

## The Patriots have arrived in Ukraine. Day 421 of the war

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The situation in the main combat zones remains relatively stable. The attacks undertaken by the Russians (on the order of 60 per day, according to the Ukrainian General Staff), as well as the few Ukrainian counterattacks and attempts at combat reconnaissance, have not resulted in any significant changes over recent days. The exception is Bakhmut, where Russian forces have probably finally driven the defenders from the centre of the town, and have made further advances in its west. The Ukrainian military still maintains the ability to send supplies and rotate fighting subunits. However, this is becoming increasingly constrained by the terrain conditions and hostile fire, especially after the Russians physically cut off the Bakhmut-Chasiv Yar road (west of the village of Khromove), as some sources have indicated. In addition to Bakhmut, clashes have been regularly occurring north and southeast of Avdiivka, southwest of Kreminna, and within and south of Marinka. Sporadically, the invaders' forces have attacked in the area of Vuhledar and Prechystivka, which lies west of it. Meanwhile, Ukrainian units have struck at Russian formations south of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia oblast.

The Russians have stepped up their drone attacks; according to Ukrainian reports, this is related to their receipt from Iran of another batch of Shahed-136 drones. The defenders claimed to have shot down most of the incoming drones: seven on 18 April, 10 out of 12 on 19 April, 21 out of 26 on 20 April, and 8 out of 12 on the night of 21/22 April. The Ukrainian side confirmed that the attacks did cause damage to infrastructure in the Snihurivka area of Mykolaiv oblast, in Sloviansk, Zaporizhzhia, and the Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava and Vinnytsia oblasts. Meanwhile the Ukrainian air defences shot down all the drones which approached Kyiv. According to Colonel Yuri Ihnat, spokesman for the Ukrainian Air Force Command, the Russians have increased the use of their own Lancet cruise munitions, with which they have mainly been attacking air defence installations.

The invaders have continued to launch missile strikes (mainly using S-300 systems) on the hinterland of Ukrainian forces in the Donbas, including in Slavyansk, Druzhkivka and Konstantynivka, and are still shelling and bombing the defenders' positions along the line of contact and in the border areas. Outside the combat areas, the enemy artillery and aviation are still mainly targeting the right-bank part of the Kherson oblast (mainly Kherson and Beryslav), the Nikopol raion of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, and Ochakiv.

On 19 April, defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov confirmed that Patriot air defence systems had arrived in Ukraine. His deputy Oleksandr Pavluk reported that the Patriots had come from the US, the Netherlands and Germany. A day earlier, the government in Berlin announced the transfer of the systems, including the Patriots, in a new package of military

support for Ukraine. The German package also included 16 trucks and two cars for the border service. According to German defence minister Boris Pistorius, his country also transferred 100 missiles to Ukraine. On 21 April General Mykola Oleschuk, the commander of the Ukrainian Air Force, announced that the Patriots just received had already begun their combat duty. On 19 April, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* reported that a few days earlier the Ukrainian army had received the second of four promised IRIS-T SLM air defence systems (the first arrived in Ukraine in autumn 2022), which included one 8-cell *box launcher*, a radar unit and a command vehicle, together with 16 missiles. Germany is also expected to hold talks with Sweden on the resale of the IRIS-T SLS launchers (which have a shorter range than the SLM version) used by the army there, for later delivery to Ukraine.

On 19 April, the United States announced another \$325 million package of military aid to Ukraine. It includes ammunition for HIMARS systems, 155-mm and 105-mm artillery shells, TOW anti-tank guided missiles and AT4 anti-tank grenade launchers, guided aerial missiles, more than 9 million rounds of small arms ammunition, and four logistics support vehicles. The new Estonian military support package for Ukraine, announced on 20 April, includes 155-mm ammunition, small arms cartridges and night vision devices. According to a report from 18 April in the *Washington Post*, Egypt, which had originally planned to deliver 40,000 unguided 122-mm rocket shells (for Grad launchers) to Russia, withdrew from this plan under US pressure, and has now agreed to sell 152-mm and 155-mm artillery rounds to the Americans for later transfer to Ukraine.

On 20 April, the defence ministries of Denmark and the Netherlands announced their intention to jointly purchase, overhaul and transfer 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks to Ukraine, which the Ukrainian army would receive in early 2024. The value of the contract was estimated at €165 million. Denmark's acting defence minister Troels Lund Poulsen indicated that the tanks would not be Danish, but he did not state which arsenal they would come from. He also reported that at least 80 of the 100 Leopard 1 tanks planned for transfer should arrive in Ukraine by the end of 2023.

