

Ukrainians damage the Chonhar bridge. Day 484 of the war

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Ukrainian forces continued their attacks on Russian positions south and west of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia oblast and south of Velyka Novosilka in Donetsk oblast. On 23 June, Ukrainian General Staff spokesman Andriy Kovalev reported that they had achieved partial success south of Orikhiv, and were consolidating around the captured positions in the areas around Novodanylivka-Robotyne and Mala Tokmachka-Novofedorivka. According to other sources, Ukrainian units managed to approach the first line of Russian trenches north of the village of Robotyne, but were repulsed from there. The fighting for Pyatykhatky, 25 km west of Orikhiv, also ended without much change; the area is now either a 'grey zone' or has once again come under Russian control. In previous days, Kovalev had also reported advances in the Mala Tokmachka-Verbove area, as well as partial successes south of Velyka Novosilka, in the Rivnopil-Staromayorske and Vilne Polle-Makarivka areas; however, there has been no confirmation that the previously held positions in these areas have changed hands. According to some sources, Ukrainian activity in the western part of Donetsk oblast has decreased significantly in recent days. Summing up the activities in the south, deputy defence minister Hanna Maliar said on 23 June that the main thrust of the offensive had not yet taken place, and that some of the Ukrainian reserves would be used later.

Russian forces continued their advance north-east of Kupiansk, approaching the town in a wedge between Ukrainian positions in the area of Synkivka and the Oskil river. The areas south and west of Kreminna have been the scene of heavy fighting. Russian forces have made field advances there, and are continuing to push towards the River Donets north-east of Siversk (in the area of Hryhorivka). On the other hand, the invaders' attacks towards the Zherebets river (near Yampolivka) and the Ukrainian counterattacks south and west of Kreminna ended without much success. On 22 June, however, deputy defence minister Maliar reported the partial success of the counter-attack in the Bilohorivka and Dibrova areas of Luhansk oblast. There has not been any significant change in the terrain in the fighting near Avdiivka and Marinka or west of Bakhmut, where both sides launched attacks on enemy positions. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, the total number of clashes on all directions has not exceeded 40 per day.

On 22 June, the Ukrainians carried out a rocket attack (most likely using Storm Shadow cruise missiles) on the Chonhar bridge in the region of Henichesk, on the route linking Crimea with Zaporizhzhia oblast. The bridge was taken out of service as a result of the damage and repairs are expected to take several weeks, according to the peninsula's occupying administration. On the same day, Ukrainian missiles also hit Melitopol, followed by Mariupol on 23 June.

In contrast, the Russians carried out two night attacks on facilities in the Khmelnytskyi oblast using kamikaze drones and cruise missiles. According to the Ukrainian Air Force Command, all the attacking drones (6 Shahed-136/131s on 21 June) and missiles (13 Kh-101/Kh-55s on 23 June) were neutralised, with the damage reported to have come from falling debris. Zaporizhzhia also came under fire on 23 June, as did Kryvyi Rih and Odesa the day before. On 22 June, the Air Force Command reported that the Russians had used three Kh-22 cruise missiles, three Kh-47 Kindzhal hypersonic missiles and four Shahed-136/131 drones, and announced that one drone had been shot down. On the same day, the Russians also conducted a sustained shelling of Kherson, which left at least several people injured.

On 20 June, Portugal announced another military support package for Ukraine, which included 14 M113 tracked transporters and a 'set' of 105-mm towed howitzers. A day later, a new support package was announced by Germany. This will include 1000 rounds of 155-mm artillery ammunition and an unspecified number of 155-mm Vulcano guided shells, as well as two MAN HX81 tractors with trailers for transporting heavy weaponry. On 22 June, a new aid package was also announced by Estonia, which in cooperation with Ireland will donate a field hospital, as well as medical, sapper and anti-drone equipment.

On 21 June, in an interview with the BBC, President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukrainian pilots could begin training on F-16 fighter jets in August, and that the first aircraft could arrive in Ukraine within six to seven months. On the same day, Air Force Command spokesman Yuri Ihnat referred to the information presented two days earlier by French President Emmanuel Macron that SAMP/T air defence systems would be deployed in Ukraine. He did not confirm when they would commence combat duty, but the following day he said that Air Force Commander General Mykola Oleshchuk would report as soon as it happens.

On 21 June, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak expressed the expectation that, prior to direct accession to NATO, Ukraine would receive security guarantees that would give it "sufficient defence capabilities" until it is integrated into the Alliance. He pointed out that the state of war must not be an obstacle to Ukraine's invitation to join NATO, as in that case "Russia will do everything to drag the war out indefinitely". On 22 June, during a speech at the Bundestag, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that Germany, together with its G7 and EU partners, is currently working out long-term security guarantees for Ukraine. At the same time, he dashed Kyiv's hopes of joining the Alliance any time soon, pointing out that this would not be possible as long as the war was ongoing. He suggested that the focus at the NATO summit in Vilnius in July should be on strengthening Ukraine's combat power and economic resilience.

