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Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 64

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The area at the junction of the Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts remains the scene of the heaviest fighting, and the positions of the parties have not fundamentally changed. Enemy troops have launched an assault on the village of Velyka Komyshuvakha (at the junction of the roads from Izyum to the west and from the town of Barvinkove to the north), but the defenders are holding the main facilities there. Ukrainian soldiers re-established control over two more villages on the outskirts of Kharkiv (Ruska Lozova and Kutuzivka), while in the Donetsk Oblast they were to switch to manoeuvre defence and launch counter-attacks locally. The second most intense area became the northern part of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast and the bordering part of the Donetsk Oblast. According to the Pentagon, the Russians are to reinforce the grouping operating towards Zaporizhzhia with units withdrawn from Mariupol (forces blocking the defender-controlled Azovstal steel works remain in the city). The number of Russian battalion tactical groups engaged in Ukraine was expected to increase from 85 to 92 within a week. After a break of several days, the shelling of the Chernihiv Oblast bordering Russian territory took place. Rocket shells fell on Kyiv, Odessa and the Shepetivka region of Khmelnytskyi Oblast.

There have been reports in the Ukrainian media of significant deliveries of heavy armaments from Poland. Over 200 T-72 tanks are to equip two brigades. The Ukrainian army has also received several dozen BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, 2S1 Goździk self-propelled howitzers, BM-21 Grad multi-track missile launchers and air-to-air missiles for MiG-29 and Su-27 fighters from the Polish Army's stocks. In addition, the Polish private company WB Electronics is to supply Ukraine with drones.

The Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (FIS) is continuing its disinformation and propaganda operation against Poland and the US. On 28 April, its head Sergey Naryshkin stated that Washington and Warsaw were developing a plan to establish strict military-political control over 'Polish historical properties in Ukraine'. According to him, the first stage of the operation will be the entry of Polish troops into western Ukrainian oblasts under the pretext of protecting them from Russian aggression. According to FIS, Warsaw is currently in talks with the administration of President Joe Biden on the terms of the upcoming mission, which is said to be with the participation of interested NATO countries.

The Ukrainian authorities conducted another prisoner exchange. Forty-five people (13 officers, 20 soldiers and 12 civilians) returned from Russian captivity. As far as the military are concerned, this was the sixth exchange of prisoners of war taking place on a 1-on-1 basis. Civilians are released as a result of separate negotiations with the Russian side. The

total number released since the end of March is 175.

According to the Ukrainian authorities, the Russians have forcibly deported more than 30,000 inhabitants of Mariupol. In this way, the occupying forces are getting rid of people from the city who are unwilling or hostile to the Russian forces. The inhabitants were taken to filtration camps organised in nearby villages, where the deportees are divided according to age and gender, their citizenship papers are taken away from them and, after being issued temporary identity certificates, they are deported to Russia.

In Kherson, the occupying forces are still encountering difficulties in preparing the 'referendum' on the creation of the so-called Kherson People's Republic. Without the support of the population, the Russians cannot proceed with the creation of polling stations, and they also have problems with the creation of a register of those eligible to vote. According to the Ukrainian authorities, the scenario of organising a 'fake' referendum outside the Kherson Oblast and presenting such a staging as a political fact is not out of the question. The occupiers are struggling to bring Russian currency into circulation. Attempts are also being made to include towns in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast in the 'ruble zone'. In the area around Melitopol, the Russian military authorities require businesses to open shops, cafés or places for recreation and leisure. Products from Ukraine are to be withdrawn from sale, and a campaign is underway to advertise goods from occupied Crimea, which can only be purchased for roubles.

Kyiv authorities have renewed their appeal for women with children and the elderly not to return to the capital yet due to the threat of further rocket attacks. Russian forces are not giving up shelling the city, the rocket strike occurred during a visit by UN Secretary General António Guterres on Thursday. During his meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the creation of a humanitarian corridor for Ukrainian soldiers and residents staying at the Azovstal steel works in Mariupol was discussed. Guterres stated that intensive talks on the matter were underway. A day earlier, after a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Guterres said that Russia 'in principle' agreed to help the UN and the International Red Cross evacuate civilians from the besieged industrial facility. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, however, denied that any concrete arrangements had been made on the subject.

The spokesman for the head of the President's Office, Mykhailo Podolak, indicated two reasons why negotiations with the Russian side were halted. The first was the aggressor's war crimes, which significantly affected the atmosphere of the talks. The second is the military potential of the Russian Federation, which allows for the continuation of military operations in eastern Ukraine. According to Podolak, Russia is seeking tactical victories in order to convince international opinion of the effectiveness of its army.

The US House of Representatives has passed a bill to restore the World War II Lend-Lease programme – this is to facilitate the delivery of US military equipment to Ukraine. The passage of the document will enable the immediate delivery of armaments to Kyiv and defer the settlement of the costs of these transactions. On the same day, President Biden asked Congress to approve $33 billion in aid to Ukraine, more than $20 billion of which is to be used for military purposes.

Commentary

- The incessant fighting in all directions still fails to produce any fundamental results, although – according to US assessments – the aggressor has learnt from the initial stage of the war and is proceeding more effectively, but is still being slowed down by the forces of the defenders. The reinforcements in terms of heavy weaponry arriving in Ukraine have taken on dimensions that allow for a noticeable strengthening of the fighting sub-units. It should be emphasised that, in this sphere, Poland has now become the main donor to the Ukrainian army.
- The disinformation operation initiated by Russian intelligence, propagating the thesis of an alleged Polish-American plan to seize western Ukraine under the guise of a peacekeeping mission, is intended to reassure Russian society that the West's aim is to take control of that country. It is also an attempt to create divisions in Ukrainian society against the background of the consequences of further involvement of the US and other Western countries in the conflict with Russia. The chances of success of the Russian disinformation operation are slim. The Russian services, indicating that Poland is interested in the disintegration of Ukraine and the recovery of 'historical territories', fail to see the anachronism in the message referring to the alleged territorial resentments of Poles. They also fail to take into account the fact that Ukrainians have a positive attitude towards Poland as a friendly state which does not pose any threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country.
- The passing of the Lend-Lease programme by the House of Representatives and the increasingly intensified military and political assistance from Western countries not only represent a strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces, but above all have a significant bearing on Kyiv's stance in talks with Moscow. The support and hope for Ukraine's victory in the war expressed by successive Western politicians (in the last few days by EU Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Council Charles Michel, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, among others) reassure the authorities in Kyiv of their growing chances of defeating Russia and prompt them to adopt an intransigent negotiating stance towards the occupying power. Ukraine will seek to exhaust the offensive capabilities of the Russian military and for the Kremlin to give up a significant part of its political demands.