

**February 2024
Ukraine Weekly Situation Report**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS

- **The Russian army, reinforced by private paramilitary groups, continues to advance in the Donetsk (near Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar) and Kharkiv (near Kupyansk) provinces. Due to insufficient volumes of ammunition and equipment to counter the Russian air force, the units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) were forced to [retreat](#) from Avdiivka on 17 February.** The authorities in the Kharkiv province are considering a forced evacuation of families with children from several settlements located along the front line. The Ukrainian army continues to shell Russian military objects located in Crimea as well as in Ukraine's other occupied territories and Russian territories situated close to the Ukrainian border. For example, a large landing ship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet *Tsezar Kunikov* was [destroyed](#) on 14 February (due to the malfunction of the Crimean Bridge, these types of ships are now providing logistics services for Russian military units in Crimea). **Also, in February, 13 Russian military aircraft were [downed](#),** including the Beriev A-50, an airborne early warning and control aircraft. Russia still has around six of these planes.
- **On 8 February 2024, [changes](#) occurred within the ranks of the supreme leadership of the AFU.** Oleksandr Syrskyi, replaced Valerii Zaluzhnyi as Commander-in-Chief. Despite Syrskyi having led successful military operations, the failure of the President to effectively communicate the reshuffle led to discontent within Ukrainian society.
- According to Ukraine, as of 27 February the total losses of the Russian army amount to 415.000 dead. In February alone Russia lost around 28.500 soldiers. At the same time, according to Ukraine, during the first two years of the war approximately 31.000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed. According to the estimates of several experts, the total losses of Ukrainian soldiers in this war stand at about 250.000.
- The Russian army continues to launch massive attacks on Ukrainian cities and towns, using not only Russian and Iranian weapons but also those from North Korea (the AFRF have used over [20 missiles from North Korea to attack Ukraine that have claimed the lives of at least 24 people, with over 100 people injured](#)). The attacks targeted [Kyiv](#), [Dnipro](#), [Kharkiv](#) (as a result of the attack on a gas station on the night of 10 February, leaked fuel led to a fire engulfing 15 private houses, killing 7 people, including 3 children), [Lviv](#), [Odesa](#), [Kherson](#), [Beryslav](#), [Slovyansk](#), [Kupyansk](#), [Velykyi Burluk](#), [Kostyantynivka](#) (following shelling on 25 February the city's [railway station](#) was destroyed), [Kurakhove](#), [Ochakiv](#), and other settlements as well as settlements in Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy provinces located on the Russian [border](#). On the night of 23 February, [Russia launched a combined attack](#) on Ukraine with [Shahid drones and different types of missiles](#). **As a result, a civilian object was hit in Odesa, claiming the lives of three people. In Dnipro 8 people were injured, two people died, and a high-rise building was seriously damaged.**
- **Russian tactics include dropping unmanned aerial grenades containing hazardous liquid during shelling, which is and of the rules of warfare. These are mainly grenades containing chloropicrin that severely irritates the eyes and lungs.**
- **On 24 February, the Russian military [once again executed Ukrainian POWs 'on camera'](#).** This is the fourth incident of POWs being executed in February that were released into the public domain. The first incident took place near the village of Vesele (Bakhmut region). [Two Ukrainian POWs were killed](#)

[there](#). The second incident happened on the *Zenit* positions in Avdiivka, where supposedly [6 POWs from the 110-th brigade of the AFU were executed](#). The third incident was registered near the village of [Robotyne](#) (three Ukrainian defenders were killed). Nineteen criminal cases are being investigated regarding the killing of 45 Ukrainian POWs.

- On 8 February, a further prisoner [exchange](#) took place. One hundred people returned to Ukraine. Around half of them are defenders of Mariupol (however, Russia did not exchange members of the Azov regiment). On 12 February, Russian allowed 11 children to be [returned](#) to Ukraine while on 16 February, the bodies of 58 soldiers were [returned](#).

HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS

- According to official data provided by juvenile prosecutors, since the start of Russia's invasion over [1740 children have been affected](#). As of [29 February, 2024](#), 529 children were killed with over 1,230 sustaining wounds of various degree of severity. At the national level, the General Prosecutor's Office is checking information related to the more than 19,500 cases of children relocated or deported from Ukraine within the framework of a criminal case. Only 388 children have been [returned](#) to Ukraine. 126,513 war crimes and crimes of aggression have been registered, as well as 16,609 crimes against national security.
- The evacuation of civilians continues. Attempts to evacuate five children aged 4-16 from the [temporarily occupied territories](#) have been successful. One of the children was an orphan. Since the beginning of 2024, 25 people from Kherson province have been returned. In the midst of a fighting, the *White Angels* police group [evacuated](#) 26 people and a dog from near Avdiivka. Some 700 residents [remain](#) in occupied Avdiivka (before the war 30.000 people lived in the city. On 14 February 2024, the Russian occupiers [shelled](#) the only remaining evacuation route from Avdiivka to the Industrial Avenue. The evacuation of civilians was virtually impossible. On 27 February, [15 children and 14 adults were evacuated from the Selydovo community in Donetsk province](#). They will be sheltered in Zakarpattia province. All children [have been evacuated](#) from the 9 settlements located in the Mariinka and Ocheretyno communities in the Donetsk province,
- Russia continues to demolish the cultural heritage and environment of Ukraine. More than 900 objects of [Ukraine's cultural heritage](#) have been damaged over the past two years. The damage inflicted on Ukraine's culture is estimated to have reached 19 billion USD. The damage to Ukraine's environment is estimated to stand at [\\$57,9 billion USD](#). Since 24 February almost 3.600 [Russian crimes against the environment](#) have been registered (ecocide). Private agricultural companies have also been [affected by Russian shelling](#), resulting in the [loss of cattle](#) as well as serious damage.
- After two years of Russia's full-scale invasion the Monitoring Mission of the UN has [confirmed](#) that **30,457 civilians have been affected by Russia's aggression**, with 10,582 people killed and 19,875 wounded. However, the real number of civilian deaths is much larger as many deaths have not yet been confirmed. 23,000 people [are still considered missing](#) after two years of the war.
- Due to Russia's war, Ukraine has become one of the most explosive contaminated countries in the world. A third of Ukraine's territory is littered with millions of unexploded landmines and cluster bombs, as well as wires, booby traps and shell fragments. Of the liberated territories, the [three most contaminated provinces](#) of Ukraine are Kharkiv, Donetsk and Kherson.
- Reprisals against the local population in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (TOT). [Russians are jamming access to the internet and mobile connection](#) in the settlements of the TOTs,

- lest Ukrainians should be able to pass on information to the Ukrainian military. More than 10 inhabitants of the Russian-occupied city of Enerhodar are [being held in Russian torture chambers](#).
- **Russian agents have [recruited Indians](#) to fight in Ukraine.** The families of the recruited claim that men aged 22-31 have been hired to work as ‘assistants at a Russian military institution’ and that they have been sent into battle under the pretext of participating in ‘training’.
 - **Russia’s attempts to manipulate and obstruct investigation.** Russia has again begun to [speculate](#) about the crash of the Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft on 24 January in Belgorod province and on its readiness to transfer the bodies of those killed in the crash to Ukraine. Russia has not yet given Ukraine the official list of those on board, nor has Moscow confirmed their death. Russia has also failed to grant access to the crash site to international organisations.
 - **Supply problems and economic war expenditures: challenges for Ukraine.** Approximately half of weapons earmarked for Ukraine by its Western partners are not delivered on time, which leads to casualties among personnel and the loss of territories. Over 150 billion USD out of 2 trillion of Russia’s economy is spent on [the war](#).
 - **Since 9 February, 2024, Polish farmers have been [protesting](#) on the Ukrainian border, blocking roads leading to border crossing checkpoints.** They demand a ban on Ukrainian agricultural produce as well as refuse to following the European green policy. During this time five cases of Ukrainian agricultural produce being dumped from cargo trains or trucks onto railways or highways have been reported. Additionally, the actions of Polish farmers’ impact the economy, preventing humanitarian cargo from reaching Ukraine, resulting in a negative response from Ukrainian society regarding Ukraine’s strategic partners.
 - Russians are planning to hold **quasi-Presidential elections in the temporarily occupied territories** of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces ahead of schedule, i.e., a week before 17 March. Furthermore, in the Zaporizhzhia province members of polling station commissions will visit voters at their homes within the framework of ‘early voting’ at the beginning of March. In light of the upcoming quasi-elections , pensioners living in Ukraine’s occupied territories are being [persuaded to join Putin’s campaign in return for rations](#). The goal of these ‘[elections](#)’ is to legitimise the full-scale invasion and collect data on Ukrainian citizens for further forced passportisation and conscription.
 - According to a survey conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens, [among main reasons that put off Ukrainian men from joining the AFU](#) are insufficient remuneration (65,6%), the prospect of sustaining serious injuries or being killed (64,1%), unspecified periods of service (63,8%) and the prospect of winding up under the command of unqualified members of the military (59,6%). Respondents also consider that the efficiency of the AFU in 2024 is affected by corruption at the Ministry of Defence (46,2%), lack of weapons and ammunition (35,7%), societal war fatigue (29%) and shrinking military aid from partners (22,3%). Uncertainty over conscription results in a decreasing readiness of citizens to join the ranks of the AFU. However, a wide range of measures were taken in February aimed at solving issues of military service, in particular, a law on the [demobilisation](#) of soldiers undergoing compulsory military service was passed, which should defuse tensions around one of the most frustrating topics.
 - **Since the beginning of the full-scale war [Ukrainian citizens have transferred money](#) to charitable online fundraising campaigns (*launched on monobank*) to the amount of 1 billion EUR.** 43,681,445.836 UAH of private funds has been used to counter the invasion. 6,6 billion USD [in taxes](#) was received by state and local budgets in January and February 2024.

