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Destination Donbas?: Challenger 2 and Leopard 2 tanks could soon be among Ukraine's growing arsenal or armour

Picture: UK MOD © Crown copyright



EDITORIAL LEADER

This late-January issue of the CHACR digest provides us with a timely reminder that the world, as we enter 2023, remains a very volatile and insecure place. If you doubt this, then it's worth switching your attention from the headlines and glancing at the bottom of this report, just to get a feel for the range of instability, conflict and potential conflict that continues to bubble away across the globe. Europe may, for example, have taken their eyes off Libya, or Taiwan, or, closer to home, Syria, or, closer still, Serbia and Kosovo, but for the people of all of those places the conflict in Ukraine is distant and secondary. Meanwhile, Europe squabbles over end-user certificates and permissions for Leopard 2 tanks as the Ukrainian President and Army become increasingly urgent in their calls for tide-turning Land capabilities. As the snow melts in Ukraine, and the subsequent mud solidifies, the late spring is likely to offer both sides the opportunity for the much-heralded counter and counter-counter offensives. For security and Defence professionals 2023 is likely to offer, as the Chinese curse would have it, 'interesting times'.

– Maj Gen (Retd) Dr A R D Sharpe CBE, Director CHACR

WILL THE US REMAIN COMMITTED TO UKRAINE?

As the Biden administration has signed off yet another aid package for Ukraine, this time including Bradley Fighting Vehicles, there have been increasingly worried questions among some in Europe about how long the US will continue paying this much attention to the war in Europe, particularly as the balance of power in the Congress has shifted. Raphael Cohen and Gian Gentile, [writing for RAND](#), argue that there is less reason for concern than sometimes suggested. They note that the war in Ukraine is fundamentally different for Americans than recent wars in Afghanistan, for example, and that any suggestion of Ukraine fatigue in the US should ultimately be regarded as little more than a myth. Separately, Cohen has penned an [article](#) (published by *War on the Rocks* and RAND) that describes the US' emerging 'two war construct', and outlines what Washington needs to do to be able to remain committed to both the current war in Europe, and a potential future conflagration with China.

UNMASKING RUSSIAN ESPIONAGE IN THE EU

It is well known that Russia has worked hard over the past decade to infiltrate NATO members. So great was the scale of human intelligence work that the number of Russian state officials expelled from EU member nations has grown to 490 since February 2022. While the EU in particular has worked hard to expose Russian espionage activities, the disjointed policies of its various member states have led to an inconsistent approach, which has allowed Russian spy agencies to capitalise. In [this article](#), the Polish security think tank PRISM advocates for a more joined-up approach, in which states of the EU share information through the European External Action Service, which would then consolidate all relevant information resulting from incidences of Russian espionage inside the EU's respective member countries. This would enhance resilience among Europe's nations and build a more effective response mechanism to counter Russian covert activity.



WIDER READING

It seems that, in every decade, new information emerges about the Cold War, papers are finally declassified, or new testimony comes to light, affording historians the chance to re-evaluate the events of the late 20th century. In his new book *Abyss*, prolific author and journalist Max Hastings takes on the challenge of the Cuban Missile Crisis. With the events of the Ukraine crisis firmly in mind, Hastings has written an authoritative tome which not only adds to the already vast literature on the Crisis, but cautions against the rush toward a new Cold War with Russia. The Crisis represents the moment where mankind came closest to total annihilation, and this book is a sobering reminder of the perils of great power confrontation.

NEW WARGAME: WHAT TO EXPECT IF CHINA INVADES TAIWAN

The possibility that China could launch an invasion of Taiwan is occupying politicians and military strategists around the world. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington has recently developed a wargame for such a scenario – in this case a Chinese amphibious invasion of Taiwan. After 24 run-throughs, results indicated that a coalition of US, Taiwanese and Japanese forces would be likely to be able to defeat such an invasion attempt, but at a very high cost in lives and equipment. The game also pointed to the likelihood of devastating effects on the global economy and US standing in the world, as well as China's internal stability. [CSIS has summarised all the results](#) (and explained the wargame in more detail) in a very readable report.

