

SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

by Mikael Hertoft (Denmark) and Andrii Ishchenko (Ukraine)

Two years have passed since Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Since then, Russia has continued its offensive, using all its military power, usually called the «second strongest army of the world», and today, according to the Ukrainian side, it controls about one-fifth of the territory of Ukraine within the borders of 1991. Ukraine defends itself with variable success. The country has an absolutely legal right to do so and must be supported in this.

In the winter of 2022–2023, we witnessed a Russian large-scale missile and drone attack on the civil infrastructure of Ukraine, which aimed to make Ukraine cold and dark. It failed, and although missile attacks and drone strikes continued in the winter of 2023–2024, they could not morally break Ukraine.

The front line hasn't changed so much the last year. There has been only minor settlements changing hands. But this does not mean that the war has become less intense or that the situation has reached a certain equilibrium. On the contrary, everything is very unstable, and fights are as a rule fierce.

Over the past year, Vladimir Putin has mobilized around 300,000 soldiers from the civilian population, including prisoners. According to Vladimir Putin's estimates on January 14, 2024, the number of the occupying Russian army on Ukrainian soil was 617,000 people, while the Ukrainian side in a commentary estimated the number of the occupying forces to be slightly smaller - 443,000 people. With this army, Russia continues its offensive along the entire front line, which now is approximately 1,200 km, and there have been several longstanding battles, that have taken a months-long fierce nature. For example, Russia spent huge military resources in an attempt to storm or surround Bakhmut and Avdiivka with huge losses of soldiers and armored vehicles, and the battles for Avdiivka and in the vicinity of Bakhmut are still ongoing. And on the left bank of the Dnieper,

not far from Kherson, since October 2023, Ukrainians have created a bridgehead in and around the small village of Krynka with a population before the war of only 1,000 people. This bridgehead has resisted all Russian attempts to crush and destroy it. But losses on both sides in the battles for the Krynka Bridgehead amount to thousands of fighters, and the entire arsenal of weapons, including Russian aviation and guided aerial bombs, is used on this battlefield.

Minsk agreements.

Before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the conflict was regulated for many years by a ceasefire agreement, known as the Minsk Agreements. This ceasefire was regulated by the OSCE, which periodically patrolled the conflict line and reported violations of the ceasefire regime. The number of victims was small and steadily continued to decrease. Political progress in the reintegration of the territories around Donetsk and Luhansk, captured by the imperial «separatists» with the support of Russia, was small due to mutual distrust between the local forces and the Kyiv government. It was Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine that interrupted the Minsk ceasefire agreements, and therefore Russia is responsible for their failure.

Is Russia failing in air superiority?

Russia has, or at least had, air superiority over the front line and an advantage thanks to constant attacks on Ukrainian civilian and military targets with the help of long-range missiles and drones. But Ukraine has attacked Russian aircraft with considerable success, partly thanks to the support of the West with anti-aircraft defense systems.

When in January Ukraine shot down 4 Russian Su-34 military aircraft over the south of Ukraine, Russia could no longer support the intensive bombing of the Ukrainian bridgehead on the left side of the Dnieper near the village of Krynka.

In addition, Ukraine was able to shoot down an A-50 radar surveillance plane (AWACS) over the Sea of Azov, and an IL-22M command military plane was shot down and forced to make an emergency landing in the city of Anapa in the Krasnodar Territory. Thus, Russia was forced to move its aerial surveillance several

hundreds of kilometers to the east and will now fly over Krasnodar Krai in Russia, quite far from the front line.

Several more Russian military planes has been shot down in other places, including the Il-76 military transport plane over the Belgorod region, which may have tragically transported Ukrainian prisoners of war for exchange.

Despite the achieved successes, they have only a limited and defensive nature though they allow Ukraine to at least defend the currently controlled territory, but do not allow the de-occupation of captured lands, due to the many-month delay in the transfer of F-16 and A-10 aircraft to Ukraine.

Russia's loss of control over the Black Sea.

The war has also developed asymmetrical, since Russia at the outbreak of the war had a dominant fleet of warships in the Black Sea, while Ukraine had no fleet. Thus, Russia started the war with control over the entire coastline of Ukraine along the Black Sea.

