

Europe's Winter of Starvation, Ukraine Collapse Underway | Stas Krapivnik

Stanislav Krapivnik discusses Europe's food and energy pressures, arguing that fertilizer costs, drought and disrupted Ukrainian exports could deepen hardship. He and Pascal Lottaz examine Germany's AfD, divisions within European opposition parties, and the limits of renewed diplomacy with Moscow. Turning to Ukraine, Krapivnik assesses manpower shortages, Russian advances, seasonal fog and the changing role of drones. He argues that new defensive technologies may restore battlefield mobility, while Pascal questions whether local breakthroughs could develop into a broader military collapse. Stas's YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@MrSlavikman> Stas's Substack: <https://zmeigarinich.substack.com> Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> 00:00 Introduction 00:52 Europe's food and fertilizer pressures 06:35 Strikes on Ukraine's ports and railways 12:20 Germany's AfD and Russia relations 18:24 Energy policy and its trade-offs 22:48 Diplomacy and Moscow's ceasefire stance 29:54 Weather, manpower and Russia's next advance 35:39 Tanks, drones and battlefield mobility

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with an update from Russia with our friend and colleague Stanislav Krapivnik. Stas, welcome back.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Thank you. Always a pleasure.

#Pascal

Thank you for coming back online, because a lot of things happened actually in Moscow and in the Russo-Ukrainian U.S. proxy war, because the Americans seem to be very desperate in getting some form of agreement from the Russians to stop the war, to stop winning. I guess that's what they want: to stop winning.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

They're winning too much.

#Pascal

They sent over the CIA director. Now they sent over Witkoff and Kushner. And those guys are now out to Ukraine, or were out to Ukraine, 24 hours after they left Russia. The bombings continued. Do we have any updates on that, where we stand at the moment on these negotiations?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Oh, we'll add one thing. This isn't just the Americans. The EU is desperate right now because the EU is facing actual something that may threaten not just their prosperity, but their existence. You see that because the European leadership suddenly is like, "You've got to get the Russians, you've got to get the Russians to negotiate." The very people that all summer and spring and the previous year were like, "No, no, no negotiations with Russia." Of course, what they want is a ceasefire, particularly a ceasefire in the Black Sea. What we have here right now in Europe is a catastrophe. Not only a multi-layered catastrophe, it's going to lead to starvation, at least among the lower classes. And food prices are already starting to spike.

What you have is a crop yield that's looking to be about 40% lower than last year's. There's several major factors involved. One, fertilizers went up two and a half times in price. And while the Americans buy Russian-made fertilizer—Russia's something like 30% of the world's fertilizer for sale—the U.S. buys Russian fertilizer, and the cost of that fertilizer went from \$650 million last year to \$1.3 billion this year. A lot of American farmers couldn't afford fertilizer. Well, the Europeans, the European Union countries, they don't produce their own fertilizer, not since 2020, 2019, because the price of gas just went up too high to be used in the production of fertilizer. A, B, they staunchly refuse to buy Russian fertilizer.

So their main fertilizer supplier was Qatar. And we know that Qatar is no longer in that game and won't be for quite a while, if and when finally the Straits of Hormuz are opened up. And the Iranians are already saying they're ready to go to the end of Trump's term, so another two and a half years at this point. Well, the other problem, the second problem, was the drought, this massive Europe-wide heat wave. Except that massive European heat wave stopped somewhere in Warsaw, and the other 45% of Europe, the one that's controlled by Russia and Belarus, there was no heat wave. It was actually a relatively cold summer. I know people sitting in Paris or in Berlin are going, "Really?"

I'm like, yeah, it was actually pretty cold. It was one of the colder summers I can remember. It was rainy enough, and Russia's first harvest was a bumper harvest, a record bumper harvest. Second harvest is being collected right now, so it's looking—it's probably going to be also a bumper record harvest. So Russia is flowing in grain, and so is Ukraine to a degree. But the West—so now you have two issues: you have fertilizer, you have drought, and then you have the third issue: diesel. Diesel is in short supply all over Europe. I've talked to various people, for example, John Laughland, who's living actually in Paris, and he's working for the Freedom Forum Party in Belgium.

