

# Situation in Ukraine as of March 25, 2022

by Jacques Baud,\* Brussels



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(Photo ma)

*You do not win a war with prejudices: you lose it. Unfortunately, the picture we have of the conflict in Ukraine tends to lead us in the wrong direction. In order to understand its latest developments and to have a clearer vision of the potential options for a political resolution, we*

*need a more objective analysis of the situation.*

## The operating situation

As of 25 March 2022, our assessment of the situation confirms the *observations and conclusions made mid-March*.<sup>1</sup>

The offensive launched on 24 February follows two lines of attack, according to Russian operational doctrine:

- A main attack towards the south of the country in the Donbass region and along the coast of the Sea of Azov. In accordance to the doctrine, the main objectives are along this line: the neutralization of the Ukrainian armed forces (“demilitarization” objective) and the neutralization of the ultra-nationalist paramilitary militias in the cities of Kharkov and Mariupol (“denazification” objective). This main attack is carried out by a coalition of forces: Russian forces from the Southern Military District through Kharkov and Crimea, and – in the center – militia forces from the Donetsk and Lugansk republics, as well as a support from the Chechen National Guard for combat in the urban area of Mariupol.

- A secondary attack towards Kiev, aimed at pinning down Ukrainian (and Western) forces to prevent them from reinforcing their main forces in the Donbass or even attacking Russian coalition forces in the back.

This offensive follows exactly the objectives stated by *Vladimir Putin* on February 24. However, by only listening to their own preconceptions, Western “experts” and politicians convinced themselves that Russia’s objective was to take over Ukraine and topple its government.

Applying a very Western logic, they saw Kiev as the “center of gravity” (“Schwerpunkt”) of Ukrainian forces. According to *Clausewitz*, the “center of gravity” is the element from which a belligerent derives its strength and ability to act, and is therefore the primary objective of an adversary’s strategy. This is why Westerners have systematically tried to take control of capitals in the wars they have waged.

Trained and advised by NATO experts, the Ukrainian General Staff has predictably applied the same logic, focusing on strengthening the defense of Kiev and its surroundings, leaving its troops helpless in the Donbass, along the axis of the main Russian effort.

If one had listened carefully to *Vladimir Putin*, one would have realized that the strategic objective of the Russian coalition is not to take over Ukraine, but to remove any threat to the Russian-speaking population of Donbass. According to this general objective, the “real” center of gravity that the Russian coalition is trying to target is the bulk of the Ukrainian armed forces massed in the

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(CIGHD) and the *Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA)*. He contributed to the introduction of the concept of intelligence in UN peace operations and headed the first integrated UN *Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC)* in Sudan (2005–06). He was head of the Peace Policy and Doctrine Division of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York (2009–11) and of the UN Expert Group on Security Sector Reform and the Rule of Law, worked in NATO and is the author of several books on intelligence, asymmetric warfare, terrorism and disinformation.

south-southeast of the country since the end of 2021, and not Kiev.

### Russian failure or success?

Convinced that the Russian offensive is aimed at Kiev, Western experts have quite logically concluded that a) the Russians are stalling and that b) their offensive is doomed to fail because they will not be able to hold the country in the long term. Generals queuing up on French TV studios appear to have forgotten what a second lieutenant should know: "Know your enemy"... And not what we would like him to be, but what he is! With such generals, we don't need an enemy anymore!

That being said, Western discourse on Russian offensive getting bogged down and having little success is also part of the propaganda war being waged by both sides.

For example, the sequence of *battle maps published by the French paper "Libération"*<sup>2</sup> since the end of February shows almost no difference from day one till March 18 (when the media stopped updating).

For instance, on March 23, on *France 5*<sup>3</sup> TV channel, journalist Elise Vincent assessed the territory taken by the Russian coalition was equivalent to Switzerland or the Netherlands. In reality it is larger than the size of Great Britain.

As another example, let's look at the difference between the situation map on March 25, 2022 published by the French newspaper *Ouest-France*:



... and the one published by the French Ministry of the Armed Forces:<sup>4</sup>



Furthermore, it should be noted that Ukrainian forces do not appear on any situation map presented in Western media. While the map of the French Ministry of Armed Forces offers a slightly more honest picture of the reality, it carefully omits mentioning the Ukrainian forces surrounded in the Kramatorsk cauldron.

