

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

**CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS**

- The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter: AFRF) assisted by private paramilitary groups continued to advance in the Donetsk oblast, in the Bakhmut, Mariinka, Avdiivka and Vuhledar [directions](#), as well as in the Luhansk oblast (near Kreminna). In the second half of March, clashes between the Russian and Ukrainian armies became more frequent in the Zaporizhzhia oblast (near Orikhove and Hulyaipole). At the same time, many experts believe that the Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter: AFU) will soon mount a counteroffensive in the Donetsk oblast, or cut the communication links between Crimea and the Donetsk oblast. Warm, dry weather will make the transit of heavy equipment possible. Moreover, there has been a major breakthrough vis-à-vis Ukraine's allies providing Kyiv with Soviet fighter jets. The Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) is preparing for Ukraine's counteroffensive by erecting anti-tank barriers in [Crimea](#) and the Bryansk oblast. On the Crimean isthmus, anti-tank barriers known as "[dragon's teeth](#)" have been spotted. This fortification line is located on the Isthmus of Ak-Monay that connects the Kerch Peninsula with the Crimean mainland. The Defense Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine had previously reported that the Russian military had formed a defensive military unit on the peninsula, readying themselves for an attack.
- According to the Ukrainian government, Russia has lost [165.600](#) soldiers. According to BBC Russia, over [1000 prisoners](#) who were serving time behind bars, have perished in Russia's war on Ukraine.
- Massive missile and drone attacks continue to be launched on Ukrainian cities. On 14 March, Russian Su-24 planes launched 4 anti-radiation missiles (possible X-31P), towards the Odesa oblast. The missiles were shot down, with their debris damaging objects of civilian infrastructure and private houses. On the night of 8 March, Russia launched 5 kamikaze-drones towards the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, with two hitting a critical infrastructure company. Some drones also reached Ukraine's western oblasts, inflicting damage on objects located close to the Polish border in the [Lviv](#) oblast. In total, on the night of 18 March, Russia launched [16 drones](#), with 11 of them downed by the Ukrainian air defense.
- Last week the cities of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Nikopol, Marhanets, Novomoskovsk, Kamyanske, Velykyi Burluk, Kupyansk, Vovchansk, Kramatorsk, Kostyantynivka, Vuhledar, Avdiivka, New York, Slovyansk and other settlements located in the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblast (located close to the Russian border) were subjected to shelling. Civilian objects, in particular, residential houses and parks, were shelled with banned [cluster munitions](#). Among other things, Russian missiles partly destroyed a [high-rise](#) residential house in Avdiivka, a [school](#) in Kostyantynivka, a [children's hospital](#) in Kherson and a [production workshop](#) in Zaporizhzhia.
- A recent survey has shown that the AFU enjoys almost [full support](#) from Ukraine's citizens. In this regard, the AFU is the institution most trusted by Ukrainians ([95,8%](#)). Prior to the war, 68% of

respondents placed full or partial trust in the Ukrainian army. At the same time, a trend of criticizing at the country's military leadership, is growing among Ukrainian politicians and experts. According to another survey, 68% of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine must try to [liberate](#) all its territories, including Crimea, even at the risk of support from the West decreasing and a protracted war. The awaited Ukrainian counteroffensive planned for spring-summer 2023 is regarded as "[a path to victory](#)".

## HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official [data](#) provided by juvenile prosecutors, 464 children have been killed, with over 935 wounded with various degrees of severity since the beginning of the Russian invasion. 16.226 children are considered to have been deported. According to the UN, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion [21.965 Ukrainian civilians](#) have become victims of Russian aggression. 8.231 persons have been killed, while 13.734 have been wounded.
- At least [940 residents](#) of the Kherson oblast remain in Russian captivity. The majority, almost [90%](#), are being detained by the Russian occupiers without any charges. According to the Center of National Resistance, while retreating, the [Russian occupiers](#) are planting mines everywhere, from gadgets to children's toys.
- According to [Deputy head of the Ministry of Defense, Hanna Malyar](#), the Russians continue to steal property in the occupied territories. For example, in the settlements of Rozdolne, Kalanchak, Nova Zburiyivka and Hola Prystan' of the Kherson oblast, representatives of occupation authorities have been conducting searches in private houses (also in the temporarily abandoned ones) on the pretext of taking anti-terrorist measures. Following these measures Russian soldiers attempted to buy food and alcohol in local shops in exchange for household appliances, kitchen utensils, laptops, and smartphones that they had looted earlier. The most cumbersome items, such as fridges, washing machines and TV sets, were loaded onto military trucks. Moreover, the occupation troops are stealing [property from Ukrainian state authorities](#) and companies located in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories. In the settlement of Strilkove (located in the temporarily occupied parts of the Kherson oblast), a decree is being drafted to forcibly and illegally expropriating the private houses of Ukrainian citizens and [transfer them to the Russian army](#).
- According to the French newspaper [Le Monde](#), for every dead Ukrainian soldier there are 7 dead Russians. The [Luhansk](#) military and civil administration said that the Russian occupiers admitted that the city of Popasna in the Luhansk oblast no longer exists. In "the laws" on "Administrative and Territorial Structure" established by the Russian occupiers the city of Popasna is not mentioned. According to the General Staff of the AFU, in the settlement of Azovske (located in the temporarily occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia oblast), Russian troops are coercing local residents into [accepting Russian passports](#). The Russians are also checking if the locals have Russian passports. Those citizens that do not, are detained, threatened and forced to apply for one. Moscow claims to have issued over [800.000 Russian passports](#) in the occupied territories.

