

Behind Ukraine's military incursion in southeast Russia

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Russian authorities help residents during evacuation efforts at a railway station in Oryol, Kursk region, August 9, 2024. Source: Handout Russian Emergencies Ministry/Reuters

Kursk: A new grey area

Aug. 8 – For months, especially after the failure of the 2023 ground offensive, which prevented Ukraine from breaking through the Zaporozhye front in the direction of Crimea, Kiev has been looking for ways to extend the war to the territory of mainland Russia.

The war is already actively present in the lives of the population of Donbass, which Kiev lost a decade ago, and which since the start of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in 2014 has looked to Moscow for security from Ukrainian aggression.

Although not war, the conflict between the two countries has also marked the situation of the population of Crimea, protected from Ukrainian ground attacks, although not from drones or periodic missile attacks.

Unable to resort to military means against the disloyal population, which since March 2014 has been overwhelmingly in favour of secession from Ukraine and joining Russia, Kiev has opted for collective punishment in the form of power cuts and in particular by blocking the Crimean-North Canal, the main source of water for the peninsula, destroying agriculture, one of the sources of employment and wealth in the area.

Now, Kiev hopes to use more weapons and ammunition to show the people living in places like Sevastopol, Simferopol or Yalta the consequences of having rejected the coup d'état a decade ago and of having opted for Moscow at the time when the chaos in Kiev made separation possible.

However, the current situation is different from those attacks on people who identify themselves as Russian, who have obtained Russian citizenship, and who live in territories that have become part of the Russian Federation. Over time, and after months of pressure and lobbying, Ukraine has obtained explicit permission from the United States and other allies to use long-range weapons provided by the West against Russian military targets.

At first, only border areas were mentioned, but the approach is increasingly ambiguous, and there are few Ukrainian actions that Washington is prepared to condemn. This week it has been seen that Kiev has carte blanche to extend the war, not only to Russian territory but to civilian villages without the slightest tactical, strategic, or logistical importance.

And in addition to advancing on objectives that are important, especially the last gas pipeline that supplies gas to the European Union, Ukrainian actions openly seek to “make them feel what war is like.” Ukraine’s logic in dealing with civilians is one of revenge: It was Russia that started the war, therefore its population is as guilty as its government and must feel the consequences.

Months ago, President Volodymyr Zelensky had already prepared the ground for actions like those currently being carried out by Ukraine, claiming that “there are hardly any civilians” in the border area, which is blatantly false.

Shelling civilian areas

Much more is unknown than is known about the ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk, Russia, which have included shelling of civilian areas in Belgorod and attacks on Russian military bases, the latest in Lipetsk. Russian alternative channels, microbloggers as The Guardian has defined them to describe them as the best source for finding out the facts, remain highly critical of the actions of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, accusing them of having been surprised

by an action that should have been detected.

These same sources confirm the Ukrainian advance on the areas through which it broke in on Aug. 6: that Ukraine is trying to avoid certain fortified areas, cut off the main supply route, and entrench itself in positions similar to those it usually uses in Donbass, that is, in residential buildings.

And what is more, worrying for Russia is that Kiev's troops are able, either by means of drones or by having gained access to security cameras on highways, as journalists such as Aleksandr Kots fear, to detect the movement of Russian troops. In the last few hours, Ukraine has been able to destroy a Russian armored column, causing losses of replaceable material and non-replaceable personnel.

Russia has also demonstrated the destruction of a Ukrainian armored column, so the parties are accumulating losses in this fight that they will have to compensate for in the future.

"According to more reliable accounts from Russian military bloggers, the Ukrainian presence in a handful of villages was explained by the active use of reconnaissance groups in the Russian rear. Entering a village is not the same as controlling it," wrote opposition journalist Leonid Ragozin, who summed up what is known about the situation perfectly, adding skeptically that "when the dust settles and the front line takes shape, the occupied area will be considerably smaller than the 350 square kilometers claimed by Agentsvo based on initial reports two days ago."

Regardless of the level of control, the reality is that Ukraine has managed to create a new grey zone of military operations in a place that Russia did not expect to have to defend.

Rybar, one of the most critical sources of Russia's actions, published a video yesterday in which one could see the way in which Ukraine is fighting: Small mobile

groups break into an area, one of them fixates the Russian troops and the rest advance in different directions, causing a problem and serious risk of being trapped for the Russian troops.

This tactic is also harder to detect and cannot be destroyed with artillery as were the armored columns that were launched to the southern front to crash into the minefields and Russian artillery in Zaporozhye a year ago.

Ukraine thus manages to bring the war to Russia in a way that it can repeat along the extensive Russian-Ukrainian and even Belarusian-Ukrainian border, causing casualties, losses and enormous nervousness among the Russian establishment.

The fact that the Pyatnashka unit, formed in 2014 by Abkhaz as an international brigade of the first militia of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), has been withdrawn from the Donbass front may indicate two aspects.

On the one hand, its presence would not be necessary if Russia had sufficient strategic reserves. On the other hand, Pyatnashka's experience in the Donbass war, which has similarities to the way Ukraine is acting at the moment, means sending into that battle a unit that has become strong precisely in a conflict in which large formations were conspicuous by their absence and lighter mobile groups were key to resolving complicated situations.

Ceasefire mirage

The current situation, with attacks in Russia, new bombings of the Energodar nuclear power plant in Zaporozhye, and the emphasis on rearguard attacks, make it clear that the recent optimism about the possibility of starting negotiations and seeking a ceasefire was the mirage it always seemed.

The operation in Kursk and the cross-border attacks also show the change that has taken place in the war since 2022, when, after the lightning attack with which

Ukraine managed to recover its lost territories in Kharkov, Kiev did not continue to attack across the border, a natural extension of its offensive.

At that time, Ukrainian troops did not have the approval of their creditors and suppliers to invade Russia, although this possibility was already on the table. For example, Andriy Biletsky dreamed of it. Now, although in a sparse way that is possibly due to electoral needs, Washington has given Ukraine the green light “to defend itself” in the way it sees fit.

In this case, this defense involves not only attacking military targets but also purely civilian villages, where Ukraine feels no responsibility for the population, whose importance for Kiev decreases as one advances from the Dnieper to the south and east, something that is perfectly felt by those who have been attacked in Donbass and now also in Kursk.

“Russian military bloggers report that the regular army defending the Kursk region from the Ukrainian advance is being joined by local militias, i.e., men with hunting rifles. This, and not popular discontent and internal strife, is what the policy of bringing war to the Russian doorstep is most likely to produce,” Ragozin commented. Instead of the destabilization that Ukraine hopes to provoke, the journalist expects Kiev’s actions to be perceived as “an invasion by NATO, not by Ukraine.”

In Ukraine, born out of the “revolution of dignity” and the Maidan coup, defense is often carried out with the participation of units of questionable taste. The importance of the use of drones in this war has already become clear and this operation, whatever its real objectives, was not going to be an exception.

In this case, the Nightingale battalion stands out in this task, a thinly veiled reference to Nachtigall, the Nazi unit led by Roman Shujevich during the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The battalion is led by Yehven Karas, one of the

most radical leaders of the extreme right and whose associates have never hesitated to take justice into their own hands and kill for ideological reasons.

Without any need to hide, Ukraine sends to Kursk, the scene of the first battle that stopped the ground advance of the Nazi killing machine, a unit whose name pays homage to those who collaborated with that regime.

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Source: Slavyangrad.es

<https://slavyangrad.es/2024/08/10/una-nueva-zona-gris/>

