Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 2.07.2024 www.osw.waw.pl

The first shells under the Czech initiative have arrived in Ukraine. Day 859 of the war

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The situation on the frontline

Over the past week, the Russian forces have continued their offensive operations in the Donbas, slowly pushing the Ukrainian troops out of their positions west and north of Ocheretyne. The attackers' main objective in this area is to sever the Pokrovsk–Kostiantynivka road, one of the main supply routes for the Ukrainian grouping of forces in the Donetsk region. Currently, this road is about 6km away from advanced Russian positions, which means it can still be used; however, it lies within range of barrel artillery fire. The second, more far-reaching objective of the Russian operation in the Ocheretyne area is to outflank the Ukrainian grouping which has been defending itself in the Niu-York /Toretsk area using the fortifications that were built along the 2014 demarcation line.

In recent days, the Russian forces have also made repeated attempts to push the Ukrainian troops out of their positions near Toretsk. They have managed to slightly improve their positions around the village of Pivdenne. Currently, the Russian forces are heavily shelling Toretsk, Niu-York and the surrounding villages, all of which until recently have functioned relatively normally, with access to electricity and mobile networks.

Intense fighting is continuing in the Chasiv Yar area. The Russian forces aim to seize the last Ukrainian resistance points located on the town's outskirts on the eastern bank of the Donets–Donbas canal. The town itself is under heavy artillery fire, including thermobaric shells fired from TOS systems.

In the last days of June, the Ukrainian forces managed to push the Russian troops out of some of their positions near the villages of Terny and Yampolivka and in the neighbouring forests on the Donets River (the border area between the Donets and Luhansk regions on the northern bank of this river). These successes are purely local and tactical, but they have allowed the Ukrainian forces to stabilise the front line in this area and thwart Russian plans to push them beyond the Zherebets River.

Russian air attacks

During the past week, the Russian forces launched only one large-scale air strike. On the night of 26–27 June, they used one Kinzhal hypersonic missile, five cruise missiles of various types and 23 Shahed 131/136 attack drones. The Ukrainian air defence claimed to have shot down all the targets except the Kinzhal missile. In addition, the Russian forces carried out several targeted missile strikes; one of these hit the centre of Vilniansk city in Zaporizhzhia region on 29 June, killing seven civilians, including three children. On 1 July, a rocket attack targeted a military airfield in Myrhorod. The Russian side claimed to have destroyed or damaged several Ukrainian Su-27 fighter jets.

The Russian forces heavily shelled and bombed the frontline and border areas. On 30 June, they used guided aerial bombs to destroy the Nova Poshta terminal in Kharkiv, killing one person.

On 30 June, The Washington Post published an article describing 38 incidents of Russian aerial bombs falling in the Belgorod region between April 2023 and April 2024. This data illustrates the technical problems of the Russian air force and the limited accuracy of the bombs it has often used against Ukrainian cities located behind the front lines.

Ukraine's military potential

A new branch of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. On 25 June, the President of Ukraine approved the decision of the National Security and Defence Council 'On the creation of the Unmanned Systems Forces as a separate branch in the structure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine'. This move is designed to increase the military's ability to use air-, sea- and land-based unmanned and robotic systems.

On 27 June, Captain Robert 'Madyar' Brovdi announced the transformation of the 414th Separate Battalion of Unmanned Strike Aircraft Systems into a regiment. This marks the next stage in the development of this structure, which has evolved from a small volunteer unit that started experimenting with the use of civilian drones on the battlefield in the spring of 2022. Almost all of the regiment's soldiers (led by its commander, an agricultural businessman in civilian life) are volunteers who had not served professionally in the military before 24 February 2022. The 'Madyar' unit has proved very effective on the battlefield. For several months, it has been part of the structure of the 30th Marine Corps; it has been operating in the lower Dnieper river area and, since mid-May, partly in the Kharkiv Oblast.

Prisoners being conscripted into the military. On 2 July, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported that more than 3,100 men on conditional release had started contract military service. So far, the courts have received more than 3,600 requests from prisoners to have their sentences suspended if they sign a contract with the armed forces; more than 3,400 of these have been granted.

Russia's military potential

Labour migrants heading to the battlefront. On 27 June, the head of Russia's Investigative Committee, Aleksandr Bastrykin, announced that more than 30,000 people who had obtained Russian citizenship and avoided conscription in recent years had been detained

following a series of raids. So far, more than 10,000 of these migrants have been sent to military units; most of them will be involved in the effort to build fortifications.

