-ukrainy-live/page3>, https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1497133197058007046, <https://twitter.com/MattMcBradley/status/1497138888304857090>, https://t.me/new_militarycolumnist/73507, <https://t.me/irpininteresting/3754>, <https://www.facebook.com/KorostenRDA/posts/275600534691137>, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/v-ahtyrke-okkupanty-obstrelyali-iz-artillerii-detskiy-sad-tyajeloraneniy-deti-glava-oga>, <https://t.me/suspilnechernihiv/6189>, February 25, 2022.

Ground-based strikes were being reported in Donbas from 0730 onwards: with the first in Starobilsk, Luhansk Oblast. At 1547, a bridge was destroyed in Shchastya, Luhansk Oblast. In terms of targeting, at 1758 Russian ground-based strikes were reported in Melitopol, Zaporzhia Oblast with a hospital shelled. Images and video footage surfaced on social media throughout the day on February 25 showing destruction of civilian infrastructure — particularly apartment blocks — in Irpin, Kyiv. Another hospital was targeted in Okhtyrka, Sumy Oblast and shown at 1733. At 2053, Russian grad strikes were shown targeting a school and apartment blocks in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.⁷⁸ These are noted as evidence that the Russian ground-based strikes in these instances were occurring even in these early and formative stages of the war, and clearly did not result from acts of despair.

Air Strikes/Air Assaults: The Russian VKS was inactive overnight in the early part of the second day. VKS and army aviation using fixed wing and rotary wing platforms were not involved in the war at a level commensurate with a large-scale war. Thus, it can be noted at the outset that in addition to the lack of VKS sorties to conduct SEAD/DEAD, there was little consistency in providing CAS for the Ground Forces advances. At 0940 Russian airstrikes were conducted against ground targets in Kherson, Kherson Oblast. At 1220, a Ukrainian MiG-29 shot down a VKS Su-35 at an unspecified location in Ukraine's airspace. At 1758, Ukrainian sources stated that the Russian military claimed to have shot down twelve Ukrainian air assets: six aircraft, five UAVs and one helicopter. At 2346, the Ukrainian defense ministry claimed to have shot down a VKS Su-25 over Kalinovka, Vinnytsia Oblast.⁷⁹ Later on the second day, the Russian defense ministry claimed that the air assault on Hostomel airfield southwest of Kyiv had resulted in its capture.

Fighting/Troop Movements: Russian Ground Forces offensives continued overnight in Dergachi, Pechenegy, Kharkiv Oblast. At 0601, reports emerged of the Russian offensive resuming in Sumy, Sumy Oblast and around the same time offensives were reported and a bridge destroyed during advances against Ivankiv, Kyiv Oblast. At 1000 reportedly the VDV 76th Air Assault Division was redirected to Gomel in Belarus and by early morning were advancing on Kyiv. Within minutes the Ukrainian 1st Brigade had stopped advancing VDV units at Bilous River, Seversk Raion, Chernigov Oblast. Russian Ground Forces units advanced towards Brovary, Kyiv Oblast bypassing Chernigov. The Ukrainian defense ministry stated that its forces were holding the line in Slobozhanshcina, Kharkiv. Another Russian advance was stopped in Oleshki, Kherson Oblast reported just after 1000 and at Chernigov, Chernigov Oblast, at 1159 the 1st Brigade destroyed up to 20 Russian MBTs, while the Ukrainian army was holding in Mariupol. In the early evening of the second day video footage on social media showed destroyed Russian military hardware in Irpin,

⁷⁸<https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/photo/rossiya-obstrellyala-starobelsk-ubit-odin-chelovek-foto-razrusheniy>, <https://twitter.com/alchevskua/status/1497239600057753604>, <https://t.me/irpininteresting/3761>, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/v-harkove-masshtabnyy-pojarna-neftebaze-video>, <https://twitter.com/UKRINFORM/status/1497285415425949698>, February 25, 2022.

⁷⁹ <https://twitter.com/Yevheniuss/status/1497114312888004609>, <https://t.me/uniannet/31860>, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/13866981>, February 25, 2022.

Kyiv Oblast. At 2309 fighting was reported in Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast and by 2353 Russian forces had surrounded Melitopol, Zaporzhia Oblast.⁸⁰

While the Russian military invasion during the first two days was steadily advancing across the vectors of attack, these early efforts were marked by widespread chaos, encountering unexpected resistance from Ukrainian military units, and revealing issues in terms of logistics and vulnerabilities (see map two). Russian Ground Forces and supporting units were restricted to roads, often moving well ahead of supporting logistics, bunching up on these roads, and neither on the march nor in combat engagements were they fighting according to Russian military doctrine or way of war fighting: they did not fight in combined arms formations and offered insufficient security for artillery or motorized rifle units. Russian military forces on the march were moving primarily in motorized rifle only or tank only formations. Russian forces sustained significant KIAs/WIAs in the first two days and lost equally significant hardware including tanks and infantry vehicles falling prey to Ukrainian artillery and UAV strikes. There were also reports of Russian conscripts admitted to local hospitals, suggesting that not all the BTGs were in fact BTGs as the BTG concept demanded exclusive manning by contract personnel. One marked difference between the opening two days of the war was the introduction of more concerted DRG activities, though the SBU seemed successful in identifying many of these. In addition, from the outset there were *Rosgvardia* and Chechen fighters involved in the ground invasion.