And he was telling me, you know, while prices for diesel in France haven't gone up since spring, they went up 40% after Trump started his little escapades in the Persian Gulf. But after that, the

government's holding the prices down, but there's just no diesel. You have shortages. You have shortages because the prices are officially held low. People are buying it up as they can, but there's a shortage of diesel. You have to go to multiple stations, fueling stations, to find diesel, and it's in limited supply. So who eats a very large chunk of diesel besides the military sector?

Oh, the agriculture sector, which is why Russia doesn't export diesel between late March and about early October, because that's the agricultural season of the year. In the south, they start sowing at the beginning or middle of March. In the north, they're sowing in May. Just in the north, it's almost 24-hour daylight, so it's a short, intensive growth period. You get maybe three months of warm weather in the farther north, but it works for grain, which is basically just grass. In the south, you get two, three harvests a year because the days aren't that long, but it's a very warm, black soil and very warm climate. So when the West was looking at all of this, they were counting on Ukraine being their backup granary.

Well, here's the problem. The West decided to go into the 40 days of deep strikes to force Russia to its knees, collapse the Russian economy, bring the pain to the people. Which, by the way, most of the pain to the people is because they're actually hitting apartment buildings with a lot of these drones. It's pretty hard to hit refineries these days because there's gun trucks all over the place shooting down. There's actually cages finally being put up in a lot of places. And plus, again, when you get the technicals, you get the pickups with the 7.62-millimeter machine guns on them. They're very effective against drones coming in and much cheaper than the drones.

But apartment buildings, you can't defend apartment buildings. You can't defend single-family homes. And that's been the main target. Well, Russia counter-escalated, as we know, and Russia counter-escalated by destroying the seven ports in Odessa, including the Odessa port, taking out everything coming in and out of those ports. They're effectively making Ukraine landlocked. Russia further escalated by making locomotives an endangered species. And this is being done by the Russian military and by Russian partisans from the population in Ukraine, inside Ukraine. Because at the end of the day, most of the population in Ukraine is Russian, whether they want to admit it or not, or they're afraid to admit it or not.

But there's a lot of partisan activity. Just in Odessa province, this is no big secret. I'm not giving away a big secret at this point. Between 2023 and 2025, three NATO trains were derailed and set on fire. Really? By sabotage actions? By sabotage. By partisan actions in Odessa province. These partisans are all over the place, and they're burning locomotives or identifying locations of locomotives for the Russian military to destroy. So now you're down to what? You're down to trucks, and that's if you have enough diesel. It's been estimated that at most the Europeans can get 6% of the grain and the sunflower oil. If you don't have oil to cook on, you have problems. You can boil things.

That's about the most you can do. You can't really cook anything without oil, so that becomes a secondary problem. Well, 6% of the grain is all you can get out by truck, and again, if you have

enough diesel. So Europe is looking at, or the European Union is looking at, starvation. Starvation, food prices skyrocketing, and hungry people are mean. And hungry people watching their children starve and possibly freeze get really, really mean. And telling them to eat cake doesn't work. We've tried that before. Well, at least the French did, anyways. Not to say Antoinette was an evil person. She was just very airheaded enough to say, "Yeah, we eat cake. Why don't they eat cake?" So, you know, no bread, there's always cake.

#Pascal

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#Stanislav Krapivnik

See you there.

#Pascal

I haven't heard yet of the—I mean, the fertilizer crisis is clear, and also the fuel shortage is clear, but that it might hit Europe with such a severe kind of food shortage, that I haven't heard yet. Is that something that you—the prognosis is like a couple of months out, for like January, February, or?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

It is. I mean, there's still food on—I'm not saying countries are going to go into famine. And don't forget the drought. I mean, there's a massive drought throughout most of Western Central Europe. That's true. The Danube went down so low they had to shut down nuclear power plants. And a couple of nuclear power plants that were on lakes, they had to shut them down anyways because the water was so hot coming in, it wasn't really cooling the reactors. So there were massive issues. The Rhine—they couldn't get coal down the Rhine because the barges were flattening out because the water level had dropped so much. Or where they could get through some of the channels, they had to lower the volume of payload down to about a third of what it was carrying just to keep it buoyant enough above the sand dunes. So yeah, this is a massive issue.