- **Ukraine has reached record-breaking export results.** The cargo turnover at the ports of Great Odessa in February amounted to eight million tons, 5,2 million of which are the produce of Ukrainian farmers. These are [record export figures](#) not only for the Ukrainian corridor, but also since the start of the war. Despite Russian scheming and manipulation, the export figures at the Black Sea ports are gradually approaching the pre-war period. The volume of exports since the corridor was established has reached 28 million tons. Of this, 19 million is grain and oil crops. Ukrainian cargo has been shipped to 42 countries.

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

- **Disappointment with the USA.** The lack of support from Washington following a long-lasting political and budget crisis has resulted in a negative view of the USA as a reliable partner, while also demoralising Ukrainian society. Coinciding with Russia's offense operations, it has had negative repercussions for Ukrainian defence, and as a result Ukraine's partners in the defense sector must shoulder part of the responsibility. At the same time, it has also been an [opportunity for Europe to improve its image](#), with many EU member states increasing military aid to Ukraine.
- **Expectations for Russia to defuse the situation in Ukraine by exploiting Zelenskyy's tenure are ending.**
- **Security agreements are perceived and positioned as support for Ukraine and Ukraine's success.**
- **Instability in the majority faction is reflected in the difficulty in passing [controversial bills](#) initiated by the Office of the President of Ukraine.** This situation has been acknowledged and addressed during a meeting between President Zelenskyy and MPs from his own faction, which was aimed at lowering tensions. According to an insider, the meeting produced limited progress. Unfortunately, the fact that the executive and legislative authorities are blaming each other for preparing and passing an unpopular bill on the changes to the system of conscription causes concern.
- **Russia has launched a [special operation called Maidan 3.0](#) against Ukraine. It aims to embed ideas among Ukrainians about the illegitimacy of decision-making by the authorities and ultimately defeat them on the battlefield in June 2024.**

INFORMATION WARFARE DIMENSIONS

- **The war through the lens of Russia's presidential elections. The 'all for victory' narrative.** On the whole Putin's presidential campaign is being run within the narratives of a just war, the need for mobilisation of society and economy for war purposes and Russian military might. Measures are being taken with the participation of combatants from the so-called 'special military operation' (SMO); forums on the 'SMO' and 'All for Victory' are being held, and social initiatives related to the war are being launched. Russia promotes its technological edge over the West. [Putin](#) has said that 'Russian modern weapons surpass their equivalent from the West' at the all-Russia forum of the People's Front called '[All for Victory](#)' (500 people who are representatives of Russia's largest defence companies, doctors and construction workers employed in the zone of the SMO took part). In terms of the rhetoric of presidential candidates, the topic of war and the achievement of the goals of the so-called 'SMO' are being promoted. Leonid [Slutsky](#) has spoken of 'Russia's right path', of the monolithic protection of Russians, the 'Russian world' and the 'Russian civilization' with the help of 'Russian weapons'.