⁸⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/synegubov.oleg/posts/505676010909758>,
<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3412265-zbrojni-sili-ukraini-cinat-opir-rosijskim-okupantam-uzumah.html>, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/25/7325638/>,
<https://twitter.com/serzzzE/status/1497115020332838913>,
<https://twitter.com/ragipsoylu/status/1497116254557069315>,
<https://twitter.com/prytslu/status/1497124801256865792>, https://t.me/dsszzi_official/923,
https://t.me/dsszzi_official/923, https://t.me/dsszzi_official/923,
<https://twitter.com/ArmedForcesUkr/status/1497121112936914945>,
<https://www.facebook.com/kommander.nord/posts/2085508531629934>,
<https://news.liga.net/politics/chronicle/novaya-ugroza-iz-rossii-vse-glavnoe-ob-eskalatsii-voennoy-agressii-protiv-ukrainy-live/page2>,
<https://www.facebook.com/100069092624537/posts/258943416418744/?d=n>,
<https://t.me/oleksiihoncharenko/10835>,
https://twitter.com/Garik_Youmar/status/1497343572286267399,
<https://www.facebook.com/borzov.s.s/posts/501703301624715>, February 25, 2022.



Map Two: Russian Invasion of Ukraine: February 25, 2022⁸¹

February 26

On the third day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the same pattern further developed of DRG activity especially in Kyiv. DRGs were captured in Kyiv with poorly forged Ukrainian language documents (one page paper), immediately identifiable to Ukrainian authorities as fake due to the poor quality Ukrainian language contained in these documents. Additionally, as the Ukrainian government recognized the growing threat to the regime posed by these DRGs, the Ministry of Infrastructure, SBU and other ministries warned citizens to report and destroy markings that Russian soldiers, DRGs or their supporters placed on street poles. The Ukrainian Ministry of Infrastructure issued an app and bot to upload and geotag markings before destruction. These were small, normally placed two meters above ground level using piece of reflective tape and a handwritten letter and number. Locals were actively involved in uncovering Russian DRG activity. Two videos on social media confirmed this, with the first showing at least two GRU Spetsnaz personnel hiding in a basement in Nikolayev. Another incident took place in Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, where a neighbor reported Chechens occupying a nearby home; these actually were later confirmed as Chechens working for *Rosgvardia*.⁸²

Also, late on February 25 and early February 26, Ukrainian forces blew bridges between Nikolayev and Odessa. Bridges were also blown between Kyiv and Zhitomir, west of Kyiv. Overnight, VDV units continued to cross the Belarus-Ukraine border in an infantry role. Around dawn on day three Russian Ground Forces captured parts of Melitopol. Russian forces continued non-contact

⁸¹ Westera, 'Russian Invasion of Ukraine,' *Op.Cit.*

⁸² RWOW Troika Observations, February 26, 2022.

strikes, with Ukrainian air defense alleging they downed a Russian cruise missile possibly targeting the hydroelectric dam north of the capital. Chaos and poor logistics continued to plague Russian columns advancing by road: multiple video uploads on social media confirmed Russian Ground Forces vehicles were running out of fuel in single or multiple cases. One example of these videos showed a single MTLB near Sumy and 300 meters nearby a T-72BZM awaiting refueling. Ukrainian forces were also reportedly successfully engaging Russian UAVs using MANPADs.⁸³

Lieutenant-General Mykola Oleschuk, Commander of Ukraine's Air Force, stated during a briefing in Kyiv that over the past 24 hours his forces shot down eleven Russian helicopters, three Su-30SMs, two Su-25s and one Il-76 transporter; following his briefing another two Il-76s were downed. Oleschuk also claimed the destruction of key ground targets including an S-300 SAM complex, Buk-1 air defense system, and the destruction of a Su-27 as a result of a Tochka-U attack on Millerova airfield in Rostov-on-Don, Russia.⁸⁴

Kyiv Area:

