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BRIEF

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

ZEROFOX INTELLIGENCE

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Classification: TLP White

Criticality: High

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical & Physical

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Scope Note

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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

Executive Summary

The Russian battleship *Moskva* sank in the Black Sea one week ago, but Russia has not released any casualty figures and continues to suppress information about the disaster. U.S. President Joseph Biden confirmed on April 21, 2022, that the U.S. was putting together another military and humanitarian aid package for Ukraine worth approximately USD 1.3 billion. Russia's offensive in the Donbas began with heavy air and artillery bombardment on the frontline, but with limited progress by its forces on the ground. Mariupol's last defenders and an estimated 1,000 civilians are trapped inside the Azovstal steel factory, the last point of Ukrainian control in the city, while Russian President Vladimir Putin has already declared Mariupol's "liberation".

Analyst Commentary

On April 14, 2022, the Russian guided missile cruiser *Moskva*, flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, sank after taking severe damage in the northern Black Sea between Odesa and the Crimean Peninsula. The Ukrainian government said that the *Moskva* was struck by two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles—a determination also supported by U.S. officials. Russia disputed the Ukrainian claim, and said that a fire on the ship caused an ammunition cache to explode, and the ship sank while being towed back to port in rough seas. A video emerged on social media on April 19, purporting to show the *Moskva* after the missile strikes or explosion, listing and in the process of sinking, but neither the Russian or Ukrainian governments have confirmed the authenticity of the video.¹

One week after the *Moskva* sank, there is still little clarity about what actually happened to the ship's crew of more than 500. The Russian Defense Ministry has not confirmed how many casualties resulted from the *Moskva*'s sinking, saying only that the whole

¹ <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1515962198488625152>



crew was evacuated to Sevastopol.² Media outlet *Meduza* reported that a source in the Black Sea Fleet revealed that 37 people died in the explosion and more than 100 were injured in the rescue effort, but these totals have not been verified.³ *Novaya Gazeta*. *Europe* was reportedly informed by the mother of a sailor that about 40 crew members died and many more were missing.⁴

Russian families have begun attempting to contact the government and the Russian Navy, searching for more details about the fate of the crew, but most information about the sunken battleship has been suppressed. According to the *New York Times*, 10 families have spoken publicly about receiving conflicting information about the status of the crew.⁵ On April 16, the Russian Defense Ministry released a video claiming to show Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov meeting with a group of rescued sailors from the *Moskva*. The video did little to clear up the confusion around the situation, as it only showed about 100 sailors being greeted by the admiral, with the fate of the rest remaining unclear.

The sinking of the *Moskva* is as much a disaster for the Russian government as it is for the military. It is the second major Russian battleship to be sunk during a war that was expected to be brief and celebratory, and the *Moskva* is the third largest ship in Russia's active naval fleet. The *Moskva* incident has drawn comparisons to the August 2000 *Kursk* submarine disaster, when all 118 crew members died after an explosion and Russian officials were accused of responding slowly and misleading the public about what had happened. It also shows the degree to which the Russian government will go to suppress information about the conflict. Despite the size of the *Moskva's* crew and the possibility that hundreds of sailors are missing, the Kremlin has denied all reporting that suggests any number of casualties.

International Response

U.S. President Joseph Biden announced on April 22, 2022, that the U.S. is preparing another military aid package to Ukraine that is expected to include a further USD 800 million in military aid and USD 500 million in humanitarian assistance. Howitzers, tactical drones, and 144,000 rounds of ammunition will be part of the military package, while Biden also announced that his government would begin a program to help resettle Ukrainian refugees in the U.S. Special advisor at the National Security Council Matt Miller recently said that the Ukrainian military requires more weapons and ammunition due to the pace at which they are using the current supply. The Biden

² <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/14388407>

³

<https://meduza.io/feature/2022/04/18/na-kreysere-moskva-pogibli-37-chelovek-utzverzhdает-istochnik-me-duzy-ranenyh-primerno-100-kolichestvo-propavshih-bez-vesti-neizvestno>

⁴ <https://novayagazetaeu.substack.com/p/-29c>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/21/world/europe/russia-moskva-warship-disinformation.html>



administration is also reportedly preparing new sanctions against Russia, though it is unclear when they will be announced.⁶

