

**July 11th - July 24th, 2023
Ukraine Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- **The counter-offensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) continues in several directions.** On 17 July, an explosion damaged the [Crimean bridge](#), a crucial logistics link for weapons and ammunition deliveries to the peninsula from Russia. The Ukrainian army subsequently shelled military infrastructure objects, ammunition depots, and Russian military units located on the territory of Crimea. On 24 July, the AFU launched a [drone attack](#) on military objects in Moscow, which confirms the AFU's ability to successfully circumvent the defensive lines of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF). Overall, 86% of the targets hit by the AFU are detected thanks to [drones](#). They are regarded as expendable since the Ukrainian military monthly loses around 10.000 drones per month.
- Six weeks into the counteroffensive, the Ukrainian army has achieved the following: approximately 1500 meters of [recaptured](#) territories to the south of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia province; to the south of the city of Velyka Novosilka in the Donetsk province the advances have been greater, with 8-9 kilometers liberated from the area where the front line was before 5 June. In the northeast Ukrainian troops have [retreated](#) a few hundred meters off the upland to the north and south of Bakhmut. According to a [statement](#) made by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, the Ukrainian counteroffensive is "far from a failure", despite the fact that it is progressing slower than expected.
- According to the Ukrainian government, as of 26 June the **total losses of Russian troops** amounted to [242.000](#) killed soldiers. At the same time, in some sectors of the front, the AFRF are continuing to advance by assaulting Ukrainian positions in Kupyansk, Lyman, Avdiivka, and Mariinka directions.
- Several scandals (including connected to corruption) regarding the activities of Territorial Centers for Recruitment and Social Assistance (TCRSA) have led to not only Ukraine's security forces and anti-corruption bodies dealing with this issue but also President Zelenskyy's involvement. He [announced](#) the start of extensive checks of these centers for illicit enrichment. The former head of the Odessa TCRSA, who is involved in the case, has already been apprehended.
- **The Russian army continues to mount massive missile and drone strikes on Ukrainian positions located far from the front line.** Strike drones, cruise, ballistic, and guided missiles are practically used on a daily basis. Cities located in the vicinity of the front line or Russian border are subject to shelling from artillery, multiple rocket launchers, and S-300 missile systems. In the past two weeks, numerous cities including [Mykolayiv](#), [Kherson](#), [Kharkiv](#), [Vovchansk](#), [Kupyansk](#), [Beryslav](#), [Hulyaipole](#), [Bilopillya](#), [Kostyantynivka](#), [Kramatorsk](#), [Druzhkivka](#), [Avdiivka](#), [Chasiv Yar](#), [New-York](#), [Nikopol](#), [Ochakiv](#) were subjected to air and missile attacks along with artillery shelling, as well as settlements of Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy provinces located close to the Russian border. During shelling Russia often uses cluster and other munitions that are banned from use in populated areas. They also use overhauled anti-ship missiles X-22 which the Ukrainian air defense system cannot yet intercept. A

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significant number of attacks target agricultural objects and ports through which Ukrainian grain is exported. For example, a port on the Danube has been shelled, near the Romanian border. The strike was the closest to [NATO](#) territory since the beginning of a full-scale war.

- Ukraine's State Border Guard Service has [confirmed](#) the movement of the Wagner private paramilitary group in Belarus. According to British intelligence, up to 20.000 inmates (recruited by the Wagner group) from Russia were killed "within a few months".
- **Odesa has been severely targeted by Russia. Large-scale attacks with Caliber, Oniks, X-22 and Iskander-K missiles as well as ballistic Iskander-M missiles have taken place. Odesa's historical city center has been substantially damaged. In 2023 the center was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List.** Also, on 23 July, one of Odesa's main cathedrals, the Transfiguration Cathedral, was [destroyed](#). In total, since 24 February 2022 Russia has either destroyed or damaged about 500 religious buildings in Ukraine. Following the shelling, Metropolitan Ahafanhel, who was previously considered one of the staunchest pro-Russian representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), made a strong statement addressing the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). In parallel, the clergy renewed their calls to the leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to break ties with the ROC.

