

UKRAINE CONFLICT UPDATES

Aug 15, 2022 - ISW Press



This page collects ISW and CTP's updates on the conflict in Ukraine. In late February 2022, ISW began publishing daily synthetic products covering key events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. These Ukraine Conflict Updates replaced ISW's previous "Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus," which we maintained from November 12, 2021, through February 17, 2022.

This page also includes prominent warning alerts that ISW and CTP launched beyond our daily Ukraine Conflict Updates. These products addressed critical inflection points as they occurred.

- [Click here](#) to see our collection of reports from October 1 to November 30, 2024
- [Click here](#) to see our collection of reports from June 1, 2024 to September 30, 2024
- [Click here](#) to see our collection of reports from January 2 to May 31, 2024.
- [Click here](#) to see our collection of reports from 2023.
- [Click here](#) to see our collection of reports from 2022.

Click [here](#) to view ISW's entire catalogue of Russia-Ukraine interactive maps.

Click [here](#) to read about the methodology behind ISW and CTP's mapping of this conflict.

NEW: Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations Updates page.

NEW: Russian Occupation Updates page.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 29, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Jennie Olmsted, Jessica Sobieski, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 29, 2025, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on May 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials continue to dictate the terms and timing of peace negotiations with Ukraine and are attempting to obfuscate the current state of negotiations. Russian officials are setting conditions to falsely accuse Ukraine of delaying negotiations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on May 28 that Russia is prepared to present its memorandum on terms for peace negotiations during the next bilateral meeting with Ukraine and suggested that Russian and Ukrainian representatives should meet in Istanbul on June 2.^[1] Lavrov claimed that Russia's memorandum proposes how to "reliably" overcome the Russia's perceived "root causes" of the war in Ukraine. Lavrov has previously defined the root causes of the war in Ukraine as NATO's eastward expansion

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following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against Russian speakers and Russian culture.^[2] Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky, who led the last Russian delegation in Istanbul, claimed on May 28 that he spoke with Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and proposed a date for Russia and Ukraine to exchange their memoranda.^[3] Umerov responded to the Russian proposal on May 28 and stated that Ukraine is ready for a ceasefire and further negotiations and that Ukraine has already presented its memorandum to Russia.^[4] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on May 29 that Russia has not received a copy of Ukraine's memorandum and that Ukraine has not responded to Lavrov's proposal, however.^[5]

Russia is forcing Ukraine to make concessions on the timing, terms, and location of negotiations. Russian President Vladimir Putin initially suggested on the night of May 10 to 11 "resuming" the 2022 bilateral peace negotiations in Istanbul but later rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation for an in-person, one-on-one meeting in Istanbul.^[6] Ukraine's willingness to attend the May 15 to 16 talks in Istanbul with Russian officials was itself a significant concession, as holding the talks in Istanbul fit into Putin's narrative that the current talks are a resumption of the 2022 Istanbul Protocols in which Russia demanded that Ukraine effectively capitulate to Russia.^[7] US President Donald Trump previously suggested that Russia and Ukraine could move peace talks to the Vatican, but Russian officials rejected this offer and continue to suggest meetings in Istanbul.^[8] Putin unilaterally announced Easter and Victory Day ceasefires in April and May 2025, and Russia is now again unilaterally imposing timelines and terms on Ukraine.^[9] Ukraine, the United States, and European states have repeatedly called for Russia to agree to a renewable ceasefire in Ukraine before Russia and Ukraine begin negotiations for an enduring peace, calls that the Kremlin has repeatedly rejected. Russian officials are instead demanding that negotiations address both a ceasefire and long-term peace agreement in Ukraine. Russian forces will continue to press along the frontline until Ukraine accepts Russia's terms or they are no longer able to do so, and Russian officials will attempt to leverage any additional battlefield gains to extract additional concessions from Ukraine and the West during negotiations.

ISW previously assessed that Russian forces are leveraging the fact that Ukraine and Russia set no concrete deadlines for the next steps in the peace process in order to delay the process altogether and prolong the war. Medinsky stated after the May 16 Ukrainian-Russian talks in Istanbul that the two delegations agreed to "write ... down in detail" the terms for peace and present a memorandum for a possible future ceasefire in the future, but did not specify a deadline.^[10] Putin told journalists on May 19 that Russia would present Ukraine with a "memorandum" detailing conditions and timing for a future peace treaty as the two countries move toward conducting bilateral negotiations, but also did not specify a deadline.^[11] Lavrov claimed on May 23 that Russia would present its memorandum to Ukraine as soon as Russia and Ukraine completed their large-scale prisoner of war (POW) exchange on May 25.^[12] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha stated on May 23 that Ukraine expected Russia to present a draft proposal for an unconditional ceasefire agreement after the third and final POW exchange on May 25.^[13] US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg told *Fox News* on May 27 that the United States received Ukraine's memorandum of conditions and timelines for a potential peace treaty and is waiting for Russia to submit its version to begin reconciling the two countries' positions.^[14] Russian officials appear to be withholding their memorandum and may attempt to withhold the memorandum until the June 2 meeting. Russian officials may assess that Ukraine will refuse to attend the June 2 meeting if Russia does not provide its memorandum in advance as Ukraine has done and likely intend to seize on Ukraine's refusal to blame Ukraine for stalling peace negotiations.

Western reporting indicates that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is increasing drone deliveries to Russia while reducing sales to Ukrainian and Western buyers, further demonstrating China's increasingly overt support for Russia's war effort in Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported on May 29 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky recently stated that the PRC stopped selling DJI Mavic quadcopter drones, which Russian and Ukrainian forces have used for surveillance and strike missions, to Ukraine and other European countries while continuing to sell the quadcopters to Russia.^[15] Zelensky stated that Russia has domestic DJI Mavic production lines, and that "Chinese representatives" are present at these production facilities. An unnamed European official told *Bloomberg* that Zelensky's statements are consistent with European assessments and stated that the PRC appears to have reduced deliveries of some drone components to Western buyers while simultaneously increasing deliveries to Russia. ISW has observed recent reporting that Russian forces are fielding Chinese-made equipment, that the PRC is likely aware of and choosing not to stop Russian military recruitment efforts of PRC citizens, and that Russia has established joint production lines with PRC manufacturers for Shahed-like long range strike drones, underscoring the extent of the PRC's support for Russia's war effort.^[16]

A Ukrainian defense manufacturer and official announced that Ukraine has fielded a long-range drone with sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI). *Forbes* reported on May 26 that Ukrainian startup company Strategy Force Solutions Chief Technology Officer "Andrii" stated that Ukrainian forces fielded the company's artificial intelligence (AI) powered "mothership" drone – the GOGOL-M – on autonomous missions against Russian military targets for the first time.[17] The GOGOL-M mothership drone can reportedly deploy two first-person-view (FPV) drones with automated target acquisition and strike capabilities, and the mothership drone reportedly has a range of 300-kilometers for one-way operations and a range of 100-kilometers to return for reuse.[18] The GOGOL-M mothership and compatible FPV drones reportedly use Strategy Force Solutions' SmartPilot system that leverages a combination of advanced sensors and AI to self-orient and execute predefined missions autonomously. The mothership and FPV drones notably do not rely on global positioning systems (GPS), thereby optimizing their electronic warfare (EW) resistance. "Andrii" told *Forbes* that Strategy Force Solutions is able to produce up to 50 GOGOL-M mothership drones and up to 400 compatible FPV drones per month. Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov confirmed on May 29 that Ukraine fielded the GOGOL-M mothership drone for the first time.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials continue to dictate the terms and timing of peace negotiations with Ukraine and are attempting to obfuscate the current state of negotiations. Russian officials are setting conditions to falsely accuse Ukraine of delaying negotiations.
- Russia is forcing Ukraine to make concessions on the timing, terms, and location of negotiations.
- ISW previously assessed that Russian forces are leveraging the fact that Ukraine and Russia set no concrete deadlines for the next steps in the peace process in order to delay the process altogether and prolong the war.
- Western reporting indicates that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is increasing drone deliveries to Russia while reducing sales to Ukrainian and Western buyers, further demonstrating China's increasingly overt support for Russia's war effort in Ukraine.
- A Ukrainian defense manufacturer and official announced that Ukraine has fielded a long-range drone with sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kurakhove and Russian forces recently advanced in northern Kharkiv Oblast and near Kupyansk, Borova, Lyman, and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 28, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Jennie Olmsted, Jessica Sobieski, and Kateryna Stepanenko with Nate Trotter

May 28, 2025, 9:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12 pm ET on May 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Western insider reporting about Kremlin demands to end the war in Ukraine continues to align with repeated public statements from Kremlin officials outlining Russia's demands, indicating that Russia's goal of Ukrainian capitulation and destruction of NATO remains unchanged. *Reuters* reported on May 28 that three Russian sources familiar with the peace negotiations stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin wants Western states to submit a "written" pledge stipulating that NATO will not expand eastward; Ukrainian neutrality; sanctions relief; the unfreezing of Russian assets in the West; and unspecified protections for Russian speakers in Ukraine.[1] Kremlin officials have repeatedly used allegations that the Ukrainian government is discriminating against Russian-speakers in Ukraine to justify Russia's calls for Ukrainian regime change and the installation of a pro-Kremlin puppet regime.[2] Russia's demands for a ban on NATO expansion, Ukrainian neutrality, and regime change are the same demands that Russia issued before the war in 2021 and when Putin launched his full-scale invasion in February 2022.[3]

Kremlin officials have consistently and publicly called for the demands that *Reuters* insider sources outlined. Russia has demanded since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion that Ukraine commit to a neutral, non-aligned status, which would require Ukraine to change its constitution and NATO to change its "open-door" policy.[4] Russian officials have also repeatedly claimed that any future peace settlement must eliminate the "root causes" of the war, which Russian officials have previously defined as NATO's alleged violation of unofficial commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[5] Kremlin

officials explicitly highlighted the "root causes" of the war and Russia's demands for Ukrainian neutrality again on May 28.^[6] ISW continues to assess that these demands are part of the Kremlin's efforts to force the West into surrendering Ukraine and breaking the NATO security alliance.^[7]

Putin reportedly maintains his demand that Ukraine cede all of the four oblasts that Russia has illegally annexed but not fully occupied, even as Kremlin officials have signaled that Russia has territorial ambitions beyond these four oblasts. A Reuters source reportedly stated that Putin is less inclined now to make territorial compromises and continues to demand the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts — including the areas that Russian forces do not currently occupy.^[8] The source stated that "Putin has toughened his position" about territory. Putin first demanded in June 2024 that Ukraine cede all of the four oblasts, and Russian officials have often reiterated this demand since.^[9] The *Washington Post* reported on May 27 that Ukrainian military intelligence assesses that the Russian military command has deployed 125,000 personnel to the borders of Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts — two oblasts that Russia has not illegally annexed.^[10] Russian forces have been conducting offensive operations aimed at creating a buffer zone in Kharkiv Oblast since May 2024.^[11] Russian forces also recently launched attacks to create a buffer zone in northern Sumy Oblast, with Russian officials calling for Russia to seize Sumy City, likely to set conditions for Russia to annex the oblast.^[12] Russia will likely struggle to seize the entirety of the four illegally annexed oblasts, especially as the seizure of the heavily fortified fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast and the forcing of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast will require significantly larger force groupings than the forces currently deployed in eastern and southern Ukraine. The Russian military command would have solely concentrated its efforts on seizing all of the four oblasts if the Kremlin's territorial ambitions were truly limited to the four oblasts, but the deployment of significant forces to attack in Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts suggests that Russia intends to increase its territorial demands. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin maintains significant territorial ambitions in southern and eastern Ukraine, and Russian officials within Putin's innermost circle have even called for Russia to take control of most of the country.^[13]

Putin continues to demonstrate his willingness to achieve his war aims militarily through a prolonged war in Ukraine during which Russian forces would continue to only make gradual, creeping advances. One of Reuters' sources reportedly stated that Putin will try to use military victories to show Ukraine and Europe that "peace tomorrow will be even more painful" if Putin is unable to secure his desired terms in a peace deal.^[14] The source stated that Putin would take advantage of any tactical battlefield opportunities to advance further into Ukraine and that Putin believes that Russia can fight for years in the face of any sanctions or other economic measures the West might place on Russia in the future. ISW has long assessed that Putin holds a theory of victory that assumes that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual, creeping advances indefinitely and to outlast and overcome Western military aid to Ukraine and Ukraine's own efforts to mobilize.^[15]

Russia will likely be able to continue its current tactics that are resulting in gradual, creeping advances as long as Russia is able to replenish its losses on the frontline. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on May 28 that almost 175,000 people have arrived at military units and that more than 14,000 people have joined volunteer units since the start of 2025, for a total of roughly 1,285 people per day.^[16] Medvedev also reiterated Putin's May 13 claim that 50,000 to 60,000 people voluntarily join the Russian military per month.^[17] Putin's claimed recruitment rate is notably higher than Medvedev's, and ISW cannot independently verify these claims. Reports from the Ukrainian General Staff about Russia's daily losses indicate that Russia suffered a daily loss rate of 1,550 per day in January 2025; 1,261 in February 2025; 1,312 in March 2025; 1,219 in April 2025; and 1,140 between May 1 and May 28.^[18] Medvedev's May 28 claim that 175,000 soldiers have joined Russian military units since January 2025 indicates that Russia is replenishing its units at about a one-for-one ratio to its loss rate. ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces, supported by Western aid, can inflict higher personnel loss rates on the battlefield that could push Putin to make difficult decisions and force Putin to engage in good-faith negotiations to end the war.^[19]

The Kremlin continues to promote its long-standing false narratives that the threat of NATO expansion forced Russia to invade Ukraine in 2022, and that NATO continues to threaten Russia's security. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that Russia is alarmed by the accumulation of NATO troops along Russia's border and that NATO's eastern expansion and discussions to bring Ukraine into the alliance triggered Russia into launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[20] Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov claimed that NATO has deployed 34,200 troops on its "eastern flank" — which runs from Finland to Turkey — since February 2022.^[21] Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed in June 2024 that Russia had deployed over 700,000 Russian soldiers to Ukraine, in contrast.^[22] NATO had not significantly progressed Ukraine's path to membership in the years since the 2008 Bucharest Declaration, in which NATO promised Ukraine and Georgia paths to membership but took no formal steps toward Ukrainian membership in late 2021 and 2022.^[23] Putin explicitly admitted in December 2024 that former US President Joseph Biden offered

in 2021 to postpone consideration of Ukraine's membership to NATO for 10 to 15 years — demonstrating that Ukraine's NATO membership was not an immediate prospect and undermining the Kremlin's attempts to blame NATO for Russia's 2022 invasion.^[24] ISW continues to assess that Putin did not invade Ukraine in 2022 because he feared NATO but because he believed that NATO was weak and aimed to destroy the alliance.^[25]

The Kremlin continues to promote Russian President Vladimir Putin's envisioned Eurasian security architecture — a Russian-led bloc aimed at countering the West and NATO. Putin gave a video address at the 13th International Meeting of High Representatives Responsible for Security Issues on May 28 and advocated for the creation of his desired Eurasian security architecture based on Russia-dominated international organizations, including the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).^[26] Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergei Naryshkin claimed at the meeting that Russia cannot be "weak" and that Eurasian and global security are dependent on Russia's strength — placing Russia at the center of this security architecture.^[27] Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov attended a CSTO defense ministers meeting on May 28 where he criticized NATO's defensive posture in Central and Eastern Europe and claimed that the West does not just threaten Russia but all CSTO member states in an effort to unify CSTO members around Russia's anti-NATO sentiments.^[28]

Russia and Belarus reduced the scope of the September 2025 Zapad-2025 joint Russian-Belorussian military exercise and relocated the main maneuver away from Belarus's western borders, likely to promote a veneer of cooperation and distract from Russia's limited military capacity outside of the Ukraine theater. Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin announced in an English-language social media post on May 28 that Belarusian officials decided to reduce the scope of the Zapad-2025 joint military exercise and relocate the main maneuver away from the western border of Belarus towards central Belarus.^[29] Khrenin claimed that Belarusian authorities made this decision to demonstrate Belarus' readiness for de-escalation, dialogue, and peace. Belarusian authorities would not have been able to make this decision independently without Russia. Russia and Belarus are attempting to posture themselves as unthreatening, reasonable, and cooperative to the West. Belarusian officials previously claimed that at least 13,000 personnel would participate in the Zapad-2025 exercise, and Russia and Belarus likely had to downsize the joint exercise as most of its forces are fighting in Ukraine.^[30] ISW observed elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Moscow Military District [MMD]), 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA, MMD), and 6th CAA (Leningrad Military District [LMD]), as well as roughly 4,000 Airborne (VDV) personnel, including from the 7th, 76th, 98th, and 106th VDV divisions participated in the Zapad-2021 joint exercise.^[31] Significant elements of these formations are currently fighting in the war in Ukraine.^[32] Russian officials unexpectedly canceled the Zapad-2023 exercise, very likely due to Russia's equipment and manpower requirements for the war in Ukraine.^[33]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to forward an unofficial Russian ideology formulated on Russian nationalism and to try to unify Russian society in support of Russia's war in Ukraine. The Kremlin published a video message from Putin on May 28 for Border Guards Day, addressing Russian border guards.^[34] Putin claimed that Russian border guards have developed their "legendary traditions" throughout Russia's "1,000-year history" since the times of Ancient Rus' (Kyivan Rus), a medieval state based in Kyiv. Putin's reference to Ancient Rus' is part of the Kremlin's years long attempts to claim that the modern Russian state is directly tied to Kyivan Rus and to claim that Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are one people who descended from Kyivan Rus.^[35] Putin similarly referred to Russia's 1,000-year history on May 22, and Putin's continued promotion of Russian nationalism is a notable departure from his usual rhetoric promoting a civic Russian identity and nationalism based on ethnic and religious diversity.^[36]

Putin also attempted to use his May 28 speech in honor of border guards to justify the use of Russian conscripts to defend Kursk Oblast. Putin used the mythos of the Second World War to glorify the role of border guards to "defend the interests of the Fatherland" and claimed that border guards have "repeatedly demonstrated themselves" in the war in Ukraine.^[37] Putin claimed that he is confident that border guards will continue to repel threats to Russia and attempts to cross the state border. Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly promised the Russian population that conscripts, whose military service is mandated by Russian law, will not be deployed to fight in Ukraine.^[38] Conscripts made up a significant part of the forces that initially met the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, however, leading to discontent among the Russian population.^[39] The Kremlin has historically responded to issues surrounding the deployment of conscripts in combat zones with great concern, and Putin is likely attempting to use narratives about Kyivan Rus and the "Fatherland" to justify Russia's use of conscripts in Kursk Oblast.^[40]

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of long-range drone strikes targeting Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) on May 27 and 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 28 that

Ukrainian Special Forces and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) struck the Kronstadt drone factory in Dubna, Moscow Oblast.^[41] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the plant specializes in producing drone ground-control systems for the Orion, Inokhodets, Molniya, Grom, Termin, Helios, and Sirius drones. Geolocated footage shows drones striking the Kronstadt plant.^[42] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the SBU also struck the Raduga plant in Dubna, which manufactures cruise missiles, including Kh-101/55 missiles, Kh-69 missiles, and Kh-59MK missiles.^[43] Geolocated footage shows a drone strike against the Raduga plant.^[44] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also struck the Angstrem plant in the Elma Technological Park in Zelenograd, Moscow Oblast, which is one of Russia's largest microchip manufacturing plants.^[45] Geolocated footage shows Russian air defense systems downing a Ukrainian drone over Zelenograd, a drone striking the technological park, and the aftermath of the drone strikes against the technological park.^[46] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, who often reports on successful Ukrainian drone strikes against Russia, reported on May 28 that Elma Park is a critical hub for Russian import substitution.^[47] Kovalenko also reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Dubna Machine Building Plant (DMZ), which produces drones, avionics, and control systems. A Russian insider source claimed that the DMZ also assembles Kh-101, Kh-5, and Kh-59 cruise missiles.^[48] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the Murom Instrument Plant, which produces ignition devices, on the night of May 27 in Vladimir Oblast.^[49] The Ukrainian General Staff also confirmed earlier reports that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the Dmitrievsky Chemical Plant in Kineshma, Ivanovo Oblast on May 26.^[50]

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated on May 28, following a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Berlin, that Germany will finance a "significant" portion of Ukraine's Starlink satellite systems operation costs.^[51] The German Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on May 28 that Germany would supply Ukraine with ammunition, small arms, and air defense and land weapon systems and invest five billion euros (roughly \$5.6 billion) in Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).^[52] The German MoD stated that Germany would support more robust cooperation between German and Ukrainian defense industrial companies. Merz stated on May 28 that Germany would help finance Ukrainian production of long-range weapons.^[53]

Ukrainian authorities recently identified a Russian servicemember responsible for the execution of two Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) in January 2025. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported on May 28 that Ukrainian officials and military counterintelligence identified a Russian soldier of the 40th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) suspected of executing two Ukrainian POWs on January 9, 2025, near Guyevo, Kursk Oblast (southwest of Sudzha).^[54] There has been a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025.^[55] ISW continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct systemic executions in direct violation of international law.^[56]

Key Takeaways:

- Western insider reporting about Kremlin demands to end the war in Ukraine continues to align with repeated public statements from Kremlin officials outlining Russia's demands, indicating that Russia's goal of Ukrainian capitulation and destruction of NATO remains unchanged.
- Putin reportedly maintains his demand that Ukraine cede all of the four oblasts that Russia has illegally annexed but not fully occupied, even as Kremlin officials have signaled that Russia has territorial ambitions beyond these four oblasts.
- Putin continues to demonstrate his willingness to achieve his war aims militarily through a prolonged war in Ukraine during which Russian forces would continue to only make gradual, creeping advances.
- The Kremlin continues to promote its long-standing false narratives that the threat of NATO expansion forced Russia to invade Ukraine in 2022, and that NATO continues to threaten Russia's security.
- The Kremlin continues to promote Russian President Vladimir Putin's envisioned Eurasian security architecture — a Russian-led bloc aimed at countering the West and NATO.
- Russia and Belarus reduced the scope of the September 2025 Zapad-2025 joint Russian-Belarussian military exercise and relocated the main maneuver away from Belarus's western borders, likely to promote a veneer of cooperation and distract from Russia's limited military capacity outside of the Ukraine theater.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to forward an unofficial Russian ideology formulated on Russian nationalism and to try to unify Russian society in support of

Russia's war in Ukraine.

- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of long-range drone strikes targeting Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) on May 27 and 28.
- Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian authorities recently identified a Russian servicemember responsible for the execution of two Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) in January 2025.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 27, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Jennie Olmsted, Jessica Sobieski, and Kateryna Stepanenko

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30 pm ET on May 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is setting conditions to establish permanent control over the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), suggesting that Russia plans to illegally occupy and annex additional territory in Ukraine. Greenpeace's Ukraine service reported on May 27 that satellite imagery from early February 2025 to May 23, 2025, shows that Russia has laid 90 kilometers of powerlines near the Sea of Azov in occupied Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts.^[1] Greenpeace reported that these new powerlines are the first observed indications that Russia is acting upon its long-held plans to connect the ZNPP to the Russian power grid.^[2] Russian state nuclear energy operator Rosatom Head Alexei Likhachev claimed on May 21 that Rosatom had developed a plan to bring the ZNPP to "full capacity," suggesting that Russia intends to bring the ZNPP's reactors out of their current cold shutdown state.^[3] Likhachev claimed in May 2024 to agree with the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) assessment that restarting the ZNPP was currently "impossible" and that the first condition for restarting the ZNPP must be to ensure its security, either with a security guarantee or after the frontline had shifted away from the ZNPP.^[4]

US President Donald Trump's April 2025 seven-point peace proposal to Ukraine included a provision for Ukraine to regain control over the ZNPP with US involvement, and the proposed Ukraine-European peace plan also contained this provision.^[5] Russian officials have repeatedly rejected giving up control over the ZNPP, however.^[6] Russian officials have also increased their rhetoric, invoking Russia's alleged historical ties to "Novorossiya," which Russian officials have defined as all of eastern and southern Ukraine, and Russian occupation authorities have recently called for Russia to control areas of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast near the Dnipro River that Russia has not yet illegally annexed.^[7] The Russian definition of Novorossiya notably includes the area directly across from the ZNPP on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River. Russia's efforts to connect the ZNPP to the Russian power grid suggest that Russia wants to maintain its control over the ZNPP and operate it safely as Russia likely expects to significantly push the frontline away from the plant or plans to occupy and annex Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.

Russian officials are likely leveraging the fact that Ukraine and Russia set no concrete deadlines for the next steps in the peace process in order to delay the process altogether and prolong the war. US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg told Fox News on May 27 that the United States had received Ukraine's list of conditions and timelines for a potential peace treaty and is now waiting for Russia to submit its version to begin reconciling the two countries' positions.^[8] Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky stated after the May 16 Ukrainian-Russian talks in Istanbul that the two delegations agreed to "write...down in detail" and present their versions for a possible future ceasefire, but did not specify a deadline.^[9] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on May 27 that Russia is preparing its version of the memorandum.^[10] Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov stated on May 27 that the success of peace negotiations will depend on the participants' willingness to address the war's "root causes," reiterating long-standing Russian demands that amount to full Ukrainian capitulation.^[11] The Kremlin is likely leveraging the lack of a deadline to prolong negotiations in an attempt to extract more concessions and improve Russia's negotiating position by making battlefield advances.

Putin continues to use orchestrated public engagements to forward the Kremlin's effort to create a militarized Russian society united against the West that supports a prolonged war in Ukraine and possible future conflict with NATO. Putin met with the supervisory board of the state-formed "Russia-Land of Opportunities" non-profit organization on May 27 and spoke with participants of the organization's programs during a highly scripted event.^[12] Putin claimed that many foreigners see Russia as a "stronghold" of traditional spiritual and moral values. Putin claimed that Soviet

citizens' "spirit of devotion to their people" formed the basis of the Soviet victory in the Second World War and stated that the "internal mobilization" of each Russian citizen and Russian society as a whole is the most important thing right now for Russia. Putin stated that the future of a state depends on its independence, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency; that Russia will not exist if it is not sovereign; and that "passion within society" is important for Russian sovereignty.

The general director of "Russia-Land of Opportunities," Andrei Betin, highlighted that Putin named 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" and noted that many Russian servicemembers who are fighting in Ukraine participate in the non-profit's programs. Putin spoke during the meeting with an active duty Russian servicemember, who proposed creating additional programs that allow Russian military personnel to work with the non-profit so that the servicemembers "will say that Russia remembers [them], Russia has not forgotten [them]." Putin claimed that the Russian government is working to create conditions for the "self-realization" of Russian servicemembers returning home from the war. Putin highlighted how many graduates of the organization's programs have gone on to become leaders and politicians in the federal, regional, and municipal government, specifically noting that many participants of the non-profit's "Leaders of Russia. Politics" program have won State Duma elections since 2020 and forecasting that more participants of the program will run in the 2026 Duma elections.

Putin and other Kremlin officials have recently focused their rhetoric on Russia's strong "traditional and moral values" and used the mythos of the Second World War to call for unity within Russian society – likely as part of an ongoing effort to foster anti-Western sentiment in Russian society and prepare the Russian population for a prolonged war in Ukraine and a possible future conflict with NATO.^[13] Putin's support for programs aimed at reintegrating Russian veterans into society suggests that the Kremlin fears political instability and the emergence of an independent veterans-based civil society – as ISW has assessed.^[14] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is engaged in a campaign to create a new cadre of militarized, loyal elites to unify Russian society against the perceived threat of the West, including by co-opting Russian veterans to participate in the 2026 State Duma elections.^[15]

The European Union (EU) Council approved the first phase of the European Commission's ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 plan. The EU Council announced on May 27 that it adopted a regulation establishing the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) financial instrument to facilitate common defense procurement efforts between interested EU member states with the goal of boosting Europe's defense industrial production capacity.^[16] The EU will provide up to 150 billion euros (roughly \$170 billion) to member states. The package will benefit Ukraine by allowing Ukraine to join common procurement efforts and make military purchases with EU companies. Ukraine is eligible to receive financing through SAFE to purchase materiel, including ammunition; artillery systems; ground combat capabilities and their support systems; critical infrastructure protection; air defense systems; maritime surface and underwater capabilities; drone and anti-drone systems; Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems; space assets protection; artificial intelligence (AI); and electronic warfare (EW) systems. The EU's five-part ReArm Europe Plan is vital for Europe's short- and long-term security and in line with US President Donald Trump's calls for Europe to shoulder more of its own defense requirements.^[17]

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine. The Swedish Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on May 26 that Sweden's government recently approved 4.8 billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$499 million) worth of funding to procure materiel to support Ukraine's defense capabilities.^[18] The package allocates 480 million Swedish kronor (roughly \$50 million) to the Ukraine Defense Contact Group; over one billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$104 million) to the Danish procurement model that allows foreign states to buy Ukrainian-produced materiel for the Ukrainian military; 418 million Swedish kronor (roughly \$43 million) for equipment procurement to support the development of Ukraine's ground combat capabilities; 550 million Swedish kronor (roughly \$57.1 million) and 546 million Swedish kronor (roughly \$56.7 million) for the Czech and Estonian ammunition initiatives, respectively; and over one billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$104 million) for air defense and long-range drone procurement for Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin is setting conditions to establish permanent control over the Russian-occupied Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), suggesting that Russia plans to illegally occupy and annex additional territory in Ukraine.
- Russian officials are likely leveraging the fact that Ukraine and Russia set no concrete deadlines for the next steps in the peace process in order to delay the process altogether and prolong the war.
- Putin continues to use orchestrated public engagements to forward the Kremlin's effort to create a militarized Russian society united against the West that supports a prolonged

war in Ukraine and possible future conflict with NATO.

- The European Union (EU) Council approved the first phase of the European Commission's ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 plan.
- Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar. Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Kupyansk, and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 26, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Anna Harvey, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

May 26, 2025, 7:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 3:00 pm ET on May 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted one of their largest drone and missile strikes of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 25 to 26 after three nights of record strikes. The May 25-26 strike is now the second largest combined strike of the war, after Russian forces conducted the largest combined strike on the night of May 24 to 25. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched nine Kh-101 cruise missiles from the airspace over Saratov Oblast and 355 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Bryansk, Kursk, and Oryol cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.^[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down all nine Kh-101 missiles and 233 drones over northern, eastern, southern, western, and central Ukraine and that 55 drones were "lost." Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strikes targeted Chernihiv, Khmelnytskyi, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Kyiv oblasts.^[2] Ukrainian officials stated that the strikes caused civilian casualties and damaged civilian infrastructure and private residences.

Russia has launched three of its largest strike packages against Ukraine over the last three days, including its two largest combined strikes, and eight of the largest strikes of the war since January 2025.^[3] Russian strikes against Ukraine continue to disproportionately impact civilians and civilian infrastructure.^[4] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on May 26 that Russia launched over 900 drones against Ukraine over the last three days and that intensified Russian strikes have a significant political meaning.^[5] Zelensky stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is choosing to continue the war rather than engage in meaningful peace negotiations and that there is no evidence that Russia is considering a diplomatic end to the war.^[6] Russia may be increasing strikes against Ukraine as part of a cognitive warfare effort to weaken Ukrainian resolve and to undermine Western support for Ukraine.

Russia's increased missile stockpiling, drone production, and drone adaptations demonstrate Russia's commitment to achieving its war goals through military means in a protracted war in Ukraine. The *Economist* reported on May 25 that Ukrainian government sources estimate that the Kremlin has a stockpile of 500 ballistic missiles.^[7] The *Economist* also reported that Russia is increasing its production of Shahed drones and can currently produce approximately 100 Shaheds a day — roughly four to five times their assessed daily production rate in late 2024.^[8] Ukrainian military intelligence told the *Economist* that Russia plans to increase its production to 500 drones a day by an unspecified future deadline. Ukrainian drone engineers reported that Russia is actively innovating and adapting its Shahed drones to circumvent Ukrainian air defenses, including by using artificial intelligence (AI) and Ukrainian internet and mobile internet networks for navigation to prevent Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. A Ukrainian officer told the *Economist* that Russian drones are flying at an altitude of 2,000 to 2,500 meters, which is out of range of the small-caliber guns and shoulder-fired missiles that Ukrainian mobile air defense crews use. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on May 25 that Russian forces recently set a new Shahed flight altitude record of 4,900 meters.^[9] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yurii Ihnat stated on May 26 that Russia is increasing its production of both Shahed and decoy drones and that Russian forces are flying drones at higher altitudes.^[10] Ihnat reported on May 25 that Russian forces have also resumed their use of Kh-22 cruise missiles after temporarily using fewer cruise missiles in their strike packages.^[11] Increasingly large Russian strike packages are consistent with reports that Russia is significantly increasing its domestic Shahed drone, decoy drone, and missile production and storage capabilities. Russia's efforts to increase domestic drone and missile

production and ongoing adaptations of these strike packages are likely part of a broader Russian effort to prepare for a protracted war in Ukraine and possibly a future war with NATO.[12]

Ukrainian intelligence continues to assess that the Kremlin is committed to its war aim of achieving complete Ukrainian capitulation and is preparing for a potential future conflict with NATO — in line with ISW's assessments. Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service (SZR) Head Oleh Ivashchenko stated in an interview with Ukrainian outlet *Ukrinform* published on May 26 that Russia's strategic plans to gain full control over Ukraine remain unchanged.[13] Ivashchenko stated that the entire Ukrainian intelligence community agrees that Russia is trying to take control over all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. Ivashchenko stated that Russia also has a long-term goal to establish influence over all post-Soviet states and that Russia will need two to four years after the end of hostilities in Ukraine to restore the Russian military's combat capabilities. Ivashchenko noted that Russia's ability to rearm its military after the end of its war in Ukraine will depend on Western sanctions. ISW continues to assess that Russia remains committed to pursuing demands that amount to nothing short of Ukraine's full surrender and that Russia will continue to pursue this objective so long as Putin believes Russia can militarily defeat Ukraine.[14] ISW also continues to assess that the Russian government and military are preparing for a possible future conflict with NATO.[15] Russian authorities recently renewed their years-long narrative rejecting the legality of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, likely to set conditions for Russia to deny the independence and sovereignty of other former Soviet states in the future.[16]

Ukrainian intelligence also assessed that Russia is facing a number of critical constraints in its economy and on the battlefield — in line with ISW's ongoing assessments. Ivashchenko stated that Russia's sovereign wealth fund has fallen from its pre-war level of about \$150 billion to about \$38 billion and that Russia's gold and foreign currency reserves are also decreasing.[17] Ivashchenko noted that Russia is suffering from serious labor shortages, which are causing problems in the Russian economy, and that Russian authorities are trying to avoid paying the financial incentives that Russia is offering new military recruits. Ivashchenko stated that roughly 80 percent of the equipment that Russian forces are using is refurbished from Russia's Soviet-era stockpiles and that only about 20 percent of the equipment is modern. Ivashchenko's statements are in line with ISW's ongoing assessment that Russia will face a number of materiel, manpower, and economic issues in the near to medium-term if Ukrainian forces continue to inflict damage on Russian forces on the battlefield at the current rate.[18] Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) will struggle to sustain Russia's current equipment and ammunition burn rates in the future, and Putin has mismanaged Russia's economy, which is suffering from increased and unsustainable war spending, growing inflation, significant labor shortages, and reductions in Russia's sovereign wealth fund.

