

HIGHLIGHTS

PULSE OF PEACE IN DONBAS



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SITUATION ON THE FRONT: SHELLING OF UKRAINE CONTINUES, WITH A RECORD NUMBER OF ROCKETS FIRED ON MARCH 26

On March 25, Russian armed forces launched a rocket attack on the territory of the Air Force Command of the Ukraine Armed Forces in [Vinnitsa](#). There were [no casualties](#) as a result of the strike, the consequences are being specified. As a result of a successful offensive operation, the Ukrainian Armed Forces liberated a number of settlements in Zaporizhia and Sumy Regions on March 26. The Sumy Regional Military Administration [reported](#) that the liberated Trostyants had suffered major damage, the city lacked any communications, including communications, electricity, and water, and the local hospital remained mined. Mariupol is surrounded by the Russian army, which continues to blockade it, while the city is [under the control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces](#). Mariupol mayor Vadim Boychenko [reported](#) that 90% of the city's housing facilities were damaged as a result of shelling and bombing by the occupiers. According to information as of March 27, the Ukrainian authorities [estimate](#) the total number of dead civilians in the city at 5,000, including 210 children. It is impossible to calculate the exact number of deaths due to the continued shelling, and about 300 people were killed in the [Drama Theater](#) building alone, which served as a shelter for civilians as a result of the Russian bombing.

On March 28, the mayor of Irpen, Kyiv region, [reported](#) that the city had been liberated from the Russian invaders. However, he noted that the city is still being cleared and counterattacks by Russian troops are expected, so it is still too early for locals to return home.

On March 26, several missiles struck [Lviv](#), destroying infrastructure, including an [oil depot](#) and a factory, but not residential buildings. The Air Force Command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces [stated](#) that Lviv was targeted because U.S. President Joe Biden was in Poland at the time, just a few extra minutes of missile flight from Lviv, and the shelling was a kind of political statement from Russia. Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander-in-Chief Wesley Clark [believes](#) that Russia could use tactical nuclear weapons on Polish territory. An oil depot in Dubno (Rivne region) was completely [destroyed](#) by shelling on March 26. In addition, Russian forces [occupied](#) Slavutych (Kyiv region).

On March 27, Russian forces [launched](#) missile strikes against Lutsk, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, and Rivne.

According to U.S. estimates, Russia has [changed](#) its priorities and is now targeting the occupation of Donbas rather than [Kyiv](#) in order to cut off Ukrainian forces in the east from the rest. Hromadske [published](#) an interview about the situation in Kyiv with Andriy Kryschenko, deputy head of the civil-military administration of Kyiv, and Serhiy Knyazev, advisor to the head of the National Police.

The situation remains tense in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk and Kherson regions. An overview of the situation in the regions by the morning of March 28 is [here](#).

Based on its sources, The Insider [estimated](#) that Russia fired at least 70 missiles at Ukraine on March 26, a record number of missiles fired in a single day. Almost all of them were shot down by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. It is noted that at least 18 missiles were launched from the territory of Belarus, which is not officially involved in military operations. The publication estimated that the total cost of production of such a number of missiles, taking into account the logistics of their launch, exceeds half a billion dollars.

[According to U.S. estimates](#), Russia has up to 60% of "failures" of high-precision missiles it uses against Ukraine – so many did not hit the target, did not work on impact or failed to launch. According to the Pentagon, Russia has launched more than 1,100 missiles of all types against Ukraine since the start of the war.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation [named](#) approximate losses of the Russian army from the beginning of the full-scale invasion until the morning of March 28. Personnel losses amount to approximately 17,000 servicemen. At the same time, the figures are not totals, and a precise calculation is complicated by the high intensity of combat operations.

THE "LPR" IS PLANNING A REFERENDUM ON JOINING RUSSIA

The leader of the so-called "LPR", Leonid Pasechnik, [has said](#) that there are plans to hold a "referendum" on the territory joining Russia. Kirill Budanov, head of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, [notes](#) that Russian President Vladimir Putin may try to impose a line of division on Ukraine between the controlled and occupied territories. The implementation of these plans is complicated by the resistance and rallies of Ukrainians in the occupied cities, counterattacks by

the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the progressive release of the territories. Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleh Mykolenko [stressed](#) that any fake referendums in the temporarily occupied territories are judicially null and void and have no legal consequences.

RUSSIA FORCIBLY TRANSFERS RESIDENTS OF OCCUPIED CITIES

The humanitarian situation in Russia-occupied territories continues to deteriorate. Residents of more than ten Ukrainian cities, including Mariupol, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, Akhtyrka, Izyum, and Chernihiv, are partially or completely without access to [drinking water](#). Despite efforts to evacuate residents of the besieged Mariupol, about 170,000 people still [remain in the city](#) as of March 27. 140,000 people were able to leave before the blockade, another 150,000 were able to evacuate. About 30,000 people were forcibly deported by Russian troops. [According to media reports](#), members of the Russian armed forces are taking children from Mariupol without their parents to Donetsk. [According to the testimonies](#) of the people forcibly removed from Mariupol who were contacted by the Trial Journalism portal Graty in Russia they have to go through FSB interrogations and filtration camps. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry [issued a statement](#) stressing that such actions by Russia are a gross violation of the laws and customs of war and international humanitarian law, calling on world leaders to take action to help the people of Ukraine and impose tough new sanctions against Russia in order to stop the war. France, together with Greece and Turkey, plans to launch a "humanitarian operation" to evacuate all those who want to leave Mariupol, French President Emmanuel Macron [announced](#). Interviews with the evacuated residents of Mariupol - [here](#).

