

Malcontent News Ukraine SITREP

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SUMMARY

Russia's ability to wage war in Ukraine continues to be diminished. Mariupol is surrounded and being systematically destroyed by sustained attack. Russian forces continue to make small gains in Donbas.

It is very unlikely that another attempt to encircle Kyiv or a sea-based invasion of Odesa will occur in the coming days. Mariupol is at risk of being captured.

CHERNIHIV REGION

Shelling and air strikes have continued in the city that is a strategic hub of transportation. Russian state media released video of a drone aiding laser-guided artillery to strike Ukrainian supplies in resources in a railyard.¹ The attack was on Sunday.²

Russian forces made several small attacks on Sumy without success.³

ASSESSMENT: Russia's inability to secure Chernihiv at the onset of the invasion, and then decide to bypass the city, has significantly impacted their siege of Kyiv from the west and east.

KHARKIV REGION

Ukrainian forces continue to make small gains northwest of Kharkiv, in what is now the fifth day of a sustained counteroffensive.

¹ https://twitter.com/L_ThinkTank/status/1503847836437336065

² <https://twitter.com/OsintUkraine2/status/1503847301076377610>

³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-15>

Last night the city received the heaviest bombardment in at least a week^{4 5}, and Russian forces are accused of using Smerch rockets with cluster munitions on civilian areas.⁶ New pictures from the Kharkiv Zoo have emerged that were not previously public using social intelligence when the zoo was bombed eight days ago.⁷

A video shows a Ukrainian SAM engaging an aerial target, and scoring a hit at dawn outside of the city.⁸

Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces in the Kharkiv access are short on personnel and ammunition.⁹

ASSESSMENT: If forces are short of munitions, it seems like a strategic waste of resources to shell civilian areas. Historically, sustained bombardment is not an effective tool at breaking the will of people, unless the intent is to completely destroy the city.

⁴ <https://twitter.com/EuromaidanPress/status/1503585076071784453>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/EuromaidanPress/status/1503585715204104192>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/UkraineUpdates5/status/1503715549041332236>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/ZarinaZabrisky/status/1503825496202616843>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1503745263017594881>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/272888168357602>

KHERSON REGION

Early in the morning, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation declared they had fully secured the Kherson Oblast.¹⁰ Given there is heavy fighting in Novovorotsovka¹¹ and an unconfirmed cruise missile strike against Ukrainian air defenses at Nikopol, that assessment seems optimistic at best.¹² Russian forces also shelled a fuel depot in Nikopol, which sits on the west bank of the Dnieper River.

Additionally, civilians were evacuated from Severodonetsk in the Luhansk Oblast to Novovorotsovka.¹³

OPINION: It seems highly unlikely that Ukrainian forces would evacuate people fleeing the Russians into Russian forces hands.

Ukrainian forces struck the Kherson Airport^{14 15}, where Russian helicopters were positioned. Drone photos indicate at least choppers were destroyed in the strike.^{16 17} Military

¹⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-kherson-capture-russia-military-b2035931.html>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/warmatters/status/1503183232778518529>

¹² https://twitter.com/momchil_ivanov1/status/1503851504679149574

¹³ https://twitter.com/Now_in_Ukraine/status/1503846544243675142

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/i/status/1503770003165880320>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1503836787533303818>

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/JosephHDempsey/status/1503864619932205065>

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1503831927245230086>

convoys are moving freely through the city of Kherson itself, in this geolocated video.¹⁸

Russian troops are accused of rounding up civilians, looting homes, and kidnappings.¹⁹

ASSESSMENT: Based on the ongoing fighting within the Oblast itself, and continued military strikes within sight of the city of Kherson itself, Russia does not control the Oblast as they claim. The use of intimidation, depravation, and intimidation will only fuel serve to fuel an insurgency.

DONBAS REGION

Irregular militias of the DNR claim they have captured the towns of Rivnopil, Zlatoustovka, and Blyzhnje northeast of Mariupol and about 60 kilometers west of Donetsk.²⁰ This was reported by the ISW, but we could not find any social intelligence to confirm the reports.