In fact, the situation map as of March 25 should look more like this:



*Situation as of March 25, 2022. The red line represents the maximum advance of the Russian coalition forces, and the blue pocket indicates the location of the main Ukrainian army. In reality, this pocket is split into several smaller cauldrons, which the Russian army is trying to reduce.*

In fact, Ukrainian forces are never represented on the maps presented by our media, because this would show that they were not deployed on the Russian border in February 2022, but that they were regrouped in the south of the country in preparation for the offensive, the initial phase of which began on February 16. This confirms Russia has only reacted to a situation initiated by the West, through Ukraine, as we shall see. As of today, it is these forces that are encircled in the Kramatorsk cauldron and methodically fragmented and incrementally neutralized piece by piece by the Russian coalition.

The vagueness maintained in the West about the situation of Ukrainian forces has other effects. First of all, it maintains the illusion of a possible Ukrainian victory. Thus, instead of encouraging a negotiation process, the West strives to prolong the war.

This is why the European Union and some of its member countries have sent weapons and thus encourage the civilian population and volunteers of all kinds to go and fight, often without training and without any real command structure, with deadly consequences.

We know that in any conflict, each side tends to inform in in order to provide a positive image of its action. However, the picture we have of the situation and of the Ukrainian forces is based exclusively on data provided by Kiev. It hides the profound deficiencies of the Ukrainian leadership, even though it is trained and advised by NATO soldiers.

Thus, military logic would have suggested to withdraw the forces caught in the Kramatorsk cauldron to a line by the Dnieper, for example, in order to regroup and carry out a counteroffensive; but they were forbidden to withdraw by President Zelensky. Already in 2014 and 2015, a close examination of the operations showed that the Ukrainians were consistently applying “Western-style” schemes, totally unsuited to the circumstances, in confronting a more imaginative, more flexible opponent with lighter command structures. This is the same phenomenon today.

Ultimately, the partisan view of the battlefield presented by our media has made us unable to help the Ukrainian leadership make the right decisions. It has led us to believe that the obvious strategic objective was Kiev, that “demilitarization” was aimed at Ukraine’s membership in NATO, and that “denazification” was aimed at overthrowing Zelensky.

This tale was fueled by Vladimir Putin’s call for disobedience addressed to the Ukrainian military, which was interpreted (with much imagination and prejudice) as a call to overthrow the government. In fact, this call was aimed at the Ukrainian forces deployed in the Donbass to surrender without fighting. The Western interpretation caused the Ukrainian government to misjudge Russian objectives and misuse its potential to win.

You don’t win a war with prejudices: you lose it, and that is what we see happening. Thus, the

Russian coalition was never “in disarray” or “stopped” by some heroic resistance: it simply did not attack where we expected it! ...

We did not listen to what Vladimir Putin had clearly told us. This is why we have become – volens nolens – the main architects of the Ukrainian defeat that is taking shape. Paradoxically, it is probably because of our self-proclaimed “experts” and occasional strategists of our television studios that Ukraine is in this situation today!

### **The conduct of combat**

As for the course of the operations, the analyses presented in our media most often come from politicians or so-called military experts, who relay the Ukrainian propaganda.

Let us be clear: any war is a drama. The problem here is that our white-collar strategists are clearly trying to *overdramatize the situation in order to exclude any negotiated solution*.<sup>5</sup>

This development is prompting some Western militaries to speak out and offer a more nuanced assessment. Thus, *in Newsweek*,<sup>6</sup> an analyst of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the American equivalent of the French *Direction du Renseignement Militaire* (DRM), observes that “in 24 days of conflict, Russia carried out some 1,400 strikes and fired nearly 1,000 missiles (by way of comparison, the United States carried out more strikes and fired more missiles on the first day of the Iraq war in 2003)”.

While the West “prepares” the battlefield by intensive and prolonged strikes before sending their troops on the ground, the Russians prefer a less destructive, but more troop-intensive approach. On France 5, *journalist Mélanie Tarvant*<sup>7</sup> presents the death of generals on the battlefield as proof of the destabilization of the Russian army.

But this is a profound misunderstanding of the traditions and operating patterns of the Russian army. While in the West, commanders tend to lead from the back, their Russian counterparts tend to lead from the front: in the West they say “Forward!”, in Russia they say “Follow me!”.

This explains the high losses in the upper echelons of command, already observed in Afghanistan, but also a much more rigorous selection of commanding officers than in the West.

