

Information and analytical reference sheet

Issues of water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol

General overview

The water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and Sevastopol via the North Crimean Canal was cut off in May 2014 following the decision of the State Agency of Water Resources of Ukraine which was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This was preceded by a “water blockade” organized by representatives of civil society (the main entities behind the blockade were representatives of the Crimean Tatar movement, right-wing and center-right political movements as well as paramilitary groups), as well as a number of technical and organizational problems (the impossibility of performing maintenance on the Canal in the NGCA).

According to Ukraine’s State Agency of Water Resources (see **Appendix 1**), before 2014, over the past decade, the North Crimean Canal annually supplied over 1 billion cubic meters of Dnieper water to the Crimean peninsula, which amounted to 85% of the total water consumption in the ARC.

In 2013 the North Crimean Canal supplied 1.134 billion cubic meters of water to the ARC, including for the following needs:

- irrigation - 952 million cubic meters (83.95% of the water supply to Crimea);
- household needs of the population (filling of water reservoirs) - 103 million cubic meters (9.08%);
- fisheries - 19 million cubic meters (1.68%);
- other needs - 60 million cubic meters (5.29%).

Consequently, most of the North Crimean Canal’s supply served the needs of ARC’s agroindustrial and industrial sectors.

Crimea’s own water resources average at 910 million cubic meters per year, diminishing during particularly dry years to 430 million cubic meters.

Projected groundwater reserves are estimated at 445.5 million cubic meters per year. To regulate water runoff on the peninsula, 1,994 ponds and 15 reservoirs were built, with a total useful volume of 470.7 million cubic meters per year.

According to state records on water usage, the ARC has been using about 101-105 million cubic meters of water annually for drinking and household needs, which is about 9 times less than the total local runoff (4 times during dry years) and projected groundwater reserves. Thus, the drinking and household needs of Crimea’s population and water users can be satisfied by local runoff even during dry years.

Also, according to experts, one person consumes about 52-54 cubic meters of water per year. Thus, even taking into account the increase in Crimea’s population as a result of Russia’s deliberate policy of moving its citizens to the temporarily

occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol, local water resources are sufficient for the household needs of Crimeans.

According to the National Institute for Strategic Studies, it was Crimea's agriculture that suffered the most from the cutting off of the water supply via the North Crimean Canal (see **Appendix 2**):

- an almost 10 times decrease in agricultural areas: from 140 thousand hectares (2013) to 11-13 thousand hectares (2015 - 2017);
- the volume of water used to irrigate agricultural land decreased to 14 million cubic meters (as of 2015);
- the reduced land irrigation has led to the decline of entire branches of agriculture, such as rice cultivation, animal husbandry, etc.;
- the decline of agriculture in Crimea's steppe regions has caused internal migration processes.

Construction of a capital supporting structure (dam) on the North Crimean Canal (107th kilometer of the Canal) near the Kalanchak checkpoint

Since the outset of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine and temporary occupation of the ARC and Sevastopol, Ukraine's State Agency of Water Resources has been unable to fully use a section of the North Crimean Canal (almost 150 km of which are located in the ARC).

The adoption by the so-called "State Council of the Republic of Crimea" of the so-called "decision" no. 1899-6/14 of 2 April 2014 "On the Nationalization of Enterprises, Organizations and Property of the State Agency of Water Resources of Ukraine located in the Republic of Crimea" disrupted operation of the North Crimean Canal as an integral water supply complex.

Thus, in accordance with sub-paragraph 4, paragraph 3 of the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine no. 1238-VII of 6 May 2014 "On Additional Measures to Strengthen the Defense Capability and Security of the State", a decision was made to meet in full the need for water resources in Kherson Oblast within the North Crimean Canal's area. This was done by building a temporary dam on the 91st kilometer of the canal, with the construction completed on 10 May 2014.

In order to ensure uninterrupted water supply via the Canal to Kherson Oblast and to carry out the orders of the Verkhovna Rada and the Government of Ukraine, a capital supporting structure on the Canal's 107th kilometer has been under construction since 2015.

Dam construction is provided for by the Procedure for the use of funds, rural settlements and agricultural lands, including in the basin of the Tisza River in Zakarpattia Oblast, approved by the Resolution of Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers no. 137 of 23 February 2011 and amended on 17 June 2015.

The party that ordered the project and is responsible for its implementation is the State Enterprise "Odesa Joint Directorate for the Construction of Water Management Facilities", which organized public tenders and determined the

project's deadlines. After its completion and commissioning, the dam is to be transferred to the North Crimean Canal's administration (see **Appendix 3**).