- Russian military might is constantly emphasised (hyper sound blocks of an intercontinental missile *Avangard* and laser complexes *Peresvet*). [Putin](#) has also claimed that Russian plants operate in three shifts.
- Practically all candidates registered in Russia deploy military rhetoric in public, maintaining that the 'goals of the SMO' will be reached on Russia's terms ('[Novye Lyudi](#)'). Communists and [Nikolai Kharitonov](#) have said that peace will be achieved only on Russia's terms and after 'Ukraine's complete defeat'.
- **Glorification of combatants of the so-called 'SMO', massive support and consolidation in Russia.** Russia continues to glorify combatants of the so-called 'SMO'. Within the framework of the Defender of the Fatherland Day, those fallen in the SMO were commemorated. According to Russian presidential aide, Vladimir [Medinsky](#), as of 1 February the Russian Military and Historical Society alone installed 80 commemorative plaques in Russian schools. Relevant campaigns have been launched in Russia's regions by the so-called Russian political parties, etc. Constant calls for societal mobilisation are being [voiced](#) as a sign of support for those who are fighting for Russia. Putin [has claimed](#) that it is devotion to the Motherland that is one of 'the greatest virtues'.
- According to the All-Russian Association for Development of Local Governance, over 35.000 Russian municipal state servants have [participated](#) in the 'SMO' in Ukraine. In his address to the Federal Assembly Putin [said](#) that Russia's new political elite consists of combatants of the so-called 'SMO'. A special personnel program *The Times of Heroes* is being introduced.
- **The active promotion and endorsement of Russia's war against Ukraine within Russian society. War for the 'Russian civilization'.** In the general discourse the idea of complete approval of the war by Russian citizens and society as a 'war for protection from Western infringement' is being holistically supported. [Putin](#) has endorsed the inevitable and justified nature of Russia's actions as defence and a warning, declaring that 'one can only regret that Russia did not act in Ukraine earlier'. Overall, Russia's propaganda sources are ubiquitously spreading optimistic appraisal of Russia's actions in the so-called 'SMO'. According to the results of the official survey conducted by the AI-Russian Centre for Public Opinion (RCPO), 65% of Russians believe that the SMO is being 'rather successfully' [fought](#) by the Russian army. The survey has also showed, that 65% of Russians back the decision to launch the SMO in Ukraine, while 19% of them 'would rather not support' it.
- **Growing number of narratives about the vision of the future and Russia's security. The narrative of 'the goals of the so-called 'SMO' are being and will be reached'.** Russian politicians are spreading narratives and messages inciting escalation, openly calling for genocide on Ukraine and Ukrainians and on Western countries. They openly issue threats against politicians in the West. 'Kyiv will be captured. If not now, then later since Kyiv is 'a Russian city' governed by Western countries. Without a complete defeat of the 'pro-Nazi clique' Russia will never be safe. The regime in Kyiv must be destroyed. Ukraine will not exist. It will not be a country, rather an entity with the centre in 'Lemberg'. The Deputy chairman of the Security Council of Russia, Dmitry [Medvedev](#) has claimed that there will either be a life in a normal common country or an endless war. [He](#) has also said that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, while rejecting Ukraine's linguistic and cultural identity. Western politicians speaking against Russia, according to [Medvedev](#), will simply die. Similar messages were being spread practically coordinated with the Munich Security Conference (MSC).



