



Kharkov Battles: Nestryha & Crimea

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1. Crimea, the source of contention in eastern Europe for more than 300 years, is the ‘pearl’ in the Crown of Ukraine, the most precious jewelry of the Black Sea region. Crimea is a world historic territory, whose history reflects a protracted struggle for dominance in the region of and on the Black Sea, dating to 1783 with Catherine the Great’s acquisition of the Crimean Khanate in 1783, at the center of the Russo-Turkish war in 1788 during the so-called Штурм Очакова, in the Crimean war in 1853, in the Bolshevik storm called Перекопско-Чонгарская операция in November 1920, during WWII in 1941 with the Nazi *Wehrmacht*’s Operation Barbarossa, the Soviets in 1944, and Russia’s reaction to Julia Nuland’s successful *coup d’état* in Maidan in 2014. “More than a sun-splashed resort,” Crimea, “which holds a key place in Russia’s war effort,” is the decisive territory for the Ukraine war where the centuries of struggle for dominance in the region of and on the Black Sea continues.[] - [“More than a sun-splashed resort, Crimea holds a key place in Russia’s war effort,” *New York Times*, August 16th, 2022]

Nestryha

2. At the beginning of the battle of Vovchansk, the struggle to capture the Nestryha island to appeared to be over. The Russian media, for instance, disputed claims Ukraine’s commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrsky, made in regards to the island, as the island changed hands multiple times.
3. On May 1st, 2024 Syrsky, declared the territory under Ukrainian control as early as May 1st. The Russian press vehemently denied the validity of Syrsky’s declaration.[] - [“Морпех заявил, что главноком ВСУ Сырский наврал о взятии острова Нестрига,” Газета.ру, 05.01.2024] The Russian news agency, Известия, published an article, stating the following: “Заявление главнокомандующего Вооруженными силами Украины (ВСУ) Александра Сырского о «захвате» острова Нестрого на Днестре не соответствует действительности.” [] - [“Украинские СМИ уличили Сырского во лжи о «захвате» ВСУ острова на Днестре, *Известия*, 04.30.2024]

4. In the weeks leading up to the Kharkiv offensive, Ukrainian armed forces launched an attack on Nestryha, which is located in the south western part of Kherson on the northern border with Crimea. Three days before the beginning of the Kharkiv offensive, on May 6th, 2024, for instance, the *Kyiv Independent* reported “Russia is trying to regain control of Nestryha island.” It stated: “Russian forces have launched repeated assaults in an attempt to retake the recently liberated Nestryha island in the Kherson Oblast, a military official said.” [] - [“Russia military trying to regain control of Nestryha island,” *Kyiv Independent*, May 6th, 2024]
5. Russia immediately launched counteroffensive operations to reoccupy the island. Within a short period of time, the Russians reoccupied the island. A geo-confirmed video with a Russian soldier raising a Russian flag absolved Ukrainian claims of control. By May 11th, 2024, less than ten days after initial reports on Syrsky’s declaration, Russian soldiers raised a flag in the island’s center, settling the dispute over the island.
6. However, on June 2nd, 2024 a “[spokesperson] for the Southern Defense Forces, Dmytro Pletenchuk, said that Russian forces are trying to storm the island of Nestryha, which was recently liberated by Ukrainian forces. Fierce battles are ongoing.” [] - [“Nestryha,” Southern Defense Forces, May 30th, 2024]
7. A video began to circulate on the Internet purportedly showing operators of Ukrainian drones, striking a group of Russians docking on the south-eastern part of the island. In a most recent video, Russian armed forces strike a compound in the south-eastern part of the island recently occupied by Ukrainian armed forces.
8. It appears that intense battles continue to erupt between Ukrainian and Russian forces over the island of Nestryha now. These battles have a relatively short history in comparison to most of the territories in the Ukraine war but Nestryha is unique.
9. It is by way of analogy that the swampy island gains its

