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Russia's attack on Ukraine: day 175

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On the evening and night of 17 August, the most tragic shelling of Kharkiv since the beginning of the Russian invasion took place (including with Iskander missiles). At least 11 civilians were killed and 37 wounded (with the number of casualties increasing as the rescue work progresses). The aggressor's artillery and aviation have also continued their attacks on Mykolaiv and Nikopol, as well as positions and support facilities of Ukrainian forces along the entire line of contact. The Bohodukhiv and Chuhuiv Raions south of Kharkiv, Avdiivka and Bakhmut in the Donetsk Oblast, towns south of Kryvyi Rih and the Bashtanka Raion of the Mykolaiv Oblast are being shelled and bombarded with particular intensity. The invaders are also continuing to shell the border regions of the Sumy Oblast, while the intensity of their attacks on the enemy army's border positions in the Chernihiv Oblast has decreased. In addition to the immediate hinterland of the Ukrainian army, rockets fell on the Ozerne military airfield in the Zhytomyr Oblast (the runway was allegedly damaged as a result of an attack from Belarus; the facility was attacked after a hiatus of several months) and infrastructure in the region of Odesa and in Zaporizhzhia. Ukrainian artillery and aviation carried out several attacks on Russian positions in the combat areas, mainly at the junction of the Mykolaiv and Kherson oblasts. According to the head of the administration of the occupied Luhansk Oblast, the defenders also shelled the enemy headquarters in occupied Lysychansk. The Ukrainian side further accused the Russians of shelling occupied Kherson and Enerhodar again.

The invading forces are continuing their assault in the Bakhmut area, and fighting is also ongoing to the north-east and south-east of the town. The defenders repulsed the advance east of the Bakhmut–Siversk road and north and west of Gorlovka, but were unable to hold off enemy forces north-west and south-west of Donetsk, where they were expected to achieve 'partial success' (in the areas of the villages of Opytne south of Avdiivka and Novomykhailivka south of Marinka, respectively). Clashes continue for Pervomais'ke on the M04 (Donetsk–Dnepr) motorway and the Avdiivka industrial area, with defenders still trying to prevent the enemy from taking full control of the village of Pisky at the exit of the route. Further attempts at a Russian assault at the junction of the Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts (Bohorodychne and Mazanivka) have been halted. In Kharkiv Oblast, the Ukrainians repelled attacks north of the village of Barvinkove (Nova Dmytrivka) and east of Chuhuiv (Bazaliivka and Leb'yazhe). At the junction of the Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts, the battle for Bilohirka continues. Attempts at a Russian assault in the Novohryhorivka area and to bring out a diversionary and reconnaissance group to the rear of enemy troops at the junction of the Kherson and Dnepropetrovsk oblasts (Osokorivka) failed.

On 17 August, Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov outlined the mobilisation needs of the Ukrainian army. It is in particular in need of artillerymen, signallers and UAV operators, as well as cyber warfare specialists, due to the losses it has suffered. The minister also stated that it was not possible to 'freeze' the conflict, although he did not rule out that there could be a reduction in the intensity of military action. He justified his forecast by the depletion of forces on both sides and the need to replenish losses and deliver new batches of arms and ammunition. According to Reznikov, the enemy has lost at least a third of the combat potential used during the invasion.

Air Force Command spokesman Colonel Yuri Ihnat estimated the enemy's aviation commitment at 150 flights per day. A total of 430 aircraft and 360 helicopters are to be based in the areas of Russia bordering Ukraine, occupied Crimea and Belarus (compared to an estimate of 450 aircraft and 250 helicopters as of 24 February by Ihnat). The Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, General Valery Zaluzhny, meanwhile, presented calculations regarding the effort of enemy artillery – it is expected to carry out 700–800 shellings with 40–60,000 rounds of ammunition per day. According to him, the invaders are mainly focused on trying to push the defenders out of the Donetsk Oblast and the Nikolaev, Nikopol and Kharkiv areas. Zaluzhny also stressed that Ukraine's commitment not to use Western weaponry to shell Russian territory is being respected, as the ban does not extend to areas occupied by Russia. Referring to the question of continuing universal mobilisation, he stated that there is currently no need to increase the number of personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and that conscription is primarily subject to persons with certain qualifications. The military needs, among others, drone operators, IT specialists, sharpshooters, liaison officers and personnel to master the handling of weapons received from the West. The commander-in-chief also expressed concern about the deployment of sensitive missile systems along the border with Belarus and air forces at the Zyabrauka airfield there.