¹⁸ https://twitter.com/el_garnati/status/1503869079240818694

¹⁹ <https://news.yahoo.com/inside-kherson-russians-rounding-civilians-145444198.html>

²⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-15>

Heavy fighting is ongoing for control of Severodonetsk, about 50 kilometers northwest of Luhansk.²¹

Fighting in Popasna, 45 kilometers west of Luhansk also continues.^{22 23 24} Another video from Russia State Media shows utter devastation of the area, irregular troops of the DNR militia occupying homes, and soldiers wounded in combat being treated.²⁵

Russian forces appear to be systematically destroying the city of Mariupol, with sections of the city resembling World War II Stalingrad.²⁶ The green corridor held out of the city held for a second day, with the City Council reporting 2,000 cars able to leave the city.²⁷

Reliable reports from within the embattled city report of mass graves, blood-soaked ground, bodies left in the streets, and a city in flames.²⁸ Additionally, a picture of people being placed in mass graves in Mariupol is the exact same trench and camera angle that Russia State Media

²¹ https://twitter.com/Now_in_Ukraine/status/1503876274921652229

²² https://twitter.com/Now_in_Ukraine/status/1503876274921652229

²³ https://twitter.com/nukesn_missiles/status/1503831763705122823

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/NovichokRossiya/status/1503768509502955525>

²⁵ https://twitter.com/200_zoka/status/1503860648064737286

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/ChristopherJM/status/1503307106971275265>

²⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/about-2000-cars-have-left-ukraines-besieged-mariupol-city-council-2022-03-15/>

²⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/ukraine-mariupol-devastation/>

used in its accusation of Ukrainian forces mass executing civilians in in Popasna, yesterday.

ASSESSMENT: The videos from Russia State Media shows tanks being dug in to remain out of sight, indicating DNR and Russian forces have significant concern about MLAW weapons. Given the numerous videos from Russian state media showing continued fighting in and around Popasna, the reports DNR and Russian forces control the area are inaccurate.

The situation in Mariupol for civilians and Ukrainian defenders is dire.

BLACK SEA & ODESA REGION

The Russian flotilla of amphibious assault ships with cruiser support has split into three groups and sailed west-northwest overnight.²⁹

Five landing ships are in one group, southeast of Odessa, while a group of four warships shadows them to the west. The third group of five warships is southwest of Serhiivka.

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/CovertShores/status/1503732767569420296>

The second group is reported to be doing mine sweeping operations.³⁰

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reported as many as 90 missiles have been launched from Russian ships at targets around Odesa.³¹

ASSESSMENT: We find it highly unlikely Russia will commit its amphibious troops on a landing in Odesa. They don't have enough support to take the city and lack air meaningful air support in the region.

KYIV REGION

Russian forces made their daily attempt to cross the Irpin River, to no avail.³²

The heaviest fighting was around Gostomel and the airbase.³³ Fighting is better described as the exchange of heavy artillery and the use of MLAW weapons.

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/CovertShores/status/1503844630189727750>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/sentdefender/status/1503817903262826496>

³² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-15>

³³ <https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1503828513111121926>

Last night, Kyiv endured the heaviest shelling in more than a week.³⁴ Missiles and heavy artillery struck residential areas of the city,³⁵ including a 15-story apartment building.³⁶ There are reports of at least 10 casualties.

The attacks ramped up overnight after it was announced that Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and deputy Prime Minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, along with Prime Ministers Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic and Janez Jansa of Slovenia would meet with President Zelensky on Tuesday.³⁷

Despite the bombardment, the four traveled by train from Poland. Czech Prime Minister Fiala tweeted, "The visit is organized in consultation with Charles Michel, President of the European Council, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. The aim of the visit is to express the European Union's unequivocal support for Ukraine and its freedom and independence."³⁸

Ukrainian President Zelensky put the capital under a 36-hour curfew, with concerns of more intense shelling, and a

³⁴ <https://twitter.com/AP/status/1503732275573366788>

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/michaelh992/status/1503649185630937088>

³⁶ <https://twitter.com/felipedana/status/1503645649463652353>

³⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-janez-jansa-jaroslaw-kaczynski-europe-95780a078715eb271edec313bfc683e7>

³⁸ https://twitter.com/P_Fiala/status/1503633293320798211

possible offensive by Russian forces from the northwest. There was no specific reason given to indicate why the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense believes this.³⁹

Fox News reported that 24-year old consultant Oleksandra "Sasha" Kuvshinova⁴⁰ was killed⁴¹ in the same attack that gravely wounded reporter Benjamin Hall and combat photographer Pierre Zakrzewski. In the last 72-hours, three reporters have been killed and two wounded in ambushes northwest of Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials report that the car they were in was struck by Russian artillery.⁴² The circumstances of the attack have not been independently verified.

Officials confirmed the loss of a Mig-29 and pilot Major Eugene Lisenko today. He was shot down by anti-aircraft fire over Zhytomyr, after engaging two Russian aircraft.⁴³

WEST REGION

³⁹ <https://twitter.com/i/events/1483255084750282753>

⁴⁰ <https://www.foxnews.com/media/ukrainian-journalist-oleksandra-kuvshinova-killed-attack>

⁴¹ <https://twitter.com/Foxyonat/status/1503765402857394181>

⁴² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fox-news-cameraman-pierre-zakrzewski-killed-kyiv-ukraine-attack-benjamin-hall-wounded/>

⁴³ <https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1503895977865977857>

There were no significant military, human rights, or geopolitical developments in the western part of Ukraine.