Russia's own defense industrial production limitations are pushing Russia to rely on its allies and partners and to find cheap solutions to adapt to Ukraine's drone and counter-drone capabilities. Ivashchenko highlighted North Korea's contribution of six million artillery shells, 120 M1989 Koksan self-propelled artillery systems, and 120 M1991 multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) to Russia since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.[19] Ivashchenko stated that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is supplying machines, chemicals, gunpowder, components, and aviation equipment to at least 20 Russian defense industrial enterprises and that 80 percent of the critical electronics in Russian drones are Chinese made. Ivashchenko stated that Belarus is producing ammunition for Russia and that the Belarusian and Russian DIBs are largely integrated. Russian forces have increasingly supplied frontline units with motorcycles and Chinese- and Russian-made buggies for use in assaults — a response to Ukrainian drone advantages on the battlefield and an effort to offset significant armored vehicle losses.[20] Russia's recent extensive modifications to its long-range Shahed and decoy drones demonstrate that Russia is trying to adapt to Ukraine's successful countermeasures that have been effectively repelling Russia's drone strikes.[21] Russian forces had previously used Shahed drones to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses so as to allow Russian missiles to hit their targets, but Russia's recent modifications to the drones suggest that Russia is attempting to restore the Shahed as an effective weapon itself.[22] Russia is likely focusing on adapting the Shaheds, increasing their production rate, and launching them in increasingly large quantities as the drones are relatively cheap and can be mass produced — unlike costly missiles that Russia can only produce at a relatively much lower rate. Russia is learning lessons about how to adapt its drone and missile strike packages to most effectively penetrate a large air defense umbrella and deplete air defense missile stockpiles, and Russia will carry these lessons into any future conflict.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent demand for Russian forces to create a "buffer zone" along the Russia-Ukraine international border, in addition to Russia's ongoing efforts to seize the remainder of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, ignores Russia's constraints and underscores Putin's intention to increase his territorial demands. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on May 26 that the Russian military command recently redeployed elements of the 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division,

20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) and 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) to reinforce the Russian force grouping attacking into northern Sumy Oblast.^[23] Mashovets stated that elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade are operating near Volodymyrivka (north of Sumy City) and in Gordeevka (just north of Volodymyrivka in Russia). Elements of the Russian 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment have been operating in the Borova and Lyman directions since at least mid-2024.^[24] ISW has observed elements of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade engaged in combat in the Bakhmut-Chasiv Yar direction — a priority direction for the Russian military — since mid-2023 and observed reports of the brigade operating in Chasiv Yar as recently as May 6.^[25] ISW has not observed additional reports of these units operating in northern Sumy Oblast but will cover any future reports about these units.

ISW previously noted that Russian forces' inability to penetrate Ukrainian defenses west and southwest of Chasiv Yar is undermining Russia's ability to prepare for major offensive operations against Kostyantynivka and the wider Ukrainian fortress belt.^[26] Redeploying forces away from Chasiv Yar suggests that the Russian military command may intend to delay its offensive operation against Kostyantynivka and supports ISW's ongoing assessment that Russia does not currently have sufficient operational reserves to intensify offensive operations in several different directions simultaneously.^[27] The Russian military command's decision to redeploy units away from this effort suggests that the Russian military may try to simultaneously continue advances in Donetsk Oblast and establish a buffer zone in northern Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv oblasts, however. The Russian military command may assess that Russian forces have a greater chance of significant advances in northern Sumy Oblast than near Chasiv Yar. Putin recently orchestrated a meeting with Russian officials to float the idea of creating an at least 25-kilometer-wide buffer zone in northern Sumy Oblast, and Putin ordered Russian forces to establish a buffer zone in northern Kharkiv Oblast in May 2024.^[28] ISW previously assessed that Putin likely intends to leverage buffer zones in northern Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts to justify expanding his claims over Ukrainian territory beyond Russia's long-standing claims over Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.^[29]

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises in the Republic of Tatarstan and Ivanovo and Tula oblasts on May 25 and 26.

Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, who often reports on successful Ukrainian drone strikes against Russia, implied on May 26 that Ukrainian drones struck the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Yelabuga, Republic of Tatarstan, and the Dmitrievsky Chemical Plant in Kineshma, Ivanovo Oblast.^[30] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* and Ukrainian outlet *Militarnyi* published footage on May 25 showing Russian air defenses appearing to defend against Ukrainian drone strikes near the Alabuga SEZ.^[31] *Astra* reported on May 26 that at least two drones struck a warehouse at the Dmitrievsky Chemical Plant and that sources in the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations reported that the warehouse sustained damage.^[32] The Ivanovo Oblast Operational Headquarters claimed on May 26 that a drone strike damaged a utility building in Kineshma.^[33] Geolocated footage published on May 26 shows an explosion near the Scientific-Production Association (SPLAV) in Tula City, which manufactures multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), grenade launchers, ammunition, and guided and unguided missiles for the Russian military.^[34] *Astra* also reported that Ukrainian drones on May 25 struck the Shcheglovsky Val Plant in Tula Oblast, which develops guided weapons, air defense systems, and small arms and produces vehicles for Pantsir-S and Pantsir-S1 air defense system.^[35]

The Kremlin's ongoing cognitive warfare effort aimed at preventing future Western military assistance to Ukraine is rooted in fear and the acknowledgement that Russia's only real hope in defeating Ukraine is by isolating Ukraine from its allies. German Chancellor Friederich Merz stated on May 26 that the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France no longer impose "any range restrictions" on Ukraine's ability to use the long-range weapons that these countries have provided and noted that Ukraine can target military positions in Russia.^[36] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded to Merz and stated that such "potential decisions" would be "quite dangerous" and "run counter to attempts at a [peace] settlement."^[37] Pro-Kremlin voices and Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers amplified similar sentiments, with some calling on Russia to respond and others claiming that Russia will achieve its war aims militarily.^[38] Peskov's statement is part of a prolonged Russian effort to persuade Western states to cease military support for Ukraine, which Russian President Vladimir Putin himself has explicitly named as a condition for engaging in negotiations for a full ceasefire.^[39] Russia's only real hope of winning its war in Ukraine is to convince the West to abandon Ukraine, and the Kremlin likely fears the impacts of continued Western military assistance on Ukraine's military capabilities.^[40] Allowing Ukraine to target military warehouses and airbases in Russia also threatens Russia's ability to continue its long-range strike campaign against Ukraine, particularly as Russia seeks to demoralize Ukrainian society through increasingly large and frequent strike packages that disproportionately affect civilian areas.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted one of their largest drone and missile strikes of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 25 to 26, after three nights of record strikes. The May 25-26 strike is now the second largest combined strike of the war, after Russian forces conducted the largest combined strike on the night of May 24 to 25.
- Russia's increased missile stockpiling, drone production, and drone adaptations demonstrate Russia's commitment to achieving its war goals through military means in a protracted war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian intelligence continues to assess that the Kremlin is committed to its war aim of achieving complete Ukrainian capitulation and is preparing for a potential future conflict with NATO — in line with ISW's assessments.
- Ukrainian intelligence also assessed that Russia is facing a number of critical constraints in its economy and on the battlefield — in line with ISW's ongoing assessments.
- Russia's own defense industrial production limitations are pushing Russia to rely on its allies and partners and to find cheap solutions to adapt to Ukraine's drone and counter-drone capabilities.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent demand for Russian forces to create a "buffer zone" along the Russia-Ukraine international border, in addition to Russia's ongoing efforts to seize the remainder of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, ignores Russia's constraints and underscores Putin's intention to increase his territorial demands.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises in the Republic of Tatarstan and Ivanovo and Tula oblasts on May 25 and 26.
- The Kremlin's ongoing cognitive warfare effort aimed at preventing future Western military assistance to Ukraine is rooted in fear and the acknowledgement that Russia's only real hope in defeating Ukraine is by isolating Ukraine from its allies.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Vovchansk, Lyman, and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 25, 2025

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Anna Harvey, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

Russian President Vladimir Putin is leveraging long-range strikes against Ukrainian cities, aggressive rhetorical campaigns, and excessive pessimism in the West about the battlefield situation in Ukraine in a multi-pronged effort to degrade Ukrainian morale and convince the West that a Russian victory in Ukraine is inevitable and that supporting Ukraine is futile. Russian forces have intensified long-range strikes against Ukraine over the last eight months and have conducted seven of the largest drone and missile strikes during the war to date since January 2025.^[1] Russian officials are currently inundating the information space with calls for Ukraine to make concessions on its sovereignty and territorial integrity, although most of these statements are consistent with long-standing Russian war demands and in fact demonstrate that Russia's demands have not changed over the last three years of war.^[2] These demands ignore the fact that the battlefield situation has shifted dramatically since early 2022, and that three years of manpower and materiel losses have significantly degraded the Russian military's ability to conquer Ukraine. Russian advances have significantly slowed as Russian forces continue to suffer personnel losses and increasingly rely on poorly trained and equipped infantry to make gains. Putin remains deeply committed to distracting from the realities of the battlefield situation, however, as bringing about the cessation of Western military assistance to Ukraine is Russia's only real hope of winning this war.

Russian forces conducted the largest combined drone and missile strike of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 24 to 25. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on May 25 that Russian forces launched nine Iskander-M and Kn-23 ballistic missiles from Kursk Oblast, 55 Kh-101 and Kalibr cruise missiles from Saratov Oblast and the Black Sea, one Kh-22 cruise missile from the airspace over the Black Sea, and four Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from an unspecified area of Russia and 298 Shahed and decoy drones from the direction of Bryansk, Kursk, and Oryol cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.^[3] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 45 cruise missiles and that two Kh-59/69 missiles were "lost in location." The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukraine shot down 139 drones and that 127 drones were "lost." Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strike primarily targeted Kyiv and Chernihiv oblasts and also targeted Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Ternopil, Sumy, Odesa, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv,

Kharkiv, and Cherkasy oblasts.[4] Ukrainian officials reported that the strikes killed at least 12 people and injured up to 60 people.[5]

Ukrainian sources noted on May 25 that Russian forces are increasingly launching missiles from occupied Crimea after using missiles less frequently over the last five months.[6] Ukrainian Main Directorate of Intelligence (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Chernyak reported that Russian forces have launched more than 50 missiles from mobile missile systems in occupied Crimea since January 1, 2025. Chernyak stated that Ukrainian Forces struggle to strike the mobile missile launch systems since Russian forces can deploy the systems in 20 minutes and quickly break down and move the systems after a launch. Experts familiar with the topic reported that Russian forces have been launching Iskander ballistic missiles, Oniks supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, and Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles from Crimea. ISW assessed on May 24 that Russian forces have used fewer cruise missiles in strike packages since January 2025, likely due to increased reliance on cheaper long-range drones.[7] The May 24 to 25 overnight combined strike indicates that Russia may be stockpiling cruise missiles in order to conduct large-scale combined strikes against multiple areas of Ukraine at will. Russia may also be using highly varied strike packages in order to confuse Ukrainian forces and prevent Ukrainian forces from conducting consistently effective air defense.

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev suggested that Russia will occupy most of Ukraine if the West continues to aid Ukraine. Medvedev called for Russian control over a buffer zone encompassing nearly all of Ukraine, apart from a relatively small area of Volyn and Lviv oblasts along Poland's border, on his English-language social media accounts on May 25 and threatened that Russia will seize virtually all of Ukraine as a buffer zone if the West continues to supply Ukraine with military aid.[8] Medvedev and other Russian officials have repeatedly called for Russia to establish buffer zones in northern Ukraine, and Medvedev himself previously called for Russia to occupy most of Ukraine as a "buffer zone" in order to place Russian cities out of the range of Ukraine's Western-provided long-range strike systems. Russian officials routinely issue demands for Ukraine to concede significant swaths of occupied and unoccupied territory to Russia and have used Russia's illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea and the Kremlin-generated concept of "Novorossiya" — an invented region of Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all southern and eastern Ukraine — to justify these claims.[9] Medvedev's statements are part of a long-term Kremlin strategy to use prominent voices in the information space and weaponized versions of history to justify Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the long-term occupation of Ukrainian territory.[10]

The Kremlin is attempting to leverage large strike packages and increasingly aggressive rhetorical efforts to distract from the Russian military's poor performance during this current stage of the war. Putin may assess that significant strikes against Ukrainian cities and aggressive Russian rhetoric against NATO and Eastern European states will draw sufficient attention away from Russia's slow, grinding advances in eastern Ukraine. ISW has previously noted that Russia has intensified its narrative efforts against Ukraine during critical moments when the West is discussing supplying Ukraine with additional military aid, and Putin likely views the current discussion of a possible ceasefire or peace agreement to end the war as another critical moment among Ukraine's supporters.[11] Putin likely intends long-range strikes and aggressive rhetoric to generate feelings of hopelessness in Ukraine and the West and dissuade European capitals and the US from further aiding Ukraine by falsely portraying Russian victory as inevitable. Russia is also platforming its partnerships with adversarial countries such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), Iran, and North Korea to push back on the appearance of diplomatic isolation and posture itself as a country with powerful allies who are willing to stand against the West.

Russian officials are attempting to obfuscate the reality of Russia's compounding economic and materiel constraints, which are increasingly hindering Russia's ability to achieve significant battlefield gains. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi recently reported that Russian forces have suffered 177,000 casualties in Ukraine since the start of 2025, and ISW continues to assess that Russia has prioritized rapidly deploying low quality troops with minimal training and battlefield experience for marginal gains, which further complicates Russian forces' ability to conduct complex operations.[12] Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) cannot produce armored vehicles and artillery systems at rates that would offset Russia's current tempo of losses in the medium- to long-term.[13] Russia is also facing significant challenges in balancing resource allocation between defense industrial production and civilian sectors, and is increasingly relying on migrant workers to alleviate significant labor shortages exacerbated by the war effort.[14] The Kremlin may be reassessing its ability to sustain a long-term war effort and appears to be reprioritizing its efforts to convince the West to preemptively concede to Russian demands in light of Russia's economic and military constraints.

Russian forces have eliminated the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk after a four-month-long offensive operation to level the frontline south and southwest of Kostyantynivka in order

to set conditions to advance towards the settlement. Geolocated footage published on May 25 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in central Zorya and northern Romanivka (west of Toretsk) and likely seized Stara Mykolaivka and Hnativka and the fields south of Romanivka.[15] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces seized Romanivka, and Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 68th Tank Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) participated in the advance north of Romanivka.[16] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked in the northern outskirts of Romanivka.[17] ISW assesses that Russian forces seized roughly 65 square kilometers of territory as part of their advance into Romanivka and Zorya, although Ukrainian forces likely previously withdrew from positions in the southern part of this pocket several days or weeks ago.

Russian forces intensified assaults in this area in early February 2025 and began a concerted effort to eliminate Ukrainian positions in the pocket south of Romanivka in late April 2025.[18] The Russian military command redeployed elements of two divisions of the 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Southern Military District [SMD]) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction in mid-February and elements of the 58th CAA (SMD) and 68th Army Corps (AC) (Eastern Military District [EMD]) from the western Zaporizhia and Kurakhove directions respectively to this area in early May.[19] Russian forces have struggled to advance in this area, however, despite appearing to prioritize this sector of the frontline and reinforcing this area in early 2025.

Russian forces would need roughly a century to seize Medvedev's proposed "buffer zone" at their current rate of advance at the cost of nearly 50 million casualties at current loss rates. Russian forces advanced an average of roughly 14.3 square kilometers per day in Ukraine and Russia between January 1, 2025, and May 24, 2025. At this rate of advance, it would take Russian forces approximately 3.9 years to seize the remainder of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and approximately 91 years to seize Medvedev's proposed "buffer zone," which includes 587,459 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory. ISW assessed on February 21 that Russia would need 83 years to capture the remaining 80 percent of Ukraine at their then rate of advance, indicating that the Russian rate of advance has slowed between February and May 2025.[20] Current and former Western officials told the *Washington Post* in an article published on May 24 that Russian forces have sustained an average of 1,500 casualties per day over the last year (since mid-2024), suggesting that Russian forces could suffer nearly 50 million casualties (approximately a third of the current Russian population) were Russian forces to sustain their current casualty rate for the 91 years that it would take to create Medvedev's "buffer zone." [21]

These estimates assume that Russian forces will be able to maintain their current assessed rate of advance and do not take into account a number of geographic and defensive barriers that Russian forces would have to overcome to seize the remaining 80 percent of Ukraine. Russian forces would need to seize Ukraine's fortress belt (a group of major cities that form a significant defensive belt in Donetsk Oblast); cross the Dnipro River and retake Kherson City in Kherson Oblast; conduct a landing operation in the Black Sea to gain positions in Odesa Oblast; and retake Sumy and Kharkiv cities and seize Kyiv and other major cities in central and western Ukraine before seizing Medvedev's "buffer zone." The Dnipro River acts as a natural barrier between current Ukrainian positions and Russian positions in Kherson Oblast and has served as a natural frontline since Ukraine retook Kherson Oblast in 2022. Russian forces failed to accomplish many of these goals during the first several months of the war, and Russian forces have not seized a major urban area since they seized Bakhmut in May 2023. [22] Russian forces have not demonstrated the ability to conduct the kind of rapid, multi-directional offensive operations necessary to accomplish these goals since early 2022 and are unlikely to significantly improve their abilities in the near future given that advancing roughly 65 square kilometers constitutes a significant success in a priority frontline area at this stage of the war.

The Kremlin is also using its bilateral engagements with Ukraine and the United States to maintain the appearance of being interested in peace and delay Western discussion of additional aid to Ukraine. Ukraine and Russia concluded the 1,000-for-1,000 prisoner of war (POWs) exchange on May 25, each exchanging 303 servicemembers.[23] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin stated that Russia expects the POW exchange to establish "a favorable atmosphere for discussing a settlement" to Russia's war in Ukraine.[24] Russian officials are framing Russia's participation in the POW exchange and bilateral negotiations with Ukraine in Istanbul as indicators that Russia is interested in peace.[25] The Kremlin is clearly attempting to portray Russia as amenable to negotiations despite Russian officials' consistent public statements about Russia's unwillingness to engage in ceasefire discussions or compromise on any agreement short of Ukraine's capitulation.

Russia's only real hope of winning this war is to convince the West to abandon Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin remains committed to his theory of victory, which assumes that the Russian military will be able to sustain significant personnel losses in exchange for

incremental gains in Ukraine indefinitely and that Russia will be able to outlast Western support for Ukraine.[26] Putin is therefore desperately seeking to prevent the future supply of Western military aid to Ukraine, as well-resourced Ukrainian forces have consistently demonstrated their ability to inflict unsustainable losses on Russian forces and defend against significant Russian advances.[27] ISW assesses that Western aid remains vital to Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian aggression and is crucial for ensuring a just and enduring peace in Ukraine and long-term security in Europe.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin is leveraging long-range strikes against Ukrainian cities, aggressive rhetorical campaigns, and excessive pessimism in the West about the battlefield situation in Ukraine in a multi-pronged effort to degrade Ukrainian morale and convince the West that a Russian victory in Ukraine is inevitable and that supporting Ukraine is futile.
- Russian forces conducted the largest combined drone and missile strike of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 24 to 25.
- Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev suggested that Russia will occupy most of Ukraine if the West continues to aid Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is attempting to leverage large strike packages and increasingly aggressive rhetorical efforts to distract from the Russian military's poor performance during this current stage of the war.
- Russian forces have eliminated the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk after a four-month-long offensive operation to level the frontline south and southwest of Kostyantynivka in order to set conditions to advance towards the settlement.
- Russian forces would need roughly a century to seize Medvedev's proposed "buffer zone" at their current rate of advance at the cost of nearly 50 million casualties at current loss rates.
- The Kremlin is also using its bilateral engagements with Ukraine and the United States to maintain the appearance of being interested in peace and delay Western discussion of additional aid to Ukraine.
- Russia's only real hope of winning this war is to convince the West to abandon Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kharkiv, Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 24, 2025

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Daria Novikov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 24, 2025, 5:15 pm ET

Russian forces conducted one of the largest combined drone and missile strikes of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 23 to 24, but used fewer missiles than in previous large-scale combined strikes. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on May 24 that Russian forces launched 14 Iskander-M ballistic missiles from the directions of Taganrog, Rostov Oblast; Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai; Bryansk City; and occupied Crimea; and 250 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Bryansk, Kursk, and Oryol cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down six Iskander-M missiles and 128 Shahed drones, and that 117 drones were "lost in location." Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strike heavily targeted Kyiv City and that drones and missiles also struck Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[2] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed prior to the strike on March 23 that Russian forces would respond "adequately" to recent Ukrainian strikes against Russian positions and defense facilities.[3] Russian forces have significantly intensified their nightly attacks against Ukraine over the last five months and have conducted several of the largest strikes of the entire war since January 2025.

Russian forces appear to be reducing their use of cruise missiles, indicating that increased Russian drone production and innovations to long-range drones and related strike tactics are providing Russian forces with a cheaper alternative to cruise missiles.[4] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuri Ihnat stated on May 24 that Ukrainian forces are struggling to use Patriot air defense systems to down modified Russian Iskander-M ballistic missiles due to recent Russian improvements, including enhancements that enable the missile to change trajectory and perform maneuvers rather than flying in a straight line.[5] Ukrainian aviation expert Anatoliy Khrapchynskyi reported on February 11 that

Russian forces had reduced their use of Kh-101 and Kh-555 cruise missiles and were increasingly using Kh-59 and Kh-69 cruise missiles.[6] ISW has observed Russian forces rarely using Kh-101, Kh-55, and Kh-555 cruise missiles against Ukraine since February 2025 and infrequently using Kh-59 and Kh-69 cruise missiles since March 2025. Russian forces most recently used almost 60 cruise missiles against Ukraine on April 24, but Russia typically uses large numbers of Shahed and decoy drones to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses in night strikes and has recently relied on small numbers of ballistic missiles to conduct more targeted strikes against Ukrainian cities.[7] Russian forces appear to be increasing their use of long-range drones and decreasing their use of cruise missiles in strikes against Ukraine, possibly to conserve the fixed-wing airframes that Russian forces use to launch cruise missiles.

Ukraine and Russia conducted a second round of prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges on May 24 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul. Ukrainian and Russian officials announced that Ukraine and Russia each exchanged 307 POWs.[8] Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian POWs included those serving in the Ukrainian Army, Naval Forces, State Border Service, and the National Guard.[9] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Ukraine and Russia have each exchanged a total of 697 soldiers and civilians over the last two days. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Russian authorities are transporting the Russian servicemembers to Belarus for rehabilitation.[10]

Russian officials will reportedly submit a draft document of their conditions for peace in Ukraine following the conclusion of the POW exchanges, although Russia's conditions are unlikely to be anything short of Ukraine's full surrender. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha stated on May 23 that Ukraine expects Russia to present a draft proposal for an unconditional ceasefire agreement after the third and final POW exchange on May 25.[11] Sybiha added that Ukraine welcomes the participation of US President Donald Trump and European leaders in future peace talks and that Ukraine has not ruled out the possibility of holding a meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated on May 23 that Russia would be ready to present Ukraine with Russia's draft document on a "long-term settlement of the crisis" as soon as the POW exchange is completed.[12] Lavrov's statement highlights the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to force Ukraine and the West to begin long-term peace negotiations without an active ceasefire in place, in contrast to US, Ukrainian, and European efforts to first secure an unconditional ceasefire agreement prior to any long-term peace talks. ISW continues to assess that Russia remains committed to pursuing demands that amount to nothing short of Ukraine's full capitulation and that Russia will continue to pursue this objective so long as Putin believes Russia can militarily defeat Ukraine.[13]

Russian forces have significantly expanded their salient southwest of Kostyantynivka in recent weeks and established sufficient positions to launch an offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka from the south or to support the envelopment of Pokrovs'k and Myrnohrad from the northeast in the coming weeks and months. Geolocated footage published on May 23 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of Popiv Yar (west of Toretsk) and seized the fields southeast of the settlement.[14] A Russian milblogger claimed on May 23 that elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) participated in the advance near Popiv Yar and that Russian forces also advanced north and south of Oleksandropil (southeast of Popiv Yar).[15] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are advancing further into Poltavka (north of Popiv Yar) and toward Rusyn Yar (northeast of Popiv Yar).[16] Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA) are advancing near Novolenivka (east of Popiv Yar).[17] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have seized most of Romanivka (southeast of Popiv Yar) and that Russian forces are eliminating the remaining Ukrainian positions south and southeast of Zorya (southeast of Popiv Yar).[18]

The Russian salient southwest of Kostyantynivka is likely sufficient to support a future Russian offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka or Pokrovs'k, but Russian forces will have to make further advances from Chasiv Yar and Toretsk and west of Pokrovs'k before Russian forces will pose a significant threat to either of these towns. ISW has observed geolocated footage indicating that Russian forces have advanced roughly 14 kilometers from the southwestern outskirts of Kostyantynivka at their closest point in this salient. Russian forces will be able to leverage this salient to advance further along the T-0504 Pokrovs'k-Kostyantynivka highway from the south toward Kostyantynivka as Russian forces contend with Ukrainian defenses west of and along the Kleban-Byk reservoir. Russian forces must eliminate the remaining Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw north of the Kleban-Byk reservoir before Russian forces will be able to advance further along the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway to support future advances up to the southern outskirts of Kostyantynivka.

ISW previously noted that Russian forces have struggled to break out of Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, which has likely complicated Russia's plans for an offensive against Kostyantynivka and the wider Ukrainian fortress belt.[19] Russian advances in Chasiv Yar have been slow over the last year, and Russian forces have yet to significantly reinforce the Russian grouping in this area to facilitate further advances. Russian forces will have to break through Ukrainian defenses and advance south and southwest of Chasiv Yar before Russian forces will be able to threaten Kostyantynivka from the northeast. Russia reinforced its force grouping in Toretsk in early 2025, but Russian forces continue to struggle to advance through the contested "gray zone" that Ukrainian and Russian drone operators have created within Toretsk and immediately west of Toretsk. Russian forces must advance in the fields north, northwest, and west of Toretsk and seize positions further along the T-0516 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway before Russian forces can launch a serious offensive operation against Kostyantynivka. **The Russian salient southwest of Kostyantynivka is therefore only one of the three necessary areas where Russian forces must make further advances in order to seriously threaten Kostyantynivka.**

Russian forces must advance further west of Pokrovsk if they intend to envelop Pokrovsk and avoid fighting through the town's urban areas in Summer 2025. Russian forces largely abandoned efforts to expand their salient southwest of Pokrovsk when Ukrainian forces conducted a series of counterattacks south and southwest of Pokrovsk in February 2025. Russian forces have not reintensified this effort and have instead prioritized advances further southwest of Pokrovsk toward Novopavlivka in March, April, and May 2025. Russian forces must reintensify their efforts to advance west of Pokrovsk toward Hryshyne if Russian forces intend to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Pokrovsk under threat of envelopment. Russian forces have recently intensified assaults immediately southeast and south of Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad, and Russian forces may be preparing to attack into the towns themselves to support the envelopment effort, as Russian forces did in Avdiivka, Vuhledar, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka over the last year. Russian forces will also have to contend with ongoing Ukrainian counterattacks and drone operations throughout the Kostyantynivka and Pokrovsk directions in future offensive operations. ISW continues to assess that Russia is unlikely to have sufficient manpower, materiel, and operational planning capabilities to conduct both an envelopment of Pokrovsk and a significant offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka in the coming months and will likely have to prioritize one direction.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted one of the largest combined drone and missile strikes of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 23 to 24, but used fewer missiles than in previous large-scale combined strikes.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a second round of prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges on May 24 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul.
- Russian officials will reportedly submit a draft document of their conditions for peace in Ukraine following the conclusion of the POW exchanges, although Russia's conditions are unlikely to be anything short of Ukraine's full surrender.
- Russian forces have significantly expanded their salient southwest of Kostyantynivka in recent weeks and established sufficient positions to launch an offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka from the south or to support the envelopment of Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad from the northeast in the coming weeks and months.
- The Russian salient southwest of Kostyantynivka is likely sufficient to support a future Russian offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka or Pokrovsk, but Russian forces will have to make further advances from Chasiv Yar and Toretsk and west of Pokrovsk before Russian forces will pose a significant threat to either of these towns.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, Toretsk, and Novopavlivka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 23, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 23, 2025, 4:45 pm ET

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded that any future peace agreement in Ukraine include conditions to prevent the election and establishment of future pro-Western governments in Ukraine. Lavrov insisted on May 23 that any peace agreement must include

conditions preventing the "repetition of what brought putschists to power through a bloody revolution," referring to Ukraine's 2014 Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity, which drove out Ukraine's former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych.[1] Lavrov also reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's repeated claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is not the legitimate leader of Ukraine and claimed that Russia could negotiate with the leadership of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada (parliament) instead of Zelensky.

Russian officials often deliberately misread the Ukrainian Constitution to claim that Zelensky's government is illegitimate since Ukraine did not hold presidential elections in 2024, although the Ukrainian Constitution and law prohibit the government from holding elections during times of martial law and external aggression.[2] Russian officials have repeatedly characterized Ukraine's Euromaidan protests and Revolution of Dignity as a "coup," and leverage this narrative to reinforce Russia's claims that the current Ukrainian government is not legitimate and thus cannot negotiate with Russia.[3] Lavrov's statement is also an explicit demand for regime change in Ukraine as a condition of any future peace agreement – a demand that Russian officials routinely make under the guise of demands for "denazification" in Ukraine.[4] Russian officials will likely falsely frame any future pro-Western government in Ukraine as inheriting the illegitimacy of all Ukrainian governments since 2014 and set conditions to claim that any agreement that Russia concludes with Ukraine is non-binding.

Lavrov also rejected US President Donald Trump's recent suggestion that the Vatican could host negotiations on Russia's war against Ukraine.[5] Lavrov claimed that negotiations in the Vatican would be "unrealistic" and that it would be "uncomfortable" for the representatives of "two Orthodox countries" to meet in the Vatican.[6]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a 390-for-390 prisoner-of-war (POW) and civilian exchange on May 23 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine and Russia exchanged 390 Ukrainians for 390 Russians in the first stage of the 1,000-for-1,000 exchange and that Ukraine expects the swaps to continue on May 24 and 25.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russia and Ukraine conducted a 270-for-270 POW exchange and a 120-for-120 civilian exchange.[8]

Russian forces reportedly recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield. The Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office stated on May 23 that it launched an investigation into reports of Russian forces executing two POWs in the Pokrovsk direction on May 22.[9] The prosecutor's office reported that Russian forces captured, disarmed, and executed two of four Ukrainian soldiers conducting a combat operation near Udachne (southwest of Pokrovsk). The prosecutor's office reported that the status of the other two Ukrainian soldiers is unknown. There has been a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025.[10] ISW continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct systemic executions in direct violation of international law.[11]

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved an experimental application to monitor migrants, likely in an effort to placate Russian ultranationalist demands while continuing to leverage migrants to support force generation and mitigate labor shortages. Putin signed a law on May 23 allowing Moscow City and Oblast authorities to introduce an experimental mobile application to register and track migrants.[12] The law forces some populations of migrants to register with Russian authorities and provide their location to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) through a mobile application. Russian state outlets reported that Russian authorities may deport migrants who attempt to conceal their location.[13] This experimental application system will begin on September 1 and will last until September 1, 2029. The official Russian government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* suggested that Russia would extend these registration and tracking systems throughout Russia should the test in Moscow City and Oblast prove successful.[14] Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin stated on May 20 at the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum that the Investigative Committee recently created a new division for investigating crimes that migrants commit in Russia.[15]

ISW continues to assess that Putin is prioritizing leveraging migrants to mitigate ongoing labor shortages and to support force generation efforts, despite ongoing complaints from Russian ultranationalists advocating for the Kremlin to impose harsher restrictions on migrants.[16] Putin may be attempting to placate Russian ultranationalists by approving select harsher restrictions that ultimately allow Russia to better monitor migrants to leverage them for labor and force generation.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded that any future peace agreement in Ukraine include conditions to prevent the election and establishment of future pro-Western governments in Ukraine.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a 390-for-390 prisoner-of-war (POW) and civilian exchange on May 23 as part of a larger 1,000-for-1,000 exchange agreed upon during recent bilateral negotiations in Istanbul.
- Russian forces reportedly recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin approved an experimental application to monitor migrants, likely in an effort to placate Russian ultranationalist demands while continuing to leverage migrants to support force generation and mitigate labor shortages.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces advanced near Novopavlivka and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment May 22, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 22, 2025, 5:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on May 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is fostering the formation of an informal state ideology based on Russian nationalism that positions Russia in opposition to the West as part of ongoing efforts to militarize and unify Russian society. Putin stated on May 22 at a likely highly scripted award ceremony that "strong family foundations" and "traditional values" support Russia's "1,000-year-old statehood."^[1] Putin emphasized that Russia's "most important" task is to preserve its people, culture, and spirituality. A Russian Orthodox priest who received an award during the ceremony thanked Putin for protecting Russian traditional culture, spirituality, and language. The priest noted that Russia's celebrations of its contributions to victory in the Second World War teach Russian youth and those in the "Russkiy Mir" ("Russian World") to defend Russia and love Russia's culture and spiritual foundations. (The "Russian World" is a Kremlin-promoted geopolitical concept with amorphous parameters that broadly encompass those who live outside of Russia's borders but relate in some vague way to Russian language, culture, Orthodoxy, and media). Russian State Historical Museum General Director and awardee Alexei Levikin claimed that many countries hostile to Russia are basing their policies and ideologies on the falsification of historical events and facts. A martial arts school director who received an award claimed that Russia always proves that its fighters are the best on the battlefields and in sports arenas.

Putin notably promoted Russian nationalism by emphasizing Russia's spirituality and thousand-year history and by giving only a Russian Orthodox priest — but no representatives of other faiths — an award, despite the fact that the Russian state formally regards Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as Russia's "traditional" religions.^[2] Putin has previously highlighted ethnic and religious minorities' contributions to Russia at high profile events and has often promoted a civic Russian identity and nationalism.^[3] Putin's departure from this rhetoric at the highly staged event on May 22 may be an attempt to appease the increasingly pro-war Russian ultranationalist community. Putin is also attempting to use the awardees' statements to reinforce the creation of an informal state ideology predicated on perpetuating the belief that the West is determined to defeat Russia, thereby justifying a future military conflict against the West to the Russian public.^[4] Putin declared 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland," and the development of an informal Russian nationalist ideology provides an ideological foundation for the ongoing Kremlin effort to develop a new cadre of loyal elites that includes selected veterans of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[5] Putin will likely expand efforts to unify Russian society against the perceived threat of the West and to develop an elite class of militarized nationalists in order to ensure that any successor will embody similarly aggressive and dangerous ideals that perpetuate eternal conflict with the West and NATO.

Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin — one of the most outspoken Russian ultranationalists in Putin's inner circle — expressed support for the inclusion of an informal state ideology based on Russian nationalism in the Russian Constitution. Russian State Duma Deputy Speaker Pyotr Tolstoy stated on May 19 at the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum that Russia may change its constitution in the future.^[6] Duma Committee on State Building and Legislation Head Pavel Krasheninnikov later stated at the forum that the Russian Constitution "meets

current realities" and does not need amending, however.^[7] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on May 19, in response to Tolstoy, that changing the constitution is "not on the [Kremlin's] agenda."^[8] Bastrykin claimed in an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS published on May 22 that Russia is built on traditional values, such as patriotism, citizenship, service to the Fatherland, and a strong family, and that these traditional values should underpin Russia's "national idea."^[9] Bastrykin further claimed that Russia should enshrine this "national idea" in its constitution. Bastrykin emphasized Russia's need to protect and preserve its "historical heritage" through legal frameworks. Bastrykin routinely publicly expresses interest in an informal Russian state ideology predicated on Russian ethno-religious nationalism and opposition to the West, in contrast to other senior Russian officials.^[10] The Russian Constitution notably forbids the adoption of a formal state ideology.^[11] Peskov stated on May 22 that it is difficult to comment on proposals to amend the Russian Constitution because the Kremlin does not have the specifics of such proposals — a departure from his May 19 statement apparently dismissing changes to the constitution.^[12] Kremlin officials most recently leveraged Victory Day, Russia's largest holiday that commemorates the Soviet Union's contributions to the Second World War, to promote a new informal state ideology based on Russian unity in the face of opposition from the West.^[13] The Kremlin is likely accelerating its promotion of this ideology to prepare the domestic population for a future military conflict against the West. Bastrykin is likely spearheading efforts to formally enshrine Russian nationalist ideology in the constitution as one of the most powerful and influential ultranationalists within the Kremlin elite.

