
Snapshot of the day:

General, humanitarian:

- Russia attacked 11 Ukrainian Oblasts over the past day. 11 out of 16 UAVs launched in the March 17 evening attack were shot down by Ukrainian air defense; two hit an infrastructure facility in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and three hit non-residential facilities in Lviv Oblast;
- The independent international commission for the investigation of violations in Ukraine finds that Russia committed war crimes by transferring Ukrainian children to its territory and separating them from their parents;
- The head of the Ministry of Reintegration, Iryna Vereshchuk, publicly called on Russia to immediately provide Ukraine with the lists of Ukrainian children taken out of Ukrainian territory.

Military:

- Russian military continue to concentrate on offensive actions in the Kupyansk, Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Shakhtarsk directions.
- The enemy has had minor success in northern Bakhmut and has advanced deep into the AZOM complex.
- **Possible operation situation developments:**
- In the short term, the enemy will concentrate its efforts in the areas between Bakhmut and Bilohorivka and in the Kreminna-Lyman direction;
- Control of the Sea of Azov coast will acquire strategic importance in the near future.

International:

- The grain deal has been extended, all involved parties reported. The term of the extension remains unclear, though. Turkey did not specify the duration, Russia claims its 60 days, and Ukraine says its 120;
- Putin made it even easier to convert Ukrainian citizens into Russian ones, though such a move is null and void under the Ukrainian constitution and legislation.
- Putin is showing up in Crimea to boost the morale of Russians who hugely support the Ukrainian peninsula's illegal annexation and calm their worries about the security of the "unsinkable aircraft carrier", as Russians call Crimea.
- Russia's Foreign Ministry's spokesperson voiced readiness of Russia to consider "serious peace proposals." However, she outlined the Kremlin's position from the beginning of its military aggression, proving it is another exercise in demagoguery.

Humanitarian aspect:

The independent international commission for the investigation of violations in Ukraine examined 164 cases when children were transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation and the territories occupied by it and found that all of them violated international humanitarian law and constituted war crimes. Instead of helping children separated from their parents to reconnect with them, the Russian Federation made this more complicated and took measures which will most likely lead to some Ukrainian children staying in the Russian Federation.

The UN commission has confirmed that the Russian armed forces are responsible for the indiscriminate air attacks on the drama theater and maternity ward in Mariupol on March 16, 2022, as well as the rocket attack on the railway station in Kramatorsk on April 8, 2022.

In Zaporizhzhia Oblast, 892 families still live in communities on the line of fire, where 1,353 children are being raised. The regional authorities do not stop trying to persuade people to leave, guaranteeing to provide the necessary accommodation for families.

The head of the Ministry of Reintegration, Iryna Vereshchuk, publicly called on the Russian ombudsman Tatyana Moskalkova and children's ombudsman Maria Lviv-Belova to immediately provide Ukraine with the lists of children who were citizens of Ukraine taken out of Ukrainian territory. "I propose to immediately transfer to the Ukrainian side the lists of all orphans and children deprived of parental care who: 1) were citizens of Ukraine on 24.02.2022, up to and including the age of 18; 2) are currently in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine; 3) were taken out of temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to Russian territory," she wrote.

Russian attacks

Over the past day, the Russian army carried out attacks on 11 regions of Ukraine. Among them are:

- The Russian military shelled **Kherson Oblast** 50 times, firing 237 shells from heavy artillery and "Grad" MRLS. The invaders shelled the city of Kherson three times. 7 shells hit residential areas, private and apartment buildings. Three people were injured. 56 more people were evacuated from the territory of the Oblast, liberated from the Russians.
- In **Mykolaiv Oblast**, on March 17, the Russian army once again attacked Ochakiv and Kutsurub communities with mortar and artillery strikes. According to preliminary information, there were no damages or injuries.
- In **Zaporizhzhia Oblast**, the enemy shelled civilian infrastructure in the area of 14 towns and villages. Seven reports were filed regarding the destruction of housing and infrastructure facilities.
- On March 17, Russian troops attacked the border villages of Kharkiv, Kupyansk, Chuhuyiv and Bohodukhiv districts of **Kharkiv Oblast** using S-300 missiles, artillery, mortars and large-caliber machine guns. Humanitarian demining of the Oblast continues. Over the past day, the pyrotechnics of the State Emergency Service examined almost 2.5 hectares of territory and neutralized 69 explosive objects.
- In **Donetsk Oblast**, Russian troops carried out an airstrike with a Kh-22 missile and shelled populated areas with artillery, Grad and Uragan MLRS, tanks, and mortars. They killed one civilian and injured three more people.