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- **Tension between the center and the regions is impacting vertical social cohesion (trust of the central and local governments) in Ukraine.** The absence of clear priorities in regional policies and mechanisms for controlling the use of funds from local budgets has resulted in misuse, rumors and political provocations. For example, Ukrainian President, Volodymyr [Zelenskyy](#), who is also head of the parliamentary faction "Servants of People", Davyd [Arakhamia](#), head of the Verkhovna Rada Finance Committee, Tax and Customs Policies, Danylo [Hetmantsev](#), and a number of other representatives of the central government have called on local governments to pay more attention to defense expenditures, while the representatives of local governments (led by the mayor of Kyiv, [Vitalii Klychko](#)) have spoken against funds for defense being allocated from local budgets. This confrontation is accompanied by numerous political scandals, one of which has led to the resignation of the Minister of Culture and Informational Policy, Oleksandr Tkachenko. **Amid war, the fight for authority between the central and local governments leads to a dead-end. Decentralization should not pose a threat to a united legal and economic space of Ukraine, while state control should not turn into a manual control over regions and local governance.** Obviously, in the context of martial law Ukraine requires an updated state policy for regional development, setting clear priorities and mechanisms for inclusive development and an increasing level of social cohesion at the national and regional levels.
- **The fact that 2.8 million working-age women will not return to Ukraine will prove costly for Ukraine's economy.** While the Ukrainian government is drawing up ambitious plans for post-war development to double Ukraine's economy by 2032, the Ministry of Economy has reported that Ukraine is [short of](#) 4.5 million workers and entrepreneurs that would be instrumental in achieving this goal. If Ukraine fails entice 2.8 million female working-age refugees back to the country, this will

cost the country 10% of its pre-war GDP. Women make up 68% of all Ukrainian refugees, since men aged 18-60 have been banned from leaving the country.

- **A number of popular products have reduced in price.** For example, in June the price of buckwheat [dropped](#) by 30.6%, being second only to the price of eggs, which shrank by 31.7% in the same month. The decrease in price by 7.2% per month is the most significant decrease among 33 types of food products. Monthly price dynamics are being tracked by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. According to the Head of the National Scientific Centre “The Institute of Agrarian Economics”, Yuri Lupenko, compared to May consumer prices for food products in June rose the least (by 0,1%) since the beginning of the year. However, prices have increased the most on potatoes (+21,7%), cabbage (+21,5%) and apples (+20,1%).

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official data provided by [juvenile prosecutors](#), 496 children have been killed, with 1072 sustaining wounds of various degrees of severity. 19.592 children are considered to have been deported. According to the [UNICEF](#), 3.3 million Ukrainian children require help due to the war.
- According to a report presented by the [UN](#), over 91% of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) have been subjected to torture and cruel treatment. The [Associated Press](#) claims that the Russian Federation (Russia) has created a network of official and unofficial prisons where Ukrainian POWs are subjected to torture, psychological violence, and forced into slavery. According to Ukrainian estimates, around 10.000 Ukrainian civilians are being detained in Russian prisons.
- The bodies of [19 people](#) who perished in Russian captivity have been returned to Ukraine, as well as the bodies of [62](#) soldiers who were killed in battle. Given that the bodies of Ukrainian POWs are [mutilated](#), their families are trying to apply for compensation. However, it is quite difficult to prove the official status of a soldier in question due to the lack of certain ID data or destroyed territorial defense units list. For example, a [family](#) of one of the tortured Ukrainian POWs was forced to file a lawsuit at the European Court of Human Rights.
- The Ukrainian government has [approved](#) a trial project for rebuilding the Kakhovka Dam. The Minister of Interior announced that [the final number](#) of those killed in the destruction of the Dam was thirty-one. A full-fledged relaunch of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant following its liberation will be [impossible](#) without the restoration of the Kakhovka Dam. As a result of the dam’s destruction, the water level in the Dnipro River, near the city of Zaporizhzhia, is too low for the Dnipro hydroelectric power to fully operate. A solution must be found ahead of the heating season. As of now, the energy system has not been restored.
- Due to Russian aggression, about [30% of Ukraine's territory](#) has sustained an unprecedented level of damage. Since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022 until July 2023, the UN has registered 298 civilian deaths from explosives. 22 of them were children, with 632 civilians injured. It is estimated that it will take 757 years to fully demine Ukraine.
- Experts from the Ukrainian Institute for the Future identified some [key economic trends](#) including a likely foreign trade deficit that creates the conditions for a devaluation of the Hryvnia. Ukraine’s

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permanent population now stands at 28.5 million people with approximately 12 million economically active citizens. The birth rate in Ukraine is in decline, remaining lower than the fertility rate, which according to estimates has already fallen below one. Should this trend continue, the number of pensioners in Ukraine will double in 5-10 years. The question then arises of how to maintain positive economic growth and the survival of a nation in general.

