

More agreements on long-term support for Ukraine. Day 733 of the war

Jakub Ber, Piotr Żochowski, Jacek Tarociński

 The situation on the frontline

Since the capture of Avdiivka, the Russians have failed to build on their success or launch a strong strike against the retreating enemy. Over the past week, the invading troops have been attacking in a westerly direction; this has allowed them to occupy an area up to 5 km from the city, including the villages of Lastochkyne and Sieverne. To a large extent this success has been due to the terrain: the area is located in a depression, and is under observation and fire from the buildings of the town and the coke-chemical complex. Russian air bombardment has also been continuously active. At present, the frontline runs close to the villages of Berdychi, Orlivka, Tonenke and Pervomayske, which are still in the hands of the defenders. In this area the terrain is more favourable to the Ukrainians, who can base their defence along the line of the ponds and the buildings of several villages, which stand in front of the hills that dominate the area.

Following the loss of Avdiivka, there have been heated discussions in Ukraine regarding the construction of fortifications at the back of the frontline. Numerous journalists and soldiers have criticised the fact that, **despite the promises by President Volodymyr Zelensky and representatives of the Armed Forces command, no further lines of defence with heavy equipment have been built in the area, and the infantry is being forced to prepare trenches under enemy fire.** Attention has also been drawn to the insufficient forces and resources available to the engineering forces, as civilian construction companies who could carry out the fortification work have still not been mobilised. There is also continuing discussion about the losses suffered as a result of the retreat from Avdiivka. According to the *New York Times*, the Ukrainians were said to have lost some 850–1000 POWs and MIAs, who were cut off at isolated resistance points in the town, although this report is difficult to verify at this point. Photos and videos published by the Russians on social media confirm that the defenders have lost at least several dozen prisoners of war, some of whom (including wounded) were murdered.

The invaders are maintaining the initiative on the remaining sections of the front, but they are not making any significant territorial gains. Heavy clashes are still ongoing, especially in the vicinity of Marinka and Novomykhaylivka, as well as at Chasiv Yar. The invading troops are unsuccessfully trying to drive the defenders out of Robotyne and from the bridgehead at Krynky. In the second half of February, the Ukrainians carried out precision

strikes against two enemy training areas in the frontline zone using HIMARS systems (at Oleshky Sands in Kherson oblast and near Volnovakha in Donetsk oblast). The Russians lost around 100 dead, including officers.

In recent days, there has been an increase in reports of war crimes committed by the invaders against POWs. In addition to Avdiivka, captured soldiers were also executed in several other sections of the frontline. In a few cases these crimes were recorded by Ukrainian reconnaissance drones; for example, near Bachmut at least seven Ukrainians who had been disarmed and were lying on the ground were murdered. It seems that the brutal crackdowns on prisoners of war represent a deliberate action by the Russians, who want to provoke retaliatory action from the enemy and thus intimidate their own soldiers into not surrendering.

Russian air attacks

Between 20 and 27 February, the intensity of air attacks against Ukraine remained relatively low. The invaders used an average of a dozen Shahed 131/136 drones per day, most of which were neutralised by the Ukrainian anti-aircraft defences. It also launched several missiles each day, some of which were missiles for S-300 systems targeted at facilities in the frontline zone.

Ukrainian operations against Russia

On 23 February, an A-50U early warning aircraft was shot down – the second such incident this year – near Yeysk in Russia's Krasnodar krai. This is a severe loss for the aviation and reconnaissance capabilities of the Russian army, as it currently has only a few aircraft of this type in its arsenal.

On the night of 23–24 February, Ukrainian drones attacked the Lipetsk metallurgical combine, which is located more than 300 km from the border. A fire broke out at the plant, although the scale of the damage and its impact on the operation of the combine remain unclear.

