

**February 21st - February 27th, 2023
Ukraine Weekly Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- The Russian army is continuing to advance in the Donetsk oblast close to Bakhmut, Shakhtarsk and Vuhledar, as well as near the city of Kreminna in the Luhansk oblast. Attempts undertaken by Russian [subversion and reconnaissance groups](#) to enter the territory of the Kharkiv oblast from Russian territories were also documented last week. While gradually approaching Bakhmut, Russian troops (sustaining heavy losses) are destroying the city with artillery and air force. Nevertheless, according to some data provided by the military, there are around 7000 [civilians](#) still living in the city, with 100 children among them.
- Ukrainian society was expecting provocations and significant escalation that would be timed with the beginning of the Russian invasion. However, neither new offensives nor opening of new front lines occurred, even though enormously intense hostilities were continuing in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblast. A new ground [offensive](#) will now be only possible after warmer weather sets in and the ground is dry again from precipitation in the second half of spring. At the same time, the visit of Joe Biden ahead of the invasion's anniversary gave much inspiration to Ukraine. Ukrainians perceived it as a show of support from the USA and NATO.
- According to Ukraine, as of February 27 losses incurred by Russian troops amounted to over [148 thousand](#) soldiers killed.
- Last week Kherson (as many as [10 rounds of shelling](#) a day were registered on some occasions), Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Nikopol, Marhanets, Kupyansk, Kramatorsk, Siversk, Myrnohrad, Vuhledar, Avdiivka and other settlements were subjected to shelling, as well as territories of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblast located close to the Russian border.
- On February 26-27, the Russian army mounted a large-scale kamikaze drone attack (14 drones were launched), the majority of which were downed. The day before a Russian jet A-50, which is used to detect aircraft, shipping, missiles, and other incoming projectiles at long ranges, was [damaged](#) following an explosion at an airfield in Belarus. According to some data, local resistance groups stand behind the explosion.
- February 26 is the [Day of Resistance](#) to the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. This year marks the 9th anniversary of the Russian invasion of the peninsula.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the [information provided by juvenile prosecutors](#), 461 Ukrainian children have been killed, with 927 wounded with various degrees of severity due to the Russian invasion. 16.221 children are believed to have been deported. On February 21, Russian occupants shelled [Kherson](#),

- which claimed the lives of 6 people, with 20 people wounded. [A kindergarten](#) in the city caught fire on February 24 following another round of shelling.
- According to the results of a [survey](#), apathy is the emotion felt least (6%) by Ukrainians, with the majority of them harboring hopes for the better. Also, a [survey](#) conducted by the Ukrainian Veterans Fund has shown that one third of Ukrainian veterans, who are not serving in the army, are unemployed.
 - Journalists from the Russian TV channel [Dozhd](#) have revealed 24 orphanages in the Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) where forcibly relocated children from Ukraine are being detained. In 21 of them sessions of “military and patriotic education” take place, such as screenings of briefings by the speaker of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Children are making candles for the front-line soldiers, while also being taught to use the Kalashnikov rifle. According to the journalists, the number of detained children exceeds the mark of 400 since there is currently no available information about other oblasts (Moscow or Leningrad oblasts which have announced “the reception of orphans” before).
 - On the day of the war anniversary, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [published confirmed data](#) on civilian victims. After a year of the war in Ukraine, 8006 civilians were killed with 13.287 wounded. However, the UN believes that actual data would show a more gruesome picture.
 - Since the beginning of the invasion Russia has subjected [the territory of Ukraine](#) to over 5 thousand missile and 3,5 thousand air strikes, having also mounted [at least 707](#) attacks on the objects of Ukraine’s medical infrastructure. [1877 settlements](#) in Ukraine are still under Russian occupation. According to [the head of the Donetsk oblast military administration](#), Pavlo Kyrylenko, Avdiivka is effectively ruined, while as many as 80% of Bakhmut has been destroyed. 180 political prisoners are being [illegally detained in Russian prisons](#), 116 of them are Crimean Tatars.
 - According to Forbes, the war in Ukraine has cost Russia [almost 115 billion USD](#). This sum makes up one third of all the income received by Russia in 2021.
 - Since the “grain deal” was signed, [43 countries](#) have received 22 million tons of agricultural produce. Nevertheless, only [40%](#) of a possible export volume has been achieved since Russia is obstructing the inspection of ships in the Bosphorus. The lack of Ukrainian agricultural produce export is mainly compensated by Australia, while Ukraine still remains the leader in the production of wheat. Interestingly, the [Russian information agency TASS](#) has mentioned the increase in the production of crops in Russia. However, Russian statistical data are also collected from Ukraine’s occupied territories. In fact, these data cover Ukrainian grain stolen by Russia.
 - After a year of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine’s environment has incurred damage amounting to [1,9 trillion UAH](#). According to some estimates, the sum of the damage inflicted on the objects of Ukraine’s local infrastructure runs as high as [130 billion EUR](#).
 - Since February 24, 2022 investigation officers of the National of Police of Ukraine have opened [64.847 criminal proceedings](#) into the crimes committed by the soldiers of the Russian army and their accomplices.