Russian authorities are renewing their years-long narrative rejecting the legality of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, possibly to deny Ukrainian and Belarusian sovereignty and independence in the future. Russian State Duma Committee on the Protection of the Family, Fatherhood, Motherhood, and Childhood Head and member of the Communist Party Central Committee Nina Ostanina stated on May 22 that Duma deputies are ready to raise the issue of the alleged illegality of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.^[14] Ostanina agreed with Russian Presidential Advisor Anton Kobyakov's May 21 claim that the Soviet Union's founding body was not involved in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and that, therefore, the Soviet Union still legally exists.^[15] Ostanina further claimed that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was illegal because "no one gave authority" to then Belarusian Parliament Chairperson Stanislav Shushkevich, then Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic President Boris Yeltsin, and then Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk to sign the December 1991 Belavezha Accords, the internationally recognized document in which the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union.^[16] Russian authorities have intermittently revived false narratives about the illegality of the Soviet Union's dissolution and calls to reestablish the Soviet Union since at least 2014, and promoted this informational effort in 2021 and 2023.^[17] The Kremlin has been pursuing its strategic effort to de facto annex Belarus through the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and consistently denies Ukrainian sovereignty.^[18] Russian officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin, have frequently invoked the "trinity doctrine" — the ideological concept suggesting that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians are a "triune" and forcibly separated people.^[19] The Kremlin may be instructing lower-level officials to reinject the narrative about the allegedly illegal dissolution of the Soviet Union into the Russian information space in order to set conditions for the Kremlin to withdraw its recognition of Ukraine and Belarus as independent states in the future and call for a united Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian state. Russian officials have notably not acted upon past calls for the reestablishment of the Soviet Union, and the most recent iteration of this information campaign is similarly unlikely to have any near-term effects.

Russian authorities and state media continue to publicly question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian negotiating team and the Ukrainian government, likely to further efforts to reject and delay negotiations and to set conditions to renege on any future peace agreement with Ukraine. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Legal Department Director Maksim Musikhin claimed to Kremlin newswire TASS on May 21 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has "long" lost his "internal" and "external" legitimacy so there "may be problems" with any agreements Zelensky may sign in the future.^[20] Musikhin claimed that a person "who has the [Ukrainian] people's mandate" should sign any future agreements and that the Ukrainian people must choose a new leader. Musikhin claimed that the Ukrainian Constitution may grant the head of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada the power to sign agreements. TASS also amplified a source allegedly "close to the negotiations" in Istanbul claiming that Ukraine will have to change the members of its negotiating group in order to work on a memorandum for a future peace treaty because the Ukrainian delegation at the recent Istanbul talks had a "shortage of politicians."^[21] The source further questioned the legitimacy of any future Ukrainian negotiating group by claiming that the group may include "spies" working for European states or the United States. Musikhin is reiterating the longstanding false Kremlin claim that Zelensky is not the legitimate leader of Ukraine and therefore cannot sign any agreements with Russia.^[22] Musikhin is also repeating Russian President Vladimir Putin's false claim that the Verkhovna Rada is the only legitimate power in Ukraine.^[23] Kremlin officials have repeatedly claimed that Ukraine must hold elections for its government to be legitimate even though Ukraine's constitution

and law explicitly prohibits elections during periods of martial law and prohibits the Ukrainian government from lifting martial law during invasion by a hostile country.^[24] Musikhin's statements and these Russian state media reports are part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to set conditions for Russia to justify its withdrawal from any future peace agreements with Ukraine at a time of Russia's choosing and to support Russia's repeated demand that Ukraine acquiesce to regime change and the installation of a pro-Russian government.^[25]

Recent Western reporting provided additional details in a case in which Russian forces executed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in November 2024, supporting ISW's assessment that high-level Russian military commanders are likely involved in these executions. CNN reported on May 21 that a Ukrainian intelligence official provided drone footage and intercepted audio in which a Russian commander ordered the execution of Ukrainian POWs and that the footage and audio correspond to a credible report of a Russian execution in western Zaporizhia Oblast in November 2024.^[26] CNN reported that it could not independently verify the radio intercept or its link to the execution but noted that a forensic expert and an unnamed Western intelligence official found the audio to be authentic and "consistent with previously documented brutal executions." Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) told CNN that elements of a "Storm" unit of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) were responsible for the November 2024 executions and at least one other suspected execution. ISW observed additional reporting and footage that indicated that Russian forces captured and disarmed six Ukrainian POWs and executed five at close range near Novodarivka (eastern Zaporizhia Oblast) on November 23, 2024, in violation of international law.^[27] UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial summary or arbitrary executions Morris Tidball-Binz told CNN that Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs cannot occur at such high numbers or frequency without the orders or consent of the highest Russian military commanders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin. There has been a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025, and ISW continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct systemic executions in direct violation of international law.^[28]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov confirmed on May 22 Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev's appointment as Russian Ground Forces Commander.^[29] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin likely appointed Mordvichev to proliferate positional warfare tactics and operational concepts for grinding marginal advances — the main tactics Russian forces used in the Avdiivka-Pokrovsk direction — across Russia's Ground Forces.^[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin is fostering the formation of an informal state ideology based on Russian nationalism that positions Russia in opposition to the West as part of ongoing efforts to militarize and unify Russian society.
- Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin — one of the most outspoken Russian ultranationalists in Putin's inner circle — expressed support for the inclusion of an informal state ideology based on Russian nationalism in the Russian Constitution.
- Russian authorities are renewing their years-long narrative rejecting the legality of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, possibly to deny Ukrainian and Belarusian sovereignty and independence in the future.
- Russian authorities and state media continue to publicly question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian negotiating team and the Ukrainian government, likely to further efforts to reject and delay negotiations and to set conditions to renege on any future peace agreement with Ukraine.
- Recent Western reporting provided additional details in a case in which Russian forces executed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in November 2024, supporting ISW's assessment that high-level Russian military commanders are likely involved in these executions.
- Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov confirmed on May 22 Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev's appointment as Russian Ground Forces Commander.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Toretsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, Daria Novikov, and Karolina Hird with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45 pm ET on May 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin likely orchestrated a meeting with Kursk Oblast officials on May 20 to set conditions to justify the renewal of Russian plans to seize Sumy City and illegally annex Sumy Oblast. Putin met with municipal leaders in Kursk Oblast on May 20, during which the head of Glushkovsky Raion, Pavel Zolotarev, asked Putin to create a buffer zone in Sumy Oblast.^[1] Putin asked how many kilometers deep this buffer zone should be, and Zolotarev claimed that Russia should seize "at least Sumy (City)" and implied that Russia should be "bigger."^[2] Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein later responded to the interaction on his Telegram channel, claiming that his grandfather was from Sumy Oblast, so "this land is not foreign to [him]."^[3] Sumy City is roughly 25 kilometers from the international border, and a buffer zone deep enough to include Sumy City would prevent Ukrainian forces from conducting tube artillery and tactical drone strikes against Russian territory. Western and Ukrainian sources reported that the Russian delegation at the May 16 Ukrainian-Russian talks in Istanbul threatened to seize Sumy Oblast in order to create a "security zone."^[4] ISW continues to assess that Russia has territorial aims beyond the oblasts that Russia has already illegally occupied or annexed and that Putin may intend to leverage further advances in Sumy Oblast to demand that Ukraine cede part of Sumy Oblast to Russia during future peace negotiations.^[5]

The Kremlin likely arranged the interaction at the May 20 meeting in order to frame Putin as an effective and engaged wartime leader by responding to Russian requests to further advance in Sumy Oblast and suggesting that Russia lay claim to more territory within Ukraine. Putin's visit to Kursk Oblast on May 20 for the first time since Russia claimed military victory in the oblast on April 26.^[6] ISW has observed reports that Ukrainian forces maintain limited positions in Kursk Oblast as fighting continues, despite official Kremlin claims that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of the oblast entirely.^[7] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 21 that Ukrainian forces continue active combat operations in Kursk Oblast.^[8] Putin also met with Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein and agreed to continue providing federal funding for local residents and to increase demining operations.^[9] Putin's meeting with Khinshtein is part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to portray Putin as an effective and caring wartime leader and to downplay Russian failures in the Ukraine theater.^[10]

Russian forces are highly unlikely to be able to seize Sumy City in the near- to medium-term given Russia's demonstrated inability to rapidly seize even much smaller settlements in Ukraine in the past three years. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on May 19 that elements of the Russian 18th Motorized Rifle Division (11th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and 72nd Motorized Rifle Division (44th AC, LMD) are conducting most of the assaults in the Sumy direction and that elements of the 83rd Separate Airborne (VDV) Brigade are likely also operating in the Sumy direction.^[11] Mashovets stated that up to four or five motorized rifle and rifle regiments of the Russian mobilization reserve are also operating in the Sumy direction.^[12] These limited elements reportedly operating in the Sumy direction are insufficient to seize a city as large as Sumy City (pre-war population of 256,000), and Russian forces have not demonstrated the capability to seize large cities since the first months of the war. Russian forces have not seized a Ukrainian city with a pre-war population greater than 100,000 since capturing Lysychansk, Luhansk Oblast in July 2022, but the seizure of Lysychansk was the result of a slow grinding effort that caused Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine to culminate in summer 2022, as opposed to a rapid and effective maneuver operation.^[13] Russian forces have since struggled to seize much smaller settlements in subsequent campaigns despite using larger numbers of forces, especially in eastern and northern Ukraine.^[14] Ukrainian officials have also previously expressed doubt that Russian forces would be able to conduct an effective offensive operation to seize Sumy City.^[15]

Russia continues to promote the false narrative accusing Ukrainian forces of "neo-Nazism" as part of dual Kremlin efforts to justify continued Russian offensive operations in Ukraine despite ongoing peace talks, and to prepare the Russian population for a Russian rejection of any future peace agreement. Putin also used the visit to Kursk Oblast to claim that Ukrainian forces intentionally damaged monuments to the Second World War during the Kursk Oblast incursion.^[16] Putin claimed that Ukrainian forces' alleged destruction of these monuments "gives [Russia] every reason to say that these are people with neo-Nazi ideology." The Kremlin has long promoted the narrative that Ukraine harbors neo-Nazi ideology in an effort to justify its military aggression against Ukraine and its calls for regime change in Kyiv. Kremlin officials, including Putin, have recently claimed that the Ukrainian government does not fully control the Ukrainian military and lacks control over alleged "neo-Nazi groups" as part of wider Kremlin efforts to undermine the Ukrainian government's

legitimacy and present Ukraine as an illegitimate negotiating partner.[17] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is using its narratives about the Ukrainian government's illegitimacy to set conditions to renege on any future Ukrainian-Russian agreements, and the Kremlin may intensify this informational campaign to socialize the Russian domestic audience for such a future rejection.[18] The fact that Putin is perpetuating these narratives to justify further offensive operations in Ukraine highlights the dissonance between Putin's posturing to Western audiences versus his posturing to a domestic audience.

Russia continues to reject American proposals to establish a ceasefire in Ukraine before starting negotiations to end the war. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on May 20 that the United States is waiting for Russia to present a document outlining the "terms that [Russia] would require in order to reach a ceasefire that would then allow for broader negotiations."^[19] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov directly rejected on May 21 the idea that Russia and Ukraine should come to "a truce and then we'll see," apparently disparaging the United States and its partners' attempts to facilitate negotiations.^[20] Lavrov claimed that Russia does not want to repeat the Istanbul 2022 Ukrainian-Russian talks. Lavrov's May 21 statement is an explicit rejection of the US proposal for the establishment of a ceasefire first and then peace talks.^[21] ISW has long assessed that Russia attempted to use the Istanbul 2022 talks to frame Russia's demands for Ukraine's full surrender as legitimate and reasonable.^[22] Lavrov's statements indicate that Russia continues to conflate the ceasefire and peace settlement processes, as Russia remains committed to making incremental gains on the battlefield indefinitely.

Russian officials are setting conditions to refuse Western involvement in peace negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine and for Russia to deny the independence and sovereignty of other former Soviet states. Russian Presidential Advisor Anton Kobyakov claimed on May 21 that the Soviet Union's founding body, the Congress of People's Deputies, was not involved in dissolving the Soviet Union, so the Soviet Union still legally exists and the war in Ukraine is therefore an "internal process."^[23] Kobyakov further claimed that the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics did not have the legal authority to ratify the December 1991 Belovezha Accords, the internationally recognized document in which the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union.^[24] The parliament of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic elected Boris Yeltsin president of the Russian republic in 1990, and it is in this capacity that he legally signed the Belovezha Accords.^[25] Article 72 of the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union, however, notably already gave each republic the right to freely secede from the USSR.^[26] The Soviet republics formalized the dissolution of the Soviet Union with Declaration No. 142-N in December 1991.^[27] Russia has long recognized the independence of and established diplomatic relations with the former Soviet republics.^[28] Russia has since entered into a number of treaties with Ukraine, explicitly acknowledging Ukraine's legitimacy.^[29] Russia has also long claimed the right to protect its "compatriots abroad" in former Soviet states and created simplified pathways for citizens of former Soviet states to obtain Russian passports – implicit acknowledgments of these states' independence from Russia.^[30]

Kobyakov's claims are likely part of efforts to set conditions for the Kremlin to present its full-scale invasion of Ukraine as an "internal Russian affair" in which foreign states should not be involved, including during peace negotiations to end the war. Kobyakov's statements notably also further set conditions for Russia to deny the legitimacy of all the former Soviet republics and to claim the right to violate the territorial integrity of other former Soviet countries beyond Ukraine. The Kremlin has long claimed that Russia is the legitimate successor state to both the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, and ISW continues to assess that Russia seeks to reconstitute the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire.^[31]

Russian security services continue to conduct hybrid operations against the United States and its allies in preparation for a larger future war with NATO. The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), along with the intelligence services of Germany, Czechia, Poland, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, and the Netherlands, issued a cybersecurity advisory on May 21 warning that a Russian state-sponsored cyber campaign has been targeting Western logistics and technology companies for over two years.^[32] The report stated that the 85th Main Special Service Center (Unit 26165) of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU) has targeted the defense, transportation, and IT service verticals of both government and commercial entities within NATO member states, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. Unit 26165 actors reportedly exploited systemic vulnerabilities and leveraged spearfishing, brute guessing, and impersonation campaigns to access information on Western aid shipments to Ukraine, including vessel numbers, routes, and cargo contents. The actors also likely gained remote access to private cameras near key logistics hubs and through public sources, such as traffic cameras, to track the movement of materials into Ukraine. IP camera attacks are largely targeted at cameras within Ukraine, Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia.

The recent establishment of the first formal motorcycle unit within the Ukrainian military demonstrates the rapid technical adaptation cycle that has become typical in Ukraine and that will become a key characteristic of future wars. Ukraine's 425th "Skala" Separate Assault Regiment reported on May 20 that the Ukrainian military command formed Ukraine's first assault motorcycle company within the regiment and tasked the company with conducting adaptable assault operations and quickly breaking through Russian positions.^[33] Ukraine is likely developing its own motorcycle units in response to the recent Russian formalization of its use of motorcycles — a tactic Russian forces have increasingly used on the battlefield since late 2024.^[34] Russian forces have grown increasingly reliant on light vehicles such as motorcycles, buggies, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) due to successful Ukrainian drone strikes that have damaged and destroyed Russian armored vehicles and exacerbated Russia's vehicle shortages.^[35] Russian forces appear to be undergoing a transition period and moving towards regularly conducting assaults exclusively on motorcycles.^[36] Ukraine's formation of its motorcycle unit demonstrates the rapid proliferation of technical adaptations throughout the frontline in Ukraine, with major changes implemented across a thousand-kilometer frontline in as few as two to three weeks.^[37]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin likely orchestrated a meeting with Kursk Oblast officials on May 20 to set conditions to justify the renewal of Russian plans to seize Sumy City and illegally annex Sumy Oblast.
- Russian forces are highly unlikely to be able to seize Sumy City in the near- to medium-term given Russia's demonstrated inability to rapidly seize even much smaller settlements in Ukraine in the past three years.
- Russia continues to promote the false narrative accusing Ukrainian forces of "neo-Nazism" as part of dual Kremlin efforts to justify continued Russian offensive operations in Ukraine despite ongoing peace talks, and to prepare the Russian population for a Russian rejection of any future peace agreement.
- Russia continues to reject American proposals to establish a ceasefire in Ukraine before starting negotiations to end the war.
- Russian officials are setting conditions to refuse Western involvement in peace negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine and for Russia to deny the independence and sovereignty of other former Soviet states.
- Russian security services continue to conduct hybrid operations against the United States and its allies in preparation for a larger future war with NATO.
- The recent establishment of the first formal motorcycle unit within the Ukrainian military demonstrates the rapid technical adaptation cycle that has become typical in Ukraine and that will become a key characteristic of future wars.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment May 20, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Daria Novikov, Nicole Volkov, Anna Harvey, Angelica Evans, and Karolina Hird with William Runkel

Senior Russian officials continue to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent efforts to feign interest in peace negotiations to end the war. Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev claimed during the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum on May 20 that there are currently no Ukrainian officials with the authority to conclude a peace treaty with Russia and that Russia may need to consult Ukraine's Constitution to identify authorized negotiation partners.^[1] Medvedev questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and claimed that Ukraine is a "failed state" whose leaders' lack of legitimacy raises "serious questions" about who Russia can negotiate with during future peace negotiations.^[2] Medvedev's claims directly contradict Putin's reported agreement with US President Donald Trump to immediately begin bilateral negotiations with Ukraine.^[3] Medvedev's statements indicate that Russia is, in fact, not interested in engaging with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other senior Ukrainian government officials who are key to bilateral negotiations to end the war.

Russian officials have repeatedly promoted the false narrative that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government are illegitimate to justify Russia's refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine and further Russia's long-standing war goal of establishing a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv.

[4] Ukraine's Constitution and Ukrainian law explicitly state that Ukraine cannot hold elections while martial law is in place and that Ukrainian authorities cannot lift martial law while "the threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity" remains.[5] Zelensky also recently clarified that a September 2022 presidential decree does not preclude him from negotiating with Putin.[6] Chairperson of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada Foreign Affairs Committee Oleksandr Merezhko recently stated that Ukraine's Constitution "clearly" specifies Zelensky as Ukraine's chief negotiator and noted that Zelensky's constitutional powers allow him to override past decrees.[7] **ISW continues to assess that any long-term peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and the Ukrainian Constitution.[8]**

Medvedev also reiterated long-standing Russian demands tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation. Medvedev falsely claimed that Russia's illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea was legitimate under international law, underscoring Russia's unwillingness to make any concessions in peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.[9] Medvedev also demanded that Ukraine demilitarize the current frontline, refuse foreign military aid, and reject European peacekeeping deployments to Ukraine.[10] Medvedev stated that Russia would consider the deployment of European forces to be a military threat and categorize future deployments of European forces in Ukraine as legitimate military targets.[11] Medvedev's statements indicate that Russia has not abandoned its original goals in Ukraine, which include the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine, securing international recognition of large parts of southern and eastern Ukraine as Russian territory, and a permanent non-aligned status for Ukraine.[12] Medvedev's threats against future European peacekeepers are also part of an ongoing effort to frame the current war in Ukraine as an existential conflict between Russia and the West.[13] Medvedev's statements indicate that Putin has not ordered Russian officials to abandon ongoing narrative efforts to discredit Ukraine in response to promises that Putin allegedly made to Trump and that Putin likely does not intend to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine.

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and support Ukraine's defense industry. Italian media reported in mid-May 2025 that Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto announced that Italy approved an eleventh military aid package for Ukraine, which will include one SAMP/T air and missile defense system, 400 M-113 armored personnel carriers, and ammunition.[14] Ukrainian state-owned defense enterprise manager Ukroronprom reported on May 20 that it signed a memorandum of cooperation with Belgian ammunition manufacturer KNDS Belgium to coordinate the joint assembly of medium-caliber ammunition for automatic cannons.[15]

The European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) announced several sanctions packages against Russia on May 20.[16] The package is the EU's largest targeting Russia's shadow fleet and the Russian energy and military-industrial sector.[17] The EU also sanctioned the Russian Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops; the 27th Scientific Center; and the Russian Ministry of Defense's 33rd Central Scientific Research and Testing Institute for Russia's use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.[18] The UK also announced new sanctions against Russia's military, energy, and financial sectors on May 20.[19]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed Colonel General Valery Solodchuk's recent appointment as Central Military District (CMD) commander on May 20.[20] Solodchuk most recently served as commander of the Kursk Grouping of Forces and led Russia's efforts to eliminate the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.[21] Solodchuk is replacing Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev, who reportedly recently replaced General Oleg Salyukov as Russian Ground Forces Commander.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Senior Russian officials continue to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent efforts to feign interest in peace negotiations to end the war.
- Medvedev also reiterated long-standing Russian demands tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation.
- Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and support Ukraine's defense industry.
- The European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) announced several sanctions packages against Russia on May 20.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed Colonel General Valery Solodchuk's recent appointment as Central Military District (CMD) commander on May 20.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts, near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, and in the Zaporizhia direction.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment May 19, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, and Kateryna Stepanenko

May 19, 2025, 5:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on May 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call on May 19 to discuss ceasefire and peace negotiations regarding Russia's war in Ukraine. Trump stated that he and Putin agreed that Russia and Ukraine will immediately begin bilateral negotiations about both a ceasefire and a peace agreement.^[1] Trump also said that he called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Finnish President Alexander Stubb, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen after his conversation with Putin and informed them that bilateral negotiations will begin immediately. Trump stated that the Vatican is "very interested in hosting the negotiations." Trump also expressed interest in reviving US-Russian trade after Ukraine and Russia agree to a peace deal and said that Ukraine could also benefit from trade during the reconstruction process. Putin spoke to journalists following the call on May 19 and stated that he and Trump agreed that Russia would present Ukraine with a "memorandum" detailing conditions and timing for a future peace treaty as the two countries move toward conducting bilateral negotiations.^[2] Putin also stated that Russia's "main" concern is the elimination of the war's "root causes," reiterating a long-standing Kremlin narrative calling for the replacement of the current Ukrainian government with a Russian proxy government and Ukraine's commitment to neutrality.^[3] Russian Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov told journalists on May 19 that Trump and Putin also discussed a possible nine-for-nine US-Russian prisoner exchange.^[4]

Zelensky stated that he spoke with Trump before Trump's call with Putin and spoke with Trump, Macron, Meloni, Merz, Stubb, and von der Leyen following the Trump–Putin call.^[5] Zelensky reaffirmed Ukraine's readiness for a full unconditional ceasefire as Trump has previously proposed. Zelensky stated that Ukraine is ready for direct negotiations with Russia "in any format" and offered Turkey, the Vatican, or Switzerland as possible venues for talks. Zelensky called for the negotiation process to involve both American and European representatives "at the appropriate level." **Russia must break its pattern of protracting negotiations and failing to offer any meaningful concessions to Ukraine in order for legitimate and good-faith negotiations to lead to a lasting and sustainable end to its war against Ukraine.**

Russia must explicitly acknowledge the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty in order to engage in meaningful, good-faith negotiations. Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly falsely claimed that Zelensky is the illegitimate leader according to the Ukrainian Constitution and that all Ukrainian governments since 2014 are also illegitimate.^[6] Ukraine's Constitution and law explicitly state that Ukraine cannot hold elections while martial law is in place and that Ukrainian authorities cannot lift martial law while "the threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity" remains.^[7] Russia and Ukraine cannot engage in meaningful negotiations so long as Russia refuses to recognize the negotiating authority of Ukraine. Russian officials have forwarded the narrative about the Ukrainian government's alleged illegitimacy as recently as May 17, and ISW continues to assess that this Russian effort is aimed at setting conditions for Russia to renege on any future Ukrainian–Russian agreements at a time of Russia's choosing.^[8] Any future peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution.

Russia must agree that ceasefire negotiations must precede peace settlement negotiations.

The United States, Ukraine, and Europe have repeatedly called for the establishment of a ceasefire to allow for diplomatic talks to end Russia's war in Ukraine to proceed.^[9] Russia has consistently rejected this sequence of events as part of efforts to hold any ceasefire talks hostage to extract additional concessions from Ukraine and the West.^[10] ISW continues to assess that Russia is committed to prolonging peace negotiations so as to continue making battlefield advances.^[11] Peace talks ahead of an established ceasefire would allow Russia to continue to make advances in Ukraine, which Russia would likely try to leverage in Ukrainian–Russian talks to extract further concessions.

Any future ceasefire will require Russia and Ukraine to engage in separate negotiations to agree on the necessary robust monitoring mechanisms, and conflating ceasefire talks with peace settlement talks will likely delay the implementation of a ceasefire.

Russia must show its willingness to make concessions of its own in any future bilateral negotiations, especially as the Kremlin appears to be setting conditions to expand its list of demands amid the peace talks.^[12] Russian officials have called for Ukraine to cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts — even the areas that Russian forces do not currently occupy — before Russia can agree to a ceasefire.^[13] Territorial demands are typically the subject of war termination negotiations, not ceasefire talks. Russia has reportedly already started to increase its demands, with Western and Ukrainian sources reporting that the Russian delegation threatened to seize Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts — two oblasts that Russia has not illegally annexed or claimed — during the May 16 talks in Istanbul.^[14] This tactic suggests that Russia will make additional, more extreme territorial demands during war termination talks should Ukraine agree to Russia's ceasefire preconditions.

Russia reportedly continues to expand its military infrastructure along its border with Finland and Estonia, likely in preparation for future aggression against NATO. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on May 19 that recent satellite imagery, which NATO officials confirmed, shows that Russia is building bases and military infrastructure near the Finnish and Estonian borders.^[15] The NYT reported that Russian forces are building and renovating tents, vehicle storage warehouses, fighter jet shelters, and helicopter bases at Olenya and Alakurtti air bases in Murmansk Oblast, Kamenka Air Base in Komi Republic, and Petrozavodsk Air Base in the Republic of Karelia. A senior NATO official stated that Russia will likely redeploy troops further north when its war in Ukraine ends and that Russia assesses that its access to the Arctic is key for its great power status. The NYT stated that Finnish defense officials predict that it will take Russia roughly five years to build up its forces to threatening levels after the war in Ukraine is over, possibly tripling the number of Russian forces on the Finnish border. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) similarly reported in April 2025 that Western military and intelligence officials stated that Russia is expanding military bases near Petrozavodsk and upgrading railway lines and other infrastructure along Russia's western border with NATO.^[16] Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev recently used narratives similar to those that the Kremlin has used to justify its invasions of Ukraine to threaten Finland.^[17]

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on May 18 and confirmed the provision of Abrams tanks to Ukraine, and the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC) reported on May 19 that the first of 49 Abrams tanks are en route to Ukraine.^[18] Denmark announced on May 17 a military aid package for Ukraine worth 4.2 billion Danish kroner (about \$632 million) for 2025–2028 that includes artillery systems and ammunition, equipment for fighter jets, and funding for Ukrainian Air Force training facilities.^[19] The Finnish Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on May 19 that it signed an agreement with the European Commission to supply Ukraine with materiel and heavy ammunition worth 90 million euros (about \$101 million) using the profits from Russian frozen assets.^[20]

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call on May 19 to discuss ceasefire and peace negotiations regarding Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Russia must explicitly acknowledge the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and constitution and Ukraine's sovereignty in order to engage in meaningful, good-faith negotiations.
- Russia must agree that ceasefire negotiations must precede peace settlement negotiations.
- Russia must show its willingness to make concessions of its own in any future bilateral negotiations, especially as the Kremlin appears to be setting conditions to expand its list of demands amid the peace talks.
- Russia reportedly continues to expand its military infrastructure along its border with Finland and Estonia, likely in preparation for future aggression against NATO.
- Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide military aid to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Borova and Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Novopavlivka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 18, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Russian forces conducted the largest single drone strike of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 17 to 18 – in disregard of US President Donald Trump's calls for Russia to stop long-range strikes against Ukraine, particularly against Kyiv Oblast.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 273 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Bryansk, Kursk, and Oryol cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.[2] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 88 drones over eastern, northern, and central Ukraine; that 128 decoy drones were "lost in location," and that one drone was still in Ukrainian airspace as of 0800 local time. Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strike largely targeted Kyiv Oblast and that drones struck Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk oblasts.[3] Russian forces launched 267 drones (and three ballistic missiles) in their overnight strike series against Ukraine on the night of February 22 and 23.[4] Russian forces have significantly intensified their nightly strikes against Ukraine over the last five months and have conducted several of the largest strikes of the entire war since January 2025. A Russian milblogger claimed that the May 17-18 record-breaking strike was effective due to Russia's use of the "Geran-3" drone (the Russian analogue to the Iranian Shahed-238), which is reportedly equipped with a turbo jet and 300-kilogram warhead.[5] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are innovating their long-range drone strike tactics in order to offset the effectiveness of Ukrainian mobile defense units and overwhelm the Ukrainian air defense umbrella.[6]

The Kremlin continues efforts to project Russia's military strength ahead of US President Donald Trump's scheduled phone call with Putin on May 19. Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin published on May 18 excerpts of an allegedly "new" interview with Putin, in which Putin claimed that Russia has enough manpower and materiel to bring the war in Ukraine to its "logical" conclusion with the "necessary" results for Russia.[7] Putin reiterated long-standing Kremlin narratives about the necessity that peace negotiations address the war's "root causes" and "protect" of Russian-speakers of Ukraine, whom Putin claimed consider Russia their "motherland." Ukrainian outlet *The Kyiv Independent* and Russian state media reported on May 18 that the excerpts that Zarubin published on May 18 are unaired footage from the documentary "Russia.Kremlin.Putin.25 Years" that the Kremlin published on May 4 in which Putin repeatedly promoted claims about Russia's ability to bring the war to its "logical conclusion."^[8] The Kremlin's decision to delay publishing these clips until May 18 suggests that the Kremlin is trying to project a strong, militarily superior Russia to the West and to domestic Russian audiences ahead of Putin's May 19 phone call with Trump. Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky recently stated that Russia is prepared to fight for "however long it takes," and Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev recently made thinly veiled nuclear threats in reference to what Medvedev categorized as "negotiating ultimatums."^[9]

Putin is attempting to distract from Russia's military and economic challenges with this rhetoric. Finnish President Alexander Stubb stated during an interview with UK outlet the *Guardian* published on May 18 that the Kremlin is falsely posturing its economy and military as strong.^[10] Stubb noted that Russia has depleted its financial reserves and that the Russian interest rate is over 20 percent. ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are sustaining significant battlefield losses at rates that are likely unsustainable in the medium- to long-term and that Putin has mismanaged Russia's economy, which is suffering from unsustainable war spending, growing inflation, significant labor shortages, and reductions in Russia's sovereign wealth fund.^[11] The continued depletion of Russian materiel, personnel, and economic resources at the current rate will likely present Putin with difficult decision points in 2026 or 2027.^[12]

Reported support within the Russian military and society for continuing the war until Russia achieves its original war aims and territorial demands reflects the success of the Kremlin's years-long narrative efforts to justify a protracted war effort. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on May 17 that interviews with 11 Russian soldiers who are currently fighting or have fought in Ukraine demonstrate that some Russian troops are against an unconditional ceasefire and believe that Russia should keep fighting until Russian forces have seized the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.^[13] Russian soldiers reportedly called for Russia to continue the war until it reaches its territorial goals and not offer any concessions to Ukraine or the West so that Russia does not have to fight Ukraine again in five or 10 years and so that Russian casualties thus far in the war will not have been in vain.

The NYT noted that an unpublished mid-April 2025 poll by independent Russian opposition polling organization Chronicles found that roughly half of respondents said that they would not support a peace deal that falls short of Russian President Vladimir Putin's initial war aims of Ukrainian "denazification," demilitarization, and neutrality. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* conducted a poll of 100 Russian military personnel in April 2025 in which only 18 percent said they would support a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine prior to achieving Putin's stated war goals and only about a fifth of respondents indicated that they thought the war would end in the coming months.^[14] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin has not been preparing the Russian information space for a peace agreement in the near future and that Russian forces and society do not anticipate an imminent end to

the war.[15] The Kremlin has been engaged in a concerted effort to justify Putin's war aims as existential to the Russian state and to garner societal support for the protraction of the war until Russia achieves these goals. Kremlin officials are increasingly publicly stating that Russia is prepared to continue fighting until Ukraine accepts Russia's demands, likely because the Kremlin assesses that it has adequately prepared Russian society and the Russian military for such a scenario.[16]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues efforts to negotiate a diplomatic end to the war in Ukraine. Zelensky spoke with US Vice President JD Vance and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Rome on May 18 and highlighted the importance of an unconditional ceasefire in Ukraine and Ukraine's willingness to engage in meaningful diplomacy.[17] Zelensky underscored that the Russian delegation presented unrealistic and unacceptable terms during the May 16 Ukrainian–Russian talks in Istanbul. Rubio had a call on May 17 with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, during which Rubio reiterated the Trump administration's call for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine.[18] Ukraine continues to demonstrate its willingness to establish meaningful peace dialogues and commit to an unconditional ceasefire.[19] Russia, however, continues to demonstrate that it is not interested in a ceasefire or in good faith negotiations to end the war.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted the largest single drone strike of the war against Ukraine on the night of May 17 to 18 — in disregard of US President Donald Trump's calls for Russia to stop long-range strikes against Ukraine, particularly against Kyiv Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to project Russia's military strength ahead of US President Donald Trump's scheduled phone call with Putin on May 19.
- Reported support within the Russian military and society for continuing the war until Russia achieves its original war aims and territorial demands reflects the success of the Kremlin's years-long narrative efforts to justify a protracted war effort.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues efforts to negotiate a diplomatic end to the war in Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 17, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Anna Harvey, Olivia Gibson, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 17, 2025, 6:40 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on May 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian delegation in Istanbul reportedly framed its demands for a final peace settlement as preconditions that Ukraine must meet before Russia will agree to a ceasefire. Most of Russia's demands are contrary to US President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan. Sources familiar with the May 16 Ukrainian–Russian talks in Istanbul reported to *Bloomberg* that the Russian delegation demanded that Ukraine cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea to Russia and that the international community recognize the four oblasts and the peninsula as Russian territory before Russia will agree to a ceasefire.[1] The Russian delegation also reportedly demanded that Ukraine adopt a neutral status, that no foreign troops be allowed on Ukrainian territory, and that Ukraine abandon its demands for war reparations from Russia. Chairperson of the Russian Federation Council's Committee on Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin stated on May 17 that the Russian delegation maintained Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 2024 demands, including that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the entirety of the four oblasts and abandon its NATO aspirations before Russia would agree to a ceasefire and peace negotiations.[2] The United States reportedly presented Russia in April 2025 with a seven-point peace plan that offered Russia "de jure" US recognition of Russian sovereignty over occupied Crimea and "de facto" recognition of Russian control over the parts of Ukraine that Russian forces currently occupy.[3] The US proposal also reportedly included "a robust security guarantee" involving a group of European states and possibly non-European states as a likely peacekeeping force. The Russian delegation's demands in Istanbul outright reject these aspects of the US peace proposal.

ISW continues to assess that Russia's war aim remains full Ukrainian capitulation.[4] Russia is reframing its territorial demands — typically the subject of war termination negotiations — as preconditions for a ceasefire.[5] Russia is attempting to posture itself as open to negotiations but is putting forward demands that Ukraine cannot reasonably accept while offering no compromises of its own. ISW continues to assess that Putin will continue to refuse to offer compromises until Ukraine and

the West are able to alter his theory of victory, which posits that Russia will win a war of attrition through indefinite creeping advances that prevent Ukraine from conducting successful, operationally significant counteroffensive operations.[6]

Russia's continued protraction of negotiations emphasizes its unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations for either a ceasefire or a final peace agreement. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on May 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky may meet only if the Russian and Ukrainian delegations reach unspecified agreements and underscored that all talks should be conducted behind closed doors.[7] Peskov's statements are likely intentionally vague in order to further delay progress in Russian-Ukrainian talks. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on May 17 that a source close to the Russian Presidential Administration stated the Kremlin viewed discussions between Putin and Zelensky as "out of the question" as Moscow knew that the conditions it was pushing Ukraine to accept were non-starters for Kyiv.[8] Another *Verstka* source close to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) similarly stated that Russian officials do not plan to discuss preparations for a Putin-Zelensky meeting. Russia has doubled down on its efforts to protract peace processes by continuing to present Ukraine with ultimatums that Ukraine cannot accept. The *Verstka* source close to the Presidential Administration added that Russia's demand that the Ukrainian-Russian talks occur without a mediator shows that the Kremlin seeks to demonstrate that it is capable of demanding that the United States limit the influence of Ukraine's Western partners. Peskov's comments and *Verstka*'s report cohere with ISW's long-standing assessment that Russia remains committed to prolonging peace negotiations so as to continue making battlefield advances and to extract additional concessions from the West.[9] Ukraine has continually demonstrated its willingness to compromise and engage in good-faith negotiations in contrast.

