

December 6, 2022 - January 9, 2023
Ukraine Monthly Situation Report

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- Russian aggression is unlikely to end in 2023. Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has made it clear that he is set for a long confrontation. Russia has taken the following steps to prepare for a new wave of military aggression:
 1. Increased funding for the army and the defense industry;
 2. Continuous mobilization and the creation of private paramilitary groups;
 3. The national economy is serving the army, and defense industry companies are operating 7 days a week, with three shifts per day;
 4. Transferring military equipment and personnel to Belarus;
 5. Attempts to increase the number of weapons deliveries from Iran and North Korea have been undertaken.
- Attempts by the Russian army (assisted by private paramilitary groups) to capture the cities of Bakhmut and Soledar in the Donetsk oblast continue. In December and at the beginning of January the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter: AFRF) repeatedly claimed to have captured Soledar. However, despite Russian troops stepping-up their assault on the town, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (hereinafter: AFU) have successfully repelled waves of attacks. Both Russia and Ukraine are sustaining significant losses. According to Ukraine, the Russian army has lost approximately [112,000](#) soldiers.
- The AFU are making advances in the Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts. In December, some [settlements](#) along with a strategically important [island](#) located on the Dnipro river near Kherson were liberated. The strategically important road between Kreminna and Svatove is now within the range of Ukrainian artillery. Ammunition was being delivered from the Russian Federation (Russia) to the Donetsk oblast via this road. At the end of December and early January the Ukrainian army carried out several devastating strikes on bases where Russian soldiers were stationed. The strike on a base in [Makiivka](#) that claimed the lives of 200-600 newly conscripted Russian soldiers drew the most media coverage. Even Russian propagandists were unable to hide this incident from the media. With freezing winter weather approaching, both sides are preparing for a new large-scale battle using armored vehicles (including tanks) which will easily move on the frozen ground.
- A potential second attack on Ukraine from Belarus was raised again in December. The possibility of such an attack was mooted after Putin and Defence Minister, Sergey Shoigu visited Minsk on 19 December, and Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko's visit to Moscow. Joint military drills continue to be carried out by Russia and Belarus. However, according to experts and Ukrainian officials, the AFRF have insufficient military strength to mount a successful attack on Kyiv.
- In December and January Russia continued to launch large-scale missile and drone attacks on Ukraine. On 16 December, another massive missile attack hit Ukraine. 76 cruise missiles were launched with the Ukrainian air defense downing 60. On 19 December, one of the kamikaze drones

launched by Russia flew over the nuclear unit of the [South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant](#). In the second half of December Russia attacked Ukrainian cities with drones and missiles. New Year's Eve was no exception. On 5 January, Russia unilaterally ordered a temporary ceasefire. However, the Russian army ignored it, continuing to advance on the front line and shell Ukrainian cities. For example, on 6 January, the city of Kherson was shelled.

- In December and January, the cities of Kherson, Beryslav, Mykolayiv, Ochakiv, Kharkiv, Meref, Zaporizhzhia, Hulyaipole, Nikopol, Marhanets, Kryvyi Rih, Kramatorsk, Kostyantynivka, Avdiivka, Kurakhove, Druzhkivka, as well as other Ukrainian settlements and territories (located on the Russian border) were shelled.
- In December and January Russian drones mainly targeted Kyiv. Thanks to Western air defense systems and the skills and professionalism of the Ukrainian military, the vast majority of drones were downed. On 1-2 January all [84 kamikaze drones](#) were downed. This prevented Kyiv from being cut off from electricity in the first warm days of 2023. However, once the cold weather returned, power outages were reintroduced.
- According to the estimates made by Ukrainian Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, the shelling and mining of Ukrainian territory has left almost 250.000 square kilometers of Ukraine [mined](#).
- Russian missile strikes and drone attacks in December mainly targeted critical and energy infrastructure of major Ukrainian cities. As a result, Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Lviv, and other large cities were periodically cut off from power, water supply, and heating. For the first time since spring 2022, the Kyiv subway [ceased](#) to operate for 24 hours.
- Maintenance crews and units of the Ukrainian State Emergency Service (whose job it is to restore critical infrastructure objects) are also becoming targets of Russian attacks. For example, on 6 January, when Russia declared a 36-hour ceasefire, a unit of the State Emergency Service was [subjected](#) to shelling in Kherson.
- Russia continues to conduct nuclear blackmail by repeatedly demonstrating its readiness for the potential use of nuclear weapons. This strategy aims to:
 1. Impact and intimidate public opinion in Ukraine, including its leadership along with that of the EU, and NATO;
 2. Spread narratives about Russia being ready for an escalation in the war including the use of nuclear weapons, which could bring about World War III;
 3. Present an ideological background for the consolidation of pro-Russian forces in the EU and NATO countries that call on Ukraine to conduct peace talks to prevent the war becoming WWIII.
 4. Define the “red line” as seen by Russia and its readiness to play the “nuclear card” if Ukraine refuses to back down on its plans to retake the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, and, especially, Crimea;
 5. Exert pressure on Ukraine's Western partners with the goal of suspending the deliveries of equipment to Ukraine that may help the country organize a swift counteroffensive and launch strikes on military targets located deep inside Russia.