Belarus escalates tension. On 29 June, the Deputy Commander of the Special Operations Forces of Belarus, Colonel Vadim Lukashevich, said that the situation on the Belarus–Ukraine border was "marked by rising tension." He claimed that Ukraine had been moving its military units, including rocket artillery systems, into the border areas. A day later, the chief of the Belarusian General Staff, Pavel Muraveiko, said that he would allow tactical nuclear weapons to be used in a situation where the sovereignty and independence of Belarus would come under threat. These bellicose remarks from Minsk were supported by Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov: on 1 July he said that the movements of Ukrainian military units to the border with Belarus were a matter of concern for the Russian government. In response, the spokesman for the Ukrainian border service, Andriy Demchenko, said that all the Ukrainian actions on the border with Belarus are aimed at ensuring protection against aggressive operations by the enemy, including through the construction of new fortifications.

Western support for Ukraine

More agreements on security cooperation. On 27 June, Ukraine signed *an agreement on security cooperation with Lithuania*. The latter confirmed that it would seek to provide Ukraine with financial support in the area of security and defence in the amount of 0.25% of its annual GDP every year (the day before, the Lithuanian State Security Council took a decision on this issue). It pointed out that this year Lithuania's military aid to Ukraine has already risen to nearly €80 million, including €35 million to fund the Czech initiative to purchase artillery ammunition.

On the same day, Ukraine concluded *an agreement* with Estonia on security cooperation and long-term support. The document confirmed that Estonia's military support to Ukraine would total more than €100 million this year. It also emphasised the need to maintain the same level of assistance of at least 0.25% of Estonia's GDP per year between 2024 and 2027.

Furthermore, the document entitled *'Joint Security Commitments between Ukraine and the European Union'* was signed in Brussels. This year, Ukraine will receive €5 billion in funding from the European Peace Facility (EPF), which will be spent on military assistance, including training. In addition, on 24 June, the Council of the EU authorised the allocation of the first tranche of profits from frozen Russian assets (€1.4 billion) to purchase new weapons and military equipment for Ukraine. In the conclusions adopted at its summit on 27 June, the European Council expressed its expectation that the first disbursements would be made as early as this summer. The EU also confirmed that it would transfer €50 billion for civilian purposes between 2024 and 2027 (€7.9 billion has already been disbursed) from its Facility for Ukraine. Moreover, the agreement envisages developing cooperation between the EU countries' defence industries and Ukrainian arms companies, countering cyber threats and combating disinformation. It stresses that the EU will provide strategic advice and practical support for Ukraine's reform efforts in line with the international principles of good governance and human rights. Ukraine has committed to adopting and implementing such reforms effectively. The document notes that the parties will step up their efforts to prevent

illicit trafficking in arms and explosives.

Ukraine has already concluded 20 agreements on security cooperation – with the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the US, Japan, Lithuania, Estonia and the European Union.

On 27 June, the Czech Defence Ministry announced that the first delivery of an unspecified number of 155mm artillery shells, financed by Germany, had already arrived in Ukraine. At the same time, Prime Minister Petr Fiala stressed that the Czech Republic would continue to supply Ukraine with tens of thousands of artillery shells per month. On the same day, the commander of the Danish Air Force announced that **the first group of fifty Ukrainian soldiers had completed training to become F-16 aircraft maintainers** and that another group is currently undergoing training.

On 28 June, **Finland announced its 24th package of military aid to Ukraine**, **worth €159 million,** without giving any other details. It also announced that it had joined the armoured capability coalition led by Poland and Germany and the IT coalition led by Estonia and Luxembourg.

The war and the internal situation in Ukraine

A POW exchange. On 25 June, 90 Ukrainian soldiers returned from Russian captivity. This was the 53rd exchange since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion; it took place on a one-to-one basis with the mediation of the United Arab Emirates. As a result of the negotiations with the Belarusian side, 10 Ukrainian citizens detained on charges of preparing acts of sabotage have been released. The Ukrainian President has revealed that this happened thanks to the 'efforts of the Vatican'.

Civilians in Russian captivity. On 30 June, Ukraine's human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said that Russia has forcibly detained more than 14,000 Ukrainian civilians. He added that the two countries had not arranged any exchanges involving these people, but only held negotiations on allowing them to return to Ukrainian-controlled areas.

