

**May 1st - May 15th, 2023
Ukraine Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- Active hostilities continue in the Donetsk oblast. Both Ukraine and Russia try to advance near Bakhmut. During the first two weeks of May, the Ukrainian army liberated several zones around the city, which allowed it to liberate Bakhmut and continue its defensive operation. According to Ukraine, as of 15 May Russian losses amounted to around [200.000](#) soldiers killed overall.
- During the first two weeks of May, missile and drone shelling of Ukrainian settlements (in particular those located deep inside the country) significantly increased. The possible goal being to exhaust and destroy Ukraine's air defense systems as well as prevent the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) from launching a counteroffensive. For example, on the night of 1 May, [18 cruise missiles](#) X-101/X-555 were launched, with 15 of them downed. On the night of 3 May, 26 [kamikaze drones](#) were launched (21 downed). On the morning of 3 May, the center of Kherson was shelled, claiming the lives of [21 people](#), with tens of other citizens wounded. On 4 May, approximately 24 [kamikaze drones](#) attacked Ukraine, with 18 of them shot down by Ukraine's air defense. For the first time in history, the Russian hypersonic missile [Kinzhal](#), with which Russia was trying to attack Kyiv, was downed. On 6 May, the Ukrainian air defense downed all 8 [kamikaze drones](#). On 8 May, all 35 [drones](#), launched from the Russian Federation (Russia) were shot down. On the night of 9 May, the Russian army fired 25 [cruise missiles](#) at Ukraine, with 23 of them downed. However, two missiles destroyed warehouses belonging to the [Ukrainian Red Cross Society](#) in the Odesa oblast. On 12 May, Ukraine's Defence Forces downed 22 types of Russian [unmanned aerial vehicles](#) and 3 cruise missiles. In several cases Russia launched single drones, using C-300 missiles to shell Ukraine along with guided bombs and other munitions.
- During the last two weeks numerous Ukrainian cities including [Kherson](#), [Mykolayiv](#), [Kharkiv](#), [Zaporizhzhia](#), [Ternopil](#), [Khmelnyskyi](#), [Ochakiv](#), [Beryslav](#), [Avdiivka](#), [Sloviansk](#), [Vuhledar](#), [Kramatorsk](#), [Kostyantynivka](#), [Druzhkivka](#), [Kurakhove](#), [Orikhiv](#), [Hulyaipole](#), [Nikopol](#), [Vovchansk](#), [Kupyansk](#), [Balakliya](#), as well as other settlements located in the Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy oblast, located close to the Russian border, were subjected to Russian air, missile and artillery attacks.

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to the official [information provided by juvenile prosecutors](#), 481 children have been killed, with over 973 wounded with various degrees of severity. 19 393 children are believed to have been deported. Ukraine managed to return only [361 children](#) from the overall number of those deported. As from the beginning of May, as a result of Russia's full-fledged invasion, [23 760 Ukrainians](#) were considered missing. Ukraine is aware of 73 cases of premeditated murder of Ukrainian soldiers by Russians. The bodies of [80 killed soldiers](#) have been return to Ukraine. President Zelenskyy has introduced draft laws [extending](#) martial law as well as [general mobilization](#) for another 90 days.