- On 17 July, Russia announced its [withdrawal](#) from the grain deal. The Russian President's Press-Secretary, Dmitri Peskov, said that "the part of this agreement that concerns Russia has not been implemented, which is why it will be terminated". During the duration of the deal no ship carrying Russian fertilizers was dispatched. In addition, Russia insists that the Russian Agricultural Bank is reconnected to the system of international payments, SWIFT. Compared to March 2023, the export of food within the framework of the agreement dropped by 29% in April and by 66% in May. Furthermore, due to the [Russian attack](#) on Odesa's and Chornomorsk's ports on 19 July, 60.000 tons of agricultural produce, which was due to be shipped to China, was destroyed. Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose country acts as an intermediary in the grain deal, is planning to discuss the extension of the deal with Putin during the latter's visit to Turkey's at the end of August. Putin claims that Russia can [replace](#) Ukrainian grain "both commercially and free of charge". The disruption of the deal has led to a [blockade of navigation](#) in the Black Sea imposed by Russia and Ukraine. Both sides have announced a ban on access of civilian ships to the ports that belong to the adversary (Russian statement) or that were captured by the adversary (Ukrainian statement). On 21 July, Reuters [said](#) that the traffic of ships carrying grain plummeted by 35%.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **Poland is occupying a part of Ukraine. Poland's fifth partition.** Russia continues to deploy historical narratives in its interpretations of the 20th century with a view to interpreting the allegedly challenges and security threats. During a Security Council meeting on 21 July, Putin [said](#) that within the framework of the Lublin triangle, Poland is planning to capture parts of western Ukraine under the guise of protecting the Ukrainian population, while also threatening Belarus. Putin has said that "Western territories of modern Poland were a gift by Stalin to the Poles. Have our friends in Warsaw forgotten that? We will remind them". Russian official propagandist sources [ask](#) questions as to whether "the fifth partition of Poland is possible". Relevant narratives are being [actively](#) promoted in Russian official propagandist media. The Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko also [spoke](#) about threats to Belarus emanating from Poland at a [meeting](#) with Putin on 23 July. Lukashenko [showed](#) a map with movements of the Polish military towards the East, which he claimed poses a threat to Belarus.
- **Grain deal. Russia has gained nothing from the deal. The deal is a commercial project of the West.** On 17 July, [Peskov](#) announced Russia's withdrawal from the grain deal. The Kremlin try to justify Russia's [refusal](#) to participate in the grain deal. In particular, Moscow claims that Russia's demands regarding the reconnection to SWIFT and the lifting of sanctions have not been satisfied. In addition, Moscow emphasizes that Russia will solve world's grain problems on its own. According to the

Kremlin, the deal itself has turned into “a commercial project of the West and has nothing to do with saving poor countries”. In other words, it is not Russia who withdraws from the deal, it is the West who is allegedly to blame for its ineffectiveness.