Western support for Ukraine

Ukraine has concluded three more bilateral security cooperation agreements with durations of 10 years. The [agreement on security cooperation and long-term support](#), concluded on 23 February in Lviv during a meeting between President Zelensky and the Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen, stipulates that Denmark's military aid in 2024 will amount to at least €1.8 billion. The agreement includes a declaration of support for Ukraine's future EU and NATO membership, cooperation in the fields of defence, intelligence, cyber security and the reconstruction of Ukraine, as well as the trial of Russian crimes. Copenhagen confirmed its readiness to provide F-16 fighter jets. On 24 February, similar documents were signed in Kyiv with representatives of Canada and Italy. [The first](#), concluded on the occasion of a visit by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, provides

macroeconomic and military support worth C\$3.02 billion (over 2.2 billion US dollars) in 2024. On the same day, Ukraine's president and Italy's prime minister Giorgia Meloni signed [a security cooperation agreement](#) confirming that Rome will provide more than the €2 billion it gave in financial assistance to Kyiv in 2022–2023, and pledging that “the same level of support will be maintained in 2024”. The Italian side said it would continue its participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine, in particular Odesa and the Odesa oblast.

Americans will train Ukrainian cadets. On 20 February the Ukrainian defence ministry announced that during a meeting with representatives of the US military training services company Sonata, it was agreed that cadets at Ukrainian military universities would be trained by US specialists. As part of the pilot project, a Ukrainian training centre will use the assessment tools used in the US army. This will allow the selection of individuals to take up positions at the rank of sergeant. According to deputy defence minister Natalia Kalmykova, training officers and NCOs up to US standards will help change the military culture currently prevailing in the Ukrainian army.

F-16 fighter jets will be delivered to Ukraine in the summer, according to a joint statement published on 22 February by the US, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway. This means that the delivery will be delayed by about six months from the original plans. The first aircraft will come from Denmark (19 in total).

To mark the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a conference was held in Paris on 26 February with the presidents of France, Finland, Poland and Lithuania, the prime ministers of the Netherlands, Portugal, Croatia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Latvia, Estonia, Norway, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Greece, Belgium, Ireland and Spain, the chancellors of Germany and Austria, the foreign ministers of Britain and Sweden, the defence ministers of Canada and Bulgaria and the US assistant secretary of state. The main topic of the meeting was further military aid for Kyiv. The French president Emmanuel Macron stated that sending troops from Western countries to Ukraine in the future cannot be ruled out, but there is currently no consensus on this issue. In addition, he announced the formation of another ‘coalition of the willing’ to supply Kyiv with medium and long-range missiles. The Czech prime minister acknowledged that 15 of the 21 countries participating in the summit were willing to support the initiative to purchase 800,000 artillery munitions for Ukraine outside the EU. Of the \$1.5 billion needed for this purpose, the Netherlands has so far pledged more than €100 million and Canada has (unofficially) pledged \$30 million.

Ukraine's military potential

Foreigners will be permitted to join the Ukrainian National Guard (NG). On 21 February, President Zelensky signed a decree allowing foreigners and stateless persons to sign contracts to serve in the NG; they will be able to take up positions as privates and NCOs. The contracts for privates will be for three years, and for sergeants for three to five years. The signing of the decree shows that the NG's formations need additional sources for replacements. Until now, foreigners could only undertake military service in the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

On 23 February, the chairman of the Servant of the Nation faction, Davyd Arakhamia, stated that **the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Oleksandr Syrskyi, was**

conducting an audit of all military units and the scale of their involvement in combat operations. He added that some units have been operating on the frontline for two years without rotation, but there are also some that have not been on the frontline at all. According to him, the audit has already identified 8000 people who “were posted to the General Staff but did not fight”. In his opinion, the final number will prove to be much higher.

Russia's military potential

On 23 February, Ukraine's National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption launched the *'Tools of War' database*, which posts information on the foreign components used by the Russian arms industry. It highlighted that South Korean and Japanese-German equipment is being used in a plant producing missiles for the S-300 and S-400 air defence systems, while equipment from the Czech Republic is being used to manufacture Iskander-M missiles. Kyiv's assessment is that the database should help manufacturers and authorities around the world to gather evidence and investigate military & dual-use supply chains.

