

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

**CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS**

- Russia's offensive continues in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as well as partly in the Zaporizhzhia oblast. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter: AFRF) continue their attempt to encircle Bakhmut, Vuhledar, Avdiivka, and other cities of the Donetsk oblast. However, they are incurring enormous losses, while failing to reach any tangible results. This could be why some Russian generals have lost their credibility. According to official data, given the unsuccessful and bloody assaults on Vuhledar, the head of the Eastern troop unit, General [R. Muradov](#), has been removed from his post. According to the Ukrainian government, as of 27 March, Russian troops incurred losses amounting to [171.000](#) dead soldiers. At the same time, the settlements located along the line of contact have been left uninhabitable. For example, public services will no longer be provided in Avdiivka while the city is faced with power outages, disrupted mobile connection, and water supply.
- There are increasing signs that a Ukrainian counteroffensive is imminent. President Zelenskyy has visited almost the entire front line in the Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. On 27 March, the first [photos of Western military equipment](#) were shared. This included pictures of a British Challenger 2 and Leopard tanks. Still, the Ukrainian army is experiencing a shortage of munitions, which risks slowing down the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Explosions continue to take place in Crimea and other occupied territories of Ukraine. Attacks on Russian military objects are carried out either by the Ukrainian secret services, or by local partisans. Either way, they lead to Russian losses and logistics disruptions.
- Last week several cities were attacked. This included Kyiv, [Kherson](#) (a hospital, residential houses, and humanitarian aid points were damaged), [Zaporizhzhia](#) (a missile attack destroyed blocks of residential houses on 22 March), Kharkiv, Rzhyshev, Nikopol, Marhanets, [Kryvyi Rih](#), Orikhiv, Beryslav, Ochakiv, Kupyansk, Vovchansk, [Kramatorsk](#), Kostyantynivka, Vuhledar, [Avdiivka](#), Druzhkivka, Kurakhove, [Sloviansk](#), Chasiv Yar, Toretsk as well as other settlements and territories of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts [located](#) close to the Russian border.
- It is likely that Russian troops have received a new batch of unmanned aerial vehicles (hereinafter: UAV) from Iran as kamikaze drone attacks on Ukraine have increased. Last week two massive missile and drone attacks were launched on Ukrainian cities. On 21 March, three missiles were fired on Odesa, with one of them hitting an Orthodox monastery. The following day 21 kamikaze drones were launched on the Kyiv and Zhytomyr oblasts (16 of them were downed by the Ukrainian air defense). On 24 March, Russia launched 6 kamikaze drones, 10 guided bombs, and 3 cruise missiles. Also, 5 drones hit infrastructure objects in Kryvyi Rih.

## HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official data [provided by juvenile prosecutors](#), 465 Ukrainian children have been killed and 942 wounded with various degrees of severity. 16207 children are considered to have been deported. During the full-scale war over 200 Ukrainian rescuers have been injured, while 68 staff members of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine have been killed.
- According to a survey conducted by [the World Bank](#), the destruction and damage to Ukraine's healthcare facilities by the Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) amount to \$2.5 billion. At least 978 Ukrainian healthcare facilities have been either destroyed or damaged. Moreover, the overall damage incurred by Ukraine due to Russian aggression has reached some \$411 billion, which exceeds the net wealth of all Russian oligarchs (estimated to amount to \$339 billion).
- Because of the war, [7,1 million Ukrainian citizens](#), or 17% of the population, are now living below the poverty line. Russia's war in Ukraine has thrown the development of the Ukrainian economy back 15 years.
- As of 27 March, [150.000](#) tons of agricultural produce have been exported from Ukrainian ports to Asian countries within the framework of the "grain deal". In total, Ukraine has exported [25,2 million tons](#) of agricultural produce from the ports of the Odesa oblast to Asian, European, and African countries.
- On 24 March, Ukraine unconditionally handed over all [seriously injured](#) prisoners of war for transit to Russia. Ukraine took this step in accordance with the terms and conditions of international humanitarian law. However, Russia is still detaining Ukrainian citizens in inadequate conditions, particularly the seriously injured.
- According to the UN, approximately 4.9 million Ukrainian citizens (which constitutes 1% of the entire EU population) have acquired the [temporary protection status](#) in European countries. The vast majority of Ukrainian migrants are women and children (87%).
- The Ukrainian High Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, has said that [308](#) children have been returned to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's invasion.
- In the Russian city of Barnaul, an administrative case has been opened against a [15-year-old schoolboy](#) after he published Nazi symbols. In "Vkontakte", the popular Russian social network, the schoolboy reposted an article exposing fake news about the swastika on Valeriy Zaluzhnyi's (Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine) wristband. Afterwards, he wrote a post on his "Vkontakte" page that compared Nazi Germany to modern Russia. Subsequently, a report on him was compiled related to this issue on the "Lentach" public chat about Valeriy Zaluzhnyi's bracelet. Due to the density of the photo one of the Scandinavian symbols became distorted, acquiring the look of a swastika.
- According to a [statement](#) by the spokeswoman of the Operational Command South, Natalya Humenyuk, large-scale Russian missile attacks on Ukraine are becoming a thing of the past.
- Ukraine has fulfilled [72% of its obligations](#) vis-à-vis the implementation of its Association Agreement with the EU. According to a report on Ukraine's progress, the work done, last year by Ukraine overall progress increased by 9%.

