

****Titre :** Russia's Advance Towards Donbas and Kharkiv: Strategic Objectives and Challenges Ahead**

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Russia is currently attempting to seize the strategic Ukrainian town of Pokrovsk, a logistical hub in the Donetsk region, by November 2024. However, its forces are a year behind schedule due to tenacious resistance from Ukrainian defenders. Russia's ultimate objectives seem to be expanding control over Donbas and moving towards Kharkiv.

In the Donbas region, Russia has been employing various tactics such as depopulation of towns near the frontline and missile attacks on energy infrastructure to wear down Ukrainian defenses. Meanwhile, the town of Pokrovsk has faced severe shelling and a forced exodus of civilians. Despite these efforts, Ukraine's military has managed to hold its ground, largely due to European support in supplying munitions.

The strategic objective beyond Donbas appears to be Kharkiv, as Russia seeks to consolidate control over eastern Ukraine and potentially threaten the capital Kyiv. However, this advance faces several challenges, including Ukrainian resistance, damage to Russian energy infrastructure caused by Ukrainian counterattacks, and the potential for European economic sanctions.

European powers could play a significant role in addressing these challenges. By engaging air threats over Ukrainian airspace that approach NATO's border and delivering in-country military training, they could bolster Ukraine's defenses and enhance its capacity to resist Russian aggression. Additionally, curbing Russia's shadow fleet, aging vessels used for oil transportation through the Denmark Strait, would put economic pressure on the Kremlin.

The winter of 2025-2026 could prove pivotal in this conflict. With Russia producing more missiles than ever before and Ukraine's damaged energy grid struggling to power the entire country, there is a risk that Russia may coerce Ukraine into submission in 2026. However, if Europe can apply sustained pressure on Russia's economy and energy infrastructure, a ceasefire could be achievable by the end of next year.

In conclusion, while Russia's strategic objectives in eastern Ukraine are clear, they face numerous challenges. European powers have a crucial role to play in bolstering Ukraine's defenses and applying economic pressure on Russia to encourage a negotiated settlement. The coming winter could determine the outcome of this conflict.