On 18 April, Pentagon spokesman Charlie Dietz confirmed the arrival in Ukraine of the first Bradley infantry fighting vehicles. Photos of Bradleys in Ukrainian camouflage had been published by the Ukrainian Defence Ministry two days earlier; the Ukrainian army is to receive 109 of them in total. On the same day, the British defence ministry announced the transfer of 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine (the first units arrived there in late March), and Ukrainian defence minister Reznikov announced that France was transferring AMX-10RC armoured reconnaissance vehicles (so-called wheeled tanks) to the Ukrainian infantry. Also on 18 April, the Lithuanian defence minister Arvydas Anušauskas communicated that his ministry plans to train "close to 1600, and possibly up to 2000" Ukrainian servicemen during 2023, a significant increase on the previous year (when 500 Ukrainian servicemen were trained).

A meeting between the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Volodymyr Zelenskiy was held in Kiev on 20 April. The Ukrainian president called for the partners to overcome their reticence in supplying long-range weapons. He added that delaying decisions on delivering such weapons, aircraft and artillery is leading to an increase in the number of deaths and delaying the end of the war. He also expressed hope that the NATO summit in Vilnius in July would decide on a new formula for relations with the Alliance which could

provide his country with security guarantees that would lead to NATO membership. Stoltenberg insisted that the Alliance would continue to support the provision of ammunition, spare parts and repairs to military equipment. He confirmed that the topic of Ukraine's NATO accession as raised by Ukraine would be discussed at the Vilnius summit, but stipulated that the most important thing for the Alliance now is to ensure Ukraine's victory, which would lead to "a meaningful discussion about Ukraine's future membership". German defence minister Boris Pistorius, in a statement to the ZDF TV channel, said that now was not the best time for NATO to decide whether to admit Ukraine, and that the war is an obstacle to holding talks on the subject.

On 20 April, Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba expressed disappointment that the activation of the EU's decision on the joint purchase of ammunition for Ukraine continues to be hampered by disputes between member countries. He noted that the situation is a test of the European Union's unity in making important decisions, and that Ukraine was paying for any delays with human lives. The EU has already approved a general procurement system and allocated €2 billion for this purpose, but member countries are still arguing over the details, including whether the contracts should be limited to EU manufacturers only, or whether they will be able to include companies from the US and the UK, among others.

On 19 April, defence minister Reznikov said that the Ukrainian forces' priority is to build a multi-layered air/missile defence system as soon as possible. He noted that the Patriot systems offer them an opportunity that they had not had before, namely to strike at ballistic targets. He recalled that Western fighter aircraft are still at the peak of the pyramid of Ukraine's needs. On 20 April, Air Force spokesman Ihnat said that Ukraine expects its partners not only to increase deliveries of the air defence systems themselves, but above all of the large number of missiles they require. He recalled that Ukrainian forces have destroyed some 1500 air targets since the beginning of the aggression.

On 17 April, commenting on the leak of documents from the Pentagon, Ukrainian military intelligence chief Kyrilo Budanov called the incident "a special information operation which, as is usual, combines truths and untruths". He expressed the belief that it was aimed at sowing distrust and compromising Ukraine's relations with the US and other countries. He categorically denied the reports appearing in Western media that Russia's chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov and secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev had tried to sabotage the seizure of Ukraine at the beginning of the war. He added that according to the Ukrainian services, the conflict between the Russian defence ministry and the Russian FSB, which has criticised the way the war is being conducted, "is not significant". Commenting on the situation on the frontline, Budanov said that another attempt by the Russian offensive to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts on 31 March had failed. He pointed out that Russia does not have the capability to conduct a strategic offensive operation for the time being, and will not be able to in the near future. The Russian forces have moved to defensive operations, and their task is to hold the occupied territories and counter Ukraine's offensive actions. Budanov declined to give any details concerning Ukrainian drone operations; however, he noted that "security standards" are often violated in Russia. On 16 April, an unidentified drone attacked an electrical substation in the Russian city of Belgorod, and an armed drone of this type crashed in Bryansk. Meanwhile on 20 April, a drone equipped with a camera crashed at the airport in Pskov, and an unmanned drone

with an explosive charge was destroyed in Belgorod oblast.

A powerful explosion occurred in Belgorod on 20 April. The local authorities admitted that nearby buildings and parked cars had been damaged and two people injured. A statement from the Russian defence ministry said the cause of the explosion was the uncontrolled departure of a missile fired from a Su-34 aircraft from its flight path. Commenting on the incident, the secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council Oleksiy Danilov said Russian forces were still firing on their own cities as provocations, to intimidate civilians and escalate the conflict. He added that only the provision of long-range weapons to Ukraine will make it possible to disrupt Russian provocations, both at the planning stage and during their execution.