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- On 6 May during a further [exchange of prisoners](#), 46 defenders of the Azovstal steel plant, who served in the “Azov” Regiment of Ukraine’s National Guard of Ukraine returned home. Russian propaganda refers to this military unit as a center of “Nazism” which is why it took so long for this prisoner swap to happen. Still, despite this development, hundreds of Azovstal defenders remain in Russian captivity.
- In the occupied territories of South Ukraine there are still [150.000 Russian occupiers](#). Nevertheless, in light of a possible Ukrainian counteroffensive, a mass flight [of collaborators](#) from these territories has been registered. For example, in Skadovsk, the Russians are [bringing the operations](#) in the rayon and city administration to a halt. The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, has said that Ukrainians living in the temporarily occupied territories should acquire Russian citizenship in order to survive. For instance, in the city of Starobylsk Ukrainian citizens who have refused to take a Russian passport are being [forcibly evicted](#) by the Russian occupiers, despite the fact that children under 18 may be living there.
- Ukraine, Türkiye, the UN and Russia have agreed to continue negotiations regarding the extension of “the [Grain deal](#)” mediated by Türkiye.
- [According](#) to the Commissioner for Persons Missing in Special Circumstances, Oleh Kotenko, over 7.000 people are believed to be missing. 15% of them are civilians, while the rest consist of members of the military. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, over 15.000 criminal proceedings have been opened regarding missing persons. 8.000 people have already been found.
- On 9 May, Yevgeny Prigozhyn, the founder of the private military group “Wagner”, released a [video](#) showing the dead bodies of “Wagner” group soldiers in the background, and in which he appeals to Sergey Shoigu, Russia’s Minister of Defense, and Vitaly Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. While using obscene language and swearing, he spoke about “the 70%-lack of munitions”, demanding more. Afterwards, Prigozhyn claimed that his “Wagner” group failed to receive the necessary munitions and that they had been warned that leaving positions in Bakhmut would be considered high treason. According to an article published by [The Washington Post](#), Prigozhyn offered to disclose the positions of Russian troops to the Ukrainian intelligence services, in exchange for the AFU leaving Bakhmut.
- Journalists from the BBC and Meduza have identified the names of [22.000](#) Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine. The majority were “Wagner Group” mercenaries who were killed near Bakhmut. According to a statement made by John Kirby, the Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council of the USA, Russia has [lost](#) 100.000 soldiers (killed and wounded) near Bakhmut during the past 5 months.
- The Russians have said that the operations of all blocks of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant have been suspended, without providing any details about the reason for this. Ukraine is expecting further provocations from Russia.
- According to the British intelligence agency, Russia is now facing “[its most acute labor shortage in the past 25 years](#)” due to the coronavirus pandemic and the war against Ukraine. In the first quarter of 2023, [the retail trade turnover](#) in Russia dropped by 7.3% per year; the sales of food products

- shrank by 3.4%, of non-food products — by 10.6%. Despite the economic drop, the Investigative Committee of Russia is intent on [putting out a “wanted list” \(APB\)](#) for the judges from the International Criminal Court for issuing an arrest warrant against Russian President, Vladimir Putin.
- According to [The New York Times](#), Western and American aviation spare parts worth of millions of dollars have been smuggled into Russia despite sanctions. Moreover, according to [Bild](#), German goods are being imported into Russia through the CIS countries, circumventing the sanctions. The export of goods from Germany to EU countries has at least doubled.
 - Hungary’s Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has referred to Transcarpathia as a [longtime Hungarian land](#) that now belonging to Ukraine.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- The European Commissioner for Economy, Paolo Gentiloni, announced that while in 2022 Ukraine’s economy shrank by about 29%, it has proven extremely resilient amid war. In 2023, the economy is expected to grow by 0.6%, and in 2024 by 4%, according to the European Commission’s 2023 spring economic [forecast](#). At the same time, according to the National Bank of Ukraine, the Ukrainian business sector has [positively](#) assessed the results and prospects of its activities for the first time since the beginning of the invasion. Among the factors that have influenced the assessment were the improvement of energy supply, heightened inflation and exchange rate predictions, a better consumer mood among the population, increased food and fuel supplies.
- The Ukrainian government continues with the process of establishing a new recovery [architecture](#). The position of Vice Prime Minister for Recovery has been established, as well as a relevant Agency. From now on, the positions of Deputy Ministers for Recovery at the Ministry will be established. These ministries will be responsible for implementing recovery projects in eleven regions that have been affected the hardest by the war.
- Rheinmetall and Ukroboronprom have signed [contracts](#) regarding the creation of a company that will produce and repair tanks. This cooperation will cover technical maintenance as well as the repair of armored vehicles in Ukraine. In parallel, the prices of tank production will also be stimulated. The German company is also hoping to soon sign a contract to launch a further two joint companies (that will be supplying munitions and air defense systems). Rheinmetall will own a controlling stake of 51% in the company and will manage it.
- According to Ukraine’s Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, Ukraine has agreed with the European Commission to lift the [blockage](#) of the transit of over 500 Ukrainian agricultural goods. The operation of the Solidarity Lanes will continue. All the other unilateral bans, introduced by five neighboring countries, have been lifted.
- In April-May 2023 Russia presented an ultimatum, initiating a negotiation process regarding “the [Grain deal](#)” in order to play for time until the results of the Turkish presidential elections. Ukraine does not rule out the possibility of the deal, whose terms allow a secure export of Ukrainian grain across the Black Sea, which expires on 18 May. Not for the first time, Moscow has threatened to withdraw from the deal if its demands regarding the free export of Russian grain and fertilizers are

not satisfied. At the same time, Ukraine is working on [bill](#) Nr 8025 that will bring about the introduction of land corridors for the export of Ukrainian agricultural produce during martial law.

