

June 13th - June 26th, 2023
Ukraine Situation Report

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- **The counter-offensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) continues apace in several directions.** In the last two weeks, a number of settlements in the Donetsk ([Rivnopil](#)) and Zaporizhzhia ([Pyatykhatky](#)) provinces were liberated. In total over 130.000 square kilometers have been liberated, despite the advantage that the Russians have in terms of artillery and air force. According to unofficial reports, following a pause due to the destruction of the Kakhovska Dam, the Ukrainian army further extended its foothold on the [Eastern bank](#) of the Dnipro River near Kherson and the Antonivskiy Bridge. The AFU have also pushed back the Russians from the [Western bank](#) of the Siverskiy Donets-Donbas canal.
- According to Ukraine, Russia has lost some [225.000 soldiers](#). Moreover, in June the AFU intensively destroyed Russian artillery, multiple rocket launchers, and aircraft, which helps improve the conditions for the counter-offensive. According to local media, Russian troops are being forced to gradually retreat from their positions near Nova Kakhovka to avoid encirclement. The Russian army could also have been weakened by the retreat of some military units belonging to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF) and private paramilitary groups during the so-called “mutiny” by the Wagner group. During their “march” to Moscow, members of the Wagner group downed 6 helicopters and a plane, which has weakened the Russian air force.
- **The Russian army continues to launch missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian cities.** On the night of 14 June the AFRF [launched](#) 4 cruise missiles (3 downed) and 10 kamikaze drones (9 downed) on Ukraine. On the night of 15 June, 4 cruise missiles (1 downed) and 20 kamikaze drones (all [downed](#)) were fired. On the morning of 16 June, Russia carried out a missile attack (Caliber cruise missiles and Kinzhal X-47 ballistic missiles). All missiles were [shot down](#). On the night of 19 June, all 4 cruise missiles and 4 kamikaze drones were [downed](#). On the night of 20 June, the Ukrainian air defense [shot down](#) 32 out of 35 Russian kamikaze drones. On the night of 21 June, the Russian Federation (Russia) attacked Ukraine with 6 kamikaze drones, all of which were shot [down](#). On the night of 22 June, three cruise missiles X-22, three “Kinzhal” ballistic missiles X-47 and four kamikaze drones (3 of them downed) were [fired](#). On the night of 23 June, all 13 cruise missiles, which the Russian army fired at Khmelnytskyi province in an attempt to damage an airfield, were [downed](#). On the night of 24 June, 49 missiles (41 of them downed) and 2 kamikaze drones (both of them downed) were [launched](#). On the night of 26 June, 11 out of 12 kamikaze drones were shot down, with 2 out of 2 cruise missiles [destroyed](#).
- In the last two weeks the cities of Kyiv, Dnipro, Lviv, Kherson (incendiary ammunition was used), Kropyvnytskyi, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Kryvyi Rih (12 people were killed and 38 injured during a single shelling on 13 June), Pokrovsk, Vovchansk were subjected to air strikes, missile and artillery shelling as well as other cities. In addition, the settlements located close to the Russian

border in Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy provinces were attacked. In addition, on [Father's Day](#) Russian troops shelled the Sumy province, which claimed the lives of a man and his 4-year-old son.