NARRATIVE DIMENSIONS

- According to the assessments of [experts](#), the West needs to prepare for a protracted conflict and continue supporting Ukraine. Putin's aggression is driven by internal problems, such as survival and the 70-year-old legacy, rather than by his false territorial claims. Since these issues lie at the heart of Putin's regime, they cannot be solved by any external attempts to "appease" the aggressor. The only solution is to defeat him.
- Putin has failed to turn this into an all-Russian war. Nevertheless, most Russian citizens remain conformists, preferring to watch the war from the sidelines. They are not disturbed by the revelations proffered by Russian propagandists. This means that even if Russia is defeated and the Putin regime falls, there will remain plenty of work to be done vis-à-vis Russian society. Russia's defeat would not only entail the country suffering a major military defeat, but also the withdrawal of its troops from all Ukrainian territories.
- According to several international and Ukrainian experts, the pressure of international sanctions must continue until Russia voluntarily delivers on its obligations. This means:
 1. Demilitarization and denuclearization;
 2. Holding those who have committed the crime of aggression and war crimes responsible;
 3. The payment of reparations;
 4. Introducing a program for the rehabilitation of society, political, social, and cultural institutions that have been affected by the misanthropic ideology of "Ruscism", the revanchist ideas of the "Russian world" and Russian geopolitical revanchism, and the isolationist ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church based on the doctrine of ethnophyletism.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- In 2022, the Ukrainian economy [avoided collapse](#). However, there are no signs of a recovery in 2023. According to the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, the country's GDP plummeted by 30.4%. In December, Prime Minister Shmyhal said that the economy could shrink by up to 50% in 2023, if Russia continues to attack the country's critical infrastructure. Analysts hold that in 2023 the risks of Russian attacks on energy facilities and other objects of Ukrainian infrastructure will continue. Dragon Capital investment bank expects Ukraine's economy to fall by 5 percent in 2023. Ukraine's 2023 budget deficit is expected to be \$38 billion. The Ukrainian government hopes to cover it with foreign aid.
- According to information provided by [juvenile prosecutors](#), 453 children died with over 877 wounded of varying degrees of severity due to the Russian aggression. 13876 children are believed to have been deported. On 26 December, the Russian military shelled a civilian hospital killing [one child](#). In the occupied city of Makiivka a family of eight (4 of them children) was [shot](#). In Beryslav (the Kherson oblast) a missile hit a private house, [killing a family](#), including a 12-year-old boy. The

Ukrainian national police are documenting the hits of Russian shells. For one night [220 hits](#) on the city of Hulyaipole were registered.