Ukrainian air defense forces destroyed 11 out of 16 Shahed-type kamikaze drones that attacked Ukraine on the evening of March 17. The attack was launched from two directions: the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov and the Russian Bryansk Oblast. Two drones hit a critical infrastructure facility in Novomoskovsk, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, setting the facility on fire and causing damage

to neighboring buildings. Three UAVs hit non-residential facilities in the Yavoriv district of Lviv Oblast.

Occupied territories

Activists of the "Yellow Ribbon" nonviolent resistance movement put up more than 300 posters saying that Crimea is Ukraine in the cities of the temporarily occupied Crimea during the week. Their social media post said that this year is the last time Russia celebrates its annexation of Crimea.

Operational situation

General conclusion:

- The main efforts of the Russian military are concentrated on offensive actions in the Kupyansk, Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Shakhtarsk directions.

Battleline:

- Units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces repelled over 100 Russian attacks in different directions;
- The Russian forces attacked along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and made unsuccessful advance attempts near Hryanykivka, Kreminna, Kuzmyne, Verkhnyokamianske, Spirne, Makiivka, Nevske, Yampolivka, Bilohorivka. The enemy advanced insignificantly near Chervonopopivka.
- The Ukrainian Joint Forces repelled Russian assaults near Bakhmut in the area of Orikhovo-Vasylivka, Hryhorivka, Ivanivske, and Klishchiivka. "Wagner" PMC attacked Ukrainian positions near Khromove and Bohdanivka. The enemy has had small success in northern Bakhmut and has advanced deep into the AZOM complex.
- The Ukrainian joint forces repelled Russian attacks near Avdiyivka, Kamianka, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Maryinka.
- Russian troops stormed the northern outskirts of Maryinka and tried to advance to Severne.
- Ukrainian Defense Forces conducted several attacks near Polohy and Orikhiv in Zaporizhzhia Oblast and improved their tactical position.

Change in enemy disposition:

- The command of the Russian "West" troops grouping reinforced the artillery grouping of the "Belgorod" operational group, which currently consists of
 - four anti-tank divisions from the composition of the territorial troops,
 - six anti-tank batteries from the composition of the 90th tank division, of the 2nd and 41st Army of the Central Military District,
 - nine artillery batteries from the 1st tank army, 6th and 20th Armies of the Western Military District,
 - two rocket artillery batteries from the 6th army and the 263rd motorized rifle division of the territorial troops.

Escalation indicators: not detected

Possible operation situation developments:

- In the short term, the enemy will concentrate its efforts in the areas between Bakhmut and Bilohorivka and in the Kreminna-Lyman direction;
- Control of the Sea of Azov coast will acquire strategic importance in the near future.

Azov-Black Sea Maritime Operational Area:

- The number of Russian ships at sea has changed over the past day. 17 ships and vessels of the Russian Federation patrol the Black Sea area where the American MQ-9 Reaper drone fell into the sea far off the coast of Crimea.
- Two surface and two underwater "Kalibr" missile launchers are among the Russian ships at sea, but the total number of missiles they carry is probably much smaller than the standard (20 missiles).
- One patrol ship is on duty in the waters of the Sea of Azov.
- Russian aviation continues to fly from the Crimean airfields of Belbek, Saky, Dzhankoy and Hvardiyske over the northwestern part of the Black Sea. A total of 24 combat sorties were made over the past day. Su-27, Su30SM, and MiG-29K aircraft from the Belbek and Saki airfields were involved in monitoring the surface and air situation in the northwestern part of the Black Sea.
- Control of the air situation and operational-tactical aviation over the waters of the Sea of Azov was carried out by the A-50U AEW&C aircraft.
- On the morning of March 18, explosions were heard in Sevastopol, reported by numerous public sources on the Crimean Peninsula. The local occupation authorities do not say anything about this.
- On March 17, due to weather conditions (fog), the ferry crossing through the Kerch Strait was once again stopped, which significantly complicated the delivery of goods to the peninsula under the conditions of continued repair of the railway branch of the Kerch Strait Bridge.

Russian operational losses from 24.02.22 to 18.03.23

Personnel - almost 164,200 people (+880);

Tanks - 3,511 (+5);

Armored combat vehicles – 6,830 (+7);

Artillery systems – 2,560 (+8);

Multiple rocket launchers (MLRS) - 506 (+2);

Anti-aircraft warfare systems - 265 (0);

Vehicles and fuel tanks – 5,404 (+3);

Aircraft - 305 (0);

Helicopters – 290 (0);

UAV operational and tactical level – 2, 2159 (+14);

Intercepted cruise missiles - 907 (0);

Boats/ships – 18 (0).

Ukraine, general news

The war in Ukraine is one of the largest armed conflicts since the Second World War; the active front line reaches 1,500 km, President Zelensky stated in a Telegram post.