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is trying to tame “political profiteers” and prevent “political unrest” among political forces as well as political and economic groups. Parliamentary elections were supposed to take place this autumn, while presidential elections were slated for the spring of 2024. President Zelenskyy has promised that elections, as stipulated in the law, will take place once martial law is abolished.
- Against the background of discussions about Ukraine’s counteroffensive, Zelenskyy referred to the public demand for liberation, once again promising that Ukraine will not agree to negotiate as long as Russian troops are on Ukraine’s soil.
- On 26 June Zelenskyy signed a decree to enact a decision by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC) about the conditions of bomb shelters in the country. According to the decree, in a meeting held on 23 June the NSDC acknowledged that the work completed by military regional administrations to ensure the safety and preparedness of bomb shelters in numerous areas across the country as unsatisfactory. It had been reported earlier that the commissions of the Ministry of Interior and State Emergency Service had finished the check of 63.000 bomb shelters. According to the prime minister, 77% of bomb shelters are ready for use. According to the new decree, the criminal liability of officials for improper maintenance and use of bomb shelters is to be strengthened, as well as for failing to provide citizens with 24-hour access. Regional military administrations have until 25 July to bring bomb shelters up to standard.
- **The implementation of the decree poses serious questions that remained out of spotlight of the decisions made:**
 - reassessment of the State management system of regional development during martial law;
 - creation of the system of risk assessment of the resilience of Ukraine’s regions;
 - quality and effectiveness of the systems for controlling the implementation of government’s decisions, presidential decrees, etc., by heads of military administrations;
 - strategic assessment of the capacity of military administrations in terms of fulfilling their functions amid the war;
 - efficiency of the existing mechanisms for financial support of government’s and the president’s decisions regarding the safety of citizens’ and the resilience of regions.
- The head of the Ternopil regional council (Mr. Holovko) as well as two deputy heads of the Ternopil regional military administration (Ihor Demyahncuk and Ihor Hayduk), have been apprehended on suspicion of corruption by detectives of Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and attests to fundamental problems in the system of regional development management.
- According to Eastern Human Rights Group, Russian security agencies have begun to detain minors en masse in the temporarily occupied territories. According to the message, “the security agencies of the occupiers have started to take measures in Ukraine’s occupied territories aimed at fighting

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dissent in people under 18 years of age. In May 2023, the security agencies detained 27 people in Antratsyt and Rovenky. Human rights activists say the detentions are taking place because youth in the occupied territories constantly visit Ukrainian internet sources, while also frequently arguing with teachers at schools about the actions of the Russian occupiers. At the same time, the parents of those detained are threatened with have their parental rights removed and the deportation of their children to Russia. The main informants of the security agencies are advisors to school principals dealing with ideology. Such a position was introduced in schools located in Russia and the occupied territories after the invasion of Ukraine. Similar information comes from temporarily occupied [Mariupol](#). Children there are checked for their involvement in guerrilla movements and cooperation with the AFU.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official data provided by [juvenile prosecutors](#), 490 children have been killed and 1031 wounded with various degrees of severity. 19,499 children are believed to have been deported. 560 are considered to have gone [missing](#) since the beginning of the full-scale war.
- In Belarus 2.150 Ukrainian children are being detained after being [illegally been deported](#). Most of them are orphans. Facts have been established that Ukrainian children are being reeducated in Belarus. According to the mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, the Russian occupiers are deporting [300 children](#) from temporarily occupied Berdyansk (Zaporizhzhia province) into Russia's Chuvashia Republic. Additionally, there are 240 cases of Ukrainian children being taken away by social services in Europe.
- The occupation authorities in Berdyansk have confirmed the [killing](#) of two teenagers whom they refer to as "pro-Ukrainian terrorists". Born in 2006 they began to fight with the Russians. The boys and their families had previously been subjected to persecution.
- The Russian army regularly blows up hydraulic constructions, which inflicts damage on agricultural land in adjacent villages. According to the representative of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Vladyslav Dudar, the Russian military have mined "[a large number](#)" of hydraulic constructions located in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces.
- Following the destruction of the Kakhovska Dam, Crimea will not receive water for [at least a year](#). The lack of water will be experienced by Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Mykolayiv province. According to a [forecast by the UN](#), the Russian act of terrorism will also result in a global rise in food prices. The UN has also said that Russia has [failed to provide access](#) to the occupied rayons of the Kherson province that have been affected by the destruction of the Kakhovska Dam. 27 settlements on the right bank of the Dnipro and 17 on its left bank remain flooded.
- The Russian army is using banned chemical ammunition. For example, in December 2022 naval marines reported that [forbidden](#) aerosol grenades K-51 were used against Ukrainian defenders. In October 2022, a Russian unmanned aerial vehicle was neutralized, which was carrying a K-51 grenade consisting of a strong [irritant](#). Also, in Eastern Ukraine Russia dropped white [phosphorus munitions](#), [flechette munitions](#) (tiny metallic darts), banned [incendiary ammunition](#) with thermite

