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BRIEF

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

ZEROFOX INTELLIGENCE

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Scope Note

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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Situational Updates

Executive Summary

Russian state-owned corporation Gazprom suspended natural gas deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria, citing the two countries' refusal to pay for gas in Russian rubles. U.S. President Joseph Biden requested USD 33 billion in funding from Congress to support Ukraine, including USD 20 billion for military support. Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Russia would respond to any perceived outside intervention in Ukraine, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that the conflict risks escalating into nuclear war. The Russian offensive in the Donbas has not achieved strategic breakthroughs and may lack the capacity to achieve the desired envelopment of Ukrainian forces.

Analyst Commentary

Gazprom suspended natural gas exports to Bulgaria and Poland on April 27, 2022. According to its official statement, Gazprom stopped deliveries to the two countries due to their refusal to pay for gas in Russian rubles.¹ In March, following the European Union's (EU) imposition of new financial sanctions, President Putin demanded that Gazprom's customers in Europe pay for gas in rubles, despite the EU's contention that it would violate existing contracts. Polish gas company PGNiG confirmed on April 27, 2022, that it was not receiving Russian natural gas through the Yamal pipeline.

In response to Gazprom's announcement, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen accused Russia of using natural gas as "an instrument of blackmail." Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov rejected the allegation and said that Russia remains a reliable supplier of natural gas but also warned that Russia could suspend deliveries to other parties that refuse Russian demands for payment in rubles.² Only Hungary has thus far agreed to make payments in Russian currency, but it is possible that other

¹ <https://twitter.com/GazpromEN/status/1519208376013664256>

² <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5328989>



governments have quietly opened Russian bank accounts to facilitate the exchange of euros into rubles before the payments are transferred to Gazprom.

The supply of Russian gas to the EU was a contentious issue prior to the war, as prices had reached record highs and some European officials had accused Gazprom of manipulating supply to influence prices. Since the Russian campaign began on February 24, 2022, it has become perhaps the most crucial element of the Russia-EU geopolitical dispute. More than one-third of the natural gas used in the EU comes from Russia, and Russia relies on Europe for revenue to fund its war in Ukraine in the midst of worsening sanctions. Russia has exported an estimated EUR 63 billion worth of fossil fuels since the invasion, with 71 percent of that volume going to the EU.³ The Ukrainian government has repeatedly called on the EU to introduce sanctions against Russian gas or fully embargo imports, but EU leadership contends that this would cause an economic crisis and has not done so to date.

International Response

On April 28, 2022, President Biden said that his administration would request USD 33 billion in aid for Ukraine to help finance the next five months of the war. The aid package will reportedly include more than USD 20 billion in military aid, USD 8.5 billion in economic aid, and USD 3 billion for humanitarian assistance. President Biden requested the funding in a letter to Congress that lauded recent measures by the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU to increase assistance to Ukraine and stated that the United States is not at war with Russia.⁴ The U.S. House of Representatives also passed a resolution on April 27, 2022, that would allow the seized assets of Russian oligarchs to be sold and the proceeds used to assist Ukraine's war effort.⁵

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht announced on April 26, 2022, that Germany will send Flakpanzer Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine. Chancellor Olaf Scholz had previously maintained that Germany would not send artillery and heavy weaponry to Ukraine for fear of provoking accusations that NATO was at war with Russia. Lambrecht announced the decision during discussions at Ramstein Air Base in Germany hosted by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and attended by representatives of 40 countries, which were organized to consolidate Western support for the Ukrainian war effort and coordinate arms shipments to the Ukrainian military.

During an April 27, 2022, speech in St. Petersburg, President Putin warned that Russia would respond with "lightning" speed to any outside intervention in the war with Ukraine. He also noted that Russia recently completed a successful test of the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile that he previously said would make Russia's enemies

³ <https://energyandcleanair.org/publication/russian-fossil-exports-first-two-months/>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-61260511>

⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6930>



“think twice” about threatening Russian interests. The declaration was likely a response to the U.S.-led conference at Ramstein Air Base and the increased volume of Western military aid to Ukraine. Foreign Minister Lavrov also warned that there was real risk the conflict could lead to nuclear war due to the failed peace negotiations and the lack of “rules” in Russia-U.S. relations.

Chinese commercial drone manufacturer DJI announced on April 27, 2022, that it would suspend business activities in Russia and Ukraine. DJI is the world’s largest maker of commercial drones and said that its drones are not intended for military use. Ukrainian officials, including Vice Prime Minister Myhailo Federov, have accused DJI of allowing Russia to use its products for reconnaissance in advance of missile strikes.⁶

Physical Security Impacts

Russia’s military offensive in southeastern Ukraine has made slow but steady progress in the past week as Russian forces push southeast from Izyum toward Slovyansk and southwest toward Barvinkove. At this stage, though, it appears unlikely that Russian forces will be able to envelop the Ukrainian Joint Forces Operation (JFO) troops and fully occupy the Donbas. According to the British Defense Ministry, Russia lacks necessary logistical and combat support for its Donbas operations and has made no notable breakthroughs.⁷ Russia also faces significant manpower shortages that cannot be resolved due to the war’s legal classification as a “Special Military Operation.” The Ukrainian JFO has prepared for a Russian invasion through the Donbas since 2014, and the increasingly efficient conventional weapons pipeline from the U.S., UK, and EU will allow Ukraine to significantly reinforce its military capabilities in order to sustain a war of attrition.

Russian forces in Kherson dispersed a pro-Ukraine rally with tear gas and stun grenades on April 27, 2022. Kherson was the first major Ukrainian city to be taken by the Russian military after its invasion, and Ukrainian officials have claimed that Russia intends to hold a referendum in the Kherson region to create a semi-autonomous Kherson People’s Republic, similar to those created in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014. Latvia-based news outlet *Meduza* reported that Russia originally planned to hold referendums in late April to incorporate the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (D/LNR) into Russia and to create the Kherson People’s Republic but that the votes were postponed until mid-May.⁸

Russia is still targeting the Azovstal metalworks complex in Mariupol with bombs and artillery and struck the massive facility at least 35 times on April 26, 2022. Despite reports that Russian troops are being transferred away from Mariupol, and President Putin’s claims that Azovstal is no longer a military target, Russian forces continue to

⁶ <https://twitter.com/FedorovMykhailo/status/1504068644195733504>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1518459493352411137>

⁸ <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/04/28/change-of-plans>



besiege the industrial complex and attempt to force out the defenders without directly engaging them. Russia also continues to utilize long-range missile strikes on targets deep inside Ukrainian territory. On April 25, 2022, at least five Russian missile strikes hit railway infrastructure targets in western Ukraine. Russian missiles also continue to hit non-military targets, such as a strike on April 23, 2022, that killed eight people, including a three-month-old baby.



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.