

WORLD

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Editor's note: As Feb 24 marks the one-year anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, China Daily is reviewing how it has reshaped geopolitics, impacted the global economy and aggravated the energy crisis.



A train with refugees fleeing Ukraine crosses the border in Medyka, Poland, on March 7 last year. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said more than 8 million refugees had fled Ukraine bound for other European countries as of Feb 15. VISAR KRZYEU / ASSOCIATED PRESS

World economy faces major risks

Experts: Standoff casts cloud over global recovery

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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The yearlong conflict between Ukraine and Russia is showing dangerous signs of escalation, evidenced this week by US President Joe Biden's surprise visit, when he pledged to support Kyiv for "as long as it takes".

In their outlooks for 2023, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund both identified escalation in the conflict as a major downside risk for the global economy, predicting that global growth could decelerate sharply to 1.7 percent and 2.9 percent respectively.

Now 12 months into the conflict, that risk appears to have become a reality on the ground, prompting calls for an early settlement of the issue.

Dan Steinbock, an advocate of the multipolar world and founder of the Difference Group, said the conflict in Ukraine had entered a new, more dangerous phase on Jan 25, with the commitment for some 70 US, German, British and Polish tanks foreshadowing a potentially lethal escalation.

"Not only will economic and human costs climb even further, but strategic risks, including the potential of nuclear confrontation, will soar," Steinbock wrote in an article on the first anniversary of what he called "the unwarranted Ukraine proxy war".

"With such escalation in high-tech arms sales to Ukraine, regional and military spillovers are no longer a matter of principle but a matter of time," he added.

Cal Jillson, a political scientist and historian at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, said that the conflict does not seem poised to end any time soon.

"Its length from here is likely measured in many months, if not years. Given Western support, Ukraine has the will to hold out, and Putin shows no willingness to retreat," he said in an email interview. "Hard to see any real winners here. No peacemakers in sight."

On Monday, Biden made an announced visit to Kyiv, promising more military aid and vowing to support Ukraine for "as long as it takes".

"The United States has said repeatedly that we are going to continue what we are doing, which is arming Ukraine for as long as it takes, but we never defined what it is," Chas W. Freeman, former US assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, told China Daily.

In its Global Economic Prospects report released on Jan 10, the World Bank revised down its 2023 forecasts for 95 percent of advanced economies and nearly 70 percent of emerging market and developing economies, citing concerns including elevated inflation, higher interest rates and disruptions caused by the conflict in Ukraine.

Freeman, now a senior fellow at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, said World Bank predictions, and the IMF's, seem realistic.

"The impact of this (conflict in



Union members protest high prices during a 24-hour general strike in Athens, Greece, on Nov 9. SOCRATES BALTAGIANNIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

2.9 percent

IMF's prediction on global growth deceleration in 2023

Ukraine) on the world is too great — food shortages, energy shortages, supply chains being broken, people being killed, people starving. This has to end," Freeman said.

At this point, the most important thing is to find a conflict-termination strategy, have a cease-fire and create a process, perhaps under United Nations supervision, for negotiation of a settlement, Freeman said.

He said resolving the conflict is a delicate diplomatic task that cannot be accomplished quickly.

"But perhaps, if the UN, with the international community acting through the UN, appoints a media-

tor or a group to mediate this, we can start addressing these two tasks: Ending the war and redesigning European security architecture," Freeman said.

In "Avoiding a Long War: US Policy and the Trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict", researchers at Rand Corp said global economic disruptions stemming from the crisis will continue and possibly multiply as the conflict goes on.

The ensuing sharp increase in energy prices has in turn contributed to inflation and slowing economic growth globally, Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe, senior political scientists at the Rand Corp, wrote in the paper. "Since avoiding a long war is the highest priority after minimizing escalation risks, the United States should take steps that make an end to the

conflict over the medium term more likely," they wrote. The US has already played "many roles" in the Ukraine conflict: guaranteeing that Ukraine will not "lose"; weakening Russia through attrition; and demonstrating resolve to allies and opponents, said Stanley Renshon, a political scientist at the City University of New York.

"The world economy would be better without the war but not by that much. The economic headwinds the world faces go well beyond the Ukraine conflict," Renshon told China Daily.