On April 19, 2022, U.S. Department of Defense Press Secretary John Kirby held a press briefing during which he said that Ukraine has more operable fighter aircraft than it had two weeks ago, and that Ukraine had received additional aircraft and spare parts for its existing fleet. His statement contradicted earlier reporting about Ukraine's air force that suggested efforts to supply Ukraine with Soviet-era aircraft, specifically the MiG-29 fighter jet, have failed. On April 20, 2022, the Ukrainian Air Force's official Twitter account denied Kirby's claims⁷; the Pentagon and Kirby later confirmed that Ukraine had not received operable fixed-wing aircraft, but that they added more than 20 jets to their fleet by fixing aircraft with parts supplied by Europe.⁸

Russia is responding to the expulsion of its diplomats from European capitals by expelling diplomatic staff from European Union embassies in Moscow. On April 15, 2022, Russia kicked out 18 members of the EU delegation. Four days later, the Russian Foreign Ministry declared that 15 diplomats from the Netherlands and an unknown number of Belgian embassy staff had two weeks to leave the country. Four diplomats from Austria were given until April 24 to leave Russia. More expulsions are likely to come, as Russia has not expelled any French or German diplomats, despite those two governments each dismissing 40 Russian diplomats.⁹ Russia also introduced travel bans on 29 Americans, including U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, as well as 61 Canadians.

Physical Security Impacts

The Russian offensive in the Donbas has proceeded with heavy bombardment but has achieved minimal advancement by ground forces. Russia stated it had struck 1,260 targets with rockets and artillery in the offensive's first day, but according to Western intelligence, the Russian military continues to be affected by technical, logistical, and force availability issues. The frontline is roughly 300 miles long, and runs through the Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions; the scale of the operation is unprecedented for the modern Russian army, and could cause extreme command and logistics challenges for Russia's military leadership.

6

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-provide-update-ukraine-russia-declares-success-mariupol-rcna25328>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/kpszsu/status/1516686129642233859>

8

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/04/19/the-ukrainian-air-force-just-got-bigger-it-seems-someone-gave-kyiv-more-mig-29s/>

9

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/04/19/russia-retaliates-against-europe-with-mass-expulsions-a77409>



On April 18, 2022, Russia succeeded in occupying Kreminna, a town of about 18,000 residents located roughly 25 kilometers northwest of Severodonetsk. They have also concentrated a large number of forces around the captured city of Izyum, and appear to be using the city as a jumping-off point for attempted advances south into the Donetsk region.¹⁰ Russian forces in Izyum and elsewhere along the northern Donbas front appear to still be targeting Kramatorsk, in the northern part of Donetsk.

Forces fighting in Mariupol for the Russia-supported Donetsk People's Republic reportedly launched an operation to enter Azovstal steel plant for the first time on April 19, 2022, after days of bombarding the facility. Several thousand members of the Azov Battalion and other Ukrainian forces are believed to have retreated inside the metalworks factory, which is the last major location in Mariupol still under Ukrainian control. Azovstal's defenders have already rejected several Russian calls to surrender. According to the Ukrainian government in Mariupol, there are also more than 1,000 civilians taking shelter in the factory.¹¹¹² Despite the ongoing fighting in Azovstal, Russia President Vladimir Putin claimed victory and the "liberation" of Mariupol on April 21, 2022.

On April 20, 2022, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereschuk said that Ukraine had secured an agreement to evacuate women, children, and the elderly from Mariupol. Recent attempts to secure evacuation corridors from Mariupol have failed due to disputes between Russia and Ukraine, and it is unclear that agreements to free civilians from the city will be fully observed. The Russian Defense Ministry said on April 20 that it would create a humanitarian corridor to allow Ukrainian service members in the Azovstal plant to surrender and evacuate, and that the corridor would also be used to evacuate civilians. Ukraine has estimated that more than 21,000 people have died in the Russian siege of Mariupol.

¹⁰

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/19/ukraine-war-battle-for-donbas-has-begun-russia-launches-offensive>

¹¹ <https://tass.com/society/1439549>

¹² <https://www.rferl.org/a/war-mariupol-azovstal-last-stand-ukraine-azov/31811117.html>



Appendix: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

Red

WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?

Sources may use TLP:

RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.

HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?

Recipients may NOT share TLP:

RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.

Amber

Sources may use TLP:

AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.

Recipients may ONLY share TLP:

AMBER information with members of their own organization and only as widely as necessary to act on that information.

Green

WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?

Sources may use TLP:

GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.

HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?

Recipients may share TLP:

GREEN information with peers & partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.

White

Sources may use TLP:

WHITE when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.

Recipients may share TLP:

WHITE information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.