#Pascal

No, it is, it is. And this summer I heard about it in Switzerland, how friends of mine have problems finding food for their cows. And those are milk cows, right? And then you don't have enough. What do you do? You have to slaughter one or two cows in order to make sure the rest has enough, because they need to be healthy and fed for good milk. So, yeah, and that will probably only get worse because the drought also meant less hay, right, to be collected, which means that all of the

foodstuffs that these cows have to eat and the animals have to eat in winter is now severely down. So your prognosis at this point is that—no, no, I mean, this is going to be very serious on the food supply side for Europe.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Look, you know, for the poor people, the lower classes in Europe, it's already been difficult. I was talking to Lucio, who's a political professor, a professor of politics in Italy, and he was telling me a year ago how a lot of the lower classes were having problems feeding their families come the end of the month. There were a lot more days than there was money in their budget. And that's without food prices spiking. I think the middle class will be able to survive. They're just going to get much poorer paying for food. Upper class isn't going to notice, particularly at the very top. The decision-makers are probably not going to notice. But I think they understand what happens when people go hungry. When there's even a rumor of famine, people start getting very antsy. And people who are antsy tend to start making revolutions. They get desperate. And when you have people in power with popularity of hemorrhoids, they, you know, if you...

#Pascal

Stas, sorry, I think you're being mean to hemorrhoids.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Probably I am. They're probably much more popular than Merz at this point, or Macron. But it's funny: for the Western European leadership, if you cumulatively take all of their popularity ratings, you get up to around the popularity rating of Putin. Of the combined popularity ratings.

#Pascal

Let's maybe talk a little bit about this big event that happened on Sunday in Germany, in Saxony-Anhalt, that they had basically 44% elected to AfD. They are not able really to form that government yet. They're still in discussion. This always takes time in Germany. But it was huge, right? And the Germans are devastated at the elites and the ruling class. And actually, also the Swiss newspapers were full with, "Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. It happened. It happened." How is Russia looking at this? Because the AfD is that one party that says, "Guys, we should have a decent relationship again with Russia, restart importing oil and gas from there, and just call it quits with this Ukraine business."

#Stanislav Krapivnik

A lot of people are excited about it, but I think less so than it would have been otherwise. And I'm one of the ones that said, well, hold up, hold up, hold up. There's no point in getting excited for

several reasons. One, the AfD itself internally is very split. The AfD in the East is very pro-Russian, which you'd think would be the opposite because they were the ones, quote, occupied by the Soviets. You'd think they'd hate the Soviets, but actually they're very pro-Russian. It was a mixed experience, but it wasn't anything close to what the CIA propaganda was about these four evil Russians just keeping the Germans down since 1945 and abusing them. No, there was none of that.

There were a lot of actual mixed marriages that came out of that and so on. And you see that 30 years later, and the East Germans are very pro-Russian. The problem is the West Germans. Even there, the AfD, there's actually quite a few AfD members that went and fought for the Ukrainians. The same thing as in the Eastern AfD, they see the genocide that the Israelis are committing, while in the Western AfD, a lot of them are pro-Israeli. So you have these splits inside the party. Additionally, you know, you got Sahra Wagenknecht, who's supposed to be this, and there used to be a lot of excitement in Russia. Oh, she's very pro-Russian. We're going to be able to talk to somebody, blah, blah, blah.