- Around midnight, Ukrainian air defense downed two Il-76s near the capital. Over the first three days of the war the VKS tried unsuccessfully to make landings and further insertions of VDV after its initial insertion at Hostomel airport. On February 26, 15 Il-76s took off from Pskov, the base of the VDV 76th Air Assault Division; these apparently aborted their mission while airborne and returned to Pskov.⁸⁵
- Early morning in Kyiv involved small arms fire and heavy fighting near the Ministry of Infrastructure and the “Manhattan City” apartments and shopping area and in residential areas west in the capital. Although there were no air raids overnight, the intensity of 12.7 mm fire exchange intensified compared to day two.⁸⁶
- Also early morning, based on security camera footage, hundreds of Chechen Kadyrovtsy were moving in large Rosgvardia vehicles crossing the Russia-Ukraine border post north of Kyiv. Civilian minibuses were visible along with other Rosgvardia vehicles.⁸⁷
- The Ukrainian military leadership commented on the vulnerability of thinly armored Rosgvardia vehicles. In addition to light or no armor, these Rosgvardia vehicles lacked gunners and convoy discipline.⁸⁸
- VKS targeting on day three switched from mainly military targets to Ukraine's civilian infrastructure.⁸⁹

Kharkiv Area

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

- Throughout the day and night of February 26 Kharkiv came under constant rocket and artillery fire. An “enormous bomb” exploded on Ukrainian defenders north of the city just after midnight.⁹⁰
- A group of five DRGs were eliminated by kill and capture in a residential area of Kharkiv. The five included one captain, one senior lieutenant, two *praporshchiks* and a senior sergeant. The documents seized included a list of equipment: personnel weapons (pistol, rifle and knife for each) secure communications equipment and large quantities of explosives.⁹¹
- Russian artillery strikes hit civilian areas of Sumy. CAS dropped munitions on a civilian neighborhood of Kharkiv around 2321 local time. The Saltivka area of Kharkiv was repeatedly hit by artillery, MRLS and CAS. In the early evening a Ukrainian Stinger shot down a Russian Mi-8 helicopter near Kharkiv.⁹²

Zaporozhye

- Russian Ground Forces successfully pushed north through Melitopol and made an attempt to envelop Zaporozhye from the east. Russian Ground Forces were also forming an artillery group southwest of Zaporozhye near the village of Vodyane.⁹³
- A Russian TOS-1A was photographed during the day passing through the village of Tokmak northeast of Melitopol.⁹⁴
- Ukrainian military barracks on the outskirts of Zaporozhye was targeted by indirect fire into the night.⁹⁵

Toward Odessa

- Russia’s 47th Combined Arms Army (CAA) or 58th Army was reportedly east of Nikolayev possibly en route toward Odessa, with Ukrainian forces anticipating an attack on Odessa as imminent.⁹⁶

Toward Mariupol

- Sartana, a village northeast of Mariupol was hit by Russian artillery killing four and wounding nine civilians.⁹⁷
- A large column of Russia armored vehicles moved west from Russia toward Mariupol. These were likely elements of the 8th CAA/150th MRD.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*



Map Three: Russian Invasion of Ukraine: February 26, 2022⁹⁹

February 27

Russian media coverage of the opening days of the war continued to display strict state control, with no dissenting perspectives and a near total lack of detail especially on how the Russian Armed was conducting its operations in Ukraine. Russian media stressed operations in Donbas, downplayed coverage of the stiff resistance from Ukraine’s military, made no mention of Russian KIAs/WIAs and even asserted that in many areas Ukrainian military personnel were surrendering. However, one theme that emerged clearly within the reports in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* was the assertion that the “Zelenskiy regime” pinned its hopes on foreign military assistance and foreign mercenaries.¹⁰⁰

Reflecting on day four of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Troika team assessed the role played by Ukraine’s wartime leadership, as follows:

The Zelenskiy government is likely the center of gravity and the Zelenskiy government acts like it. President Zelensky and his senior government leaders such as Vitaly Klichko constantly and regularly address their public by short videos throughout the day to reassure citizens and prove that they are still alive and in Kyiv. They sometimes appear in different places outside in Kyiv to prove that they are still in the city. On day one Klichko publicly reminded Parliamentarians that they are forbidden from leaving Kyiv.

⁹⁹ Westera, ‘Russian Invasion of Ukraine,’ *Op.Cit.*

¹⁰⁰ Vladimir Mukhin, ‘Bystroy pobedy ne vyshlo, no Moskva atakuyet, (There was no quick victory, but Moscow attacks),’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, https://www.ng.ru/armies/2022-02-27/1_8380_victory.html, February 27, 2022,

Ivan Shvarts, ‘Okruzheniye ukrainskoy armii zavisit ot boyev u Vasilovki (Encirclement of the Ukrainian army depends on the fighting near Vasilovka),’ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, https://www.ng.ru/armies/2022-02-26/100_260222_army.html, February 26, 2022.

Many leaders in President Zelenskiy's government appear separately from the President and provide similar “do not panic” messages. That may also be so that even if the President does not survive, the Zelenskiy government will.

President Zelenskiy sets the tone and mayors and governors throughout the nation address their publics in similar tones. Many tour battlefields on video soon after combat and reassure nearby civilians.