Furthermore, the *DIA analyst*<sup>8</sup> notes that “the vast majority of airstrikes are carried out over

the battlefield, with Russian aircraft providing 'close air support' to ground forces. The rest – less than 20 percent, according to U.S. experts – target military airfields, barracks and support depots."

Therefore, the phrase of "indiscriminate bombing [that] devastates a city and kills everyone" echoed by the Western media seems to contradict the US intelligence expert who says "if we just convince ourselves that Russia is bombing indiscriminately, or that they are not able to inflict more damage because their personnel are not up to the task or because they are technically inept, then we are not seeing the conflict for what it is".

In fact, Russian operations differ fundamentally from the Western concept. The Western obsession with zero casualties among their own forces leads them to carry out operations mainly by air with very lethal strikes. Ground troops only intervene when everything has been destroyed.

This is why, in *Afghanistan*<sup>9</sup> or *in the Sahel*,<sup>10</sup> *Westerners kill more civilians*<sup>11</sup> than terrorists do. This is why Western countries engaged in Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa no longer publish the number of civilian casualties caused by their strikes. In fact, Europeans engaged in regions that only marginally affect their national security, such as the Estonians in the Sahel, go there for "live training".

In Ukraine, the situation is quite different. It is enough to look at a linguistic map of Ukraine to see that the Russian coalition operates almost exclusively in the Russian-speaking area, thus in the midst of populations that are generally favourable to it.

This also explains the statements of a *US Air Force officer*:<sup>12</sup> "I know media keeps saying Putin is targeting civilians, but there is no evidence Russia is doing it intentionally."

In contrast, it is for the same reason – but in a different way – that Ukraine has deployed its ultra-nationalist paramilitary fighters in large cities such as *Marioupol*<sup>13</sup> or *Kharkov*:<sup>14</sup> without emotional or cultural ties to the local population, these militias can fight regardless of the price paid by civilians.

These atrocities, which are *currently being unveiled*,<sup>15</sup> are still hidden by the French-speaking media, for fear of losing support for Ukraine, as noted by *medias close to the Republicans*<sup>16</sup> in the United States.

After the decapitation strikes launched the very first minutes of the offensive, the Russian operational strategy has been to bypass urban centres and surround the Ukrainian army pinned down by the armies of the Donbass republics.

It is important to remember that "decapitation" does not aim at destroying the military or government leadership (as our so-called "experts" tend to understand it), but to cut off lines of command, thus preventing the coordinated manoeuvring of forces. On the opposite, the aim is to preserve the leadership structures in order to be able to negotiate a way out of the crisis.

On March 25, 2022, after having completed the encirclement of the cauldron of Kramatorsk, closed any possibility of retreat to the Ukrainians forces and taken most of the cities of Kharkov and Mariupol, Russia has practically fulfilled its objectives: it only remains to concentrate its efforts on reducing the pockets of resistance.

So, contrary to what the Western press has claimed, this is not a redirection or resizing of its offensive, but the methodical implementation of the objectives stated on February 24.

### **The role of volunteers**

A particularly disturbing aspect of this conflict is the attitude of *European governments*<sup>17</sup> that *allow or encourage*<sup>18</sup> their citizens to volunteer for fighting in Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky's call to join the newly created *International Legion for the Territorial Defence of Ukraine*,<sup>19</sup> has been welcomed with enthusiasm by all European countries.

Encouraged by the media that portray a disbanded Russian army, many of these young people leave imagining that they are going – literally – on a hunting party. However, once there the disillusionment is great.

The evidence shows that these "amateurs" often end up as *"cannon fodder"*<sup>20</sup> *without having any real impact on the outcome*<sup>21</sup> of the conflict. The experience of recent conflicts shows that the contribution of foreign fighters brings nothing to a conflict except *to increase its duration and lethality*.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, the arrival of several *hundred Islamist fighters*<sup>23</sup> from the Idlib region, a region under the control and protection of the Western coalition in Syria (and in which two leaders of the Islamic State were killed by the US special forces) should arouse our concern. Indeed, the weapons

that we are very liberally supplied to Ukraine are already partly in the hands of criminal individuals and organizations, and start already to pose a security problem for the Kiev authorities themselves. Not to mention the fact that the weapons, which are touted as effective against Russian aircraft, could eventually threaten our military and civilian aircraft ...

