

Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 49

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On the evening of 13 April, Ukrainian media reported that two Neptun missiles hit the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet – the missile cruiser 'Moskva'. The missiles for the RK-360MC Neptun system, serial production of which was just beginning (the first subdivision in experimental and combat mode went into service in 2021), were to be transported to Odesa from the facilities of the 'Luch' Design Bureau in Kyiv on 3 March (just before they were bombed). In an official communiqué, the Odesa military-civil administration reported that the ship was hit by a Ukrainian missile, possibly a British Harpoon missile, or there was a diversion by Ukrainian services. In turn, the Russian defence ministry reported an explosion of ammunition, as a result of which the entire crew was evacuated from the cruiser. So far, the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Ukraine have not taken a position, but on their social media profiles they express joy at the spectacular success.

From the residual communiqués of the army and local authorities, the military situation in the next day has not changed significantly. The adversary continues rocket-air strikes and shelling of civilian and military facilities, and is expanding its grouping in the border oblasts of Russia. On the Slobozhansky direction, Ukrainian units were to repel one attack. The defenders of Kharkiv were to conduct counterattacks in the direction of Derhachi and Rohan (on the northern and eastern outskirts of the city), and fighting is underway south of Izyum. Ukrainian Special Operations Forces reported that a bridge in the Kharkiv Oblast was blown up as a Russian column of four trucks drove by. On the Donetsk direction, defenders repelled eight hostile attacks. Shelling of settlements and fighting continues in the areas of Sloviansk and the Popasna–Zolote line in the Luhansk Oblast, as well as near the towns of Avdiivka, Marinka, Kurakhove and Ocheretyne in the Donetsk Oblast. At least some soldiers of the Ukrainian 36th Naval Infantry Brigade broke through from Mariupol port to the Azov regiment, defending itself on the territory of the Azovstal combine in Mariupol. On the Southern Buh direction, the main combat areas were to be Oleksandrivka east of Mykolaiv and Osokorivka south of Kryvyi Rih. On one direction of defence, the Ukrainian Airborne Forces were to destroy the command of the 4th Battalion Tactical Group from the 201st Mechanised Division of the Central Military District (MD).

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine has provided information on the course of mobilisation and related expansion of the so-called people's militias of the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. After 24 February, five new mechanised regiments with a five-battalion structure and a number of at least 1,500 soldiers each were formed in them. The regimental commands are made up of Russian officers, and 5–10% of

their personnel are expected to have combat experience. The new units are to have difficulty equipping themselves with weapons, ammunition and medical supplies. The – described as forced – mobilisation, which is to include 60–70,000 people, has so far as achieved one fifth of the plan.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, in a speech in English, presented a list of the most urgent needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the supply of armaments and military equipment. He listed:

- 155 mm calibre barrel artillery (NATO calibre, which the Ukrainian army has not used so far) and ammunition for it;
- as much 152 mm artillery ammunition as possible;
- Grad and Uragan multiple launch rocket system, possibly the US M142 HIMARS;
- armoured personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles;
- T-72 tanks, possibly their American or German equivalents;
- S-300 and Buk air defence systems, possibly similar Western systems;
- combat aviation.

The Central Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine has reported on the possible formation of a Ukrainian resistance movement in Russian-occupied Melitopol. According to the ministry, about 70 Russian soldiers patrolling the city's streets during curfews were killed as a result of attacks by unknown perpetrators between 20 March and 12 April. The occupation authorities are unable to identify the attackers.

The Russian government has threatened a missile attack on state administration buildings in Kyiv if Ukrainians do not stop acts of sabotage on Russian territory. In response, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak said that actions of this nature attributed to the Ukrainian armed forces are a pretext for formulating further demands and threats, and that Ukraine is ready for any scenario of situation development and will not be intimidated.

The leader of the pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life (OPZZ) Viktor Medvedchuk, who was detained yesterday, was placed under house arrest (he was placed under house arrest in April 2021 and charged with treason and supporting terrorists in October). Kyiv's suggestion that he be exchanged for Ukrainian prisoners of war was rejected by Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who ruled that Medvedchuk could not be subject to this procedure as he was not a Russian citizen. Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Vyacheslav Volodin said that President Zelensky was personally responsible for the safety of the leader of the pro-Russian group.

The Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine Oleksiy Danilov asked the deputies of the Verkhovna Rada to adopt legislation to simplify the procedure for punishing collaborators (he made it clear that he was referring primarily to people associated with the OPZZ). The chairman of the party Servant of the Nation Davyd Arakhamia announced that the group would not vote for the introduction of criminal liability for men subject to military mobilisation who went abroad and did not return. In his opinion,

punishing expatriates would not only not contribute to the security of the state, but above all would directly threaten it.

