

May 16th - May 29th, 2023
Ukraine Situation Report

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- Hostilities continue to take place in the Donetsk oblast, with the warring parties fighting near Bakhmut. The Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) have liberated a few areas around the city, while the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF) control most city blocks. The Ukrainian army is intensively targeting and hitting the enemy's logistics objects, areas where equipment is stationed, ammunition depots and other key targets, in preparation for a large-scale offensive.
- In Southern Ukraine, Russian troops have militarized [the natural resort island of Dzharylhach](#) which was annexed to the temporarily occupied part of the Kherson oblast, close to Lazurne on 19 May. The AFRF have also stationed 300 military personnel on the island.
- According to the Ukrainian government, as of 29 May, the overall losses of Russian troops amounted to over [207.000](#) killed.
- The Russian army continues to launch large-scale missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian cities. Since the beginning of May, 17 attacks have taken place. On Kyiv Day (28 May) the Ukrainian capital was attacked with a [record number](#) of kamikaze drones. Overall, 59 drones were launched on Kyiv and other cities, with 58 of them downed. On 29 May, two attacks took place. 30 drones and 37 cruise missiles were fired during the night, while at least [11 Iskander missiles](#) were fired during the day. Large-scale attacks also occurred on 19 May (16 Shahed drones and 3 Calibre missiles), on 20 May (4 kamikaze drones), 22 May (4 cruise missiles and 20 kamikaze drones), 23 May (6 kamikaze drones), 25 May (36 kamikaze drones), 26 May (10 cruise missiles and 31 kamikaze drones). In addition, on 26 May a Russian missile [hit](#) a healthcare facility and a veterinary clinic, leaving 3 people dead and 25 being wounded. The majority of missiles, drones, etc. are downed by the Ukrainian air defense system.
- For the past two weeks the cities of [Kherson](#), [Zhytomyr](#), [Khmelnytskyi](#), [Ochakiv](#), [Kramatorsk](#), [Kostynatynivka](#), [Vuhledar](#), [Avdiivka](#), [Beryslav](#), [Hulyaipole](#), [Nikopol](#), [Izium](#), as well as the settlements of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts located close to the Russian border were subjected to air strikes, missile and artillery shelling. On 25 May, a [dam](#) on the Karlivske water reservoir in the Donetsk oblast was destroyed due to Russian shelling, which now risks the surrounding settlements being flooded. On 26 May, the Russians hit a [healthcare facility](#) in Dnipro, which claimed the lives of 2 people, with at least 30 injured.
- Representatives of the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Legion of "Freedom of Russia" [entered the territory](#) of the Graivoron city district of the Belgorod oblast in the Russian Federation (Russia). They managed to bring several settlements of the city district and a Russian border checkpoint under their control. The Russian authorities lost control of part of the territory of the district for more than a day, and a counter-terrorist operation regime was declared in the Belgorod region. Ukraine denies any links between these units and the Ukrainian intelligence services.