Kremlin officials continue to signal that Russia is prepared to continue or even escalate its war against Ukraine should Ukraine and the West not agree to Russia's demands for Ukraine's surrender. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on May 17 on his English-language X account that "all enemies of Russia that issue negotiating ultimatums" should remember that peace negotiations do not always lead to the end of hostilities and that unsuccessful negotiations can even lead to a "more terrible stage of war with new weapons and participants."^[10] Medvedev's statement is a thinly veiled threat of possible Russian nuclear weapons use, the introduction of Russian allied forces in the war, or even Russian attacks against Europe. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is extremely unlikely to use nuclear weapons or to attack NATO states at this time.^[11] Russia has demonstrated that it will not accept any terms less than Ukraine's full capitulation and would likely view any negotiations that do not fulfill these war aims as "unsuccessful." The threat that Russia could continue its war against Ukraine and even escalate it should Russia not achieve its goals mirrors Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky's May 16 statement that Russia is ready to fight for "however long it takes."^[12] Medvedev's threat is part of Russia's reflexive control campaign meant to push Ukraine and the West to accept Russia's demands for Ukrainian surrender.

Russia continues to deny the current Ukrainian government's legitimacy and is likely setting conditions to renege on any future Ukrainian-Russian peace agreement. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on May 17 that it is important for Russia to understand exactly who from the Ukrainian government will sign the documents that may result from any future Russian-Ukrainian agreement.^[13] Peskov's comments are likely part of the Kremlin's long-standing narrative rejecting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy and the legitimacy of all post-2014 Ukrainian governments.^[14] This rhetorical campaign is part of efforts to set conditions for Russia to withdraw from any future peace agreements at a time of Russia's choosing and to support Russia's repeated demand that Ukraine acquiesce to regime change and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government.^[15] Any future peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the Ukrainian government's and the Ukrainian Constitution's legitimacy.

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian delegation in Istanbul reportedly framed its demands for a final peace settlement as preconditions that Ukraine must meet before Russia will agree to a ceasefire. Most of Russia's demands are contrary to US President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan.
- Russia's continued protraction of negotiations emphasizes its unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations for either a ceasefire or a final peace agreement.
- Kremlin officials continue to signal that Russia is prepared to continue or even escalate its war against Ukraine should Ukraine and the West not agree to Russia's demands for Ukraine's surrender.

- Russia continues to deny the current Ukrainian government's legitimacy and is likely setting conditions to renege on any future Ukrainian-Russian peace agreement.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Lyman, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Novopavlivka, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 16, 2025

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Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, and George Barros

May 16, 2025, 8:00 pm ET

Ukrainian and Russian delegations met in Istanbul on May 16 but made little progress towards agreeing to a full ceasefire or a peace settlement to Russia's war against Ukraine. The Russian delegation reportedly formally demanded that Ukraine cede territory to which Russia has informally been laying claim, while asserting that Russia is ready to continue the war for years. Russia may again formalize previously informal territorial claims in the future as part of Russia's effort to secure full Ukrainian capitulation. Turkish, Ukrainian, and American delegations met on the morning of May 16 in Istanbul, after which Turkish, Ukrainian, and Russian delegations met.^[1] Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky, the head of the Russian delegation, likely met with US State Department Director of Policy Planning Staff Michael Anton before the Ukrainian-Russian meeting.^[2] The Ukrainian delegation, including Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha, and Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, met with US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg, UK National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell, French Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonn, and German Chancellor's Advisor for Foreign and Security Policy Gunter Sauter to coordinate positions before the Ukrainian-Russian meeting.^[3] Umerov and Medinsky announced that Ukraine and Russia would exchange 1,000 prisoners of war (POWs) each in the near future.^[4] Medinsky stated that the Russian and Ukrainian delegations agreed to "write...down in detail" and present their visions for a possible future ceasefire and that bilateral negotiations will continue after this presentation.^[5] Kremlin newswire TASS reported that an unspecified source stated that there was no specific date set for Russia and Ukraine to exchange their ceasefire plans.^[6]

Medinsky highlighted that Russia is prepared to continue its war in Ukraine for years to come. Medinsky claimed that those "who do not know history" say that there should be a ceasefire first, then negotiations to achieve peace.^[7] Medinsky claimed that war and negotiations should be conducted simultaneously, and Carroll reported that Medinsky stated that Russia is "ready to fight for a year, two, three – however long it takes."^[8] Medinsky reportedly referenced the Great Northern War (1700-1721) when asking "how long [is Ukraine] ready to fight?" and claimed that "Russia is prepared to fight forever."^[9] Russia state media confirmed that Medinsky spoke about the 18th-century war with Sweden during the meeting.^[10]

Ukrainian diplomatic sources told various Western and Ukrainian outlets that the Russian delegation made "unrealistic" and "unacceptable" demands that went "far beyond" any demands Russia has previously discussed.^[11] The delegation reportedly repeated the Kremlin's demand that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the entirety of the illegally annexed Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts before the start of a ceasefire. *The Economist* foreign correspondent Oliver Carroll reported that a source stated that the Russian delegation additionally threatened to seize Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts, and Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Oleksiy Goncharenko similarly reported that the Russian delegation threatened to annex Sumy Oblast in order to create a "security zone."^[12]

The Kremlin has repeatedly publicly demanded that Ukraine cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts – even the territory that Russian forces currently do not occupy – but had not formally demanded that Ukraine cede all of Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts before the May 16 Istanbul meeting.^[13] Russian officials have informally claimed all of Kharkiv Oblast as part of Russia and launched offensive operations to create buffer zones in Kharkiv and Sumy Oblasts in May 2024 and March 2025, respectively, that are likely part of Russian territorial expansion efforts, however. Kharkiv Oblast occupation governor Vitaly Ganchev claimed in early February 2025 that Kharkiv Oblast is "strategically" and politically significant for Russia and that he was "certain" that Russian forces would seize all of Kharkiv Oblast because Russia needed a "sanitary zone" to protect itself from Ukrainian shelling.^[14] Ganchev further claimed that Kharkiv Oblast would have held a "referendum" to become the "fifth oblast to join Russia" in September 2022 had it not been for the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast at that time. Russian forces launched attacks across the Sumy-Kursk Oblast border in April 2025 to create a buffer zone and possibly press further toward Sumy City in order to expand Russian territorial demands in Ukraine.^[15] Russian forces similarly launched offensive operations in May 2024 to create a buffer zone in northern Kharkiv

Oblast, and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev stated at that time that Russia's envisioned "buffer zone" should encompass all of Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin's concept of the buffer zone is a thinly veiled justification for Russia's intent to subsume larger portions of Ukraine.[16]

Russian officials have long been informally laying claim to additional territories in Ukraine beyond Sumy, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. Russian officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have consistently claimed that "Novorossiya" – an invented region of Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all southern and eastern Ukraine – is an "integral" part of Russia and that Odesa City is a "Russian" city.[17] Novorossiya geographically encompasses Kharkiv Oblast. Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo stated in April 2025 that the "return" of the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River to Russia is "fundamentally important" and an "absolute priority."[18] Saldo called for Russia to completely control the areas of the Dnipro River that pass through Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts – a call for Russia to not only gain control over parts of Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy but to control parts of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, which Russia has not formally claimed or illegally annexed. **The Kremlin may increasingly adopt this pattern of informally discussing additional Russian territorial claims and then formally introducing these claims as demands in peace negotiations in the future.**

ISW has consistently assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not compromise in peace negotiations unless Ukraine and the West inflict significant battlefield and economic losses on Russia and force Putin to rethink his theory of victory. Putin articulated his theory of victory for his war in Ukraine in June 2024, which posits that Russia will be able to win a war of attrition against Ukraine by continuing gradual, creeping advances indefinitely and preventing Ukraine from conducting successful, operationally significant counteroffensive operations, assuming Russia's war effort outlasts Western support for Ukraine.[19]

ISW previously assessed that Russia faces a number of compounding materiel, defense industrial, manpower, and economic issues that threaten Russia's ability to continue the war in Ukraine in the long term.[20] Putin is likely prioritizing dividing Ukraine's Western allies and weakening Western support to Ukraine in order to secure his desired end state in negotiations, rather than effectively addressing Russia's domestic problems. Putin's decision to intensify offensive operations throughout Ukraine in March and April 2025 is only exacerbating these issues and underscores his commitment to pressuring Ukraine in negotiations. ISW continues to assess that increased Western – especially US – military aid and economic sanctions are necessary to enable Ukraine to inflict significant battlefield losses on Russia and force Putin to either change his theory of victory or make an economically painful and unpopular decision to implement another partial involuntary reserve call-up.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly approved a series of command changes in the Russian military, including a new Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on May 15 to appoint former Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces General Oleg Salyukov as Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council.[21] Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestia*, citing an unspecified source, reported on May 15 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appointed Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev as Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces of the Armed Forces to replace Salyukov.[22] Mordvichev most recently served as the commander of both the Russian Central Grouping of Forces and Central Military District (CMD) and oversaw Russia's seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024.[23] Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian MoD also appointed Colonel General Valery Solodchuk as the new CMD commander, and Russian outlet *Ura* reported that a high-ranking source in Russian military circles confirmed these reports.[24] Solodchuk most recently served as commander of the Kursk Grouping of Forces and led Russia's efforts to eliminate the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.[25] Russian insider sources and milbloggers welcomed Mordvichev's appointment and interpreted it as a sign that the Kremlin is initiating a modernization effort to enhance Russia's ability to plan and execute operations in Ukraine and beyond.[26]

The Kremlin is likely appointing Mordvichev to proliferate positional warfare tactics and operational concepts for grinding marginal advances – the main tactics Russian forces used in the Avdiivka-Pokrovsk direction – across Russia's Ground Forces. Mordvichev's appointment indicates that the Kremlin approves of the tactics developed under Mordvichev's command – namely, the use of grinding, highly attritional, infantry-led assaults – and aims to institutionalize these tactics that the CMD used to advance in the Avdiivka-Pokrovsk direction since late 2023.

Mordvichev is one of the few Russian commanders to have achieved tactical penetrations of the Ukrainian line in the last two years and one of Russia's most celebrated commanders at the moment, but these limited tactical penetrations have come at great costs.[27] Russian forces suffered significant

personnel and equipment losses in exchange for approximately 60 kilometers of penetration since elements of the CMD first redeployed to the Avdiivka-Pokrovsk direction in October 2023.[28] Mordvichev's appointment is likely also an effort to distill lessons learned and tactics from the CMD to the rest of the Russian military, as ISW has previously observed Russian units in the Kupyansk and Velyka Novosilka directions implementing the attritional assaults that the CMD utilized to seize Avdiivka in February 2024.[29]

Russian forces are continuing to expand their salient northeast of Pokrovsk and southwest of Toretsk, although it remains unclear whether the Russian military command will prioritize further advances towards Kostyantynivka or Pokrovsk during Summer 2025. Geolocated footage published on May 16 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in northern Myrolyubivka (east of Pokrovsk) and seized Myrolyubivka and Mykhailivka (just west of Myrolyubivka).[30] Russian milbloggers claimed on May 16 that Russian forces advanced further north and southwest of Myrolyubivka and northwest of Hrodivka (east of Pokrovsk).[31] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) credited elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], Southern Military District [SMD]) with seizing Myrolyubivka, and a Kremlin-affiliated milblogger insinuated that the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade is subordinated to the Central Grouping of Forces.[32] The brigade was likely previously subordinated under the Southern Grouping of Forces, as the Russian military command redeployed elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade from the Kurakhove direction to reinforce offensive operations near Vozdvyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk) in January 2025.[33] ISW has not observed reports of the brigade engaged in combat since March 2025, however. Elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade and other elements of the 51st CAA appeared to culminate in Toretsk in February and March 2025, but the brigade may be reentering combat after a period of rest and reconstitution.

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on May 16 that Ukrainian forces maintain some positions near and within Yelyzavetivka (east of Myrolyubivka) that are complicating Russian advances towards Myrnohrad (west of Yelyzavetivka and just east of Pokrovsk) and Pokrovsk.[34] Russian milbloggers also recently acknowledged that Ukrainian forces maintain positions north of Yalyzvetivka, and ISW is therefore expanding Ukrainian advances in the area, although these advances are likely not recent.[35] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA, SMD) and 51st CAA are attempting to advance from Malynivka toward Novoekonomichne and north of Nova Poltavka (all northeast of Pokrovsk) in order to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Yelyzavetivka and to envelop Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad.[36]

Russian forces have recently intensified offensive operations northeast and east of Pokrovsk after largely abandoning this area in favor of advances further northeast of Pokrovsk toward Kostyantynivka and southwest of Pokrovsk toward Novopavlivka in early 2024.[37] Ukrainian officials recently reported that Russia is reinforcing its units in the Pokrovsk direction, and ISW recently observed reports that elements of the Russian 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) recently redeployed from the Kurakhove direction to near Malynivka.[38] These recent redeployments and the reported appointment of Valery Solodchuk as Central Military District (CMD) commander after his recent success in Kursk Oblast indicate that the Russian military command may refocus on the seizure of Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in the coming weeks and months. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces may attempt to advance along the Vozdvyzhenka-Yelyzavetivka-Myrne-Razine line to envelop Pokrovsk instead of fighting through the more urban and heavily defended settlements of Novoekonomichne and Myrnohrad closer to Pokrovsk.[39] The Russian military command may redeploy forces from Kursk Oblast or additional elements of the 51st CAA to the CMD's area of responsibility (AoR) around Pokrovsk and reintensify efforts to advance west of Pokrovsk should the Russian military command prioritize seizing Pokrovsk over pushing further toward Kostyantynivka from the southwest during Summer 2025.

The Russian military command may alternatively choose to continue prioritizing advances toward Kostyantynivka in Summer 2025. Russian forces intensified offensive operations aimed at eliminating the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk in February and March 2025, and recent Russian advances into Novooleinivka and near Zorya (both southwest of Toretsk) will likely force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from their limited positions remaining in the pocket in the near future.[40] Mashovets stated that Russian forces are currently attempting to attack along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway toward Stepanivka (northwest of Toretsk) and Yablunivka (west of Toretsk).[41] Mashovets stated that elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division are the main force attacking between Stara Mykolaiivka (southwest of Toretsk) and Nova Poltavka and that elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA) are attacking in other areas southwest of Toretsk, including toward Romanivka.[42] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces likely intend to leverage advances southwest of Toretsk to push along the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway and facilitate deeper advances northeast of Pokrovsk along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway toward Kostyantynivka.[43] ISW recently observed reports that elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined

Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) redeployed from western Zaporizhia Oblast to the Stara Mykolaivka area and that unspecified drone operators recently redeployed from the Kursk direction to near Kalynove (south of Stara Mykolaivka).[44] The Russian military command may continue to reinforce the Russian force grouping southwest of Toretsk and attempt to advance further along the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway toward Oleksandro-Kalynove (west of Toretsk) in the coming weeks if they intend to prioritize offensive operations against Kostyantynivka in Summer 2025.

Russia is unlikely to have sufficient manpower, materiel, and operational planning capabilities to conduct both an envelopment of Pokrovsk and a significant offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka in the coming months. Russian advances southwest of Toretsk currently support both of these efforts, but the Russian military command will likely have to choose to prioritize one direction in the coming weeks due to near-term constraints in Russia's manpower and materiel reserves.[45] Recent Ukrainian estimates suggest that Russia is recruiting enough forces to slowly grow their force grouping in Ukraine, but ISW has not observed indications that the Kremlin has generated a sufficient operational reserve to support multiple intensified operations as of this report. [46]

Russian forces have thus far struggled to break out of Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, which has likely complicated Russia's plans for an offensive against Kostyantynivka and the wider Ukrainian fortress belt. Russian forces may conduct an operational pause after they level the frontline southwest of Toretsk in order to give Russian units in Chasiv Yar and Toretsk time to make more significant advances before beginning a concerted offensive against Kostyantynivka. The recent intensification in Russian activity northeast, east, and south of Pokrovsk suggests that Russian forces may assess that Ukrainian positions in Pokrovsk are becoming increasingly vulnerable and that Russian forces should renew their efforts to envelop the town. The Russian military command may attempt to pursue the envelopment of Pokrovsk and significant advances toward Kostyantynivka simultaneously, but pursuing both operations will expedite the timeline for a likely Russian culmination and will undermine Russian forces' ability to accomplish either goal. Russian forces also must continue to balance offensive operations near Toretsk and Pokrovsk with the manpower and materiel demands of ongoing efforts to advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, seize Kupyansk, and push toward Borova, Lyman, Sumy City and Kharkiv City.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian and Russian delegations met in Istanbul on May 16 but made little progress towards agreeing to a full ceasefire or a peace settlement to Russia's war against Ukraine.
- Medinsky highlighted that Russia is prepared to continue its war in Ukraine for years to come.
- The Kremlin has repeatedly publicly demanded that Ukraine cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts – even the territory that Russian forces currently do not occupy - but had not formally demanded that Ukraine cede all of Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts before the May 16 Istanbul meeting.
- ISW has consistently assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not compromise in peace negotiations unless Ukraine and the West inflict significant battlefield and economic losses on Russia and force Putin to rethink his theory of victory.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly approved a series of command changes in the Russian military, including a new Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces.
- Russian forces are continuing to expand their salient northeast of Pokrovsk and southwest of Toretsk, although it remains unclear whether the Russian military command will prioritize further advances towards Kostyantynivka or Pokrovsk during Summer 2025.
- Russia is unlikely to have sufficient manpower, materiel, and operational planning capabilities to conduct both an envelopment of Pokrovsk and a significant offensive operation toward Kostyantynivka in the coming months.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Novopavlivka and in the Zaporizhia direction.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 15, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

May 15, 2025, 6:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12 pm ET on May 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to engage in bilateral negotiations in Istanbul and continues refusing to offer concessions to end the war in Ukraine. Putin spoke to media organizations on the night of May 10 to 11, following the May 10 joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal for a general ceasefire for at least 30 days beginning on May 12.^[1] Putin did not agree to the joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal and instead proposed that Russia and Ukraine "resume" on May 15 the direct negotiations that he claimed Ukraine "interrupted" in 2022 in Istanbul. Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accepted Putin's proposal to hold bilateral negotiations in Turkey on May 15.^[2] Zelensky stated that he would personally wait for Putin in Turkey and arrived in Turkey on May 15.^[3] Putin assigned several Russian officials, who are notably not in Putin's innermost circle, to attend the talks in Istanbul, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov confirmed on May 15 that Putin will not travel to Istanbul.^[4] Putin's rejection of Zelensky's invitation demonstrates Putin's continued resistance to making any concessions and engaging in legitimate, good-faith negotiations at the highest level.

The Russian delegation in Istanbul does not include officials in Putin's innermost circle and is largely the same delegation that Russia sent to the Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in 2022 in Istanbul. Putin announced on the night of May 14 that Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky is leading the Russian delegation in Istanbul.^[5] The delegation also includes Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, Chief of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU) Igor Kostyukov, and Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin. Medinsky similarly headed the delegation in 2022, and Fomin and Galuzin's predecessor participated in the 2022 talks.^[6] Kostyukov is the only 2025 participant who did not attend the 2022 talks.

The 2025 Russian delegation also includes four experts from the Presidential Administration, GRU, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) that correspond with the four leading delegation members: Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration for State Policy in the Humanitarian Sphere Elena Podobreevskaya, Director of the Second Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alexei Polishchuk, First Deputy Chief of Information of the GRU Alexander Zorin, and the Deputy Head of the Main Directorate of International Military Cooperation in the Russian MoD Viktor Shevtsov.^[7]

Medinsky explicitly described the May 2025 Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Istanbul as a continuation of the early 2022 Istanbul negotiations during which Russia issued demands that were tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation. Medinsky told journalists on May 15 in Istanbul that Russia considers the May 2025 negotiations a "continuation" of previous negotiations in Istanbul in April 2022, which he claimed Ukraine interrupted.^[8] Medinsky is reiterating Putin's May 11 framing that the new bilateral negotiations in Istanbul would be based on the April 2022 Istanbul protocols draft agreement, which included terms that would have amounted to Ukraine's surrender and left Ukraine helpless to defend against potential future Russian aggression.^[9] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and the *New York Times* (NYT) reported in March and June 2024 that they both obtained several versions of the Istanbul protocols draft agreement.^[10] The draft protocols demanded that Ukraine forego its NATO membership aspirations and amend its constitution to add a neutrality provision that would ban Ukraine from joining any military alliances. The draft protocols also would have banned Ukraine from hosting foreign military personnel, trainers, or weapon systems in Ukraine. Russia demanded that it, the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), the People's Republic of China (PRC), France, and Belarus serve as security guarantors of the agreement. Russia demanded that the guarantor states "terminate international treaties and agreements incompatible with the permanent neutrality [of Ukraine]," including military aid agreements. Russia demanded that Ukraine limit its military to 85,000 soldiers, 342 tanks, and 519 artillery systems as part of the Istanbul protocols. Russia additionally demanded that Ukrainian missiles be limited to a range of 40 kilometers (25 miles), a range that would allow Russian forces to deploy critical systems and materiel close to Ukraine without fear of strikes.

Russia demanded these terms in the first and second months of its full-scale invasion when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv City and making significant gains throughout northeastern, eastern, and southern Ukraine. Russia is now attempting to reiterate these same demands after three years of war, despite the fact that Ukrainian forces have since successfully forced Russia to withdraw from northern Ukraine, liberated significant swaths of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts, and blunted

the Russian rate of advance across the theater. Medinsky is purposefully attempting to frame the May 2025 talks as a continuation of the April 2022 Istanbul negotiations to portray Russia's demands for Ukraine's surrender as legitimate, despite the fact that Ukraine is now in a much stronger battlefield position on the battlefield than in April 2022 and the Russian military is much weaker than in the early months of the full-scale invasion.

Medinsky also reiterated Putin's longstanding demands that any resolution to the war must result in regime change in Ukraine and restrictions on NATO. Medinsky claimed that Russia's goal for the May 2025 Istanbul negotiations is to "establish long-term peace by eliminating the root causes" of the war.[11] Russian officials routinely demand that any peace agreement address the war's "root causes," which Russian officials define as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[12] Russian officials have leveraged claims that Ukraine has mistreated Russian speakers in Ukraine to justify the Kremlin's demands for regime change in Ukraine, the establishment of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv, and Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. Medinsky's attempt to frame May 2025 Istanbul negotiations as peace talks contradicts stated Ukrainian, US, and European efforts to first establish a longer-term ceasefire in Ukraine that would precede peace negotiations.[13] Medinsky's framing echoes consistent Russian rejections of this sequence of events, which Ukraine and the United States have consistently supported.[14]

Reported Kremlin instructions to Russian media explaining how to cover the Istanbul negotiations indicate that the Kremlin is preparing the Russian population for a longer war in Ukraine and is not interested in engaging in good-faith negotiations that require compromises from both sides. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on May 15 that it acquired a manual that Russian media received from the Presidential Administration's political bloc with instructions about how to cover the negotiations in Istanbul.[15] The manual reportedly instructed Russian media to explain Medinsky's participation in the Russian delegation as "logical" since he led the Russian delegation in Istanbul in 2022 and is continuing this work. A political strategist who works with the Kremlin told *Meduza* that Russian officials overseeing domestic policy assess that the Istanbul talks will end in "deadlock" and that the Kremlin assesses that the West will likely impose new sanctions in response to such "deadlock." The manual reportedly advises Russian media to preemptively talk about a "new package of sanctions" while claiming that new sanctions will not harm Russia's development as Russia "successfully copes with the challenges of any sanctions." Russian media should reportedly vaguely say that "negotiations are taking place on worse terms for Ukraine" than three years ago, but the manual does not explain how current battlefield realities where Russia controls much less of Ukraine are "worse terms." The Presidential Administration's claim that the May 2025 negotiations are taking place on "worse terms" for Ukraine compared to 2022 is an attempt to posture Russian military strength and battlefield successes while ignoring Ukraine's significant battlefield successes and ability to slow Russian advances in the last three years of the war. This claim also ignores significant Russian losses among elite forces and increasing reliance on poorly trained recruits. The Presidential Administration's reported framing of the negotiations demonstrates that Russia expects Ukraine to refuse the terms the Russian delegation will present in Istanbul as Ukraine would not accept terms tantamount to its surrender. Russia similarly issued ultimatums to Ukraine, the West, and NATO in 2021 before it launched its full-scale invasion in 2022 certainly knowing that NATO and Ukraine would not undergo the transformations to their core charters, constitutions, and principles required to meet the Russian demands.[16] The West rejected Russia's pre-war ultimatums, allowing Russia to establish superficial justifications for its subsequent full-scale invasion. Russia's continued insistence on its 2022 Istanbul demands in May 2025 demonstrates that Russia continues to only be interested in a full Ukrainian surrender, is unwilling to offer compromises in any good-faith negotiations, and is prepared to continue the war to achieve its goal of Ukrainian surrender.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to engage in bilateral negotiations in Istanbul and continues refusing to offer concessions to end the war in Ukraine.**
- **The Russian delegation in Istanbul does not include officials in Putin's innermost circle and is largely the same delegation that Russia sent to the Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in 2022 in Istanbul.**
- **Medinsky explicitly described the May 2025 Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Istanbul as a continuation of the early 2022 Istanbul negotiations during which Russia issued demands that were tantamount to Ukraine's complete capitulation.**
- **Medinsky also reiterated Putin's longstanding demands that any resolution to the war must result in regime change in Ukraine and restrictions on NATO.**

- Reported Kremlin instructions to Russian media explaining how to cover the Istanbul negotiations indicate that the Kremlin is preparing the Russian population for a longer war in Ukraine and is not interested in engaging in good-faith negotiations that require compromises from both sides.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, Novopavlivka, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 14, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, and Karolina Hird with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on May 14. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 15 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent call to base future negotiations with Ukraine on the early 2022 Istanbul protocols that included Russian demands for Ukraine's complete capitulation. Russian Ambassador-at-Large and former Russian occupation official, Rodion Miroshnik, claimed on May 14 that the April 2022 draft Istanbul protocols could be the basis for an agreement to end Russia's war in Ukraine.^[1] Miroshnik is echoing Putin's May 11 call to "resume" the 2022 Istanbul direct negotiations in response to the May 10 joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal for a 30-day minimum general ceasefire.^[2] Miroshnik noted that Russia and Ukraine could make "adjustments" to the 2022 Istanbul protocols to account for changes in the past three years, but specifically insisted that Russia's April 2022 demands that Ukraine significantly reduce its military capabilities and amend its constitution to add a neutrality provision that would ban Ukraine from joining any military alliances — including NATO — remain unchanged. Putin and Miroshnik are deliberately reiterating Russia's terms in the Istanbul protocols because the protocols included terms that would have amounted to Ukraine's surrender and left Ukraine helpless to defend against potential future Russian aggression — aims that the Kremlin continues to pursue.^[3] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and the *New York Times* (NYT) reported in March and June 2024 that they both obtained several versions of the draft protocols from the April 2022 Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiations in Istanbul.^[4] The draft protocols also would have banned Ukraine from hosting foreign military personnel, trainers, or weapon systems in Ukraine. Russia demanded that it, the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), the People's Republic of China (PRC), France, and Belarus serve as security guarantors of the agreement. Russia demanded that the guarantor states "terminate international treaties and agreements incompatible with the permanent neutrality [of Ukraine]," including military aid agreements. Russia demanded that Ukraine limit its military to 85,000 soldiers, 342 tanks, and 519 artillery systems as part of the Istanbul protocols. Russia additionally demanded that Ukrainian missiles be limited to a range of 40 kilometers (25 miles), a range that would allow Russian forces to deploy critical systems and materiel close to Ukraine without fear of strikes.

Russia demanded these terms in the first and second months of the full-scale invasion when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv City and making gains throughout northeastern, eastern, and southern Ukraine. Russia is now attempting to reiterate these same demands after three years of war, despite the fact that Ukrainian forces have since successfully forced Russia to withdraw from northern Ukraine, liberated significant swaths of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts, and blunted the Russian rate of advance across the theater. Miroshnik's observation that Russia and Ukraine could adjust aspects of the Istanbul protocols to reflect the changes in the war over the past three years is an attempt to frame the Kremlin as willing to negotiate, which obfuscates the fact that Russia has actually maintained its long-term goal of total Ukrainian surrender. Putin, Miroshnik, and other Russian officials continue to demand Ukraine's full surrender in an attempt to secure Russia's strategic goals by drawing out negotiations while continuing to make battlefield gains.^[5]

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also reiterated the Kremlin's demands that any resolution to the war must result in regime change in Ukraine and restrictions against the West ahead of negotiations in Istanbul. Ryabkov stated on May 13 that the upcoming Istanbul discussions would need to address the "primary sources" of the war in order to achieve a sustainable end to the war, likely alluding to Russia's continued demand that any peace agreement address the war's "root causes."^[6] Ryabkov also reiterated the claim that Ukraine must continue to "denazify." Russian officials repeatedly invoke the term "denazification" to demand regime change in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv.^[7] Russian officials have defined the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.^[8] Ryabkov's

statements reflect the Kremlin's long-standing effort to achieve its pre-war demands that call for NATO to abandon its open-door policy and for the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv, despite recent Kremlin efforts to feign interest in good-faith negotiations.

Polling from early May 2025 indicates that the majority of Ukrainians support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the legitimate leader of Ukraine and are against holding elections before a final end to the war — in accordance with Ukrainian law and the Ukrainian Constitution. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) published a survey conducted from May 2 to 12 that showed that 74 percent of respondents trust Zelensky — an increase from 69 percent in March 2025.[9] The May 2025 KIIS poll showed that 71 percent of respondents do not support holding elections after a ceasefire, even if Ukraine receives security guarantees, and instead think that Ukraine should hold elections only after the establishment of a final peace agreement and a complete end to the war. KIIS noted that the majority of respondents in all regions of Ukraine support Zelensky and do not support holding elections until after the end of the war. The poll's majority opinion that elections should not occur until after the end of the war is in line with Ukraine's law on martial law and the Ukrainian Constitution, which stipulate that Ukraine cannot hold elections during martial law and cannot lift martial law while "the threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity" remains.[10] The Kremlin has repeatedly tried to weaponize Zelensky's alleged "illegitimacy" to reject and delay ceasefire proposals and negotiations and to set conditions to renege on any future agreements Russia may sign with Ukraine.[11] The Kremlin has also repeatedly attempted to justify its invasions of Ukraine by claiming that large portions of eastern and southern Ukraine want to join Russia.[12] The KIIS poll — the results of which were relatively consistent across all regions of Ukraine - undermines these Kremlin narratives.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent call to base future negotiations with Ukraine on the early 2022 Istanbul protocols that included Russian demands for Ukraine's complete capitulation.
- Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also reiterated the Kremlin's demands that any resolution to the war must result in regime change in Ukraine and restrictions against the West ahead of negotiations in Istanbul.
- Polling from early May 2025 indicates that the majority of Ukrainians support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the legitimate leader of Ukraine and are against holding elections before a final end to the war — in accordance with Ukrainian law and the Ukrainian Constitution.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovs'k, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 13, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11 am ET on May 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian military is reportedly generating enough forces to replace losses and is reinforcing the size of the Russian force grouping in Ukraine despite experiencing an increased casualty rate per square kilometer gained. Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be embracing significant losses in exchange for diminishing returns to make battlefield gains and manage perceptions about Russia's military capabilities to pressure Ukraine in negotiations. Putin stated on May 13 that 50,000 to 60,000 people voluntarily join the Russian military per month.[1] Putin gave this figure as part of a statement claiming that Russia has a higher monthly recruitment than Ukraine and therefore may be exaggerating these recruitment figures to posture a large Russian military amid ongoing negotiations with Ukraine and the West, however. Putin did not explicitly state when Russian recruitment levels hit 50,000 to 60,000 personnel each month, but previous Ukrainian and Russian statements imply that Russia may have aimed to reach this monthly recruitment figure in 2025. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov gave recruitment figures at the end of 2024, indicating that Russia is recruiting just enough military personnel to replace its recent casualty rates.[2] Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev stated in late January 2025 that roughly 450,000 people signed Russian military service contracts, that an additional 40,000

people joined Russian volunteer formations in 2024, and that the Russian military aimed to "maintain this momentum."^[3] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Head Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated in early March 2025 that Russia's recruitment plans for 2025 will "mostly" allow the Russian military command to replace its battlefield losses should the current tempo of offensive operations and losses continue.^[4] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated in April 2024 that Russian forces are "increasing the number" of personnel in Ukraine by 8,000 to 9,000 new personnel per month through contract recruitment and that the Russian force grouping fighting against Ukraine increased from about 603,000 on January 1, 2025, to 623,000 just over three months later.^[5] Syrskyi stated on May 13 that Russian forces have suffered 177,000 casualties in Ukraine since the start of 2025.^[6] Syrskyi's and Putin's figures indicate that Russia may be generating enough forces to replace losses while also increasing the overall size of its force grouping in Ukraine.

Russia continues to tolerate personnel losses comparable to the casualty rate Russian forces sustained during a period of intensified advances in Fall 2024, despite a slowed rate of advance in the first four months of 2025.^[7] Russian forces are likely able to generate enough forces to sustain their replacement rate and increase the size of the Russian force grouping in Ukraine by rapidly deploying low quality troops to frontline units. ISW has repeatedly observed reports that new Russian recruits only receive a month of training before deploying to Ukraine, and this limited training is likely constraining recruits' combat capabilities and the Russian military's overall capacity to successfully conduct complex operations.^[8] The Russian military is currently prioritizing sending poorly-trained recruits into highly-attritional infantry assaults to make grinding advances — despite enduring a higher casualty rate per square kilometer gained — in an effort to pressure Ukraine and the West into acquiescing to Russian demands amid ongoing negotiations. Russia is also attempting to prolong negotiations to extract additional concessions from the United States and while making additional battlefield advances.

The Russian military may also be prioritizing recruitment as part of longer-term efforts to build out a post-war strategic reserve for a potential future conflict with NATO. US European Command (EUCOM) Commander and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher Cavoli informed the US Senate Armed Services Committee in April 2025 that the Russian military is reconstituting and expanding its force structure and materiel production at a faster rate than most Western analysts anticipated, despite suffering approximately 790,000 casualties since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.^[9] Cavoli stated that the Russian military command has deployed over 600,000 soldiers to the frontlines in Ukraine, which is nearly double the size of Russia's initial invasion force and is consistent with Syrskyi's report that there are 623,000 Russian military personnel in Ukraine. Putin signed a decree in September 2024 ordering the Russian military to establish a 1.5 million combat-ready force, indicating his long-term interests in increasing the size of the Russian military.^[10] Cavoli's report coheres with recent indicators signaling that Russia is expanding and upgrading military bases, barracks, training grounds, warehouses, and railways near Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, to support a future influx of personnel.^[11] Russia is also integrating railways and roadways in the Moscow Military District (MMD) with Belarusian infrastructure. ISW has long assessed that Russia's restoration of the MMD and Leningrad Military District (LMD) is part of the Kremlin's long-term restructuring effort to prepare for a potential large-scale conventional war against NATO.

