Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 1.04.2025 www.osw.waw.pl

Mutual accusations of attacks on energy facilities. Day 1133 of the war

Andrzej Wilk, Krzysztof Nieczypor

The situation on the frontline

Russian troops continue to advance on the main sections of the front, but still relatively slowly and this is not bringing about any change in the overall situation. Russia has made further advances west of Orikhiv in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, consolidating control over the section of the rocade road between Stepove and Shcherbaky (both of which have been at least partially occupied by the invaders). It also expanded its holdings between Velyka Novosilka and Pokrovsk, partially levelling the front line, as well as in the Toretsk area, Chasiv Yar and at bridgeheads on the Lyman (on the right bank of the Zherebets River) and Kupiansk (on the right bank of the Oskil River) directions. According to some sources, Ukrainian forces successfully counter-attacked west of Pokrovsk and in Toretsk, once again regaining some of the positions previously held there.

On 27 March, President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that the Russians were preparing a large-scale offensive expected to begin in the coming weeks. He indicated that it would take place in the Sumy, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. Two days later, citing Ukrainian government and military analysts, The Associated Press reported that Russia would go on the offensive along the entire 1,000 km front line. The offensive is expected to last six to nine months and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position. So far, the formation of large Russian strike groups, which could confirm these reports, has not been observed.

Kyiv accused the Russians of failing to comply with the moratorium on attacking energy infrastructure. The shelling was said to have occurred twice in Kherson (28 March and 1 April) and once in Poltava Oblast(28 March). **Moscow made similar allegations, according to which the Ukrainians have again been shelling energy facilities in the Russian Federation's border oblasts** (Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk) **since 26 March**. Both sides also accused each other again of shelling the Sudzha gas transmission metering station on 28 March. Neither side has made public any material that could confirm the allegations. However, it must be assumed that the shelling of energy infrastructure located in the frontline zone and in the immediate vicinity of the frontline is unavoidable, especially as the facilities are often used directly by the military.

Russian air attacks

Russia carried out a series of massive attacks on Kharkiv. According to a message from the local authorities, a total of 22 enemy drones hit the city for five days in a row. The most serious attack took place on 29 March, with two civilians killed and 26 wounded. President Zelensky reported that there were 55 casualties – most likely including soldiers (one of the targets is thought to have been a military hospital in Kharkiv). Serious hits were also reported on 26 and 31 March, with damage mainly to production halls and warehouses.

On two occasions, the Dnieper River was the target of powerful attacks by drones. On 26 March, only damage to infrastructure facilities and businesses was reported, however, two days later civilian casualties were also reported – four dead and 25 injured. Russian drones and – occasionally – missiles also struck Kryvyi Rih (25 and 29 March), Poltava (27 March), Odesa and Sumy (28 March) and Zaporizhzhia (31 March). Other targets included gas production infrastructure in Poltava Oblast (27 March). According to Naftohaz, this was the eighteenth attack on gas infrastructure, and the eighth since the beginning of the year.

The Ukrainian Air Force Command (UAFC) relayed that from the evening of 25 March until the morning of 31 March, Russia had used a total of 780 drones. Ukraine reported the downing of 403 with 274 locationally lost. The enemy is thought to have used 12 missiles (mainly ballistic missiles Iskander-M) during this period, none of which were shot down. **On the night of 31 March to 1 April, Ukrainian sources reported no attacks using an attack drone.** This was the first time this had happened since 12 December last year, and some sources link this to talks between Moscow and Washington. **In contrast, the UAFC reported the shooting down – for the first time in three weeks – of Russian missiles** (two Ch-59 guided air-to-air missiles).

Western support for Ukraine

The Swedish military support package for Ukraine, the largest to date, will be worth USD 1.6 billion, Defence Minister Pål Jonson announced on 31 March. This is the 19th consecutive package prepared by Stockholm. The total value of its military aid to Kyiv in 2025 is expected to be $4 billion.

France will provide an additional €2 billion in military aid to Ukraine. Emmanuel Macron announced this on 26 March during a meeting with President Zelensky. The planned support package will include MICA air-to-air missiles, Mistral very short-range anti-aircraft missiles (VSHORAD) and Milan anti-tank guided missiles. Two days later, the Danish Ministry of Defence announced a €40 million fund to support the technological development of the Ukrainian army .