- On 22 May, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) was [disconnected](#) from the power supply coming from high-voltage lines due to Russian shelling. After the external power supply was lost, all Diesel-generators automatically switched on. The supply of fuel is sufficient for 10 days.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official [information provided by juvenile prosecutors](#), 483 children have been killed and over 986 wounded with various degrees of severity. 19.484 children are believed to have been deported. Only [371 children](#) have returned to Ukraine from the overall number of those deported. In Avdiivka and Bakhmut [five children](#) remain. Their parents do not allow their evacuation. The Belarusian opposition has conducted a [study](#) which concludes that 2.150 Ukrainian children have been relocated to the so-called health camps and sanatoria in Belarus. The General Prosecutor's Office has opened a criminal proceeding against the forcible deportation of over [19.000 children](#) from the occupied oblasts.
- According to the data provided by the [Ministry of Education and Science](#), 3.267 educational facilities in Ukraine have been subjected to bombing and shelling, with 261 of them now completely destroyed. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Russia has launched over [900 attacks on Ukrainian healthcare facilities](#), claiming the lives of at least 97 people.
- The register of missing persons now contains the names of over [23.000 people](#). Last month the bodies of [50 missing people](#) were found in the liberated territories. In addition, 106 people have returned to Ukraine from Russian captivity. 68 of them were [believed](#) to be missing. Over the past 12 months the whereabouts of approximately [8.000 people](#) have been identified. The bodies of over 1.500 Ukrainian defenders have been returned.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia has threatened to [boycott](#) the extension of the grain deal, if there is "no progress regarding its demands — namely, to launch a pipeline to transport ammonia to Ukraine's Pudency port for further export to world markets as well as the return of Rosselkhozbank to the international payment network SWIFT" from which it was booted out under sanctions. Russia is threatening to block the extension of the deal beyond 17 July if its demands are not met. Furthermore, the grain deal [does not](#) operate at full capacity. The average number of daily inspections at the entry and exit of ships has decreased to 3.2, which is the lowest number since the deal came into force in August 2022. Russia has also blocked the passage of [28 ships](#) through to the port of "Pivdennyi", which is a direct violation of the grain deal.
- The premises of the ZNPP continue to be [militarized](#). The premises of power units Nr 1,2 and 4 are effectively being used as a logistics and military base.
- In the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia oblast the Russian occupiers are not paying salaries to the people who are working for them. For example, in the township of Yakymivka the employees of the company [Raycomunservice](#) have not received their salaries for the third month in a row. The same goes for employees of Melitopol State University.

- On 29 May, Putin signed [a bill](#) that allows “elections” in the occupied territories of Ukraine to take place. The bill also grants the occupying authorities the right to deport residents from these territories.
- Over [100 Crimean Tatars](#), who have been illegally imprisoned by Russia on political grounds, are being detained in colonies throughout Russia.
- In the city of Zaliznyi Port in the Kherson oblast, the Russian occupiers have forcibly [repurposed](#) the premises of a school into the center of the Russian movement of children and youth. This organization denies the existence of the Ukrainian identity.
- Head of the private paramilitary group “Wagner”, Yevgeniy Prigozhyn, claimed that Bakhmut “had been completely taken” by mercenaries. Back in April Prigozhyn [claimed](#) that Bakhmut was captured in “legal terms”. According to [British intelligence](#), “Wagner” group fighters are retreating from their positions near Bakhmut.
- On 19 May, Russian shelling damaged the [main lines](#) that provided power for one of the power stations in East Ukraine, resulting in Ukrainians having to reduce their electricity consumption in the evening.
- The Russian State Duma adopted amendments to the law on “The Procedure for Leaving and Entering the Russian Federation”, according to which conscripts [must](#) hand in their passports for traveling abroad within 5 days following the announcement of conscription. Should they fail to comply, their passports will be cancelled.
- Passportization in the temporarily occupied territories is taking on a more [tough form](#): Russians are forcing the locals to sign new contracts for energy supply in their homes, which is only possible with a Russian passport. From 1 June those people who do not have Russian passport will no longer be eligible for free medicine. Medical insurance is now only available to those with a Russian passport. The seriously ill will be most affected by this situation, with their lives put at serious risk.
- An investigation conducted by [The Insider](#) revealed that 25 European companies continue to make deliveries for the Russian army. The equipment needed by Russian defense companies is imported into Russia by military contractors who have avoided being put on the sanctions list.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- The advisor to the Office of Ukraine’s President, Mykhailo Podolyak, stated that the only condition for the end of the war is the [Ukrainian peace formula](#). A compromise with Russia would only result in a new escalation as well as the growth of global terrorism.
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has begun his [second tour](#) through African countries. Ukraine is a guarantor of Africa’s food security. Therefore, this tour is aimed at strengthening the international coalition for Ukraine’s support, the promotion of President Zelenskyy’s Peace Formula and the presentation of win-win cooperation.
- The government is assessing the possibility of [attracting investment](#) secured by Russian assets. Using Russian assets as security could be an opportunity to generate income as well as being an alternative to reparations.