The volunteer proudly presented by the Belgian TV station RTBF on the evening news of March 8, 2022, was an admirer of the "Corps Franc Wallonie" a Belgian volunteers corps serving under the Third Reich during WWII, and illustrates the type of audience that join Ukraine forces. In the end, one has to ask who gained the most from it, Belgium or Ukraine ...

Indiscriminate distribution of arms could well turn – volens nolens – the EU into a supporter of *extremism*,<sup>24</sup> or even international terrorism. As a result, we are adding misery to misery, in order to satisfy the *European elites*<sup>25</sup> more than *Ukraine itself*.<sup>26</sup>

### Concluding remarks

*Western intelligence ignored by policy makers*

*Military documents found at Ukrainian headquarters*<sup>27</sup> in the south of the country confirm that Ukraine was preparing an attack against the Donbass breakaway republics and that shelling observed by the OSCE Mission from February 16 onwards, signalled an imminent offensive in days or weeks.

This requires some thinking in Western countries: either their intelligence services did not see what was happening and they are not fulfilling their task, or the political decision-makers deliberately chose not to listen to them.

We know that Russian intelligence services have far superior analytical capabilities to their Western counterparts. We also know that US and German intelligence services had a very good understanding of the situation since the end of 2021 and knew that Ukraine was preparing an offensive in the Donbass.

This allows us to assess that the US and European political leaders deliberately pushed Ukraine into a conflict that they knew was lost in advance, for the sole purpose of striking a political blow to Russia.

The reason Zelensky did not deploy his forces to the Russian border and repeatedly claimed that his large neighbour would not attack him was presumably because he thought he could

rely on Western deterrence. This is *what he told CNN on March 20*:<sup>28</sup> he was clearly told that Ukraine would "not going to be a NATO member, but publicly, the doors will remain open"!

The Ukraine was thus instrumentalized to target Russia. The initial objective was the closure of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, *announced on February 8 by Joe Biden*<sup>29</sup> during Olaf Scholz's visit, which eventually turned into a downpour of sanctions.

*A broken diplomacy*

Clearly, since the end of 2021, no effort has been made by the West to reactivate the Minsk Agreements, as evidenced by the records of visits and telephone conversations, including *between Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin*.<sup>30</sup>

In that respect, France, as a guarantor of the Minsk Agreements and as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has not respected its commitments, thus leading to the current situation experienced by Ukraine. One even has the feeling that the West has sought to add fuel to the fire since 2014.

Thus, Vladimir Putin's activation of nuclear forces on 27 February was presented by our media and politicians as an irrational act or blackmail. What we fail to mention is that this was done after Jean-Yves Le Drian's threatened, three days earlier, that *NATO could use nuclear weapons*.<sup>31</sup> It is very likely that Putin did not take this "threat" seriously, but simply wanted to push Western countries – and France in particular – to abandon excessive language.

*Europeans' vulnerability to manipulation is increasing*

Today, the perception propagated by our media is that the Russian offensive has broken down, that *Vladimir Putin is mad, irrational*<sup>32</sup> and therefore ready to do anything to break the deadlock in which he would be.

In this totally emotional context, the question asked by Republican Senator *Marco Rubio at Victoria Nuland's Congressional hearing*,<sup>33</sup> "If there is an incident or an attack in Ukraine with biological or chemical weapons, is there any doubt in your mind that there is a 100% chance that the Russians be responsible?" Of course, she answers she has no doubt.

Yet, there is absolutely no indication that the Russians may want to use such weapons. Moreover, the Russians *finished destroying their*

chemical weapons stockpiles in 2017,<sup>34</sup> while the Americans have not yet destroyed them ...<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps this means nothing. But in the current atmosphere, all the conditions are met for an incident to happen, which could push the West to become more involved, in one form or another, in the Ukrainian conflict (a “false flag” incident).