Ukraine has opposed Russian naval ships with a fleet of water- and air-based drones, as well as missiles. In this way Ukraine successfully has attacked and destroyed several Russian Black Sea warships: the cruiser and Flagship *Moscow*, submarine *Rostov-on-Don*, the large amphibious ship *Novocherkassk* and others. Only in February 2024, the missile corvette *Ivanovets* and the large landing ship *Cesar Kunikov* were hit. According to the Ukrainian side, about a third of the warships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet have been decommissioned - 25 ships and 1 submarine. At the same time, Ukraine launched long-range attacks in Crimea on Russian air defense, command centers, oil depots, and railway infrastructure. Ukraine practically pushed the Russian fleet out of Crimean ports. The Russian fleet has been forced to seek safety in the port of Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Territory, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

But even there, on the Russian Black Sea coast, at a great distance from Ukraine, there have been Ukrainian attacks with the help of drone boat, and recently an oil depot in the Russian city of Tuapse was set on fire. Thus, the Russian Black Sea Fleet has been strategically weakened, and this also affected the possibility of using the fleet as a platform for launching missile strikes on Ukrainian land.

Thanks to this, it has been possible to lift the blockade of the western part of the Black Sea, which allowed to resume the export of Ukrainian grain through three large ports around Odessa.

Socio-political situation in Russia.

Russia has turned into a full-scale dictatorship, where the opposition is severely oppressed, and any public support for peace with Ukraine is forbidden. As if to confirm this, on February 13, the Russian Court of Appeal hardened the sentence of the famous Russian sociologist and left-wing oppositionist Boris Kagarlitsky, who opposed the war in Ukraine, and replaced the sentence of the court of first instance in the form of a fine with a severe 5 years of imprisonment in a Russian prison. And following at February 16, he Alexei Navalnij, were murdered in a Russian prison colony. Navalny is known for his resistance against Russian war in Ukraine, his fight against corruption as well as being liberal.

Thus, contradictions are growing, and a real storm of problems are boiling in Russia. It is sufficient here to indicate beginning of a shortage of food products, in particular, eggs and inexpensive chicken meat disappeared from the shelves of Russian stores at the same time. In the winter of 2023-2024, which was not colder than usual, the heating system in Russia failed in many places, because it was outdated and there was a shortage of technical staff for its maintenance.

In March, we will see the presidential elections of Russia, in which Putin will once again will run for president. To the surprise of many, the peace-loving sentiments of the Russian civil population managed to manifest themselves in connection with the upcoming elections. Borys Nadezhdin, a kind of peace-loving and moderate candidate for ending the war, was nominated in the ballots against Putin. During few days hundreds of thousands of Russians stood in queues to sign for his nomination. Putin's nomination signatures were collected with administrative and command methods.

The authorities could not stand the information outburst of opposition and the Russian authorities blocked the registration of presidential candidate Boris Nadezhdin. They accused his supporters of falsifying

signatures. But the very process of nominating a presidential candidate for peace and collecting signatures in his support clearly showed that broad sections of Russians are against the war. In this situation, it is extremely important to support the peaceful and democratic opposition in Russia.

Due to the partly military failures in 2022, Russian Economy has been urgently rebuilt during the last year of 2023. It has been turned into a military economy, where production grows - but only for the needs of the war, not for the needs of the civilian population. In this sense, history repeats itself by analogy with the First World War. The civilian population in Russia suffers greatly - and there is an acute labor shortage in many sectors. Russia also suffered huge losses of men in the war - and in addition many people has left the territory of Russia in order not to be mobilized.

Putin's way of governing is extremely centralized, brutally repressive, highly bureaucratic, and extraordinarily corrupt.

Therefore, as reported by the German newspaper "Deutsche Welle", Russia has allocated a record 10.8 trillion rubles in the budget for military expenses and the war in Ukraine for 2024 (which, according to the official exchange rate of the Central Bank of Russia, is equal to a fantastic 118 and a half billion US dollars).

The socio-political situation in Ukraine.

In the first year of Russian aggression, Ukrainian society was able to consolidate, and President Zelensky, earned a significant increase in the trust rating against the background of an armed attack on the country from the outside. That happened even though he was unpopular before the war due to neoliberal economic policies. Hundreds of thousands of motivated Ukrainian volunteers went to assembly points. They joined the ranks of the post-Soviet Ukrainian army with the aim of protecting their cities, families and land, This was significantly strengthening and renewing it.

Practically without Western weapons, only thanks to the popular uprising of 2022, the Ukrainian army was able to repel an aggressive neighbor and freed significant territories around Kyiv, Kharkiv and

the Kherson region from the occupation forces. But the cost of the liberation raids was hundreds of thousands of human victims of Ukrainian volunteers who faced, with only old Soviet automatic weapons in the hands, an army many times advanced in artillery, tanks and aviation.