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **Western threat to Russia, criticizing Western support for Ukraine.** Russia is actively spreading a narrative about [Western elites beginning to destroy Russia with the help of Ukraine](#). Russia's effort to "defend itself" is being interpreted by the West as "aggression", while the West itself is trying to "promote in the information space its myth about Russia attacking Ukraine". Another narrative has it that Russia is not fighting Ukraine but the West, with the latter using Ukraine to fight Russia. Russian media covered China's active steps vis-à-vis the peace talks [process](#) with restraint. Traditionally, Russia spreads narratives in its official media about the lack of support among citizens regarding the government's help (weapons) provided to Ukraine. Moscow claims that many British citizens are criticizing their government for providing Ukraine with missiles and causing a security threat. The Kremlin claims that the amount of western equipment (in particular, planes from Slovakia) and aid for Ukraine will be limited due to changes in the political landscape. Russia criticizes Western sanctions, spreading messages ([through Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitry Peskov](#)) about "Russia having never used energy to pursue its political goals". Russian official media claim that despite the sanctions, Russia's economy ranks among the world's top economies. Moscow also claims that everyone in the world is aware of the "[Ukrainian case being a pretext to kill our country](#)". At the same time, Russia says that the European Union is no longer able to introduce additional sanctions on Russia – "[Sanctions are over](#)". Anti-Polish narratives abound. Some politicians in Russia deny the right of Poland to have its own name and subjectivity. They claim that in the Russian empire Poland used to be called "[territories around Vistula](#)".
- **Attack on the Kremlin, ruby lines.** Ukraine is being accused of attacking the Kremlin on 3 May, using drones. "[While we are conducting a special military operation, Ukraine is waging war](#)". Russia also claims that this attack was prepared by the USA, with Ukraine following Washington's instructions. Ukraine is also accused of "[terrorism](#)".
- **Threats to Russia. Victory Day.** Mobilization narratives are being promoted as society being called on to repel the attacks and face up to the threats emanating from Russia's enemies. In terms of Victory Day, Putin drew parallels with the current developments, saying that [a real war has been waged on Russia](#) with the goal of achieving the collapse and destruction of our country, erasing the achievements of WWII". In official messages the Russian media have written about "a breakfast" with "[the leaders of the CIS countries](#)" with restraint. In official propaganda the arrival of the CIS leaders has been [represented](#) as Russia's diplomatic victory, with the country would now be "looking towards the South and East", rallying "close foreign countries" around, while "Russia is working miracles of soft, hard, fluid and gas-like power on the "near abroad' front".

In terms of “victory”, in Russia’s internal information space the narrative about Russia “[fighting in Ukraine a liberation war](#)”, just like it did eighty years ago saving peoples around the world from Western Nazism” is spread.

- **“Our cause is just”. Denying the desecration of the “special military operation” in society.** The number of propaganda stories regarding the fatigue of Russian society has grown. Nevertheless, Russian media claim that all of this is happening for the sake of Russia’s security as [the West is attempting](#) to prevent Russia from winning by assuring them that they are fighting for the unjust cause. Russia has drawn parallels with 1917 and the fall of the Tsar regime, which led to the collapse of Russia.

In the military context, the weakness of Russia is being denied. Moscow claims that such messages have been initiated by Russia’s enemies and are the result of an information and psychological operation conducted by Ukraine. Prigozhyn, who promised to capture Bakhmut by 9 May, has [shot](#) controversial videos accusing Russian generals of incompetence, as well as claiming that his mercenaries were forced to pull back due to a shortage of shells/ammunition, which he blames the Kremlin for. On 11 May, Dmitry Peskov [ignored](#) several appeals by Prigozhyn on social networks. On 10 May, Peskov claimed that “the video appeal was not watched in the Kremlin”. For their own part, official Russian media have quoted “Wagner” group’s fighters, who claimed to have effectively “captured Bakhmut”, with [a few meters](#) remaining.

