

Ukraine's first defeats and successes on the Zaporizhzhia front. Day 474 of the war

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Over the past four days, Ukrainian forces have continued their offensive operations on the Zaporizhzhia front. Attempts by mechanised subunits to break through the Russian defences south of Orikhiv (near the village of Robotyne) have failed. The enemy defended this section ably, using fortifications and minefields which they had prepared in advance. The attackers (mainly subunits of the 47th and 65th Mechanised Brigade) suffered significant equipment losses (including a dozen Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and several Leopard tanks). Since 10 June, the clashes near Orikhiv have cooled off: in this direction, the Ukrainians have probably limited themselves to artillery shelling and reconnaissance. However high-intensity fighting south of Velyka Novosilka is continuing; in this area the Ukrainians have managed to push the enemy back up to 10 km from their starting positions and captured several villages over the past few days. The situation in the area is unclear: the Russians appear to have launched counterattacks that have halted the Ukrainian subunits' movement south towards Staromlynivka, where there is an important road junction.

Battles of local importance are continuing on the other fronts; these have not significantly affected the position of either side. At Bakhmut, Ukrainian troops are maintaining the initiative and making attempts to capture Klishchiivka and cut off the Bakhmut-Sloviansk road near Berkhivka, albeit so far without success.

Both sides are making intensive use of long-range barrel artillery and multiple launch rocket systems to shell the enemy hinterland, especially in the areas of the most intense fighting on the Zaporizhzhia front. The Ukrainians are using HIMARS systems effectively; their main target is the enemy's artillery and command posts. It is likely that shells fired from HIMARS hit a command post of the Russian 35th Combined Arms Army, resulting in the death of deputy commander and chief of staff Major-General Sergey Goryachev (according to Russian accounts, this happened on 12 June).

There have been two massive attacks on Ukraine using kamikaze drones and missiles in recent days. On the night of 9–10 June, according to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, the Russians used a total of 35 Shahed-131/136 drones and eight missiles of various types, of which 20 drones and two missiles were shot down. The main target of the attack was the military airfield at Myrhorod in Poltava oblast, which was hit by Iskander missiles among others; elements of the infrastructure were destroyed. Other targets included Odesa, where the Ukrainian side claimed to have shot down all eight Shahed-131/136 drones, but three people were killed by falling debris. The second major attack took place on the night of

12–13 June, when the Russians used 15 Kh-101/555 cruise missiles and four Shahed-131/136 drones; the Ukrainian air defence shot down 11 of the missiles and one drone. Kryvyi Rih was the worst-hit location; an apartment block was destroyed and at least 10 people were killed. In addition, two Kalibr missiles hit unknown targets located in Kharkiv oblast.

On 9 June, the Pentagon announced a new military support package worth \$2.1bn. It included additional missiles for the Patriots air defence system, the HAWK air defence system and additional missiles for it, 105-mm and 203-mm artillery munitions, RQ-20 Puma reconnaissance drones, laser-guided rocket system munitions and unspecified spare parts, and a training package. On the same day, Belgium announced it would transfer 105-mm artillery ammunition worth \$35 million to Ukraine.

On 10 June, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced during a visit to Kyiv that his country would provide an additional \$500 million in military support to Ukraine this year (\$1 billion in support has been provided so far), and presented an aid package including 287 AIM-7 Sparrow anti-aircraft missiles and 10,000 155-mm artillery shells. Canada will also join a coalition to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets. Trudeau also announced the transfer to Ukraine of one Russian-registered An-124 heavy transport aircraft, which was seized on Canadian territory last February. On 12 June, Denmark pledged to supply Ukraine with 2000 155-mm artillery shells. A day later the German defence minister Boris Pistorius announced that Germany was unable to make up the Ukrainian losses of Leopard 2 tanks, but that the first deliveries of Leopard 1 tanks would be made as early as July.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Raytheon Technologies Corporation chairman and CEO Gregory J. Hayes announced that the company he leads is stepping up production of Patriot medium-range air defence systems from five to 12 batteries per year. In his statement, he said that another five batteries of this system would be delivered to Ukraine by the end of 2024; it remains unclear who will pay for them. At present, only the US and Germany (Berlin has confirmed it will send a system from Germany) have pledged to send Kyiv one Patriot battery each from their own armed forces.