- Russian participation in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START III) [has been suspended](#). Also, the Russian President has said that over 91% of Russia's nuclear arsenal is equipped with state-of-the-art systems. The START III was the last document aimed at restricting the arsenals of Russia and the USA, while Moscow and Washington continued to cooperate in this area. A few hours after Putin's address (during which the suspension of the START III was announced) the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an explanation, according to which Russia would comply with quantitative limitations postulated in the START III, pledging to inform the USA of future launches of ballistic missiles. However, such a pledge is not binding and only covers a part of the treaty.
- In occupied Mariupol, Russians are throwing books out of the [library of the Pryazovskyi State University](#) on the streets for their further disposal.
- The situation in Ukraine remains critical. 60% of the country's population is below the [poverty line](#). 6,3 million Ukrainians [have found](#) shelter in Europe. 6,6 million Ukrainians are internally displaced people. However, there has been positive change as well: [20% of Ukrainian mothers and their children](#), who relocated following the full-scale invasion, have returned to their homes.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

- Volodymyr Zelenskyy's [press conference](#) on February 24 demonstrated the asymmetry between external and internal messages shared by the President. While Zelenskyy highlighted the achievements of drumming up international support of Ukraine and weapons deliveries (such as the latest meeting at Rammstein, participation in the summit of the EU countries, Joe Biden's visit), this success does not exempt the Ukrainian government from the need to solve complex internal economic and political issues. Zelenskyy aims to avoid politicizing "complex issues", saying that "certain decisions, which I make at the meetings of the General Staff and that regard certain persons or the defense of our country, are not discussed by me personally. One of such decision concerns ***the situation in some regions and some state institutions***. In this regard, I had a few thoughts not exclusively on the relevant ministry but on the infrastructure that is supposed to ensure our security, which would be strengthened by the military or intelligence officers, or civil servants. This also regards the ***situation in some regions close to the Russian border***. That is it. I discussed the issue at hand from this perspective".

During the press conference the following issues were addressed:

- Ukraine is not ready to go for compromises or negotiations unless its territories have been liberated (unless Russia has not withdrawn its troops from Ukraine's territories).
- Zelenskyy is ready to meet Xi Jinping, however, without acknowledging Chinese proposals as "a plan for peace".
- Ukraine would like the "South" countries, in particular, India and China, to join the Peace Forum initiated by Zelenskyy.

Moreover, the press conference has demonstrated that Ukraine society:

- lacks a clear vision of its government regarding the prospects for economic and political development in the post-war period;
- demands fight against corruption;
- demands justice and legality amid war;
- wants the government to be prepared to take into account criticisms expressed by society and Ukrainian businesses, as well as to rectify the mistakes made (the question posed by the journalist from the 5th channel).
- On February 23, 2023 the head of the Office of the President, Andriy Yermak, chaired over the extended [meeting](#) of the Presidium of local and regional authorities under the auspices of the head of state. Formally, the meeting was organized to prepare for the Congress of local and regional authorities due to be held in March. According to Yermak, the key issues of the agenda will be the energy sector, economic recovery and the needs of IDPs. One may assume that the real intentions of the Office of the President are: 1) to avoid vacuum in the system of the management of regions' development; 2) to extend influence over regional elites and expand the Office's political base there.
- The fight between Ukraine's political leaders influenced by oligarchs continues. It has been announced that the registry of [oligarchs](#) will be available after the Venice Commission delivers its verdict. According to experts, Ukraine's big businesses may want to regain sway. However, it is not to be expected that oligarchs will be able to regain much of the influence they were able to exert before the war.
- According to the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, about 3 million refugees are expected to come [back](#) to Ukraine during the first year after the war. 1,5 million are expected to return during the second post-war year. In total, 75% of Ukrainians, who fled the country after the invasion, are expected to return.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- Russian media were doing their best to represent Putin's address before the Federal Assembly in the most favorable light on February 24. The messages about the legitimacy of "[retaking historical lands](#)" during the special military operation (hereinafter: SMO) abound. Participants of the SMO are supported. According to some [narratives](#), the whole world was watching Putin's address, i.e. the most important event happening in the world. Putin spoke a lot about Russia's [historical lands](#). Russia claims that Russian society has shown more [interest](#) in Putin's address this year than the year before.
- Overall, Russian information space is hosting many narratives that turn the SMO into a mundane occurrence as its going to be "a protracted thing". Moscow believes the SMO is necessary and legitimate, aiming to counter the West and prevent it from destroying Russia. The Kremlin claims that the West intends on "[taking](#) the entire post-Soviet countries". In Russia this war is represented as the unification of Russian society in the face of new threats. A romantic image of the war is being forged (also, with the help of pop culture, e.g., the concert at [Luzhniki](#) on February 22, with Russian