- **Readiness for peace talks. The narrative of ‘Calls for peace talks are the will of the West to haggle over a respite’.** [Medvedev](#) has said that the signals sent by the West regarding the necessity of holding negotiations is a ‘cunning’ move in the hope for a respite, which is then used to supply weapons to Kyiv and launch a successful counteroffensive. Russian narratives also raise the stakes regarding the wishes of Russian society. ‘A part of Ukraine can still be saved in some form’ - this message is publicly [voiced](#) by Russian officials in the context of negotiations.
- Anti-American and anti-European narratives are being spread, particularly in the context of Western aid for Ukraine. In this regard the rhetoric of WWII is being deployed. For example, in the messages targeting Germany, [Medvedev](#) has quoted a poem written by a Soviet poet calling for ‘killing the enemy’ or the line that says ‘let his house burn down, and not yours’. At the same time, Kremlin Spokesman, [Dmitry Peskov](#) has officially rejected escalation in Russia’s internal space, or the possibility of a war between Russia and NATO countries.
- In parallel to the rejection of negotiations, [Medinsky](#) has claimed that Russia is ready to take part in negotiations with ‘representatives of Ukraine’.
- **Legitimacy of the election campaign. The narrative of ‘The West is willing to discredit and derail Russia’s presidential elections’.** The [results](#) of the so-called ‘surveys’ carried out by the RCPO at the beginning of February are being shared, proving that 75% of Russians are ready to vote for Vladimir Putin at the presidential elections.
- Narratives are being constantly spread about Western countries discrediting the Russian elections and that ‘Western money’ [is preparing](#) Russian citizens (in particular, those who have relocated to the West) to derail the elections (a message spread by Ella Pamfilova, head of Russia’s Electoral Commission). According to Russian messages, the election process is [completely](#) discredited in the West. The general Russian propaganda narratives state that the elections are being deliberately [discredited](#) by foreign agents from abroad, who are supported by the West and who are spreading fakes, while criticizing Russia’s position on the war, which poses a threat to Russian sovereignty.
- **Discrediting Ukraine’s army. The narrative of the ‘Strategic destruction of Ukrainian defence’.**
- Ahead of the Russian elections narratives and messages are being actively circulated about the inability of the AFU to counter Russia’s military might, in particular, following the loss of Avdiivka. Russian analysts predict Ukraine’s complete disorganisation and the [demolition](#) of Ukraine’s military resistance. Russians highlights the never-ending victories of their army. Russia’s Minister of Defence, Sergei [Shoigu](#) has spoken about ‘downing Ukrainian drones’ and achievements on the battlefield, also claiming that Russia ‘has liberated 317 square kilometers from the AFU’, with 72 square kilometers liberated in Avdiivka. Putin [has referred](#) to the AFU’s retreat from Avdiivka as ‘[chaotic disarray](#)’. Russian society is being constantly [informed](#) of alleged successful strikes on Ukrainian military infrastructure and on [objects](#) of Ukrainian defence sector. At the same time, Russian official propaganda sources contain quite sparse information on the downing of Russian planes or on the strikes launched by the AFU on Russian military infrastructure. Russia highlights losses inflicted on the AFU instead, in particular losses of [aircraft](#) and equipment.
- Russia is running a campaign discrediting Ukraine’s General-in-Chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi. A video featuring his stepson is being circulated, that claims he resides in Australia and [supports](#) Russia’s actions. Syrskyi’s Russian family is also emphasised.



- **Anti-western rhetoric. The narrative of ‘Russia is fighting the West, the USA and NATO’.** Narratives are being spread referring to Western politicians calling for the need to negotiate with Russia. Messages are being promoted, according to which German supplies of long-range weapons to Ukraine [will contribute](#) to an escalation of the ‘conflict’. Traditionally, [Dmitry Peskov](#) has claimed that any European sanctions will play the boomerang role for Western countries, without affecting Russia’s economic capabilities. Also, the so-called ‘SMO’ is periodically referred to in the official discourse and by politicians as ‘an operation that was originally meant to target Ukraine, but has evolved into a war against the West over time, which may prolong its duration but will not change its course’ ([Peskov](#)). Russia continues to spread [narratives](#) about the presence of Western military in Ukraine.
- **Discrediting Ukraine’s political leadership.** Ukraine is [accused](#) of carrying-out ‘terrorist attacks’ on supposedly Russian territories (which include both Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territory of [Crimea](#) and the Russian regions of Belgorod, [Dzerzhynsk](#) and others). However, Moscow emphasises that Russia is in full control of the situation. Russia is spreading messages about the existence of ‘anti-Russia’ in Ukraine. The traditional rhetoric about Ukrainian politicians as ‘[typical Fascists](#)’ is being deployed. Russian propaganda is typically promoting narratives in Russian public domain, [claiming](#) that ‘the AFU are purposefully launching strikes on civilians and infrastructure at the behest of Kyiv’. Zelenskyy’s statement about Ukrainian military losses has been dismissed by Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, [Maria Zakharova](#) as nonsense, since the Kyiv authorities ‘cash in on the war’.
- **Anti-war rhetoric. The narrative of ‘Navalny’s death is only beneficial to Russia’s enemies’.** In Russian official propaganda sources, the message is being promoted that the death of the opposition politician, Alexei Navalny, is ‘unprofitable’ for Russia’s leadership. Accusations of Navalny’s death levelled at Putin are [considered](#) and interpreted by Kremlin propagandists as being part of ‘a large-scale anti-Russia campaign, pursued by Washington and its allies’. The sanctions imposed on Russia following Navalny’s death are being lambasted. Criticism is not only being expressed by Russian actors but are also by Western politicians and journalists ([Tucker Carlson](#)). In addition, narratives are being spread that discredit Navalny’s wife, Yulia Navalnaya, who is referred to in official Russian propaganda sources as ‘[a jolly widow](#)’.
- Russian President’s press-secretary, Dmitry Peskov, [rejects](#) any responsibility of the Kremlin for the situation around Navalny’s body. Russia claims that accusations of obstructing Navalny’s funeral are levelled by ‘Russia’s foreign enemies’, trying to spread disinformation against the head of state.