



CrisisWatch 2024 – August Trends and September Alerts

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➡ **Kosovo** Govt efforts to fully integrate Serb-majority north continued, while President Osmani announced parliamentary elections would take place in February 2025.

Pristina took further steps toward fully integrating Serb-majority north. PM Kurti 2 Aug presented govt plan to open central Ibar bridge, which connects Serb-dominated north and Albanian south of Mitrovica city, during briefing to representatives from Quint (U.S., UK, Germany, France, Italy) and EU ambassadors. Days later, hundreds of Kosovo Serbs 7 Aug gathered near bridge to protest plans, citing security concerns. U.S. Ambassador Jeff Hovenier 13 Aug warned move “increases the threat [...] for the local community, but also for NATO soldiers”. Police 5 Aug closed nine Serbian Post offices amid Pristina’s efforts to push out Belgrade-backed institutions and end use of Serbian dinar for cash transactions; EU same day urged govt to “reconsider its decision”, calling for “negotiated solution” within EU-facilitated Dialogue. Govt 30 Aug announced closure of five “illegal parallel institutions” in north, prompting U.S. embassy same day to express “disappointment with [govt’s] continuing uncoordinated actions” and said “issues related to Serbia-supported structures in Kosovo should be dealt with through the EU-facilitated Dialogue”.

In another important development. President Osmani 16 Aug announced parliamentary elections for 9 Feb 2025.

Caucasus

➡ **Armenia** Yerevan and Baku overcame major stumbling block in peace talks, while frontlines remained relatively calm despite occasional incidents.

Yerevan and Baku agreed to defer corridor issue amid ongoing peace efforts. Azerbaijan’s presidential aide Elchin Amirbayov 7 Aug told media outlet RFE/RL that Armenia and Azerbaijan had agreed to remove references to development of transport corridor linking Azerbaijan with its exclave Nakhchivan from draft peace treaty and to “refer to it at a later stage”; Yerevan next day confirmed announcement. Decision removed key sticking point in talks, and indicated sides could be opting for shorter, simplified statement, rather than the detailed agreement previously envisioned. Moscow appeared to insist on continued discussions about issue, however, given that the 2020 ceasefire deal potentially paved way for major Russian

security role along corridor. Notably, Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 19 Aug urged sides “to follow the spirit and letter” of 2020 agreement, while Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Russian President Putin 28 Aug reportedly exchanged views about “opening of the transport corridor”.

Baku reported several small incidents along frontline. Baku 15, 16, 18 Aug accused Armenian forces of firing at military positions in traditionally calm areas of Nakhchivan, 19 Aug claimed its troops had come under fire along main road leading from Armenia to Azerbaijan’s Kelbajar district; Baku same day said it had destroyed Armenian quadcopter in Lachin district. Yerevan denied all incidents and 15 Aug restated its June proposal to establish mechanism for investigating alleged ceasefire violations, which outgoing EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar 16 Aug reiterated support for.

➡ **Azerbaijan Baku and Yerevan overcame major stumbling block in peace talks, frontlines remained relatively calm despite occasional incidents, and relations with Iran remained fragile.**

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Important international developments. Baku 20 Aug applied for BRICS membership after Putin’s 18-19 Aug state visit. Meanwhile, Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu 6 Aug met with Aliyev in capital Baku following trip to Iranian capital Tehran; visit came amid speculation that Iran – which accuses Baku of hosting Israeli military bases – could target Azerbaijan in retaliation for July assassination of Hamas political leader in Tehran, which it blamed on Israel; Russian media portrayed visits as effort to prevent all-out war in Middle East.

➡ **Georgia** Political parties intensified their election campaigns amid deepening polarisation, and breakaway Abkhazia region appointed veteran diplomat to serve as de facto foreign minister.

Election campaigning accelerated amid deepening polarisation. Election campaigning in run-up to Oct parliamentary polls intensified. Ruling Georgian Dream party 13 Aug used anniversary of 2008 war with Russia to accuse largest opposition party and former administration United National Movement of starting war, backed by West, and promised to prosecute its leaders; opposition groups said comments escalated electoral tensions and further endangered Georgia's path toward EU integration. Opposition parties and their allied media reported uptick in physical attacks and interference in their regional campaigns; notably, assailant 11 Aug punched leader of opposition alliance Coalition of Change, Nika Melia.