- balls. On 25 June, prohibited [asphyxiating](#) aerosol munition was dropped on AFU positions near Mariinka.
- On 14 June, a military court in Rostov-on-Don began holding hearings regarding the 22 Ukrainian soldiers from the Azov battalion that were taken captive in May 2022 (among them 8 women). In doing so, Russia is committing a war crime as it deprives [prisoners of war](#) of their right to a fair trial. Russia accuses the Ukrainians of undertaking terrorist activities on its soil. They could be sentenced to 15 years in prison.
 - On 8 June, the Russian Orthodox Church claimed to have [handed over](#) 11 Ukrainian POWs (from Transcarpathia) to Hungary. In Hungary, the prevailing narratives about returning the land lost 100 years ago and the Treaty of Trianon impose Russian friendship on Viktor Orbán. Hungary refuses to [grant Ukrainian diplomats access to these](#) POWs. They are banned from calling their families to inform them about their condition. The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, stated that with international mediation Ukraine has ensured a consistent prisoners swap with Russia. Hungary has [violated](#) international humanitarian law by conducting negotiations with Russia and hosting Ukrainian POWs.
 - Russia continues to force people to take [Russian citizenship](#). For example, at the beginning of 2023, in Kamyanyets (Zaporizhzhia province), the occupying forces made taking Russian nationality a precondition for employees of the Center for Primary Health Care if they wanted to receive their full salary. If they refused, then their salaries would be reduced by 60%. Since the majority of employees refused Russian passports, the occupiers decided to close the Center.
 - Members of the Russian State Duma [adopted a law](#) exempting those who have fought in the war against Ukraine from criminal liability. There is an exception for those convicted of certain crimes, including rape, terrorism, sabotage, high treason and espionage.
 - According to a [survey](#) conducted by Transparency International Ukraine, Ukrainians fear potential corruption during post-war recovery the most. 73% of Ukrainians and 80% of representatives of the business sector are concerned about a possible return of corruption schemes during the recovery process. According to a survey [carried out by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology](#), two thirds of Ukrainians believe that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate should be totally banned.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **Nuclear threats. “A difficult but necessary decision”. “The US is to blame for everything”.** Narratives are being spread about nuclear threats. There are different opinions as to why Russia will have to go nuclear and why Moscow is ready to do this, although it does not want to. On 16 June, Russian President, Vladimir Putin [said](#) that the use of nuclear weapons “is theoretically possible”. Russia will take this step if its territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty or the very existence of the state itself is threatened. According to Putin, “there is currently no need to take this step”. Russia’s official media have started to spread stories written by Kremlin analysts regarding nuclear weapons. These people claim that the US can potentially use nuclear weapon to destroy Russia. They

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write that the US has already sacrificed the lives of the Ukrainian people, is leading Europe to destruction. Political analyst and economist close to the Kremlin, Sergei Karaganov, has written an [article](#) entitled “A difficult but necessary decision”. In it, he explains why Russia is obliged to use nuclear weapons in its confrontation with the West. He refers to Russia as the “civilization of civilizations”, while Ukraine is a satellite of a nuclear superpower. On 25 June, after the news broke about the end of the Wagner Group’s mutiny, Karaganov published an article entitled “[There is no other choice: Russia will have to deal a nuclear strike on Europe](#)” in the Kremlin’s official propagandist media. He claims that “the military and political leadership of Russia will face a terrible moral choice and will need to make a difficult decision. However, I believe that our president will at some point have to be decisive in using nuclear weapon”. In other [publications](#) the situation in Ukraine is compared to the Cuban missile crisis when US strategy on Russia crossed all red lines, with the present conflict could go well beyond “the borders of Ukraine”. At the same time, “Russian strategy is based on achieving the goals of the special military operation (SMO) without resorting to nuclear weapons. However, the situation during the war can develop in different directions, which means it could quickly and unexpectedly spin out of control. We must be ready for this, and we must be prepared to stop the trajectory of the conflict if it leads to nuclear war”.