On Day two, the Mayor of Kharkiv (an ethnic Uzbek) addressed his citizens over the internet via a bullhorn while speaking to hundreds seeking shelter in the subway system. He acknowledged their losses and sacrifices, recommended that they move their families and friends underground to the Metro for safety, told them how to get services, but also made sure residents knew that conditions may get tougher in the next few days.

One common message from the President, governors and mayors is that the Ukrainian military is fighting and will continue to fight until the end. Many times, Ukrainian government leaders appear with local military commanders. The message is that Territorial Forces and individuals shooting at Russians on the streets and woods are not alone and that the military is continuing to fight alongside them.

There seems no doubt that Ukrainian leaders learned from the August 2021 Afghanistan debacle: There will be no Ghani moment escaping the capital. There will be no post-ANA or post-Bagram collapse. Competent Ukrainian leaders at all levels are working earnestly and publicly to prevent that. It is remarkable.¹⁰¹

The Troika observations continued noting the impact on the Russian invasion of the level of Ukrainian resistance:

Despite Russian advances on day three and the overall challenging situation for Ukraine, hundreds of Russian KIA were recorded on videos and photos. Many Russian KIA were gruesomely burned to death or decapitated. That will have an effect on Russian morale if it is projected into Russia. Such photos and videos are all over Unian Net (Uniannet), a Ukrainian media service.

Russian soldiers surrendered to Ukrainian forces willfully as early as day one. They pleaded that they were misled and told that this was “an exercise.” On videos, it was clear that some Russian soldiers capitulated rather than fight for what they knew to be an immoral cause. On days two and three, there were probably 50 x Russian EPWs recorded each day on video or photos and posted to Uniannet. That said, there are still tens of thousands of Russian soldiers fighting.

GRU Spetsnaz “diversants” are being identified, captured or killed throughout Ukraine. The Ukrainian government prepared its public before the invasion by describing the future situation and providing apps and phone numbers to report suspicious behavior. This is having positive effects on Ukrainian morale and it is helping the SBU and other authorities capture and kill GRU Spetsnaz DRGs.

The BMD-3, BMP-2 and *Rosgvardia's* thinly armored vehicles offer little protection in mechanized warfare. Projected into Russia and Russian media, this will help undermine GF, VDV and *Rosgvardia* morale.¹⁰²

Kyiv Area

- At dawn on February 27, a Russian battalion or battalions arrived in Bucha, between Hostomel to the north of Kyiv and Irpin to the south of the city; Russian Ground Forces were dismounted around their BMP-2s during attacks and fighting

¹⁰¹ RWOW Troika Observations, February 27, 2022.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

in urban areas. Russian military hardware in Bucha displayed “Vs” painted on their sides.¹⁰³

- A large bomb or missile struck a target in Irpin before midday, similar in size and impact to the strike on Kharkiv the previous day.¹⁰⁴
- In Kyiv, the Office of the President claimed that convoy of Rosgvardia Chechens had been videotaped entering the country at Mozire. Around midnight this same convoy was ambushed near Hostomel by Ukrainian forces.¹⁰⁵
- At the Belarus-Ukraine border near Mozire, a long Rosgvardia convoy was waiting to cross into the country around midnight. Locals in Belarus tipped off the Ukrainian authorities by posting videos on social media and after the convoy was struck at Hostomel this Rosgvardia column waited for hours stuck at the border.¹⁰⁶
- North and east of the capital Russian Ground Forces (possibly 1st Guards Tank Army) attacked into Chernigov, with tank units reaching Korukivka, northeast of Chernigov.¹⁰⁷
- An oil refinery near Vasilkov south of Kyiv attacked either by the VKS or an Iskander-M missile continued to burn overnight.¹⁰⁸

Kharkiv Area

- Russian Ground Forces conducted repeated MRL-delivered scatterable munitions attacks, ground-burst artillery barrages and a another massive bomb or missile struck a target north of the city. Large numbers of GRU Spetsnaz from the 25th Spetsnaz Regiment attacked at dawn. Several GRU Spetsnaz were taken EPW.¹⁰⁹
- Throughout the morning, though initially outmanned, Ukrainian formations destroyed 25th Spetsnaz Regiment vehicles north of the city.¹¹⁰
- An NLAW was used by Ukrainian forces outside Kharkiv to score a catastrophic kill on a T-72BZM.¹¹¹

Toward Odessa

- Despite Russian Ground Forces attacks, Nikolayev still held the line. Russian Ground Forces from the 49th CAA/58th Army attacked the city during the night but these were repelled.¹¹²
- Russian forces fought their way into the city’s main thoroughfare. Videos posted on social media showed multiple BMP-2s burned out and destroyed. Some of these videos also identified two T-72BZMs burned out.¹¹³
- Ukrainian forces also reportedly exacted a heavy price on Russian armor using the Turkish Bayraktar UCAV on convoys at Chornobaivka, west of Kherson.¹¹⁴

