

Welcome to the Teresan Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt. I am Colonel Markus Reisner, I am the head of the Research and Development Department, and today we want to take a look at how the current situation in the Donbass is shaping up: What do we know and what can we already say about the course of battle in the Donbass? First, a quick orientation: what happened in the last few weeks? In recent weeks, the Russian offensive in the north of Ukraine failed and there was a shift of Russian forces to the east. The Russian side expressed that their new objective was to encircle the Ukrainian forces in the Donbass. This means that the main effort of the last few weeks has basically been the Russian side's warfare in the Donbass, which the Ukrainian side is now trying to counter. An operation can be divided into three phases: The first phase is the so-called preparation or shaping phase. This preparatory phase has taken the form of the Russian side trying to deploy 50,000 to 60,000 soldiers, who were already weakened by the fighting in the Kiev area, over 1,000 kilometres by rail, to the east of Ukraine, and to set the conditions there for further operations. While this was happening - at the end of March/beginning of April – the Russians were also trying to prevent the Ukrainian side from bringing in forces in preparation for this battle. The decisive phase then began just about mid-April and that was the attempt by the Russian side to encircle Ukraine's forces along the line of contact. There were two options: An encirclement in depth, following the Dnieper, or a short encirclement. In the last few days we have been seeing this short encirclement, where they are trying to encircle these Ukrainian forces with a northern pincer grip and force deployment and a southern pincer as well as force deployment.

Now, at the beginning of May, this Russian attack is obviously not taking the course that was expected. Although we do see that there are successes on the Russian side at several points of the short encirclement, obviously the Ukrainian defence is so massive that the Russians cannot penetrate and advance into the depth. Why? Let's have a closer look. When we look at the Russian advance, we can see that they are proceeding according to the Russian doctrine. That means considerate deployment of forces which is coordinated with the various capabilities of artillery or air support. But even so, the Russian forces are not rapidly securing the terrain they need in order to then be able to advance into the depth. Let's pick four factors and look at the situation. The first factor is the terrain itself. We can see that in the central area of the encirclement the advance is happening in four places, and in parallel at least the beginning of another advance further to the south-west. Looking at the terrain, we can see that, firstly, the Ukrainian side has set itself up in several defense lines staggered in depth. That is, it can be assumed that in the encirclement itself, for example, there are at least three defence lines holding off the Russian side. The next terrain factor that limits the Russian side concerns vegetation and terrain structure. You can see it very well here: it took the Russians a while to be able to move out of this area, which is forested and also has a river flowing through it, in order to then develop the northern pincer grip - a situation like in the west, where the Dnieper is clearly the next strong line of defence. As a second factor, let's now look at the forces and compare them. On this sketch you can see that on the Ukrainian side a total of 27 brigade equivalents are employed. A brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces consists of approximately three battalions. That means we are talking about a total of 81 battalions. Regarding the Russian side, the Western media but also the Western intelligence services assume that 93 battalion tactical groups are deployed. That means we have a ratio of 81 to 93. If we look at the situation in the possible encirclement, we see a ratio of 48 to 68 battalions. This means that the ratio the attacker needs - namely 1:4 - is not met by the Russian side. This is because on closer examination one finds that the forces are roughly equal and the Ukrainian side also has the advantage that its forces are massively

entrenched. Another factor is time. In order to be able to develop an operation quickly and purposefully, it is quite crucial to act quickly. It was here where the problem of the Russians was, if you think back to the terrain: that they needed time at the beginning to be able to move out of the difficult terrain, to get ready for the attack, which was planned to take place southwards. This can be exemplified by Iziium. This is a small town nestled between two difficult parts of terrain, mainly forested, with the added challenge of a river - the Siverskyi Donets - flowing through this area. The Ukrainian defences follow this terrain. The first attack by the Russians was repelled. So it took some time before the Russian side was able to conduct an envelopment through this forested area, which is actually not suitable for the deployment of mechanised forces, laid two pontoon bridges and then continued to attack from here and actually managed to encircle and disrupt the Ukrainian side in the depth. Only then were the conditions established to get ready here for another attack towards the south. Of course, this took time, which was lacking in the conduct of the operation. After the encirclement and the laying of the pontoon bridges, it was possible to bring forces across the river into an attack position. This included main battle tanks on the one hand, but also motorised elements, and of course artillery. This attack position was expanded and the Russians started to launch the attack towards the south. The next factor that is decisive is information. The Russian side is constantly trying to create a common operational picture regarding the deployment of the Ukrainian forces. UAVs, in particular, are being used for this purpose. Time and again, the Ukrainian forces manage to shoot down these UAVs, such as the "Orlan-10" system, which makes it difficult for the Russians to actually create a common operational picture and, above all, to use their own combat support - i.e. artillery - effectively. The operational picture is particularly important for the Russian side, because the deployment of forces is naturally oriented towards the positioning of the Ukrainian forces. Here we see an example of a Ukrainian position. There are advanced fighting positions, but also here at the edge of the terrain with additional fighting positions and also shelters. The Russian side is now trying to reconnoitre these positions and strike them precisely with artillery. The relatively light Ukrainian forces, on the other hand, can hit and attrit the Russian side with relatively little effort when the Russian forces advance, for example with anti-tank weapons. This means that we can see that the Ukrainian side has used the last few years to entrench themselves. Time and again, the so-called mobile defence is used. This means that before a volley, the Ukrainians try to evade or to go into the shelters and then occupy their positions again only when the Russians form up and achieve a defensive success.