Constitutional Court reviewed appeals against foreign agent's law. Ministry of Justice 20 Aug appointed personnel responsible for implementing 'foreign influence' law, which 1 Aug came into effect. Meanwhile, Constitutional Court 29-31 Aug held hearings on appeals against law filed by numerous civil society organisations and opposition MPs.

Breakaway Abkhazia appointed veteran diplomat as de facto foreign minister. De facto president of breakaway Abkhazia 6 Aug appointed veteran diplomat Sergey Shamba as de facto FM. Shamba has held position twice before and previously called for increased dialogue with Tbilisi, raising hope among some that appointment could lead to more informal contacts. Meanwhile, Shamba 8 Aug announced Russia would not build naval base near Abkhazia's Ochamchire town, a proposal floated by de facto president in 2023.

⬇ **Russia (Internal)** Ukraine launched incursion into Kursk region, capturing swath of Russian territory, killing dozens and forcing many thousands of civilians to evacuate; 26 people were freed in major Russia-West prisoner swap.

Ukraine launched surprise offensive into Kursk region. Ukraine 6 Aug launched surprise cross-border ground assault, making rapid gains into poorly-defended areas of western Kursk region in largest incursion into Russia since World War II. Ukraine's top general Oleksandr Syrskyi 27 Aug claimed forces had captured 1,294 sq km and 100 settlements, including Sudzha town, key Russian gas hub; they also destroyed three bridges over the Seym River and 15 Aug established military commandant's office, indicating plans to try and hold on to territory. Russia 23 Aug accused Ukraine of attempts to attack Kursk nuclear power plant; head of UN nuclear watchdog Grossi 27 Aug warned about "possibility of a nuclear accident" after visiting site. According to Russian officials, well over 130,000 civilians had fled as of 31 Aug while incursion had left 31 dead, though actual toll could be much higher. Offensive began to slow late Aug as Russian units redeployed from other areas, though situation remained dynamic and heavy fighting continued, leaving open the possibility of further escalation along 1,200km-long frontline. Ukraine also attacked neighbouring Bryansk and Belgorod regions, though without much success. Meanwhile, Ukrainian attacks on infrastructure and military facilities escalated; notably, Ukrainian drones 28 Aug struck Kirov region for first time.

Peace talks remained elusive. President Putin 12 Aug claimed Ukraine had launched Kursk offensive “with the help of its Western masters” in attempt to “improve its negotiation position”, and ruled out negotiations with “people who indiscriminately attack civilians”. According to 17 Aug report by media outlet The Washington Post, Kyiv and Moscow were planning talks in Qatar on cessation of strikes on energy infrastructure, which latter postponed following incursion.

Russia completed largest prisoner exchange with West since Cold War. Russia, U.S. and other Western countries 1 Aug completed high-profile prisoner exchange involving 26 people, including U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich, Russian opposition politicians and Russian intelligence officers (see Russia/U.S.).

➡ **Russia/U.S. Russia completed largest prisoner exchange with West since Cold War.**

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Eastern Europe

➡ **Belarus Minsk bolstered troop presence along border with Ukraine amid stepped-up tensions; West imposed more sanctions in response to crackdown.**

Tensions with Ukraine remained high. President Lukashenko 10 Aug claimed multiple Ukrainian drones had violated Belarusian airspace; Foreign Ministry same day summoned Ukrainian chargé d'affaires, threatening to review “appropriateness” of Kyiv’s diplomatic mission in Belarus in event of further such incidents. Lukashenko 18 Aug said he deployed nearly a third of Belarus’ armed forces to border with Ukraine in response to stepped-up troop presence there, also noting raised stakes due to Kyiv’s incursion into Russia’s Kursk region (see Russia). Kyiv 25 Aug urged Minsk to withdraw forces from border and warned officials to not make “tragic mistakes [...] under Moscow’s pressure”; days later, Lukashenko 29 Aug emphasised Belarusian troops “will fight only when someone comes to us with bad intentions”. Meanwhile, Lukashenko 15 Aug called on Russia and Ukraine to “sit down at the negotiating table and end this scuffle”, accusing the West of fuelling conflict.