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Clearly, based on the available reporting, the Russian invasion was not going well. Many western reports repeatedly the mantra that the invasion was no “going according to plan.” However, there was simply no discernible plan at all. The pattern, yet more oddly, which had emerged in the first three days of the war continued with Russian forces not fighting their doctrine, avoiding engaging enemy forces in combined-arms warfare, instead fighting as motorized rifle or tank units alone. This was further underscored from no less a credible source than Ramzan Kadyrov, Head of the Chechen Republic, with a posting on social media questioning the tactics being used by Russian forces: “In my understanding, the chosen tactics in Ukraine are too slow. It takes a long time and, in my opinion, is not effective.”¹¹⁵



Map Four: Russian Invasion of Ukraine: February 27, 2022¹¹⁶

February 28

Over the course of previous four days, although Russian Ground Forces continued to advance through Ukrainian territory and in the multiple vectors of its invasion, the overall picture was one of chaos, with Russian forces suffering high levels of KIA/WIAs and heavy equipment losses. To western analysts of the Russian Armed Forces how these early advances and fighting was reportedly conducted was inconsistent not only with the Russian way of war, but simply not commensurate with such a large scale operation. Whatever the General Staff’s operational planning and operational design had been in the pre-war phase, the IPW in Ukraine — once again — was not going well. The fifth day, like the more consistent introduction of the DRG activity on the second day of the war, appeared to signal a shift away from its apparent focus on instigating a *coup de main* and ultimate regime change in Kyiv to an emphasis

¹¹⁵ https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/1265, February 27, 2022.

¹¹⁶ Westera, ‘Russian Invasion of Ukraine,’ *Op.Cit.*

on seizing territory and destroying civilian infrastructure. The Troika team underscored this underlying shift in focus as follows:

A shift in Russian tactics to Russian Aleppo-style methods already started in Kharkiv. Despite losses, Ukrainian forces' morale seems higher across all areas of fighting. Combat experience appears to be hardening and encouraging Ukrainian soldiers.

Russian desertions on 27 February 2022 were highest among two units: 25th GRU Spetsnaz Regiment at Kharkiv and 33rd MRR/20th MRD fighting north from Melitopol north toward Zaporozhye. The 25th GRU Spetsnaz Regiment from Stavropol, southern Russia was not ready for urban combat. The 33rd MRR/20th MRD is a new regiment formed in 2021 at Kamyshin north of Volgograd as part of the new 20th MRD when 20th MRB became a new division. A familiar answer in videoed interrogations was that 33rd MRR soldiers were surprised to be shot at and unwelcome in Ukraine.

RF GF personal gear across their force is much improved since the initial fighting in Donbas in 2014 and 2015. Soldiers have better kevlar helmets, rain repellent jackets, polypro underclothing, winter watch caps and gloves. They do not wear ballistic goggles. Their body armor was certainly modeled after US models perfected in Iraq and Afghanistan including the same clip-on straps for ammo pouches and other equipment (knives, radio pouches, etc). That is noticeable on all the EPWs captured throughout Ukraine as photographed and videoed by Ukrainian forces. The Russian personnel equipment 2020 reform is what they call the Ratnik system (Warrior). It was apparently a very efficient program. Russian soldiers are far better equipped than Ukrainian forces.¹¹⁷

Kyiv Area

- Large parts of the civilian population in the capital continued to join the outflow of refugees from Ukraine. In the morning of day five, a Russian battalion was reportedly advancing on the capital from the territory of Belarus and through Borodyanka 40 km northwest of Kyiv.
- Ukrainian forces remained in control of Irpin northwest of Kyiv despite heavy fighting. Reportedly, Ukrainian forces defeated another Russian battalion providing further evidence that BMP-2s were not suited urban warfare.
- Chernigov was attacked again by Russian forces following overnight rocket attacks and targeting by Iskander-M. Rockets struck a downtown supermarket and apartment block.
- The SBU, local police and territorial defense forces continued to have successes against Chechen forces deployed in Ukraine.

Kharkiv Area

- Throughout the morning the Russian Ground Forces fired 122mm MRL-delivered air-burst munitions into residential areas of southeast Kharkiv. There were no videos on social media of GRU Spetsnaz or Ground Forces units fighting in the city.
- In the afternoon, residential area in the north of the city were hit repeatedly by the same munitions types.
- Many city residents were using metro stations for protection, and these were being deliberately targeted to terrorize the civilian population.
- Russian Ground Forces units were also targeting oil tanks and gasoline storage facilities in the Suny area and Atyrka and its vicinity.

¹¹⁷ RWOW Troika Observations, February 28, 2022.

Zaporozhye

- Locals including territorial defense fighters were defending barricades close to key bridge at the entrance to Enerhodar south of Zaporozhye and preventing a Russian Ground Forces from entering the town.
- An unidentified Russian CAA formation appeared east of and south of Zaporozhye. Additionally, an army artillery group was deploying southwest of Zaporozhye.

