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New Russian conquest of Kyiv - a danger that can and must be avoided



Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, shared a strategic assessment with the entire world – an assessment which, according to the logic of warfare, should remain a closely guarded secret. “I have no doubt they (Russians) will have another go at Kyiv”, Zaluzhnyi told The Economist, and explained his conviction in detail.

As a matter of fact, a new Russian attack on Kyiv in the next few months, with the aim of occupying it, appears to be a realistic option, given the current situation on the front and a possible Russian response to the losses and retreats they have experienced in the past few months. Needless to say, Moscow cannot be expected to make any reliable signals for such plans.

The new attempt to take down Kyiv remains in the Kremlin's plans as an unfulfilled dream, as a goal that would end the nightmare Russia has been living in for almost a year. It was the first war goal with which the invasion of Ukraine was launched on February 24, and thus it has not been forgotten, despite the fiasco that unfolded in just a few weeks.

Demilitarisation and denazification (whatever that means) were Putin's original war goals, which he announced on February 24 while his troops had already been moving towards Kyiv with the main objective to destroy its "drug-addicted" leaders (Putin's words). All the subsequent strategic shifts and consolidation of the army around the four annexed areas in the east of Ukraine were only a partial satisfaction for the megalomaniacal conquest goals that Moscow has not abandoned.

Big attack on Kyiv is still irresistibly attractive to Moscow

Putin's possible new attack on Kyiv, with the desire for Kyiv to be occupied, would return the war to the very beginning and to its original goal – capturing the capital, overthrowing the government and installing a puppet pro-Russian administration, and thereby stopping the organised Ukrainian

defence.

This would be Putin's possible way out of a protracted war and further depletion of rather exhausted war resources – people, materials, money and the weakened economy due to sanctions. And that is why a new, big attack on Kyiv is still irresistibly attractive to Moscow.

This is supported by General Zaluzhnyi's calculation that in the period between January and spring, about 200,000 of the 300,000 recently mobilised Russian reservists would be ready to fight, and they could be used for a new offensive on the Ukrainian capital.

Although he did not mention it, a possible new attack on Kyiv would certainly include the fact that the majority of Ukrainian forces are engaged in the east of the country, in an attempt to preserve the front in the breakaway areas, and there would be great problems in reorienting the large defence forces to the protection of the capital. Also, the new Russian attempt to conquer Kyiv could include Belarusian forces, actively and on the front, not only as support from their territory, as in the first attack in February.

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The current Russian missile attack on Ukrainian cities, and especially the destruction of the infrastructure, as a result of which half of the population is suffering without electricity and water, is certainly aimed at destroying the morale of the army and the population. A possible assumption is that the stalemate in the east, with daily missile attacks on cities and infrastructure, with no hope of restoring heating, electricity and water supplies in the short term, would completely demoralise the Ukrainians to repeat the strong resistance they displayed in February and

March. We should not lose sight of the timing for the strong symbolic effect of this possible operation.

According to Ukrainian assessments, both by General Zalyzhnyi and by the head of diplomacy, Dmytro Kuleba, January and February will be the most probable time for a new broad Russian offensive. Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov, also said in remarks published in The Guardian on Thursday, that evidence was mounting that Russia planned a broad new offensive. "The second part of the mobilisation, 150,000 approximately ... takes a minimum of three months to prepare. It means they are trying to start the next wave of the offensive probably in February, like last year. That's their plan", Reznikov told The Guardian.

Why wouldn't Putin time his second attempt to occupy Kyiv right before the anniversary of the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, with the idea of declaring February 24, 2023 as the new day of Russia's victory, and maybe then triumphantly arrive in "liberated" Kyiv? Such symbolic and irrational motives should not be underestimated when talking about Russian military planning.

The entire Ukrainian operation rests on myths about the non-existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians as separate entities, about their Russian origin and about the Russia's need to finally take over its historical territories and people, because it considers them to be a "natural" part of Russia. Even if, after such a symbolic capture of Kyiv, resistance to the Russian invasion continued in Ukraine, Putin could declare victory in front of his subjects, and thus raise the weakened enthusiasm of his people deeply saddened by the tens of thousands of dead soldiers and the very difficult economic situation.

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offensive on Kyiv would be a desperate attempt by Putin to reverse the losing course of the invasion of Ukraine, to shorten its expected long and exhausting duration and to break the organised defence with a blow "to the head".

The risk is great, because in the event of a new defeat, such as Russia experienced at the very beginning of the invasion, there would be no salvation for the Russian operation. However, a new attack on Kyiv would undoubtedly be a cruel and destructive operation, because Russia would not spare victims to achieve such a goal, let alone victims and destruction on the Ukrainian side. Ukrainian military and political leaders are open about their assessments of what the enemy might do next and what they are possibly preparing for. There is only one reason why they are doing it, which is for Ukraine.

The pressure on the West not to hesitate too much in sending additional military aid to the Ukrainian defence so that even before the beginning of next year it could discourage a new Russian offensive, including the occupation of Kyiv. They can achieve this only if they do not allow the Russian troops to take a break, to consolidate and prepare for a new offensive wave, which the Russians are doing right now. If they succeed in this, the Ukrainian general's suspicions about a new Russian offensive may become a reality in a few months, and the Russian occupation may gain a new momentum. Western governments have the responsibility in their hands not to allow such a development. They simply need to respect what the Ukrainian fighters are asking of them. They must not hesitate.

If such assessments really come true, the new