

General Zaluzhnyi is the new ambassador to London. Day 747 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

The situation on the front has returned to what it was before the fall of Avdiivka. The Russians are making slow progress in protracted positional combat. West of Kreminna they have widened the base of departure for their attack on the town of Terny on the Zherebets river, fortifying themselves a few hundred metres from this location. West of Bakhmut they have seized further areas in Ivanivske, and west of Avdiivka they have pushed the defenders to the outskirts of Orlivka and Tonenke. Meanwhile the Ukrainian forces are holding their positions in the village of Berdychi, which lies to the north of those villages. On the southward Russian attack from the Avdiivka area, the invaders outflanked the defenders in the centre of Pervomaiske, but did not force them to withdraw. Clashes for the village continue.

The invaders have also made further advances south, west and north of Marinka. Having reached the railway line in the south-eastern part of Krasnohorivka, they have created a base from which they can strike the centre of that town. The battles for Robotyne south of Orikhiv in Zaporizhzhia oblast have not been won. The ruins of individual quarters of the town have passed from hand to hand, and the scale of the destruction has made it difficult for both sides to consolidate their positions.

Russian air attacks

The invaders have confined most of its missile attacks to their opponents' immediate hinterland in the frontline areas. On 6 March, a Russian rocket fell on Odesa and exploded a few hundred metres from the motorcade carrying President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who were visiting at the time. According to Ukrainian data, from the evening hours of 5 March until the morning of 12 March the invaders used a total of 42 missiles of various types (mainly from S-300 systems), one of which the defenders shot down.

The Russians continued their attacks on targets deep inside Ukrainian territory using kamikaze drones. Destruction and damage to industrial, energy and storage infrastructure occurred in Odesa, which along with its surroundings was attacked every day except 7

March (no attacks using Shaheds were reported in Ukraine on that day). Drone attacks were also launched on Kharkiv (11 March), Sumy (6 and 7 March) and in the Vinnytsia (10 March) and Khmelnytskyi oblasts (6 March). The invaders used a total of 180 Shaheds, while the defenders claimed to have shot down 150 of them.

On 9 March, an Iskander ballistic missile destroyed two launchers of the Patriot system near Pokrovsk in Donetsk oblast. These belonged to a mobile battery used in the frontline areas (these stationary batteries are defending Kyiv and Odesa). This is the first confirmed case where elements of this system have been damaged (in May 2023, there was damage to the components of a battery protecting Kyiv, which was hit by Kinzhal hypersonic missiles). Earlier, the route of the Ukrainian column's march was traced using a drone. The lack of response to the airborne reconnaissance and attack means indicates that it was not shielded from the air attack by short-range anti-aircraft systems, which should be the norm in such a case (the Russians are using Pantsir artillery-missile systems to shield the S-400 systems).

On 10 March, in an attack on Myrnohrad in Donetsk oblast, the invaders used 250-kilogram UMPB D-30SN guided aerial bombs with an additional rocket propulsion system for the first time. These are the equivalents of the GLSDB missiles which the Americans have supplied to Kyiv. With an attack range and precision similar to the performance of missiles from S-300 systems (with a 150-kg warhead; it was initially suspected that the invaders had used three such missiles), the scale of the damage could have been significantly greater. The local authorities reported damage to 17 blocks of flats and said 10 civilians had been injured. In recent weeks guided aerial missiles of various sizes (up to 1500 kg) have become the main weapons launched against the Ukrainian fortified positions, as they are far more effective in this respect than artillery shells and rockets. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, enemy aviation carries out an average of 100 attacks per day using them (a record 114 air strikes were recorded on 11 March).

Ukrainian operations against Russia

Ukrainian kamikaze drones have hit more oil industry facilities and fuel depots on Russian territory. On 12 March, Ukrainians carried out a massive attack on several Russian regions, during which one of the processing facilities of the Lukoil refinery in Kstovo in Nizhny Novgorod oblast and the tank of the fuel & energy complex in Oryol were hit. Ukrainian drones also caused fires at a fuel base in Kursk (10 March) and the fuel depot of the Mikhailov Mining & Processing Complex in Kursk oblast (6 March; this facility was struck twice).

An explosion caused by a drone strike was also reported from the Severstal plant in Vologda oblast. Meanwhile, there was an unsuccessful mass-scale drone attack on the Beriev plant at Taganrog in Rostov oblast (9 March), where A-50 early warning aircraft are manufactured and overhauled. According to Russian sources, the Ukrainians used a record 41 drones in the attack.