Toward Odessa

- Ukrainian forces generally scored marked successes against Russian hardware by exploiting the Turkish Bayraktar UCAV, this was specifically beneficial in stalling the Russian military advance toward Odessa.
- A fierce battle occurred at Novaya Kakhovka close to a key bridge east of Kherson. Russian Ground Forces units engaged enemy forces in the area with repeated volleys of BM-21 fires. However, Russian forces were unable to secure rear areas in their advances.

Toward Mariupol

- Russian forces occupied Berdyansk between Melitopol and Mariupol. Mariupol was effectively enclosed on both sides.



Map Five: Russian Invasion of Ukraine: February 28, 2022¹¹⁸

Assessment

¹¹⁸ Westera, 'Russian Invasion of Ukraine,' *Op.Cit.*

In general, the Russian concept of the initial period of war and the *special military operation* have little in common. Russia's underestimation of Ukrainian capabilities, for reasons previously discussed, caused Russian military planners to discount the importance of suppressing Ukrainian air defenses and command and control. Russia did not employ a strategic operation to destroy or degrade these capabilities, and then inserted troop formations, as the coalition did during the 1991 Gulf War. Instead, Russia started the campaign with air and missile strikes while large troop formations simultaneously invaded attempting immediate regime change. From the perspective of a Russian military theorist, the Russian conduct of the *special military operation* violated the core tenets of IPW, if that what the Russians were intending. More simply put, the "noncontact" warfare and "shock and awe" associated with IPW did not occur.

Although IPW was likely not employed as a concept in the *special military operation*, some aspects of the early days of the invasion may provide insight to Russian thinking regarding the IPW. This is because, despite substantial differences, the *special military operation* and the IPW concept are fundamentally similar in the sense that both shared a common goal of quickly achieving decisive results. Perhaps more importantly, the *special military operation* also employed some of the same means that we would expect to see with a Russian implementation of IPW, such as missile and aviation strikes and EW/cyber operations. Therefore, even though the IPW concept was likely not employed in the *special military operation*, analysis of the early days of the conflict can provide important clues about what the Russian IPW concept will look like when implemented. In addition, studying the similarities and differences of the way that IPW was envisioned to be conducted (for offensive purposes) with the first few days of the *special military operation* could be useful in explaining why Russia was unsuccessful securing an early victory.

Massive Missile and Aviation Strikes

The hallmark of IPW is a strategic operation that delivers massive missile and aviation strikes (*massirovanny raketno-aviatsionny udar*) to cripple enemy command and control and air defenses. This clearly did not happen during the first few days of the *special military operation*. The Russians certainly used many missiles the first few days of the invasion. Russia reportedly fired over 100 missiles in the first few hours of the conflict, and 320 missiles on one day early in the invasion, but their use was uncoordinated.¹¹⁹ Although Russia expended a large number of missiles and hit some important targets, there was no systematic destruction of Ukrainian command and control and air defense. Instead of employing an integrated fires approach that would have prioritized targets to achieve the invasion's objectives, the Russians appear to have simply allocated missiles to various commands, and let the commanders decide target priority based upon their particular missions. By early May, according to President Zelensky, the Russians had fired 2154 missiles, yet Ukrainian air defenses and command and control still remained intact:

Just think of this terrible figure: 2,154 Russian missiles hit our cities and communities in a little over two months. 2,770 appearances of enemy planes in our sky were recorded. The Russian bombing of Ukraine does not cease any day or night....In two

¹¹⁹ '320 missiles in a day: Russia targets short-range ballistic missiles at Ukraine; what is the result?' *Wion*, <https://www.wionews.com/photos/320-missiles-in-a-day-russia-targets-short-range-ballistic-missiles-at-ukraine-what-is-the-result-458123#russian-short-range-ballistic-missile-attack-on-ukraine-458094>, March 2, 2022.

days, on May 8 and 9, when Europeans honored the memory of the victims of World War II and celebrated Europe Day, the Russian army launched 25 missiles targeting Odesa and the Odesa region alone. All 25 missiles were aimed at civilian objects.¹²⁰

Perhaps more perplexing, were some of the targets that Russia was engaging. Multiple media sources have stated that the Russians have been targeting civilians.¹²¹ It is difficult to surmise if this truly is the Russian intent, or if Russians have received faulty intelligence about the nature of these targets, or if Russian precision weapons were just simply missing their intended targets. Whatever the truth of the matter, what can be said is that some Russian missiles were destroying targets with no military value. If Russia's military had employed the IPW concept during the *special military operation*,¹²² a more coordinated employment of these missiles may have resulted in tangible effects that would have created conditions more suitable for the ground invasion. Russia seems to have had plenty of missiles, but many were not well used. This point will likely be addressed when Russia studies its "lessons learned" from the invasion, and it should not be assumed that the Russians will make the same mistake again.