Against the background of the front-line successes of 2022 and fearing the strengthening of the uncontrollability of a large number of armed people from the ranks of the Ukrainian people, the beginning of 2023 was marked by legislative changes initiated from above. The bureaucratic leadership of the country and the armed forces decided to reformat the internal structure of the Ukrainian army, changed its nature from voluntary to compulsory and strengthened the caste division between commanding officers and powerless soldiers. This bureaucratic process, which took place in the first half of 2023, led to a significant demotivation of Ukrainian society and a new reality in the army, reviving the mothballed Soviet order in the worst sense of the word. At the same time, painfully slow deliveries of Western weapons and equipment for the counteroffensive operation of summer-autumn 2023 began. The result of the counteroffensive of the Ukrainian army of the new coercive model, despite the definite support of the equipment from NATO countries, was only insignificant territorial gains. They are incomparable in scale with the liberation operations of the first year of the war, when Ukrainian soldiers crushed a big part of the «second army of the world». The ground counteroffensive operation of the summer-autumn of 2023 essentially failed. There were several reasons for this:

- the bureaucratic reorganization of the army from voluntary to forced,
- slow non-systematic supplies of Western equipment of outdated models in limited quantities,
- the lack of supplies of modern Western aircraft for air superiority and long-range missiles for disorganization the rear of the Russian army,
- and, in addition, the self-confidence and self-will of the Ukrainian generals, encouraged by the unexpected successes of 2022 that got to the heads of the generals.

Meanwhile, the war, wartime and the long-term transport blockade in the Black Sea inexorably weakened the strength of the Ukrainian economy, especially since the neoliberal government of Zelensky-Shmygal used the moment of the war to strengthen the processes of privatization, reduction of social support, reduction of the number of civilian jobs and reduction of the rights of wage workers due to martial law. The situation was complicated by the presence of a large number of internal refugees from the occupied regions of Ukraine, a significant outflow of the population in the form of millions of Ukrainian refugees to the countries of the European Union, and the beginning of forced mobilization of citizens into the army. Ukrainian cities lost about a third of their population and has become depopulated. The number of volunteers for the army decreased to near zero, the mood in society changed to critical in relation to the own government and the continuous pressure for the population of Ukraine, which, unlike the army, no one provided economic support. The population of Ukraine has been left to its own devices and abandoned to basic survival in a country where production stopped and transport routes ceased to function, and the government engaged only in external political bravado and continued the policy of cutting the incomes of its own citizens. As a result, according to the announcement in mid-October 2023 of the scientist of the Kyiv Institute of Demography and Social Studies named after Lyudmyla Cherenko, 67% of Ukrainians are living in poverty, and in quantitative terms this amounts to 20 million people. The process inevitably worsens further, since the Ukrainian government continues its brutal neoliberal policy, and corruption does not disappear. A two- or three-fold increase in the prices of essential goods, rocket attacks on cities, daily air alarms, a two-year curfew, restrictions on the departure of men abroad, obstacles to the free movement of citizens around the country with the help of militarized checkpoints, a significant increase in gas and electricity tariffs and water supply - all this fell on the shoulders of the Ukrainian civil population. At the same time, the economy stopped altogether, and the country now lives in with military reports and information from the front, often informal from mouth to mouth, telling of vast human loses and dead's, lag of weapons an munition, and cause of that

dominance of the occupying forces in artillery, air force and armed vehicles.

Ukraine's difficult situation.

In view of all this and in connection with the injuries and deaths of the main part of volunteers, as well as problems with the allocation of financial support from the USA and the EU defending Ukraine against aggression, the forced mobilization of the civilian population has been enforced. The lack of weapons has to be compensated with manpower, especially since the losses on the Ukrainian side are not much less than those on the Russian side, and the losses must be replenished and the front held against the breakthrough of the Russian invaders into the depths of Ukraine. Repressive measures of army recruiters bordering on the law only led to public rejection, and the society is now leading a silent boycott of mobilization, which causes even more repressive measures on the part of the state. The parliament of Ukraine is considering an unprecedented draft law on the strengthening of forced mobilization and repressive measures of the state, which further aggravates the socio-political situation in Ukraine, and already clearly visible tendencies of the restriction of human rights and the power's desire for Russian-style totalitarianism. As a result, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian army, General Zaluzhny, was dismissed, to which the above-mentioned processes and the impending split of the Ukrainian generalship led to two factions - the "cabinet" and "field" factions, and the informal leader of the "field" faction, which grew stronger with the development of the war, General Syrsky, was appointed as the new commander-in-chief.

The front is still holding, mainly thanks to the incredible efforts and self-sacrifice of Ukrainian soldiers, but how long this will last is unclear, since there are considerable differences between the sides in demographics and a large deficit of ammunition and modern weapons. Ukraine's economy is in a deplorable state, and the long-term delay in financial and military support from the EU and the USA has a serious negative impact and portends a depressing military outlook.

Continuation of support for the defense of Ukraine against occupation.

The losses of troops on both sides are huge and according to various unofficial estimates (official information is classified and the parties report only the losses of the opposing side, waging a mutual disinformation war) amounting to a total of 300,000 to 1 million dead and missing people, and for the restoration of the destroyed cities in the east Ukraine, caused by Russia's attack, will need decades.

But there should be no doubt that we, the leftists, support Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in the fight against Russia's armed attack and advocate humanitarian and military support for the victims of aggression.

We continue to demand from Russia the immediate withdrawal of troops to the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. We demand an immediate end to Russian bombing. We consider Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an imperialist aggression and advocate systematic support for the Ukrainian people's struggle for independence and life.

Peace talks.

We are not against negotiations, and one day peace must come. But this does not mean that we are for a peace like the «peace» between Germany and Czechoslovakia of the 1938 model with the occupation of the territory of Czechoslovakia as a result of the «Munich peace treaty». Such a «peace» is only an excellent launching pad for strengthening the aggressor and thus a high-quality preparation for the start of a new war.

Negotiations should be conducted by Ukrainians with Russia, and the West should not put pressure on Ukraine. Until now, a cease-fire would mean the recognition that the conquering imperialist army can continue to hold what it has taken by force, and we are against it.

We are in favor of a future unified European security structure that will provide peace to all countries and parts of the continent.

Other imperial forces.

The world consists of various imperialist forces that are in a constant struggle for influence and resources. In addition to the Russian Federation, the EU and the USA are among them. A long history and

many reasons have led to the current disaster in Ukraine. Western countries missed a golden opportunity to achieve a lasting peace and build a peaceful European continent in the 1990s, when Russia was weakened and sought agreements. But this history does not justify Russia's current aggression. We are ready to participate in the discussion of the lessons of the past, and for this we should look for a common understanding.

In recent months, we have seen that the ongoing struggle in the USA between the Democrats and the Republicans has hindered US aid to Ukraine, and the situation has not yet changed. For the time being, the USA can not be considered a stable ally of Ukraine. At the same time, the package of US aid to Ukraine, which is subject to aggression, has for some unknown reason been connected with the package of military aid to the occupying army of Israel.

If Donald Trump is elected US president in November, support for Ukraine will become even less likely.

Probably, the ruling circles of the USA are not interested in the fastest ending of the war, because the ongoing war allows to cut off the economy of their European competitor, the EU, from inexpensive Russian energy resources. US support for Ukraine might be measured so that the war continues only on its territory and lasts as long as necessary, which cost the lives of Ukrainians and weaken the competitors of the American economy.

The European Union as a structure are for now also an unreliable ally for Ukraine, since the right-wing Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, blocked even minimal support for Ukraine for a long time, and the amount of aid allocated to Ukraine does not cover even a third of what is needed. There is also an economic and transport blockade of Ukrainian agricultural production by the Eastern European countries of Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, and the agricultural industry is currently one of the main ones for supporting the economy of the defending Ukraine. In addition the ruling circles of the EU understand very well that they will be able to accept and absorb into the European Union only such a Ukraine, in which the industry will be destroyed, the economy will be weakened and the

population will be significantly reduced. Therefore, the EU, most likely, is not interested in a quick end to the war and provides only dosed support to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people to preserve the buffer zone with Russia.

Support for Ukraine is a chance to avoid a big war.

However, after two years since the beginning of the armed aggression in Ukraine, there is still a lot of support, although not enough to stop the suffering, end the war and end the occupation. And this support of the Ukrainian people in the face of injustice and imperialist aggression must be strengthened and is shown systematically and continuously. Otherwise, Ukraine, exhausted by aggression, will fall, and the world community will be completely destroyed, and the world will then move with great risk on the slippery road of expanding the war with probably tens of millions of victims and refugees.