While in Kyiv, Biden pledged an additional \$500 million in US assistance on top of the more than \$50 billion already provided. A day before his trip, hundreds of people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in an anti-war rally protesting the massive amounts of US funding for Ukraine as well as the US' role in the conflict.

Biden also had a firsthand look at the devastation wrought by the conflict. "The cost that Ukraine has had to bear has been extraordinarily high," Biden said. "And the sacrifices have been far too great."

Douglas Macgregor, a retired US Army colonel and former Pentagon adviser, said "disaster wrapped in rhetoric is not the way to save the people of Ukraine".

"The victims do not live in North America. They live in a region that most Americans can't find on a map. Washington urged the Ukrainians to fight. Now Washington must urge them to stop," he wrote in the article, titled "Washington Is Prolonging Ukraine's Suffering", published on Dec 20.

Russians resilient despite sanctions

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russia and its people are living under the pressure of what seem like endless sanctions from Western countries, but they are coping with them, President Vladimir Putin says.

He made the remark at a meeting of judges of arbitration, military and common jurisdiction courts on Feb 14.

In the weeks before Russia launched what it called a "special military operation" a year ago, US President Joe Biden attempted to influence events by warning Putin of "economic consequences like none he's ever seen".

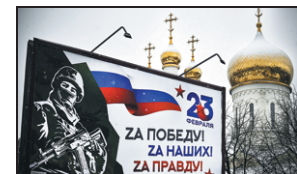
The US and its allies have imposed unprecedented economic measures on Moscow. Russia is now the world's most sanctioned country, with more than 5,500 measures aimed against it.

Initially it seemed that sanctions could be devastating for the country; it caused the value of the ruble to slide rapidly, the banking system to shudder and companies worldwide to stop exporting vital goods to Russia.

However, one year later Russia has remained more resilient than many expected, thanks to its oil and gas exports, and deft maneuvering by its central bank and others that has allowed some banned technology to sneak through.

Russia's position looked strong in the early days as the ruble remained strong, even though Western governments had frozen a large portion of the country's hard currency reserves, sanctioned financial institutions and expelled major banks from SWIFT, the international payments system.

There was a risk of a bank run at the beginning of the conflict and shortly after the sanctions were imposed, said Alexandra Prokopenko, at the time an adviser to the Russian central bank's first deputy chairwoman, now living in exile in the West.



A poster dedicated to the upcoming Defender of the Fatherland Day in Moscow on Monday. ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP

The steps sparked financial panic, prompting lines at bank machines as people feared the ruble would crash and result in a cash shortage.

The measures banned companies globally from selling Russian computer chips and other high-tech goods the country needed to build weapons and military vehicles.

They also severed so many banking links that Russian importers had trouble paying overseas counterparts. By April Russia's imports were 43 percent below prewar levels, a recent report by the think tank Silverado Policy Accelerator in Washington said.

However, quick countermeasures by Russia's central bank soon restored a measure of stability. Officials closed down stock markets, forced the main interest rate to 20 percent, and imposed restrictions on currency exchange, withdrawals and hard-currency transfers overseas. The measures reversed the ruble's slide.

Janis Kluge, an economist at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, forecasts that Russia's budget deficit could reach 5 percent of GDP this year, compared with 2 percent last year, due to the drop in energy exports and the rapidly falling tax take from the declining economy.

On Thursday the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development lowered its forecast for Russia's economic growth this year to 3.5 percent but maintained its forecast for a 3 percent decline in GDP this year.

Forecasts for Russia's economic growth outlook have become a matter of contention after the International Monetary Fund forecast this month that the country's economy would grow 0.3 percent — faster than that of both Germany and the UK.

Duma OKs suspension of key treaty

MOSCOW/WARSAW — The Russian Duma, the lower house of parliament, on Wednesday endorsed President Vladimir Putin's draft law on suspending participation in the New START treaty, The Associated News reported.

Putin announced the freeze during a speech on Tuesday in which he also accused the West of seeking to destroy Russia.

The Russian president emphasized that Moscow was not withdrawing from the pact altogether, and the Russian Foreign Ministry said the country would respect the caps on nuclear weapons set under the treaty and keep notifying the US about test launches of ballistic missiles.