EW/Cyber Operations

Due to the technical and usually secretive nature of EW/cyber operations, it is difficult to assess the impact that these means had on the *special military operation*, but a few insights can be offered. In terms of electronic warfare (EW), Russia reportedly had tactical successes, but the Russia's use of EW did not produce the same results as occurred during Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine.¹²² As previously discussed, the planning assumptions of the *special military operation*, that discounted Ukrainian military capabilities and resolve, may have been a factor, but it is also possible that Ukrainian efforts to integrate "lessons learned" from the past years of fighting Russia in the Donbas and the fruits of Western provided training and technology were simply not considered by Russian military planners.

Russian electronic warfare (EW) was vicious and effective at the beginning of the Battle for Kyiv. The Ukrainian forces were often 'blinded' by it, it took down their eyes and ears, and often fell back to old fashioned runners when their communications went down. The two commanders with whom I spoke shook their heads when remembering it. They noted that Russian artillery, EW, and drones were superior in every way, to include in significant numerical superiority.¹²³

Russian performance regarding cyber operations is especially difficult to ascertain. Due to its secretive nature, the success, or failure, of all Russian cyber operations may never be known. What is known, is that at least a few Russian cyber operations were successful immediately before the invasion and during the first few days of the invasion.

¹²⁰ President Zelensky: Russian troops launch over 2,000 missile strikes on Ukraine, *Ukrinform.net*, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3480152-president-zelensky-russian-troops-launch-over-2000-missile-strikes-on-ukraine.html>, May 10, 2022.

¹²¹ Peter Beaumont and Dan Sabbagh, 'Russia escalating attacks on civilians, says top Ukrainian official,' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/15/russia-escalating-attacks-on-civilians-says-top-ukrainian-official>, *The Guardian*, July 15, 2022.

¹²² Thomas Withington, 'Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities Have Had Mixed Results Against Ukraine,' *The Drive*, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/this-is-whats-happened-so-far-in-ukraines-electronic-warfare-battle>, June 16, 2022.

¹²³ Dan Rice, 'The Untold Story of the Battle for Kyiv,' *Small Wars Journal*, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/untold-story-battle-kyiv#_ftnref8, July 27, 2022.

On April 27, 2022, Microsoft's Digital Security Unit issued a report that enumerated and analyzed all known Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine in the first months of the war. The report concluded that the Russian military intelligence service (commonly known as the GRU), foreign intelligence service (or SVR), and federal security service (or FSB) 'have conducted destructive attacks, espionage operations, or both, while Russian military forces attack the country by land, air, and sea.' The objective, the company added, was "to disrupt or degrade Ukrainian government and military functions and undermine the public's trust in those same institutions.'

...It noted that Russia unleashed the destructive WhisperGate wiper (that deletes hard drives and renders computers unbootable) on a limited number of Ukrainian "government and IT sector systems" when diplomatic talks between Russia, Ukraine, NATO, and EU nations failed on January 13, 2022. Russia followed with denial of service attacks on Ukrainian government websites...On the eve of war on February 23, 2022, Russia's GRU threat group, Iridium, unleashed another destructive wiper, FoxBlade, on hundreds of Ukrainian military and government networks simultaneously. Microsoft also observed connections between specific military actions and cyberattacks. For instance, cyberattacks were geographically concentrated around Kyiv and in Donbas, and targeted Ukraine's nuclear power company around the same time that Russia occupied Ukraine's largest nuclear power plant in Zaporizhia. During wartime, Microsoft concluded, cyberattacks are more frequent, more destructive, and coordinated with military action.¹²⁴

The most infamous Russian cyber operation of the invasion was undoubtedly Russia's AcidRain attack that targeted Viasat's KA-SAT network, which was likely conducted to degrade Ukrainian command and control by way of 'wiping' the computers and modems that control satellite uplink and downlink activities.¹²⁵ Although the attack caused significant disruptions in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe, this, and the Russia's other cyber attacks, did not produce effects that influenced the initial outcome of the invasion.

In general, despite some successful EW and cyber operations, the Russians were not able to translate these activities into operational or strategic success. Russian EW/cyber operations may have degraded Ukrainian air defense and command and control, but they certainly did not deliver a systematic shut-down of key Ukrainian defensive capabilities to facilitate the objectives of the invasion. It is difficult to determine if this situation was due to an overestimation of Russian EW/cyber capabilities, underestimation of Ukrainian capabilities, or the possibility that Russia had certain capabilities it did not wish to reveal. It is even possible, due to the nature of the *special military operation*, a large-scale coordinated use of EW/cyber operations to achieve certain strategic effects, as would be expected in IPW, was not envisioned. Whatever the reasons that Russia did not achieve decisive effects with their EW/cyber operations during the *special military operation* it should not be assumed that Russian EW/cyber operations will necessarily have similar results in the future.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Juan Andres Guerrero-Saade, 'AcidRain: A Modem Wiper Rains Down on Europe,' Sentinel One, <https://www.sentinelone.com/labs/acidrain-a-modem-wiper-rains-down-on-europe/>, March 31, 2022; 'KA-SAT Network cyber attack overview,' *Viasat.com*, <https://www.viasat.com/about/newsroom/blog/ka-sat-network-cyber-attack-overview/>, March 30, 2022.