The Russian military command appears to be establishing a tactical doctrine and force structure for motorcycle and civilian vehicles units in frontal assaults, underscoring the Russian military's efforts to offset Ukraine's drone advantages and achieve maneuver in modern ground warfare. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on May 13 that the Russian military command has developed a series of standards in equipping frontline units with motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and Chinese- and Russian-made buggies.^[12] Mashovets stated that Russia is working to equip every battalion with up to 30 motorcycles, up to 20 ATVs, and up to six buggies; every platoon with up to nine motorcycles, up to 20 ATVs, and up to six buggies; and every "Storm V" penal recruit assault company with up to 15 motorcycles, up to 20 ATVs, and up to three buggies. Mashovets noted that the Russian military command is struggling to source enough motorcycles to equip every unit to the standard level and that equipment rates between frontline units vary considerably as a result. Mashovets stated that the Russian 3rd Combined Arms Army (CAA) (formerly the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]) had up to 1,125 motorcycles, up to 975 ATVs, and 210-215 buggies as of end of April and beginning of May 2025 and noted that other Russian CAAs have varying equipment allocations depending on the number of assault companies and platoons within the CAA. Ukrainian and Russian sources previously suggested that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is working to formalize Russian motorcycle usage, and the appearance of a defined doctrinal organization and allocation for motorcycle units within the Russian military is consistent with this effort.^[13]

Russian forces currently appear to be utilizing motorcycles in tandem with armored vehicles, although Russian units may begin conducting assaults exclusively with motorcycles in the future. Mashovets stated that Russian units currently prefer to use motorcycles in tandem with infantry and armored vehicles.[14] The Russian military appears to be undergoing a transition period and moving towards regularly conducting assaults exclusively on motorcycles, although Russian forces may also continue to conduct these combined assaults if Russian commanders assess that motorcycle assaults are less successful. The Russian military may also continue to rely on combined assaults if the Russian MoD cannot improve its abilities to supply Russian units with motorcycles; however, as Mashovets noted that Russian servicemembers are continuing to rely on volunteer organizations to supply some units with motorcycles.[15] ISW previously noted that Russian motorcycle usage is a response to Ukrainian drone innovations and an attempt to offset the significant armored vehicle losses that Russian forces sustained in 2024 and possibly conserve some tanks and armored vehicles for future use.[16] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces will likely increasingly depend on motorcycles and other quicker, unarmored vehicles, as slower-moving vehicles have become a hazard on the more transparent battlefield of Ukraine.[17] The Russian military will likely retain its lessons learned in Ukraine beyond the war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials recently clarified that a September 2022 presidential decree does not preclude Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky from negotiating with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Zelensky signed a decree on September 30, 2022, prohibiting Ukrainian negotiations with Putin.[18] Zelensky told journalists during a press briefing on May 13 that Russian officials are misrepresenting the decree as an obstacle to negotiations as the decree is intended to prevent Ukrainian persons besides Zelensky from negotiating with Putin on Ukraine's behalf, rather than restricting Zelensky from exercising his "[constitutional] rights and duties," as Ukraine's head negotiator.[19] Chairperson of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada Foreign Affairs Committee Oleksandr Merezhko reiterated this point to Ukrainian English-language news outlet *Kyiv Independent* on May 13 and stated that Ukraine's Constitution "clearly" specifies Zelensky as Ukraine's chief negotiator and noted that Zelensky's constitutional powers allow him to override past decrees.[20] Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak stated on May 13 that Zelensky will only negotiate with Putin in Istanbul, as lower-level officials from either country would lack the authority to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine.[21] Russian officials routinely cite this decree as an "obstacle" to negotiations despite ongoing Ukrainian outreach to Russia to engage in good-faith negotiations.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian military is reportedly generating enough forces to replace losses and is reinforcing the size of the Russian force grouping in Ukraine despite experiencing an increased casualty rate per square kilometer gained. Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be embracing significant losses in exchange for diminishing returns to make battlefield gains and manage perceptions about Russia's military capabilities to pressure Ukraine in negotiations.
- The Russian military may also be prioritizing recruitment as part of longer-term efforts to build out a post-war strategic reserve for a potential future conflict with NATO.
- Ukrainian officials recently clarified that a September 2022 presidential decree does not preclude Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky from negotiating with Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- The Russian military command appears to be establishing a tactical doctrine and force structure for motorcycle and civilian vehicle units in frontal assaults, underscoring the Russian military's efforts to offset Ukraine's drone advantages and achieve maneuver in modern ground warfare.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Lyman, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 12, 2025](#)

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, Angelica Evans, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

May 12, 2025, 4:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11 am ET on May 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials appear to be setting conditions for Russian President Vladimir Putin to reject Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to meet on May 15 in Istanbul for bilateral ceasefire negotiations. Russian Federation Council Deputy Speaker Konstantin Kosachev responded to Zelensky on May 12 and claimed that Zelensky's invitation is "pure spectacle" and "comedy."^[1] Kosachev claimed that high-level meetings are not organized in "such a difficult situation" and accused Zelensky of trying to blame Russia for what he claimed was Ukraine's disinterest in negotiations. Russian Ambassador-at-Large Rodion Miroshnik questioned the intentions behind Zelensky's invitation to Putin to meet in Istanbul.^[2] Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Deputy Chairperson Alexei Chepa expressed doubt on May 12 that Putin will travel to Istanbul to meet with Zelensky.^[3] Chepa insinuated that Russia cannot trust Ukraine in any negotiations because Ukraine has violated previous agreements and unilaterally imposed Russian ceasefires. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed on May 12 that Zelensky is trying to co-opt the ongoing discussion around negotiations by inviting Putin to Istanbul and making Putin seem intransigent if he does not attend.^[4] Kremlin-level officials have not formally responded to Zelensky's invitation as of this report, although statements from lower-level Russian officials indicate that Putin will likely not travel to Istanbul and meet with Zelensky.

Putin has engaged in significant rhetorical efforts to prepare the Russian public for a long-term war effort — and not a near-term peace agreement — including by promoting the false narrative that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government are illegitimate.^[5] Putin and Russian officials often use this narrative to justify Russia's refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine and to further Russia's strategic war goal of establishing a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv. Putin may assess that the Kremlin would need to adjust or completely retract this narrative in order to rhetorically prepare the Russian public for direct negotiations with Zelensky before such meetings. Putin notably referred to the "Kyiv authorities" rather than Zelensky or the Ukrainian government in his invitation to negotiate in Istanbul.^[6] Senior Kremlin officials most recently reiterated this false narrative in late April, and Russian media continues to reiterate this narrative in publications as of May 12.^[7] ISW has not observed any indications that the Kremlin will alter or abandon this rhetoric. Putin may instead choose to let this narrative lie dormant for now and intensify this rhetoric should Russia and Ukraine sign a peace agreement in order to set conditions for Russia to justify reneging on any future peace agreement and relaunching the war at the time of Russia's choosing. **Any long-term peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president, government, and the Ukrainian Constitution.**

Russia has reportedly deployed a largely ceremonial regiment of the Federal Security Service (FSB) to the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, likely in an effort to generate fear of more rapid future Russian advances. The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Chasiv Yar direction reported on May 12 that elements of the elite Russian FSB Presidential Regiment are reinforcing Russian forces attempting to seize Chasiv Yar.^[8] This regiment reports directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin and is primarily responsible for fulfilling honor guard duties at state functions and guarding Russian officials, the Kremlin, and the Eternal Flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin Wall.^[9] ISW has not previously observed the regiment operating in Ukraine. Russian state media reported in 2014 and 2016 that the unit is approximately the size of a motorized rifle brigade and is composed of conscripts and contract soldiers.^[10] Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly promised the Russian population that conscripts, whose military service is mandated by Russian law, will not be deployed to fight in Ukraine after utilizing conscripts in combat operations during the initial months of the war.^[11]

Russian state media reporting suggests that elements of the Presidential Regiment likely lack the training and combat experience necessary to successfully reinforce Russian operations near Chasiv Yar and the longer-term Russian effort to seize the Ukrainian fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast. The Russian military command's decision to deploy the Presidential Regiment to fight in Ukraine is likely part of a larger Russian effort to intimidate Ukraine and the West through intensified battlefield activity and portray Russian forces as elite and fully capable of achieving significant successes in Ukraine in the near future. The Russian military command may also be trying to feed any manpower available into the Chasiv Yar area due to its apparent effort to prioritize offensive operations against Kostyantynivka in recent months.^[12] Russian forces are currently prioritizing quickly replenishing frontline units with new recruits to maintain the battlefield initiative in Ukraine over building up a pool of well-trained operational reserves, which is in turn hindering Russian forces' ability to conduct sophisticated operations and penetrate Ukrainian defenses.^[13] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces lack the capacity to make significant battlefield advances in the near future, however, and that Russian officials are leveraging Russia's retention of the battlefield initiative to strengthen their negotiating position.^[14]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials appear to be setting conditions for Russian President Vladimir Putin to reject Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to meet on May 15 in Istanbul for bilateral ceasefire negotiations.
- Russia has reportedly deployed a largely ceremonial regiment of the Federal Security Service (FSB) to the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, likely in an effort to generate fear of more rapid future Russian advances.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk direction. Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Novopavlivka directions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 11, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

May 11, 2025, 4:45 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin called for Russia and Ukraine to resume bilateral negotiations based on the early 2022 Istanbul protocols that include Russian demands amounting to full Ukrainian surrender. Any agreement based on those protocols would be a capitulation document. Putin spoke to media organizations on the night of May 10 to 11, following the joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal for a general ceasefire at least 30 days long beginning on May 12.[1] Putin did not agree to the joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal and instead proposed that Russia and Ukraine "resume" the direct negotiations that he claimed "[Ukraine] interrupted" in 2022 on May 15.[2] Russian Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov stated that Russia will soon announce its delegation to the resumed negotiations in Istanbul and that such negotiations should account for "developments of the 2022 talks."[3]

Putin and Ushakov are referring to Russia's April 2022 Istanbul protocols draft agreement, which included terms that would have amounted to Ukraine's surrender and left Ukraine helpless to defend against potential future Russian aggression.[4] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and the *New York Times* (NYT) reported in March and June 2024 that both publications obtained several versions of the draft protocols from the April 2022 Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiations in Istanbul.[5] The draft protocols demanded that Ukraine forego its NATO membership aspirations and amend its constitution to add a neutrality provision that would ban Ukraine from joining any military alliances, concluding military agreements, or hosting foreign military personnel, trainers, or weapon systems in Ukraine. Russia also demanded that it, the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), the People's Republic of China (PRC), France, and Belarus serve as security guarantors of the agreement. Russia demanded that the guarantor states "terminate international treaties and agreements incompatible with the permanent neutrality [of Ukraine]," including military aid agreements. Russia demanded to limit the Ukrainian military to 85,000 soldiers, 342 tanks, and 519 artillery systems as part of the Istanbul protocols. Russia additionally demanded that Ukrainian missiles be limited to a range of 40 kilometers (25 miles), a range that would allow Russian forces to deploy critical systems and materiel close to Ukraine without fear of strikes.

Russia insisted on these terms in the first and second months of the war when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv City and throughout northeastern, eastern, and southern Ukraine. Russia is now attempting to reiterate these same demands after three years of war, despite the fact that Ukrainian forces have since successfully forced Russia to withdraw from northern Ukraine, liberated significant swaths of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts, and blunted the Russian rate of advance across the theater. Putin is rejecting the joint US-Ukrainian-European proposal for a general ceasefire and instead continues to demand Ukrainian surrender in an attempt to secure his strategic goals by drawing out negotiations while continuing to make battlefield gains.

Putin also continues to demand that any negotiations address Russia's perceived "root causes" of the war in Ukraine. Putin stated during the press conference that the purpose of renewed bilateral Russian-Ukrainian negotiations would be to "eliminate the root causes" of the war in Ukraine. [6] Putin suggested that Russia and Ukraine could pursue a ceasefire as part of these renewed negotiations, but claimed that a "real truce" should not enable the "rearmament" and "replenishment" of the Ukrainian military. The Kremlin has repeatedly claimed that Russia must eliminate the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine, which Russian officials have defined as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into Eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[7] Kremlin officials recently claimed that any ceasefire

agreement should limit Ukraine's ability to mobilize and train new troops and receive Western military aid, while failing to offer similar concessions for Russia to limit its own force generation and defense production efforts.[8] Calls for the elimination of these alleged "root causes" and limitations on Ukraine's force generation capabilities are in line with Putin's demands for Ukrainian neutrality, as well as Putin's pre-war demand that would have required NATO to roll back to its pre-1997 borders.[9]

Putin is attempting to manipulate ongoing discussions about a ceasefire and future peace in Ukraine, likely in an effort to undermine Ukrainian-US-European unity around a comprehensive 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine. Kremlin officials have recently intensified their engagement with Western media in an effort to message directly to the Trump administration and American public and portray Russia's terms for Ukraine's surrender as reasonable.[10] Putin's May 11 press conference and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's recent interviews with Western media are part of an attempt to inject Kremlin narratives into the Western information space aimed at convincing the West that Russia is able to conquer all of Ukraine militarily and scaring Ukraine and the West into conceding to Russia's demands.[11] Putin's rhetorical posturing is an attempt to conceal limitations in the Russian military's capabilities and distract from Russia's failure to make any significant progress on the battlefield over the last two years. Putin and other Kremlin officials firmly maintain their war aims that amount to Ukraine's full capitulation and have thus far refused to consider any peace deal that does not concede to all of Russia's demands.[12] The Kremlin is falsely portraying itself as willing to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine while continuing to attack frontline Ukrainian positions and setting conditions for further military aggression against Ukraine and NATO in the coming years.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accepted Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal to hold bilateral negotiations in Turkey on May 15. Zelensky stated that he will personally wait for Putin in Turkey and that Ukraine is waiting for Russia to agree to the US-Ukrainian-European general ceasefire proposal.[13] Putin discussed renewing the 2022 Istanbul negotiations in a call with Erdogan on May 11, and Erdogan expressed support for resuming talks.[14] Erdogan noted during his call with Putin that a comprehensive ceasefire would "create the necessary environment" for peace talks.[15] European officials largely called on Putin to agree to a comprehensive ceasefire agreement before beginning bilateral peace negotiations with Ukraine.[16]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin called for Russia and Ukraine to resume bilateral negotiations based on the early 2022 Istanbul protocols that include Russian demands amounting to full Ukrainian surrender. Any agreement based on those protocols would be a capitulation document.
- Putin also continues to demand that any negotiations address Russia's perceived "root causes" of the war in Ukraine.
- Putin is attempting to manipulate ongoing discussions about a ceasefire and future peace in Ukraine, likely in an effort to undermine Ukrainian-US-European unity around a comprehensive 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accepted Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal to hold bilateral negotiations in Turkey on May 15.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in the northern Kharkiv and Novopavlivka directions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 10, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

May 10, 2025, 3:45 pm ET

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov rejected another US-Ukrainian general ceasefire proposal on May 10 amid continued Russian demands that any future ceasefire include conditions that support Russia's long-term goal of gaining control of all of Ukraine and would allow Russia to resume offensive operations from a more advantageous position at a time of its choosing. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced following the Coalition of the Willing meeting in Kyiv on May 10 that he, European officials, and US President Donald Trump are proposing a general ceasefire at least 30 days long beginning on May 12.[1] Zelensky called on Russian officials to respond to the proposal and stated that Europe and the United States should

impose additional sanctions on Russia's energy and banking sectors if Russia fails to agree to the ceasefire proposal. Peskov responded by claiming that Ukraine has not responded to Russian President Vladimir Putin's previous ceasefire proposals and that pressuring Russia is "useless." [2] Peskov claimed during an interview with ABC News published on May 10 that Putin supported the idea of a ceasefire but has "questions" about how a ceasefire will account for recent and possible future Russian advances in Ukraine, Ukrainian mobilization, and Western military assistance to Ukraine.[3] Peskov reiterated Putin's previous demands for the West to stop all military aid to Ukraine and force Ukraine to stop mobilizing and training servicemembers as a condition of a ceasefire. Putin criticized the initial March 13 US-Ukrainian general ceasefire proposal and insinuated that any ceasefire agreement should limit Ukraine's ability to mobilize and train new troops and receive military aid.[4]

Putin, Peskov, and other Russian officials have not yet offered any comparable concessions, such as stopping Russia's own force generation and defense industrial efforts, as part of a ceasefire agreement. Russian officials appear to be trying to define the conditions of any and all ceasefires in a way that facilitates further Russian battlefield gains in the short term and supports Russia's ability to attack Ukraine again in the future. Peskov also claimed that Ukraine is trying to leverage ceasefire proposals to "escape from negotiations," questioning Trump's stated objective of using a general ceasefire as a building block to precede peace negotiations.[5]

The UK and French-led Coalition of the Willing expressed support for the US-Ukrainian proposal of a general ceasefire of 30 days or more on May 10. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with the Coalition of the Willing during a semi-virtual summit on May 10, consisting of officials from Lithuania, Romania, Finland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Canada, Latvia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Australia, Croatia, Iceland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, the European Commission, and the European Council.[6] Zelensky welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in Kyiv for the summit.[7] The Coalition of the Willing and NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte expressed support for the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal.[8] Macron stated that the coalition is working on a proposal to deploy a military contingent to Ukraine and that the coalition will hold a series of meetings in the coming weeks.[9] NBC News reported that Ukraine, the United States, and European partners formulated a term sheet with a list of conditions for Russia to consider.[10] The document, according to an unspecified Western official, contains 22 proposals, including the 30-day general ceasefire. Reuters reported on May 9 that a French diplomatic source stated that US and European partners are finalizing the 30-day ceasefire proposal and new sanction packages if Russia refuses the proposal.[11]

Iran will reportedly deliver short-range ballistic missile launchers to Russia for use in Ukraine. Reuters reported on May 10, citing two Western security officials and a regional official, that Iran is preparing to provide Russia with an unspecified number of Fath-360 launchers in the near future.[12] The officials stated that Russia likely intends to use these launchers with the short-range ballistic missiles that Iran provided to Russia in Fall 2024. A Ukrainian military source told *The Times* in September 2024 that Iran provided over 200 Fath-360 ballistic missiles to Russia.[13] US European Command (EUCOM) Commander and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher Cavoli stated in April 2024 that Iran has provided over 400 short-range ballistic missiles and "hundreds of thousands" of artillery shells to Russia.[14] ISW has not observed reports of the Russian military launching Iranian-provided missiles against Ukraine, however. Iran began providing Russia with Shahed drones in Fall 2022, and Russia began producing and using its own Shahed-131 and Shahed-136 analogues (which Russia calls Geran-1 and Geran-2, respectively) with imported Iranian components and using Iranian production licenses as early as summer 2023.[15] Russia continues to deepen military cooperation with Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Russia's use of Iranian missiles against Ukraine would mark a significant intensification of Russian-Iranian relations.[16]

The United States Embassy in Kyiv issued a statement on May 9 warning of a significant Russian air strike against Ukraine over the next several days -- potentially involving Oreshnik medium-range ballistic missiles.[17] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported on May 10 that the Russian government plans to close the airspace over Volgograd and Saratov oblasts near the Kapustin Yar missile launch site in Astrakhan Oblast, where Russian forces reportedly store Oreshnik missiles, from 0600 May 12 to 1600 May 13 Moscow time.[18] Russian milbloggers asserted that the airspace closure is typical for combat and test launches of ballistic missiles and claimed that the closure suggests Russia might conduct an Oreshnik strike on Kyiv City.[19]

US and Western military support remains vital to Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian aggression. Deputy Head of the Verkhovna Rada's Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence, Yehor Chernev, told *The New York Times* (NYT) in a May 10 article that

Ukraine is "running low" on long-range missiles, artillery, and ballistic missile defense systems.[20] An unspecified congressional official told the NYT that the United States recently approved Germany's transfer of 125 long-range artillery rockets and 100 Patriot air defense missiles to Ukraine. A Western intelligence official stated that the Ukrainian military has improved its ability to "ration" Patriot air defense missiles by using cheaper interceptors to target smaller threats. Patriot air defense systems are essential to maintaining Ukraine's air defense umbrella, as Soviet-era and other Western-provided air defense systems are unable to intercept Russian ballistic missiles.

Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov rejected another US-Ukrainian general ceasefire proposal on May 10 amid continued Russian demands that any future ceasefire include conditions that support Russia's long-term goal of gaining control of all of Ukraine and would allow Russia to resume offensive operations from a more advantageous position at a time of its choosing.
- The UK and French-led Coalition of the Willing expressed support for the US-Ukrainian proposal of a general ceasefire of 30 days or more on May 10.
- Iran will reportedly deliver short-range ballistic missile launchers to Russia for use in Ukraine.
- The United States Embassy in Kyiv issued a statement on May 9 warning of a significant Russian air strike against Ukraine over the next several days -- potentially involving Oreshnik medium-range ballistic missiles.
- US and Western military support remains vital to Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian aggression.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 9, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

May 9, 2025, 6:30pm ET

US President Donald Trump explicitly called for a longer-term ceasefire in Ukraine that would precede peace negotiations — a sequence that Ukraine has consistently supported and that Russia has consistently rejected. Trump stated on May 8 that the United States calls for a 30-day unconditional ceasefire that "must ultimately build toward a peace agreement."^[1] Trump noted that he is committed to securing a Ukrainian-Russian peace with the Europeans. US Vice President JD Vance stated on May 8 that Russia asked for "too much" because Russia perceives that it is winning the war on the battlefield.^[2] Vance stated that Russia cannot expect Ukraine to cede territory to Russia that Russian forces have not seized — in reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin's demand that Ukraine cede territory in eastern and southern Ukraine that Russian forces do not currently occupy.^[3] Vance reiterated that the United States wants Ukraine to remain a sovereign country. US President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on May 9 that he is working together with European states to achieve a ceasefire at least 30 days long.^[4] Zelensky reported that his May 8 phone call with Trump demonstrated that the United States, Ukraine, and Europe are "on the same page" about the necessity of a full ceasefire. The Kremlin has consistently rejected Ukrainian and American proposals for 30-day ceasefires while blaming Ukraine for the lack of progress towards peace negotiations.^[5]

Ukrainian resistance with Western support has prevented Russian forces from seizing any of their self-identified objectives in Ukraine over the past year, depriving Russian President Vladimir Putin of significant battlefield successes to celebrate on Victory Day. Putin did not discuss the battlefield situation in Ukraine during Russia's Victory Day celebrations in Moscow on May 8 and 9 but claimed that all of Russia supports Russian servicemembers fighting in Ukraine.^[6] Russian forces have not seized any significant towns in Ukraine since the seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024, and the only mid-sized settlement that Russian forces have seized in Ukraine since December 2024 is Velyka Novosilka (pre-war population of 5,000).^[7] Ukrainian sources previously reported that Russian forces were trying to seize Pokrovsk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and the remaining area of Luhansk Oblast and advance into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast by Victory Day on May 9.^[8] Russian forces did not accomplish any of those objectives, and have in fact been trying to seize Pokrovsk, Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk for roughly a year.^[9]

Ukrainian long-range strikes and improved integration of tactical drone operations with defensive operations and counterattacks — all enabled by Western military support — have slowed, and in some places stalled, Russian offensive operations in Ukraine. Ukraine's successful integration of Ukrainian drone innovators and operators with ground forces appears to have stalled Russia's offensive against Pokrovsk and Toretsk in 2024 and early 2025.[10] Ukrainian long-range strikes against Russian ammunition depots, defense industry facilities, and oil and gas infrastructure have at times compromised Russia's ability to supply frontline units and have compounded the rising costs of Russia's war against Ukraine.[11] Ukrainian forces have also intentionally exacerbated other Russian vulnerabilities over the last year, including exacerbating Russia's shortage of operational reserves by launching the incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024 and forcing the Russian military to redeploy troops from other frontline areas to defend against the incursion.[12]

The only recent military operation that Putin featured on Victory Day was the repulsion of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. Putin thanked and highlighted North Korean troops at the Victory Day parade on May 9, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov noted that high-ranking North Korean commanders who participated in recapturing Kursk Oblast attended the parade.[13] Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov declared that Russian forces pushed all Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast on April 26, after almost nine months of Russian operations to push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.[14] Russian officials have repeatedly platformed the recapture of Kursk Oblast as a significant military achievement, and ISW previously forecasted that Russian officials would highlight the Kursk operation as part of the Victory Day celebrations.[15] Russian officials' praise of the Kursk operation ignores the fact that Putin reportedly initially tasked Russian forces with retaking Kursk Oblast by mid-October 2024 and Putin's continued willingness to extend this timeline throughout Fall 2024 and Winter 2024-2025, prioritizing offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast over retaking Russian territory.[16] Russian officials are also ignoring recent Ukrainian attacks and advances into Tetkino, Kursk Oblast.[17]

Russian officials highlighted technological adaptations and innovations that Russian forces have integrated in Ukraine over the last three years during national and regional Victory Day celebrations. Russian state media posted footage on May 9 showing Russian forces displaying Orlan-10, Orlan-30, and Zala reconnaissance drones; Lancet-51 and Lancer-52 loitering munitions; and Geran and Garpiya long-range strikes drones during the Victory Day parade in Moscow City.[18] Russia state news outlet RIA Novosti posted footage showing Russian forces riding in Chinese-made all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and Russian-made buggies during a Victory Day parade in Khabarovsk City, Khabarovsk Krai.[19] Russian media also posted footage of Russian forces showcasing tanks equipped with counter drone netting at a Victory Day parade in Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast.[20] Russia's use of counter drone netting, ATVs, buggies, and motorcycles are all tactical adaptations in response to Ukrainian drone operations. Russian forces have increasingly leveraged reconnaissance and strike drones to destroy frontline Ukrainian positions and damage Ukrainian cities throughout the war in Ukraine. Russian officials appear to be highlighting these weapons, vehicles, and counter-drone adaptations to the Russian public to frame these innovations as a form of "victory" in Ukraine. Russian officials' willingness to highlight these adaptions during Victory Day parades suggests that the Russian military intends to preserve these adaptions in future military operations rather than reverting to pre-2022 forms of combat.

The Kremlin seized on Russia's May 9 Victory Day celebrations to posture itself as having broad international support three years into its invasion of Ukraine and especially highlighted Russia's growing partnerships with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and North Korea. The Kremlin indicated that heads of state and senior representatives of at least 30 states, the heads of the Palestinian Authority and Kremlin-backed separatist region of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the heads of several international organizations — including the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) — travelled to Russia for the Victory Day parade and subsequent events on May 9.[21] The Kremlin reported that 55 military units and over 11,500 military personnel in total participated in the parade in Moscow, including military personnel from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Egypt, the PRC, Laos, Mongolia, and Myanmar.[22]

Russian officials specifically praised the PRC and North Korea for their support, including of the war in Ukraine. Putin gave a speech at the parade in Moscow highlighting the contribution of the "courageous people of China" in Russia's victory in the Second World War, and Putin sat next to PRC President Xi Jinping at the Victory Day parade.[23] Putin and Xi issued a joint statement on May 8 that referenced Putin's original war aims in Ukraine and called for the resolution of the war in Ukraine to eliminate the "root causes" of the war — a long-standing Russian talking point and demand for the installation of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine.[24] ISW noted that this joint statement was a notable inflection in PRC rhetoric. Putin expressed well-wishes to North Korean soldiers and hugged a North Korean

military veteran at the parade, and Russian state media highlighted this gesture.[25] North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, his daughter Kim Ju-ae, and several North Korean officials visited the Russian embassy in Pyongyang to commemorate the May 9 Victory Day holiday.[26] Russia is likely attempting to emphasize its deepening relationships with the PRC and North Korea in particular to posture itself as possessing broad international support, including for its war in Ukraine, to a domestic Russian audience and the wider international community.

Putin used the Victory Day holiday to promote the development of a civic Russian identity at odds with Russian ultranationalist efforts to promote ethno-religious nationalism predicated on a Russian state mainly led by and comprised of ethnic Russians. Putin claimed on May 8 at a dinner with foreign delegations in Moscow that May 9 is a “sacred date” for the “multinational people” of Russia.[27] Putin also claimed on May 9 in a speech at the Victory Day parade that the Soviet Union’s “truly iron unity” prevented Nazi Germany from seizing the country.[28] Putin claimed that Russia defends the honor of all Red Army soldiers from different nationalities and that all of the republics in the Soviet Union bore a common burden in the Second World War. Putin additionally said that Central Asia and the South Caucasus made “enormous” contributions in the Second World War. Putin’s efforts to highlight Russia’s and post-Soviet countries’ diverse population as equal contributors to the Soviet war effort are part of an effort to promote an informal state ideology that supports a civic Russian identity and a multiethnic and religiously diverse population. Putin routinely attempts to posture Russia as an ethnically diverse and harmonious country in an attempt to balance among Russian ultranationalist demands for restrictions against migrants and assimilation of ethnic minorities. [29] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is trying to leverage migrants to offset labor shortages while also disproportionately targeting migrants and ethnic minorities in Russian military recruitment efforts.[30] Putin’s choice to promote multiculturalism at Russia’s largest national holiday demonstrates that Putin continues to support an informal state ideology that supports Russian civic nationalism. This manifestation of Russian nationalism is notably at odds with Russian ultranationalists’ attempts to create an ideology predicated on a Russian state mainly led by and comprised of ethnic Russians that defends and platforms Russian Orthodoxy.[31] Putin will likely continue to struggle to balance Russia’s need to leverage migrants to offset labor shortages and long-term demographic decline with placating the increasingly influential pro-war Russian ultranationalist community.

Delegations from 35 countries and the Council of Europe visited Lviv City on May 9 in celebration of Europe Day in Ukraine.[32] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated that the delegations would hold a meetings of EU foreign ministers and the Core Group on the Establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.[33] The Core Group announced on May 9 the creation of a special tribunal within the Council of Europe to investigate and prosecute Russian officials for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.[34]

Ukraine’s European allies continue to support the Ukrainian military and defense industrial base (DIB). The EU, Denmark, France, and Italy agreed on May 9 to transfer one billion euros (roughly \$1.1 billion) from proceeds from frozen Russian assets to the European Peace Fund to purchase weapons from the Ukrainian DIB for the Ukrainian military.[35] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced that the EU also allocated 600 million euros-worth (roughly \$675 million) of artillery and ammunition to Ukraine and more than 200 million euros (roughly \$225 million) to strengthen Ukrainian air defenses.[36] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha noted on May 9 that the EU has committed to supply Ukraine with over 1.35 million artillery shells in 2025.[37]

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump explicitly called for a longer-term ceasefire in Ukraine that would precede peace negotiations — a sequence that Ukraine has consistently supported and that Russia has consistently rejected.
- Ukrainian resistance with Western support has prevented Russian forces from seizing any of their self-identified objectives in Ukraine over the past year, depriving Russian President Vladimir Putin of significant battlefield successes to celebrate on Victory Day.
- The only recent military operation that Putin featured on Victory Day was the repulsion of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Russian officials highlighted technological adaptations and innovations that Russian forces have integrated in Ukraine over the last three years during national and regional Victory Day celebrations.
- The Kremlin seized on Russia’s May 9 Victory Day celebrations to posture itself as having broad international support three years into its invasion of Ukraine and especially highlighted Russia’s growing partnerships with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and North Korea.
- Putin used the Victory Day holiday to promote the development of a civic Russian identity at odds with Russian ultranationalist efforts to promote ethno-religious

nationalism predicated on a Russian state mainly led by and comprised of ethnic Russians.

- Delegations from 35 countries and the Council of Europe visited Lviv City on May 9 in celebration of Europe Day in Ukraine.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to support the Ukrainian military and defense industrial base (DIB).
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk, Novopavlivka, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka directions and in Zaporizhia Oblast, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 8, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

May 8, 2025, 10:45pm ET

The Kremlin continues to seize on the Russian mythos of the Second World War ahead of Russia's May 9 Victory Day holiday to set informational conditions to justify a prolonged war in Ukraine and future aggression against NATO to Russian society. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov published an article on May 8 in which he argued that Russia's war in Ukraine will go down in history as a feat of courage and significance equal to the victory of the Soviet military and people during the Second World War.^[1] Belousov claimed that Russia's war in Ukraine is a continuation of the "glorious traditions" of Soviet bravery and heroism and of the Soviet people's enthusiasm for enlisting and otherwise supporting the war effort. Belousov claimed that Russia's victory in Ukraine is "inevitable." Belousov said that domestic unity is a necessity for Russia's victory in Ukraine just as the Soviet Union's "moral and spiritual unity" was a critical factor for its victory in the Second World War. Russian state media highlighted Belousov's statements comparing the Second World War to Russia's war in Ukraine in their coverage of his 10-page essay, indicating that the Kremlin is trying to message to the domestic audience that Russia will achieve its goals in its war in Ukraine as long as Russian society remains unified and supportive.^[2] Kremlin officials have recently seized on the mythos of the Second World War to form the basis of a new pseudo-state ideology that will span across generations and that the Kremlin intends to use to justify potential future aggression against the West.^[3]

Belousov reiterated the Kremlin's oft-repeated fallacious narrative that Russia had no choice but to launch its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 because the situation was "life or death." Belousov claimed that Ukraine is a conduit for the collective West's "crusade" against Russia, which Belousov claimed is a manifestation of "eternal Russophobia" and intended to eradicate Russian statehood. Belousov quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech from February 24, 2022, announcing the full-scale invasion.^[4] Belousov amplified Putin's accusations that the United States and its Western allies had a policy of "containment" against Russia and created a situation in which Russia had to launch the full-scale invasion of Ukraine to defend Russia's interests.^[5] The Kremlin is attempting to link Putin's anti-Western claims to the mythos of the Second World War in order to heighten the existential threat against Russia that the Kremlin claims Russia is currently facing. It is also reconstructing the Soviet-era narrative that the West is conspiring to destroy Russia (in place of the Soviet Union) and that the conflict will be unending.

Belousov explicitly identified large-scale Russian military reforms as preparations for a future conflict with NATO as Russian Security Council Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev threatened European countries that support Ukraine.^[6] Belousov stated in his May 8 essay that Russia has reformed and augmented its military specifically in response to NATO expansion and military build-up (undertaken only well after the Russian 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine), including by reorganizing Russia's Western Military District (WMD) into the Moscow and Leningrad military districts (MMD and LMD); re-opening two former military academies and establishing a new third military academy; and fully forming, staffing, and equipping two combined arms armies, a river flotilla, a mixed aviation corps, and 50 other formations and units.^[7] ISW has long assessed that Russian military restructuring efforts, including reforms of the LMD and MMD, are part of future preparations for war against NATO.^[8]

Medvedev threatened that European countries must "remember" the "crushing defeat of Nazi Germany" when supporting Ukraine.^[9] Medvedev notably made his threat on his English-language X account, indicating that Medvedev intended this threat for international audiences.^[10] Other senior Russian officials have also intensified accusations against European states for supporting "Nazism" in recent days.^[11] Medvedev's threat and Russian claims of European "Nazism" are part of the Kremlin's

ongoing reflexive control campaign that aims to push European countries into refraining from providing further assistance to Ukraine.[12] Kremlin officials have also recently framed European efforts to shoulder more of their own defense requirements (in line with US President Donald Trump's efforts) as threatening to Russia, and the Kremlin's reflexive control campaign likely also aims to prevent European states from building up their defenses. Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service Head Vice Admiral Peter Reesink warned in an interview with Politico published on May 8 that Russia's most threatening behavior is its military buildup and moving military assets towards Russia's borders with Finland and the Baltic states.[13] Reesink stated that Russia appears to be producing more artillery than the Russian military needs for its war in Ukraine when taking account of the assistance Russia is receiving from its allies. *Reuters* published an investigation on May 8 revealing that Russia has been constructing a significant new production line for explosives at the Biysk Oleum Plant in Siberia that is planned to produce 6,000 metric tons of explosives annually.[14] *Reuters* noted that this would be enough explosive to manufacture 1.28 million 152mm artillery rounds and that Russia produced nearly two million 122mm and 152mm artillery rounds in 2024, suggesting that this new production line could expand Russia's artillery shell production capacity by over 50 percent when completed.

Russia claimed to have implemented its unilateral Victory Day ceasefire on May 8 and accused Ukraine of ceasefire violations even though Ukraine did not officially and publicly agree to Russia's ceasefire. Russia's unilateral Victory Day ceasefire and accusations of violations continue to demonstrate the necessity that any ceasefire or peace agreement be formally agreed to in advance by all parties and include robust monitoring mechanisms. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on April 28 Russia's ceasefire starting at midnight on the night of May 7 to 8 and ending at midnight on the night of May 10 to 11 in honor of Victory Day on May 9.[15] Russia's Victory Day celebrates the Soviet Union's contributions to defeating Nazi Germany during the Second World War while minimizing the role of the United States. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces completely ceased combat operations and remained at their current positions at midnight Moscow time on May 8 in accordance with Russian President Vladimir Putin's unilateral ceasefire.[16] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces did not stop combat operations "despite the announcement of the ceasefire." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha stated on May 8 that Russian forces continued to attack across the entire frontline.[17] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Russian forces shelled Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts after the start of the ceasefire.[18] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that servicemembers from three Ukrainian units operating in the Pokrovsk direction and in southern Ukraine confirmed that they received instructions to open fire only in response to Russian combat operations.[19]

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Ukraine's willingness to implement US President Donald Trump's desired 30-day ceasefire to precede peace talks. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that he spoke with Trump on May 8 about the concrete steps needed to achieve peace.[20] Zelensky reiterated to Trump that Ukraine is ready for an immediate 30-day ceasefire and for talks "in any format." Zelensky reported that Trump supported a 30-day ceasefire. Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak stated that Ukraine can only start peace negotiations after the implementation of an unconditional 30-day ceasefire and that the United States and Ukraine's European partners agree with this timeline.[21] Yermak noted that Russia and Ukraine can agree on a format for peace negotiations and appoint delegations after a longer-term ceasefire is in place.

