

March 7th - March 13th, 2023
Ukraine Weekly Situation Report

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter: AFRF), backed up by private paramilitary groups, continue to advance in the Donetsk oblast towards the cities of Bakhmut, Lyman, Mariinka, Avdiivka and Vuhledar, along with Kreminna in the Luhansk oblast. The [conflict](#) between the regular Russian army and private paramilitary groups, particularly the “Wagner” group, continues to simmer.
- According to the Ukrainian government, as of 13 March the Russian Federation (hereinafter: Russia) lost [160.000](#) soldiers. 5,970 Russian soldiers were killed in battle last week alone. At the same time, the Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter: AFU) are also sustaining heavy losses. According to the High Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for the Rights of Defenders, Alyona Verbytska, over 15.000 Ukrainian soldiers are considered [missing](#).
- Last week the cities of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Nikopol, Marhanets, Kupyansk, Chuhuiv, Shostka, Zolochiv, Kramatorsk, Vuhledar, Avdiivka, Slovyansk, Ochakiv and other settlements of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy oblasts located close to the Russian border were subjected to shelling and missile strikes. Objects of Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure continue to be shelled, in particular, [educational facilities](#). According to the Ukrainian Minister of Interior, Ihor Klymenko, as of now 30% of Ukraine’s territories require [demining](#). However, it is difficult to do this in many regions due to ongoing hostilities. It may take decades to demine Ukraine’s contaminated territories. The AFRF continue to carry-out large-scale missile and drone attacks, in parallel to using ballistic and cruise missiles, kamikaze drones and fake targets to reveal the positions of Ukraine’s air defense systems. On the night of 6 March Russia launched [81 missiles](#) on Ukraine, including 6 “Kinzhal” missiles. 34 out of the 81 missiles launched were downed by the Ukrainian air defense. Prior to the attack, Russia launched fake targets, with the aim of detecting the positions of Ukraine’s air defense systems.
- Today, the Ukrainian military makes up the country’s new political elite. The old generation of politicians has to reckon with this new reality. This was especially obvious during the funeral of legendary Ukrainian [hero](#), Dmytro Kotsiubaylo (aka "Da Vinci"), who fell in battle near Bakhmut.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official data provided by [juvenile prosecutors](#), 464 Ukrainian children have been killed with over 934 wounded, with various degrees of severity. 16.226 children are considered to have been deported. Since the beginning of Russia’s invasion, at least 12 journalists and other media employees have been [killed](#), with 21 wounded in the line of duty. During a further [prisoner exchange](#) 126 defenders returned to Ukraine.

- According to a [statement](#) by Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Interior, Russia shelled Ukraine over 40.500 times, resulting in the destruction of over 152.000 residential homes. In the past 5 months Russia [launched](#) 821 missiles (worth \$7,462 bn) on Ukraine. Approximately 2-3 Russian soldiers [are taken captive](#) every day near Bakhmut.
- According to the estimates of the [HALO Trust](#), landmines and explosive substances have contaminated territory equivalent to the UK, in Ukraine. The second [sowing campaign](#) amid war has begun, covering 16.000 hectares of land. [The New York Times](#) believes that Russian troops are deliberately shelling and mining Ukrainian agricultural fields in order to inflict as much damage as possible on Ukraine's agricultural sector.
- According to a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, [68% of Ukrainians](#) believe that Ukraine must try to liberate all its territories, including Crimea, even if it risks the West reducing its support and increases the prospect of a protracted war. Furthermore, according to recent surveys, over 50% of Ukrainians support the legalization of same-sex [partnerships](#). Approximately 53% of Ukrainians believe that it is inappropriate for Ukrainian artists to create their products in [Russia](#).
- On 29 March, [the rent agreement](#) between the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter: UOC MP) will be terminated. Previously, Ukraine returned the ownership of two key churches of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (the Svyato-Uspensky Cathedral and the Trapezna Church) back to the state. Some representatives of the UOC MP are ready to challenge the Ukrainian government's position on property issues, which could lead to a conflict. At the same time, according to surveys, more than fifty percent of Ukrainians back the idea of [shutting](#) down the UOC MP. However, its clergy are determined to reverse the government's decision to cancel the contract. This would allow them to continue to rent the most famous religious buildings in Ukraine, particularly, the [Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra](#).
- Due to heavy losses, Russia resorts to [alternative ways](#) to replenish its manpower. A train was detected travelling to the Donetsk oblast with convicted women on board.
- Russian troops continue to loot Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories. For example, in Enerhodar, the Russian occupiers have begun [stealing training equipment](#) from the educational and training center of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. According to [CNN](#), Russia steals weapons that were delivered to Ukraine by its partners and passes them on to Iran.
- [Tajik migrants](#) are complaining about not having received payment for the recovery of Mariupol. Russian construction companies sent them to work in Mariupol in October-November 2022.
- On 13 March, another [round of consultations](#) between the Russian interagency delegation and representatives of the UN were held concerning the extension of the "grain deal". Russia did not object to the deal being extended as it was only [for 60 days](#). Russia's position in the future will depend on progress vis-à-vis the normalization of Russian agricultural exports. The "grain agreements" reached in July 2022, and brokered by the UN and Turkey, will expire on 18 March. Initially, Ukraine insisted on the deal being concluded for an indefinite period of time as Ukraine is a [guarantor of food safety](#) for 400 million people around the world.

- Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko signed a [decree](#) ordering reserve officers to serve the army (230 officers aged under 27) and join the country's border service (up to 20 officers).
- According to the Center of the National Resistance, the Russian occupiers are preparing a [new wave of conscription](#) in the temporarily occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. The occupation recruitment offices have called on the local educational institutions to submit lists of all young men born in 2006.
- According to the Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine, as of early March 2023 the number of unregistered internally displaced persons (hereinafter: IDPs) in Ukraine was as high as [seven million](#). This attests to a discrepancy between the official data and the actual situation. Therefore, there is a need to respond not only to official data, but also to more serious problems.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **“Trusting the President”, rallying around him.** Putin has again spoken [about](#) direct threats to Russia's security, and called on the Russian people to defend and protect the country. Numerous stories and messages concern the high level of trust in Putin and his actions. According to the [results](#) of a survey carried out on 10 March, most Russians (80%) trust Putin. His policies are backed by 76.7% of the population, according to the All-Russian Center for Research on Public Opinion. The level of support has purportedly grown since February 2023.
- **“Constant victories of the Russian army, and Ukrainian losses”.** Russia is spreading narratives about the Russian army's success in the Donetsk oblast. Russian Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu [believes](#) that “by taking Bakhmut, Russian troops would be able to continue advancing deep behind the Ukrainian army's defensive lines”. Russia's official media continues to [cover](#) the victories of the Russian army in the so-called “special military operation” (hereinafter: SMO) and circulate these stories throughout Russia. The Russian Ministry of Defense has informed Russian citizens that it [has destroyed](#) the AFU in different directions, while military depots, etc., have also been targeted. Russian messages mainly focus on the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. Russian official TV channels run the [address](#) made by Yevgeny Prigozhyn, the head of the “Wagner” group, regarding the precarious situation near Bakhmut. The Russians constantly [spread](#) messages about the Ukrainian army's enormous loss of manpower.
- **“Retaliation strike”, justifying massive missiles strikes on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure.** Missile strikes on Ukrainian energy and civilian infrastructure on 9 March were [interpreted](#) by Russia's official media as “a retaliation strike” following the terrorist attacks allegedly undertaken by Ukrainians in the Bryansk oblast.
- Some narratives and messages offer explanations as to “why Ukraine did not freeze in winter”. A key [conclusion](#) is that the tactics of shelling the objects of Ukrainian energy infrastructure was successful. However, due to the fact that many Ukrainians fled the country (with the winter of 2022-2023 being quite warm) Ukraine managed to survive.
- **“We do not abandon our own”, social support for participants of the SMO.** Information is being shared about the [support](#) provided for the families of those taking part in the SMO ([medical service](#)

- [support](#) was offered to residents of the Chuvashia Republic). Putin [met](#) with the leader of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Ramzan Kadyrov, to personally thank Kadyrov and the Chechens for fighting in the SMO. Russian [official](#) media channels have shared the video of the meeting.
- **Rejecting the Ukrainian identity and dismissing the prospect of negotiations. “The goals of the SMO will be reached by military means, “liberating the Ukrainian people”.** The Kremlin dismisses the prospect of peace talks, insisting on continuing to wage war and its long-term nature. Messages about the war “for survival” (accompanied by a strong military component) are being circulated. Russia’s political leadership state that the goals of the SMO can only be achieved by military means. Kremlin Spokesman, [Dmitry Peskov](#) has claimed that the issue of peace talks is not relevant now. He believes that there are no preconditions for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Russians continue to reject the Ukrainian identity. The Kremlin asserts that “[the liberation of the Ukrainian people](#)” is the prerequisite for a peaceful solution.
 - **“Reprisals in Ukraine”.** Moscow continues to promote narratives related to the steps taken against the UOC MP, which is subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church. A number of statements have been issued by Patriarch [Kirill](#) of Moscow, claiming that the UOC MP is under the pressure “from the Ukrainian state”.
 - **“Russia’s expansion into the new territories”, “we do not abandon our own”. The integration of the “new territories into Russia”.** The integration of “the new regions” of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblast into Russia continues. For example, Moscow represents arrests and reprisals against civilians as those targeting “[the accomplices of the Armed Forces of Ukraine](#)”. The Kremlin has announced Putin’s participation in the events timed with the “reunion of Crimea with Russia”. De facto authorities of Crimea [believe](#) that the “integration of the new regions” into Russia may take up to 5 years. On 7 March, Putin [met](#) with the head of the occupation administration in the Zaporizhzhia oblast to discuss the launch of a military corps composed of the oblast’s residents. This meeting has been interpreted as the launch of the “volunteers battalion”. It has also been [claimed](#) that “these volunteers” are taking a polygraph.
 - **“China and Russia”. Anti-western narratives.** The Russian media is spreading anti-American and anti-western narratives, in particular, about the need for peace talks between the USA and Russia lest “[the Russian army reach Poland](#)” since the Ukrainian army is incurring heavy losses. Russia claims that these messages are being circulated by retired US soldiers. In parallel, the Russian official media is [spreading](#) “analytical pieces” on Russia’s evolving cooperation with China. Moscow claims that Beijing has become aware of “an inevitable conflict” with the West. At the same time, Russia [claims](#) that the US is inferior to China in terms of technological development. Sergei Shoigu [believes](#) that the cooperation between Russia and China is the bulwark of global stability. After Chinese President Xi Jinping was elected for a third consecutive term, Patriarch Kirill [congratulated](#) the Chinese leader, speaking about the “orthodox community in China” and its glorious past. The agenda for talks between Russia and China on “Chinese peace initiatives” have been [announced](#).