THE FIRST EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND REPRESSIONS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The first [full-fledged exchange of prisoners](#) of war took place between Ukraine and Russia - 10 Ukrainian servicemen for 10 occupants, said Minister of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine Iryna Vereshchuk. Ukraine also handed over 11 sailors to the Russian side in exchange for 19 Ukrainian sailors. Since the first days of the war, residents of Russian-occupied Ukrainian cities have been holding peaceful rallies, which Russian armed forces have been trying to suppress, kidnapping journalists, activists, and officials, intimidating and shooting protesters. On March 26, there was a protest against the Russian occupation in [Slavutich](#) (Kyiv region). On March 27 – in [Kherson](#) and Kakhovka (Kherson region). "Hromadske" [spoke](#) to people from Kherson, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Kakhovka, and Energodar who participated in protests against the occupation. At the same time, Russia is trying to organize "rallies in support" of the actions of the Russian armed forces on occupied territory, but people [refuse](#) to participate. The practice of reprisals against residents of occupied Ukrainian cities is [widely used](#): information is gathered

on where people who do not agree with the occupation and who believe that the Ukrainian authorities are the only legitimate ones live. Journalists who continue to work in the occupied territories receive threats and demands to stop working for Ukraine. The Ukrainian initiative Euromaidan SOS published a [list](#) of activists missing and detained by Russia, and launched a joint action campaign in their defense.

As of the morning of March 28, 143 [children](#) had been killed and another 216 injured since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, UNICEF [stated](#) that a month of full-scale war in Ukraine has displaced 4.3 million children, more than half of the total number of children in Ukraine. 1.8 million children have been removed from the country, and another 2.5 million have been forced to move to safer regions. UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell notes that this is one of the fastest and most widespread forced displacements of children since World War II, with potential long-term consequences.

BIDEN VISITS POLAND TO SUPPORT UKRAINE

US President Joe Biden [met](#) with Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba as part of his European tour. The topics of discussion included U.S. actions to support Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression, including military and humanitarian aid, as well as steps the U.S. is taking together with allies and partners to bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to justice. Following the meeting, Dmytro Kuleba [noted](#) that Joe Biden has a clear understanding that this is not only Russia's war against Ukraine, but also the war of tyranny against the free world, with the USA guaranteeing continued support for Ukraine.

Also, Ukraine and the U.S. began talks in a new 2+2 format: at the level of the heads of the [foreign](#) and [defense](#) ministries. At the meeting in Warsaw, the American side was represented by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) the purpose of this format was to find practical solutions in both political and defense spheres for the sake of enhancing Ukraine's ability to resist Russian aggression. In particular, the talks focused on the details of the new anti-Russian sanctions being prepared by the United States.

On March 26 in Warsaw, Joe Biden [made a speech](#) about the Russian invasion. He said that the fight for democracy was not over in the Cold War and could not end now. He noted that Russia has suppressed democracy at home and is trying to do so elsewhere, called cynical lies about Russian President Vladimir Putin's intention to "denazify" Ukraine and warned Russia against any possible attack on NATO member states. At the same time, the unprecedented sanctions imposed on Russia do not allow it to reinforce its troops. During his visit, he also [called](#) Vladimir Putin a "butcher".

UKRAINE CONTINUES TO WORK ON DIPLOMATIC PLATFORMS

On March 24, three summits took place in Brussels at once: of NATO, the EU and the G7 countries. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in his [address](#) to the NATO summit stressed that in a month of war Ukraine has confirmed how much it can do for common security in Europe and the world, and NATO has yet to show what the alliance can do to save people, and called on NATO countries to provide Ukraine with arms. Following the summit, NATO approved military assistance for Ukraine, all 30 member states of the Alliance also adopted a common [resolution](#) calling on Russia to immediately stop the war in Ukraine, for Belarus — to stop complicity in Russia's military actions, and for all states — to participate in maintaining international order. In addition, it is noted that any use of chemical or biological weapons by Russia is unacceptable and will lead to grave consequences. The leaders of the member states stressed that NATO remains open to countries that wish to join, while the idea of a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine has not yet been supported.