- According to Bloomberg, the Wagner Group, private Russian paramilitary unit of mercenaries, is preparing to [discontinue its operations](#) in Ukraine and refocus on its operations in Africa. This could be due to the Russian political establishment banning Yevgeniy Prigozhyn, the founder of the Wagner Group, from recruiting new soldiers from Russian prisons. It has also ceased to supply Prigozhyn with munitions. In addition, the Wagner Group has failed to capture the city of Bakhmut. The [intensity of assaults](#) is losing its steam.
- A number of Ukrainian oblasts have reduced wartime [curfews](#), while the timetable for public transport has increased. For example, on 26 March, the curfew times in Kyiv were relaxed from 23:00-05:00 to 00:00-05:00

## **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS**

- The estimates for economic growth in 2023 give little reason for optimism: the government has [forecast](#) a mere 1% growth. Analysts believe growth may range from 0.5-3 percent, given the decrease of 29.2% registered last year, which was the worst indicator in Ukraine's history since independence. Ukraine's Prime Minister stated that the damage inflicted by Russia on Ukraine's infrastructure has peaked at over \$140 billion, which is equal to Ukraine's 2022 GDP.
- A survey by the "Rating" group has [revealed](#) that a third of Ukrainians who had a job before the war are now unemployed. 40% of those who had employment prior to the war are still in employment, 17% are working either remotely or part-time, while 8% have found another job. At the same time, 33% of respondents are currently working. For 6% of respondents, their level of income has increased, while for 36% their income has not changed and for 17% of respondents their income has slightly dropped. However, the income of 30% has considerably shrunk and for 10% they have effectively lost all [sources of income](#).
- According to a survey, after Ukraine's victory many Ukrainians have no intention to return to the norms and the rhythm of life that existed before 24 February 2022. Ukraine [has to become](#) an economically developed and socially oriented country, with the rule of law as well as strong and independent democratic institutions, which will enhance the development of trustworthy and transparent businesses with zero tolerance for corruption.
- The Ukrainian Minister of Defense, Oleksii Reznikov, [has promised Ukrainian youth to complete the reform](#) on the registration of firearms used on the territory of Ukraine, so that every Ukrainian under 18 knows what a gun is and how it is to be handled. According to a survey, about 61% of Ukrainians believe that [mass armament of citizens with firearms](#) will help strengthen the country's defense capabilities.
- At the same time, the authorities have called on the residents of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast to surrender their weapons and munitions (that were distributed to them at the start of [the full-scale invasion](#)) within the next 10 days.
- Ukraine has officially invited China to participate in the implementation of the [peace formula](#). President Zelenskyy has said, "We have offered our formula to the world, which also goes for our relations with China. We have publicly passed on our peace formula to China through diplomatic

channels, having invited Beijing to participate in it. We invite them to engage in a dialogue and are waiting for their response”.

- An [online course](#) on the liberation and reintegration of Crimea has been launched. According to its developers, D. Svrydova and Y. Tyshchenko, the course aims to introduce the topic of state policies regarding the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as of events and processes that are currently taking place on the peninsula. The course will also cover the state policies for the liberation of Crimea and the reintegration of its residents.
- The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter: UOC MP) is expected to be evicted from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. This could lead to social and political unrest. According to the latest news, monks at the monastery are removing their property and even [icons](#) from the premises. After the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [said](#) that the searches conducted by the police at the UOC MP may “bear the signs of discrimination”, representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine have made a statement, saying that freedom does not imply having the right to carry out subversion activities. The Ministry also said that despite pressure from international institutions, Ukraine reserves the right to counter potentially dangerous (to the state of Ukraine) activities undertaken by religious organizations.

## INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **Demonstration of partnership with and support of Russia by China.** A large number of Russian narratives and messages were related to the visit of Chinese President, Xi Jinping to Russia. The visit was referred to as “[the event of the year](#)” that defines the strategic agenda, offering an alternative to the hegemony of the West. At the same time, the official media outlets of the Russian President were at times cautious in the [details](#) they gave the public about the results of the visit, failing to provide concrete details. Russian official narratives talk about a geopolitical partnership between Russia and China, claiming that the two countries counter “US hegemony”. According to Nikolai [Patrushev](#), one Putin’s closest advisers and the head of Russia’s Security Council, Russia is preventing “the US from expanding into China”. Moscow is spreading [information](#) about the deepening economic and [interregional](#) cooperation with China. Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitry [Peskov](#) has described the meeting between Putin and Xi Jinping as the meeting of two “[strong willed people](#)”.
- **The Western threat to Russia’s security.** The Kremlin is spreading narratives about the western threats to Russia. For example, Nikola Patrushev has [said](#) that NATO is a party to the conflict in Ukraine, and that it does not hide its main goal, which is to defeat and destroy Russia. Putin has [said](#) that the West “has crossed all the red and even burgundy lines” drawn by Russia. [Anti-Polish](#) narratives continue to be spread. The Russian media refer to the European Union as “Euro Reich” that limits the sovereignty of independent countries. Moscow is also criticizing Ukraine's European integration process. The Kremlin predicts the imminent collapse of the EU, a [lack of trust in it](#) and internal political disagreements.
- **On achievements and success of the Russian army, and the losses of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.** Russia continues to spread official messages and narratives about the achievements of the Russian

army on the front ([in the Kharkiv, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia](#) oblasts). The Russian media claims that the AFRF have hit Ukrainian munitions and UAV depots Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu [has said](#) that 20 objects of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter: AFU) were destroyed during the “special military operation” (hereinafter: SMO). There are numerous stories about “[mercenaries](#)” from the Arab states, Poland, the US, Spain and other countries fighting in the AFU.

- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army.** Russia is systematically disseminating narratives about “crimes” committed by the Ukrainian army against civilians. For example, Russian media claim that the AFU have been [shelling](#) the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and the chemical plants in [Horlivka](#). Ukraine is also accused of committing “[war crimes](#)”. Russia’s official media is [spreading](#) fake news about the Ukrainian authorities carrying out reprisals (concentration camps) against those unwilling to fight Russia. Further fake news is related to the reprisals taken against Russian speaking citizens as well as about the Ukrainian leadership consciously [sending](#) Russian speaking “cannon fodder” to the most dangerous areas at the front. According to Moscow, “[the mobilization in Ukraine has mainly touched the citizens living in the Eastern oblasts of the country, having taken on terrible dimensions](#)”. The Kremlin claims that this is all done by Ukraine to eradicate Russian speaking citizens.
- **Glorification of the SMO. Discourse of WWII. Longing for the Soviet Union.** Russian media continues to spread narratives promoting a positive image of the SMO. For example, the Russian authorities are “glorifying” those that join the SMO (in the [Stavropol Krai](#), a center for military and sports training has been named after a “hero” of the operation). In the official discourse Putin addresses Russian society, saying that the Russian military “[are showing courage and fearlessness](#)”. Putin has [introduced](#) a new medal “for bravery” to be bestowed on Russians and foreigners. In parallel to this, Russian official discourse is full of narratives praising mobilization, glorifying Stalin as the leader who transformed the economy of the Soviet Union to satisfy the military needs. During a [special](#) meeting, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, even [read out](#) a telegram written by Stalin during WWII to the directors of military plants. Medvedev [expressed](#) nostalgic sentiment when speaking about the collapse of the USSR. At the regional level, the Russian media [are spreading messages](#) about the social support provided for the participants of the SMO. At the same time, the partial mobilization is mainly glossed over by official propaganda outlets.
- **Ukraine as a threat, the spread of the depleted uranium “shells”.** Russian official narratives interpret the provision of depleted-uranium shells for Ukraine as Kyiv violating the agreement on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Maria [Zakharova](#) claims that “Ukraine may use nuclear weapons”. On 21 March, Putin [said](#) that “the West is using the arms of the collective West with a nuclear component”, which will lead to another wave of escalation, not only in Ukraine but also in a larger geopolitical area. Later Putin [spoke](#) about environmental risks for civilians connected to the use of nuclear weapons.
- **Threats of using nuclear weapons by Russia “to defend itself”.** [Medvedev](#) has promoted the narrative about Russia possibly using nuclear weapons should Ukraine plan to liberate Crimea. Russia justifies the decision to station nuclear weapons in Belarus, by claiming that it has been forced to do

so as “[a natural retaliation](#)” for the actions of the West. It is claimed that by supporting Ukraine the West “has pushed Moscow to take this step”.

- **Integration of the “new territories” into Russia.** Russia’s official media continues to promote narratives about the integration of the “new territories” i.e. the occupied territories of Ukraine, into Russia, and, in particular, into its political life. For example, the Kremlin claims that 56.000 residents of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic have [joined](#) the party of “United Russia”.