



# Ukraine Essential

**Brief Six**

22 March 2022

# Ukraine Essential

## Brief Six

### Key Past Developments

- ▶ Ukraine has succeeded in preserving its statehood during the first phase of the war – this ardent resistance has spurred a change in Russian tactics. Moscow has now turned instead towards embracing a war of attrition in lieu of achieving initial objectives such as quick regime change and the [capture of cities](#) in the East.
- ▶ Heavy fighting continues in the centre of Mariupol, with Russia achieving [progress](#), though minimal at that, only on the Donbas front. Ukrainian forces have pushed back Russian troops north of Kyiv and around Mykolaiv in the South. Ukraine further maintains limited capability for precision strikes and continues to be aided by [real time US intelligence](#).
- ▶ While peace talks reportedly are heading toward a compromise, buy-in from both sides is still absent at this stage. Russia and Ukraine are rather using the time to regroup ahead of a likely second phase of the war.

### Key Developments to Watch

- ▶ Mariupol [is expected to fall](#) – this development would enable Russia to reinforce its campaign on the Donbas front with additional troops. The next 7-10 days could indeed prove decisive for the South-Eastern frontlines – the management of logistics, supplies and [reserves](#) will all be pivotal towards determining the outcome.
- ▶ Russian troop maneuvering will continue to focus on bringing in fresh forces to the East, reinforcing positions in the Southeast and North and sowing confusion within US and Ukrainian intelligence about its main line of attack in a potential second wave. The Russian armed forces (RAF) will continue targeting Ukrainian military, transportation, and civilian infrastructure. The remaining airports close to the western border are at increased risk.
- ▶ Domestic political disagreement about the shape of any compromise will continue: news that Kyiv may be ready to accept neutrality and relinquish its prospects for NATO membership were met with vehement criticism from opposition parties. It is unclear if the necessary 300 votes (of 450) could be found to change the constitution accordingly.

### Russian Blunders

Following four weeks of war, the [consensus](#) in Western and Ukrainian military [circles](#) holds that Moscow's initial objectives – such as regime change - have not been met. The Russian Army (RAF) launched the war at a [disadvantageous](#) defender-to-attacker ratio. Moscow ostensibly had naively also expected less resistance and greater cooperation among some local elites.

These political and military blunders have contributed to significant losses and low [motivation and morale](#) of troops. Even though nearly 90% of Russian forces remain combat capable according to US [intelligence](#), the losses have disproportionately impacted Russia's [elite forces](#). The mobilization of Russian reserves, especially conscript soldiers, is only further problematic, with the Kremlin failing to prepare society for a protracted and deadly war against its "brotherly nation".

The Russian military challenges are connected to these miscalculations - [force multipliers](#) such as digital warfare and air and technological dominance have not lived up to expectations against the Ukrainian Army's (UAF) fierce defense of the country. Russian anti-access and area denial capabilities, considered superior, have failed to function effectively in Ukraine. Russian coordination and communication are also suffering following the RAF's destruction of local communication infrastructure. Six senior Russian commanders (of 20 total generals [serving](#) on the frontline) have lost their lives during the war, with Ukraine aided by [US intelligence in these efforts](#). The botched military operations have meant that no major cities, apart from Kherson, have fallen. The RAF simply lacks the troop capacity to entirely encircle key cities such as Kharkiv and Kyiv or launch a comprehensive assault on Odesa.

These developments have compelled Russia to alter its tactics – now it is seemingly pursuing a war of attrition and concentrating its efforts towards finalizing the land bridge from Crimea to Donbas. Concerns that Belarus may potentially participate can also be part of an info-war campaign intended to persuade the UAF to maintain a strong presence in Western Ukraine instead of maneuvering additional troops to the east. The encirclement of Kyiv remains a priority too (and potentially the extension of the land bridge to Transnistria which would cut off the Odesa region and Ukraine more generally from the Black Sea). Russia, however, would need to devote significantly more troops towards both Kyiv and Odesa if mission success is to be achieved. If the Kremlin indeed wishes to force any concessions on Ukraine at all, it will need to make a [breakthrough](#) (such as noticeable advances in Donbas) in the coming days.

Russia, that said, has systematically destroyed Ukraine's military and industrial capacities and transportation infrastructure. The use of artillery has also seen increased use against civilian infrastructure as Ukrainian forces fall back to their strategic defensive lines in cities. The substantial damage, calculated at over [\\$60 billion at this stage](#), is putting additional pressure on Kyiv at the negotiations. The war of attrition, notably, includes political aims as well: Moscow appears content with the extremely high number of refugees and internal displaced persons (reaching 10 million altogether at present). Given increased animosity towards Russia, spurred by the war, this mass exodus may be necessary to control the country from the Kremlin point of view.

