



By: *The Editorial Board*

# The destruction of the Kakhovka dam - a war crime as an introduction to a new Russian strategy in Ukraine



As with any other crime, the greatest suspicion falls on those who had the means, opportunity, and motive to commit it. When it concerns the destruction of the Kakhovka dam on the Dnipro River, every finger points at Russia; none at Ukraine.

Officials in the West are reluctant to name Russia as responsible for destroying the dam and causing a humanitarian disaster in occupied eastern Ukraine until they have solid evidence.

On this occasion, 80 inhabited areas, including the city of Kherson, were threatened by floods, tens of thousands of people were left without drinking water, and the safety of the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, Zaporizhzhia, was also threatened, even though its reactors had been shut down earlier.

Russia has had control over the Kakhovka dam for over a year and has exclusive access. Therefore, only Russia had the means and the opportunity to blow it up because an attack by the Ukrainian army could not cause that much damage and destruction.

The motive exists only on the Russian side. It aims to submerge a significant area of land to thwart the expected and announced offensive of the Ukrainian forces.

With the region around the Kakhovka dam submerged, Ukrainian troops stationed on the west bank of the Dnipro River cannot plan and execute a breakthrough to the opposite bank, occupied and controlled by the Russian military.

## Hydraulic warfare

By destroying the dam and submerging a huge area Russia is implementing hydraulic warfare, an ancient war technique that has been used by many people in history - from the Dutch in the 16th century to China in the 1930s against the Japanese, and the demolition of dams and reservoirs in Germany in World War II.

The Soviets also used this method to slow

down or stop the advance of the Nazis.

Almost all such operations were defensive, to prevent the enemy advance, which has been the case with the plans of the Russian occupation forces in Ukraine.

While the search is on for a "smoking gun" that would prove that Russian forces were behind the disaster on the Dnipro, there is already talk of new material to extend the list of war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine.

## Demolition of the dam is a war crime

According to the Geneva Convention (Article 56 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I), the destruction of facilities such as the Kakhovka dam or the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is prohibited, and considered a weapon of mass destruction and a war crime.

Such facilities protected by international humanitarian law must not be subject to attack "even where these objects are military objectives if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population."

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, has no doubt that the perpetrator was Russia and that this is "the largest man-made environmental disaster in Europe in decades".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres hesitated to mention Russia as the perpetrator, but did not suggest that it was a crime when he said the dam destruction in Ukraine was a "monumental humanitarian, economic and environmental catastrophe".

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, however, had no such hesitations - "the destruction of civilian infrastructure clearly qualifies as a war crime - and we will hold Russia and its proxies accountable".

## A new phase in Russian aggression

Such accusations will not discourage Russia from denying all responsibility for the dam destruction, and later from repeating a similar operation.

The series of events where it is reasonably assumed that Russia committed war crimes is lengthy and well-documented. The dam destruction would be the final point for the Russian war campaign.

The demolition of the Kakhovka dam could mark a new phase in Russian aggression against Ukraine, meaning a new strategy more oriented towards retaliation than the achievement of war goals.

With the earlier bombing of electric power facilities, Russia has shown readiness to retaliate for Ukrainian attacks on targets in Crimea.

The destruction of critical infrastructure has been raised to an even higher level with the Kakhovka dam destruction, and hinted at the turning of Russian goals towards the greatest possible disabling of Ukraine's vital systems and the complete paralysis of everyday life.

"Terrorists don't stop unless they are stopped. They don't negotiate with anything except force. They cause huge catastrophes without regret. Lasting peace in Europe requires a Ukrainian victory both on the battlefield and in court. Nothing else will work", said Lithuania's Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on the occasion of the demolition of the Kakhovka dam.