- In the temporarily occupied city of Henichesk and the eponymous rayon, the Russian military have embarked on [raids](#) and searches of the local population. Russians coerce them into obtaining Russian passports through intimidation. Employees of the Russian migration services take the fingerprints of local residents, check their phones and take mugshots and full-length profile photos.
- On 18 March, Russian President Putin [visited](#) temporarily occupied Crimea. His visit was timed with the 9th anniversary of the peninsula's annexation. Putin met with the occupation governor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev. He also visited a School of Arts and a children's center "Korsun". Furthermore, in the past two weeks seven searches were carried out at the home of Crimean Tatars. They were clearly aimed at intimidating the proprietors.
- On the night of 19 March, [Putin visited Mariupol](#). He met with residents, taking a trip through the city and participating in a briefing held by Russia's Vice Prime Minister, Marat Khusnullin, on recovery works in the city. Putin's visit is believed to be a response to the arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (hereinafter: ICC). Putin is trying to show that he is untouchable. Putin's visit to Mariupol also [coincided](#) with that of Mukaddas Bibarsov, who is one of Russia's Muslim leaders and the mufti of the Volga region. Bibarsov, who has publicly backed the political course taken by the Kremlin, visited a destroyed (during the capture of the city) mosque. Muslim leaders in Russia continue to support the war, although not as overtly as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow.
- The temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine are experiencing an acute [shortage of educational personnel and health care workers](#). Local doctors and education workers are being enticed to the region with high salaries. Russian occupation troops are bringing new personnel to the occupied city of Melitopol.

## **POLITICAL DIMENSIONS**

- The [transformation of the Ukrainian government](#) is taking place. A new position of Vice Prime Minister for Innovations, Education Development, Science and Technology will be established. It may be offered to Mykhailo Fedorov. A new Education Minister is expected to assume office following the resignation of Serhii Shkarlet. His position may be filled by the head of the Minor Academy of Science of Ukraine, Oksen Lisovyi. The position of the Minister for Strategic Industry Sectors will be held by Oleksandr Kamyshin.
- According to the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, [Oleksii Danilov](#), four principles of the "Peace Formula" proposed by President Zelenskyy and aimed at ending Russia's war on Ukraine remain unchanged — returning to the 1991 borders, compensation for the damaged inflicted on Ukraine by Russia, bringing the military and political leadership of Russia to justice and security guarantees.
- On 15 March, the Office of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro Atlantic integration along with the Government's Commissioner for Gender policy issues and the Deputy Minister of Social policy of Ukraine, Ulyana Tokarieva, presented a new online platform, [the Platform of Aid for the Rescued](#). The platform offers extensive information on all the aid services available for those affected by the war.

- Ukraine will require 40-48 billion USD in financial [support](#) in 2023. Most of this will be covered by the United States (hereinafter: US) and the European Union (hereinafter: EU). The International Monetary Fund (hereinafter: IMF) is also expected to announce a 15 billion four-year program for financing Ukraine in the near future.
- Since the Black Sea “grain deal” was signed in July 2022, [about 25 million tons of grain](#) has been exported from three Ukrainian ports located in Odesa province to 45 countries. This has contributed to decreasing global prices for agricultural produce by approximately 18%. Russia has agreed to a 60-day [extension](#) of the deal, although Ukraine has announced a 120-day extension. Turkey and the UN have not provided any clarifications on the duration of the extension.
- On 20 March, members of the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter: UOC MP), led by Metropolitan Onufriy (secular surname — Berezovskyy), [arrived](#) at President Zelenskyy’s office to explain “the actual and undistorted position of the UOC MP regarding all issues related to relations between the state and the church”. Zelenskyy refused to meet the delegation. A few hours later they headed to a session of the Synod, where a number of decisions were made that could be considered as a compromise (in particular, the removal of Crimean metropolitan Lazar (secular surname — Sheets)) from office along with several other controversial members of the clergy. However, the relationship between the church and the government remains quite strained, and the latest incident at the President’s Office has contributed to its further politicization.

## INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **A split in the western world regarding support of Ukraine. Criticizing EU countries for supplying weapons to Ukraine.** Russia is spreading anti-western narratives about EU countries supplying Ukraine with weapons. Moscow has [threatened](#) Great Britain in view of London sending arms to Ukraine. The official Russian media have given significant focus to the position of Hungary as Budapest refuses to help Ukraine purchase weapons. According to the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Péter Szijjártó, Budapest needs to “[steer clear of this war](#)”. Moscow [claims](#) that western unity for Ukraine is dissipating, and that it could worsen with the forthcoming presidential campaign in the USA.
- **Western threats to Russian security.** The Kremlin is spreading narratives about threats to Russia emanating from the West. In his [article](#) for the Chinese People’s Daily “Russia and China — a forward-looking partnership”, Putin wrote about the threats posed to Russia by NATO. The Russian media insists that “the crisis in Ukraine” was being provoked by the West. In parallel, ahead of President Xi Jinping’s visit to Moscow, stories about western threats to Russia were circulated in Russia’s official media outlets, as well as narratives about the US striving to contain China by threatening “[a big war](#)”. There were also numerous accounts about the mutual “enemies” of Russia and China. Narratives about Warsaw’s [intention](#) of entering the war against Russia and the militarization of Poland abound.

- **Support for Putin, the political future of Russia.** Moscow is pushing the [official narrative](#) about China's full support for the policies introduced by President Putin, as well as emphasizing that Russia "[is prospering](#)" thanks to Putin. Results of surveys conducted by the [Russian Public Opinion Research Center](#) are being disseminated, according to which [80% of Russian citizens](#) support Putin.
- **Readiness for peace talks (political and diplomatic resolution).** Ahead of the Chinese leader's visit to Russia, Putin [spoke](#) about the readiness for a political and diplomatic resolution of the situation in Ukraine. Nevertheless, no further details regarding the means and tools for such resolution were provided, apart from mention of [China's support](#) in these endeavors. According to Russia's official media, China is playing [the main role](#) in this issue.
- **Downplaying the arrest warrant for Putin issued by the ICC.** On 20 March, the Russian Investigative Committee [opened a criminal case](#) against the judges of the ICC who issued an arrest warrant for Russia's President and the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova. The Russian media dismissed the warrant as "worthless". It is claimed that "the [absurd and useless](#)" decision discredits international institutions ("privatized" by the West) even more in the eyes of the whole world. The Russian media began spreading information about Lvova-Belova [helping](#) Ukrainian families reunite with their children. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy chairman of the Security Council of Russia, branded the ICC as "a miserable organization", and threatened to [launch hypersonic missiles](#) on its premises. Another Russian narrative (promoted by Vyacheslav [Volodin](#), Chairman of the Duma) has called the persecution of Putin tantamount to "the persecution of the whole of Russia".
- **Persecutions of the Orthodox in Ukraine (the Russian church).** Russia is spreading information about the persecution of the Russian church in Ukraine. Moscow [has forecast](#) public clashes around the issues of the Kyiv-Pechersk and Pochaiv Lavra.
- **Integration of "the new territories" into Russia.** On 19 March, Putin [visited](#) the occupied city of Mariupol. The main narrative pushed by the Russian media was focused on the [recovery](#) of the city and its peaceful life that have been secured by Russia. The construction of new roads and objects of infrastructure were announced. Prior to his trip to Mariupol, Putin visited Sevastopol, congratulating residents of "[Crimea on their reunion with Russia](#)". Russian propaganda claims that nearly 190.000 Ukrainian citizens (living in the newly occupied territories of Ukraine, namely, in the Zaporizhzhia oblast) receiving [Russian passports](#).
- **Victories and achievements of the Russian army.** Narratives about the decisive [victories](#) and achievements of the Russian army at the front, in particularly in the Donetsk direction, are profuse. Russia claims that Ukraine is sustaining heavy losses of equipment because of the [effectiveness](#) of the Russian army and the [destruction](#) of Ukrainian control rooms. Against a backdrop of its military success stories, Russians share never-ending narratives about the [aid](#) provided to the families of the military and the conscripted, as well as about the social benefits offered to those living in Russian regions. According to the Russian media, social payments in the [regions](#) has been [streamlined](#).
- **Economic growth of Russia.** Russian media continue to highlight Russia's strong economic growth and the unsuccessful [attempts](#) of the "West" to destroy the Russian economy by imposing unjustified sanctions. On 16 March, Putin [spoke](#) about the growth of the Russian business sector at the Congress of Entrepreneurs of Russia.