

No new armaments for Ukraine from Ramstein. Day 358 of the war

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Ukrainian forces have managed to push the invading forces back south of the Bakhmut-Kostiantynivka road, but it is still in the combat zone, and cannot be used as a supply line. The defenders can still be supplied via the local road through Chasiv Yar, but civilians are being restricted from entering the town due to the fighting, and the residents remaining there have been urged to evacuate. The Russians have reinforced their positions northwest of Bakhmut, and have taken control of the section of the M03 road to Sloviansk. Fighting continues for Paraskoviivka, which is the last village under Ukrainian control north of the town, as well as in the areas east and south of Sloviansk itself. Ukraine's army has repelled further attacks south of Siversk, west of Kreminna, in the Avdiivka area and in a wide arc west of Donetsk (the Russians are trying to outflank the Ukrainian forces defending the western part of Marinka) and on the southern and eastern outskirts of Vuhledar. The invaders are trying to break through the Ukrainian defences on the Zherebets river on the border of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (Nevske), as well as on the Oskil river in the Dvorichna area of Kharkiv oblast (Hrianykivka); they have also made progress toward Kupiansk. Both sides will likely bring new units to the battle areas (the Russians are also expected to accumulate new forces at the Pogonovo training ground in the Voronezh oblast bordering Ukraine), reinforce their existing defensive positions and create new ones.

On 16 February, the Russians launched a missile attack on logistics and industrial infrastructure in several regions of Ukraine. Facilities in Kremenchuk and Pavlohrad were hit, as were targets in the Kirovohrad (the Shostakivka fuel depot) and Lviv oblasts. The Russians used 32 air- (Kh-101/Kh-555 and Kh-22) and ship-launched (Kalibr) cruise missiles for the attack, of which the Ukrainians shot down 14. Ukrainian air defences also shot down two air-to-ground Kh-59 missiles. On the same day, industrial infrastructure in Kharkiv also came under attack by S-300 missiles.

The Ukrainian hinterland in the north-western part of Donetsk oblast (Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk, Lyman, Pokrovsk) is still under constant attack from Russian missiles; Kupiansk was also hit by rocket strikes. Russian artillery and aviation are still shelling and bombarding the positions and facilities of the defending forces along the line of contact and in the border regions. Kherson is being shelled up to a dozen times a day. The railroad infrastructure in the occupied town of Ilovaisk was the target of Ukrainian shelling (using HIMARS systems). Further acts of Ukrainian sabotage were reported in Berdyansk.

On 16 February, in an interview with the BBC, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky said that the new Russian offensive had already begun (in previous weeks, Ukrainian and Western sources had said that it would start in spring, and then reported that it could begin as early as February). In doing so, Zelensky noted that the defending forces will resist until they are ready to launch their own counteroffensive. In previous days the Ukrainian defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin had reported that a Ukrainian counteroffensive could be expected in the spring, upon receiving supplies of heavy armaments from the West.

On 14 February, on the sidelines of a meeting of NATO defence ministers in Brussels, the ninth meeting of the contact group of countries offering military support to Ukraine took place. For the first time, no announcements of transfers of armaments and military equipment to the Ukrainian army were made. Secretary Austin, who chaired the meeting, reaffirmed the earlier pledges to provide Ukraine with tanks which had been made by the United States (Abrams), the United Kingdom (Challengers) and Poland (T-72s), as well as the Czech-Dutch-American consortium (T-72) and a coalition of countries using Leopard-2s (he mentioned Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Norway, Poland and Portugal by name). He also recalled the military aid package which Washington announced in early February, as well as the French-Italian initiative to transfer air defence systems (SAMP/T) to Ukraine.