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- Ukraine plans measures aimed at [strengthening energy independence](#) by increasing natural gas production. Ukraine ranks second in Europe in terms of confirmed natural gas reserves. Ukraine's two biggest companies in this field, UkrGasVydobuvannya and Ukrnafta, are starting to operate new wells, while also revising the list of other wells with aim of restoring them. The head of Ukrnafta announced that the restoration of even 10% of abandoned wells would secure some 30% of the current company's fund.
- Ukraine's demographic indicators are a major concern. Due to the war, the birth rate has reached the critical [minimum](#). According to preliminary estimates, one woman now gives birth to 0,7 children. In 2021 it stood at 1.2 children. To achieve the natural replacement of generations (given Ukrainian mortality rate), an ordinary woman will need to have 2.15 children.
- The discussion about the status of liberated Crimea has been postponed due to Ukraine's internal politics. History shows that autonomy fuels separatist sentiment, while a change in the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea will require changes to Ukraine's Constitution and political consensus. Thus, the advisor to the Office of Ukraine's President, Mykhailo Podolyak, believes that following the liberation of [Crimea](#) the peninsula could lose its autonomous status. The Crimean Tatar Ismail Khalikov, who serves in the AFU, has [called](#) for the settlement of the issue of the national Crimean-Tatar territorial autonomy as soon as possible. Among other things, he recommends referring to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and drawing on the international experience.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **The western threat to Russia's security, criticizing western countries for supporting Ukraine.** In the official media Russia continues to [promote narratives](#) about EU societies not tolerating the support given to Ukraine as well as clashes between politicians and citizens, which could jeopardize the electoral support of certain political leaders. Anti-American narratives (such as "[sponsors of terrorism and genocide](#)") are also common (after US Senator Lindsey Graham allegedly spoke about "the investment" in "killing Russians"). Ukrainians are referred to as "consumables" for the US (Senator Leonid Slutsky). "The West" is accused of destroying cities. [Dmitry Medvedev](#) claims that the US must compensate Russia for the destruction of Mariupol and other cities that have been destroyed with American assistance.
Russians are vigorously spreading stories claiming there is growing animosity towards President Zelenskyy from "[ordinary](#)" citizens of different countries. The delivery of fighter jets to Ukraine is seen by Moscow as an "[unacceptable](#) escalation", whereas Ukraine, according to the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, is "[a terrorist state](#)".
- **"Partisans in Russian territories". Belgorod oblast.** Previously Russia's official media was quite reserved about the issue of "Russian partisans" taking settlements in the Belgorod oblast. The incident was interpreted as a "terrorist attack". The West and Ukrainian authorities were accused of "sabotage". Moscow insisted that the incident was a PR measure aimed at sowing [fear and panic](#) in Russia, and that it was doomed to failure. After a few days the Kremlin shifted its focus to Ukraine's

leadership, accusing it of using “western weapons” in Russia. Moscow claims that actions taken by the Ukrainian leadership “are framing” the West and the US in terms of the use of western weapons. In late May the Russians began telling stories about the terrorist nature of actions taken by Ukraine’s political leaders. Messages promoted about the actions of the “partisans” were part of a PR exercise aimed at “mitigating the [effect](#) of the surrender of Bakhmut”. Furthermore, Belgorod’s governor [Gladkov](#) said that the shelling of the region will stop if Kharkiv is annexed to Belgorod.