On 12 March, military intelligence spokesman Andriy Yusov announced that volunteers from the 'Free Russia' Legion, the Russian Volunteer Corps and the 'Siberian Battalion', which fight on the Ukrainian side, had made a sortie onto the territory of the Belgorod and Kursk

oblasts. An armoured personnel carrier was destroyed during clashes with enemy forces. This was a diversionary raid, which was aimed at publicising the involvement of Russians hostile to the Putin regime.

Russian operations against Ukraine

On 5 March, the Security Service of Ukraine reported that the enemy had increased the number of large-scale cyber-attacks, from 1400 in 2021 to 4500 in 2022–3. The Federal Security Service and military intelligence have recruited students from technical universities to work on developing malware which could disrupt Ukraine's critical infrastructure.

Ukraine's military potential

On 8 March, the Ukrainian defence ministry reported that as of January 2024, more than 45,000 women are serving in full-time military positions in the army, with the number expected to rise to around 62,000 by the end of the year. This compares with around 16,500 in 2014.

Western support for Ukraine

The *New York Times* reported that the first F-16 fighter jets are ready to be sent to Ukraine, and that six of them could arrive there in July once the pilots have completed training. On 11 March, the newspaper reported that the problem is not a shortage of aircraft, 45 of which have been promised to Kyiv so far, but the lack of pilots and certain limitations in the training process. By the summer of this year, 12 men are expected to have completed basic courses in Denmark, the US and the UK; this will allow them to receive combat training at a specially created centre in Romania, where instructors from NATO countries are already waiting. The six aircraft and 12 pilots will be the equivalent of half a squadron (in the standard adopted by the Ukrainian Air Force), but the handover of the first F-16s to the Ukrainians will not be tantamount to integrating them into frontline operations. When they achieve operational readiness will depend on the progress of their training in Romania.

On 8 March, the French defence ministry stated that this year it intends to expand its training programme for the Ukrainian army, including airborne and naval personnel. Since the start of the invasion France has trained almost 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers, including 8800 in 2023 alone. The training they currently offer focuses on urban and trench warfare tactics, the use and maintenance of weapons, healthcare, logistics and mine clearance.

On 8 March **President Zelensky visited Turkey, where he met President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.** He handed him a list of Ukrainian prisoners held by Russia, hoping for Ankara's effective mediation for their release. The detained include Crimean Tatars who have been subject to political repression. On the same day, the Ukrainian leader gave the name *Hetman Ivan Vyhovsky* to the Ada-class corvette under construction at the Istanbul shipyard, the keel of which was laid last 18 August. The ship is the second of its kind. The first, the *Hetman Ivan Mazepa*, was launched on 2 October 2022, and after it goes into service (by the end of

this year), it is expected to become the flagship of the Ukrainian Navy.

The war and the internal situation in Ukraine

Commenting on 7 March on **the Foreign Ministry's agreement on the candidacy of former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi for the post of ambassador to the UK**, President Zelensky said that it was the general himself who had expressed an interest in taking up the diplomatic post. Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba stressed that Zaluzhnyi's military experience would be an asset during his diplomatic mission. The decision to send him to a foreign post is a political ploy, and represents an attempt to marginalise a highly popular general who could become a political rival to Zelensky.

The Ukrainian government is continuing their fight against the smuggling of male draft-dodgers across the border. On 8 March, the border service stopped a minibus heading to Romania which was carrying 34 fugitives aged between 25 and 40. Each man had paid the smugglers €10,000. Data published by investigative journalists from the [Independent Centre for Anti-Corruption \(NGL\)](#) testify to the large scale of the smuggling business: since the beginning of the war, 2248 men have left Lviv oblast on the basis of fraudulent documents allowing them to cross the border. Social and cultural organisations acted as intermediaries in obtaining permits. The cost of this 'service' runs at between \$3000 and \$5000. On 11 March, [Opendatabot](#), a service that analyses court and business records, highlighted the growing number cases of people evading military service. In 2023, 1257 were recorded, 60 of which ended in prison sentences.

The situation in the occupied territories

On 11 March, early 'presidential election voting' began in the occupied territories. The vote is effectively a forced plebiscite, with flying 'electoral commissions' collecting votes from residents both in their homes and on the streets. The campaign will last until 17 March.