ISR FOR NORTHERN EUROPE, THE ARCTIC AND THE BALTIC

Russia's war against Ukraine has provided new impetus for new thinking across Europe – including the UK – about Northern European security, including the security of the Arctic and Baltic regions. A new [research paper](#) published by IISS highlights that there is a particular need for European governments to invest in more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. The report's authors argue that while NATO, as a whole, has substantial ISR capabilities, these are mostly of US origin, and that European nations, particularly those in the North of the continent, need to do more to be able to contribute independently.

2023 BEYOND RUSSIA AND CHINA

In 2023, as in 2022, governments in the UK and across Europe and NATO will likely have two top priorities: continuing to counter Russia and help Ukraine survive and/or win the war, and further advancing thinking about how to deal with China and how to engage more actively and strategically in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, they can also not afford to lose sight of events elsewhere. As every year, the International Crisis Group has published its list of [10 Conflicts to Watch in 2023](#), which starts with Ukraine and ends with Taiwan, but also includes the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and internal conflicts Iran, Ethiopia, and Haiti, amongst others. Meanwhile, [Alex Vines at Chatham House](#) focuses on Africa and explains how the ongoing war in Ukraine is likely to contribute to continuing political and economic volatility across the continent. For RUSI, Tobias Borck writes about key areas to keep an eye on in the [Middle East](#), including the evolving energy landscape, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and ongoing conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen. Benjamin Gedan, Beatriz Garcia Nice, and Francisco Urdinez at the Wilson Centre highlight the rise of authoritarianism, an increase in displaced people, and competing economic models (with China as a key stakeholder) as the main [trends to watch in Latin America](#).

ISRAEL'S NEW GOVERNMENT STARTS WITH A BANG

In the final days of 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu was once again sworn in as Israel's Prime Minister after spending around 18 months in opposition. This time around, his rise to power has been enabled by an unprecedentedly right-wing coalition. Just days later, Netanyahu's new Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, made a highly controversial visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, raising fears that a major new escalation in the decades-old conflict between Israel and the Palestinians could be looming. The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv has recently run a wargame trying to anticipate how another similar event could trigger widespread conflict, and what this would mean for the Israeli Defence Forces. The final report is available [here](#). Meanwhile, also for INSS, Udi Dekel and Noa Shusterman have produced a very [interesting report](#) examining the strategic implications of the eventual departure of Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, who has been in power since 2005.

JAPANESE DEFENCE POLICY CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

Towards the end of last year, Japan announced a dramatic change in its national defence and security policy, releasing three key strategy documents (a National Security Strategy, a National Defence Strategy, and a Defence Build-up Programme) that outline a departure from the country's post-World War Two approach. Yuka Koshino provides a useful [overview and analysis](#) of these changes in an article published by IISS. Meanwhile, Christopher Johnstone, writing in [Foreign Affairs](#), makes the argument that the best way for the US to support Japan in its pursuit of becoming a more robust security actor, particularly in its immediate neighbourhood that is otherwise so dominated by China, is to pull Japan closer and strengthen the bilateral relationship across all spheres. At the time of writing, extensive analyses of the [UK's new defence agreement with Japan](#), signed by Prime Ministers Sunak and Kishida on 11 January, had not yet been published.



NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the war in Ukraine and its multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

In early January, CIA Director William Burns made a rare [visit to Libya](#); his focus was reportedly on terrorism and the presence of the Russian Wagner Group in the country.

[In Peru](#), President Petro Castillo is increasingly coming under popular pressure to step down as violence increases.

Brazil's [President Lula](#) has pledged to purge members of the security forces loyal to his predecessor Bolsonaro after a near-coup in early January.

Members of the international community are urging the [Taliban](#) to reverse the banning of women in many public places and in participating in aid organisations' work; large amounts of aid for Afghanistan are being withheld in the meantime.