During the 'Army-2022' International Military-Technical Forum held in Kubinka, near Moscow, the Russian defence ministry signed seven and confirmed 29 previously signed contracts for the supply of armaments and military equipment worth more than 500 billion roubles ($8.5 billion). The armed forces there are to receive 3,700 new and 100 upgraded units, and the orders mostly relate to equipment used in the war against Ukraine. Among the items specified are. Deliveries of T-90M tanks, BTR-82A wheeled armoured personnel carriers, Tigr-M armoured cars (including with the Arbalet remote controlled weapon stations), Su-34 strike aircrafts, Ka-52M and Mi-28NM attack helicopters, Inochodets unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), Orlan-10, Orlan-30 and Eleron-3, missiles for Iskander systems, 300mm rocket ammunition for Smerch systems, UAB-20 guided bombs for UAVs, air-to-ground missiles (including anti-radiation), as well as the overhaul and modernisation of T80BW tanks and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles. The orders also included new equipment for the Strategic Nuclear Force (including RS-28 Sarmat missiles), the Navy (including three more submarines and two reconnaissance vessels) and the Air and Space Force (S-500 systems, Lotos-M reconnaissance satellites).

On 16 August, commenting on news of further explosions at Russian military facilities in Crimea, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to the civilian population not to stay near enemy military facilities. He added that the causes of the explosions 'may be different', but

that all these incidents are instrumental in hampering the logistics of the occupation forces and reducing the stocks of its ammunition and military equipment.

The Ukrainian interior ministry said that since 24 February, more than 1,200 criminal cases have been opened against people who have cooperated with the occupying forces: 627 of these cases concern voluntary work in the collaborationist local administration, and 313 concern participation in diversionary groups acting on behalf of the Russians. The largest number of acts of collaboration or agent cooperation were found in the Luhansk (174), Kherson (140), Donetsk (106) and Kyiv (118) oblasts. The Interior Ministry clarified that people exercising their former profession in temporarily occupied territories would not be held responsible for collaboration.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres arrived in Lviv on 16 August. On 18 August, he is scheduled to meet with the presidents of Ukraine and Turkey. The main topics of discussion will be the situation around the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and the search for a political solution to end the war. A day later, Guterres is due to travel to Odesa to assess the functioning of the grain corridor, which was set up with UN involvement and became operational on 1 August.

According to a poll by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), 58% of respondents believe that it is more important for the state to have a strong leader than a democratic system under conditions of war, while 27% have the opposite view. At the same time, 79% of Ukrainians are convinced that the president should have the right to interfere in the activities of the parliament and the government in order to increase the country's defence regardless of the division of competences (16% are against), and 48% believe that the authorities should be able to violate existing legislation (41% of respondents disagree with this statement). Nearly two-thirds (62%) of those surveyed believe that during a war, even constructive criticism of the actions of those in power should not be allowed (32% are against).

The KIIS survey also shows that the main sources of information for Ukrainians are: social networks (69%), shared broadcasting of TV channels (the so-called 'telemarathon', 57%), conversations with friends (51%) and online portals (39%). The most important social media include: Telegram (used by 44% of respondents), Facebook (36%) and YouTube (36%). Respondents' preferences in this area are very much influenced by their age – in the 18–29 age group, social networks are cited as a source of information by 87% of respondents and 'telemarathon' by only 28%, while in the 60+ group the proportions are almost the opposite (34 and 61% respectively).

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced that Canada is to provide Ukraine with 450 million Canadian dollars for the purchase of gas. According to the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, the country is in 73% ready for the heating season. As of 17 August, 12.6 billion m^3 of gas (in underground storage facilities) and 1.9 million tonnes of coal have been stockpiled. In addition, the use of alternative fuels is being considered, including 2.3m m^3 of wood. As a result of the aggression, gas consumption has decreased by 40%.

As part of the business relocation programme, 710 businesses were relocated from areas at risk of warfare, of which 500 resumed operations. More than half of these relocated to three

oblasts of Western Ukraine – Lviv (29%), Zakarpattia (18%) and Chernivtsi (12%).

