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Follow up thread on Russian force availability and long-term prospects. The Russian military has taken significant casualties. After redeploying, and pulling additional units from standing formations, it may be tapped out of available forces, for now. Thread 1/

If the Russian leadership wants to continue this war it has to make a significant political choice. They cannot sustain a long war against Ukraine as a special operation, and they don't want to reframe it as a war. This has implications for force availability. 2/

Moscow is trying to fight a war with the largest country in Europe without declaring a state of war at home. Ukraine has fully mobilized, and has extensive Western support. Russia may technically have more manpower and materiel on paper, but it is politically inaccessible. 3/

The Russian military is not prepared for a long war, and expected this 'operation' to be done within days. Now a significant part of the force is exhausted. As a very rough estimate, they may have lost ~30 battalions (not BTGs) worth of equipment. 4/

Although the Russian military has a lot of kit, assuming a 200,000 force deployed with more than 120 BTGs involved, separatist army corps, and Rosgvardia, that military now has substantially reduced combat effectiveness. 5/

The Russian military has pulled together what they could from the remaining standing force, including bases abroad, and Kaliningrad. There's now close to nothing left to send beyond those battalions that have recently arrived to support offensives in the Donbas. 6/

It is difficult to say what constitutes the current ground force available for the next phase in the war. I don't like low confidence numbers since they give a false sense of certainty. 7/

I would say it is still a significant, but substantially diminished force. Best guess is ~80 BTGs total. I would take that number with a grain of salt, keeping in mind that BTGs are used here as a rough unit of measurement. 8/

There is also no evidence of stoploss. The Russian military is taking in 134,500 conscripts this month as part of a biannual draft & releasing those whose terms of service have expired. Since Moscow has not declared a war, it has no political basis for retaining conscripts. 9/

So how is the Russian leadership trying to square this circle? There are rumors that they're offering sizable payouts to those willing to sign a contract, including conscripts getting out of service, and those with prior military experience. 10/

There are also cases where conscripts are intimidated into switching to contract service - sometimes given the choice between months of difficult serving conditions and signing a contract. 11/

Behind the scenes the Russian military is likely trying to increase manning in formations. These are often manned at ~75%, hence the tiered readiness system with contract-staffed BTGs. Many have heard of Shoigu's 168 BTG figure. I think this number is technically committed. 12/

Brigades and regiments are generally supposed to generate 2 BTGs, and be able to produce a 3rd over time with increased manning. The Russian military expected to raise those manning levels via mobilization in the event of a war - they're likely trying to do it piecemeal now. 13/

By offering substantial amounts of  $\square$  to get more manpower, the Russian military may fill out some of these formations. In my view, they may then deploy as battalions and entire units, since many unit HQs & support elements are in the war already. 14/

There are also auxiliary forces. Syrian mercs, Wagner ChvK, etc. These are not going to make a difference in this war. They can amount to a few battalions more at best. They're symptomatic of the problem: Russia is short on troops, looking to get manpower where they can. 15/

In short, Russia can get more battalions, but without a national mobilization its ability to pursue the war beyond the Donbas looks very circumspect. And it can't get more units quickly. Right now, the Russian mil has to fight largely with what it has managed to put together. 16/

This problem is somewhat unsurprising. The Russian mil was built around the concept of active defense, eschewing strategic ground offensives. It lacks the logistics, and manpower, to sustain this kind of fight in the largest country in Europe. 17/

However, if Putin chooses to declare a state of war, conduct national mobilization, the situation becomes a lot more complicated. In that case, Russian manpower and materiel availability would be subject to a decidedly different set of calculations. 18/

Would he have the domestic support to do it? Entirely up for debate. There appears to be substantial support for the war within the Russian public, but it is uneven, and extent of true support vs fake poll reporting highly disputed. 19/

Conversely, Ukraine is going to need ammunition and more equipment to replace losses, equip reserves. It needs mechanized equipment for counter-offensives. ATGMs and

MANPADS alone won't do. Hence the ask for Soviet equipment from countries that have inventories. 20/

I'm sure some folks will say - but Ukraine has captured a lot of equipment. On paper, yes, but it's going to be a while before this kit is serviceable, manned, and deployed where it makes a tangible difference. A few captured tanks or IFVs do not an armored brigade make. 21/

In some ways this is a story of one military which has large amounts of mobilized manpower, but shortages of kit to equip the force, and another military which has large reserves of equipment, but a visible crunch in available manpower without national mobilization. 22/

Beyond the current battle in the Donbas, if this eventually becomes a prolonged war of attrition, Ukraine seems overall in a more favorable position, but I think the honest answer is 'it depends.' That's my unsatisfactory conclusion thus far.

Some folks below asked about intangibles like morale. The asymmetry between the two armies is quite clear, but this thread is about force availability, not expected performance.

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