- In 2022 Ukraine [liberated](#) 40% of the territories occupied after 24 February, which makes up 28% of all of its occupied territories. The Russian army continues to be checked along the 3786-kilometer-long front line. [85%](#) of Ukrainians do not support the idea of territorial concessions for the sake of peace.
- Russia's war in Ukraine has provoked the largest [wave of refugees](#) since WWII. According to data provided by the United Nations (UN), over 7.9 million people have fled Ukraine with another 5.9 million becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- The situation for IDPs is becoming increasingly [serious](#): almost half of them are seeking work, while one third are looking for safe accommodation. Only 6% of respondents have already [found a job](#) near their new place of residence. Nevertheless, 8% of IDPs are not intending on returning home.
- Since the beginning of the war Ukraine has [exported](#) 17 million tons of agricultural produce through its sea ports within the framework of the "Grain deal".
- On New Year's Eve another prisoners of war (PoW) [swap](#) took place: 140 Ukrainians returned home. At the same time, 34.00 Ukrainian soldiers continue to be held in Russian captivity.
- The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, [announced](#) on Telegram that a meeting with his Russian counterpart, Tatiana Moskalkova, would take place in Turkey. The topic of the meeting would be the return of Ukrainian soldiers.
- In captured Mariupol 22 new houses have been constructed. However, this represents just [2%](#) of all the buildings in the city.
- In the Kuban village of Baku, [a cemetery containing the bodies](#) of mercenaries from the Wagner private paramilitary group has been discovered. According to the gravestones, the vast majority had been convicted for serious crimes and had been sentenced to long term sentences.
- According to Ukraine's Minister of Defence, since the beginning of the war Russia has caused [some \\$35.3 billion in damages](#) to Ukraine's environment.
- Russia has created [the largest minefield in the world](#) in Ukraine. The 250.000 square kilometer minefield is the equivalent to the entire territory of the UK.
- In December and January, several key events took place in [state-and-church](#) relations in Ukraine. The Dormition Cathedral and the Refectory Church of the 1,000-year-old Pechersk Lavra in Kyiv were taken over by the government after the lease of them held by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (hereinafter: UOC) expired. The church had been affiliated with Moscow's patriarchate.
- On 7 January, the Metropolitan Epiphanius of Kyiv and All Ukraine conducted a liturgy in the main cathedral of the monastery. Furthermore, personal sanctions have been placed on the most fervently pro-Russian representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Some individuals have been stripped of Ukrainian citizenship (probably due to them holding Russian passports). The church factor is taking on a mainstream role in Ukrainian politics.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **Mobilization rhetoric and further militarization of the discourse.** Mobilization rhetoric continues to be circulated throughout Russian society. Messages continue to be communicated related to the “special military operation” (hereinafter: SMO), which is explained solely through the lens of a confrontation with western countries. Information and stories about mobilization is also widely dispersed. In his New Year’s [address](#) (with soldiers standing in the background) Putin claimed that threats emanating from the West triggered Russia’s reaction. Putin also spoke about the need for the cohesion of Russian society in the face of the threats posed by western countries. The SMO in Ukraine was [explained](#) by Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of Russia’s Security Council, as necessary to protect the citizens of Donbas. At the same time, Russian media devotes a lot of attention to conscription and the payments for the families of fallen Russian soldiers. Also, narratives are being promoted that glorify dying in battle for Russia in the face of external threats. The Russian media tends to gloss over problems related to the newly conscripted and victims of the war. Opinions on [increasing](#) the term of service in the Russian army from one to two years (from 2024 onward) are also circulating.
- **Further encroachments on rights and freedoms.** The information space is full of messages of contempt for those Russian citizens who do not [back](#) the Russian government. Dmitry Medvedev has suggested dealing with them according to “martial law”.
- **Demonstration of support of Russia’s position.** The Russian media claim that Russia enjoys support from several countries, [including](#) some post-Soviet ones. Significant efforts have also been made to [inform](#) Russian society about the unity within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the attempts to settle any disagreements, as well as the important role played by Russia in stabilizing the situation in Kazakhstan (the claims of a color revolution having been thwarted).
- **Rejecting Ukrainian identity.** The imperial discourse incorporating Soviet legacy and the history of the Russian Empire remains the same. Russia continues to deny the existence of Ukrainian identity and statehood. Ukraine is represented as a Western creation and as an antithesis of Russia. The Russian Patriarch Kirill has again [said](#) that Ukrainians and Russians are one people which the hostile anti-Russian forces are trying to split. The Soviet legacy is being idealized. In the modern Russian discourse this legacy is being represented as the historic [heritage](#) of the “Russian Empire” (according to Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin Spokesman). In their 2022 assessments, Russian official media spread the narrative about Ukraine as a “pseudo-state”, rejecting Ukrainian identity. Ukrainians are referred to as “part of [our people](#)”.
- **Negotiations.** In December Russia demanded concessions from Ukraine to bring about peace. Putin said that Russia was ready for peace talks given “[the new territorial reality](#)”. Russian official discourse remains the same – “Russia keeps reaching the goals of the SMO” in Ukraine. According to Medvedev, the operations goal remains the same, namely, to [put an end](#) to “the Kyiv regime”. Moscow claims that the Kyiv regime is ready to sacrifice its people.