But then you look at her, it's like, look at her party realistically. First of all, she, as a politician, is a very safe politician. She makes pretty speeches. She's very kind in the eyes. And by the way, she never brought a crowd out into the streets. She's safe. She doesn't play protests. And then when you look at her party, a lot of her party switches sides and goes to the uniparty when the AfD shows up. Instead of working with the AfD and making a coalition government, they make a coalition government with the war parties, which is basically the uniparty in Germany. Everybody else wants war. And a lot of times her party will go over and sell out their positions. So again, who are you getting excited about?

That's the problem. It's the same thing as Le Pen, Marine Le Pen. She was the great big hope. We're going to have normal relations with France. But then look at her party. Look at her position. Yeah, we don't want to send soldiers to Ukraine, but fine, send all the equipment and the weapons you want. That's her position. So she sold out from that point. And it's been a lot of disappointment. And I think waiting for rational players to come into power in the European Union is pointless. They're not going to come in. The whole system is made to make sure they never get there. And if they look like they're about to get there, they get compromised or they get bought out.

#Pascal

That's basically what happened with Meloni, right? I mean, she came in being like a voice of reason and whatnot, and had an instant flip. That's, you know, the tools of Ursula von der Leyen. But then again, then again, it is a pretty strong signal that a large part of the population is just not on board with all of this, especially in the East. BSW, it's also too small as a party. I mean, even if BSW in Saxony went into coalition with the AfD, they would still not clear the 50% mark just because her party, BSW, only has 5.4 or 5.5% support, right?

And the AfD, 44, they still don't get across the 50. So the issue is that all the other parties, plus people within those parties, they're still to some degree on this government line. It's actually also something to be expected. If a party grows to the size of 44%, there must be various wings in it, otherwise it wouldn't have that size. But I still wonder if, you know, in a sense, the tide is starting to turn. Obviously hasn't turned yet, but it's kind of going now the other direction, which freaks out the kleptocrats in their offices, right? The Merzes and the Macrons and so on. How do you see that one?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

I think that is a good point. It is, in that case, it is happening. Because I'll say one thing: while the AfD is very split on foreign policy, they are pretty unified on internal policy. Stop uncontrolled migration, which, again, I'm not against migration. Like most people, I'm against irrational, uncontrolled migration. Like what Merkel did: you bring in a million people in one year. My God, who the hell are you bringing in? Nobody knows. It's impossible to filter that many people that quickly. And this is what we've seen all over the European Union. And the Russian liberals, by the way, are all for it too. They're all for flooding Russia with whomever, which has had a lot of backlash.

Russians aren't quite as tolerant about that. Well, Russia has positive migration, but the tendency has been to get rid of the people that shouldn't be here in the first place and control the migration, economic migration or political migration. Control that so we know who's coming in. That's what the AfD stands on. The other thing the AfD stands on is rational energy policy. You see, the Germans, if you go a little bit deeper into them, they virtue-signaled, "We are against nuclear power." They blew up a lot of nuclear—well, blew up a lot—they dismantled all of their nuclear power plants. They were getting somewhere around, I think it was up to about 60% or 70% of their power from nuclear energy.

But they countered by buying up French nuclear energy and Swiss nuclear energy and Austrian nuclear energy. You know, it's the same thing as a lot of Europeans were looking down their nose at Russia and other countries, going, "We are so green compared to you dirty people with your trash." Meanwhile, they're sending all their trash to Africa or to China. And Americans were doing that too, until the Chinese said, "Well, we don't need your trash to process anymore." And then the American recycling points all said, "Okay, we don't want to take anything else. We don't know what to do with this trash anymore," because their whole plan was, we just ship it over to the Chinese and get rid of it.

#Pascal

See, we're green.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

We're really green. We just shift the problem to other people.

#Pascal

Yeah, you know, that's the thing with energy, right? There is no perfect way of producing the thing. It's always a trade-off. I remember 2011 in Japan when they switched off all 52 reactors overnight because they had that incident in Fukushima, right? And they switched everything off. And you know how they kept the lights on? Because it's an island, they cannot import from France or from China, for that matter. *Onuunuuunania*.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

They also import from Russia.

#Pascal

Well, yeah, yeah, in that sense.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

There's a big electric cable that runs.

