

**February 14th - February 20th, 2023
Ukraine Weekly Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- The Russian army continues to advance in the Donetsk oblast, mainly around the cities of Bakhmut and Vuhledar, and in the Luhansk oblast, in the vicinity of Kreminna. Disagreements have arisen between the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF) and the “Wagner” private paramilitary group, whose fighters are also engaged in hostilities. The group’s leaders accuse the Russian Ministry of Defense of reducing munition supplies. As of 20 February, the Russian army had lost [a total of 143.500](#) soldiers. According to the Ukrainian government, over 5.000 Russian soldiers were killed last week alone.
- According to Ukrainian and international analysts, the Russian army has been instructed to take Bakhmut prior to the first anniversary of the invasion. This means that Russia’s assault is expected to become increasingly intense. According to Ben Wallace, British Defence Secretary, [up to 97%](#) of the entire Russian army is in Ukraine. Also, according to Ukrainian intelligence, the Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) has [amassed](#) 450 tactical aviation jets and 300 helicopters 200 km from the Ukrainian border, which could also signal that a new wave of escalation is imminent.
- The Ukrainian army is preparing for a counteroffensive. According to the latest [survey](#), 89% of Ukrainians are ready to keep fighting even in the event that Russia resorts to using tactical nuclear weapons. Ukraine’s allies are also determined to continue supporting Ukraine. During his visit to Kyiv on 20 February, US President, Joe Biden stated that the coalition of allies intended to supply [700 tanks](#) to Ukraine.
- Last week several cities including Kherson, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Pavlohrad, Nikopol, Marhanets, Hulyaipole, Orikhiv, Kupyansk, Vovchansk, Beryslav, Kramatorsk, Druzhkivka, Kostyantynivka, Pokrovsk, Siversk, Vuhledar, Avdiivka and other settlements of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblast located on the Russian border were shelled by Russia. On 16 February, the AFRF attacked Ukraine with [36 missiles](#), with 16 downed by the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). On 18 February, another massive missile attack was launched by Russia. Sixteen missiles, and four air attacks were carried out. Two “Caliber” missiles were downed by Ukraine’s air defense.
- The Russian army is suffering from a lack of kamikaze drones. Last week’s shelling with loitering munitions was not as intense as in previous months. Instead, Russia has started to use intelligence air balloons - i.e. flying objects that have been spotted in Ukrainian airspace several times.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the data provided by [juvenile prosecutors](#), 461 Ukrainian children have been killed, with 926 wounded with various degrees of severity. 16.207 children are believed to have been deported. At least 6.000 Ukrainian children have been transferred to occupied Crimea and Russian territories, ending up in a network of centers for “re-education and adoption”. According to a [report](#)

published by the Humanitarian Research Lab from the Yale School of Medicine, at least 43 such camps have been discovered in Russia. Children who used to have parents or guardians live there, as well as those who have been declared orphans by the Russian authorities. The youngest child is only four months old. Some of the children have been taken into custody or adopted by Russian families.

