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ICC to seek arrest warrants for Russian officials over Ukraine war

МКС вимагатиме ордери на арешт російських чиновників через війну в Україні

Президент України В. Зеленський заявив, що від результатів боїв на сході України, зокрема в Бахмуті та навколо нього, залежатиме майбутнє України. Бахмут став центром російського вторгнення, і багатомісячна боротьба за нього стала найкривавішою піхотною битвою в Європі з часів Другої світової війни. Очікується, що Міжнародний кримінальний суд (МКС) домагатиметься арешту російських чиновників за примусову депортацію дітей з України та напади на цивільну інфраструктуру, що стане першою міжнародною справою про військові злочини, пов'язаною з вторгненням. Хоча звинувачення може поглибити дипломатичну ізоляцію росії, незрозуміло, які посадовці можуть стати мішенню. Тим часом українські військові заявили, що відбивають атаки біля Кременної, на північ від Бахмута, а деякі військові аналітики сумніваються, чи оборона Бахмута є найкращою стратегією для України.

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/icc-to-seek-arrest-warrants-for-russian-officials-over-ukraine-war-20230314-p5cryk.html>

Ukraine's future is hinging on the outcome of battles in the east, including in and around Bakhmut, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

The ruined mining town of Bakhmut has become the focus of Russia's invasion, with the months-long fight for it becoming Europe's bloodiest infantry battle since World War II.

"It is very tough in the east. Very painful," Zelensky said in a video address that he has held nightly since Russia launched its invasion more than a year ago.

"We have to destroy the enemy's military power. And we shall destroy it."

Separately, in what would be the first international war crimes cases arising from the invasion, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was expected to shortly seek the arrest of Russian officials for forcibly deporting children from Ukraine and targeting civilian infrastructure, a source with knowledge of the matter said.

Ukraine and its Western allies say Russia has committed "crimes against humanity" by targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Russia denies that.

It was unclear which Russian officials the prosecutor might seek warrants against or when they might be issued, but they could include the crime of genocide, the source said.

Moscow would be certain to reject arrest warrants against its officials, but an international war crimes prosecution could deepen its diplomatic isolation over a campaign that has killed thousands of civilians and driven millions from their homes.

Russia, however, appeared on the cusp of one long-sought diplomatic breakthrough with sources telling Reuters that Chinese President Xi Jinping could visit Moscow as soon as next week.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The Kremlin said it had nothing to announce yet.

On the battlefield, Ukrainian soldiers said they were repelling attacks near Kremenno, north of Bakhmut.

In a forest some 8 kilometres from the front, cannons boomed, targeting enemy positions to the north-east. Explosions rumbled constantly in the distance.

"Two or three weeks ago the fighting was at its peak but it has calmed down a bit," said Mykhailo Anest, a 35-year-old medic. "There is a lot of artillery and mortar fire."

Trench warfare, described by both sides as a meat grinder, has claimed a huge toll in Bakhmut, in Donetsk, with both sides reporting hundreds of enemy troops have been killed.

Russia says taking Bakhmut would open a path to capture all of Donetsk, a central war aim. Ukraine, which has decided to defend Bakhmut rather than withdraw, says wearing out the Russian military now will help its counter-offensive later.

But not every military analyst is convinced that defending Bakhmut is the best strategy for Ukraine.

“As of now we have information that Ukraine is sending reserves to Bakhmut that underwent training in Western countries. And we are suffering losses among reserves that we intended to use for counter-offensives,” Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov said.

“We could lose here everything we wanted to use for those counter-offensives.”

Ukrainian military historian Roman Ponomarenko said the threat of encirclement was “very real”.

“If we simply give up Bakhmut and withdraw our troops and equipment, nothing terrible can happen ... if they seal the ring, we will lose men and equipment,” he told Ukrainian radio NV.

The ICC prosecutor’s office declined to comment. Russia’s Defence Ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Konstantin Kosachyov, deputy speaker of Russia’s upper house of parliament, said the ICC had no jurisdiction over Russia since it withdrew its backing in 2016.

“The ICC is an instrument of neo-colonialism in the hands of the West,” he said.

Russia has pushed back against previous accusations that it had forcibly moved Ukrainians.

But it has not concealed a programme under which it has taken thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, but presents it as a humanitarian campaign to protect orphans and children abandoned in the conflict zone.

Ukraine says thousands of deported Ukrainian children are being adopted into Russian families, housed in camps and orphanages, given Russian passports and brought up to reject Ukrainian nationality.

The UN genocide convention defines “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” as one of five acts that can be prosecuted as genocide.