#Pascal

It fired up the coal plants, and that was always a backup plan, and the backup plan worked brilliantly. But it just means that, yeah, it all goes into the atmosphere. So there is just no perfect way of doing it. The question is, what mix of imperfect do you use?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

I'm going to drive a lot of people crazy, and I keep meaning to. I've been doing these other projects. I keep meaning to do this project on green energy. Green energy is, A, it's not green. B, it's more expensive and more damaging to the environment than burning coal. It's just something that's not seen. I mean, for each of these windmills, people really have—I mean, they've been sold a lie nonstop. Windmills are a prime example. You know, there's 300,000 tons of cement that goes into these windmills for the foundation, and rebar steel and cement made—oh, there's a lot of burning coke and a lot of chemical waste in manufacturing cement on an industrial scale. Like it or not, yeah, that's how it's made. And you still have to manufacture the steel, or the steel rebar for it, and so on.

And it takes a diesel to get it there for a windmill, which, by the way, will probably never pay itself back in energy generation because the motors, which are lubricated with oil, and the blades have to be de-iced by a helicopter flying up there. When you go into this and you look at the life cycle from start to end, there's nothing green about the green technology. It's just like the car batteries, electric

car batteries. You don't see the little African children, quite literally the little African children, mining cobalt in southwest Africa, the biggest deposit of cobalt in the world. You don't see that. You don't have to see the slave labor. See, you have a clear conscience. You don't see the huge junkyards where they drop the batteries because there's absolutely no processing plant for lithium batteries.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

What do you do with them? By the way, when lithium is exposed to oxygen, it burns. And it burns until it burns out. That's why if you're in a car wreck in a modern electric mobile with the batteries underneath, if it's a hard enough car wreck, run. Because if you've never seen one of these things burn, oh my God. I mean, as each cell starts popping and burning, the explosions... There was one car like that on the Moscow Beltway, and it was videoed, with people standing there videotaping the whole explosions. And it's just a series of explosions, flames shooting five meters in the sky, shooting out to the sides. And you look at that, like, you know, there'd be nothing left to bury from a person who was stuck in that. So it's...

#Pascal

No, no, you're right. We got sidetracked. We got sidetracked. Yes, we did. Let's go back. I mean, that was the tangent. Back to the development. Okay, so some Russians are excited. In general, is this looked at as something positive, that now also the Americans came over here and that it seems that the West is getting nervous and kind of desperate to somehow trap Russia into stopping, putting a pause button on the war?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

It's a confirmation for Russians that Russia is advancing. Because, by the way, the same day that Ratcliffe showed up, you had the Vatican show up. The Vatican hasn't given a damn about Orthodox Christians being persecuted, murdered. We just had an attack in the Sviatogorsk Monastery. One monk was murdered. Two more were injured by people in Ukrainian uniforms, is what the survivor said. The two monks were heavily stabbed, but they survived. The third one was murdered, stabbed to death. And, you know, the Vatican hasn't given a damn about that for a single moment. And all of a sudden they do. And all of a sudden you had Lula, who's facing an election right now, coming over there talking to Putin. Then you had what really pissed Putin off, and you could tell when he was talking about it, as subdued as he keeps his emotions.

You had Modi and Erdogan at the Shanghai Association meeting. They were coming in there, oh, we need a ceasefire. You know, India always goes for peace. Yeah, except when it goes for war. You

just had a war a year ago. Okay, you go for peace every time. Right. But when Putin was asked about that at the Far East Economic Forum, what he came back with was, yes, sometimes you have to listen to the concerns of your allies and friends. Kind of like, you know, I really want to go tell them to go bounce, but I held off. I mean, he was obviously very pissed off, but he's holding it back. And then when Tweedledee and Tweedledummer show up, I'm not sure which one. It's a voting. Let the audience vote. Who's Tweedledee? Who's Tweedledummer? Between Witkoff and Kushner. When those two guys show up.