The Kremlin is attempting to exploit its unilateral Victory Day ceasefire to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress toward a longer-term ceasefire and peace negotiations despite Russia's continued rejection of such a longer-term ceasefire. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on May 7 that Ukraine does not want to seriously discuss a long-term ceasefire.[22] Zakharova claimed that Russia's support for the previous US- and Ukrainian-proposed 30-day moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure and Russia's unilateral Easter truce shows that Russia has never been against a ceasefire, even though the Kremlin has continued to protract and delay meaningful negotiations to establish a comprehensive ceasefire.[23] Zakharova accused Ukraine of repeatedly violating the strikes and Easter ceasefires and claimed that there could be progress toward a long-term ceasefire should Ukraine observe shorter-term ceasefires. Zakharova repeated recent Kremlin narratives that Ukraine cannot control its own military and Putin's rejection of previous US and Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposals on the grounds that there are "nuances" about enforcement mechanisms and weapons provisions to Ukraine that the parties would need to work out prior to implementation.[24] Russia previously accused Ukraine of violating the strikes and Easter ceasefires while rarely offering evidence supporting these accusations, and Russian officials will likely do the same during the unilateral Victory Day ceasefire in order to distract from Russia's continued intransigence in negotiations about Ukraine.[25]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping conducted a series of bilateral engagements in Moscow on May 8, showcasing deeper Russian–Chinese cooperation and alignment.[26] These engagements mark the third official meeting in 2025 between Putin and Xi. Putin and Xi signed a package of bilateral intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation documents and issued a joint statement on May 8.[27] Xi travelled to Russia to attend Russia's Victory Day celebrations on May 9. Putin and Xi discussed the roles that China and the Soviet Union played in the Second World War, emphasized the importance of their countries' contributions to the defeat of fascism, highlighted significant Chinese and Soviet losses in the war, and claimed that China and the Soviet Union were the "main theaters" in the war.[28] Russian officials repeatedly use the mythos of the Soviet Union's sacrifice during the Second World War to persuade the Russian population that their increasing social and economic sacrifices for the Russian war effort in Ukraine can lead to victory.[29] Russian officials are likely overemphasizing World War II mythos to bolster support for Russia's war effort in Ukraine in part due to Russia's inability to showcase battlefield successes for Victory Day 2025.

The joint Russian–Chinese statement on May 8 referenced Putin's original aims in launching his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to lend international support and legitimacy to Russia's goals and attempted justifications for the war. The Russian–Chinese joint statement asserted that Russia and the PRC are "convinced" that a long-term and sustainable settlement in the war in Ukraine requires the elimination of the "root causes" of the war.[30] The joint statement claimed that Russia and the PRC will work to counter attempts to "rehabilitate" Nazism and the rise of militarism that contribute to discrimination and intolerance. The joint statement noted that Russia "positively evaluates" the PRC's position on the war in Ukraine and that Russia welcomes the PRC's desire to play a role in the political and diplomatic efforts towards settling the war. The PRC and Brazil — two members of BRICS — have notably put forth peace proposals for the war in Ukraine that heavily favored Russia.[31] The Kremlin has repeatedly claimed that Russia must eliminate the "root causes" of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which Russian officials have defined as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[32] Putin named Ukraine's "demilitarization" and "denazification" as Russia's main goals when he launched his full-scale invasion in February 2022, and Russian officials have consistently used these terms to call for the removal of the current legitimate Ukrainian government, the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv, and the reduction of Ukraine's military such that Ukraine is unable to defend itself in the future.[33] Russia has attempted to exploit diplomatic meetings with PRC and Iranian officials in recent months to publicly reiterate these original war aims and posture Russia's allies as supportive in these efforts.[34] The PRC has previously publicly attributed talk of Russia's alleged need to eliminate the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine only to Kremlin officials — not PRC officials.[35] The May 8 joint Russian–Chinese statement declaring that "the parties" are "convinced" of the need to eliminate the "root causes" of the war is a notable inflection in PRC rhetoric.

The joint Russian–Chinese statement supported Putin's proposed Eurasian security architecture and Russia's ongoing efforts to create a Russia-dominated alternative, anti-Western bloc. Russia and the PRC reiterated their mutual interest in establishing a multipolar world order in which the UN plays a central role.[36] Xi further claimed that both Russia and the PRC bear a special responsibility as permanent members of the UNSC and great powers to oversee the creation of a new multipolar world.[37] The joint statement underscored both parties' commitment to the creation of a Eurasian security architecture - a reference to the architecture that Putin first proposed in June 2024 with Xi's support.[38] The joint statement highlighted the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRICS - organizations that Kremlin officials have previously labelled as the foundation of Putin's proposed Eurasian security architecture. [39] The joint statement paradoxically called for an end to confrontational bloc mentality and specifically cited NATO expansion as an example of such bloc mentality. The statement noted that Russia and the PRC find the construction of military blocs that are anti-Russian and anti-Chinese in nature unacceptable. The statement emphasized the need to eliminate the "root causes" of interstate conflicts before the creation of a Eurasian security architecture - the first time Russian officials have publicly linked their calls for the elimination of "root causes" with Putin's proposed Eurasian security architecture. ISW continues to assess that Russia has been building a web of overlapping coalitions and partnerships, including within the CSTO, CIS, ASEAN, BRICS, and SCO, to offset the limits of Russian state power and that Putin's Eurasian security architecture proposal is part of Russian efforts to create an alternative Russian-led bloc to further Putin's goals of destroying NATO and weakening the West and its allies.[40]

The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine's (UN HRMMU) reported that Ukrainian civilian casualties have significantly increased between 2024 and 2025. The UN

HRMMU reported that Ukrainian civilian casualties increased 23 percent between March 2025 and April 2025 and increased by 84 percent between April 2024 and April 2025.^[41] The UN HRMMU reported that at least 209 civilians were killed and 1,146 civilians were injured in the war in April 2025. The UN HRMMU reported that 97 percent of these civilian casualties were in unoccupied Ukraine and that April 2025 had the highest number of civilian casualties since September 2024. The HRMMU reported that almost half of these casualties were due to missile and loitering munition strikes and noted several Russian drone and missile strikes in urban areas of Kryvyi Rih and Sumy, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, and Kharkiv cities in April 2025. The UN HRMMU reported that short-range drone strikes accounted for 23 percent of civilian casualties, most of which were in Kherson Oblast. The UN HRMMU noted that a drone strike against a civilian bus in Marhanets, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (on the east [right] bank of the Dnipro River immediately across from the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant) significantly contributed to these casualties.

The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada ratified the US–Ukrainian bilateral economic partnership agreement on May 8.^[42] The United States and Ukraine signed the bilateral economic partnership agreement on April 30.^[43]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin continues to seize on the Russian mythos of the Second World War ahead of Russia's May 9 Victory Day holiday to set informational conditions to justify a prolonged war in Ukraine and future aggression against NATO to Russian society.
- Belousov explicitly identified large-scale Russian military reforms as preparations for a future conflict with NATO as Russian Security Council Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev threatened European countries that support Ukraine.
- Russia claimed to have implemented its unilateral Victory Day ceasefire on May 8 and accused Ukraine of ceasefire violations even though Ukraine did not officially and publicly agree to Russia's ceasefire. Russia's unilateral Victory Day ceasefire and accusations of violations continue to demonstrate the necessity that any ceasefire or peace agreement be formally agreed to in advance by all parties and include robust monitoring mechanisms.
- Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Ukraine's willingness to implement US President Donald Trump's desired 30-day ceasefire to precede peace talks.
- The Kremlin is attempting to exploit its unilateral Victory Day ceasefire to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress toward a longer-term ceasefire and peace negotiations despite Russia's continued rejection of such a longer-term ceasefire.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping conducted a series of bilateral engagements in Moscow on May 8, showcasing deeper Russian–Chinese cooperation and alignment.
- The joint Russian–Chinese statement on May 8 referenced Putin's original aims in launching his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to lend international support and legitimacy to Russia's goals and attempted justifications for the war.
- The joint Russian–Chinese statement supported Putin's proposed Eurasian security architecture and Russia's ongoing efforts to create a Russia-dominated alternative, anti-Western bloc.
- The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine's (UN HRMMU) reported that Ukrainian civilian casualties have significantly increased between 2024 and 2025.
- The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada ratified the US–Ukrainian bilateral economic partnership agreement on May 8.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Sumy oblasts and near Kupyansk, Borova, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 7, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, and Karolina Hird with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

May 7, 2025, 9:30 pm ET

US officials acknowledged Russia's continued intransigence toward any ceasefire agreement in Ukraine while reiterating that Ukraine remains committed to US President Donald Trump's

proposed comprehensive 30-day ceasefire. US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg stated on May 6 that Russian President Vladimir Putin's refusal to agree to a 30-day ceasefire is the main impediment to establishing peace in Ukraine and that Russia will be hurt if the parties do not agree to a comprehensive ceasefire, as "Russia is not winning the war."^[1] Kellogg noted Russia's failure to secure positions on the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast, its inability to reach Kyiv and Odesa cities, and Russian forces' high attrition rates — all in line with ISW's assessment that Russia's battlefield situation has deteriorated since 2022.^[2] US Vice President JD Vance stated on May 7 that Russia is "asking for a certain set of requirements" and "concessions in order to end the conflict," but that the United States thinks that Russia is "asking for too much."^[3]

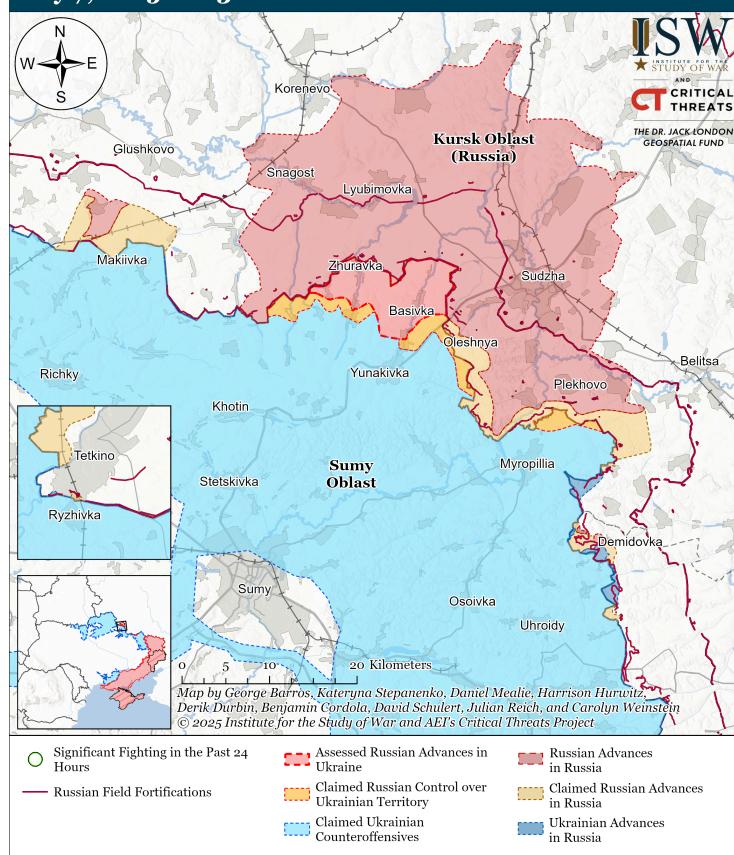
Kellogg reiterated that Ukraine has agreed to a renewable comprehensive sea, air, and land ceasefire for a minimum of 30 days and that Ukraine is willing to immediately sign the agreement.^[4] Kellogg stated that Ukraine is prepared to accept a "ceasefire in place" that will require both Russia and Ukraine to withdraw 15 kilometers from the current frontline in order to establish a 30-kilometer demilitarized zone that could fall under an unspecified monitoring mechanism. Kellogg stated that members of the UK- and French-led Coalition of the Willing are willing to deploy a "ceasefire force" west of the Dnipro River that will patrol and reinforce the comprehensive ceasefire. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded to Kellogg's statement on May 7, claiming that Russia has not received any Ukrainian proposals to establish a demilitarized zone.^[5]

Russia is likely attempting to prolong and delay discussions about a comprehensive ceasefire to obfuscate its continued rejection of the United States' ceasefire proposals. ISW continues to assess that Russia likely remains opposed to any sort of enforcement or monitoring mechanisms, as Russia would likely weaponize the absence of such mechanisms to flood the information space with unsubstantiated claims of Ukrainian ceasefire violations, as it has done before.^[6] The Kremlin has also repeatedly outright rejected the prospect of European peacekeepers in Ukraine, claiming that such deployments would be unacceptable for Russia.^[7] Russia remains committed to its long-standing effort to prolong peace negotiations in order to make battlefield gains and attempt to secure additional concessions from the United States.^[8]

Ukrainian forces likely recently advanced across the international border into southern Tetkino, Kursk Oblast, amid continued limited Ukrainian attacks in the area. Geolocated footage published on May 6 shows Russian forces conducting an airstrike against a building in southern Tetkino (southwest of Glushkovo), indicating that Ukrainian forces likely seized positions in Tetkino.^[9] Russian milbloggers claimed on May 6 that Ukrainian forces seized up to two streets in southern Tetkino and continued to claim on May 7 that Ukrainian forces maintain positions within the settlement.^[10] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, including elements of the 56th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division), pushed Ukrainian forces out of Tetkino, however.^[11] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled limited Ukrainian mechanized assaults against Tetkino and Novyi Put (east of Tetkino along the international border) on May 7 and that Ukrainian forces continue efforts to use mine-clearing equipment to create paths through Russian minefields in the area.^[12] One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Novyi Put, but other milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults in the area.^[13] ISW has not observed geolocated footage indicating that Ukrainian forces have entered Novyi Put. Elements of the Russian 98th VDV Division are reportedly operating near Tetkino.^[14]

Assessed Control of Terrain in the Sumy Direction

May 7, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST



Ukrainian forces conducted long-range drone strikes against defense industrial facilities and airbases in Russia overnight on May 6 and 7. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, who often reports on successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian territory, reported on May 7 that Ukrainian forces struck and seriously damaged the Fiber Optic Systems plant in Saransk, Republic of Mordovia.[15] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces struck the plant.[16] The Fiber Optic Systems plant is the only plant in Russia that produces fiber optic cables, which Russian forces are increasingly relying on for the operation of fiber-optic first-person view (FPV) drones on the battlefield in Ukraine.[17] Ukraine notably struck the same plant on April 5.[18] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported that Ukrainian strikes on May 7 caused a second fire near the Fiber Optic Systems plant, likely at the Saranskkabel machine-building enterprise.[19] Kovalenko also reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian defense enterprises in Tula City, including the Instrument-Making Design Bureau, which produces anti-tank systems, small arms, and combat modules, and the Scientific-Production Association (SPLAV), which produces Grad, Uragan, and Smerch multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS).[20] Ukrainian outlet Suspilne reported that its sources in the Ukrainian special services stated that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted drone strikes that hit the SPLAV plant and the Bazalt weapons and ammunition plant in Krasnoarmeysk, Moscow Oblast.[21] Geolocated footage published on May 7 shows smoke near the Fiber Optic Systems and SPLAV plants.[22]

Kovalenko further reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Shaykovka Airbase in Kaluga Oblast, where Russia bases and stores Tu-22M3 strategic bombers and Kh-22 cruise missiles, and the Kubinka Airbase in Moscow Oblast, where Su-27 and MiG-29 fighter jets are based.[23] Russian milbloggers, including a source reportedly affiliated with the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), also reported that Ukrainian forces struck Kubinka Airbase.[24] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses shot down at least nine drones over Kaluga Oblast, at least six drones over Tula Oblast, and at least two drones over Moscow Oblast.[25]

Russian authorities will likely test their ability to completely disconnect large areas of Russia from the internet on May 9 under the guise of protecting Russian Victory Day celebrations.

Officials in the republics of Chuvashia and Tatarstan and in Voronezh and Tver oblasts warned on May 7 that authorities may restrict mobile network usage to "ensure security" on May 9.[26] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov warned on May 7 that Moscow City and Oblast authorities may place "limitations" on mobile internet operation during Victory Day celebrations "for obvious reasons" and stated that Russians "must treat this with absolute understanding."[27] Several Russian banks

and internet giant Yandex warned that the disconnection will likely affect Russians' access to banking, taxi, courier, and public transportation services, particularly in Moscow City and Oblast.[28] Russian authorities have been periodically testing their Sovereign Internet system, which allows Russia to completely disconnect itself from the global internet and increasingly censor Russians' ability to communicate and access information.[29] Reports of significant Russian internet outages have increased in the first months of 2025, and Russian authorities likely seek to take advantage of the May 9 holiday to conduct a widespread test of the Sovereign Internet system without encountering significant opposition from Russians.[30] The Kremlin also likely seeks to prevent Russians from circulating imagery and footage of damage and fires from any possible Ukrainian long-range strikes on May 9 to avoid shattering the facade that Russia's victory in Ukraine is near on Victory Day itself — even though Russia has no significant battlefield successes to flaunt for the 2025 holiday.[31]

Russian authorities have already tested the ability to temporarily disconnect from the internet during recent Ukrainian long-range drone strikes against Russia and likely intend to informationally link these planned May 9 disconnections to actual Ukrainian drone strikes as part of efforts to mitigate any opposition to the disconnection ahead of May 9. Russian media reported that over 30 Russian cities, including in Yaroslavl, Tver, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Tula, Leningrad, Kaluga, and Kursk oblasts, experienced difficulties connecting to the internet during the Ukrainian drone strikes on May 7 and that all of Saransk and several other settlements in the Republic of Mordovia were completely disconnected from the internet.[32] Moscow City residents have been complaining about widespread mobile internet outages since May 5, which Russian authorities have explained as preparations for the May 9 Victory Day celebrations.[33] A Russian Telegram source claimed on April 25 that Russian authorities shut down mobile internet access in occupied Crimea due to Ukrainian drone strikes and alleged that the measure was ineffective, only causing issues for Russian authorities who rely on the internet for communications.[34] Russian authorities will likely continue disconnecting large areas of Russia from mobile internet networks during Ukrainian long-range strikes to continue testing the Sovereign Internet system and, secondarily, prevent Russians from immediately circulating reports, imagery, and footage of the results of these Ukrainian strikes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro signed the Russia-Venezuela Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement on May 7.[35] The agreement addresses enhanced defense cooperation and coordination; the "legacy and falsification" of colonialism; arms control and non-proliferation, including in space; organized crime and internationally sponsored terrorism; international information security and the regulation of the information space; and energy and economic cooperation. The agreement notably includes a provision for the development of military-technical cooperation between Russia and Venezuela. This strategic partnership agreement coheres with Russian efforts to strengthen relations with Venezuela over the past several years, in large part to contest US influence in the Western hemisphere and to paint Russia as a competitive and capable world power.[36] Russia and Venezuela previously signed 17 agreements, including eight strategic-level agreements, in November 2024 that include intelligence sharing, counterespionage, drone use, and petroleum technologies.[37] Maduro is in Moscow for the May 9 Victory Day celebrations, and Russia is likely attempting to showcase its allies, partners, and diplomatic successes to international audiences.[38]

Ukrainian and European officials continue to report on Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of international law and Russia's use of chemical weapons in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a signatory. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's *Current Time* outlet reported on May 6 that the European Council prepared a new sanctions package against the Russian Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops, 27th Scientific Center, and 33rd Scientific Research and Testing Institute.[39] The sanctions package will reportedly reference November 2024 and February 2025 reports from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) detailing how Russian forces used chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) gas — a type of riot control agent (RCA) banned under the CWC — near Marivka and Ilinka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (on the west [right] bank of the Dnipro River across from Enerhodar and the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant [ZNPP]) in 2024. The OPCW found traces of CS gas in soil and water tests following Russian strikes, which explains its presence in areas beyond the current frontline. The Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported on May 6 that Russian forces executed three surrendering Ukrainian POWs on May 3 near Novopil (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[40] ISW continues to observe a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025 and to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling, their subordinates to conduct these executions in violation of international law.[41]

Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared to reject Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov's recent request to resign from his post. Putin and Kadyrov met on May 7 to discuss socioeconomic issues in the Chechen Republic.[42] Kadyrov ended the meeting by thanking Putin for

his positive assessment of Chechen force generation efforts and Chechen forces' participation in Russia's war in Ukraine. Kadyrov stated that "we will not let [Putin] down," to which Putin replied, "I have no doubt," suggesting that Putin expects Kadyrov to continue leading the republic. Kadyrov expressed his desire to resign from his post on May 5 in an interview with *Chechnya Segodnya*, but noted on May 6 that only Putin can authorize this decision.[43]

Key Takeaways:

- US officials acknowledged Russia's continued intransigence toward any ceasefire agreement in Ukraine while reiterating that Ukraine remains committed to US President Donald Trump's proposed comprehensive 30-day ceasefire.
- Ukrainian forces likely recently advanced across the international border into southern Tetkino, Kursk Oblast, amid continued limited Ukrainian attacks in the area.
- Ukrainian forces conducted long-range drone strikes against defense industrial facilities and airbases in Russia overnight on May 6 and 7.
- Russian authorities will likely test their ability to completely disconnect large areas of Russia from the internet on May 9 under the guise of protecting Russian Victory Day celebrations.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro signed the Russia-Venezuela Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement on May 7.
- Ukrainian and European officials continue to report on Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of international law and Russia's use of chemical weapons in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a signatory.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared to reject Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov's recent request to resign from his post.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Novopavlivka, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment May 6, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on May 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued limited attacks across the international border near Tetkino and Novyi Put, Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed on May 6 that Russian forces repelled the Ukrainian attacks near Novyi Put and Volfino (southwest of Glushkovo) and that fighting continued near the railway station in southern Tetkino (southwest of Glushkovo).[1] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces seized up to two streets in southwestern Tetkino, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 83rd Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 217th VDV Regiment (98th VDV Division), and 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division) are defending near Tetkino.[3]

Ukrainian forces also continued drone, air, and artillery strikes aimed at isolating Russian units in and near Tetkino. Geolocated footage published on May 6 shows Ukrainian forces conducting a Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) guided munition strike on a Russian position in southwestern Tetkino, indicating that Russian forces maintain positions near the Tetkino Railway Station.[4] Russian milbloggers continued to claim that Ukrainian forces are conducting drone and artillery strikes against Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to isolate Russian units near Tetkino.[5] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones have interdicted and maintained fire control over an unspecified section of the 38K-040 Tetkino-Karyzh highway.[6] Russian milbloggers claimed on May 5 that Ukrainian forces destroyed a bridge over the Seim River between Zvannoye (northwest of Glushkovo) and Tetkino.[7]

Kremlin officials are continuing to leverage the mythos of the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War to form the basis of a new state ideology that will span generations and that Russia intends to leverage to justify a future military conflict against the West. Russian Security Council Secretary and former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu published an op-ed in the official Russian government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on May 6, arguing that military and political unity against

a common enemy is Russia's only path to a strong and victorious future.[8] Shoigu repeatedly juxtaposed the Red Army's defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War (referred to as the Great Patriotic War in Russia) with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Shoigu extolled the Soviet State Defense Committee's (an executive governing body established following Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union) "strictly centralized framework" that ensured effective coordination and implementation of orders on the frontline and the home front. Shoigu stated that Russian public consciousness experienced a national identity crisis following the fall of the Soviet Union and underscored the importance of preserving and strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values to resolve this crisis and form an unofficial Russian state ideology (the Russian constitution forbids the adoption of a formal state ideology).[9] Shoigu reiterated Russian narratives designed to justify Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and accused the collective West of preparing for a direct military conflict with Russia and seeking to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia.

The Kremlin appears to be consolidating around an informal state ideology predicated on perpetuating the belief that the West is determined to encircle and defeat Russia. The Kremlin is leveraging government-wide initiatives to place veterans of the war in Ukraine in positions of power in Russia and long-term rhetorical campaigns to disseminate the belief that the world is divided into two groups (the West and the Russian-led "multipolar world") seeking to destroy one another — mirroring the Soviet Union's framing of geopolitics as an existential conflict between communism and capitalism. [10] Russia's evolving informal state ideology includes aspects of the Soviet Union's ideology, such as a strong centralized government and a unified perception of the state enemy, but lacks the greater justification for why Russia must destroy its enemies.[11] The Kremlin is attempting to unify Russian society, particularly elites, under this world view in order to ensure that any successor to Russian President Vladimir Putin will embody similarly aggressive and dangerous ideals that perpetuate eternal conflict with the West and NATO.

Putin's envisioned informal state ideology is somewhat at odds with that being developed by Russian ultranationalists — one of Putin's key constituencies. Putin is promoting an informal state ideology that supports a civic Russian identity and a multiethnic and religiously diverse population.[12] Russian ultranationalists, whose perspective is often voiced most clearly by Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin, appear more interested in an ideology predicated on a Russian state mainly led by and comprised of ethnic Russians that defends and platforms Russian Orthodoxy.[13] Putin is likely resistant to such an ideology as it risks fragmenting Russia's multiethnic and religiously-diverse population and could pose a threat to regime stability. Russian officials are struggling to balance placating the increasingly influential ultranationalist community with offsetting critical economic issues and labor shortages with migrant labor, and the war in Ukraine and a possible future conflict with the West will only exacerbate these issues.[14]

Shoigu also underscored the importance of the Kremlin's development of military-patriotic education programs — such as the Volunteer Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy of Russia (DOSAAF), Yunarmiya, and the Russian Military Historical Society — and noted that they are designed to prepare Russian citizens for military service.[15] ISW has long reported on the Kremlin's efforts to centralize control over and expand multi-generational youth programs as part of Russia's long-term force generation efforts and multi-pronged efforts to militarize Russian society.[16] The Kremlin may intend to leverage these military-patriotic education programs to workshop a future state ideology and socialize Russian citizens to this ideology from a young age.

Russian officials also appear to be leveraging the story of the Second World War (referred to as the Great Patriotic War in Russia) to dismiss Russia's early failures in the war in Ukraine and present the false image that Russian victory in Ukraine is as inevitable as the Soviet triumph over Germany became at the end of World War II. Shoigu noted in the May 6 article that the Soviet Union made "mistakes" when planning for a war with Nazi Germany, including failing to properly equip and manage Soviet troops, and suffered from poor strategic planning and ineffective military doctrine. [17] Shoigu claimed that Nazi Germany was able to exploit these mistakes to make significant advances early in the war (to the gates of Moscow, in fact), but that the Soviet Union was able to improve its capabilities and mobilize society to support an eventual victory. Shoigu's article notably ignores the role that the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, which Joseph Stalin used to seize the Baltic States and part of Poland while Adolf Hitler invaded the rest of Poland in 1939, played in Stalin's unwillingness to prepare for war with Nazi Germany. Shoigu's comments are likely an attempt to use references to the Second World War to tacitly acknowledge the Russian military's shortcomings at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, for which Shoigu was to a considerable extent responsible as Defense Minister. Shoigu's retelling of the Second World War mirrors Russia's unpreparedness for a long war at the start of the full-scale invasion and significant setbacks in 2022 when Ukraine forced the Russian military to withdraw from around Kyiv and from northern Ukraine and liberated significant swathes of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts. Shoigu is also attempting to draw parallels to the Second World War to frame the Russian military as having

secured the permanent initiative on the battlefield and portray a Russian victory in Ukraine as inevitable to both the international community and the domestic Russian populace. Shoigu is likely attempting to draw on the mythos of the Second World War to signal to domestic audiences that Russian victory is near and requires united societal support, even though Russia has no significant battlefield successes to flaunt on Victory Day 2025.

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov expressed his desire to resign from his post but acknowledged that only Russian President Vladimir Putin can approve this request. Kadyrov has helped stabilize interethnic tensions in the North Caucasus, and leaving his post without a suitable successor could threaten the stability of Putin's regime. Kadyrov told Chechen news outlet *Chechnya Segodnya* on May 5, in response to rumors of his resignation, that he asked to be "relieved" from his post as Chechen Republic head and hopes that his request "will be supported" but that unspecified others "will have their own initiatives, their own vision."^[18] Kadyrov stated on his Telegram channel on May 6 that "many" misunderstood his May 5 statement and clarified that only Putin can decide whether Kadyrov can leave his post and that Kadyrov can only ask to leave or offer his resignation.^[19] Kadyrov emphasized that he is a "team man" and will follow Putin's orders, implying that he will retain his post if that is what Putin decides.^[20] It is currently unclear how serious Kadyrov is about this request, as Kadyrov has periodically expressed his desire to resign as Chechen Republic head since 2016 and has consistently walked back these statements.^[21]

Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on March 27, citing a source in the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), that Kadyrov's relations with Putin have deteriorated in recent months as Putin was displeased with Kadyrov's "frequent and uncoordinated negotiations" with monarchies in Middle Eastern countries.^[22] One source told investigative outlet *Novaya Gazeta* that Kadyrov helped Putin negotiate with Qatar about the fate of Russian military bases in Syria and that Kadyrov "carried out even more delicate orders from the Kremlin" in the Middle East, however.^[23] Kadyrov has acted as a stabilizer within the Chechen Republic and elsewhere in the North Caucasus during particularly tense moments since the early 2000s, particularly moments that could pose threats to the stability of Putin's regime.^[24] Kadyrov's death or departure from office, should it occur during or immediately after the war in Ukraine, could leave Putin's interests in the North Caucasus unguarded unless Kadyrov and Putin appoint a suitable successor.

It remains unclear who might succeed Kadyrov in the event of his resignation or death. *Novaya Gazeta* reported on May 5, citing a Russian Telegram channel and several other sources familiar with the matter, that Kadyrov has "changed priorities" and spent a lot of time receiving health treatment and largely delegated his external engagements since February 2025.^[25] *Novaya Gazeta* reported that Kadyrov's daughter and former Chechen Deputy Prime Minister and Culture Minister Aishat Kadyrova suddenly resigned in early February 2025 and that sources in the Chechen government reported that Kadyrov's other two daughters, Khutmat and Khadizhat Kadyrova, also stopped working in civil service positions at the same time. *Novaya Gazeta* reported that Aishat Kadyrova travelled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in late February 2025 to identify investment opportunities for the Kadyrov family in the wake of Kadyrov's reportedly declining health.

Novaya Gazeta reported that only two of Kadyrov's 14 children "play a significant role" in Kadyrov's future plans: 26-year-old Aishat Kadyrova and 17-year-old Adam Kadyrov.^[26] A *Novaya Gazeta* source reported that Kadyrov would not have "had the headache of appointing a successor" if "Aishat [Kadyrova] had been born a man," given Aishat's success in political and business roles. *Novaya Gazeta* reported that Kadyrov has positioned Adam Kadyrov as his obvious successor, including by instructing Chechen officials to treat Adam as Kadyrov's main heir. ISW has previously observed reports of Kadyrov giving favorable appointments to Adam, arranging meetings between Adam and Putin, and appearing to prefer him as heir over his elder son, Akhmat Kadyrov.^[27] Adam Kadyrov famously stoked interethnic tensions after footage emerged in September 2023 of Adam beating a detained man accused of burning a Quran, an act which Ramzan Kadyrov praised and subsequently rewarded.^[28]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a 205-for-205 prisoner of war (POW) exchange on May 6. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on May 6 that Ukrainian authorities returned 205 Ukrainian POWs, comprising members of almost all branches of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.^[29] Zelensky thanked the United Arab Emirates for mediating the POW exchange with Russia. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also reported on May 6 that Russia and Ukraine conducted a 205-for-205 POW exchange.^[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continued limited attacks across the international border near Tetkino and Novyi Put, Kursk Oblast.

- Ukrainian forces also continued drone, air, and artillery strikes aimed at isolating Russian units in and near Tetkino.
- Kremlin officials are continuing to leverage the mythos of the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War to form the basis of a new state ideology that will span generations and that Russia intends to leverage to justify a future military conflict against the West.
- The Kremlin appears to be consolidating around an informal state ideology predicated on perpetuating the belief that the West is determined to encircle and defeat Russia.
- Russian officials also appear to be leveraging the story of the Second World War (referred to as the Great Patriotic War in Russia) to dismiss Russia's early failures in the war in Ukraine and present the false image that Russian victory in Ukraine is as inevitable as the Soviet triumph over Germany became at the end of World War II.
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov expressed his desire to resign from his post but acknowledged that only Russian President Vladimir Putin can approve this request. Kadyrov has helped stabilize interethnic tensions in the North Caucasus, and leaving his post without a suitable successor could threaten the stability of Putin's regime.
- It remains unclear who might succeed Kadyrov in the event of his resignation or death.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a 205-for-205 prisoner of war (POW) exchange on May 6.
- Russian forces advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Novopavlivka, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment May 5, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Anna Harvey, and Kateryna Stepanenko with Nate Trotter

May 5, 2025, 4:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:45am ET on May 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian sources claimed on May 5 that Ukrainian forces conducted a series of limited attacks across the Russia-Ukraine international border near Tetkino, Kursk Oblast. Russian sources claimed on May 5 that Ukrainian forces attacked across the Russia-Ukraine international border near Tetkino and Popova-Lezhachi (far west of Sudzha and southwest of Glushkovo) and Novyi Put (east of Tetkino) on the evening of May 4 and morning of May 5.[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces used mine clearing equipment to create a path through Russian minefields along the border, but that Ukrainian forces have not made significant advances in the area thus far.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces engaged in a small arms clash near the Tetkino Railway Station in southern Tetkino and that Ukrainian forces later withdrew back into Sumy Oblast.[3] A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces have not seized Tetkino or broken through Russia's defenses near Novyi Put.[4] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division, likely referring to the 5th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment, other Russian military personnel, and Russian border guards are defending against the Ukrainian attacks.[5]

Ukrainian forces are attempting to isolate Russian units near Tetkino and throughout Glushkovsky Raion. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 4 that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian reconnaissance and strike drone command post near Tetkino and killed up to 20 Russian servicemembers.[6] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Russian forces have been training drone operators at a school in Tetkino since 2022.[7] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces intensified drone strikes and artillery fire against Tetkino in the night of May 4 before attacking toward the settlement.[8] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces destroyed a bridge over the Seim River between Zvannoye (northwest of Glushkovo) and Tetkino.[9] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are also using drones to interdict Russian logistics in the area.[10]

The Russian military command reportedly recently redeployed elements of the 68th Army Corps and 58th Combined Arms Army to the Toretsk direction from the Kurakhove and western Zaporizhia directions. Geolocated footage published on May 5 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in eastern and southern Myrne (southwest of Toretsk) during a platoon-sized mechanized assault.[11] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) participated in the advance and were attacking in the direction of Malynivka (just west of Myrne).[12] ISW first observed reports that elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade redeployed to the Toretsk direction in late March 2025 after operating in the Vuhledar and Kurakhove directions.[13] Elements of the brigade may be currently deployed across several sectors of the front. A Russian milblogger claimed on May 4 that elements of the Russian 42nd

Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are attacking in Stara Mykolaivka and Oleksandropil and conducting clearing operations near Kalynove (all southwest of Toretsk). Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division have been operating in the Zaporizhia direction since at least Summer 2023 during the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the area.[14] ISW observed reports that elements of the division were operating in the Zaporizhia direction as of May 4, and the division is likely currently split between the Zaporizhia and Toretsk directions.[15] The Russian military command previously reinforced offensive operations southwest of Toretsk with elements of the 150th and 20th motorized rifle divisions (both part of the 8th CAA, SMD) in early 2025, and the repeated reinforcing of this effort from three different sectors of the frontline indicates that the Russian military command views this as a priority frontline sector.[16]

A Russian milblogger speculated on May 4 that Russian attacks near Nova Poltavka (northwest of Myrne and northeast of Kalynove) are part of long-term Russian efforts to advance toward Myrnohrad (just east of Pokrovsk) and envelop Myrnohrad and Pokrovsk from the east and west.[17] Russian forces re-intensified offensive operations in mid-March 2025 aimed at enveloping Pokrovsk and seizing Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad but have not made significant advances in the area since late Fall 2024 due to localized Ukrainian counterattacks and drone operations.[18] Russian forces appeared to shift their focus toward the Novopavlivka direction in an attempt to reach the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border in recent months.[19] Russian forces have not been able to advance the remaining three kilometers to the border in the past month, however, and may be pursuing opportunistic advances in other areas, such as near Nova Poltavka.[20] Russian forces may attempt to leverage recent redeployments to Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions as part of a mutually reinforcing effort aimed at eliminating the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk to facilitate advances toward Kostyantynivka from the south and enveloping Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad.[21]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Czech President Petr Pavel announced on May 4 that Czechia will work with Ukraine to establish a school to train Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets outside of Ukraine.[22] Pavel added that Czechia and members of the French- and British-led Coalition of the Willing will train Ukrainian pilots. The US Department of State announced on May 4 that it approved \$310.5 million for F-16 training, equipment, and support services for Ukraine.[23] Zelensky stated that the Czech Ammunition Initiative could deliver 1.8 million artillery shells to Ukraine in 2025 and that Ukraine is expecting its allies to deliver three million artillery shells in total this year.[24] Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová stated in April 2025 that the Czech initiative had secured funding for artillery deliveries to Ukraine through Fall 2025.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian sources claimed on May 5 that Ukrainian forces conducted a series of limited attacks across the Russia-Ukraine international border near Tetkino, Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian military command reportedly recently redeployed elements of the 68th Army Corps and 58th Combined Arms Army to the Toretsk direction from the Kurakhove and western Zaporizhia directions.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Czech President Petr Pavel announced on May 4 that Czechia will work with Ukraine to establish a school to train Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets outside of Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Siversk, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 4, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, and Kateryna Stepanenko with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

May 4, 2025, 4:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11am ET on May 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated that Russia maintains the initial objectives of its war in Ukraine, which are tantamount to Ukraine's surrender, despite ongoing negotiations with the United States. Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin published a documentary on Russian state TV channel Rossiya 1 about Putin on May 4, in which Putin claimed that Russia has enough manpower and materiel to bring the war in Ukraine to its "logical conclusion with the result that Russia needs."^[1] Putin also claimed that Russian reconciliation with the Ukrainian part of the Russian people is "inevitable." Putin has repeatedly claimed that the Ukrainian people are simply a subset of Russians

rather than a distinctly separate nation to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the occupation of Ukrainian territory and people.[2] Russian state media notably highlighted that Putin has previously made the false claim that Russians and Ukrainians are one people.[3] Putin's statements indicate that Russia continues to assess that it can achieve its original objectives of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which include demilitarizing Ukraine, installing a pro-Russian government in Ukraine, forcing Ukraine to abandon its aspirations to join NATO and other security blocs, and forcing Ukraine to make massive territorial concessions to Russia, including parts of Ukraine that Russia does not currently occupy.[4] These demands amount to Ukraine's full capitulation. Russia will likely continue efforts to achieve these goals through military and diplomatic means, as Russian officials continue attempts to leverage battlefield gains to strengthen their negotiating position.