The authorities of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic said that 1,350 Ukrainian soldiers defending Mariupol had been taken prisoner. The Ukrainian side said that in an attempt to break through to comrades-in-arms, 'significantly fewer' servicemen were taken prisoner and not as a result of voluntary surrender.

On 13 April, no humanitarian corridor for refugees was functioning. Buses in Zaporizhzhia Oblast were blocked by Russian troops and in Luhansk Oblast they were not guaranteed safe passage. Despite this, 1,567 people left the occupied territories using their own transport. Nine green corridors were scheduled to be launched on 14 April: to Zaporizhzhia from the cities of Donetsk Oblast and to Bakhmut from the cities of Luhansk Oblast.

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia paid a visit to Kyiv on 13 April. Amongst other things they visited Borodianka, near Kyiv, which has suffered greatly from the occupation. In addition, there was a meeting with President Zelensky, who expressed his gratitude for the support Ukraine had received from these countries since the beginning of the war, especially for weapons and supplies for the army. There are continuing echoes of Kyiv's rejection of German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's proposed visit. Chancellor Olaf Scholz found the refusal incomprehensible, but indicated that he was not planning to go to Ukraine in the near future. Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said that Kyiv had made a diplomatic blunder, since refusing the offer to meet with the president is tantamount to refusing Germany. Zelensky, in turn, said that he had not received an official request for a meeting from Steinmeier, and that the deputy of the President's Office had conditioned a possible visit on Germany's agreement to an embargo on Russian oil, the supply of heavy armaments, Ukraine's rapid membership of the EU or substantial financial aid.

On 13 April, a telephone conversation took place between Zelensky and President Joe Biden, during which they condemned Russian crimes and discussed increasing sanctions against Russia. The White House decided to provide additional aid in the form of \$800 million worth of arms and ammunition. Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said that the US will most likely officially recognise the actions of Russian troops as genocide, but it will not be a quick process. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has assessed that Russian crimes committed on Ukrainian territory can be referred to as genocide. On 13 April, Ukraine signed a \$400 million budget support loan agreement with Canada, and the EU Council allocated an additional €500 million in aid to Ukraine.

Commentary

- The heavy damage to the missile cruiser 'Moskva' represents the biggest success of the Ukrainian coastal defence and a spectacular failure or outright blunder of the Russian Navy. Previously confirmed hits on Russian vessels approaching relatively close to the Ukrainian coast were caused by fire from land-based Grad multi-barrel rocket launchers (with a range of up to 20 km) or diversion (destruction of a landing ship while unloading ammunition in Berdiansk). The General Staff of the Ukrainian Army reports a total of seven destroyed/submerged Russian units ('Moskva' was not included in the daily report for 13 April), most of which were landing boats. Their destruction occurred during diversionary landings in the first weeks of the war. In turn, information about the sinking

of the missile corvette 'Vasily Bykov' was not confirmed. Few ships of the Ukrainian Navy were destroyed in the first weeks of the war or – as in the case of the flagship frigate 'Hetman Sahaydachnyy' – self-dumping was carried out.

- Information from the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine shows that even if the so-called separatists in Donbas have not carried out the planned mobilisation plan, they have made a significant effort to expand their military formations (the so-called people's militias are de facto 1st and 2nd Army Corps subordinate to the Southern MD command, however, with somewhat separate structures and equipment). Their all-military potential has been increased by almost half – so far, the separatist forces in Donbas had a total of eight brigades and three mechanised regiments, as well as an artillery brigade and independent tank battalions.
- The expected resumption of large-scale Russian military operations in the Donbas is translating into tougher rhetoric from the government in Kyiv towards its Western partners, who are not actively enough and are providing less assistance than expected to the Ukrainian armed forces. The need for armaments for the fighting army, as indicated by President Zelensky (which are needed in large numbers and immediately), has been raised by the Ukrainian side more and more persistently since mid-March (earlier, only combat aircraft were mentioned, possibly aircraft and air defence systems). For the first time, the Ukrainian leader made a suggestion questioning the sense of mass deliveries of light weapons, most of which the army is unlikely to be able to use. Heavy weaponry, due to the very high losses so far, is needed not only because of the impossibility of conducting an effective counter-offensive without it and pushing the aggressor out of the country's territory. The fact that Ukrainian units increasingly use only light weapons (of which they already have an excess) implies the way in which they fight. Deprived of armour and air cover, the defenders naturally protect themselves in built-up areas, where the basic protection is provided by walls (the evacuation of the population is largely intended to facilitate the actions of the Ukrainian army). The need for such a strategy, however, leads to the almost complete destruction of the localities where the clashes are taking place.
- Russian threats of rocket attacks on state administration buildings in Kyiv are expected to put pressure on the Ukrainian authorities for concessions in peace talks. Moscow also hopes that the resumption of military action in a situation where residents have begun to return to the capital will deepen public frustration. At the same time, the threat of shelling is a signal to Western politicians to stop visiting Kyiv.