Russia's military potential

As part of the spring conscription, Russia will send 160,000 people to basic military service – 10,000 more than a year earlier. A decree to this effect was signed by Vladimir

Putin on 31 March. Conscription will be conducted from 1 April to 15 July and will cover men aged between 18 and 30. The vast majority of them will serve in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and others in the so-called other troops subordinate to the ministries responsible for internal security. The conscripts are not taking part in the so-called special military operation in Ukraine, but they were used in the first weeks of the Ukrainian military action in the Kursk region.

Moscow's plan to increase the size of the Russian Armed Forces from 1 million at the beginning of 2022 to 1.5 million in 2026 has so far not translated into a visible increase in the number of conscripts. This means that Russia still has no significant problems filling newly created posts in the contract system. Basic military service continues to be mainly a mechanism for creating reserves in the event of a large-scale armed conflict, used in the so-called partial mobilisation in autumn 2022 (300,000 reservists were then sent to replenish units fighting in Ukraine).

The spring conscription currently organised in Russia has reached the level of the first half of the previous decade, when an average of 155,000 young men were sent to serve (in the 2010s, their number was 200,000-300,000). Autumn conscription remains smaller, with 133,000 recruits in 2024.

Ukraine's military potential

On 26 March Ukrainian State Border Service spokesman Andriy Demchenko reported that **since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies have dismantled 820 criminal groups involved in smuggling citizens subject to compulsory military service into neighbouring countries**. The largest number of attempted illegal border crossings take place on the border with Romania and Moldova, with the smallest being to Poland.

Verkhovna Rada Plenipotentiary for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets stated on 26 March that **human rights violations by employees of territorial recruitment centres in Ukraine "have become widespread and systemic"**. In his view, the number of these disturbing incidents requires urgent intervention by the authorities to stop the further brutalisation from recruitment centre workers.

Russian operations against Ukraine

Deputy head of the National Police Andriy Nebytov reported on 25 March that since April 2024 there has been an intensification of the ongoing recruitment of young Ukrainians by the intelligence services of the Russian Federation to carry out sabotage actions on Ukrainian territory. Its main tool is online social networks, and minors are persuaded to carry out sabotage actions in exchange for financial remuneration. Another way is to blackmail them by threatening to publish compromising photos obtained from an internet user or by passing on information about the contact to the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. Those recruited are usually ordered to set fire to military facilities or vehicles.

In recent days, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) reported that two teenagers aged 18 and 19 had been detained in Zaporizhzhia, accused of attempting to plant an explosive charge under one of the buildings of a military unit. In Lviv, the SBU detained two people aged 22 and 23 who had attempted to plant an explosive device under a car belonging to a Ukrainian soldier. In Kryvyi Rih, a person aged 26 planned to cause an explosion in the building of a military recruitment centre. On 26 March in Kharkiv, an 18-year-old was arrested for setting fire to a car belonging to a military officer.

On 26 March, the Southern Regional Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced 23 Ukrainian soldiers to prison terms ranging from 13 to 23 years. They were accused of being members of the 'Azov' regiment at various times – some of them were said to have taken an active part in the defence of Mariupol in 2022, and some were already demobilised at the time the full-scale invasion began, but had participated in the fighting in Donbas after 2014. The court did not recognise them as prisoners of war, but convicted them of participation in a 'terrorist organisation', since Russia recognised the regiment as such.

On 27 March, the SBU announced that in 2024, its officers had prevented more than 2,800 cyber incidents and cyberattacks carried out by the Russians and targeting Ukraine's IT infrastructure. "Unfortunately, the enemy's potential and resources are significant and, despite setbacks, it is capable of repeating its actions until it reaches its target", it stressed.

On the same day, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted on a law on the cyber protection of state information resources and critical infrastructure facilities. The new regulations provide for the creation of special cyber security teams in government institutions that process citizens' vital data. The State Special Liaison and Information Protection Service will be responsible for the functioning of this system, which will include CERT-UA (the government agency for rapid response to IT security incidents) and regional response teams.