- According to surveys, a third of Ukrainians who used to have employment before the war are now unemployed. According to a statement made by Ukraine's General Prosecutor, Andriy Kostin, cases of sexual violence have been documented everywhere where Russian troops have been stationed. Therefore, Russia is using sexual violence as a weapon in this war.
- On 16 February, all electric transport in the Ukrainian capital [became operational again](#). 286 vehicles are operating on 46 trolleybus routes and 195 vehicles on 32 tram routes.
- [According](#) to Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Defense, Hanna Malyar, some Russian army units lost 80% of their personnel. The combat capability of the Russian army has dropped by 40%, with two thirds of their tanks either destroyed or damaged. Some of the fighters from the "Wagner" group (who have been taken prisoners) made the following remarks about the [Russian offensive](#) on Bilohorivka in the Luhansk oblast: *"If one group does not succeed in its attack, another one begins an assault. If the same fate befalls the second group, yet another one is sent to attack"*. Moreover, [a mass grave of 37 bodies](#) was discovered near Luhansk. According to the BBC, these could be the bodies of "Wagner" fighters who were either convicted in Russia or supposed to serve the time.
- According to an [analysis](#) published by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russia does not have combat-ready reserves at its disposal that would be capable of launching a full-scale offensive. According to the UK [Ministry of Defense](#), Russian losses in this war so far amount to 175-200.000 soldiers.
- On 16 February, a further prisoner exchange took place. 101 Ukrainian soldiers were [freed](#) including 63 defenders of "Azovstal" and one civilian, the first Deputy Mayor of Enerhodar, Ivan Samoydyuk. He spent 333 days in Russian captivity.
- Russia is hindering the [rotation of the experts from IAEA](#) at the temporarily occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). Russia continues to actively militarize the plant. Moreover, [600 freshly mobilized soldiers and cadets](#) have arrived at the ZNPP from Russia. They are waiting in the ZNPP's bomb shelter to be transferred to the Donetsk front line.
- The war has resulted in a major [decline](#) of Ukraine's main economic sectors. For example, "Metinvest", the biggest Ukrainian metal producer, reduced its output by 62% in 2022. The amount of produced coke has dropped by 64%, i.e. to 1,653 million tons. Furthermore, last year the company reduced the production of iron ore concentrate by 66% compared with the previous year, while the amount of iron ore products shrank by 55%.
- The Russian Federal Security Service began to [completely block the services of Google](#) in Mariupol and across the entire occupied parts of the Donetsk oblast. Zoom can now only be used through VPN.
- The situation with the "grain deal" is deteriorating due to Russia blocking the inspection of ships in the Bosphorus, with [a line of 140 ships](#) has formed in the straits. Most ships have been waiting for

- their cargo to be unloaded for over a month. In the past three 10 million of tons of Ukrainian agricultural produce has been held up, having a major impact on food supply chains.
- In the temporarily occupied territories of the Kherson oblast, the Russian occupation “administration” has embarked upon [measures aimed at the privatization of property](#). For example, abandoned houses are being sealed, with stories being shared claiming that being transferred to the ownership of the local occupation “administration”. Military personnel of the Russian occupation forces are going door-to-door, checking property rights documents.
 - The scale of terror in the Zaporizhzhia oblast is increasing. To be able to travel between occupied cities a special “ID-pass” is required. Starting from [March 1](#) this ID will only be obtainable for those with a Russian passport.
 - As of now, there are over 5.3 million of internally displaced [persons](#) (IDPs) in Ukraine. In May 2022, this number stood at 8 million, which means that almost 3 million people have returned home. The fact that their homes are located near to the front line does not deter them.
 - The size of Ukraine's volunteer movement is significantly larger than the number of officially registered volunteers. 2383 Ukrainians registered themselves in the Register of [Volunteers](#) of the Ukrainian State Tax Service last year. This number is 8.4 times higher than at any time since the existence of the Register. The vast majority of volunteers registered themselves in December 2022 in order to avoid tax problems.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- Russian official discourse calls on Russian society to [support](#) and trust the Russian President. Putin is represented as a figure that unites people. On 18 February, the All-Russian Center for Research of Public Opinion released a report that claims that 79.1% of Russians trust Putin. 76% of Russians approve of his work, while 16,7% do not agree with his policies. Russian official discourse [is going to great lengths to emphasize](#) that Russian society is focused on supporting the President and his efforts to unite the country. The Kremlin also insists that the Russian economy is resilient, and that Russian society is stable.
- Moscow continues to spread stories about [the fatigue](#) suffered by the USA regarding Ukraine and Zelenskyy. Russian official media are sharing stories about “a secret warning sent” to the Ukrainian President saying that the US will no longer support Ukraine. The Kremlin also claims that “ordinary Americans” are not happy about US support for Ukraine.
- Some Russian propagandists have interpreted the visit of President Biden to Ukraine on 20 February as a public humiliation of Russia. Some Russian channels on Telegram [called](#) for a missile attack on Kyiv during Biden's visit. Russian propagandists are appalled by the lack of a strong Russian response to the visit. At the same time, Russian officials claim that the visit was agreed in advance with Moscow in terms of security issues. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia [said](#) that Joe Biden had received “security guarantees”. Russian official media are circulating messages about the allegedly negative reaction of Biden’s visit by some “[French](#)” and American politicians who claim that Joe Biden wants to “unleash WWII”.