- **The grain deal. Russia will feed the Global South by itself.** The Kremlin is deploying a narrative of the support Russia offers to the worlds’ poorest countries, despite the position taken by the West. An [article](#) published on the Kremlin’s website claims that Russia is expecting a record high harvest, and that Moscow is ready to replace Ukrainian grain and provide the world’s poorest countries with food “for the sake of progress”. Russia emphasizes its systematic support to African countries.
- **Russia’s achievements in the Global South despite the pressure exerted by the West on different countries.** Russia continues to spread the narrative about the deep ties between Russia and African countries as well as with the countries of South America. Putin will [not go](#) to South Africa as he does not want to embarrass its President. Moscow claims that the International Criminal Court in the Hague is a tool used to wield pressure on Russia, and the warrant was issued in order to limit Russia's capacities, in particular of its cooperation with the countries in the Global South.
- **Europe wants to kill Russians and destroy the Russian state. The West is becoming exhausted by its confrontation with Russia.** A narrative is being promoted about Ukraine fatigue in western societies as well as a split in the West regarding support for Ukraine. Putin has [spoken](#) about support for Ukraine from EU societies [decreasing](#) as well as about the policies of the EU leaders running counter to the expectations of the European society. Traditionally, anti-European narratives regarding the readiness of the EU to [support](#) Ukraine in “mass killings” are being promoted. At the same time, according to Russian propaganda, the resources allocated by the EU for Ukraine are [depleting](#) the European economy, while being met with the resistance from EU societies.
- **Our cause is just. The goals of the special military operation (SMO) remain the same. Ukraine’s defeat is a matter of time.** Different propagandist texts spread narratives about the “[goals of the so-called SMO remaining unchanged](#)”. Moscow claims that the SMO will be implemented until its goal is fulfilled: the removal of anti-Russia and its pro-Western government.
- **Everything is under control. The government is stronger than ever.** Russia’s official discourse is full of narratives claiming that the Kremlin has everything under control. The Russian media has practically been silent on the [arrest](#) of the war criminal, Girkin-Strelkov. The issue of peace negotiations has also been glossed over. Some Kremlin officials and experts believe that peace is impossible due to the reluctance shown by the West. For Russia, hypothetical [conditions](#) for peace talks would be Ukraine's military defeat, the reluctance or lack of capacities on the part of the West to support Ukraine or “the freezing of the conflict”. Russia insists on negotiations taking place on Russia’s terms.
- **The Kyiv regime are terrorists.** Ukraine is [accused](#) of conducting terrorist attacks on Russian territories ([Crimea](#), Moscow, etc.). Moscow emphasizes that Russia is in full control of the situation. The Russian media continues to spread the narratives about “anti-Russia” in Ukraine.

- **Participants of the SMO are heroes.** Traditionally, the Russian media highlights the initiatives dedicated to the further militarization of Russian society and “patriotic education”. For example, Russian teachers have allegedly [spoken in favour of](#) the introduction of an initiative to carry-out weeks of screening documentaries at schools about the participants of the so-called SMO. Memorials continue to be erected in [Primorsky Krai](#) and other Russian regions. [Peskov](#) has announced the participation of the SMO fighters in meetings held by the federal authorities.
- **Shelling Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and objects of cultural heritage. Russia is not guilty. Ukraine is to blame for everything. Russian weapons are high-precision weapons.** The Russian Ministry of Defense has reported about high-precision strikes on [military](#) objects in South Ukraine, without [denying](#) the continuous shelling. At the same time, Moscow claims to have destroyed Ukraine's grain infrastructure, including elevators for storing Ukrainian grain. On 23 July, the Russian Ministry of Defense [denied](#) Russia's involvement in the destruction of the Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa. In a [statement](#) issued by the ROC, the destruction is pinned on Ukraine. The ROC did not even consider the statement made by the Odesa Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in which the shelling of the Cathedral was mentioned. On 23 July, Patriarch Kirill [called](#) for prayers for the unity and for “the Russian military”. According to Russia, “the most likely reason for the Cathedral’s destruction was Ukraine downing its own guided surface-to-air missile due to incompetent air defense operators”. Prior to this, the Russian Ministry of Defense had [claimed](#) that “high-precision” weapons had hit targets where “drone boats” were being produced. Also, Dmitri Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, [has urged Russia](#) to pick “non-standard goals” for Russian missile attacks on Ukraine – “Not only depots, energy hubs or oil depots. There are also other facilities where they are not waiting for us yet”. After the attack on the Crimean bridge Medvedev said that “the homes of Ukraine’s leadership and relatives of the representatives of the Ukrainian government” [had to be destroyed](#).
- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army. The counteroffensive of the AFU has failed.** Every day Putin [speaks](#) about the [failure](#) of the Ukrainian counteroffensive which disappoints “western curators”, while “the defense lines of the Russian army remain effective”. This narrative is continuously [promoted](#) by official propaganda sources – the Ukrainian counteroffensive has failed, and the capacities of the Russian military are high. According to some narratives, it is not Ukrainians who are fighting against Russia, but foreign mercenaries and western troops. The Russian media continues to report about continuous hits on AFU targets where “foreign mercenaries” are allegedly stationed ([Chernihiv province](#)).
- **Victories and achievements of the Russian army. The losses suffered by the AFU.** The Russian propaganda space is awash with stories about the achievements of the Russian army in the so-called SMO ([destruction of equipment](#)), the professional behaviour of the Russian military that “is witnessed by the whole world” ([Putin](#)), the Russian [offensive](#) near Kupyansk, and [repelling](#) the AFU’s attacks in the Donetsk province, etc.