The United Nations reported three-million civilians have fled Ukraine, including 1.8 million to Poland.⁴⁴ It is the biggest refugee crisis to develop since World War II, when you consider that border crossing started 19 days ago.

Romania is now supporting almost 500,000 refugees followed by Moldova with 340,000.

THEATERWIDE & EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

Russian strategic bombers were airborne again on Tuesday night Seattle time, with air raid sirens blaring in six Oblasts including Kharkiv and Kyiv.⁴⁵

Russian forces continue to use unencrypted HF radio frequencies for strategic operations, which were quickly jammed by HAM radio operators.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-ukraine-nearly-3-million-people-have-fled-ukraine-due-to-senseless-war-u-n-says/>

⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/te3ej/status/1503884701915832325>

⁴⁶ https://twitter.com/Brian_NUFC/status/1503886285999640581

President Zelenskyy will address Congress by video tomorrow. He is expected to ask for additional aid and to establish a no-fly zone.⁴⁷

United States President Joe Biden announced he will travel to Brussels for an unprecedented meeting of NATO next week.⁴⁸

Billionaire Elon Musk and disputed Chechen leader Ramzaan Kadyrov got into a social media argument on Telegram. The two traded barbs over Musk's offer to fight Putin one-on-one, and if Musk could beat up Russian President Vladimir Putin.⁴⁹

WAR CRIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Marina Osvyannikova of Russia One, who staged an on air protest against the war yesterday, was released after a 14-hour interrogation and paying a 30,000 Rouble fine (\$270~

⁴⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/watch-live-zelensky-to-deliver-virtual-address-to-u-s-congress>

⁴⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/03/15/ukraine-russia-invasion-live-updates/7044496001/>

⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1503828461235982339>

USD).⁵⁰ She was charged with “hooliganism,” and found guilty, but her legal woes are just beginning.

Authorities are considering other charges against her, with the potential of 15-years in prison.

Osvyannikova made a statement to awaiting reporters after her release in Russian and English.⁵¹ She says she did not have access to legal aid during her interrogation.

Russian media and Russian supporters in the United States are circulating a clip of United States Vice President Kamala Harris and Polish President Andrzej Duda laughing. The allegation is the pair were laughing at Ukrainian refugees. The two started to talk over each other during a question-and-answer session with the press, and laughed as they both tried to answer the question.⁵²

GEOPOLITICAL

Russia imposed sanctions on President Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin,

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/EilishHart/status/1503765739404206091>

⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/EilishHart/status/1503772205943083011>

⁵² <https://twitter.com/ReutersFacts/status/1503802206688096261>

press secretary Jen Psaki and other members of the administration. It also included former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Hunter Biden, and the Joints Chief of Staff Mark Milley.⁵³

The most significant name is Secretary of State Antony Blinken. By banning him from traveling to Russia, it is another sign we are deep into the Cold War II.

The UK imposed a fourth round of sanctions, bringing the nation in line with the European Union and the US. Targets include former president Dmitry Medvedev, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu,⁵⁴ and Russian television executive, Konstantin Ernst.

US astronaut Mark Vande has spent almost a year in space, setting a new record. His time on the International Space Station is coming to an end, but he'll need to hitch a ride with the Russians for a trip to Kazakhstan.

Roscosmos head Dmitry Rogozin has made bellicose threats against the ISS, including destroying it. Russia state

⁵³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-60754136>

⁵⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/business/britain-ban-exports-luxury-goods-russia-impose-new-import-tariffs-2022-03-15/>

media was hinting they would leave Vande behind, but today Rogozin made it clear they would do no such thing.⁵⁵

ECONOMIC

It appears Russia does not have a solution to make the \$117 million payment of the sovereign debt is sold in 2013.⁵⁶ Experts say this is uncharted economic waters, however, Russia technically has until April 15 to find a solution.

The price of oil entered bear territory, plunging below \$100 a barrel. WTI closed at \$96 a barrel with July deliveries down to \$90. Gasoline wholesale prices have dropped a full dollar in a week, but drivers shouldn't expect relief at the pump anytime soon. Brent closed just above \$100 a barrel.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5q3bm/russia-says-it-wont-actually-leave-us-astronaut-in-space>

⁵⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/sanctions-savaged-russia-teeters-brink-historic-default-2022-03-16/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/business/oil-falls-ukraine-talks-fears-slower-demand-china-2022-03-15/>