- **Ukraine fatigue in the West.** Russian propaganda is going to great lengths to spread narratives about Western countries growing [tired](#) of supporting Ukraine or “paying” for the war. Narratives aimed at discrediting Zelenskyy (referring to him as a “clown”) abound.
- **Strengthening the “allied state”. Preparing Belarus for the war.** At the end of December Russian officials [spoke](#) about the need to strengthen the “allied state” comprised of Russia and Belarus (according to Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov). In early December Russian officials [denied](#) any information about attempts to drag Belarusian troops into the SMO. If Russian officials are to be believed, the visit of Putin, [Shoigu](#), and Lavrov, to Minsk was not aimed at “forcing Belarus” to participate in the SMO. The Russian media announced the [beginning](#) of Russian military drills in Belarus. Minsk has [said](#) that the Belarusian army is constantly on alert. At the end of December 2022, the rhetoric took on a more military dimension. Joint military drills were referred to as “[containment measures](#)”. At the beginning of January 2023 Belarusian officials [said](#) that the united regional unit of allied troops of Russia and Belarus were ready to protect the “allied state”, according to Andrei Zhuk, Deputy Belarusian Minister of Defense. The drills are conducted in accordance with Russian standards. Messages were distributed related to the extension of the “regional unit” of Russian troops in Belarus. At the end of December, the Russian media vigorously informed Russian society of “a Ukrainian missile hitting the territory of Belarus”.
- **Shelling of Ukrainian civilian infrastructure.** Russian officials speak about the [complete success](#) of the large-scale missile attacks targeting Ukrainian energy objects and equipment to repair infrastructure. Stories are being spread about the catastrophic humanitarian [situation](#) in Ukraine, including lack of heating and power outages, as well as soaring prices. Interestingly, massive missile and drone attacks on Ukraine were not covered by official Russian media at the end of 2022, since there was no information about destruction and victims available. Instead, the Kremlin is [promoting](#) stories about the achievements of the Russian army in Donbas, its [offensive](#) in the [Donetsk](#) direction, the [destruction](#) of [Ukrainian military equipment](#) and the deaths of Ukrainian soldiers.
- **Ukraine shelling the territory of Russia.** Russia accuses Ukraine of shelling Russian territories located close to the Ukrainian border (e.g., Belgorod) using western weapons. For example, the Russian Ministry of Defense [claimed](#) to have downed HARM missiles on 19 December. According to Moscow, there were civilian casualties, and the region was [cut off from power](#).
- **Further accentuation of anti-Western rhetoric.** The Russian information space is overflowing with anti-Western, anti-American and anti-European narratives including claiming that “the West is [trying](#) to destroy Russia”. The deliveries of weapons from the West to Ukraine is being criticized. The [delivery](#) of the MIM-104 Patriot systems by the USA to Ukraine is represented in Russia as the “extension of American participation in the war”, with specific objects [becoming](#) legal targets for Russia. Several articles have also been published claiming that the goal of the USA and the West is to [destroy](#) Russia. The Russian media also talks of “a dangerous line” that the West might [cross](#) in its confrontation with Russia. At the same time, it is claimed that the SMO constitutes a restoration of Russian sovereignty with the Kremlin being interested in a “new world order”, which Russia would play a central role in developing, and which would “[guarantee security for Russia](#)”.

- **“New territories”**. Russian narratives continue to revolve around the idea of a further integration of “the new territories”. The most popular narratives in this regard are the following – [“Russia is expanding”](#) and “we don’t abandon our people”. On Russia’s New Year TV shows “the new territories” were referred to as a *fait accompli*. Putin is participating in PR rallies about Ukraine’s occupied territories. Moscow uses narratives about the Russian peacekeeping mission in Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories.