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Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 41

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The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine provided further information on the situation on the front after 41 days of Russian aggression, focusing on the losses and problems of the invaders and the successes of the Ukrainian army. The 200th Mechanised Brigade of the Northern Fleet was to lose nearly 30% of its personnel (one battalion tactical group from this brigade was to be destroyed by the defenders, the other – withdrawn to regain combat capability to the Belgorod Oblast). In turn, the 236th Artillery Brigade of the 20th Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District (MD) was to lose nearly 20% of its troops and armament. A covert mobilisation is to be carried out in the Western MD, and the manpower of the units is to be supplemented with cadres from military educational institutions. The Armed Forces of Ukraine were to drive the enemy out of three localities in Kherson Oblast near the border with Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and to shoot down eight winged missiles.

The Ukrainian General Staff has been reporting on the situation in the combat zone only cautiously. However, the communiqués draw attention to the growing threat of the territory of Transnistria being used for aggression (preparations are underway at Tiraspol airport to receive aircraft) and the possibility that the Russians may leave forces in Belarus in order to tie up Ukrainian units in the north, thus preventing them from strengthening other directions of defence. Representatives of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry point to the crucial importance of the clashes in the east, the intensity of which was expected to decrease in recent days, while Russian groupings in the direction of Sloviansk were reinforced. It was also suggested that a plan for the liberation of Kherson had been drawn up.

Local military-civilian administrations report that heavy fighting is taking place in eastern and southern Ukraine, and the aggressor has increased the intensity of missile-air strikes on critical infrastructure facilities. The blockade, shelling and bombing of Kharkiv continues (27 strikes were recorded on the night of 6 April, mainly against civilian targets). Clashes continue on the border between Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts, where defenders were to repel one attack, and in the Sievierodonetsk area. In total, nine Russian attacks were to be repulsed in Donbas. Localities with Ukrainian positions have been continuously shelled and bombed. There has been a humanitarian catastrophe in the combat areas, as it is not possible to evacuate the remaining residents or provide them with assistance.

Data arriving from the Mykolaiv Oblast indicate that the aggressor forces have partially abandoned the positions previously held there (probably at the same time as they withdrew from the northern oblasts of Ukraine) and are concentrating on shelling and bombing from the Kherson Oblast. At the same time, fighting continues on the border between Kherson

and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts. The situation on the line of contact of troops in the northeastern part of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast has relatively calmed down. In the Odesa Oblast, the invader is to conduct aerial reconnaissance.

The Russians have continued missile and air strikes on critical infrastructure facilities across Ukraine, mainly on fuel depots and railway hubs. The Ukrainian side maintains an information blockade and speaks of the impact of the attacks only in the case of fires visible from afar. From the residual data, it appears that the aggressor's target is likely to be primarily fuel tankers transported by rail, possibly with ammunition (as evidenced by reports of explosions). The attacks took place in the north of the Poltava Oblast, in the Kremenets District of the Ternopil Oblast, in the vicinity of the towns of Novomoskovsk and Synelnykove in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (two attacks took place, the second one – at night – was carried out by the air force; it was reported that a fuel depot was destroyed), Radekhiv in the Lviv Oblast and Koziatyn in the Vinnytsia Oblast.

On 5 April, the Ukrainian government supplemented the list of weapons that can be used by members of voluntary formations of territorial communities with small arms (until now there was a permission to use private hunting weapons). The most important change is the confirmation of their right to use artillery weapons, guided and unguided missiles, grenade launchers, flame throwers, mines and grenades. Earlier, the Verkhovna Rada equated territorial defence volunteers with war veterans, granted them the status of veterans and persons disabled as a result of warfare.

The withdrawal of Russian troops from the northern oblasts has prompted a response from the Belarusian defence ministry. The Belarusians have deployed mechanised infantry, airborne infantry, artillery and unmanned aerial vehicle units near the border. They have protected critical infrastructure facilities – including railway lines, bridges and viaducts. Fire positions for infantry and artillery have been established in their vicinity. Tasks are carried out in cooperation with border service units and field bodies of the Ministry of Interior.

The aggressor continues its brutal pacification operations in the occupied territories with the help of local collaborators. The mayor of occupied Kherson reported that the occupation forces are taking steps to identify local activists and families of Ukrainian soldiers. Collaborators took over the databases of the local Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and police, which had been abandoned before the occupation of the city, without destroying the data carriers. The National Guard and the FSB, using the information at their disposal, carry out searches and interrogations, and on occasion rob the property of people suspected of anti-Russian attitudes.

In occupied Izium in the Kharkiv Oblast, the aggressor's soldiers are deliberately preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the inhabitants and are trying to force them to leave for the Belgorod Oblast. They have proscription lists and are catching people who fought in territorial defence or otherwise support the Ukrainian army. Mobile telephony and the Internet are not functioning in the city. Fire from automatic weapons is opened on people trying to escape. The mayor of Rubizhne in the Luhansk Oblast, which has sided with the occupying forces, provided information on individuals representing pro-Ukrainian attitudes. The SBU detained the head of the Mykolaiv district prosecutor's office on charges of treason. It has evidence that he collaborated with representatives of the Russian security forces, providing them with data on the situation in the region.

During the 35 days of occupation of Hostomel, a town in the Kyiv Oblast, more than 400 people went missing. They were most likely abducted and some were killed. According to the local authorities, the Russians had time to cover the traces of their crimes before withdrawing from the town.

The municipal authorities in Mariupol have reported that Russian mobile crematoria have started operating in the partially occupied city. It was recalled that a week ago conservative estimates put the death toll at 5,000, but – given the size of the city and the duration of the blockade – the victims could be tens of thousands of residents. The invaders have formed special brigades to destroy the bodies of the dead, manned by local collaborators and members of the units of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. The work of these groups is coordinated by the self-styled mayor Konstantin Ivashchenko, who is collaborating with the Russians.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov appealed to citizens not to panic over the information about the impending attack of the aggressor. He stressed that the city's defensive capabilities had been increased and that its assault would bring serious losses to enemy forces. He warned that the Russians, as part of a psychological operation, would try to create panic among the citizens.

Units of the National Guard of Ukraine have entered the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The main tasks of the service include protecting and defending the power plant facilities and protecting fissile materials.

The Finance Ministry has admitted that the created volunteer IT forces bringing together IT specialists from Ukraine and other countries have attacked more than 600 Russian Internet resources since the beginning of the aggression. The aim of the attacks is to paralyse the functioning of the digital resources of the state institutions there, large corporations, communications operators, banks and the electronic digital signature service.

As of April 1, the value of losses caused by Russia's military actions is estimated to be at least $68 billion. The authorities in Kyiv estimate that since 24 February, approximately 26,000 m^2 of residential space, 533 educational institutions, 196 health care facilities, 300 kindergartens, 8 civilian airports, 10 military airports, 129 factories and enterprises, over 22,000 km of roads, 226 bridges and viaducts have been destroyed. Indirect losses to the economy are estimated at $600 billion.

The Cabinet of Ministers has allocated 32.8 billion hryvnias (about $1.1 billion) from the reserve fund of the state budget for the urgent needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It also decided to transfer 1.45 billion hryvnias ($50 million) to the SBU. The additional funds will be spent on salaries, equipment, weapons, fuel and other supplies.

On 5 April, 3846 people were evacuated through humanitarian corridors, 2216 of whom arrived in Zaporizhzhia from Mariupol and Berdiansk by their own transport. In addition, 1080 people from Luhansk Oblast were evacuated. A column of seven buses escorted by representatives of the International Red Cross intended for Mariupol residents was blocked and then turned back by Russian troops. Ukrainian Railways said it was transporting more than 8,000 people a day from Kramatorsk and Sloviansk in the Donetsk Oblast. Eleven humanitarian corridors from southern Ukraine to Zaporizhzhia and Bakhmut were agreed on 6 April. The authorities hope that additional groups of women with children and wounded

people can be transported out of Mariupol along with Turkish citizens with the mediation of Turkey.

The Rating Agency has published a poll conducted on 30–31 March, according to which support for Ukraine's membership of NATO, which had risen from 62 to 76% at the beginning of the war, has fallen to 68%. At the same time, 91% of respondents are in favour of the country's integration into the EU (a record level in the history of the poll), and only 4% are against. 56% of respondents believe that Ukraine will become an EU member within one-two years, while another 23% believe that the process will take up to five years. 85% of respondents are convinced that the country will be victorious in its war with Russia, with 1% holding the opposite view.

A group of human rights NGOs protested against the disconnection of TV channels Espreso, Priamyj and 5 channel from the digital platform, which took place on 4 April. It considered such action a restriction of freedom of expression and asked the president and the authorities to restore the broadcasts.

In a wide-ranging interview with Ukrainian media, President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine's victory would be to defend its sovereignty and regain territories controlled before 24 February. He also stated that Russia's demands for denazification and demilitarisation had been rejected by Kyiv. Zelensky explained the continuation of negotiations after the revelation of the aggressor's crimes in Bucha by saying that dialogue sometimes succeeds in reaching agreement on humanitarian issues. Ukraine is currently in talks with the US, France, Germany, Turkey, the UK, Poland, Israel and Italy on receiving security guarantees, but this is not the final list. The president identified the status of Donbas as the most difficult issue in negotiations with Russia. The EU and Ukraine were to reach an agreement on the establishment of a joint commission on Russian crimes in the Kyiv Oblast.

Russia is taking international action to mitigate its image damage after the revelation of a war crime in Bucha. Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that the Ukrainian accusations were fabricated and said that Kyiv wanted to break off peace negotiations in this way. He also admitted that Ukraine categorically refuses to discuss denazification, demilitarisation and the status of the Russian language. He stressed that Russia would not agree to the immediate withdrawal of its troops even after the conclusion of the peace agreement. He regarded the position put forward by Ukrainian negotiators on the need to hold a referendum on the conclusion of such an agreement as playing for time. During the UN Security Council meeting to discuss the aggression against Ukraine and the OSCE Council of Permanent Representatives meeting devoted to the mass murder of civilians in Bucha, Russian diplomats denied the involvement of local soldiers in the crimes, describing the 'Bucha case' as a propaganda operation by the Kyiv authorities to discredit Russia.

According to information from the Polish Border Guard, 2.523 million people have left Ukraine for Poland since the beginning of the war, and 21,000 on 5 April (a 13% increase on the previous day). In the opposite direction, 485,000 people have crossed the border since 24 February.

Commentary

- The situation in the south-eastern direction of the Ukrainian army's defence indicates that it is eagerly taking advantage of the enemy's withdrawal in the Mykolaiv Oblast and coming into fire contact with him. The lack of interest of the official Ukrainian media in at least partially unblocking Mykolaiv and in the progress of its own troops in the direction of Kherson remains an open question, especially when juxtaposed with the meticulous treatment of the slightest signs of success in other directions.
- The actions of the Russians in the occupied territories are taking the form of increasing pacification. Its aim is to identify and arrest those actively supporting the Ukrainian authorities and army. Cases of collaboration with the occupying forces are still not of a mass character and are mostly the result of pressure and a feeling of threat to life. The invaders are still unable to organise efficient local structures and as far as possible deport the local population to Russia. This is because they consider that leaving them where they live will create difficulties in controlling the occupied territory.
- The government's decisions indicate that preparations are underway to defend the larger towns, and the plan to equip volunteers with anti-tank weapons shows that the Ukrainian army has large reserves of light weapons.
- After the start of the aggression, the largest TV channels (including 1+1, ICTV, Inter and Ukraine 24) began to provide 24-hour joint coverage of the war and the actions of the authorities. Two channels owned by former president Petro Poroshenko (5 and Priamyi) and Espreso joined the joint transmission for 12 hours a day, while the rest of the airtime was devoted to broadcasting their own programmes. Although their narrative was pro-state and the stations avoided direct criticism of the authorities, they also focused on promoting politicians from the opposition European Solidarity. It is not known who was behind the decision to disconnect the channels from the digital platform, but it was most likely taken by the Office of the President, which aims to obtain a monopoly in information broadcasting. The station's broadcasts can still be watched on YouTube.