Putin highlighted domestic support for the war and promoted the ideal of sacrifice on the frontline and the home front, likely in an effort to prepare Russian society for a longer war in Ukraine and potential future confrontations with the West. Putin told Zarubin that Russian society reacted positively to the invasion of Ukraine and that each citizen realized that "he is the state" and Russia's survival depends on each individual.[5] Putin stated that Russia is a country of "moral and ethical values" and that the basis of the Russian conscience is "the family, the state, and the future of Russia."[6] Putin is notably attempting to frame the Russian public's support for the war through shared values despite the Kremlin's reliance on financial incentives to recruit the majority of its military personnel and to maintain its war effort.[7] Putin accused the West once again of "deceiving" Russia following the 2015 Minsk agreements, likely in an effort to convince the Russian domestic audience that Russia cannot negotiate with the West and needs to continue the war.[8]

Putin's statements throughout the documentary indicate that Putin likely does not intend to slow offensive operations or transition to defensive operations in Ukraine and instead is attempting to ideologically prepare domestic Russian society for a long war. ISW has previously assessed that Russian officials are setting conditions to maintain a long war and to justify future aggression against Ukraine and NATO.[9] Russian officials have also consistently intensified efforts to militarize Russian society since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, further indicating that Russia is preparing for a protracted conflict. Russian officials are engaged in long-term efforts to consolidate control over Russia's veteran civil society and elevate a cadre of loyal veterans to positions in Russia's regional and federal government.[10] Putin officially declared 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland," following the launch of myriad militaristic initiatives in 2023 and 2024 to provide veterans with social and financial support and reinforce the Russian state narrative that veterans are the new "elite" class[11] Russia is also investing heavily in military-patriotic education for Russia's youth, demonstrating the Kremlin's interest in creating a new generation of militarized, loyal citizens in the medium to long term[12]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov provided new details on May 4 about the report that Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian fixed-wing aircraft with a surface-to-air missile (SAM) attached to a naval drone on May 2. Budanov reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two Russian Su-30 fighter jets over the Black Sea with AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles fired from Magura-7 naval drones.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated that Russia maintains its initial objectives of its war in Ukraine, which are tantamount to Ukraine's surrender, despite ongoing negotiations with the United States.
- Putin highlighted domestic support for the war and promoted the ideal of sacrifice on the frontline and the home front, likely in an effort to prepare Russian society for a longer war in Ukraine and potential future confrontations with the West.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov provided new details on May 4 about the report that Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian fixed-wing aircraft with a surface-to-air missile (SAM) attached to a naval drone on May 2.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 3, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:45 am ET on May 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied that Ukraine would concede to the vague terms of Russian President Vladimir Putin's unilateral May 8-11 Victory Day ceasefire proposal. Zelensky referred to Putin's May 8-11 Victory Day ceasefire demand as a "theatrical production" that does not appear to be serious and is designed to create a sense of comfort and safety for participants of Russia's Victory Day celebration.[1] Zelensky once again articulated Ukraine's willingness to extend a short-term ceasefire to 30 days and stated that an effective ceasefire requires high-quality monitoring mechanisms. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that any joint ceasefire should be comprehensive and last for at least 30 days with the possibility for renewal.[2] Kovalenko noted that shorter ceasefires with vague terms and a lack of monitoring mechanisms afford Russian forces the opportunity to seize on tactical pauses to better prepare ahead of a future summer offensive in Ukraine. Victory Day is Russia's principal patriotic holiday that commemorates the Soviet Union's contributions to victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War (known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War), and Russia celebrates Victory Day on May 9. Putin first announced on April 28 Russia's intention to implement a Victory Day ceasefire between midnight on the night of May 7 to 8 and midnight on the night of May 10 to 11.[3] Putin's decision to unilaterally impose a fleeting ceasefire during Russia's Victory Day celebration is a deliberate attempt to project a sense of power and control in Russia to both domestic and international audiences. Putin likely also seeks to avoid the embarrassment of Ukrainian strikes during these celebrations by imposing such an agreement.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that the purpose of Russia's unilateral Easter and Victory Day ceasefires is to "test" Ukraine's readiness to pursue paths towards a sustainable peace.[4] Peskov claimed that Russia will wait for "final," unambiguous statements from Ukraine and will look for Ukrainian actions aimed at de-escalating the war during the holiday. Ukraine and the United States have previously proposed a 30-day general ceasefire to Russia, but Russian officials continue to ignore or outright reject these general ceasefire proposals.[5] Ukraine has also repeatedly called for longer ceasefires so as to pave the way for negotiations toward a durable peace settlement — which is in line with US President Donald Trump's efforts to leverage a ceasefire as the foundation for a lasting peace agreement in Ukraine.[6] Russia is very likely to continue its pattern of leveraging short-term ceasefires to flood the information space with unsubstantiated claims of Ukrainian ceasefire violations in an effort to discredit Ukraine and to create tactical or operational pauses to conduct troop rotations, resupply units, and prepare for future offensive operations, as evidenced by the Easter and long-range energy infrastructure strikes ceasefires.[7] Russia's continued rejection of Ukrainian and US ceasefire proposals of any reasonable length with necessary monitoring mechanisms showcases Russia's disinterest in peace in Ukraine in the near term.

The Trump administration appears to have finalized its first military equipment sale to Ukraine. The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on May 2 that the US State Department approved and notified the US Congress of a possible Foreign Military Sale (FMS) of equipment and maintenance services for Ukraine's F-16s worth an estimated \$310.5 million.[8] The DSCA reported that the sale will include aircraft modifications and upgrades; personnel training related to operation, maintenance, and sustainment support; spare parts, consumables, and accessories; repair and return support; ground handling equipment; classified and unclassified software delivery and support; classified and unclassified publications and technical documents; studies and surveys; and US Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services.

Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian fixed-wing aircraft with a surface-to-air missile (SAM) attached to a naval drone for the first time on May 3. Ukrainian forces launched an aerial drone, a naval drone, and missile strike against Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai, and surrounding areas on May 3.[9] The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) confirmed that Ukrainian forces used a SAM fired from a Magura naval drone to down a Russian Su-30 fighter jet over the Black Sea near Novorossiysk.[10] Ukrainian forces used missiles attached to a Magura naval drone to shoot down a Russian Mi-8 helicopter in December 2024, but this is the first time that Ukrainian forces have downed a fixed-wing aircraft using this tactic.[11]

Russian milbloggers responded to the May 3 strike, claiming that Russia is lagging behind Ukraine on naval drone development and complaining that Russia has previously lost aircraft over the Black Sea due to Ukrainian drone dominance.[12] The milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have the means to combat Ukrainian naval drones and protect Russian aircraft from missile strikes, but that Russian leadership is unwilling to prioritize Russian drone development and innovation. The milbloggers called

for Russian coastal defense units and drone operators in the Black Sea to integrate lessons learned from Russian infantry fighting in Ukraine in order to integrate first-person view (FPV) drones with aerial reconnaissance.

Senior Kremlin officials continue to set informational conditions that could support military operations against Lithuania (and other NATO states) by advancing narratives that deny the sovereignty of Lithuania and other former Soviet states. Independent Russian media outlets *Meduza* and *Agentstvo* reported on May 2 that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov authored the foreword of a new book titled "History of Lithuania," which the "Foreign Relations" publishing arm of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) published in March 2025.[13] Lavrov's foreword claimed that the national policies of Baltic countries, including modern Lithuania, leverage "falsified" historical narratives to "stimulate" Russophobic and anti-Russian sentiments in their domestic audiences.[14] Lavrov claimed that the book seeks to analyze the development of the "lands that were associated with Lithuania at different times." Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys stated that the book is a Russian propaganda tool designed to provide the Kremlin with scholarly literature to support its denial of neighboring countries' statehoods and histories separate from that of Russia.[15] Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have recently intensified their threats against Europe — particularly the Baltic States — due to Europe's alleged "Russophobia."^[16] Kremlin officials have also indicated that Russia views independent states that were once part of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union as part of modern-day Russia.^[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denied that Ukraine would concede to the vague terms of Russian President Vladimir Putin's unilateral May 8-11 Victory Day ceasefire proposal.
- The Trump administration appears to have finalized its first military equipment sale to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces shot down a Russian fixed-wing aircraft with a surface-to-air missile (SAM) attached to a naval drone for the first time on May 3.
- Senior Kremlin officials continue to set informational conditions that could support military operations against Lithuania (and other NATO states) by advancing narratives that deny the sovereignty of Lithuania and other former Soviet states.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, Siversk, Novopavlivka, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 2, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

May 2, 2025, 9:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00 pm ET on May 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian gains along the frontline have slowed over the last four months, but Russia continues to tolerate personnel losses comparable to the casualty rate Russian forces sustained during a period of intensified advances between September and December 2024. ISW assesses that Russian forces gained a total of 1,627 square kilometers in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast in January, February, March, and April 2025, and daily Russian casualty reports from the Ukrainian General Staff indicate that Russian forces suffered 160,600 casualties during the last four months for an average of 99 casualties for every square kilometer taken over the last four months. ISW assesses that Russian forces seized an estimated 496 square kilometers in January 2025; an estimated 313 square kilometers in February 2025; an estimated 601 square kilometers in March 2025; and an estimated 217 square kilometers in April 2025. Ukrainian General Staff reports indicate that Russian forces lost an estimated 48,060 casualties in January 2025, 35,300 casualties in February 2025, 40,670 casualties in March 2025, and 36,570 casualties in April 2025.^[1] Russian advances significantly increased in March 2025 due to the elimination of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, coinciding with the temporary cessation of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine, although Russian advances on average decreased between January, February, and April 2025. Russian gains have also slowed as Russian forces come up against more well-defended Ukrainian positions in and around larger towns such as Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovs'k over the last four months.

Russian forces are currently sustaining a higher casualty rate per square kilometer gained than in Fall 2024. Russian forces gained an estimated 2,949 square kilometers at the cost of 174,935 casualties between September and December 2024 — an average of 59 casualties per square kilometer taken.^[2] Russian casualty rates consistently increased throughout September, October, November, and December 2024 and peaked at an estimated 49,135 total monthly casualties in December 2024.^[3] Monthly Russian rates of advance plateaued at 839 square kilometers in November 2024, however, and began to slow in December 2024 to an assessed 593 square kilometers and have continued to slow in 2025 (with the exception of the elimination of the Kursk salient). Russian gains have been 45 percent slower between January and April 2025 than in the period between September and December 2024, although Russian casualty rates have only decreased by 10 percent in that interval. The Russian military command thus appears to be tolerating similar personnel loss rates despite a significant decrease in the rate of territorial gains.

Russia has thus far sustained these casualties and the current tempo of offensive operations by rapidly deploying low quality troops to frontline units, although the reliance on such troops is also hindering Russia's ability to conduct complex operations and make rapid advances in Ukraine. ISW has not observed a notable decrease in the tempo of Russian offensive operations along the frontline in recent months, despite the slowing rates of advance, suggesting that Russia is generating enough forces to sustain these casualties without having to deprioritize any frontline area. ISW has repeatedly observed reports that new Russian recruits only receive a month of training before deploying to Ukraine, and this limited training is likely constraining recruits' combat capabilities and the Russian military's overall capacity to successfully conduct complex operations.^[4] The Russian military command is currently prioritizing funneling poorly trained recruits into highly attritional infantry assaults to offset personnel losses in Ukraine while sustaining the current tempo of operations, possibly at the expense of Russia's long-term warfighting capabilities.^[5] The Russian military does not have a reserve pool of well-trained troops who are not currently engaged in combat in Ukraine and can rapidly deploy along the frontline, and the Russian military command's decision to funnel poorly trained troops to the frontline in Ukraine is undermining Russia's ability to create a pool of such forces.^[6]

Russian President Vladimir Putin's commitment to maintaining the tempo of offensive operations despite diminishing returns underscores Putin's ongoing efforts to leverage further battlefield gains to generate pressure on Ukraine in ceasefire and peace negotiations or otherwise to force Ukraine's collapse. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is attempting to prolong negotiations to extract additional concessions from the United States and Ukraine and make additional battlefield gains.^[7] Russian forces intensified offensive operations throughout the frontline in February and March 2025, including a limited offensive operation into northern Sumy Oblast, as part of an ongoing Russian effort to slowly degrade frontline Ukrainian positions and make opportunistic tactical advances. Putin may intend to leverage any gains over the last four months and in the near future to extract further Ukrainian and Western concessions during future peace negotiations. It remains unclear if Russia will maintain sufficient force generation rates to sustain offensive operations in Ukraine indefinitely, however, due to the rising economic cost of social benefits and one-time payments for Russian servicemembers.^[8] ISW previously noted that Russia's ongoing and forecasted economic struggles are closely tied to Russian losses on the battlefield and that it is not possible for the United States or the wider West to exert maximum pressure on Russia with economic tools alone.^[9] **The United States can better leverage Russian vulnerabilities and achieve a stronger negotiating position and more durable resolution to the war in Ukraine by forcing Putin to rethink his negotiation and battlefield strategies and empowering Ukrainian forces to continue inflicting significant manpower and materiel losses on Russia.**

Western intelligence reportedly suggests that Putin may begin prioritizing short-term goals such as consolidating Russia's gains in Ukraine and Russia's immediate economic viability over seizing more territory, but Putin's demonstrated commitment to maintaining the tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine despite continuing high casualty rates is a counter-indicator to this reported assessment. CNN reported on May 1 that new intelligence reviewed by US and Western officials suggests that Putin may be pivoting his immediate focus to shorter-term objectives of cementing Russian control over occupied Ukrainian territory and boosting Russia's economy.^[10] CNN reported that Putin may be concerned by the Trump administration's threats to apply more sanctions on the struggling Russian economy. An unnamed official told CNN that Putin's willingness to settle for more limited objectives in Ukraine depends on whether Putin can portray Russia's gains in Ukraine as an acceptable victory domestically. The source insinuated that Putin likely remains committed to revisiting his longer-term goals of subjugating all of Ukraine and undermining NATO after taking a "significant pause," however.

ISW has observed a variety of indicators suggesting that Putin is not reconsidering his short-term objectives in Ukraine, however. Russian forces have increased the intensity of offensive operations throughout the theater, particularly redoubling efforts to advance deeper in the Lyman, Toretsk,

Pokrovsk, and Novopavlivka directions and launching a limited offensive operation in Sumy Oblast.[11] Russian forces are rapidly integrating tactical innovations to optimize timely gains in response to Ukrainian drone operators, including integrating motorcycles into offensive operations in Ukraine.[12] The Kremlin is also leveraging legal, financial, and socioeconomic measures to increase Russia's force generation capabilities and boost Russia's drone production capabilities to support the war in Ukraine.[13]

A future slowing of Russian offensive operations and/or transition to defensive operations in all or part of the theater would be indicators that Putin is shifting his short-term goals from seizing more territory to consolidating previously held territory. Putin could choose to pivot toward shorter-term objectives on account of mounting economic and manpower constraints that are increasingly hindering Russia's ability to perpetuate its war in Ukraine.[14] Russian forces could slow the tempo of offensive operations and work to implement policies and tactics to mitigate casualties if Putin issues an order to prioritize consolidating Russia's hold over occupied Ukraine instead of making further gains. Russian forces would likely shift to defensive operations with the aim of fortifying and consolidating current positions on the frontline, largely in an effort to safeguard battlefield gains and preserve increasingly limited manpower and materiel reserves, in response to such an order. Russian forces could begin constructing fortifications near frontline positions in response to such an order. ISW would observe such indicators and will continue to monitor Russian and Ukrainian reporting for these indicators.

ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains committed to his long-term military objectives of seizing all of Ukraine and undermining NATO. Senior US officials reportedly remain skeptical that Putin has eased his intransigence regarding a peace agreement and told CNN that Russia may resume the war and try to seize more Ukrainian territory even after agreeing to a US peace proposal.[15] CNN reported that unspecified officials maintain the belief that Russia will retain its aims of seizing the maximal amount of Ukrainian territory even if Putin signs a peace agreement. Ongoing Russian efforts to seize Lyman and Pokrovsk and advance north of Toretsk toward the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Kostyantynivka indicate that Putin maintains his long-standing goals of seizing the remainder of Donetsk Oblast.[16] The Russian government's efforts to expand Russia's force generation capabilities in the short- and long-term and Russia's ongoing military restructuring efforts suggest that Russia is not only responding to a drawn-out conflict in Ukraine but also preparing for a future conflict on Russia's western borders.[17] The Russian government also continues to prioritize long-term investment in Russia's domestic industrial base (DIB), despite the significant economic cost of this wartime economy to Russia's population.[18] These factors indicate that Putin is not abandoning his territorial ambitions in Ukraine but is in fact preparing for a long war of attrition against Ukraine and likely the collective West.

Russian officials are also continuing to condition Russian society to support a long-term war effort in Ukraine and against NATO. Russian officials, including Putin, have consistently leveraged false claims about the war in Ukraine to make maximalist territorial demands, including that Ukraine give up "Novorossiya" — an invented region of Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all of southern and eastern Ukraine and is an "integral" part of Russia that Ukraine must concede for Russia to end the war.[19] Putin invoked the term "Novorossiya" as recently as April 21, indicating that the Kremlin has not abandoned this territorial objective.[20] Russian state media previously cautioned Russian domestic audiences in March 2025 against expecting "big agreements" from recent peace negotiations between Putin and US President Donald Trump.[21] A Verstka poll of 100 Russian military personnel published on April 29 indicates that only 18% of career Russian military personnel and officers, most of whom have been fighting in Ukraine for over two years, would support a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine prior to achieving Putin's stated goals (likely referring to the demilitarization and "denazification" of Ukraine).[22] Only about a fifth of surveyed Russian military personnel and civilians indicated that they believe the war will end in the coming months. Verstka's polling indicates that the Kremlin is not preparing the Russian information space for a peace agreement in the near future and that Russian forces and society do not anticipate an imminent end to the war. This pattern of Kremlin informational activity and the resonance it has achieved in Russian society will make it much harder for Putin to present any long-term ceasefire, let alone peace agreement, that falls far short of his stated aims as any kind of victory to his domestic audience.

Statements by US officials suggest that the Trump administration is considering stepping back from intensified mediation efforts to end the war in Ukraine. US Vice President JD Vance told Fox News on May 1 that the war in Ukraine will not end "any time soon" and that it is "up to the Russians and Ukrainians now that each side knows what the other's terms are for peace."[23] US Secretary of State and Acting National Security Advisor Marco Rubio told Fox News on May 1 that US President Donald Trump will need to prioritize other issues if Ukrainian and Russian negotiating positions remain too far apart for reconciliation but that the United States will continue "helping" wherever possible.[24] US Department of State Spokesperson Tammy Bruce echoed Rubio's statements during a press

briefing on May 1 and noted that the matter of resolving the conflict in Ukraine is "now" between Russia and Ukraine, as the United States is changing its "style" and "methodology" and will no longer "fly around the world at the drop of a hat" to mediate negotiations."^[25] Bruce reiterated that the United States is "still committed" to a lasting peace in Ukraine

The US Department of State submitted a proposed license for defense exports to Ukraine to the US Congress on April 29.^[26] The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is considering the proposal.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian gains along the frontline have slowed over the last four months, but Russia continues to tolerate personnel losses comparable to the casualty rate Russian forces sustained during a period of intensified advances between September and December 2024.
- Russian forces are currently sustaining a higher casualty rate per square kilometer gained than in Fall 2024.
- Russia has thus far sustained these casualties and the current tempo of offensive operations by rapidly deploying low quality troops to frontline units, although the reliance on such troops is also hindering Russia's ability to conduct complex operations and make rapid advances in Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's commitment to maintaining the tempo of offensive operations despite diminishing returns underscores Putin's ongoing efforts to leverage further battlefield gains to generate pressure on Ukraine in ceasefire and peace negotiations or otherwise to force Ukraine's collapse.
- Western intelligence reportedly suggests that Putin may begin prioritizing short-term goals such as consolidating Russia's gains in Ukraine and Russia's immediate economic viability over seizing more territory, but Putin's demonstrated commitment to maintaining the tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine despite continuing high casualty rates is a counter-indicator to this reported assessment.
- A future slowing of Russian offensive operations and/or transition to defensive operations in all or part of the theater would be indicators that Putin is shifting his short-term goals from seizing more territory to consolidating previously held territory.
- ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains committed to his long-term military objectives of seizing all of Ukraine and undermining NATO.
- Statements by US officials suggest that the Trump administration is considering stepping back from intensified mediation efforts to end the war in Ukraine.
- The US Department of State submitted a proposed license for defense exports to Ukraine to the US Congress on April 29.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, May 1, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Daria Novikov, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, and Karolina Hird with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

May 1, 2025, 6pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:20am ET on May 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The United States and Ukraine published additional information about their April 30 bilateral economic partnership agreement.^[1] The Trump administration and the Ukrainian government published the joint text of the US-Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund on May 1 and reported that the agreement is a "fully collaborative partnership" that will fund Ukraine's long-term reconstruction and modernization. The agreement establishes a joint fund that the United States and Ukraine will equally pay into to fund development, infrastructure, and natural resource extraction projects in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials noted that Ukraine will retain full control over "subsoil, infrastructure, and natural resources" and the right to determine the terms of use for Ukraine's natural resources.^[2] Ukrainian officials stated that United States can make monetary contributions or supply additional military assistance to Ukraine as part of the fund, and that Ukraine will allocate 50 percent of its state budget revenues from rent payments, license fees, and other revenue from national resource extraction projects to the fund.^[3] The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada must ratify the agreement, and it

appears that the United States and Ukraine will also have to sign a series of more technical agreements that will define the terms of the investments and projects in the future.[4]

The Trump administration noted that the agreement signals US commitment to "Ukraine's long-term success" and noted that the United States and Ukraine will not allow any person, company, or state that supplied the Russian war effort to benefit from the reconstruction of Ukraine.[5] US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent also noted during an interview on *Fox News* on May 1 that the agreement is a "strong signal" to Russian officials that there "is no daylight" between the United States and Ukraine.[6] **Ukraine's participation in this agreement underscores Ukraine's continued willingness to make compromises in pursuit of a long-term, sustainable resolution of the war in Ukraine despite consistent Russian disinterest in US and Ukrainian peace proposals.**

US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg recently reaffirmed that Ukrainian officials remain committed to resolving the war in Ukraine, despite ongoing Russian refusals to accept US President Donald Trump's repeated proposals for a general ceasefire in pursuit of lasting peace in Ukraine. Kellogg told *Fox News* on April 29 that Ukrainian representatives repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to negotiate during talks with senior US and European officials in London on April 23, and it is now "up to [Russian President] Vladimir Putin" to achieve a peaceful resolution to the war.[7] Kellogg stated that Ukrainian representatives in London agreed to 22 "concrete" terms including a "permanent, comprehensive" ceasefire, for which US President Donald Trump has long advocated. Kellogg also stated that US officials previously presented Putin with a roadmap for ending the war in Ukraine and that Putin should directly engage with the US proposal if he "really" wants to end the war. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed in an interview with Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* published on April 28 that "the ball is not in [Russia's] court" in terms of ceasefire negotiations because Ukrainian officials have not shown "readiness" for peace negotiations. [8] Lavrov's statements indicate that Russian officials are uninterested in serious peace negotiations to end the war and are prolonging negotiations to facilitate battlefield gains. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is attempting to hold ceasefire negotiations hostage in order to extract additional concessions from Ukraine and the United States by falsely shifting the blame onto Ukraine for stalling negotiations to end the war.[9]

Russia continues to reject US and European proposals to deploy Western peacekeeping forces to Ukraine and calls for Russia to make territorial concessions in pursuit of a lasting peace in Ukraine, signaling the Kremlin's unyielding negotiating position. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu stated on April 30 during a BRICS foreign ministers' summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil that Russia will consider Western peacekeeping contingents in Ukraine as legitimate military targets and that such contingents are unacceptable.[10] Shoigu added that Russia has observed signs that the West is planning to introduce "pseudo-peacekeepers" into Ukraine, and another Russian official recently insinuated that Russia would not accept the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as a monitoring mechanism for a ceasefire or permanent peace. [11] Russian officials have repeatedly rejected Western overtures to implement any sort of monitoring mechanisms in Ukraine, weaponizing unclear and unilateral Russian ceasefire terms to blame Ukraine ceasefire violations.[12] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated on May 1 that Russia will "take all necessary measures" to prevent Ukraine and its Western allies from restoring Ukraine to its 1991 internationally recognized borders.[13] Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly demanded that Ukraine acquiesce to territorial concessions while Russia remains steadfast in its refusal to offer any concessions of its own.[14]

Key Takeaways:

- The United States and Ukraine published additional information about their April 30 bilateral economic partnership agreement.
- US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg recently reaffirmed that Ukrainian officials remain committed to resolving the war in Ukraine, despite ongoing Russian refusals to accept US President Donald Trump's repeated proposals for a general ceasefire in pursuit of lasting peace in Ukraine.
- Russia continues to reject US and European proposals to deploy Western peacekeeping forces to Ukraine and calls for Russia to make territorial concessions in pursuit of a lasting peace in Ukraine, signaling the Kremlin's unyielding negotiating position.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Lyman, Siversk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 30, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros with
Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:40 am ET on April 30. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The United States and Ukraine signed a bilateral economic partnership agreement on April 30. The US Department of the Treasury announced the agreement, which created the United States-Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund that aims to accelerate Ukraine's economic recovery.[1] The precise terms of the agreement are unspecified as of this publication. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent reiterated that the United States remains committed to peace and prosperity in a free Ukraine and noted that "no state or person who financed or supplied the Russian war machine" will be allowed to benefit from Ukraine's reconstruction.[2] Bessent also stated that the agreement signals to Russia that the Trump administration is "committed to a peace process centered on a free, sovereign, and prosperous Ukraine over the long term." The *BBC Russian Service* reported that the agreement includes language that future US military aid to Ukraine could be labeled as US "investment" in Ukraine, though these details remain unconfirmed as of this report.[3]

Russian officials continue to demand full Ukrainian capitulation as the sole basis on which Russia is willing to accept a future peace agreement. *Bloomberg* reported on April 29, citing three sources in Moscow familiar with the matter, that Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff's proposal to freeze the war on the current frontlines during their April 17 meeting in Moscow and instead insisted that Russia gain all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts as part of any peace agreement.[4] *Bloomberg*'s report is consistent with Kremlin officials' repeated public demands that any future peace deal must satisfy all of Russia's war goals, including the cession of all of Crimea and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts to Russia.[5] Kremlin officials have continued to reiterate their refusal to make any territorial concessions even after recent reports of the US seven-point peace plan that offered Russia "de jure" US recognition of Russian sovereignty over occupied Crimea and "de facto" recognition of Russian control over the rest of occupied Ukraine — the plan that Witkoff reportedly presented to Putin on April 17.[6]

Senior Russian officials continue to demand that any end to Russia's war in Ukraine must also accomplish all of Putin's original war aims. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated on April 30 that Putin's main goal remains the achievement of the original goals of his full-scale invasion of Ukraine — Ukrainian demilitarization, neutrality, and regime change with the installation of a pro-Kremlin puppet government.[7] Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebenzya similarly stated on April 29 that Russia is committed to finding long-term solutions to eliminate the "root causes" of Russia's war in Ukraine."[8] Russian officials have repeatedly defined these "root causes" as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s Ukraine and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine. [9] Calls for the elimination of these alleged "root causes" are in line with Putin's demands for Ukrainian regime change and neutrality as well as Putin's pre-war demand that would have required NATO to roll back to its pre-1997 borders.[10]

Russian officials continue to set conditions to manipulate any future ceasefires and renege on any future Russian-Ukrainian agreements at a time of Russia's choosing. Peskov claimed that Russia must conclude a peace agreement with Ukraine rather than with the United States, and Nebenzya claimed that Russia is willing to hold direct talks with Ukrainian officials "without preconditions" despite alleged issues with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy.[11] Putin and other Russian officials have similarly claimed that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate because Ukraine did not hold presidential elections in 2024 (in accordance with its constitution and law).[12] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is setting conditions to renege on any future agreement it signs with Ukraine on the grounds that the Ukrainian government was not legitimate.[13] Any long-term peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian Constitution. These intransigent Russian demands run contrary to both the US-proposed seven-point peace plan and US President Donald Trump's stated goal of ensuring a lasting peace in Ukraine.[14]

Peskov overinflated Russia's current military strength and battlefield victories thus far in the war in an attempt to justify Russia's continued unwillingness to make territorial concessions. Peskov claimed that the situation on the ground in Ukraine is different from what it was in March 2022 and that it is "impossible" not to recognize this situation "de facto or de jure."[15] Peskov vaguely referenced the March 2022 Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Istanbul (that resulted in a draft agreement that would have effectively disarmed Ukraine, banned Ukraine from receiving any

foreign weapons, and forced Ukraine to commit never to participate in military blocs) and blamed the West and Ukraine for dismantling these 2022 negotiations.[16] Peskov is attempting to create the impression that Russia is in a stronger position today than it was in March 2022. Peskov is also signaling that Russia will not make any territorial concessions, amid reports that a recent US war termination plan proposal included "de jure" US recognition of Russian control over Crimea and "de facto" recognition of Russian control over occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[17]

Peskov's assessment that the battlefield situation has changed between March 2022 and now is correct, but because Russia's battlefield situation has deteriorated since the initial days of the invasion, rather than improved as Peskov falsely suggested. Russian forces were on Kyiv's outskirts and seized Kherson City in March 2022. Since then, Ukrainian counteroffensives pushed Russian forces away from Kyiv City and other areas in northern Ukraine in March-April 2022; liberated a significant portion of Kharkiv Oblast and pushed Russian forces away from Kharkiv City in September-October 2022; and completely pushed Russian forces from west (right) bank Kherson Oblast and liberated Kherson City in November 2022.[18] Russian forces advanced more than 1,000 square kilometers per day on average in March 2022 — significantly faster and deeper than the Russian rate of advance in Winter 2024, when Russian forces were advancing at a relatively faster tempo than the months of positional warfare that characterized most of 2023 and early 2024.[19] Ukrainian forces have been able to use Western military aid and increased Ukrainian defense industrial production capabilities to limit Russian forces to incremental, gradual advances at the cost of high personnel and equipment losses.[20]

Russian officials continue to call for the cessation of Western aid to Ukraine as part of efforts to reintensify offensive operations when Ukraine's defense capabilities are

weakened. Nebenzya claimed that Europe is issuing "empty declarations and calls for a truce" in Ukraine but that Russia expects the West to give "clear and specific signals" that it "really want[s] to help find a long-term solution" to the war in Ukraine.[21] Nebenzya claimed that one of the main "signals" the West could give is to stop arms supplies to Ukraine. Putin made similar demands about Western military aid when he rejected the US- and Ukrainian-proposed 30-day ceasefire on March 13, questioning whether Ukrainian forces would be able to continue to receive military aid from their partners and allies during such a ceasefire.[22] Nebenzya's April 30 renewal of Putin's demand is part of the Kremlin's wider reflexive control campaign that aims to push the West to make decisions that are in Russia's favor. The cessation of Western military aid to Ukraine would not only further the longstanding Russian demand for Ukraine's demilitarization, such that Ukraine can no longer defend itself, but would also encourage Russia to continue and even expand offensive operations to take advantage of Ukrainian weaknesses — as Russia has done before. Russia most notably used the months' long US delay to approve additional security assistance to Ukraine in late 2023 and early 2024, and subsequent Ukrainian material constraints to intensify offensive operations and expand their goals to attempt operationally significant breakthroughs.[23] Russian forces are still engaged in some of the offensive efforts that gained momentum in late 2023 and early 2024 due to lapses in US security assistance to Ukraine.

Senior Russian officials continue to claim that Russia is open to diplomacy to end the war while rejecting US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals that would allow for formal peace

negotiations to begin. US Department of State Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on April 29 that the United States wants to see a "complete, full, durable" 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine and not just a "three-day moment" to "celebrate something." [24] US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg similarly stated on April 29 that Trump wants to see a comprehensive 30-day land, sea, and air ceasefire that can be extended and described Russia's May 8-11 proposed ceasefire as "absurd." [25]

Nebenzya and Peskov claimed on April 29 and 30 that Russia prefers "diplomatic" and "peaceful" methods to achieve all of its goals in the war.[26] Peskov, however, reiterated Putin's rejection of recent US- and Ukrainian-proposed ceasefires that would pave the way for diplomatic talks on how to end the war. Peskov claimed that Putin supports a longer-term ceasefire but "questions" the "nuances" that the parties must resolve before Russia can agree to this ceasefire.[27] Peskov claimed that the United States wants a "quick success" in Ukraine but that the process is "too complicated." [28] Peskov referenced Putin's March 13 rejection of the first US- and Ukrainian-proposed full 30-day ceasefire, about which Putin claimed there are questions that "require painstaking research from both sides." [29] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is attempting to prolong negotiations to extract additional concessions from the United States and Ukraine and make additional battlefield gains.[30]

Russian state-owned and pro-Kremlin media appear to be attempting to portray Russia as willing to negotiate. Russian state media broadly reported on April 30 that the state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom CEO Alexei Likhachev stated that Russia is "ready to discuss" a possible US presence at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), which Russian forces currently occupy.[31] Likhachev's statement is in reference to the reported US seven-point peace proposal that stipulates that Ukraine

would reacquire the ZNPP and that the plant would function under US operation.[32] A Russian official agreeing to negotiate on this point would represent a major inflection, as Russia has rejected Ukrainian or US operation of the ZNPP previously. Rosatom's press service issued a correction on April 30, however, reporting that Likhachev stated that Rosatom is ready to discuss cooperation with the United States regarding the operation of the ZNPP "on the condition that a political decision is made by the Russian leadership."[33] Rosatom noted that some unspecified Russian news agencies initially incorrectly quoted Likhachev.[34] Many of the Russian state media outlets are still showing the earlier headlines mischaracterizing Likhachev's quote as of this publication, despite Rosatom's clarification.[35] Russia is currently very unlikely to cede the ZNPP to Ukraine, given the Kremlin's continued insistence on achieving all its war goals and continued demonstration of its unwillingness to offer territorial concessions.