On 20 June, the head of Ukraine's military intelligence (HUR) Kyrylo Budanov warned that there could be a disaster at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant due to the actions of Russian forces. By destroying the dam of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, the invaders disrupted the intake of water for the reactors' cooling apparatus. Budanov did not rule out that the water reservoir at the power station had been mined, indicating a readiness to blow it up. On 22 June, these concerns were shared by President Zelensky. He stated that Russia was probably preparing for a terrorist attack on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which could result in the release of radiation. He added that Ukraine is passing on all the information on this subject to its partners in Europe, the US, China, Brazil, India, the Arab

world and Africa. The head of Enerhoatom Petro Kotin assessed that blowing up the water tank would not jeopardise the safety of the facility (all six reactors have been turned off), but pointed out that there is a great deal of fissile material on the site. On 23 June, HUR spokesman Vadym Skibitsky said that a possible incident at the power plant could be either planned or an accident. He recalled that Kyiv is in favour of demilitarising the facility, and stressed that much depends on the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been demanding that Russia guarantee basic safety conditions at the plant.

On 21 June, Budanov commented on media reports that Russia might use nuclear weapons. He said he discounted such a scenario, and added: "Despite my hostility to the Russian Federation, I don't think there are that many idiots in the leadership." HUR spokesman Andriy Yusov said that while hypothetically the threat of a nuclear attack from Russia is permanent, it cannot be considered to have particularly increased now.

On 20 June, the Russian State Duma passed amendments to the law on military service, which allows citizens subject to conscription while serving a prison sentence to sign a contract with the Russian Armed Forces. An exception is made for those serving sentences for certain crimes such as terrorism, treason, espionage or extremism. Provisions have also been adopted providing for exemption from criminal liability, and for the removal from the register of convicted persons taking part in the so-called special military operation.

On 22 June, a meeting of the Russian Security Council was held. The classified format of the meeting was partially abandoned, so it acquired a propaganda dimension allowing the government to justify the continuation of the war. President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine's mobilisation reserves were limited, and that "Ukraine's Western allies had decided to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian". Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu presented an optimistic picture of the armed forces' actions against Ukraine. He indicated that the defence ministry is currently not interested in recruiting new volunteers, stating that "so far" 114,000 professional soldiers and 52,000 volunteers have signed contracts. He announced that the process of organising a 'reserve army' would be completed by the end of June, on the basis of which an army corps would be formed, and the 1st and 20th Armoured Armies would include an additional five regiments. He acknowledged that despite their significant losses and regrouping, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are preparing for further offensive operations.

On 21 June, the Ukrainian government's National Resistance Centre announced that an Azov Naval District is being established within the Russian Black Sea Fleet, with its command located in occupied Mariupol. The organisational activities and the relocation of vessels are expected to be completed by 1 July. Eight ships (including three small missile ships equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles) and 16 auxiliary vessels are to be stationed in Mariupol.

On 21 June, the services responsible for ensuring the security of Kyiv conducted a training exercise. The scenario, in which 250 people participated, involved checking procedures and response skills in the event of structural damage to the Kyiv Hydroelectric Power Plant and the flooding of five city districts. The authorities have insisted that the power plant is well protected against attacks both from the air and from within.

On 21 June, Ukrainian prime minister Denys Shmyhal said that Russian assets frozen in the West should not be returned to the Russian Federation, as this would be a great injustice to

Ukraine and run the risk that the funds would be used to finance another war. He added that the blocked assets should be confiscated and used for the reconstruction of Ukraine. In his opinion this would require a number of measures to be taken, such as the creation of an international commission to determine the amount of compensation for the victims of the war, and for Kyiv's partners to amend legislation to allow the transfer of frozen assets and create a compensation fund to hold the collected funds. Shmyhal stressed that Ukraine was proposing the creation of a universal system under which an internationally recognised aggressor would have to pay for the damage it had caused. In doing so, he indicated that this would be a "perfectly legal mechanism based on the relevant international agreements".

On 20 June, the Russian parliament took steps to call into question accusations that the Russian authorities have participated in the deportation of Ukrainian children. To this end, it initiated the establishment of a parliamentary commission on "the Kyiv regime's crimes against minors". The enquiry is tasked with creating "an evidential base", making all materials public and sending them to the parliaments of other countries. The establishment of the commission is a disinformation operation designed to raise doubts about the credibility of Kyiv's reports of Russian war crimes.

Commentary

- The shortest route from Crimea to Melitopol, which is one of the main Russian bases in the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia oblast, runs along the Chonhar bridge. Ukraine's attack on it will make it difficult to supply the Russian forces which are holding back the Ukrainian offensive in the south via the peninsula. The land route via the Perekop Isthmus at Armyansk is nearly 150 km longer; this will not only increase the time and cost of supplying the Russian forces, but will also expose Russian convoys to Ukrainian attack from the right-bank part of the Kherson oblast. However, it should be remembered that supplies and reinforcements for Russian units in Zaporizhzhia oblast also arrive there by land directly from Russia and via the ports on the Sea of Azov, mainly Berdyansk (which explains the repeated Ukrainian attacks on this city, especially on its port facilities). The decentralisation of the Russian logistics was ultimately determined by the successful Ukrainian attack on the Crimean bridge in October 2022; since then, it has become more resilient to the various types of disruption caused by the periodic shutdowns of this supply route.
- Ukraine is displaying serious concern about the possibility of Russian forces causing an incident at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. It is possible that the Russians will cause a provocation resulting in a minor contamination of the plant site (for example, by unsealing fissile material stores) and accuse Kyiv of carrying out a terrorist attack. If such a scenario materialises in the near future, it could disrupt the July NATO summit in Vilnius and put the question of the wisdom of supporting Ukraine in the war on the agenda.