Based on the positive conclusion of the comprehensive state valuation no. 16-1125-17 of 13 July 2017, the total estimated cost of construction is 71,675.84 thousand UAH.

As of 1 May 2020, 50,197.4 thousand UAH worth of work was complete. This corresponds to the first stage of construction as defined in project documentation.

However, no funds were provided from the state budget in 2017-2019, which has been causing a gradual increase in the cost of construction. In order to bring the cost of construction in line with current prices, adjustments to the project documentation have been made, with the latter being currently under review.

According to the designer's calculations, the current total estimated cost of construction is 76,983.57 thousand UAH, which leaves another 26,786.17 thousand UAH necessary for completion. The project is currently 70% complete (see **Appendix 4**).

Potential risks and consequences that would arise from the restoration of water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol before full deoccupation of the Crimean peninsula:

- if water supply is resumed before full deoccupation, it could potentially complicate and delay deoccupation and reintegration as well as lead to further depletion of Crimea's natural resources and continued oppression of Ukrainian citizens living in the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol.
- possibility of protests among various social groups (representatives of the Crimean Tatar movement, right-wing and center-right movements, political opposition, NGOs, members of the military and combatants, intellectuals, students, farmers of Kherson Oblast) and general socio-political destabilization of the situation (possibility of mass riots) in the country. Further divisiveness in society.
- possibility of another "water blockade" of Crimea and actions aimed at disrupting the North Crimean Canal.
- lower financial and economic costs of keeping the Crimean peninsula for the occupying power.
- indirect recognition of the attempted annexation of the Crimean peninsula. Setting a precedent for the attempt to legitimize Russia's occupying administration.
- creating favorable conditions for further militarization and alteration of Crimea's demographic composition.
- supporting the incorporation and integration of the Crimean peninsula into Russia.
- weakening the international coalition of partner countries against Russia's aggression in Ukraine as well as the international political and diplomatic

pressure on the aggressor state. Withdrawal of special international and other sanctions. Reduced weight of the Ukraine issue at the international level. General weakening of Ukraine's positions on the international arena.

- reduced influence for Ukraine in the field of policy on deoccupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories.
- decreased trust in the current government.

Possible scenarios of Russia's actions if water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol is not resumed before full deoccupation of the Crimean peninsula:

1. *Opening of a "Southern Front" and creation of a land corridor between Crimea, the NGCA of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and Russia; invasion of Kherson Oblast's southern regions.*

Military aspect. Currently, the number of formations and ground forces with heavy armored vehicles and artillery systems in Crimea is limited in terms of the diversity of military forces, which prevents them from conducting large-scale offensive operations without significant support by units of Russia's Southern Military District. Thus, Russia's advance from the south is likely only in the event of a full-scale offensive against Ukraine on several fronts. However, even then the "Southern Front" would only be of secondary importance.

At the same time it should be noted that the priority task for Russia's military and political leadership in the occupied Crimea is to make their forces diverse enough to form a shock army - a self-sufficient military formation capable of conducting large-scale offensive operations even without reinforcements from Russia's Southern Military District, as evidenced, in particular, by the gradual change in the proportions of the types of military forces in Crimea (given the current dynamic, the above goal can be achieved in the medium term).

Thus, in 10-15 years the likelihood of invasion into the southern regions of Kherson Oblast will rise significantly.

Political aspect. In terms of politics, the creation of a "corridor" will require direct annexation of the so-called "DPR/LPR" by Russia, which is not tactically beneficial to Russia. Under the current conditions, indirect control over the "quasi-republics" is much more useful to Russia as they serve to wear out and destabilize Ukraine. This state of perpetual conflict is a tool that Russia uses to influence Ukraine and interfere with its internal affairs. In addition, indirect control over the temporarily occupied territories in Ukraine's east minimizes Russia's responsibility for armed aggression and allows it to avoid spending budget funds on these territories directly.

Thus, this scenario is unlikely at the moment.

2. *Full-scale offensive against Ukraine because of the water situation in Crimea.*

At present, full-scale armed aggression by Russia in connection with the water crisis on the Crimean peninsula is politically unjustified as it could weaken the current political regime in Russia. There's also the current unfavorable epidemiological and economic situation in Russia to consider (in particular, the global decrease in oil prices), as well as Russia's internal political crisis due to the transition of power. In these circumstances, new international sanctions for armed aggression are extremely undesirable for Russia.