Ukrainian Minister of Education Serhiy Shkarlet, Minister for the Strategic Industries Pavlo Ryabikin and Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov have filed their resignations. The Verkhovna Rada Chairman Ruslan Stefanchuk said that the Rada would take a vote as soon as possible. Oksen Lisovy is expected to become a new Education Minister, Ryabikin is expected to be replaced by the former Head of “Ukrzaliznytsia” National Railway, Oleksandr Kamyshyn, and Fedorov is expected to be reappointed to a position with an extended sphere of responsibility - Deputy Prime Minister for Innovation, Development of Education, Science, and Technology — Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine.

International diplomatic aspect

"Following talks with the two parties, we have assured the extension of the deal that was due to expire on March 19," Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said about the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The Turkish President didn't clarify the term of prolongation, but Russia's Foreign Ministry's spokesperson stated that it's 60 days, in violation of the written agreement brokered by the U.N. and Turkey that envisages a 120-day term. Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov, however, announced the continuation of the grain initiative for 120 days. He thanked UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Turkish President Erdogan, Minister Hulusi Akar and "all partners for sticking to the agreements and extending the agreement for another four months." He added that 25 million tons of Ukrainian grain had been delivered to world markets thanks to joint efforts.

Russia has been mounting pressure on Ukraine, its international partners, and most cynically, on the countries in need for food quite a long time. As CDS reported in previous Briefs, the median quantity of bulkers sailing to Ukrainian ports decreased from 5.9 a day in September last year to 2.5 in March. Russian representatives to the Joint Coordination Centre reduced their working hours and increased time for paperwork and actual inspections of cargo ships. The Russian officials claimed without justification that the other parties didn't fulfill their part of their obligations. Using the “Grain Initiative” negotiations leverage, Russians might want to relaunch the Togliatti–Odesa ammonia pipeline, which is not operational due to fighting around Kupyansk in the Kharkiv region. Moscow would love Ukraine to apply a ceasefire over there, but not willing to withdraw its own troops and stop targeting Ukrainian cities in the region. In its turn, Kyiv cannot agree on a ceasefire for the benefit of Russia, while Kharkiv, the second largest city in the country, and other cities and towns are being leveled on a daily basis. The Russian “goodwill gesture”, as they portray a 60 days prolongation, is rather a willingness to play in President Erdoğan's favor before the elections on May 14. The Kremlin would not be happy with the alternative candidate from the united opposition who is thinking about mending Turkey's relations with the West and restoring a more vivid role of the Parliament in the political system.

The ICC alleged war criminal Vladimir Putin signed a law allowing Russian citizenship to Ukrainian citizens without a procedure for proper exiting from Ukrainian citizenship. Such a predatory practice is way more liberal than the one applied in 2014 to Ukrainian citizens in Crimea. Then,

Russia converted all Ukrainian citizens into Russian ones without their consent, like in the "good old days" of serfdom when people were traded with acquired plots of land. Whatever legislation Russia enacts, Ukraine considers anyone a Ukrainian citizen until after they carry out a procedure of exiting Ukrainian citizenship.

Vladimir Putin traveled to Crimea to mark the ninth anniversary of the illegal annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula. Besides symbolism important in totalitarian states, Putin wants to boost morale, for the majority of Russians are proud of the land grab and still support it in high numbers. Eighty-eight percent of Russians supported the illegal annexation in March 2014, and there was a slight decrease to eighty-six percent in March 2021, according to polls by Levada Centre. Crimea became the jewel of the crown of Putin's empire and remained the only real achievement in its war against Ukraine. "Obviously, security issues take top priority for Crimea and Sevastopol now. We will do everything needed to fend off any threats," Vladimir Putin said to Crimeans, who got used to missile and drone attacks on Russian military installations and warships.

"We have repeatedly stated that we are open to really serious proposals from the West and Ukraine for a political and diplomatic solution to the crisis, but the language of ultimatums is unacceptable for us," Russia's Foreign Ministry's spokesperson wrote in a Telegram. However, her understanding of serious proposals contradicts the Ukrainian proposals, the U.N. Charter, and international law. "In order to achieve sustainable peace, it is necessary to achieve the cessation of the supply of weapons and mercenaries to Ukraine, the end of hostilities, the return of Ukraine to a neutral non-bloc status, international recognition of the new territorial realities that have emerged as a result of the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination. The demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine must be carried out, all threats emanating from its territory must be eliminated, and its non-nuclear status and guarantees for the observance of the rights of the Russian-speaking population and national minorities must be secured. An integral part should be the abolition of all illegal sanctions and lawsuits against Russia in international courts," Maria Zakharova said. It hardly could be called a willingness to find a compromise.

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