## **Ukrainian Tactical Successes**

Ukraine's more decentralized military tactics, including the use of [small unit ambushes](#), has caused significant consternation for the centralized Russian command. So too has the lack of a [Russian counter-drone doctrine](#). The UAF has succeeded in [trading space for time](#), ceding some territory in exchange for fighting at the times and places of their choosing.

The UAF also published its losses for the first time (claiming to have endured only around half the loss of life of the [Russian side](#)). Although little is known about the state of the UAF, its combat potential will be naturally fading. The scheduled Western deliveries cannot fully compensate for the destruction of armored vehicles, MLRS, artillery, and aviation nor can on-going mobilization immediately replace the highly capable and experienced Donbas units that have been lost. Yet Ukraine maintains some advantages stemming from its higher troop ratio. Nevertheless, Ukrainian [authorities are cautious of](#) emerging fatigue – a development that Russia hopes will press Kyiv towards concessions. A Russian assault of Kyiv or Odesa, in fact, would only further mobilize Ukrainians though.

While the Russian ultimatum to give up Mariupol was rejected, the city called [hell on earth](#) is expected to fall. Kyiv [admitted](#) last week that it is in no position to lift the siege as other UAF units are over 100km away and Russia maintains air superiority in the area. The current Russian priority is to finalize the land bridge between Crimea and Donbas and to encircle the UAF Donbas units, which are among the best in Ukraine. The future focus is likely to remain directed at widening the Russian controlled area in the Southeast (with an emphasis on Mykolaiv) and laying siege to the capital.

## Peace Talks

No matter the ultimate outcome, Ukraine has [already won the war](#) from a certain perspective. Kyiv has managed to preserve its statehood, undergirded by the performance of the UAF, the resilience of central authorities and the resistance of society. The nation-building project, which had proven polarizing in some eastern regions following the Maidan, can now [be finalized](#).

Ukraine, nonetheless, faces enormous destruction and challenges - no wonder President Zelensky and his colleagues are [using the term “compromise”](#) more. According to Turkish officials who are making an attempt at mediating, an [agreement is reportedly emerging](#) that would see Ukraine made a neutral country and leave it out of NATO. Ukraine rather would keep a limited military and offered security guarantees. The rumoured deal would further ban some right-wing groups and lift restrictions on the use of the Russian language in Ukraine. The cancellation of sanctions against Russia has emerged as [another topic](#) during the talks (incorporation of this issue will also enable third parties to gain significant influence over the process). The course of negotiations overall suggests that a potential compromise can be formulated (but it is unlikely to be finalized at this stage).

Although the Ukrainian authorities undoubtedly face difficulted choices, it is far from certain that Ukraine is [ready to accept](#) a deal along these lines. Ukrainian societal support for resistance is resounding, with the population [highly confident](#) (over 90%) that the invasion can be repelled. However, a [settlement to end the war](#) will indubitably be necessary unless the West genuinely deems a conclusive Ukrainian victory plausible and the price to get there acceptable. And while confidence of victory is robust, Ukrainians share a desire for peace, with [74% backing](#) the talks.

Emotions are already running high regarding the issue of NATO membership - Zelensky may face a serious challenge in finding the necessary 300 votes to change the constitution to cement neutrality. The most vocal critics include Poroshenko deputies that backed NATO and EU membership ahead of the 2019 elections. There is also growing Ukrainian resentment of NATO which is directed at the perceived insufficient support from the Alliance to Ukraine when it comes to closing the sky or providing air defense, particularly against the backdrop of an increasing number of air strikes.

Ukrainian politics has rather hardened - all news and content television channels in Ukraine are [requested to broadcast the unified round the clock TV marathon УАразом](#). The National Security and Defence Council has [suspended several political parties](#) due to ‘ties with Russia’ throughout the martial law period. Given that this ruling includes the Opposition Block/For Life, it also complicates the enactment of any constitutional changes. The National Anti-Corruption Bureau has announced that it is currently assisting the SSU to uncover collaborators and created a [list of 245 people who might be helping Russia in its war against Ukraine](#). Compromise may prove difficult to accept for many in this environment.

On the other side, Moscow appears to be resisting any type of agreement until it first achieves its mission, at least, in the East. Both sides, consequently, are using the pause rather to prepare for the second phase of the war.

## War Losses as of 20 March 2022 (UAF data)

	Russia	Ukraine
Manpower (total)	12108	6296
Aircraft	96	54
Helicopters	118	10
Tanks	476	238
AFV	1487	459
Artillery	230	263
MLR	74	34
Anti-Tank Missiles	No data	126
UAVs	21	60
AA	44	145
Naval vessels	3	2
Vehicles	947	983
Special	12	No data
Equipment (other)	No data	825