- significance. The battle over Nestryha is significant in so much as the swampy island is a microcosm for Crimea. If the Russians are unable to invade, defend, or hold the island, while the Ukrainians are able to invade, defend, or hold the island, then Ukraine's high command is in a position to argue both to inferior commanders, as well as to the head of NATO's own command that it is within Ukraine's ability to stage, execute, or accomplish a major military operation to lay siege to Crimea, the world historic territory.
10. The shift from an expansion of last year's Ukrainian 'Spring' counteroffensive on Tokmak to a major military operation on Crimea—the most important city of which is Sevastopol—is a shift away from a negotiated settlement to a 'theory of victory' for Ukraine. Should the Ukraine be in a position to stage, execute or accomplish a major military operation on Crimea, the Ukraine would undoubtedly secure victory in the war Russia's full scale invasion initiated in February 24, 2022.
 11. On August 3rd, 2023, the United Kingdom's Defence Intelligence published an "Intelligence Update," in which the agency attributed three factors "to the generally slow progress of combat" during last year's Ukrainian 'Spring' counteroffensive. These three factors were: 1) "Undergrowth regrowing across the battlefields of southern Ukraine is." 2) "The predominately arable land in the combat zone has now been left fallow for 18 months, with the return of weeds and shrubs accelerating under the warm, damp summer conditions. The extra cover helps camouflage Russian defensive positions and makes defensive mine fields harder to clear." 3) "Although undergrowth can also provide cover for small stealthy infantry assaults, the net effect has been to make it harder for either side to make advances."
 12. The primary reason for Ukraine's failure during last year's Ukrainian 'Spring' counteroffensive, however, is unrelated to any of these factors. Ukraine's failure during last year's Ukrainian 'Spring' counteroffensive is related to Ukraine's inability to establish

localized air superiority for an advance. During the advances in the Tokmak direction, Ukraine's air force failed to provide closed air support. In the absence of closed air support, military analysts predicted that Ukraine would not be able to overcome the complex layer of defenses Russia's famous general, Sergey Surovikin, built during the 'мясорубка' at the battle of Bakhmut-Artemovsk.

13. It is unclear why NATO has waited until the present time to completely revamp Ukraine's air force. There is no foreign force in the history of mankind that has received more donations from an alliance like NATO's than Ukraine's. Within the past few months, Ukraine's air force has received an unprecedented number of military aircraft from these donations. Arabic language military bloggers have listed these aircraft. Among the aircraft Ukraine is expected to receive are the following:

- 1) 30 F-16AM/BM from Belgium,
- 2) 16 F-16AM/BM from Denmark,
- 3) 1 L-39ZA from,

- 4) 24 F-16AM/BM from France,
- 5) 4 Su-25 Rooks from,
- 6) 1 F-16AM/BM from,
- 7) 14 MIG-29A/UB from Poland,
- 8) 13 MiG-29AU/UBS from Slovakia,
- 9) 2 SAAB 340 AEW from Sweden.

14. In the lists that the Arabic language military bloggers, however, left out the fact that Sweden donated two of its SAAB 340 AEW. However, the Arabic military bloggers noted the following: "في المجمل، أكثر من ١٠٥ مقاتلة وطائرة هجومية وطائرة تدريب، منها أكثر من ١٠٠ مقاتلة متعددة المهام (٧٣ إف-١٦ و ٢٧ ميغ-٢٩).

15. These lists circulated without any commentary on their significance. While the absence of a repair facility, spare parts, or mechanics is likely to be a difficult challenge for Ukraine, the fighter jets are less like tanks in terms of replaceability. It is easier to replace tanks than fighter jets. Accordingly, Ukraine's new arsenal of fighter aircraft provides a legitimate basis upon which to assert localized air superiority, especially given the missiles,

which NATO has attached to these fighter jets, as former Soviet, new Ukrainian, or NATO types have been integrated already.

16. Coupled together with Ukraine's new arsenal of aircraft is a new situation for Russian armed forces with ATACMS. While Russian armed forces likely focused on protecting major military installations deep within Russian territory, Kyiv struck a number of both Russian *Flugabwehr* as well as *Luftabwehr*, degrading Russia's overall ability to counter Ukrainian attempts to establish localized air superiority. An example of these strikes is Ukraine's destruction of a Russian Rocket Complex (Зенитный Ракетный Комплекс) called «Оса-АКМ» on May 24th, 2024. [] - [“ЗСУ знищили російський ЗРК Оса на околиці Донецька,” *Militaryni*, 24 Травня, 2024] The most recent attack on Russia's «Оса-АКМ» is part of a series of attacks.

17. On April 28th, 2024, for instance, Ukrainian military bloggers reported the following: “28 ОМБр знищила FPV-

дронем ворожий ЗРК “Оса.”[] - [“28 ОМБр знищила FPV-дронем ворожий ЗРК “Оса,” *Militaryni*, 28 Березня, 2024] These systems, which are largely incapable of being repaired or reproduced, are likely part of a wider strategy to target Russia's legacy weapons to compel modern production. Under sanctions, tariffs, or protectionists measure, NATO wagers that Russia's military industrial complex cannot find suitable replacements for the simple fact that Russia uses these legacy weapons in the first place. In addition, Ukraine's 2 SAAB 340 AEW from Sweden enable Ukraine to generate data on new targets in the form of Russia's anti-air defense systems that Ukraine's drone crews would be able to strike with drones like the strikes on Russia's «Оса-АКМ», further threatening Russia's ability to counter Ukraine's air forces.