Western countries imposed additional sanctions against Belarus. U.S., Canada and UK 9 August announced sanctions against Belarus to mark fourth anniversary of disputed 2020 presidential election; in joint statement with EU, govts called on “authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the almost 1,400 political prisoners”. Later, Lukashenko 16 Aug signed decree pardoning 30 people convicted of “protest-related crimes”.

➡ **Ukraine** **Russian forces closed in on strategic town of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region, which looks set to become next epicentre of conflict in east; Kyiv's forces launched surprise attack into Russia's Kursk region.**

Russians closed in on Pokrovsk, key logistical hub in eastern Donetsk. Russian forces quickened their advance toward Donetsk's Pokrovsk town, whose strategic location at intersection of several roads and railways facilitates provision of supplies to Ukrainian troops along eastern frontline. Authorities 15 Aug ordered civilians to evacuate as Russians closed in, making rapid gains late Aug in several areas south east of Pokrovsk and fuelling fears of grinding battle for control of town in coming weeks and months. Russian forces also continued their relentless advance near Toretsk and Chasiv Yar towns. Meanwhile, strikes on Ukrainian cities persisted, with President Zelenskyy 26 Aug calling early-morning Russian missile and drone attack "one of the biggest combined strikes" since full-scale invasion.

Ukraine launched surprise incursion into Russian borderlands. Ukraine 6 Aug launched incursion into Russia's Kursk region (see Russia), capturing swath of territory in attempt to strengthen Kyiv's hand in future talks and divert Russian troops from Donetsk; top commander Gen. Syrskiy 27 Aug said Moscow had anticipated this and instead bolstered troops in Pokrovsk direction. In response to incursion, Russian President Putin 12 Aug ruled out talks with Kyiv; media outlet The Washington Post 17 Aug reported sides were planning talks in Qatar on mutual cessation of strikes on energy infrastructure. Zelenskyy 27 Aug said offensive was part of "victory plan" to end war.

Kyiv sought support among African nations, engaged with Indian PM Modi. FM Kuleba 4-8 Aug visited Malawi, Zambia and Mauritius in effort to bolster support for Ukraine among African countries. Yet Mali 4 Aug cut ties with Ukraine over its alleged support for Tuareg-led deadly assault on Russian paramilitaries and Malian soldiers in July (see Mali); Niger 6 Aug followed suit. Meanwhile, Indian PM Modi 23 Aug held talks with Zelenskyy in capital Kyiv, called on warring parties to move toward diplomacy and said "India is ready to play an active role" in peace efforts.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ **Cyprus** **Amid controversy over invitation to UN-mediated talks, Republic of Cyprus (RoC) faced criticism for alleged role in Gaza war and "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") party leaders clashed.**

Confusion over invitation to UN-mediated talks sparked controversy. RoC President Christodoulides 3 Aug said he had accepted UN invitation to tripartite meeting on 13 Aug with "TRNC" leader Ersin Tatar. Tatar next day denied invitation, saying he "would not have accepted it even if it was sent". RoC 5 Aug clarified govt had only been "sounded out" for possible meeting date.

RoC accused of involvement in Gaza war. In response to RoC opposition Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL)'s criticism of U.S. warship arriving in Limassol port, RoC 9 Aug said "Cyprus is not involved in military operations or any conflict". Tatar 12 Aug accused RoC of becoming "military stopover", being complicit in crimes against humanity in Gaza, making "Cyprus into a target".

“TRNC” party leaders clashed over approach to Cyprus problem. “TRNC” opposition party leader Tufan Erhürman 8 Aug criticised “Tatar’s avoidance of diplomacy and dialogue”. Tatar next day said, “diplomacy has not stopped” and accused Erhürman of adopting positions close to RoC’s.