A few hours after Putin's address, US President Joe Biden gave a separate speech on Tuesday, proclaiming untiring support for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the European Union is close to a 10th sanctions package against Russia for its special military operation in Ukraine and EU governments hope to reach a deal on Wednesday, EU diplomats said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Hypocrisy exposed over Hersh disclosure on blasts

By SHAO XINYING and CHEN YINGQUN

Weeks after the US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said in a report that the United States Navy was involved in the Nord Stream explosions last year, Western mainstream media have remained largely silent, let alone done follow-up reports, experts say.

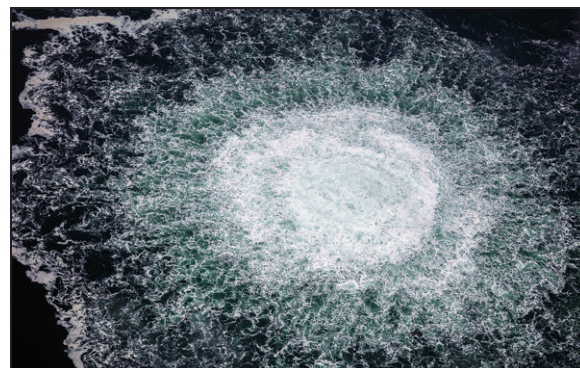
This, they say, demonstrates the hypocrisy and bias of Western news coverage.

Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize winner renowned in particular for uncovering the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War, wrote on the US portal Substack on Feb 8 that the Nord Stream pipelines attacks were orchestrated by the White House. The US Navy and the CIA were also involved, he said, citing an unnamed source.

If true, it could be "a terrorist act" committed by the US government against vital German infrastructure, Stephan Ossenkopp, a German scholar with the think tank Schiller Institute, told CGTN.

The US has dismissed Hersh's allegations as "utterly false and complete fiction". Denmark, Germany and Sweden said on Tuesday that blast inquiries have not yet concluded. Russia has called a United Nations Security Council meeting over the attacks.

US mainstream media have by and large remained silent on Hersh's claims. A week after the revelation, US online news portal Mint-Press reported that the 20 most



Gas emanates from a leak in the Nord Stream gas pipeline, in the Swedish economic zone, on Sept 28. SWEDISH COAST GUARD VIA AFP

influential news publications in the US, including CNN, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post, have essentially disregarded Hersh's story. Four media outlets gave scant attention to it, such as a report of 100 words or so by Bloomberg.

European outlets including the BBC, The Guardian and most German newspapers have ignored it, the Washington-based online magazine Responsible Statecraft said on Feb 16.

Hersh told the US broadcast Democracy Now!, published on Feb 15, that "I wasn't even thinking of taking a story like this to The New York Times", which he had worked for.

Western mainstream media "intentionally ignores" Hersh's

report, said Ding Yifan, a research fellow at the Development Research Center of the State Council's Institute of World Development in Beijing.

"Any story that goes beyond their values and stance will not be published," Ding said. "Misinformation, or even disinformation, abounds in Western media, which is part of their public opinion war, or propaganda war. These are their tactics."

Responsible Statecraft quoted Mark Ames, who interviewed Hersh on the US Radio War Nerd program on Feb 11, as saying: "The corporate media is ignoring Hersh's story because they're deeply invested in the US empire and don't like stories that make the US empire look bad."

However, European media were "caught in a dilemma" on this mat-

ter, said Wang Zhen, a research professor of international politics at the Institute of China Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

"Dramatizing the issue will only make Europe, especially Germany, look awkward."

'Biased' coverage

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has been politicized in the US, Wang said, pointing to "one-sided and biased" news coverage. "Western-led media are intentionally amplifying any information that is unfavorable to Russia, but disseminating news favorable to Ukraine."

The West simply uses the media as a tool to serve their purpose in geopolitical wrestling, Ding said.

Early in the Russia-Ukraine conflict the West imposed economic and political sanctions on Russia, and Russian media organizations such as RT and Sputnik were targeted.

"Western media proclaim that they support freedom of speech and being impartial in their reporting, but this is total self-deception," Wang said, echoing Ding's view.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Monday that the Nord Stream pipeline explosions dealt a severe blow to the global energy market and the global natural environment. An objective, impartial and professional investigation into the explosions is called for, he said.

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