- At the same time, on 25 June, during the talk show “Moscow-The Kremlin-Putin”, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov [referred](#) to the words of President Zelenskyy, concerning the nuclear rhetoric used by Moscow as “turbulent stream of consciousness”.
- **The conflict between the Ministry of Defense and the Wagner group. “Shoigu is to blame for everything”. “The criminal case against Prigozhyn has not been closed”.** The official discourse of the Ministry of Defense is all about the never-ending victories of the Russian army. On 23 June, the head of the Wagner group, Yevgeny Prigozhyn, [shared](#) an interview in which he blames Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, for the losses of the Ministry of Defense, claiming that the reason why Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has failed is due to the Shoigu, corruption and some Russian oligarchs. At the same time, Putin appears to act as a detached observer who is misinformed by the military. Afterwards, during the military mutiny Prigozhyn accused Putin of everything.
- After agreements were made with the Wagner group and the end of the “Time of Troubles”, information was spread by TASS on 26 June about “a criminal case against Prigozhyn” is still ongoing and being investigated by the Investigative Committee of the Federal Security Service. Interestingly, the information was shared through unnamed “sources”.
- **“Everything is under control”. “The government is stronger than ever”, “the people support their president”.** After the armed mutiny was apparently brought to an end, the official narratives interpret the events in a rather detached manner, although the actions of the government are referred to as [harmonious](#) (Prime Minister, Mikhail Mishustin’s statement of 26 June), with the government “fully controlling” the situation. The media also claimed that “[the people have supported the president](#)”, “the words of the president fully concur with the public assessment (that was formed in the last 12 hours) of what is going on”. On the official newsfeed of TASS, the key news section “SMO” was replaced with “[attempted armed mutiny by the Wagner group](#)”. Messages were

circulated underlining the lack of support for the Wagner Group in Russia's regions. The media claim that "Russia is a [mature country](#)", capable of "dealing with difficult issues internally". Putin stated "[Russia is confident and able to implement all scheduled plans and tasks](#)" regarding the so-called SMO.

- On the evening of 23 June, Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitriy Peskov claimed that Putin was [informed](#) of the situation. The relevant message was published on the [website](#) of Putin's administration at 02:30 a.m., i.e. an hour before the Kremlin shared [Putin's address](#) to Russian youth, following the start of the mutiny in Rostov-on-Don. On 24 June, in his video [address](#) Putin accused Prigozhyn of high treason, comparing it to events in 1917. The official narrative used by the Kremlin during the mutiny was laconic, practically demonstrating detachment from the events. Official statements of loyalty to the president were made. During the day it was emphasized that "[Putin was working at the Kremlin](#)" and that Dmitriy Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia and his aides [were at their workplaces](#). Chairman of the Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin said that "[MPs were supporting their president](#)". On 24 June, verbatim reports about Volodin's [meeting](#) with the leaders of the Duma factions were released, whereas prime minister Mikhail Mishustin was [holding](#) meetings with the members of his cabinet, among other things discussing the development of airline industry. It was claimed that the Council of Federation was not planning to hold an extraordinary session and that everything [went according to plan](#).
- After striking a deal with Prigozhyn, official narratives were circulated about "everything being under control", in particular, under Putin's control. On 25 June, Russian propaganda channels [shared](#) information about a meeting between Putin and representatives of military universities. It was claimed that Putin was closely following the situation in Ukraine and the work of the defense industry. While commenting on the agreements with Prigozhyn, Peskov [said](#) the personnel issues of the Russian Ministry of Defense fell under the purview of the president, adding that these issues could hardly have been discussed during the negotiations conducted between Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko and Prigozhyn. Already at 07.00 a.m. on 26 June, the official Russian media [published](#) a story about a meeting (held [close to the front lines](#)) between Shoigu and the commanders of the Western front. The message touched on the care for "the personnel" and the progress of the so-called SMO.
- Lengthy comments published in the official media [refer](#) to the actions of the Wagner group as "Uprising in Russia" which was avoided by Russia (which does not want to kill their fellow citizens to the disappointment of the West) due to their well-developed consciousness. It was highlighted that there was nothing unique about the mutiny as Russia had already lived through this during Yeltsin's times and emerged stronger. A [narrative](#) has been promoted about the "internal turmoil" failing to receive support from society, nor from the elites. Russians have learned the lessons of the past and demonstrated "[state thinking](#)".
- **Causes of the war. The West started it.** Narratives have appeared stressing that Russia did not start the war. The Russian media claims that Russia was forced to put an end to it with the help of the army. [According](#) to Putin, the collective West and not Russia is the aggressor. "When they told us

that we started the war, and that Putin was the aggressor... No, it is them who is the aggressor, they started the war, while we are trying to end it. However, we are forced to do so with the help of the armed forces”. Putin acknowledged the strikes on the Ukrainian energy system in retaliation for “crossing red lines”. “Were the strikes on the Ukrainian energy system not a retaliation for crossing red lines? And the destruction of the head office of the Main Directorate of Ukrainian Intelligence in Kyiv — was it not the retaliation? It was! We will continue to work selectively. We will not resort to things done by these jerks who strike civilian targets and residential blocks. We will not do that. The director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, has [said](#) that during the SMO Russia obtained information about plans by the Ukrainian forces to “strangle Donbas”. According to him, the preparation of a “punitive operation” was being made with the assistance from the West and was to have taken place in 2022. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that Western countries have turned Ukraine into a terroristic cell, using the country as a staging ground to fight Russia.