celebrities singing songs dedicated to the SMO, etc.). Moscow continues to share narratives about the national support of the SMO. In particular, the Kremlin [uses](#) big names in Russian music and cinematography to promote its narratives.

- Threats posed by the West are [represented](#) as threats to Russia, to the existence of Russians as a people, which has also been claimed by Putin. The collapse of the USSR is put down to the plan hatched by the West, aiming to destroy Russia and continue to deploy similar policies in the future.
- Russian media share messages about [the support](#) and payments provided for the participants of the SMO, as well as support offered by [priests](#) of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Moscow deploys the rhetoric full of messages regarding Russian victory and possible peace talks. At the same time, official messages promoted by the Kremlin are adamant about the conditions and demands set by Russia. On February 24, which marked the anniversary of the Russian invasion, Dmitry Medvedev [wrote](#) that “the victory will be achieved”. Messages about territorial gains and expectations for expansion (“we will retake our territory”) are being spread. The goal of the SMO is being explained as a response to threats posed to Russian borders, which includes reaching beyond “Polish border”. Moscow is also circulating messages about negotiations, however, not with Ukraine, but with the western countries supporting Ukraine. Such messages have been [shared](#) by Sergei Shoigu. He said that “the advances of the Russian army will, among other things, depend on what kind of long-range weapons Kyiv will receive from the West”. Russian media believe in Zelenskyy’s [imminent defeat](#) that is to come “in October 2023”.
- Russia has backed the proposals put forward by China. Maria Zakharova [commented](#) them on the third day after they were released, saying that Russia endorses the proposals, albeit on Russian terms - Ukraine’s neutrality, no further deliveries of weapons for Kyiv, abolishment of sanctions imposed on Russia, etc. Peskov has also said about [the lack](#) of preconditions for peace talks with Ukraine.
- Anti-Western narratives are being shared in Russia, in particular, about the ability of the country to foster its technological development in the field of artificial intelligence. Moscow claims that Russia is in need of its own technologies as “[Western AI hates Russia](#)”. Messages about possible nuclear war are being spread. Russian media maintain that some US experts are well aware of such risks. These narratives are being [promoted](#) by Russian official media that also refer to western media outlets.
- Russian internal discourse is being permeated by messages about the lack of unity within the EU regarding the support of Ukraine and weapons deliveries; about big rallies in the EU countries against such policies ([Germany](#) being a case in point). Moscow emphasizes the illegitimate nature (as seen by EU citizens) of western governments’ decisions to support Ukraine. The Kremlin also claims that [Germany, Spain and Italy](#) endorse the idea of holding peace negotiations with Russia. It is claimed that there is a [lack](#) of unity among western countries regarding future relations with Russia. Moscow promotes the idea of citizens of the western countries supporting Putin’s idea about Russian [traditional values](#) and “moral decay of the West”. In Russia, messages about Russian resilience in the face of western sanctions and Russian [economic development](#) are plentiful.

- There are narratives galore about Russia controlling everything in terms of its relations with the West. The Kremlin opines that that Biden’s visit to Kyiv would have been impossible, had Moscow not [approved of](#) it. According to the Kremlin’s version, “Moscow lured Biden into Ukraine”. Russia [downplays](#) the visit of the American President.
- Narratives are being issued about achievements made by the Russian army in the SMO, about [the edge](#) it has over the Ukrainian army in terms of the quantity of shells. This narrative has come as a response to messages shared previously on Russian telegram channels about the lack of shells. [Evgeniy Prigozhyn](#) has shared messages about [advances](#) of the Russian army and it having taken new settlements.
- Russian far-right channels on Telegram support Prigozhyn, while also chastising Russian top military brass. Officially, the Kremlin prefers to [refrain from commenting](#) about disagreements between the private paramilitary group “Wagner” and the Russian Ministry of Defense regarding the information about the latter not delivering weapons to the former.