The Russians are trying to counter these tactics of the Ukrainians by massively using artillery. On the one hand, there is an increasing use of thermobaric rocket launchers of the type TOS-1 or TOS-1A, but also multiple launch rocket systems of the type BM-30 or BM-27. Only after this preparatory artillery fire they try to advance slowly with mechanised forces, supported by infantry. Of course, this brings the challenge that the surviving Ukrainian forces can attack the Russians again and again with anti-tank weapons.

We also know that the Ukrainian side has probably assembled forces in the depth if the Russian side should actually penetrate their lines in order to attack the northern or southern pincers. In order to do this, they need tanks on the one hand, but also infantry fighting vehicles, and on the other hand the ability to let these forces carry out an attack. That is why the delivery of the "Gepard" self-propelled anti-aircraft gun is so important. Because only by using the "Gepard" self-propelled anti-aircraft gun would it be possible to prevent the Russian side from stopping this attack. The Russian

side's advantage is that they have air superiority in the Donbass. This means that they suffer losses again and again, but they can strike where they want with their fighter aircraft and attack helicopters. This means that such a counterattack by the Ukrainian side can only work if it succeeds in preventing the Russian side from disrupting it. On the Russian side, the following are deployed: SU-25 ground attack aircraft, but also attack helicopters. Therefore, with the anti-aircraft systems of the Ukrainian side, it would be possible to neutralise them in such a way that this Ukrainian counter-attack could actually gain some terrain. The question now is: How will the situation develop in the coming weeks or who will possibly decide this battle in their favour? There are some factors that play an important role. I have already stressed the importance of artillery. On the one hand, we have massive artillery deployment on the Russian side, which the Ukrainians are now trying to counter. And it is clear that the arms deliveries from the West - whether they are towed artillery like the one from the USA, or motorised units on wheels or self-propelled guns - are aimed precisely in this direction: That is, to make artillery systems available to the Ukrainians in order to eliminate the Russian artillery systems. The very important second factor is that in principle we can see the following attempt on both sides: Namely, the Russian side is also trying to gradually attrit the Ukrainian side by bringing in additional artillery systems (on the one hand multiple launch rocket systems, but also large-calibre artillery, such as these 203 mm guns), in the hope of attriting them in such a way that they can carry out an appropriate attack that breaks through before the Western weapon systems arrive. There are, of course, other factors at play. For example: If the Russian side should actually succeed in breaking through to the north near Izium, for example, it could be that we will see the already announced use of kamikaze UAVs, which will then put an end to this Russian advance. But we must not forget that the Russian side is trying to prevent this. This means that the Russian side is not only concentrating on the Donbass, but is also trying to interrupt the supply of weapons to the Donbass, especially in the rear of the country. It is using its air force to do this, such as the MiG-31, with the hypersonic missile, or also the most diverse systems of ballistic missiles, but also of cruise missiles, which we have seen in action every day since 24 February. We have seen a good example of this intention in the last 10 days. Again and again, the Russian side has tried to hit the structure of the railway facilities in the depth of the country by attacking the transformer stations and substations of the Ukrainian side - in the hope of reducing transports due to the no longer available electrified network, because the Ukrainian side has to resort to diesel locomotives for it can no longer use its electric locomotives. The attacks in the last few days were particularly interesting, when, for example, there was a deliberate attempt to interrupt the transformer station supplying a tunnel in the Beskids. This means that it is the intention of the Russians to prevent these Western weapon systems from arriving in time for the battle in the Donbass by means of air interdiction. After this description of the situation, I would like to take a brief look at the past and try to use a historical example to draw conclusions about how this situation may develop in the coming days and weeks. The fact is that in the same area in 1943 there was already a battle of encirclement, namely the famous Battle of Kursk - the German "Citadel" operation that took place north of Kharkiv. Here, the Soviet side held a bulge towards the west and the German side tried to encircle the Soviet forces in a pincer movement from the north and from the south. The situation today is very similar: south of Kharkiv we also have a bulge, this time formed by the Ukrainian side, towards the east and the Russian side is trying to encircle the Ukrainian forces in two pincer movements from the north and from the south. If we look at the outcome of the Battle of Kursk in 1943, historians agree that there were essentially three factors that decided this battle for the Soviet side. The first factor was that the Soviet side knew exactly where and at what time the German attacks would take place – due to the decoding of a German cipher machine of the type "Enigma", it is assumed. The second factor was

that the Soviet side prepared very precisely for this attack for months and set up defensive positions in the depth, especially along the flanks, to defend against the German attack. The third factor was the doggedness of the Soviet soldiers in fighting and defending against these German attacks, and in the end the German side had to stop both of these pincer movements and the Soviet side was able to decide the battle in its favour. If we transpose this situation to the Donbass, we see that these three factors also apply here. The first factor is that the Ukrainian side obviously knows very much about the methods of the Russian attacks. The second factor is that the Ukrainian side has been preparing for years and has set up defence positions in the depth in anticipation of a Russian attack. The third factor is undoubtedly the doggedness of the Ukrainian soldiers who are defending virtually every metre of ground with the intention to attrit the Russian side so that this attack will finally fail and does not bring the success expected by the Russian side.

Finally, I would like to show you this video clip and a freeze-frame from this sequence. You can see here the situation of the Ukrainian soldiers in the Donbass. There is a line of trenches running from north to south. We can see craters from the impact of Russian artillery during the last few days, and we can also see the impact of a Russian artillery shell here. The Ukrainian soldiers we can see are trying to avoid these impacts by taking shelter in the trenches. This picture should show you that we have a situation that is very reminiscent of the First World War: Verdun 1916, i.e. a trench war, where both sides tried to attrit each other through massive use of artillery. The Russian side is trying to disrupt the Ukrainian positions in order to be able to attack. The Ukrainian side is trying to attrit the Russians so that the attack is no longer possible.

Now I have reached the end of my brief. Thank you very much for watching and until next time!