- The Kremlin is also spreading official narratives that are supposed to somehow transform the causes and consequences of the war. Russia is blaming the West alone for waging and continuing the war. According to the [secretary](#) of the Security Council of Russia, Nikolai Patrushev, “the West is continuing the military confrontation in Ukraine, having effectively become a party to the conflict”. Moscow insists that it is the West that is responsible for Ukrainian losses and that the West does not regard it as its own problem, only being interested in weakening Russia. Mobilization rhetoric is being used throughout Russia with the calls to respond to the threats posed by the West.
- Russia’s official media has been quite moderate in their coverage of the [meeting](#) between Putin and Belarus President, Alexander Lukashenko in Novo-Ogaryovo. The two presidents spoke about strengthening cooperation between their countries, their [readiness](#) to foster economic cooperation in security area as well as to build assault aircraft.
- The Russian media is spreading stories about victory in the war as well as the achievements of the “special military operation” (SMO), claiming that “Russian troops have [broken through a tight defense](#) in the Luhansk oblast”. Messages about the [achievements](#) of the Russian army in the Zaporizhzhia and [Donetsk](#) oblast (Russians claim to have taken the [Krasnaya Gora](#) settlement which is located close to Bakhmut. Almost 500 people used to live there before the war) are being shared. The “Wagner” group has said that its units are [advancing](#) in the Donetsk oblast. According to Russia, all settlements are “[strategically important](#)”. The Russian propagandist media claim that Ukraine is [doomed](#) to lose and that no military equipment from the West will help Kyiv. Moscow is convinced that the West has become one of the warring parties. The Russian Ministry of Defense rejects any information about losses, maintaining that Ukraine is [attempting](#) to sow panic within Russian society by spreading videos on social networks featuring Russian losses. The Heads of four military districts have been [replaced](#). In parallel, the Russian media try to avoid covering the simmering conflict between the head of the “Wagner” paramilitary group and the Russian Ministry of Defense.
- Measures aimed at social mobilization and militarization continue. It was announced that “participants of the SMO” have been [invited](#) to attend Putin's address before the Federal Assembly. Messages have appeared around “[the shift of elites](#)”. Also, Russian media circulate messages about privileges and prospects for career growth offered to those who have gone to “assault Mariupol and Bakhmut” since these people “are building a new Russian state, a military empire”. It seems that the Russian federal center is being blackmailed by influential people living in Russian regions.
- The Russian media is writing about plans hatched by private paramilitary groups. For example, Head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov [announced](#) that he plans to create a private paramilitary group, once he leaves office.
- There are a growing number of messages hinting at tensions in Ukrainian-Polish relations. Russia claims that there is growing discontent with Ukrainian [refugees](#), while issues are being addressed about the ways of [representing](#) historical memory.
- Moscow has announced the integration of “the new regions” into Russia. In particular, the Russian Social Fund is supposed to “[ensure](#) the support offered by the Federal Assembly for the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, as well as for the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts starting from 1 March”.

- On the eve of Putin's address (which is presented as an important event) before the Federal Assembly on 21 February, latent messages spread by Russian political experts close to the Office of the Russian President, merit a separate mention. For example, [in an interview](#) Vladislav Surkov hinted at the possibility of holding unscheduled elections to the Russian State Duma, as well the normalization of relations with the West.
- The Kremlin dismisses any information about a long-term peace agreement with Ukraine. According to [Dmitry Medvedev](#), every new Ukrainian leader rescinds agreements previously reached. Russia continues to reject Ukraine's agency in terms of its ability to make decisions. Russia believes that Ukraine depends on someone else (implying the West).
- The Russian media has criticized [statements](#) made by western officials regarding the legitimacy of Ukraine destroying Russian military objects on the territory of occupied Crimea. Nevertheless, the official propagandist media are spreading information about American experts [pointing out](#) the risks related to the prospect of shelling Crimea in view of a potential nuclear escalation between Russia and the West. Russia claims that there is no common position between Western countries regarding the prospects for the liberation of Crimea.
- The official Russian media continues to [spread](#) anti-Ukrainian narratives, claiming that Ukraine is a “fictional state”, the product of Anglo-Saxon imagination. The Kremlin believes that Ukraine’s European aspirations will destroy Europe since Ukraine is a “traitor” of the Russian people, which means that Ukrainians will betray Europeans. Russian media engage in humiliating Ukrainian political leaders.