The EU heads of state and government have agreed to create a Trust Fund of Solidarity with Ukraine — as stated in a [communiqué](#) published after a meeting of the European Council. The European Council invited its international partners to participate in the fund and urged to start preparations without delay. European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis [announced](#) that the EU had hit Russia with four waves of sanctions: against the financial system, high-tech industries and corrupt elites - but would do "more to stop the aggression against Ukraine".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has [addressed](#) the leaders of the G7 countries, calling on them to impose a full embargo on trade with Russia, deprive it of the ability to use GPS, and completely block Russian banks from the global financial system. He also said that the G7 countries should take part in creating a new system of security guarantees for Ukraine and the region. G7 leaders [condemned](#) military actions, in particular those targeting the Ukrainian population and civilian infrastructure, and supported the use of international mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, to hold Vladimir Putin and others accountable. Countries also reaffirmed their intention to reduce dependence on Russian energy.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [commented](#) on the progress of the negotiation process between Kyiv and Moscow. According to him, the sides are allegedly "close to a consensus" on four out of the six points of the negotiation process, in particular the status of the Russian language and NATO accession. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [denied](#) this statement. He stressed that there was not and could not be any consensus with Russia regarding these topics, in particular the only state language in Ukraine is and will always be Ukrainian. At the same time, Dmytro Kuleba thanked the Turkish side and separately Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for political and humanitarian aid, as well as diplomatic efforts to stop Russia's war against Ukraine. The next negotiations between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations should take place in [Istanbul](#) on 29-30 March.

Ukraine [demands](#) that the UN Security Council immediately take measures to demilitarize the Chernobyl exclusion zone and introduce a special UN mission there. Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk stressed that the Russian armed forces continue to transport and store a significant amount of ammunition in close proximity to the nuclear plant, and such continued militarization of the exclusion zone poses a very serious [risk](#) of damaging the isolation facilities built over the fourth power unit of the plant after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which will inevitably lead to contamination not only of Ukraine, but also other European countries.

WESTERN COUNTRIES INTRODUCE NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

The United States intends to [allocate](#) an additional \$100 million to Ukraine to strengthen civil security. The Wall Street Journal [quoted](#) official documents and officials as saying that the Joe Biden administration is also preparing sanctions against Russian companies, which, according to it, provide goods and services to the Russian military and intelligence services. The paper reminds that previously these companies were put on the list of companies that were prohibited to export sensitive technology, but with which it was allowed to maintain business relations. Now it is supposed to ban any financial transactions.

The United Kingdom has sanctioned another 65 individuals and companies involved in the invasion of Ukraine, including the main Russian manufacturer of unmanned aerial vehicles. The new sanctions are intended to damage the Russian defense industry and limit its ability to make up for the loss of drones. In addition, the U.K. Ministry of Defense [handed over](#) to Ukraine a batch of portable Starstreak surface-to-air missile systems designed to defeat helicopters and low-flying aircraft. Switzerland [toughened](#) sanctions against Russia, banning exports of goods and related services of the energy sector there. [Australia](#) and [Japan](#) imposed new sanctions. [Canada](#) imposed new sanctions on 160 Russian lawmakers and banned technology exports to weaken the capabilities of the Russian military in areas such as electronics, information technology, telecommunications, navigation and transportation.

The Czech Republic has already frozen assets of Russians and Russian companies for hundreds of millions of crowns, and plans to seize Russian property in the future. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala [stated](#) that the government is preparing a number of legislative changes to speed up this process.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN RUSSIA HAS SHARPLY DETERIORATED: A REPORT BY HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Agora International presented the [report](#) "Russia: Human Rights under Martial Law" dedicated to the first month of Russia's war in Ukraine. The report provides a detailed analysis of the background and the international reaction to the war, anti-war protests, facts of military censorship, attacks on the media and blocking of social networks, restrictions on freedom of movement, the rights of servicemen, enlisted

men and Rosgvardia employees, counter-sanctions in the economy and revision of property rights.

It is noted that over the course of just one month in Russia, basic constitutional rights and freedoms were extremely restricted: of assembly, speech, movement and private property. Restrictions in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and increased police control were used by the Russian authorities to prepare for war, but only after the invasion of Ukraine did the logic and background of the total pressure on the political opposition and the media space become clear: its purpose was to neutralize groups with the main protest potential.

Experts at the University of Helsinki [elaborate](#) on how Russia's withdrawal from the Council of Europe will affect participants in anti-war protests from Russia and Ukraine: in their opinion, the Russian Criminal Code article on keeping prisoners in their home region does not apply to Ukrainian citizens who oppose the Russian occupation, and an exception to this rule would apply to Russian citizens who participate in anti-war protests.

ZELENSKY GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO RUSSIAN MEDIA

On March 27, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky gave an [interview](#) to a number of Russian media, the first since the beginning of the war. "Russia must know the truth," was how the office of the Ukrainian president commented on this decision. At the same time, "Roskomnadzor" banned Russian media that had interviewed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky from publishing it.

The President of Ukraine described what development of events can be considered a victory for Ukraine: "To reduce the number of victims as much as possible, to reduce the terms of this war. To withdraw Russian troops to compromise territories." He noted that an attempt to force Russia to fully liberate the occupied territories could "lead to World War III," and stressed that it was impossible to negotiate security guarantees while Russian troops were in Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky called on Russia to withdraw the troops back to the positions they were in before February 24 in order to begin a dialogue on the issue of Donbas.

The main theses of the interview are [here](#).