In an important international development. Turkish FM Hakan Fidan 31 Aug attended informal EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, first invitation to Turkish FM in five years, signalling positive turn in Türkiye-EU relations. Among other issues, long-stalled visa liberalisation and Customs Union upgrade processes were discussed; divergence persisted, however, over EU’s linkage of Cyprus issue to Türkiye-EU relations. Notably, Fidan stated “While we are committed to advancing our relations with the EU, it is not constructive to tie every aspect of our dialogue to the Cyprus issue”.

◆ **Türkiye Authorities targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and Islamic State (ISIS), and continued active foreign engagement, notably with Syria and Iraq over security and other issues.**

Operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Islamic State (ISIS) persisted. Drone strike 14 Aug reportedly killed high-ranking PKK militant in Turkish province Ağrı. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya 17 Aug announced security forces detained 222 individuals with alleged links to the PKK. Anti-PKK operations in Syria and Iraq continued. Notably, Defence Ministry 7 Aug announced “neutralisation” of four PKK/People’s Defence Unity (YPG) militants in northern Syria; same day said PKK militants killed Turkish soldier in northern Iraq. Defence ministry 9 Aug said Türkiye “neutralised” 12 PKK militants in northern Iraq; Turkish strikes 12 Aug “neutralised” 17. Defence Minister Yaşar Güler 14 Aug said PKK was in “desperate situation”; 22 Aug resumed ground patrols with Russia in northern Syria. Turkish drone 23 Aug killed two journalists in Iraq’s Kurdistan region. Anti-ISIS operations continued; notably, Interior Ministry 2 Aug announced detention of 99 individuals across 26 cities in three-day operation.

Bilateral engagements with Syria and Iraq continued. Russia’s Middle East and Africa Special Envoy 9 Aug said Russia supports continuation of Türkiye-Syria normalisation and proposed Moscow to host tripartite summit. Defence Minister Güler 12 Aug listed Turkish conditions for pulling out of northern Syria, including new constitution, new elections and border security (see Syria). Türkiye and Iraq 15 Aug signed MoU on military, security and counter-terrorism cooperation in capital Ankara.

In other important international developments. Türkiye 7 Aug filed request to join South Africa’s International Court of Justice genocide case against Israel; President Erdoğan 14 Aug met Palestinian President Abbas in Ankara; Abbas next day addressed Turkish parliament. Unknown assailant 18 Aug killed Palestinian and injured two others in shooting attack in Istanbul city. U.S.-Russia prisoners’ exchange 1 Aug took place in capital Ankara with Turkish coordination (see Russia-U.S.). Ankara 12-13 Aug hosted Türkiye-mediated indirect talks between Somalia and Ethiopia on Red Sea port deal (see Somalia). Turkish FM Hakan Fidan 31 Aug attended informal EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, first invitation to Turkish FM in five years (see Cyprus).

Central Asia

➡ **Kyrgyzstan Sixth consultative meeting of Central Asian leaders underscored deepening regional cooperation.**

Kazakhstan 9 Aug hosted presidents from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for VI Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in capital Astana, also attended by Azerbaijani President Aliyev and head of UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, Kaha Imnadze. Kazakh President Tokayev said these regular meetings illustrated all five countries' commitment to strengthening cooperation, and hailed efforts "to ensure regional stability and security", strengthen trade and expand transport links. Leaders signed number of documents, including several pertaining to development of regional integration in mid- and long-term.

➡ **Tajikistan Sixth consultative meeting of Central Asian leaders underscored deepening regional cooperation; stifling of media persisted.**

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Repression of media persisted. Committee to Protect Journalists 19 Aug urged authorities to release Ahmad Ibromim, editor of independent weekly newspaper Payk, who was arrested 12 Aug; watchdog said Ibromim's arrest is a "reminder of how dangerous any form of critical journalism is in the country's deeply repressive media environment".

➡ **Uzbekistan Sixth consultative meeting of Central Asian leaders underscored deepening regional cooperation, while PM Aripov visited Afghanistan.**

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PM Aripov visited Afghanistan. PM Aripov 17 Aug visited Afghan capital Kabul, marking first visit of PM from any country to Afghanistan since Taliban takeover; countries same day signed 35 trade and investment agreements worth \$2.5bn.