Conclusion

This report posits that the IPW concept and its preparations are primarily discussed in conjunction with strategic operations and war, and so due to the nature of the *special military operation*, the IPW concept was likely in no way a part of the planning process. While this was politically driven, it is also because Russian military theory has long-standing definitions for military conflict and what exactly “war” means in the context of Russian military art. Despite Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine consisting of what the West refers to as “large-scale combat operations,” from the view of Russian military theory, a *special military operation* falls on the spectrum of military conflict below the level of war. This fact does not downplay or mitigate any Russian responsibility for the invasion or any actions related, but simply describes how Russian military theorists view this event on the spectrum of military conflict.

Although the differences between the Russian terms “war” and *special military operation* are inconsequential for most in the West, the choice of terms likely had major ramifications for the planning and conduct of the invasion. Such a decision was most likely taken at the highest political levels, which consequently severely restricted General Staff planning for the ensuing operations in Ukraine — especially in its critical and formative early days. The absence of strategic level operations conducted using air, land, sea and assets in the electromagnetic spectrum confirms that in this early stage of the invasion the conceptual approach was not rooted in the IPW. The underlying causes of the Russian military’s early failures merits more study — especially when credible Russian sources become publicly available and most likely post-war — but have generally been attributed by Western analysts and armchair generals to Russian military ineptness, insufficient intelligence/understanding of the operational environment (underestimating Ukrainian military capabilities), insufficient logistics, and just plain poor planning. As information about Russian preparations for the invasion comes to light in future, it is very likely that many of the invasion’s failures will be attributed to planning considerations and command and control issues stemming from the Russian political decision to designate the invasion as a *special military operation*. Thus, Russia’s Armed Forces were effectively inhibited by its political leadership from unleashing the full conventional combat power that would have been the case in the application of the IPW concept.

This means that Russia’s failure to rapidly achieve success during the initial invasion should not be put at the feet of the military planners for not correctly applying the tenets of the IPW to the Ukraine invasion. Instead, the fault lies with the top senior political-military decision makers who opted to pursue the *special military operation* as the means to achieve Russia’s political-military objectives. If Russia properly respected Ukrainian military capabilities and resolve avoiding underestimating enemy forces and willingness to fight, perhaps they would have treated Ukraine as a peer-level adversary warranting the application of IPW, and found success in the early days of the invasion, instead of embarrassment. Although Russia’s IPW concept was envisioned primarily for defensive purposes, such as defending against a US/NATO offensive similar to the 1991 Gulf War where massive air and missile strikes crippled the Iraqi military, Moscow likely would have had far greater success pursuing a Russian version of the IPW concept against Ukraine.

It is also possible that President Putin, by way of his treatise on the nature of Ukraine published July 2021, bears some responsibility for the invasion's problems. Putin's suppositions that Ukraine is "entirely the product of the Soviet era," and governed by Nazis that are oppressing the Russian-friendly masses may have negatively influenced the planning process.¹²⁶ Once Putin had published his treatise, it was likely very difficult for Russian military planners to propose any plans that dealt with contingencies that were contrary to Putin's political views, such as encountering an unwelcoming civilian population and a well-motivated military with a stingy defense. In addition, the errors in Putin's treatise may well have led to the initial misreading of the operational environment which proffered that a single decisive, *special military operation* capable of rapidly the goals to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine was even possible.

As of the drafting of this report in August 2022, it is obvious that the nature of the conflict and Moscow's plan for concluding it have changed — this will not be a "short, victorious war."¹²⁷ Moscow's failure to successfully conclude the *special military operation* as initially envisioned has caused Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine to now be considered a more standard "local war" as understood by Russian military theorists. The Kremlin's insistence on the continued use of the term has almost certainly been promoted to conceal its failure as originally conceived as a single combined arms operation that achieves a deceive result. Judging by how ill prepared the Russians were for an extended military conflict, the Russian military appears to have conducted no planning for such a contingency. This is somewhat surprising for a military culture that professes to conduct operational research based on historical study. Most military campaign plans involve a series of decisive operations to rapidly achieve victory, but the study of history reveals that this outcome is more often the exception than the rule — a lesson all too familiar to graduates of the General Staff Academy.

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¹²⁷ Vyacheslav von Plehve, Minister of the Interior (1902–1904), reportedly said: 'What this country needs is a short, victorious war to stem the tide of revolution,' in reference to the Russo-Japanese War, as the Japanese were seen to be an inferior opponent. Russia's loss of the war resulted in international humiliation, and was credited with being the cause of the 1905 Russian Revolution.

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