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

<sup>1</sup> <https://cf2r.org/documentation/la-situation-militaire-en-ukraine/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.liberation.fr/international/europe/guerre-en-ukraine-la-carte-des-bombardements-russes-20220224\\_BULDIVKBVGS5CBDLTMWWSVPO4/](https://www.liberation.fr/international/europe/guerre-en-ukraine-la-carte-des-bombardements-russes-20220224_BULDIVKBVGS5CBDLTMWWSVPO4/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://youtu.be/ThzBH5cbH0A?t=1372>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/ukraine-point-situation>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/manifestations-en-ukraine/guerre-en-ukraine-vladimir-poutine-ne-veut-rien-negocier-il-veut-extermine-l-ukraine-affirme-un-specialiste-de-l-europe\\_5006026.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/manifestations-en-ukraine/guerre-en-ukraine-vladimir-poutine-ne-veut-rien-negocier-il-veut-extermine-l-ukraine-affirme-un-specialiste-de-l-europe_5006026.html)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/putins-bombers-could-devastate-ukraine-hes-holding-back-heres-why-1690494>

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/KV39YTyQpQ?t=669>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/putins-bombers-could-devastate-ukraine-hes-holding-back-heres-why-1690494>

<sup>9</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/30/asia/afghanistan-nato-taliban-intl-scli/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.franceinter.fr/monde/les-armees-regulieres-seraient-tout-aussi-meurtrieres-voire-plus-que-les-terroristes-au-sahel>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rtf.be/article/sahel-les-populations-craignent-plus-les-bavures-des-forces-de-protection-que-les-attaques-djihadistes-10740544>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/putins-bombers-could-devastate-ukraine-hes-holding-back-heres-why-1690494>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/the-azov-battalion-extremists-defending-mariupol/a-61151151>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REKHrhfQQOc>

<sup>15</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-27-22/h\\_6e158d3fc5b-c5efe7fc3f10b69b7aeec](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-27-22/h_6e158d3fc5b-c5efe7fc3f10b69b7aeec)

<sup>16</sup> [https://theconservativetreehouse.com/blog/2022/03/27/zelenskyy-worried-about-western-financial-support-after-video-surfaces-showing-ukraine-military-torturing-russian-pows/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=zelenskyy-worried-about-western-financial-support-after-video-surfaces-showing-ukraine-military-torturing-russian-pows](https://theconservativetreehouse.com/blog/2022/03/27/zelenskyy-worried-about-western-financial-support-after-video-surfaces-showing-ukraine-military-torturing-russian-pows/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=zelenskyy-worried-about-western-financial-support-after-video-surfaces-showing-ukraine-military-torturing-russian-pows)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60544838>

<sup>18</sup> <https://euobserver.com/democracy/154473>

<sup>19</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/making-the-most-of-foreign-volunteers-in-ukraine/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/03/17/wanted-us-cannon-fodder-say-british-medical-volunteers-tricked/>

## Two very current publications by Jacques Baud



“Poutine, maître du jeu?”, Editions Max Milo, March 2022. ISBN 978-2-315-01026-4

“Gouverner par les Fake News”, Editions Max Milo, 2020. ISBN 978-2-315-00956-5

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-701412>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/03/10/foreign-fighters-are-heading-to-ukraine-thats-a-moment-for-worry-00016084>

<sup>23</sup> <https://thecradle.co/Article/news/7669>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-other-extremists-respond-to-russian-invasion-of-ukraine>

<sup>25</sup> <https://unherd.com/2022/03/how-western-elites-exploit-ukraine/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-11/are-foreign-fighters-a-blessing-or-a-curse-for-ukraine-in-russia-s-invasion>

<sup>27</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/29677?single>

<sup>28</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-20-22/h\\_7c08d64201fd-d9d3a141e63e606a62e4](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-20-22/h_7c08d64201fd-d9d3a141e63e606a62e4)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/video/20220208-biden-vows-to-end-nord-stream-2-pipeline-if-russia-invades-ukraine>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/02/20/entretien-telephonique-avec-vladimir-poutine-president-de-la-federation-de-russie-1>

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.bfmtv.com/international/ukraine-le-drian-rappelle-a-poutine-que-l-alliance-atlantique-est-aussi-une-alliance-nucleaire\\_AD-202202240685.html](https://www.bfmtv.com/international/ukraine-le-drian-rappelle-a-poutine-que-l-alliance-atlantique-est-aussi-une-alliance-nucleaire_AD-202202240685.html)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.tf1.fr/tmc/quotidien-avec-yann-barthes/videos/invite-inarretable-irrationnel-michel-eltchaninoff-nous-explique-qui-est-vraiment-vladimir-poutine-79621347.html>  
<http://www.slate.fr/story/225399/blog-sagalovitsch-poutine-le-fou>

<sup>33</sup> <https://youtu.be/SWAgSBfU3xk?t=255>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-11/news/russia-destroys-last-chemical-weapons>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/events/2021-09/us-chemical-weapons-stockpile-elimination-progress-update>