On 10 June the head of the Russian defence ministry, Sergei Shoigu, signed an order to regulate the legal status of volunteer formations taking part in the attack on Ukraine. By 1 July, those wishing to continue serving in these formations should sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence (either in the form of an individual contract, or the collective contract of a given volunteer unit). The signing of these contracts is intended to ensure that the fighters' family members are covered by social security measures and financial support. Russian deputy defence minister Nikolai Pankov noted that more than 13,500 people have taken up contract service since the beginning of June this year. On 12 June, the commander of the 'Akhmat-North' Chechen regiment signed a collective contract (the unit was formed in September 2022 and is estimated to number around 2000 men). A number of contracts have also been signed by the commanders of the units that make up the 'volunteer assault corps'; it is not entirely clear which specific units are involved. It is possible that, for propaganda purposes, contracts are being renewed with those fighting as part of the so-called army corps of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, which were incorporated into the Russian armed forces at the beginning of the year. Shoigu's order stoked the ongoing conflict with the owner of the Wagner Group mercenary company Yevgeny

Prigozhin, who stated that his formation would not sign any such contracts with the Ministry of Defence. As he put it, Wagner is subordinate to the President (Commander-in-Chief) of Russia, and coordinates its activities with one of the deputy commanders of operations in Ukraine, General Sergey Surovikin.

The Ukrainian government's National Resistance Centre announced on 12 June that a Russian squadron armed with Bal surface-to-surface missile systems had been transferred to Bryansk oblast. The unit belongs to the 11th Independent Shore Artillery Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Utash (Krasnodar *krai*). The inland redeployment of cruise missiles designed to destroy sea targets signals that they may also be used to destroy land targets, and the move represents an *ad hoc* addition to Russia's missile capability.

On 12 June, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that 2526 Ukrainians had returned from enemy captivity since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Commentary

- Given that the Russian positions south of Velyka Novosilka had been well in advance of the main line of defence, the Ukrainian advances so far must be considered a success on a purely tactical scale. It appears that the Ukrainian side's offensive operations are still limited in nature, and some of their reserves have not yet seen combat. The probable main objective is to find weak spots in the enemy grouping and to gain bridgeheads to develop an offensive. It is also possible that the assaults at Orikhiv and Velyka Novosilka are intended to distract the enemy's attention, and the burden of fighting will shift to other sections of the front in the near future.
- The experience of the clashes south of Orikhiv vividly illustrates the importance of anti-tank mines in this war. Well laid minefields, which at the same time are monitored by the defenders' firepower (especially heavy artillery and anti-tank guided missiles), are very difficult to penetrate. In previous months, the Russians have encountered similar problems in Ukrainian minefields (most recently in January and February during the battle of Vuhledar). It remains an open question how impermeable and effective the Russian minefields along the remaining sections of the Zaporizhzhia front actually are, and whether the Ukrainians will be able to pass through them.
- The Russian defence minister's order regulating the status of volunteer formations taking part in the invasion against Ukraine will probably lead to the army taking full control over them. Signing contracts will serve to maintain discipline in these formations, and should reduce the number of arbitrary decisions on how to participate in clashes. Formalising the subordination of the volunteers to the regular army is also an attempt to weaken the position of Prigozhin's so-called private military company; he has been sharply critical of the leadership of the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of the Russian Federation, accusing them of ineptitude in their conduct of the war. The Wagner Group's refusal to sign the contract could lead to it being deprived of material support and removed from the Donbas region as a self-proclaimed military formation. It also cannot be ruled out that the army will attempt to absorb some of the volunteers who had hitherto been fighting in the ranks of Wagner.

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