18. These two factors—Ukraine's new arsenal of aircraft together with Russia's degraded anti-air defense systems—present a new Ukrainian military. While the Russian military has passed through phases based on Russia's war machine, NATO's

ability to supplant Ukraine's absence of a Defense Industrial Base with donations has caused a change of state in its internal alignment of forces.

19. Nonetheless, there are two reasons that Ukraine's new alignment fails to provide a basis for a Ukrainian breakthrough in the eastern or northern Donetsk region. The first is that there are few to no examples of failed Russian defenses. The second is that the number of Ukraine's arsenal of aircraft falls short of the number that Russian forces lost defending itself in eastern and northern Donetsk during Ukrainian advances in 2023.
20. While hardly providing a basis for a Ukrainian breakthrough in the eastern or northern Donetsk region, Ukraine's new internal alignment of forces presents a new challenge for Russia's strategy on the ground in the struggle for dominance in the region of and on the Black Sea.

Жемчужина или Яблоко Раздора : Third Scenario

21. In regards to the new challenge Ukraine's new internal alignment of forces presents,

there are two primary consequences: the first is that Ukraine likely has the power now to challenge Crimea as well as prevent Russia's realization of the so-called 'Third Scenario.'

22. The 'Third Scenario' is one of six scenarios (the first five of which are laid out properly, while the sixth is not) from a famous article published by the research center, *Stratfor*. The article published on May 9th, 2015 is entitled, "Wargaming Russia's Military Options in Ukraine." In the article the authors describe third scenario for a Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine as an operation on Odessa.
23. To reduce the scenario to elements, it is important to quote in full the entirety of the second scenario's description: "One of the most commonly rumored options entails Russia driving along Ukraine's southern coast to link up Crimea with separatist positions in eastern Ukraine. For this scenario it was assumed that planners would make the offensive front broad enough to secure Crimea's primary water supply, sourced from the Dnipro. This feature is significant

- because much of Russia's defensive line would be anchored on the key defensible terrain in the region, namely, the Dnipro river. This would achieve a land-bridge and secure supply lines into Crimea."
24. Russia's full-scale invasion of Crimea secured the elements of the second scenario. Russia established a 'broad offensive front,' in which Russia anchored its "key defensible terrain." With the satisfaction of these elements, Russia put itself in position to look north rather than south.
25. If Russia seeks to advance on the so-called third scenario, the Russians' most opportune moment would be 'after' the seizure of Kharkiv for two reasons. The first is that "[one] of the potential constraints to this scenario is the fact that lines of supply would extend for quite some distance along a thin, difficult to defend, stretch of land." The second is that Ukraine 'likely' cannot fight on both banks of the Dnipro, while Russians, who have the power to supply an advance with its nearly completed sub-Surovikin railways, does.
26. With Ukrainians pinned down in Kharkiv, tied to the eastern bank of the Dnipro, the Russians advance to a position of strength, with which to leverage the mere threat of a drive on the capital, Kyiv, to induce Ukraine to divert its manpower or matériel north rather than south, to Kyiv rather than Odessa.
27. In such a scenario, the Russians would be leveraging Ukrainian expectations in order to fulfill Clausewitz's "Akt der Gewalt." In his book, *Vom Kriege*, Clausewitz states: "Der Kriegen ist also ein Akt der Gewalt, um den Gegner zur Erfüllung unseres Willens zu zwingen." With its manpower or matériel diverted away from Odesa, Kyiv would be in no position to strengthen its defenses against a Russian attack on Odessa or the consummation of Russia's execution of the 'Third Scenario.'
28. The 'Third Scenario,' however, is the most difficult of all the scenarios on account of the width of the great Dnipro river but most of all because the 'Third Scenario' depends upon Russia's control over the

geopolitically significant
Kharkiv direction.

29. Odesa is thus described as an «Жемчужина» or «Яблоко Раздора». With Ukraine's new arsenal of aircraft together with Russia's degrade anti-air defense systems, the 'Third Scenario' becomes much more difficult, as Ukraine presents a new challenge for Russia's strategy on the ground in the struggle for dominance in the region of and on the Black Sea with an assertion localized air superiority.
30. Should Ukraine secure control over the Nestryha island, Ukraine's assertion of localized air superiority may empower it with the ability to lay siege to Crimea itself. Ukraine's ability to lay siege to Crimea, however, depends upon its ability to avoid Russian control over the geopolitically strategic Kharkiv direction.

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