- **“Our cause is just.” “The goals of the SMO remain unchanged.”** Russia continues to promote a “just war” narrative. For example, Russian political elites constantly emphasize the fact that the war was not [started](#) by Russia. They claim that it was unleashed against Russia, and that Moscow wants to end to it through the “special military operation” (SMO). Putin has also said that a part of “the Russian people” has found itself outside the historical Russian state due to historical injustices and that these people must be protected. The Kremlin continues to reiterate that the goals of the “SMO remain the same” and that they will be fulfilled. At the same time, Kremlin Spokesman, [Dmitry Peskov](#) has failed to clarify the exact goals of the operation.
- **The entire world is on our side. Most of the world’s countries support Russia.** Stories are being circulated about the support for Russia’s actions in Ukraine, including in terms of security. Russian society is being fed stories about the development of cooperation, in particular, within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and with [Syria and Palestine](#), [Egypt](#) and others (an opinion expressed by [Nikolai Patrushev](#), Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, at the 11th International conference of dignitaries in charge of security issues).
- **“Shelling Ukrainian civilian infrastructure.”** Missile attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and the urbocide are portrayed as the “[liquidation](#)” of military objects with Russian [high-precision](#) weapons.
- **Denying the Ukrainian identity and statehood.** Russia continues to spread narratives about the need to destroy Ukraine, rejecting the existence of the Ukrainian language and history. On 22 May, President Putin [took](#) an 18th century French map and exclaimed that “there is no Ukraine on the map”, since “prior to the October Revolution there was no such state as Ukraine in history”.
- **Integration of the “new territories” into Russia.** A law has been signed on the [elections](#) in the “new territories” amid martial law. Russia continues to take “integration” measures. Messages have been spread about the “primaries” of the “United Russia” party held in the Zaporizhzhia oblast. It was claimed that 65.000 people participated in the [preliminary voting](#).
- **Russia’s humanitarian mission.** Russia claims that since the beginning of the so-called SMO, it has granted entry to almost 3.5 million Ukrainian citizens.
- **Discrediting Ukraine and Ukrainian authorities that “drag the West into an escalation against Russia”.** Ukrainian political leaders are presented not only as “blind US puppets”, but also of being responsible for [dragging](#) the US into a further escalation against Russia. The Russians have spread “edited” statements made by an American senator said in Kyiv in the context of Russophobia. Zelenskyy is referred to as “the leader” of a [non-existent country](#) with whom Russia does not need to speak at the negotiating table. The narrative about a “cooked up” and a conflict country is being

spread. Furthermore, Russia's official discourse is discrediting Ukraine's European aspirations. Moscow declares that Ukraine is now another "Syria or Afghanistan", and not the West or Europe ([Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia](#)).

- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army.** Stories about the "exhausted" Ukrainian army (due to manpower losses) are abound, as well as Ukraine's inability to launch a "counteroffensive" and the despair that borders on demoralization. Messages from "[Ukrainian experts](#)" are being promoted about the "outbreak of a civil war" due to "enforced mobilization" into the Ukrainian army as well as military losses. Russia insists on an "[aggressive draft](#)" being undertaken in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army is being accused of using chemical weapons ([Rogozin](#)).
- **"About victories and success of the Russian army. Losses of the AFU."** According to the official narrative regarding the situation on the front, Russia has everything "under control", with all the goals of the SMO are being achieved. On 21 May, Putin [congratulated](#) the "Wagner" group on [taking](#) Bakhmut. In the official media the accusations leveled by [Prigozhyn](#) at the Russian Ministry of Defense have barely been commented on. Messages are being spread through Russian official media about how Russian army is fully in [control](#) of the situation in the Zaporizhzhia oblast, AFRF's victory at Bakhmut and Ukraine's inability to launch a counter-offensive due to lack of forces. At the same time, the Russian media glosses over the conflict between Prigozhyn and the Russian Ministry of Defense related to the planned retreat of the "Wagner" group from Bakhmut. Russia claims to have [destroyed](#) "all the Bayraktar drones" used by the Ukrainian army. On 18 May a message was shared about the "[destruction](#)" of Ukraine's Patriot air defense systems. On the whole, the Russian military's rhetoric is full of messages about the "victories of the AFRF" and the "[heroic deeds](#)" of Russians during the so-called SMO.