On 20 April, Ukrainian military intelligence representative Andriy Yusov indicated that there had been a change in the terror tactics based on the use of Russian missiles compared to the winter period, as the first stage of this operation had been unsuccessful. The Russian army is taking advantage of the current pause in massed airstrikes to accumulate means to destroy Ukrainian logistics and disrupt the defenders' preparations for a counteroffensive. According to Yusov, the invaders will not be able to rebuild a missile potential of similar quantity and quality to the one it had at the beginning of the attack, even if the air attacks are halted by September this year.

On 18 April, US State Department deputy head Wendy Sherman said that the United States and NATO have not noted any changes in the deployment of Russia's strategic nuclear forces or the relocation of tactical nuclear weapons to the Republic of Belarus. She stressed that if it occurred, it would be considered a "dangerous escalation".

On 18 April, the Russian State Duma put forward amendments to the Criminal Code toughening penalties for crimes against the state. The maximum possible sentence for 'treason against the state' will be raised from 20 years to life imprisonment. A new development is the criminalisation of 'cooperation in the execution of decisions by international organisations of which Russia is not a participant, or other foreign state bodies'; this act will be punishable by imprisonment for up to five years. The change is intended to deter Russian citizens from cooperating with the International Criminal Court investigating Vladimir Putin's responsibility for the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, or with foreign entities collecting evidence of Russian war crimes.

On 20 April, British military intelligence announced that the invading forces operating in southern Ukraine had established a new structure, the Dnieper Army Group. It was emphasised that in Russian nomenclature the term 'group of troops' means a specially created operational formation. At the beginning of the invasion, the invaders' forces were organised into groups of troops, each of which was linked to its own military district in Russia, for example forming the 'West', 'East' and 'Central' groups. The establishment of the new formation signals that the initial organisation has changed, probably due to the heavy losses Russian personnel have suffered. The task of this new army group is likely to involve the defence of the occupied zone's southern sector, including the southwestern flank which runs along the line of the River Dnipro.

The period 1 April to 15 July will see the spring conscription campaign in Russia. When it ends, it is expected that 147,000 people between the ages of 18 and 27 will have joined the

army, 27,000 more than in last year's autumn conscription drive.

On 20 April, the Russian State Duma completed work on amendments to the law on veterans. The new measure allows for veterans' rights to be granted to members of the 'people's militias' who have fought on the side of the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics since 12 May 2014. An important change is that veteran status may now be granted to those who have signed a contract with organisations "contributing to the performance of tasks entrusted to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" in the Donbas since 24 February and 30 September last year on the territories of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. This means that veteran's privileges will be given to members of mercenary formations such as the Wagner Group, whose existence is not regulated by Russian law.

### Commentary

- The arrival of the Patriots will expand Ukraine's air defence capabilities. They will be able to shoot down at least some of the missiles which the systems previously used could not reach (including Western-supplied NASAMS and IRIS-T kits), mainly ballistic missiles. However, the Patriots are still too few in number to significantly enhance Ukraine's ability to repel hostile air attacks. The two batteries whose arrival has been announced – from the US and the German-Dutch contingent – allow for the relatively effective shielding of one selected region (most likely Kyiv). Contrary to the words of Deputy Minister Pavluk, it is likely that not all the promised systems have yet arrived in Ukraine. At least initially, they will mainly be used to further train soldiers in combat conditions, until all of the weapons pledged have been deployed.
- Ukrainian representatives have pointed out that one significant problem of the air defence is not just the lack of modern systems, but primarily of missiles. It must be assumed that the ammunition for the US-supplied Patriots will be transferred on a relatively regular basis (as is the case with the other types of missiles the Americans have sent), and the users will mainly be limited by the small number of launchers at their disposal. On the other hand, Europe is already having problems providing missiles for the Patriots, perhaps even more serious than those already observed in the case of artillery munitions deliveries. The IRIS-T SLM systems are cited as an example: the Ukrainian side reported a shortage of rockets for them as early as last autumn, shortly after receiving the first set. The situation concerning the defence of Kyiv with missiles for the German-Dutch Patriot battery should be considered little better. The one hundred missiles which Minister Pistorius announced are unlikely to be enough (given the intensity of Russian attacks in the past), so further deliveries will be necessary.
- The Duma's decision to grant members of irregular military formations the status of combat operation veterans is a way of legalising the activities of the mercenary companies supporting the Russian army. The granting of legal subjectivity to the so-called 'Vagnerovtsy', among others – although contrary to Russian law, which considers such activity illegal – shows that the military is still interested in using this type of formation. The granting of veteran privileges to mercenaries, putting them on a par with regular army soldiers, effectively legalises the so-called military companies, indicating that they are working exclusively for the Russian Armed Forces. This means that despite the much-touted disagreements between the Wagner Group's owner Yevgeny Prigozhin

and senior military officials over how to use the irregular formations at the front, the Kremlin has decided to take another step towards recognising mercenaries as a permanent part of the state's military organisation.