On 15 February, Germany's defence minister Boris Pistorius announced that it would be difficult for Western allies to assemble the two battalions of Leopard-2 tanks which it had promised to Kyiv in January. Only Germany and Portugal have decided to hand over some of their Leopard-2A6s (17 in total, 14 and 3 from each country respectively). As he said, "nearly 30 units of the old version" of the 2A4 are to be collected by Poland (14 tanks) in cooperation with Canada (4) and Norway (8); that should be 'almost sufficient for a standard Ukrainian battalion of 31 tanks'. Pistorius did not mention Spain, which has not yet clarified how many Leopard-2A4s it can send (recent news reports have put the number at between four to six). Meanwhile, he noted that the Polish tanks of this type which Warsaw has offered to Ukraine may be in poor condition and in need of overhaul.

The Dutch defence minister recalled that Berlin has refused to give Kyiv 18 Leopard-2A6 tanks which the Dutch army had leased from Germany; this was in response to suggestions in the German media that the Netherlands and Denmark do not want to hand over their tanks to Ukraine (which only Copenhagen has confirmed). At the same time, she announced that her country was sending 20,000 pieces of 120-mm tank ammunition to Ukraine (more than 470 units of fire). Spain's defence minister announced the expected arrival of 55 Ukrainian tank personnel and technical support soldiers for training in her country. On 13 February, Ukrainian crews began training on Leopards in Poland, with the participation of instructors from Canada and Norway, as well as in Germany. Norway's prime minister said that in addition to the eight tanks it was donating, Oslo will also send four specialised vehicles based on chassis of the same type of tank, as well as ammunition and spare parts. The defence minister of Finland announced that it too was participating in the coalition supplying Leopard-2s, although it intended to limit its participation to supplying spare parts, service and training.

France has sent Ukraine the first batch of AMX-10RC armoured reconnaissance vehicles (so-called wheeled tanks), the transfer of which it officially announced in early January. The head of Greece's defence ministry announced that his country was sending the Ukrainian army 20 BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles (in exchange for Marders donated by Germany). The German defence minister indicated that the delivery of two more batteries of the IRIS-T air defence system is conditional on the capabilities of the German defence industry (Ukraine should receive four in total; it took delivery of the first one last autumn). He noted that the batteries should be delivered in the next few months. As part of a Dutch-funded project, the Czech defence industry is to prepare a hundred Toyota pickup trucks with mounted machine guns for the Ukrainian army and supply ammunition for them.

On 15 February, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that member countries would step up their production of 155-mm artillery munitions in support of Ukraine. On the same day, the US military announced that two contracts had been signed (with Northrop Grumman Systems and Global Military Products) to produce such ammunition, at a total cost of \$522 million. Deliveries of the new cartridges are expected to begin in March. According to the *New York Times*, production of 155-mm ammunition in the US increased from 14,400 rounds in February 2022 to 90,000 rounds in January this year. The Pentagon is said to be planning to expand the industry to its largest scale in 40 years. France and Australia also intend to jointly produce 155-mm ammunition. According to the British defence minister Ben Wallace, however, the Ukrainian army must learn to conserve its ammunition; the British-led training it is receiving is intended to help with this. The *Daily Telegraph* has reported that Ukrainian forces are using 6000 artillery rounds per day. European countries are able to produce 300,000 of these annually, but 'relatively rapid' production capacity can only be increased by around 50%.

Germany's defence minister has confirmed that the Rheinmetall Group's plant in Lower Saxony will begin production of 35-mm ammunition for the Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns; it is expected to deliver up to 300,000 units in July. Referring to the stockpile of ammunition at the disposal of the Ukrainian army (the Gepards are being used sparingly away from the frontline due to their scarcity), the minister said that "there should be enough until the summer."

In an interview with Reuters on 15 February, Ukraine's defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov said he would remain in his post for the next few months, in accordance with President Zelensky's decision. The day before, changes in senior positions at the ministry were made: the first deputy minister Ivan Rusnak was dismissed (to be replaced by Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavluk), as was another of the deputy ministers, Oleh Haiduk. This was possible thanks to Zelensky's decree allowing the appointment during martial law of an officer in active service with the rank of at least lieutenant general or vice-admiral as first deputy defence minister; hitherto, only a civilian could legally hold this post. Reznikov also announced the appointment of two new deputy ministers: the founder of a volunteer organisation Vitaliy Deyneha (for digital development) and the diplomat Andriy Shevchenko (for European integration). The latter two appointments have not yet been approved by the Council of Ministers.