#Pascal

Everybody in the comments, Witkoff and Kushner, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, which one is which one? Please vote now. Okay, Stas, continue.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

So when they showed up, again, what have they got to bring? Please stop fighting so we can rearm Ukraine. Please. You could see Putin when he's talking to them. Again, body language, body language, body language, body language. And as much as he's trying to hold it back, if you look at the way he's talking and he's explaining, it's like he's for the tenth time having to explain to the class dunce that two plus two means four. It doesn't mean three. It doesn't mean ten. It doesn't mean twelve. It doesn't mean one and a half. It still means four. He's talking that way. You can tell in his face that, you know, I'd rather be picking lint out of my belly button than talking to these two guys. That doesn't work on his face.

#Pascal

But then the whole point is, like, the question is, like, why does Moscow receive them? And the answer probably is, like, because why not? Okay, then we talk to them again. We tell them again. Fine. I mean, so you can never say that we didn't talk to you, right? So that's kind of right.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

But Zelensky closed the door fully, or maybe he closed the door fully quite a long time ago. But he allowed the Kremlin to take the stance that the door is fully closed when, I don't know if this was Zelensky's own initiative, probably not, probably a paper placed in the sands by the CIA, where he flat-out threatens to go after civilian airlines, and not just Russia, any civilian airlines flying with Russia. And the next day he doubles down on it. So for those that said, well, he didn't know what he was saying or that you're misinterpreting—no, no, he doubled down on it the next day. He didn't waste any time. And what did Putin say when he was asked about this during an interview with journalists? He said, you know, that's state terrorism. We don't negotiate with terrorists. That fully closed the door.

#Pascal

I just wonder what the approach now is. And I know that Larry Johnson keeps saying, look, there is no plan, there is no strategy. But if you understand that you're losing, if you know that your puppet government in Kiev is, like, you know, on the back foot, and that you actually have to now use the really bad, bad guys in the East, the actual, let's call them ultra-nationalists, who in uniform, the Azov guys, the Azov people, and... probably with the hope that a good part of them doesn't really make it back because that would make it easier for a transition government later. I mean, you know you're losing this. And it's so clear now that it actually seeps through into the media space, which is the propaganda space, right? And I think they too are panicking. It's like, how are we going to sell this after four and a half years of it's just one more week till Russia collapses? Yeah. They have a huge problem now, don't they?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Yeah, yeah. Oh, they do. And I'll tell you this: the problem with the ultranationalists is, by the way, they're not dumb. First of all, their leadership—they're not unified. Let's begin with this. There are different organizations of ultranationalists, and their leaderships are in competition with each other to make money out of this. There's always money at the end of all of this. Second of all, they're not dumb. They're not willing to go throw their lives away. They want to grab power. They want to make money. And the ideology—sure, a lot of them are true believers, but they're not suicidal. And several times, Azov, that started as a battalion, created and funded by Kolomoisky, who was a citizen, a dual citizen with Israel. And they're not neo-Nazis. They're Nazis. They're as Nazi as Nazi gets. I mean, for God's sakes, if you stripped them down from all their tattoos—Nazi tattoos—half of them would be as naked as the day they were born.

I mean, they're literally covered. Some of these works of art with Hitler's portrait all the way on the guy's back. One guy actually tattooed a Nazi uniform on his head. I mean, this is a level of insanity that is just hard to describe. But at the end of the day, at least the leadership is not suicidal. And there have been several times they've been ordered to go into basically suicide missions and counterattacks, and they said no. A couple of times they just left the battlefield. They're really good at terrorizing civilians. They're really good at being the backstop to keep the Ukrainian army from retreating. But they're not really good at sacrificing themselves for the greater cause. That's a bridge too far for a lot of these guys. As insane as they are, again, they're not suicidal.

