

Ukraine: Are Putin's Eggs Hard Boiled Or Still Too Soft?

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Ukraine's army and territorial defence have repelled the Russian army so far for three essential reasons: first, its regular army, territorial defence brigades and volunteer battalions have a stronger motivation and sense of purpose in defending their homeland than the invading Russian enemy; second, they have employed a superior war fighting strategy and better battlefield tactics, notable for the independent initiative and flexibility in action of their smallest units; and third, they have remodelled their technically inferior, lighter weapons to strike blows on a better armed but less agile foe.

The Ukrainian scholar and socialist activist Zakhar Popovych points out, in an article forthcoming on the Kyiv website *Spil'ne (The Commons)*, that the Ukrainians have combined successfully their Soviet era weapons with contemporary communications technology. Nowhere is this more evident than in their ability to frustrate Russian low level air force attacks, to destroy helicopters and fixed wing aircraft and to deny the Russians complete domination of the skies. Popovych attributes this third factor of success to the Ukrainian research and education system's retention and development of the fundamental science disciplines, training students in mathematics, physics and information technologies which they now deploy as soldiers, officers, designers and weapons' producers in this war. Russian arms have been unable to break the Ukrainians' resistance despite Russia's massive advantage in firepower and troop numbers. Adding now to these comparative strengths on the Ukrainian side is the increased provision of weapons and munitions by Western states. But will they be enough to bring the war to a halt or will it be a long, drawn out war of attrition and massive destruction taking place solely in Ukraine? How will Russian and Ukrainian societies and their economies fare on the way to exhaustion, in the struggle to keep sending soldiers, weapons, food and provisions to the front? There is a lesson on this prospect from the First World War, when Russia, the weakest of the imperialist adversaries, was the first to exhaust its economic capacity, to starve its civilians into revolt and cause its soldiers to refuse to fight any more for Tsar and Empire. The autocracy collapsed and revolution followed in 1917.

The new Russian offensive in today's war of aggression began around 17 April. Their army is sticking to the strategy of punishing the Ukrainian civilian population, while now concentrating its ground forces for an offensive to take all of Donbas and the Azov and Black Seas coasts westward to Odesa. It will not pause now: Russia refused an appeal from UN secretary general Antonio Gutierrez for a four day pause in fighting over the Orthodox Easter to allow humanitarian aid to reach besieged areas and for civilians to evacuate. These Christian holy days coincided this year with Jewish Passover and Muslim Ramadan, all of them celebrated by large communities in Ukraine and, indeed, in Russia. Russian authorities said that a pause would allow the "Kyiv nationalists" a chance to regroup and to create new "fake news" about the behaviour of Russian troops. Meanwhile, Russian artillery has destroyed the remaining food stores and five apartment blocks in and around Rubizhne and Severodonetsk, Luhansk oblast. In Kherson oblast the occupying army is trying to

conduct simultaneously a referendum, presumably on joining the Russian Federation, and a compulsory military mobilisation. Civilians have been told that no further humanitarian aid from the Ukrainian government will reach them and that Russian forces will respond to any fire on them from by firing on the unarmed civilian population.

The fiercest fighting continues to be in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, where the Russians want to break Ukrainian defensive lines and extend their control over the entire two oblasts. They are also moving heavy armour and troops in the direction of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, which was taken back from them by the Ukrainian side. In the region of Slobodzhanshchyna around Kharkiv the Russian forces are concentrating their fire on towns and cities they have also lost after first occupying them. They are moving more of their wounded soldiers into local hospitals and clinics, evidence of higher casualties and a lack of transport to evacuate them for treatment in Russia.

Mariupol is barely holding out. The Azovstal steel plant, where a thousand fighters including the 36th Marine Brigade, Interior Ministry troops, border guards and the Azov Regiment are protecting a still undetermined number of sheltering civilians, is the last stronghold in a totally pulverised city.

Serhiy Volynia, the 36th Marine Brigade commander, appealed for all of them, including the civilians, to be allowed to leave unharmed, to a third country. All they want now is their lives and to bring out the dead for burial. But they are not surrendering. Intensive artillery shelling, missile strikes and high level aerial bombing have continued all across all the country, the Russian government reporting more than one thousand strikes in a single day. They are targeting civilian housing, transport, economic production, processing and warehouses, as well as the armed forces. But the Ukrainian authorities still remain in control on the ground over much of the country.

According to British intelligence the Russians want to demonstrate significant progress by 9 May, the Day of Victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two. As they have done so throughout two decades of Putin's rule, they will mark Victory Day as a great achievement of the Russian people, as a Russian nationalist holiday of restored imperial glory. They would like to insert at least one small jewel from Ukraine on 9 May into their crown of conquest.

They will remain silent about the enormous contribution of the Ukrainian people to the Soviet victory in 1945, in which four and a half million of them fought in the Red Army, accounting for 40% of its total number. They will not acknowledge that Ukraine paid the heaviest price of all the Soviet Union's republics to defeat Nazi Germany in terms of the lives it lost and the material destruction it suffered. However, Putin's regime can no longer ignore the fact that the Ukrainian people retain more than one lesson from that victory in 1945 and they are using it to good effect to withstand yet another imperialist aggressor in 2022.

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