- **Integration of the new territories of Russia. Denying Ukraine’s identity.** Russian media have announced the “[evacuation](#)” of the citizens from eighteen settlements in the Zaporizhzhia oblast. Russia also claims that Ukraine is constantly shelling the [territories](#) of the Luhansk and [Donetsk](#) oblasts.
- **Discrediting Ukraine and its leadership.** Messages have been spread (purportedly by “American experts”) about Zelenskyy dreaming of dragging the USA into a war with Russia as the Ukrainian President is in despair. As for the Ukrainian President, Russian officials ([Dmitry Medvedev](#)) are using disrespectful superlatives in the Russian information space.

An [attempt](#) on the life of one of the leaders of “Just Russia”, Zakhar Prilepin (who was on his way to Moscow from the Donetsk oblast), in Nizhny Novgorod on 6 May, was referred to as a “terrorist act” carried out by Ukraine. Messages have been spread about detachments made up of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars being involved in the [explosion](#) of Prilepin’s car. Russian lawyers are demanding that Ukraine be recognized as “[a terrorist state](#)” and that Ukraine “[is carrying out a genocide in Donbas](#)”.

- **Glorification of the “Special Military Operation” (SMO). The SMO as a “political lift”.** Reprisals are growing against those who do not support the war, in particular, the representatives of the arts (creative and cultural professions). It has been suggested that those people who do support the “SMO”, should be put on a special register for limiting the activities of “[cultural collaborators](#)”, including, blocking access to finance and other resources to support their work.
- **Discrediting the Ukrainian army.** The Russians are spreading information about the death of Ukrainian General Valerii Zaluzhnyi. Narratives about the defeat of the Ukrainian army and the “[dissatisfaction](#)” of the USA about Ukraine’s delayed counteroffensive are repeatedly promoted.

Messages about the “victories of the Russian army and the defeat of Ukraine” are being spread, together with messages rejecting any [losses](#) sustained by the Russian army near Bakhmut. Russian narratives change according to the goals pursued by the Russian army. The messages about the capture of buildings are gradually replaced by other interpretations that explain the absence of a military success in Bakhmut. On 7 May, Prigozhyn said that his goal was not to “capture” Bakhmut, but to conduct an operation called “[Artemivisk massacre](#)” in order to exhaust the AFU and inflict losses on them. On 12 May, Prigozhyn [claimed](#) that the “Wagner” group controlled 95% of Bakhmut. Russia constantly spreads messages about Ukraine shelling the Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod oblasts as well as [civilian objects](#) bearing the brunt of these attacks.

- **About the victories and achievements of the Russian army. Losses incurred by the AFU.** Russia is promoting a narrative about the efficiency of the Russian army and its successful efforts to repel all attacks. On the official level Russia is circulating materials that deny the opinions expressed by war correspondents and z-bloggers about the catastrophic state of the Russian army and that it is abandoning positions on the battlefield. Russia has ruled out the possibility of the Ukrainian air defense system efficiently downing Russian [hypersonic missiles](#).
- **Shelling Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure, shelling oblast centers. “[Russia is not waging war](#)”.** Certain transformations have been registered regarding Russia's assessment of the war in Ukraine. For example, in some of its official messages Russia has denied waging war in Ukraine and destroying civilian infrastructure (cities, civilian objects, the energy system), claiming that it only hits military targets. On 11 May, Dmitry [Peskov said](#) that Russia is not fighting in Ukraine, nor is it destroying cities. He claimed that the goals of the “SMO” had partly been achieved. Russia has begun to issue official messages about constant nighttime shelling of Ukrainian cities with missiles and drones (Kyiv, Dnipro, etc.) as a [concentrated](#) attack on dislocation points of the AFU. In parallel to this, the Kremlin is promoting the narrative of Russia successfully and systematically [destroying](#) exclusively military objects of Ukraine.

On 13 May, Russia's reaction to its planes and helicopters being shot down in the Bryansk oblast was quite restrained. Russian officials referred to this incident as “a [crash](#)”, having failed to offer any other comments on the topic.