#Pascal

So what is your view of how Russia is now going to approach the next couple of months? Because now the weather is turning, right? And the mud is going to come pretty soon. That will probably, again, have an impact on the battlefield situation.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

You know, Kramatorsk, the agglomeration, Sloviansk-Kramatorsk-Druzhkivka, is already cut off by roads of death because Russia's burrowed 10 kilometers deep into the front lines that nobody really wants to talk about. And it's coming up behind Kramatorsk and expanding that bridgehead. It's been there for three weeks. And that's a great place for drone operators to really get in deep, plus aviation. And you see that those areas are already cut off. So getting in and out is going to be really impossible when the rain really kicks in. But more important than the rain—in this case, the rain is going to be very much to Russia's advantage—but more importantly than the rain is what also comes with the rain. First of all, drones don't fly during the rain, for obvious reasons. Drones don't fly during heavy wind. I'm talking about the FPV drones. They're not stable. They're not that stable.

A good rain will lock them down, or a heavy wind. So that's one. But more important than that is the fog. Nobody talks about the fog. The fog season kicks in about mid to late September and will run up to about late April. And if you've never been in that fog, I've been in that fog many times. And most nights will have fog. It won't necessarily be the super fog, but it'll have fog. Sometimes you'll have the super fog that will stay the entire day. It won't burn off. And that fog is a pea-soup fog. You cannot see three meters ahead of you. You're not going to fly drones out of fog because you're going to run into something. It's pretty hard to find anything in that area, let alone fly into it. Second of all, if you fly the drone over the fog, you can't see what's in the fog. The fog bank is very thick and very high. So that comes, and it literally comes rolling in, if you've never seen fog.

The only place I've seen fog that heavy was in Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels, those areas in southern Germany, where you just felt like you were sitting in the middle of a cloud—fog on that level. You know, I could see to the end of my turret, and then somewhat I could see somewhat of my gun barrel, but I couldn't see to the end of the tank because you're just sitting in a cupola of fog, you know, which you can't see. That's the type of fog that this area also gets. But you have satellite navigation, which means you still know the direction you're moving. So if you're advancing in that fog, you're not going to get turned around because we've got satellite navigation.

So you keep going west. You're on course. So the problem for the Ukrainians is when they don't have enough manpower, and they're trying to make it up with drones, and you get weather where there is no drone flight, but the enemy, in this case the Russian Army, can advance easily. Your three, four guys, where there should have been 10, 12 guys, are not going to hold the line in those points. And the Russian Army will advance. It has done it. It did it in Kupinsk. It did it in other places last year. It was caught on video, this Mad Max mass advance, people going straight up on these different cars or motorcycles. Yeah, because the fog is in. There's no drones.

Drones are not the cure-all that a lot of people think they are. So you get certain atmospheric conditions like that, and the fog in that area is very intense, and the Ukrainian manpower shortages are very intense. So I think there's going to be a lot more advancement. And you see the line cracking in a lot of different places. They've started launching suicide attacks into Kupinsk again, trying to keep the Russian military from advancing out of Kupinsk. Because when you advance out of

Kupinsk, you basically cut off the entire northeastern section of Kharkov province. And chunks of Kharkov province in the northeast are already being cut off.

There's already a new pocket that got formed a couple days ago that's got about 2,000, or now they're talking about maybe about 1,700 left alive, Ukrainian soldiers in it. And there's a secondary pocket behind that that's being formed, and so on and so on. So you're chomping a piece at a time, separating it out. So the Ukrainians have a lot of problems. And the other thing you'll notice is the Russian Air Force is now actively working inside of Ukraine. Russian Air Force has bombed positions in Odessa, flying that far, where earlier they couldn't do it because while the Patriot missiles are bad at taking out ballistic missiles, they're actually pretty good at taking out airplanes, jets, or aircraft.

#Pascal

Is it just a question, like, in your estimate, is it likely that at some point the front line will crack in a way that the army will just have to disperse? And at that point, Russia will be able to kind of storm the center of Ukraine, as in there's just nothing that keeps them anymore, because now also the fortifications are about to be breached. Are we looking at that kind of scenario, or further incrementalism?