The probability of a full-scale offensive against Ukraine will increase significantly by the end of Putin's presidential term. However, such a step would require consensus among Russian elites (central, regional, military and oligarchic).

3. Recurrence of "hybrid" takeover scenarios leading to the occupation of new territories in southern Ukraine

The Command of Ukraine's Naval Forces considers as a likely scenario of "creeping" occupation the armed aggression by sea combined with the use of "hybrid warfare".

In the event of an offensive along the Black Sea coast, Russia is likely to use the "Crimea scenario", deploying its troops and special forces at Ukrainian coastal cities. Russia's military-political command's goal here would be to try and cut off the bases of the Ukrainian military, southern airports and sea trade ports with the help of pro-Russian population.

This scenario could occur in the event of general socio-political destabilization in Ukraine (mass riots, events similar to what happened during autumn 2013 - winter 2014, etc.).

4. Continued "hybrid pressure" on Ukraine as part of Russia's ongoing "hybrid aggression"

Russia will use the full spectrum of methods of military-political pressure and "hybrid influence" on Ukraine in order to have water supply to the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula restored. In particular, the most likely methods are: keeping this issue in the center of public discourse, trying to bring this issue to international forums, attempting to establish indirect mechanisms for bringing water to Crimea (for instance, through private companies), causing escalation of tensions in eastern Ukraine and the Azov-Black Sea region, conducting demonstrative military exercises, stepping up restrictions on civil trade shipping in the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, trying to solve the water supply issue through its agents in Ukraine and other countries, committing sabotage and terrorist acts at critical infrastructure facilities (such as dams or the North Crimean Canal).

This scenario appears to be one of the more likely ones.

Recommendations and suggestions

1. Prevent restoration of water supply (both direct - at the state level - and indirect - through “shadow schemes”) to the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol until full deoccupation of the Crimean peninsula.
2. Refuse to settle the armed conflict in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts by agreeing to restore water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol before full deoccupation of the Crimean peninsula.
3. Strive for socio-political consensus and implement a consistent and balanced state policy, including in the information sphere, on the inadmissibility of restoring water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol before full deoccupation of the Crimean peninsula. Reduce attention toward this issue in the information sphere and in the media.
4. Take measures to improve the defense capabilities of Ukraine’s south, Kherson Oblast in particular, taking into account all possible scenarios of the potential escalation of Russia’s armed aggression through the opening of a “Southern Front”, in order to increase defense against localized attacks as well as full-scale military operations with the use of aircraft, navy and heavy armaments, in particular by improving land defense to protect against attacks from the sea and air, modernizing air and missile defense systems, building fortifications, developing military infrastructure and improving the logistics potential of infrastructure in southern Ukraine.
5. Optimize mechanisms of deterrence against the aggressor state and implement an asymmetric counteraction model by focusing funding not just on long-term large-scale rearmament projects but also on the production and procurement of arms which would be effective in the short term (electronic warfare and smart weapons); developing territorial defense systems as well as making use of reserve service (forming reserve units).
6. Prepare and adopt a state program for the development of the Naval Forces to prepare them for countering threats in the Azov-Black Sea region.
7. Conduct regular military exercises in the Black Sea region with the involvement of multiple types of troops together with NATO partners (in particular with NATO member states from the Black Sea region).
8. Step up security measures at critical infrastructure facilities.
9. Step up counterintelligence efforts within the state authorities of Ukraine responsible for: a) developing and implementing state policy on the deoccupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol; b) deciding on whether to restore water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol before Crimea’s deoccupation.
10. Step up the efforts of Ukraine’s diplomatic missions abroad aimed at preventing Russia’s attempts to bring up at international forums (official and unofficial ones) the idea of restoring Crimea’s water supply before full deoccupation. Also,

condemn the actions of the Russian Federation and its occupying administration in Crimea aimed at altering the peninsula's demographic composition.

11. Take measures to improve irrigation and land reclamation in the southern regions of Kherson Oblast under conditions of the cut off water supply to the temporarily occupied territory of the ARC and Sevastopol.
12. Complete the construction and transfer of the water management structure on the North Crimean Canal's 107th kilometer (dam near the Kalanchak checkpoint) to make it possible to restore water supply to the Crimean peninsula after deoccupation.

Author: Anton Tverdovskyi, Chief Consultant, Service for Reintegration and Deoccupation of the ARC, Mission of the President of Ukraine in the ARC.