[Sri Lanka](#) has announced a plan to cut its army by one third in an effort to reduce government spending; the country is in a devastating economic crisis.

[Covid-19 is rampant in China](#) after almost all restrictions were lifted following popular protests.

In talks with Turkey over Northern Syria, Syrian [President Assad](#) has called for an end to the Turkish 'occupation' of Idlib, the remaining opposition stronghold.

Tensions between [Kosovo](#) and [Serbia](#) appear close to boiling point; a return to violent conflict is increasingly possible.

In Pakistan, former Intelligence Chief [Asim Munir](#) has been appointed to lead the country's army; Pakistan is teetering on the edge of conflict.

[Protests in Iran](#) have abated somewhat, but the regime is still under pressure.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT PEACE IN ETHIOPIA

Last November, the African Union succeeded in facilitating a ceasefire agreement between Ethiopia's central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, offering new hope that the war that erupted in the country in November 2020 could finally come to an end. In an [interview with the Institute Montaigne](#), International Crisis Group analyst William Davison offers valuable insights about how November's ceasefire agreement became possible, and how the momentum towards peace can be sustained. But he also urges caution, highlighting the enormous humanitarian challenges Ethiopia – and the surrounding region – is facing.

MAINTAINING DETERRENCE WITH NORTH KOREA

The problem of North Korea and its nuclear capability may not be front page news these days, but the nuclear policy of Pyongyang still presents policy makers with an incredibly difficult challenge. For North Korea, the war in Ukraine has validated its perception that nuclear weapons are critical to its security. The regime appears to have taken a leaf out of Putin's playbook, announcing rationales for the possible pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons while also beefing up its battlefield nuke capability and making breakthroughs in ballistic missile technology. In this [interactive long read](#), CSIS scholars assess the threat posed by North Korea in the current global environment, and suggest a more robust Pacific posture in which the US expands trilateral operations, and openly signals a more aggressive nuclear posture, while aligning more closely with South Korea. The authors contend this may serve to reassure a nervous Seoul that appears unable to prevent North Korea from rapidly upgrading its offensive abilities.



OUT NOW...

● *"The internet is an effective incubator of radicalisation and violent extremism, producing echo chambers wherein virtual social networks serve as a shield for radicalised individuals, denying them an opportunity to encounter contrary descriptions of reality."* – **Colin P. Clarke, Director of Research at The Soufan Group, explores the evolution of extremism in a digital age. Read his In-Depth Briefing and CHACR's library of commentaries and articles at [chacr.org.uk](#)**

IN-DEPTH BRIEFING // #43 // JANUARY 23

TECH-SAVVY TERRORISM: THE EVOLUTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN A DIGITAL AGE

AUTHOR: Dr. Colin P. Clarke, Director of Research, The Soufan Group

CHACR: The Centre for Homeland Resilience Studies, University of Exeter

EVOLUTION OVER TIME: This briefing examines the evolution of violent extremism in a digital age, exploring how technology has become a key enabler of radicalisation and recruitment.

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IN-DEPTH BRIEFING // #42 // DECEMBER 22

PRECISION PLANNING: IRAN'S AERIAL ADVANCES

AUTHOR: Dr. Colin P. Clarke, Director of Research, The Soufan Group

CHACR: The Centre for Homeland Resilience Studies, University of Exeter

PRECISION PLANNING: This briefing examines Iran's recent advances in precision-guided munitions and aerial operations, highlighting the implications for regional and global security.

1 | IN-DEPTH BRIEFING - CHACR

IN-DEPTH BRIEFING // #41 // DECEMBER 22

ESCALATION RISKS IN THE AEGEAN SEA

AUTHOR: Dr. Colin P. Clarke, Director of Research, The Soufan Group

CHACR: The Centre for Homeland Resilience Studies, University of Exeter

ESCALATION RISKS: This briefing examines the escalating tensions in the Aegean Sea region, particularly between Greece and Turkey, and the potential for a wider conflict.

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