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Something in between. First of all, the whole front's not going to crack. It's just too long of a front. Isolated areas will crack. I think in some areas, the commanders may start a retreat, even though Zelensky insists they stay to the last. He's channeling his inner Adolf. So, yeah, which is good in this case, because they tend to stick around long after they should have retreated and get wiped out. But there is a limited mobility that's returning, too, something that hasn't really been talked about. There was a Russian column that was ambushed: four tanks, one infantry fighting vehicle. And I think two of the tanks were destroyed eventually.

One of the drone videos of the drone going down into the hatches, open hatches, so the crew was out. But instead of taking the usual three to four, maybe five drones to take out a tank, they were taking up to 20 to 30 drones to take out a tank, because the tanks are armed with what's called the Arena system. The Arena system, you get blocks about this big on the tank. The system was designed originally to take out missiles, incoming missiles like Javelins. So the radar built in the system picks up the warhead flying in. It's not reactive; it's active defense. It launches this block forward, the entire block, and the block is basically a small Claymore mine.

So the block is flying in. You've got the missile coming in this way. The block flies into its direction and explodes out, and all these ball bearings and the explosion just shred the missile. Well, these blocks have been reprogrammed to work on drones. So these tanks were armed with a new version of the Arena system that's anti-drone. There were 12 of these boxes on each of the tanks. Now, they were talking about the tanks taking between 20 to 30 drones to take out because they had

passive defenses on them, plus these active defenses. And you can place a hell of a lot more than just 12 Arena boxes on a turret of a tank.

You can place 30, 40 of them. And here's the problem: it becomes a logistic nightmare. So for the Ukrainian drone operators, and just like the Russian drone operators, they go out in teams of one to three. They go out to the front. They get as close to the front as they can before they set up shop. They're carrying on their back food, ammunition, extra battery packs, RPG rounds for these drones, and they're carrying the drones. So, you know, there's a limit of capacity of what you can carry. You can't drive up there because any vehicles get destroyed. These teams are carrying maybe six, seven, ten drones, because they're also having to carry the RPG heads, which are weighing about two kilograms, three kilograms apiece. Multiply that out by 10. Now you're carrying 30 kilos of just explosives.

So you get a limiting factor. Now, when you could take three, four, five drones to take out a tank, a two-man team could theoretically take out a platoon of tanks quite easily. Now, if you're having to go up to 20 to 30 drones for a tank, a team maybe could take out one tank. You need multiple teams up there. And from what some of my friends and acquaintances are saying, the drones lately that they're flying are not flying very steadily. They're flying like this, or they're making very crude maneuvers. And that means the drone operators aren't experienced. Ukraine is losing a lot of drone operators.

Russia's using various systems, including recon drones, that find where the signal's coming from, and they send back the coordinates, and the Russian artillery takes out the drone operators. So they're having to push through a lot of people, and the drone operators aren't experienced, and you see that just the way they fly the drones. They don't target as well, they don't fly as well. So now you're having—while drones are never going to go away—they're the machine gun of 1916, and all of a sudden mobility comes back because tanks and airplanes appeared. While in 1914-15, they were screaming, "That's it. War is over. Machine guns defeated war." The same thing with the drones. Technology advances. It's an endless race.

#Pascal

Yeah, but so in general, because we do have to wind it down, because we have this hard stop now coming up, the battlefield doesn't look promising for the Ukrainians. The political situation doesn't look promising either. I mean, we are not expecting any kind of dramatic change within the next week. I mean, nobody knows what's going to happen. I mean, a lot of weird things have happened over the past couple of years. But thank you, as always, for your assessment. Stas, if people want to find you, they should go and find you at mrslavicman.com.

#Stanislav Krapivnik

Yes, @MrSlavicMan, all one word, Slavic with a K. That's on YouTube. @Stanis Kropivnik on X. Let's see, Zmej Geremic. Spell it just like it sounds, with a Z. That's my Substack. Mostly I'm using that right now. I've got some writings on there. I need to start writing a lot more again. But mostly I'm using that right now as an archive for my videos, just in case, just like you, Pascal. Yeah, never know. It's just, yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, we'll talk about that another time. Thank you so much for your time today.