On 16 February, another one-to-one exchange of prisoners of war took place. 100 privates and NCOs, including 94 defenders of Mariupol, were returned to Ukraine. In addition, the

exchange included a civilian, Ivan Samoydiuk, who had been serving as the deputy mayor of Enerhodar. He refused to cooperate with the occupying authorities, for which the Russians arrested him in March 2022.

Commentary

- Zelensky's announcement that the Russians have launched a new offensive should be seen as another attempt to convince Western partners to increase and accelerate their military support for Ukraine. So far, the situation on the front does not confirm the reality of his statement. The breakthrough of the Ukrainian defences observed in recent weeks is still taking place within the framework of positional operations; on one hand it is the result of the systematic reinforcement of Russian troops as a result of the so-called 'partial mobilisation', and on the other, the weakening of the defenders as they face shortages of armaments and ammunition. In all likelihood, the Russians have not yet accumulated the potential in the theatre of war that would enable them to return to the manoeuvring operations of the kind observed in the early stages of the war.
- The ninth meeting of the Ramstein group failed to meet Kyiv's expectations of progress on the transfer of combat aircraft to Ukraine. Ukrainian officials had signalled this back in January, and defence minister Reznikov had even referred to the February meeting as an "aerial Ramstein". In recent weeks Kyiv had devoted much of its diplomatic activity to efforts to obtain the aircraft, including President Zelensky's visits to Western capitals. Meanwhile, the organisers of the meeting announced explicitly that the transfer of combat aircraft to Ukraine would not be discussed. It is possible that larger deliveries of military equipment (although not fighter jets) might be announced during US President Joe Biden's visit to Poland (21–22 February), or on the eve of the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The doubts raised about equipping the Ukrainian army with two battalions of Leopard-2 tanks could be a negative sign regarding military support for Kyiv. Initially, the plan was for these battalions to form a 'seed' around which the Ukrainian army could transition to the standards of most European NATO armies. Each of these battalions was to have 44 tanks (as recently as 11 February, Chancellor Scholz had suggested that 80 Leopard-2s would be ready for Ukraine by the end of March). However, according to the latest reports, the Ukrainian army will receive a maximum of 49 – just over 1.5 battalions by Soviet standards (31 tanks). In this context, the promise to hand over 100-plus obsolete Leopard-1 tanks, made when the first problems with making up the battalions of Leopard-2s arose, should be seen as a kind of 'consolation prize' for Ukraine. The first Leopard-1s should be delivered during the summer.
- A more positive sign for Ukraine is the efforts some Western countries are making to increase the production of artillery munitions. Outside of the US, however, most of the allies have limited capacity in this regard, and providing the Ukrainian army with the necessary number of cartridges would require them (at least partially) to shift their economies onto a war footing. Nor, according to Western data, is the Russian capacity to produce new ammunition really clear. Nonetheless, it can maintain the daily consumption of 20,000 artillery shells (compared to between 5000 and 7000 on the Ukrainian side), and certain industries of the Russian economy – especially compared to those of Europe

- have been operating on a *de facto* war footing for many years.
- Reznikov's declaration that he will remain as defence minister, together with the personnel changes in the ministry's leadership, should be read as the closure of a two-week period of uncertainty and communication chaos, which has caused a serious image problem for the presidential camp. It appears that in the near term Reznikov will focus on international cooperation and obtaining supplies of equipment to Ukraine, while matters related to mobilisation and supplies for the army will be coordinated by General Pavluk. Pavluk (born 1970) is an experienced army officer with experience in both the armoured and mechanised fields; the Russian invasion found him as commander of Joint Forces Operation in the Donbas. From mid-March to mid-May 2022, he was in charge of organising the defence of Kyiv and served as head of the Kyiv regional administration. Pavluk is well acquainted with the needs and moods of the military. Also, he has not had any previous experience in the logistics units, and that may benefit the ministry's work in the context of the corruption scandals and organisational problems recently uncovered there.