

## Ukraine’s gamble doesn’t halt loss of turf

Russia continues to grind forward in the east after Kyiv’s incursion in Kursk

BY SIOBHÁN O’GRADY, TETIANA BURIANOVA AND SERHIY MORGUNOV

SUMY, UKRAINE — More than three weeks into the plan by Ukraine’s military chief to turn the tide of the war by sending troops into Russia, much looks as if it’s proceeding as intended — except that Russians are still advancing inside Ukraine.

Russia’s offensive continues even with hundreds of its soldiers in Ukrainian prisons and hundreds of square miles of its sovereign territory under Ukrainian control.

If the bold plan by Kyiv’s Gen. Oleksandr Syrsky fails, Ukraine could lose many well-trained soldiers and much of the foreign equipment it has deployed to Kursk, as well as land in its own east, where Russian troops — who far outnumber Ukraine’s — persist in their grinding assault on the key transit hub of Pokrovsk.

Analysts say it is not at all clear what the end game is — or if Syrsky’s gamble will pay off.

Nico Lange, a former German defense official who is now a fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, noted that the incursion into Russia gave Ukraine “tangible gains,” including prisoners of war and a much-needed morale boost. But Russian President Vladimir Putin is downplaying the incursion and keeping the focus on Ukraine’s east.

SEE UKRAINE ON A19

In Kharkiv: Russian glide bombs kill six and injure nearly 100. A19



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

Sgt. 1st Class Dane Beaston, center, waits for visitors after giving a Humvee tour at the Ocean County Fair in Bayville, N.J., in July. Beaston runs the Army recruiting station in Toms River, which has dispatched team members around the Jersey Shore.

## Selling America: The Army’s fight to find recruits in an angry and divided nation

TOMS RIVER, N.J. — Sgt. 1st Class Dane Beaston had endured the stress, frustration and disappointment of one of the worst recruiting slumps in the half-century history of the U.S. military’s all-volunteer force.

Now he was trying to do his part to end it. It was early June, and his central New Jersey recruiting station was on the hook to find seven recruits who were willing to join the Army — the station’s highest monthly quota of the year. Beaston scanned a color-coded list of about 30 prospects on the station’s radar.

“That’s not nearly enough,” the 31-year-old sergeant told his recruiters as the month began.

Political, economic and social crises have made it difficult to find citizens willing to serve

BY GREG JAFFE AND MISSY RYAN

If Beaston and his team didn’t deliver, he knew his Army career was in jeopardy. “You can do all the work 100 percent of the time, but if you don’t find the right person, you’re out of luck,” he said.

The unrelenting pressure Beaston and his six-person team were feeling each month reflected the high stakes for the military and the country. Each of the services — except for the Marine Corps — missed its 2023 recruiting goal. The Army, which had come up short two years in a row, was aiming to bring in 55,000 recruits in 2024 — about 10,000 fewer than last year’s missed goal. The new target wasn’t determined by the threats facing the country, the

SEE RECRUITERS ON A10

## In Gaza, a sprint to blunt polio

VACCINE CAMPAIGN SET TO START TODAY

The aim: Shots for young during pauses in fighting

BY LENA H. SUN AND HAJAR HARB

The World Health Organization and its partners are gearing up for an ambitious mass vaccination campaign in the Gaza Strip after a baby boy contracted the Palestinian enclave’s first case of polio in 25 years.

“All his limbs are now paralyzed,” the boy’s mother, Nevin Abu al-Jidyan, said in a telephone interview last week from her tent in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza. “The left side is more rigid. He is even unable to bend over. I cannot even help him sit.”

The campaign was set to begin Sunday and would roll out in phases, with both Israel and Hamas agreeing to brief “humanitarian pauses” to allow the vaccinations to take place. Health-care workers in southern Gaza on Saturday inoculated a small number of infants as a symbolic start to the immunizations, which the local health ministry said includes children up to age 10.

Polio’s reemergence in Gaza poses a looming threat to the war-torn territory and adjacent regions, health and humanitarian experts said. The highly infectious and deadly disease affects the nervous system and is a significant challenge to contain because the majority of people infected either have no symptoms or mild flu-like symptoms, potentially spreading the virus unknowingly.

SEE POLIO ON A18

### ELECTION 2024

## Black support for Harris in N.C. fogs up over abortion

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.

