

## ***Can Ukraine Crush the Wagner Group Once and For All?*** ***Brent M. Eastwood - 1945***

*Ukraine is increasing the number of troops it sends to fight the scorching [battle of Bakhmut](#) in the eastern Donbas region. Both sides have dug in their heels and are aching to take control of this town. Reinforcements from Ukraine arrived in Bakhmut and the nearby [village of Soledar](#) on January 9. [Russia](#) is also enhancing its forces with operators from the [Wagner mercenary group](#), which have proved more effective on the attack than [Vladimir Putin](#)'s conscripts.*



*M1 Abrams© Provided by 1945*

*Here is a rundown of the state of play in Ukraine right now:*

### ***Both Sides Have Their Backs to the Wall***

*The fight is becoming desperate as both sides are utilizing artillery to pepper enemy positions. [Russia](#) wants [Bakhmut](#) to show it can achieve newfound momentum while [Ukraine](#) wishes to continue its success in a counteroffensive that has spanked the occupiers since early autumn. Russian and Ukrainian troops show no signs of letting up in this region and the Russians have suffered [thousands of casualties](#).*

### ***It's a Battle of Will Power in Ukraine***

*If the Russian forces take [Soledar](#) they could [surround and cut off Bakhmut](#) from supplies and reinforcement. [Ukraine](#) has its own vote in the battle and its newly deployed troops could push the Russian soldiers out of [Soledar](#) which is located northeast of [Bakhmut](#).*

### ***Russia's Private Army Eyes Natural Resources***

*The Russian mercenaries from [Wagner](#) have figured out an interesting byproduct in [Bakhmut](#). The [Institute for the Study of War](#) said on [January 8](#) that [Donbas](#) city has minerals such as [salt and gypsum](#) in mines around [Bakhmut](#). [Wagner Group](#) head [Yevgeny Prigozhin](#) is never one to leave money on the table and [Wagner](#) wants to rule [Bakhmut](#) and take advantage of these resources.*

### ***The Mines Are Helping the Defenders***

*The mines also have military value because Ukrainian defenders of the city are believed to be recuperating underground and getting ammunition and supplies there, then emerging topside to force the Russians back. Prigozhin thinks the mines have “[unique and historic defenses](#)” that act as a “network of underground cities.”*

### ***The Ukrainians Are Hanging In There***

*The Ukrainians are showing strength and taking positions around Soledar and Bakhmut. Meanwhile, the [Russian conscripts have been probing](#) the defenders and looking for weak spots then attempting to pour mercenaries and other experienced fighters into the breach. But the Russians are finding these tactics are tough sledding. The battles for Bakhmut and Soledar have become a fight that has devolved into major attrition for both sides. Russia has been trying to take Bakhmut for around six months as the Ukrainian forces have not yielded.*

### ***Ukrainian President Is Focusing His Forces in Bakhmut***

*Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is remaining defiant. “Bakhmut is holding out against all odds,” [Zelensky said in a January 8 address](#). “And although most of the city is destroyed by Russian strikes, our warriors repel constant attempts at the Russian offensive there.”*

*Ukraine is [sending generals](#) to the front lines to rally troops. The towns do not have much strategic significance and if one side or the other takes the area, it will only serve as a short-term tactical win as the victor is likely to be counter-attacked.*

### ***The U.S. Is Becoming More Generous with Ukraine***

*The United States has observed the brutal fighting and has sent [50 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and 18 155mm self-propelled Paladin howitzers](#), the most advanced artillery system in the U.S. Army. It is not clear if that military hardware will be sent to the Bakhmut front as the Ukrainians will have to be trained on the systems. The Paladins will take longer for Ukrainian troops to familiarize themselves, but the Bradley's could enter the fray much faster.*

### ***Ukraine Really Wants Tanks***

*It will be interesting to see if the Americans will choose to send [M1A2 Abrams tanks](#) to Ukraine. [Germany will send Marder infantry fighting vehicles](#) to Ukraine as well. [France has chosen](#) to supply armored reconnaissance combat vehicles. Kyiv really wants Abrams or Leopard main battle tanks, but this shows that the Ukrainian allies are upping the ante and that tanks could someday be part of a future package.*

*Ukraine has to be given credit for defending Bakhmut so steadfastly and the extra armored vehicles and artillery will help, but Russia is determined too.*

*The Bakhmut area of operations will be one to watch going forward and fighting there will likely go back and forth with both sides sending reinforcements into the meat grinder until a winner can be decided.*