Serhiy Sukhomlyn, mayor of Zhytomyr, said that fortified defensive positions were being developed near the border with Belarus. Several defence lines of prefabricated reinforced concrete have been created. This is yet another piece of information confirming that the Ukrainians continue to take into account the possibility of an incursion by enemy troops from Belarus and are building engineering infrastructure in advance to hinder their offensive.

An advisor to the head of the Ukrainian President's Office, Mykhailo Podolak, announced that the Russian military had ordered railway workers in the occupied territories to divert all the freight wagons there to Crimea. Chassis are being dismantled and bodies are being sent to be cut up for scrap. Railwaymen have been ordered to leave only wagons useful for transporting military equipment and for maintaining passenger communications in the occupied territories. According to Podolak, these actions demonstrate that the occupiers are continuing to plunder Ukrainian property, thereby undermining plans for integration with Russia.

In a bid to limit losses among good military units, the aggressor army continues to create 'volunteer battalions' in the regions of the Russian Federation. In Tomsk, meetings are being held at state-owned enterprises where men aged 18–60 are encouraged to sign a six-month contract and take part in a 'special operation'. The organisers emphasise that the unit will only deal with logistical support for soldiers fighting at the front, the 'conscripts' will undergo two weeks' training before being sent to Ukraine, and their monthly salary is expected to be up to around 220,000 roubles ($3,500). Volunteers are also promised status as participants in hostilities and all benefits (especially pensions), annual 'spa treatment' for the volunteer and his or her family, and out-of-competition admissions for children to study.

Commentary

- While the periodic intensification of Russian shelling of specific areas or repeated bombing of the same targets is part of the logic of warfare, the intensified attack on Kharkiv in recent days should be seen as a kind of revenge by the aggressor for Ukrainian diversionary activities in Crimea. The explosion at Saky military airfield on 9 August did the most damage – blowing up an ammunition depot contributed to the destruction or damage of eight aircraft (earlier reports of nine were not confirmed), while a small ammunition depot and a barracks building next to the airfield suffered in the explosions on 16 August. Leaving aside the losses made by the Ukrainian side, allowing this to happen represents a blunder by the services protecting the so-called operational depth of the grouping. Carrying out retaliation for the humiliation suffered – usually in the form of increased attacks on civilians – is part of the Russian tradition of warfare and has also already taken place in the current phase of aggression against Ukraine (including after the sinking of the missile cruiser Moskva, the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet).
- The plans revealed during the 'Army-2022' forum for Russia's purchase of armaments and military equipment, as well as information from the Ukrainian military regarding the aggressor's artillery and aviation efforts, confirm that the nearly six months of the so-called 'special military operation' have cost the Russian army no small amount of effort. However, the small extent of the modernisation work ordered (a total of around 100 tanks and infantry fighting vehicles) indicates that the losses incurred are not so severe

for it to be forced to place its main emphasis on upgrading the armaments it already possesses faster and cheaper than producing new units. The exception is modern UAVs, of which Russia has no Soviet-era stockpiles. Their new deliveries were ordered at once from three manufacturers who, according to earlier information, had already taken steps to intensify production. The combat experience of both sides confirms that drones of all kinds are as useful on the modern battlefield as they are vulnerable to destruction.

- The information policy of the Ukrainian authorities on the issue of explosions at Russian military facilities in Crimea has the characteristics of a well-prepared psychological operation aimed at inciting panic among the occupying forces. Withholding details and circumstances of the attacks carried out and creating an aura of secrecy around them increases Russian anxiety and undermines the position of the Black Sea Fleet as a guarantor of Crimea's security. The moves of the Ukrainians effectively question the efficiency and good preparation of the opponent's army to conduct combat operations. An important element of increasing pressure is the announcement of further attacks on the deep hinterland of the invading forces, including the possibility of damaging or destroying the so-called Crimean Bridge, which connects the peninsula to Russia.
- From 1 to 17 August, a total of 24 vessels transporting a total of more than 600,000 tonnes of cereals and vegetable oils left Ukrainian ports. Although these figures are significant, they are far from reaching the export levels assumed by the authorities in Kyiv (100 ships carrying a total of 3 million tonnes of goods per month).