CHARLOTTE — Vice President Kamala Harris spent the second anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in this Southern city, comparing the people fighting for abortion rights today to the civil rights activists who refused to leave Whites-only lunch counters six decades ago.

“We — all of us — are now called upon to advance the promise of freedom, including the freedom of every woman to make decisions about her own body, not the government telling her what to do,” Harris said in June.

But once Air Force Two had flown back to Washington and Democrats here began urging their family, friends and neighbors to vote for her and other Democratic candidates, their cold calls to strangers and polite post-church conversations rarely touched on abortion, Democratic volunteers say.

“We know that’s not a winner down here,” said Rosemary Lawrence, a longtime Democratic activist who is on the social justice

SEE ABORTION ON A9

Reproductive rights: GOP careens between its base, swing voters. A8



THE WASHINGTON POST

## The hidden life of wildflower seeds

BY SARAH KAPLAN, ALICE LI AND AUDREY VALBUENA

There is a secret landscape beneath every field of wildflowers; a place inhabited by beings just as varied and beautiful as the blossoms above.

They are pockets of promise and reservoirs of resilience. The fates of entire ecosystems are contained within their tiny, tenacious forms.

This is the world of seeds. Buried in the earth, almost too small to see, seeds have long been underestimated — dismissed as mere inert specks, barely even

Beneath our feet lies a world of endurance, beauty and fragility

A grid of seeds as seen through a microscope. They are a variety of textures, colors and shapes. No two seeds look the same.

considered alive.

Yet the more closely researchers have examined these embryonic plants, the more they have learned about their dynamism and endurance. Many are made

for time travel — small, sturdy packages that can lie dormant underground for years, waiting for just the right moment to emerge. Their persistence provides a lifeline for species in unpredictable climates, allowing plants to stockpile offspring in the soil during periods of prolonged drought.

“They have evolved such an amazing diversity of strategies for coping with uncertainty,” said Marina LaForgia, an ecologist at California State University at Sacramento.

Now, as invasive species transform treasured vistas and greenhouse gas pollution sends global

SEE SEEDS ON A14

## Little-known adviser helmed Biden’s bid to tighten border

Data-driven official led policy pivot that has helped slash crossings

BY NICK MIROFF

The lead architect of President Joe Biden’s border strategy is not Vice President Kamala Harris, despite persistent Republican claims to the contrary. That role belongs to a bookish, little-known policy adviser named Blas Nuñez-Neto.

A data-driven technocrat, Nuñez-Neto has engineered Biden’s pivot toward tougher border enforcement and sweeping restrictions on asylum — moves that have helped slash illegal crossings by nearly 80 percent since December.

The transformation is shoring up one of Democrats’ biggest vulnerabilities ahead of the Nov. 5 presidential election and potentially defusing a top polling issue for Republican nominee Donald Trump. After three years of record crossings, the U.S.-Mexico border is quieter and more controlled today than at any point since late 2020, before Trump left office.

Nuñez-Neto pulled that off by steering the administration back to a border policy framework



Nuñez-Neto

Democrats used to embrace more easily, according to current and former administration officials. The formula: Be generous and welcoming to immigrants seeking to come lawfully, but stingy and firm with those who don’t.

The White House declined to make Nuñez-Neto available for an interview. Biden officials said the administration’s border policy moves have been shaped by senior White House officials and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, whom Nuñez-Neto worked for before

being promoted to the White House in June.

In a statement, White House spokesperson Angelo Fernández Hernández said Biden “believes it is a false choice to say we have to walk away from being an America that embraces immigration in order to secure our border.”

“We must enforce our laws at the border and deliver consequences to those who do not have a legal basis to remain in the United States, and we must expand lawful pathways,” Fernández Hernández said.

Nuñez-Neto’s policy approach embodies the political calculus that while most Americans remain favorably disposed toward immigrants, few things erode the welcoming spirit faster than an out-of-control border. The

SEE BORDER ON A12

### METRO

Loudoun weighs letting students carry Narcan to reverse overdoses.

### SPORTS

Maryland opens its football season with a 50-7 rout of Connecticut.



### ARTS & STYLE

Catering to nerds has left us trapped in the “explainer movie.”

### BOOK WORLD

A major new biography of the literary great Christopher Isherwood.



### TRAVEL

A gay beach oasis has flourished in Michigan’s Bible Belt for decades.

### BUSINESS

Shoppers bear the pain as small grocers get squeezed by suppliers.

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