



Summary (As of 1430 Hrs UTC)

As of 12 April, Ukrainian ports remain closed.

As of 12 April, concerns are mounting for the crew of a stranded vessel in the port of Mariupol. On 11 April, Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian military had seized the crew of the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier SMARTA. Russian forces reportedly arrested 18 Ukrainian sailors, one Egyptian sailor and the wife of the master of the vessel who was onboard at the time. The vessel had been fired on before it was boarded. The current whereabouts of the crew remain unknown and the vessel remains docked at the western end of Mariupol's port. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the sailors were taken in the direction of Donetsk.



Advisory

MS Risk continues to advise any vessels currently within Ukrainian Ports to leave immediately, if it is deemed safe to do so. Vessels should ensure that they are broadcasting on AIS and clearly state their intentions across VHF. In the event that any vessel is challenged by Russian military vessels, they are advised to comply fully with instructions. MS Risk further advises all commercial operators at this time to avoid any transit or operation within the EEZ of Ukraine or Russia, notably in the vicinity of the Crimean Peninsula within the Black Sea.

On the Ground

Reports have emerged that Russia has used chemical weapons after a Ukrainian unit alleged that a chemical agent had been deployed in Mariupol. The reports emerged on Monday 11 April, with a number of countries, including the UK, US and the United Nations trying to verify reports that Russia has used chemical weapons in an attack on the besieged city of Mariupol. If confirmed, the use of chemical weapons in the war in Ukraine would mark a significant escalation in this conflict which is now in its second month. Ukraine's Azov regiment has reported that three soldiers were injured by "a poisonous substance" in an attack on 11 April. The Azov battalion, which has been involved in fighting in Mariupol and has strong ties to the far-right, wrote in a post on Telegram that Russian forces had dropped "a poisonous substance of unknown origin" during a drone attack at the city's large Azovstal metals plant. The post went on to say that the battalion's fighters suffered minor injuries, including shortness of breath. One injured man described a "sweet-tasting" white smoke covering an area of the plant after an explosion while another said that he immediately felt unable to breathe and had collapsed with "cotton legs." The reported incident occurred hours after a spokesperson for the Moscow-backed Donetsk People's Republic urged Russia to bring in "chemical forces" to the besieged south-eastern city. Eduard Basurin told Russian state TV that the remaining Ukrainian forces in Mariupol were entrenched at the Azovstal plant and that Russia should encircle it and "smoke out the moles."

While so far, no evidence has been presented to confirm the use of chemical weapons, Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar has disclosed that the government was investigating the allegations, adding that early assumptions suggested that phosphorous ammunition had been used. While phosphorous is not classified as a chemical weapon under the Chemical Weapons Convention, using it as an incendiary weapon near civilians would

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be illegal. On 12 April, pro-Russian separatist forces in Donetsk denied carrying out the attack. Western nations previously warned that the use of chemical weapons would mark a dangerous escalation of the conflict. They have pledged to take firm action if Russia carries out such attacks.

In other parts of the country, UK intelligence suggests that Russian forces are preparing for what is expected to be a large and more focused push on expanding their control in the eastern region of the country. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also warned in recent days that Russia has deployed tens of thousands of troops to “prepare new attacks.” The UK’s Ministry of Defence has also warned that fighting is likely to get worse in eastern Ukraine over the coming two to three weeks as Moscow redirects its attacks on that part of the country. The ministry disclosed that Russia is already focusing attacks on Ukrainian defenders near Donetsk and Luhansk in the east, with a renewed push towards the town of Kramatorsk. Further fighting is now taking place around Kherson and Mykolaiv, both of which are located near the Black Sea, east of Odessa. The British ministry also reported in its daily intelligence brief that Russian forces, which had retreated into neighbouring Belarus following the failed attempt to take Ukraine’s capital of Kyiv, are now rotating towards the east.

The UN has reported that to date, 1,892 civilian deaths and 2,558 injuries have been confirmed in Ukraine since the Russian invasion began on 24 February, noting that the death toll is likely to be higher, citing delayed reporting due to the armed conflict. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights added that most of the civilian casualties recorded were caused by the use of explosive weapons, including shelling from heavy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, as well as airstrikes and missiles.

Vladimir Putin has claimed that there is no doubt that Russia’s invasion in Ukraine will achieve its objectives, as he warned that Russia “cannot be isolated” from the West. According to a translation, Putin, who was speaking along Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko during a visit to the Vostochny Cosmodrome to mark Russia’s annual Cosmonautics Day, stated that “there’s no doubt that the goals and objectives in operation in Ukraine will be fulfilled,” adding that “Russia will not self-isolate and it cannot be isolated.”

Ukraine has reported that the Kremlin is plotting to carry out acts of terrorism on its own soil in a bid to turn public opinion against Ukraine. Ukrainian Defence Ministry chief Kyrylo Budanov has claimed that “mining and blowing up residential buildings, hospitals and schools in Russian population centres” are parts of the plans, adding that they are also planning “missile strikes on, and bombings of, Belgorod (near Ukraine’s eastern border with Russia) or a Crimean city (in the south of Ukraine). Budanov went on to say that it is possible that Russia will portray these acts as “justification for brutality against Ukrainian civilians” in Bucha, near the capital Kyiv, and the eastern city of Kramatorsk. There has been mounting evidence of atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians in areas previously held by Russian forces, including in Bucha. Ukraine has also accused Russian forces of deliberately targeting civilian targets, including the 8 April attack on Kramatorsk railway station.



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