- **Negotiations are inappropriate. “The West prevents Ukraine from conducting negotiations”.** The Chairwoman of the Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko, has [said](#) that Russia is ready for peace talks over Ukraine on realistic conditions. However, there are currently no preconditions for this, particularly in the context of the “peace initiatives” proposed by China, Africa and others. She has claimed that the West will prevent Kyiv from “taking such a step”.
- **Rejecting Ukrainian identity and statehood. “Sanitary zone” in the territory of Ukraine.** Putin has [addressed](#) the need to create a “sanitary zone” in Ukraine’s territory to eliminate “threats to Russia”. Maria Zakharova, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, has again [referred](#) to Ukrainian historical figures as “Nazis”, saying that Ukraine has no right for such “identity”.
- **The Ukrainian government is against Orthodox shrines to please Catholics and “global elites”.** In the Russian information space narratives abound about the anti-Orthodox nature of the Ukrainian government. For example, on 25 June, a story was [spread](#) by the press office of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (referring to its Director, Sergei Naryshkin), about the Ukrainians government planning to [put](#) the Orthodox shrines of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra at the disposal of UNESCO. It is claimed that officials in Kyiv have finished all the technicalities and are preparing for the transfer to museums in Italy, France, Germany and the Vatican, which is the center of Catholicism. According to the message, “global elites are interested in this”.
- **Developments around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).** [Messages](#) are being shared about Ukraine preparing terrorist attacks ([Kyiv is preparing a nuclear catastrophe](#)) at the ZNPP and subsequently accuse Russia of the act, “as was the case at the Kakhovska Dam”. To substantiate these claims, Russia brings in western commentators to prove their story.
- **Russian humanitarian mission in Kherson province. Ukraine is to blame for the humanitarian crisis.** Russian propaganda news outlets emphasize the humanitarian nature of Russia’s actions in the flooded territory of the Kherson province following the destruction of the Kakhovska Dam. Ukraine is accused of preventing the evacuation of the locals (form the city of [Oleshky](#)).

- **Discrediting Ukraine and its government.** Russia continues to share narratives discrediting the Ukrainian government on a systematic and personal level, in particular, regarding its ethnical composition. While answering a question about the policies of President Zelenskyy at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin [referred](#) to him as “a disgrace to the Jewish people”.
- **“Ukraine does not belong to the EU”.** Russian official media is promoting a narrative about the [inability](#) of the Ukrainian government to comply with the EU’s requirements to become a member. Moscow also claims that Ukraine will not be able to communicate with the EU on equal terms, alleging that Ukraine is not part of the European project.
- **“The counteroffensive of the AFU has failed”.** **Discrediting the Ukrainian army.** A significant part of Russian narratives focus on the strength of the Russian army and its confrontation with the AFU and the West. According to official Russian messages, Ukraine’s counteroffensive has failed. Stories are being systematically promoted about Ukrainian losses and the inability of Ukraine’s military leadership to prevent human losses and [massacre](#). The Russian Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, alleges that the Ukrainian army has lost the [“offensive potential”](#) in the course of its counteroffensive, having also [suffered](#) many losses. The Kremlin promotes stories about [unsuccessful](#) attempts by the Ukrainian army to liberate Bakhmut. Russia also emphasizes the failure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. During a meeting of the Russian Security Council on 22 June, it was [said](#) the AFU have failed to carry out a successful operation in any direction or managed to liberate territories. All assaults turn into “massacres”.
- **“About the victories and achievements of the Russian army and the losses of the AFU”.** The Russian Ministry of Defense continues to [spread](#) triumphant narratives about the [losses](#) incurred by the Ukrainian army, [lost](#) military equipment and the “disappointment” of the West. The Russian Ministry of Defense is actively commenting on developments, as well as “rewarding” Russian military personnel and offering them social support, etc.