Russian officials continue to falsely portray European efforts to increase their own defense capabilities — in line with US President Donald Trump's objective to have Europe shoulder more of the burden for collective security — as a threat to Russian national security, likely to support Russian efforts to justify future Russian aggression against NATO. Russian authorities organized the third Anti-Fascist Conference on April 30, which included military representatives from Belarus, North Korea, and Vietnam.[36] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Viktor Goremykin claimed that Western states have supported the Ukrainian government in implementing Ukraine's alleged "Russophobic" policies, claiming that these policies are direct threats to Russia's security. Goremykin also claimed that the European Union's (EU) five-year rearment defense plan is unacceptable to Russia, and that Russia will take "all necessary" measures to protect its security. Belarusian Defense Minister General Viktor Khrenin also warned that European rearment efforts threaten global peace and claimed that some European countries, particularly the Baltic States, promote Russophobia in their state policies.[37] Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have recently intensified their threats against Europe — particularly the Baltic States — due to Europe's alleged "Russophobia" and aggressive military buildup.[38]

North Korea and Russia continue to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in the military and labor spheres. *Reuters* reported on April 30, citing South Korean intelligence, that roughly 600 North Korean troops have died in Russia out of a total deployment of 15,000 since November 2024 and that North Korean forces have suffered approximately 4,700 casualties in Russia's war against Ukraine to date.[39] *Reuters* also noted that North Korean battlefield experience in Russia's Kursk Oblast over the past six months has improved North Koreans' combat capabilities, particularly in drone usage, and that Russia has provided North Korea with technical assistance on spy satellites, drones, and anti-air missiles in return for its military support. *Reuters* also reported that South Korean intelligence suggests that North Korea has sent approximately 15,000 workers to Russia, in violation of United Nations (UN) sanctions that prohibit the export of North Korean labor to third countries. US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on April 29 that North Korea is derailing efforts to achieve peace between Russia and Ukraine and that Russia's military assistance and training of North Korean troops directly violates the UN Security Council Resolutions 1718, 1874, and 2270, all of which broadly prohibit North Korea from receiving or providing military training or assistance to other countries.[40] Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin stated on April 30 that Russia and North Korea are constructing a bridge to enhance bilateral relations.[41] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* added that Russia and North Korea will complete its construction in 1.5 years (approximately in late 2026) and that the bridge will support vehicle traffic between the two countries.[42] Russia and North Korea will likely use the bridge for materiel transportation as the two states strengthen their cooperation.

Ukrainian sources continue to report on cases of Russian commanders ordering their subordinates to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of international law. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported on April 30 that the deputy commander of the Russian 1st Motorized Rifle Battalion of the 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) and company commander of the "Storm" Detachment in the 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division) ordered their subordinates to execute a Ukrainian POW and then desecrate his body near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka) in June 2024.[43] ISW has observed and reported on numerous instances of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs along the frontline in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast and continues to assess that this is a systemic trend in the Russian military and that Russian commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct such atrocities. [44]

Key Takeaways:

- The United States and Ukraine signed a bilateral economic partnership agreement on April 30.

- Russian officials continue to demand full Ukrainian capitulation as the sole basis on which Russia is willing to accept a future peace agreement.
- Peskov overinflated Russia's current military strength and battlefield victories thus far in the war in an attempt to justify Russia's continued unwillingness to make territorial concessions.
- Russian officials continue to call for the cessation of Western aid to Ukraine as part of efforts to reintensify offensive operations when Ukraine's defense capabilities are weakened.
- Senior Russian officials continue claim that Russia is open to diplomacy to end the war while rejecting US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals that would allow for formal peace negotiations to begin.
- Russian officials continue to falsely portray European efforts to increase their own defense capabilities – in line with US President Donald Trump's objective to have Europe shoulder more of the burden for collective security - as a threat to Russian national security, likely to support Russian efforts to justify future Russian aggression against NATO.
- North Korea and Russia continue to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in the military and labor spheres.
- Ukrainian sources continue to report on cases of Russian commanders ordering their subordinates to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of international law.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman and Toretsk

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 29, 2025

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Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, Anna Harvey, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev stated on April 29 that Russia's war in Ukraine must end in Russian "victory" and the "destruction" of the current Ukrainian government.^[1] Senior Kremlin officials continue to signal that Russia has greater territorial ambitions than just the occupied areas of Ukraine, particularly in areas bordering the Black Sea. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev claimed in an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS published on April 29 that Ukrainian civilians, particularly those living in the Black Sea region, must "determine their own future."^[2] Patrushev specifically noted that Odesa City spent over two centuries as the Russian Empire's and Soviet Union's outpost in the Black Sea and claimed that Odesa City residents have "nothing in common" with the current Ukrainian government. These statements are a reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2023 claim that Ukrainians living in the Black Sea region have nothing "to do with Ukraine" and that Odesa is a "Russian city" and follows Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's April 14, 2025 claim that the Ukrainian government "does not represent" residents of Odesa City and other Ukrainian territories.^[3] Patrushev claimed that Russia "respects the will of the [Ukrainian] people" and attempted to justify Russia's illegal annexation of occupied Crimea, Donbas, and "Novorossiya" — an invented region in Ukraine which the Kremlin has claimed includes all of eastern and southern Ukraine and is an "integral" part of Russia.^[4] Medvedev also claimed that the current Ukrainian government does not speak for the Ukrainian people.^[5] Medvedev's and Patrushev's statements reference the longstanding Kremlin demand for regime change in Ukraine with the installation of a pro-Russian puppet government that could struggle to oppose or even support the Kremlin's goal to occupy more territory in Ukraine at a later time of the Kremlin's choosing.^[6]

Senior Russian officials reiterated the longstanding, false Russian narrative that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, likely in order to set conditions to manipulate ceasefire negotiations and renege on any future Russian-Ukrainian agreements at a time of Russia's choosing. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 29 that the "illegitimacy" of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency would create legal difficulties in direct peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, but that Russia is more interested in starting negotiations and "everything else is secondary."^[7] Peskov claimed on April 24 that Russia would restart its war should "people...question the legitimacy" of Zelensky and stated that Russia has "no confidence" in the Ukrainian government.^[8] Putin and other senior Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that all Ukrainian governments since 2014 are "illegitimate" and that Russia would not view any agreements concluded with the current Ukrainian government as binding.^[9] Putin and other Russian officials have

similarly claimed that Zelensky is illegitimate because Ukraine did not hold presidential elections in 2024, and have additionally alleged that all Ukrainian civil authorities are therefore illegitimate since the president appoints regional officials.[10] The Ukrainian Constitution explicitly prohibits elections during periods of martial law and invasion by a hostile country, however.[11] The Kremlin is deliberately coupling its purported interest in Russian-Ukrainian peace negotiations with its false narrative of Zelensky's illegitimacy in order to set conditions for Russia to claim that any future peace settlement that Russia signs with Zelensky is illegitimate, to renege on the agreement, and relaunch the invasion at the time of Russia's choosing. **Any long-term peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include Russia's explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian Constitution.**

Russian officials are setting conditions to baselessly accuse Ukraine of violating Russia's unilateral May 8 to 11 ceasefire, as the Kremlin has done during previous ceasefires, while rejecting Ukraine's proposal for a 30-day ceasefire. Lavrov claimed on April 29 that the May 8 to 11 ceasefire will be the "beginning of direct negotiations, without preconditions," but stated that Russia considers the US- and Ukrainian-proposed 30-day ceasefire to be a "precondition."^[12] Lavrov reiterated Putin's rejection of the US- and Ukrainian-proposed longer-term ceasefires, claiming that Russia cannot accept any longer-term ceasefire since such ceasefires require extensive monitoring measures. Lavrov stated that Russia does not think "honest" monitoring is possible during a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 29 that the Ukrainian government does not have full control over all Ukrainian military units and will be unable to guarantee that Ukrainian forces adhere to the May 8 to 11 ceasefire.^[13] Putin similarly declared a unilateral Easter ceasefire in mid-April 2025, and Russia has consistently accused Ukraine of violating previous ceasefires while rarely offering evidence supporting these accusations.^[14] Ukraine — unlike Russia — supports US President Donald Trump's proposals for a 30-day temporary ceasefire or more permanent ceasefires.^[15] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is leveraging unilateral ceasefires to achieve informational and battlefield advantages in Ukraine and to maintain the illusion that Russia is interested in meaningful peace negotiations.^[16]

Kremlin officials within Putin's inner circle continue to threaten NATO as Putin himself refrains from doing so — likely as part of Kremlin efforts to justify future Russian aggression against NATO to the Russian population. Medvedev claimed that the West is attempting to use a principle of "peace through force" to harm Russia, but that Russia's only possible response to this principle is "peace through fear."^[17] Medvedev claimed that other approaches do not work but that "fear still works." Medvedev claimed that the leaders in the European Union (EU) are "Russophobic" and that Russia's relations with Europe have "passed the point of no return."^[18] Medvedev attempted to argue that allegations that Russia is trying to attack Europe are "nonsense."^[19] Patrushev claimed that parts of Europe, including France and Germany, are "flirting with the Nazis" and "deploying the military machine against Russia."^[20] Patrushev claimed that the United Kingdom (UK), the EU, and NATO leaders are threatening Russia and criticized NATO for holding large-scale exercises on its eastern flank, claiming that these exercises are practicing offensive actions against Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke on April 29 at the "Great Heritage — Common Future" forum dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and claimed that Russia must prevent the revival of Nazism and the spread of destructive ideologies, including Russophobia and national or religious intolerance.^[21] Putin's statements paralleled those of Medvedev and Patrushev, but were more tempered as Putin did not criticize or threaten Europe. Kremlin officials, including those within Putin's inner circle, have recently threatened European states, including NATO member states, and are setting conditions to justify potential future Russian aggression against Europe.^[22]

Putin promoted his previously proposed Eurasian security architecture on April 29 as part of Russian efforts to create an alternative Russian-led bloc that furthers Putin's goals of destroying NATO and weakening the West and its allies. Putin claimed that the world must create a new security architecture, particularly in Eurasia.^[23] Putin claimed that the basis of this Eurasian security architecture could be already existing organizations, such as the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Patrushev similarly claimed in the April 29 TASS interview that the "Western-centric world" is no longer useful and that the popularity of BRICS and the SCO is growing.^[24] Putin first proposed an alternative Eurasian and world security system in June 2024, reportedly with the support of People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping.^[25] The organizations that Putin listed as the possible foundation of his proposed Eurasian security architecture are mostly Russian- or PRC-dominated and are meant as alternatives to the United Nations (UN) or US-led alliances. Putin's renewed calls for the creation of a Eurasian security architecture notably come as Russian and North Korean officials abruptly started to publicly acknowledge their military cooperation in Russia's war in Ukraine.^[26] ISW continues to assess that Russia has been building a web of overlapping coalitions and partnerships, including within the CSTO, CIS, ASEAN, BRICS, and SCO, to

offset the limits of Russian state power.[27] These efforts aim to make Russia's geopolitical clout more resilient and to expand the space in which Russia can spread narratives and create perceptions.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev stated on April 29 that Russia's war in Ukraine must end in Russian "victory" and the "destruction" of the current Ukrainian government. Senior Kremlin officials continue to signal that Russia has greater territorial ambitions than just the occupied areas of Ukraine, particularly in areas bordering the Black Sea.
- Senior Russian officials reiterated the longstanding, false Russian narrative that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, likely in order to set conditions to manipulate ceasefire negotiations and renege on any future Russian-Ukrainian agreements at a time of Russia's choosing.
- Russian officials are setting conditions to baselessly accuse Ukraine of violating Russia's unilateral May 8 to 11 ceasefire, as the Kremlin has done during previous ceasefires, while rejecting Ukraine's proposal for a 30-day ceasefire.
- Kremlin officials within Putin's inner circle continue to threaten NATO as Putin himself refrains from doing so — likely as part of Kremlin efforts to justify future Russian aggression against NATO to the Russian population.
- Putin promoted his previously proposed Eurasian security architecture on April 29 as part of Russian efforts to create an alternative Russian-led bloc that furthers Putin's goals of destroying NATO and weakening the West and its allies.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Belgorod and Sumy oblasts and near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 28, 2025

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

April 28, 2025, 8:15 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced another unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine, this time in honor of a major Soviet and Russian military holiday, while continuing to reject the March 2025 US-Ukrainian 30-day general ceasefire proposal. Putin continues to refuse any ceasefire other than on terms that advantage his war effort. The Kremlin announced on April 28 that Putin declared a ceasefire in honor of Victory Day on May 9 – when Russia celebrates the Soviet Union's contributions to defeating Nazi Germany during the Second World War (while minimizing the role played by the United States) – between midnight on the night of May 7 to 8 and midnight on the night of May 10 to 11.[1] The Kremlin stated that Russian forces will respond to any Ukrainian ceasefire violations. The Kremlin claimed that the Victory Day ceasefire demonstrates Russia's supposed readiness for peace negotiations without preconditions to eliminate the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russia is exchanging information with the United States about the Victory Day ceasefire and characterized the unilateral ceasefire as a "manifestation" of Russia's goodwill.[2] The Kremlin is preparing to welcome a significant number of foreign dignitaries, including from former Soviet, Latin American, Asian, and African countries, for Russia's Victory Day celebration, and Putin likely seeks to avoid the embarrassment of Ukrainian strikes during these celebrations.[3]

Putin previously declared a unilateral ceasefire in honor of Easter in mid-April 2025, but Russian and Ukrainian sources repeatedly accused each other of violating the ceasefire throughout the theater in Ukraine.[4] Russia also repeatedly accused Ukraine of violating the 30-day moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes but rarely offered evidence of these alleged violations.[5] ISW previously noted that the energy strikes ceasefire and Easter ceasefire underscored the need for the details of any future ceasefire or peace agreement to be publicly available, formally agreed to in advance by all parties, and to include robust monitoring mechanisms.[6] Putin's proposed Victory Day ceasefire does not include any additional monitoring mechanisms, and Russian sources will likely leverage the lack of such mechanisms to again flood the information space with unsubstantiated claims of Ukrainian ceasefire violations. Russian officials appear disinterested in establishing meaningful monitoring mechanisms or a general public basis for these ceasefires, likely because Russia benefits from weaponizing the vague and unclear conditions of the ceasefires against Ukraine.

Putin is leveraging unilateral ceasefires to achieve informational and battlefield advantages in Ukraine, counter to US President Donald Trump's goal of using a general ceasefire as a stepping stone towards an enduring and sustainable peace agreement in Ukraine. Putin appears to be opportunistically declaring ceasefires during major religious and military holidays in order to force Ukraine to accept the ceasefire or risk appearing intransigent to the West. Unilaterally declaring ceasefires also allows Putin to distract attention from his rejection of the March 2025 US-Ukrainian 30-day general ceasefire proposal and to maintain the illusion that he is interested in peace negotiations while keeping full control over the conditions and timing of any ceasefire agreements. Russian forces seized on the Easter ceasefire to shell and conduct reconnaissance of frontline Ukrainian positions and damaged vehicles along the frontline in preparation for future Russian assaults, and Russian forces will likely use the Victory Day ceasefire for similar preparatory efforts.^[7] Putin likely views the Victory Day ceasefire as a chance for Russian forces to rest ahead of future frontline activity in Ukraine and as a way to ensure that Ukraine does not conduct any significant long-range strikes against Russia during Victory Day celebrations. Putin likely does not view the Victory Day ceasefire as a serious step towards lasting peace in Ukraine.

Ukraine, in contrast to Russia, continues to demonstrate its support for Trump's desired full, permanent ceasefire. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated on April 28 that Trump has made it clear that he wants a permanent ceasefire first (presumably before negotiations for a final end to the Russian invasion).^[8] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted on April 28 that Ukraine supported the US proposal for a full ceasefire, proposed a ceasefire on strikes against civilian infrastructure, and proposed extending the Easter truce – all proposals that Russia has rejected.^[9] Zelensky stated that there is no reason to wait for May 8 to start the temporary ceasefire and called for an immediate, full, and unconditional ceasefire for at least 30 days, as this is the "foundation that could lead to real diplomacy." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha similarly called for an immediate ceasefire and questioned why Putin was "waiting" for May 8.^[10] Sybiha reiterated Ukraine's support for a "long" and complete ceasefire.

Ukrainian and European representatives reportedly recently presented the United States with a proposal to end the war that called for a full, unconditional air, sea, and land ceasefire – in line with Trump's continued calls for a full ceasefire.^[11] Putin's continued efforts to obfuscate his previous rejections of US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals run counter to Trump's stated approach of first establishing a ceasefire and then negotiating a broader peace agreement, and to Trump's goal of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.^[12]

The Kremlin continues attempts to hold legitimate ceasefire negotiations hostage in order to secure additional concessions from Ukraine and the United States. The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) published a readout of an April 27 phone call between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio that claimed that Lavrov and Rubio emphasized establishing "prerequisites for starting negotiations" toward a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine.^[13] The US State Department's readout of the call notably did not mention discussions of "prerequisites" to negotiations, and the Russian MFA statement notably contradicts the Kremlin's April 28 claim that the Victory Day ceasefire demonstrates Russia's supposed readiness for peace negotiations without preconditions.^[14]

Putin, Lavrov, and other senior Russian officials have consistently demanded since June 2024 that Ukraine withdraw from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and that Ukraine must officially abandon its goal of joining NATO (by amending its constitution in which that goal is enshrined) before Russia can agree to a future ceasefire and peace negotiations.^[15] Putin stated in June 2024 that Russia is prepared to begin negotiations with Ukraine as soon as Ukraine agrees to withdraw from the entirety of the four oblasts. The Kremlin is insisting on significant Ukrainian territorial and political concessions as prerequisites to negotiations in an effort to begin negotiations from the strongest position and achieve longstanding Russian goals in Ukraine through diplomatic means that it is unable to secure on the battlefield.

Lavrov reiterated on April 28 Russia's longstanding demands for Ukraine's surrender and concessions from the West, as Russia continues to offer no concessions of its own. Russian officials, including Putin, have repeated Russia's longstanding demands that any resolution to the war in Ukraine must include Ukrainian regime change, demilitarization, abandonment of aspirations to join NATO or any security bloc, and the cession of territory to Russia.^[16] Lavrov reiterated these demands in an interview with Brazilian outlet O Globo published on April 28 and claimed that any resolution of the war must address the war's "root causes."^[17] Lavrov and other Russian officials have repeatedly defined the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.^[18] Russian officials have leveraged claims that Ukraine has mistreated

Russian speakers to justify Russia's invasions, occupation, and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory since 2014.

Lavrov additionally demanded during the April 28 interview that the international community recognize Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea as part of Russia and that the West return frozen Russian assets.[19] Lavrov also demanded that the West provide Russia with "security guarantees" against supposed threats from NATO and the EU. Lavrov's statements mirror Putin's December 2021 demands that NATO commit to not accepting Ukraine or any other countries as new members; that the United States commit to upholding the ban on NATO enlargement; that NATO not deploy any military forces to states that became NATO members after May 1997; that NATO refrain from military activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia; that NATO states refrain from deploying intermediate-range missiles in areas from which they could reach Russia; and that the United States refrain from deploying intermediate-range missiles in Europe or nuclear missiles outside of US territory.[20] Putin's December 2021 demands notably extend beyond Ukraine and aim to roll back NATO. The Kremlin likely seeks to intensify these demands amid ongoing negotiations with the United States to manipulate Western leaders into acquiescing to Putin's demands. These demands would weaken NATO under the guise of terms of a peace negotiation to end the Russian invasion of Ukraine and allow Russia to set conditions to strengthen its position for future aggression against Ukraine and NATO.

Russian and North Korean officials touted the success of their joint military operations in Kursk Oblast in order to highlight the international community's inability to deter Russian efforts to involve its allies directly in Russia's war against Ukraine, as the Kremlin pledged to offer North Korea reciprocal active military support. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on April 28 that the Russian military recently achieved its objective of pushing Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast and thanked North Korean forces for their active participation in these efforts.[21] Putin personally thanked North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un and reiterated that Russia and North Korea acted in accordance with the December 2024 bilateral Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.[22] Putin also claimed that North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine did not violate international law. Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov also recently acknowledged North Korea's participation in retaking Kursk Oblast.[23] Russian officials have previously refused to acknowledge North Korean soldiers operating in Kursk Oblast and attempted to disguise North Korean soldiers as Russian forces from the Republic of Buryatia.[24] The Kremlin's abrupt rhetorical shift suggests that Russia is no longer concerned about the possibility of Western retaliation for involving North Korean forces directly in its war against Ukraine.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on April 28 that North Korea's participation in operations in Kursk Oblast demonstrates the effectiveness of the Russian-North Korean Strategic Partnership Treaty and affirms that Russia is "absolutely" prepared to provide North Korea with reciprocal military assistance in the future.[25] The North Korean Central Military Commission stated on April 28 that Kim ordered the deployment of North Korean troops to Kursk Oblast in accordance with the partnership agreement and that the "sacred mission" in Kursk Oblast solidified the "friendship and solidarity" between Russians and North Koreans.[26] The United States and the wider West largely failed to meaningfully respond to Russia's growing military cooperation with Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Former US President Joe Biden's decision to ease restrictions on Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory using US-provided long-range missile systems in November 2024, formally cast as a response to the introduction of North Korean forces into the war, did not significantly impact the Kremlin's calculus in expanding its military cooperation with North Korea or Russia's wider military planning in Kursk Oblast and elsewhere in Russia and occupied Ukraine.[27]

Russian milbloggers reacted triumphantly to official announcements of Russian and North Korean forces concluding operations in Kursk Oblast. A Russian milblogger claimed on April 28 that North Korea's and Russia's announcements provide a general deterrent to future Ukrainian and Western operations on Russian territory.[28] Some milbloggers also advocated for Russia to expand military, economic, and labor collaboration with North Korea, including in the event of future military aggression against North Korea.[29] Other milbloggers emphasized the bravery of North Korea's forces and claimed that North Korea and its people have shown themselves to be better allies than many Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) states.[30]

Russian officials and milbloggers are likely leveraging Russia's recent operational and diplomatic successes in Kursk Oblast to prepare the information space for Victory Day celebrations on May 9, which a number of international partners will attend. The Kremlin likely plans to highlight Russian successes in Kursk Oblast during the May 9 celebrations, as Russian forces have not been able to achieve significant battlefield successes in Ukraine in the past year.

Russia is reportedly expanding its military infrastructure along its border with Finland and stockpiling new tanks, likely in preparation for future aggression against NATO. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on April 27, citing Western military and intelligence officials, that Russia is expanding military bases near Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, and upgrading railway lines and other infrastructure along Russia's western border with NATO.^[31] WSJ reported that the Kremlin plans to create a new army headquarters near Petrozavodsk in the next several years and that Russia is integrating roadways and railways in the Moscow Military District (MMD) with infrastructure in Belarus. Sources stated that Russia intends to form new divisions on the basis of existing brigades in the Leningrad Military District (LMD) in the coming years and that Russia is constructing new barracks and training grounds and upgrading warehouses and railways near Petrozavodsk to accommodate the future influx of personnel. A senior Finnish military official stated that Russia is sending "almost none" of its newly produced tanks to the frontline in Ukraine but is stockpiling the tanks for "later use." ISW previously assessed that Russia's restoration of the MMD and LMD is part of a long-term restructuring effort to prepare for a potential future large-scale conventional war against NATO.^[32]

Russian authorities are also preparing to update Russia's National Security Strategy, likely to reflect Russian President Vladimir Putin's greater territorial ambitions in Europe and ongoing efforts to justify future aggression against NATO. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu claimed during an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS published on April 24 that Russia is preparing to update its National Security Strategy to account for the new problems and threats that Russia is facing.^[33] Shoigu claimed that Russia's updated National Security Strategy must account for the "crisis" of European security, the formation of a new global order, and the challenges that the changing world presents to Russia. Shoigu stated that Russia's National Security Strategy defines Russia's "long-term, strategic goals" and the "main instruments" for achieving these goals. Russia updates its National Security Strategy every five years, and last updated the strategy in 2021.^[34]

Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová announced on April 27 that the Czech Ammunition Initiative will have delivered another 400,000 rounds of large-caliber artillery ammunition to Ukraine by April 30.^[35] Černochová also announced that the initiative secured funding for further artillery deliveries to Ukraine through Fall 2025. Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský stated that Canada, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands previously provided funds to the initiative. Lipavský reported that Czechia aims to supply Ukraine with 125,000 rounds of ammunition per month in 2025, but will deliver as much ammunition as possible.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin announced another unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine – this time in honor of a major Soviet and Russian military holiday, while continuing to reject the March 2025 US-Ukrainian 30-day general ceasefire proposal. Putin continues to refuse any ceasefire other than on terms that advantage his war effort.
- Putin is leveraging unilateral ceasefires to achieve informational and battlefield advantages in Ukraine, counter to US President Donald Trump's goal of using a general ceasefire as a stepping stone towards an enduring and sustainable peace agreement in Ukraine.
- Ukraine – in contrast to Russia – continues to demonstrate its support for Trump's desired full, permanent ceasefire.
- The Kremlin continues attempts to hold legitimate ceasefire negotiations hostage in order to secure additional concessions from Ukraine and the United States.
- Lavrov reiterated on April 28 Russia's longstanding demands for Ukraine's surrender and concessions from the West, as Russia continues to offer no concessions of its own.
- Russian and North Korean officials touted the success of their joint military operations in Kursk Oblast in order to highlight the international community's inability to deter Russian efforts to involve its allies directly in Russia's war against Ukraine, as the Kremlin pledged to offer North Korea reciprocal active military support.
- Russia is reportedly expanding its military infrastructure along its border with Finland and stockpiling new tanks, likely in preparation for future aggression against NATO.
- Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová announced on April 27 that the Czech Ammunition Initiative will have delivered another 400,000 rounds of large-caliber artillery ammunition to Ukraine by April 30.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Kupyansk, Siversk, Toretsk, and Novopavlivka.

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, and George Barros with William Runkel

April 27, 2025, 6:15pm ET

Ukrainian and Russian forces' constant technological and tactical battlefield innovations continue to transform the character of warfare in Ukraine. A non-commissioned officer (NCO) in a Ukrainian unmanned systems battalion, likely operating in the Chasiv Yar direction, reported on April 27 that continuous technological innovations and battlefield adaptations have increasingly transformed the character of modern conventional warfare in Ukraine into a war that primarily features "long-range, remote combat" over meeting engagements between infantry and armored vehicles.[1] The NCO noted that Ukrainian and Russian forces' intensifying drone usage has expanded the area of contested gray zones and kill zones at the forward edge of the battle area. The NCO noted that in 2024, contested gray zones were roughly 500 meters to two kilometers in depth, but more intense drone usage since then has expanded the gray zone up to five to seven kilometers in some areas of the frontline. The NCO reported that Russian forces are improving and expanding their unmanned systems capabilities and emulating Ukrainian forces' tactics of using drones to intercept enemy drones and conduct remote mining. Ukrainian forces have successfully leveraged superior drone capabilities to defend critical sectors of the frontline while also mitigating manpower and materiel constraints.

Ukraine maintains over 100 brigades that must defend a frontline (both within Ukraine and along Ukraine's international border with Russia) currently over 2,100 kilometers long and significantly leverages drone capabilities, in tandem with traditional capabilities, to deny Russian attacks across the frontline.[2] Ukraine has demonstrated an ability to rapidly upscale domestic drone production and foreign drone procurement that is conducive for defending the frontline as well as executing a sustained long-range strikes campaign targeting Russian critical energy and defense industrial facilities deep within Russian territory that disrupts and degrades the Russian military's production and logistics.[3] Both Ukrainian and Russian forces have more regularly been using fiber-optic drones to strike each other's frontline positions and have successfully used first-person view (FPV) drones to intercept larger reconnaissance drones over the past several months.[4]

ISW has observed the rapid rate at which both Ukraine and Russia have managed to conceptualize, field, and implement near-continuous technological innovation and battlefield-adjusted tactics to optimize combat dynamics.[5] Ukrainian and Russian forces field new adaptations over the course of months rather than years and are constantly experimenting, further driving the feedback loop of increased reliance on technology and tactical innovation to maintain battlefield advantages. The innovation and operational concepts being forged in Ukraine will set the stage for the future of warfare.

Russian forces are attempting to offset Ukrainian technological adaptations and drone operations by integrating motorcycles and civilian vehicles into offensive operations along the entire frontline. The NCO in the Ukrainian unmanned systems battalion stated that Russian forces are increasingly using infantry assaults and motorized assaults on motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and light vehicles to advance in areas where Ukrainian forces leverage drone usage to maintain frontline positions.[6] The non-commissioned officer reported that Russian forces leverage motorcycles and other light vehicles to disperse forces to more easily avoid drone strikes. A Ukrainian soldier operating in the Pokrovsk direction stated on April 27 that Russian forces have conducted 13 motorized assaults on motorcycles since March 20.[7] A Ukrainian servicemember operating in the Pokrovsk direction stated on April 27 that Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction cannot drive heavy armored vehicles to frontline positions due to disrupted Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs), resulting in Russian forces shifting tactics to prioritize daily infantry assaults supported by motorcycles.[8]

ISW has observed Russian forces throughout the entire theater struggling to operate heavy armored vehicles close to the line of fire without being struck by Ukrainian drones. Russian forces are likely leveraging the speed, maneuverability, and small profiles of motorcycles and other light civilian vehicles to mitigate the efficacy of Ukrainian drone capabilities and are likely developing a tactical doctrine for systematic offensive motorcycle usage and preparing to integrate motorcycle usage into Summer and Fall 2024 offensive operations.[9] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and military command previously responded to Ukrainian drone innovations by attempting to formally integrate and centralize Russia's drone operations and production.[10] The Ukrainian and Russian defense industrial bases (DIBs) continue to compete in the innovation of new, cost-effective systems that enhance assault and battlefield capabilities and counter each other's innovations. Russian forces likely see a tactical opportunity in leveraging motorcycles and civilian vehicles to advance and seize as much Ukrainian territory as possible despite Ukraine's drone defenses.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reaffirmed Russia's long-standing position against making any form of territorial concessions, undermining US President Donald Trump's efforts to broker a lasting peace. Lavrov stated in an interview with CBS News conducted on April 24 and aired on April 27 that "Russia does not negotiate its territory" when asked about the status of Russian-occupied Crimea in ongoing negotiations.[11] Lavrov also stated that he does not "think any change is conceivable" when asked about whether the Kremlin is willing to consider transferring control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) - reportedly one of the terms in the Trump administration's seven-point conflict termination plan.[12]

Russian officials adopted constitutional amendments that declared Crimea, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts as Russian territories and have since relied on a pseudo-legal framework that claims occupied Ukrainian territories are now part of Russia "constitutionally" to reject ceding any area in Russian-occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson Oblasts and Crimea to Ukraine as part of a peace deal to end the war.[13] Russian officials also use this pseudo-legal framework to demand that Ukraine cede additional territory within Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson Oblasts to Russia that Russia does not currently occupy.[14] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova similarly stated on April 26 that Russian forces will seize all "territory of Russia," which she claimed includes Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[15]

Lavrov and other Russian officials' recent statements directly contradict the Trump administration's proposed peace framework, which reportedly includes mutual territorial concessions, including Ukraine regaining territory in Kharkiv Oblast and the ZNPP.[16] ISW continues to observe that Ukraine remains open to good-faith dialogue with Russia and is willing to consider territorial issues, while Russia fails to offer any concessions of its own and insists on terms tantamount to Ukraine's surrender.[17]

Russian law enforcement announced on April 26 the arrest of Ignat Kuzin, the suspect whom Russia accused of planting the improvised explosive device (IED) that killed the deputy head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, Lieutenant General Yaroslav Moskalik, on April 25.[18] The Russian Investigative Committee and Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that Kuzin purchased a car and installed the IED, which the Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) detonated from Ukraine. BBC Russia, citing Kremlin newswire TASS, reported that Turkish authorities detained and extradited Kuzin to Russia after he allegedly attempted to flee from Moscow to Turkey.[19] ISW was not able to identify any Turkish confirmation of this claim, and Ukrainian officials have not commented on the attack as of this publication.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian and Russian forces' constant technological and tactical battlefield innovations continue to transform the character of warfare in Ukraine.
- Russian forces are attempting to offset Ukrainian technological adaptations and drone operations by integrating motorcycles and civilian vehicles into offensive operations along the entire frontline.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reaffirmed Russia's long-standing position against making any form of territorial concessions, undermining US President Donald Trump's efforts to broker a lasting peace.
- Russian law enforcement announced on April 26 the arrest of Ignat Kuzin, the suspect whom Russia accused of planting the improvised explosive device (IED) that killed the deputy head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, Lieutenant General Yaroslav Moskalik, on April 25
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova. Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 26, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Daria Novikov, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros with William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12 pm ET on April 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov claimed on April 26 that Russian forces pushed all Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast. Gerasimov told Russian President Vladimir Putin on April 26 that Russian forces had fully defeated Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast and seized Gornal (southwest of Sudzha), the last Ukrainian-held settlement in Kursk Oblast.[1] Gerasimov

credited elements of the Russian 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]), 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla), and 1427th Motorized Rifle Regiment (formed during the 2022 partial reserve call up) with seizing Gornal. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov was visiting a Russian command post in Kursk Oblast to hear reports from Kursk Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Valery Solodchuk when Russian forces seized Gornal.^[2] Geolocated footage published on April 26 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along Gora Street in central Gornal.^[3] The Ukrainian General Staff refuted the Russian claims later on April 26 and stated that Ukrainian forces maintain unspecified positions in Kursk Oblast.^[4] The General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled five Russian assaults in Kursk Oblast on April 26. Russian milbloggers similarly claimed on April 26 that fighting continued near Oleshnya (northwest of Gornal), Guyevo (south of Sudzha near the international border), and St. Nicholas Monastery (southwest of Guyevo).^[5]

Ukraine's August 2024 incursion into Kursk Oblast successfully pinned some Russian combat power, including elite airborne (VDV) and naval infantry units, but its long-term effects remain unclear at this time. The Russian military command generally regards VDV and naval infantry units as elite forces (even though many Russian elite units have been heavily attrited and lost their elite status over the course of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine) and deploys them to critical sectors of the frontline.^[6] ISW previously observed reports that Russia redeployed elements of each of the seven VDV formations and four of the six naval infantry formations from frontline positions in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast in the months following the incursion, although some units remained split between Kursk Oblast and occupied Ukraine.^[7] Putin claimed on April 26 that the most effective Russian forces operating in Kursk Oblast included elements of the 104th, 234th, and 237th airborne (VDV) regiments (all of the 76th VDV Division); 51st, 119th, and 138th VDV regiments (all of the 106th VDV Division), 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division); 11th and 83rd VDV brigades; 204th "Akhmat" Spetsnaz Regiment and 1434th "Akhmat" Motorized Rifle Regiment (both Chechen units); 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet); 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet); and 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, LMD).^[8] Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast likely has continued to pin these VDV or naval infantry elements, as ISW has not observed reports of such units redeploying from Kursk Oblast to the frontline in Ukraine. ISW observed on April 18 the first reports that Russian forces redeployed unspecified drone units from the Kursk direction to the area southwest of Toretsk near Kalynove and that these units are now operating in the Kostyantynivka direction.^[9] Russian forces intensified offensive operations to push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast in early March 2025 after tactically exploiting the temporary US intelligence sharing cutoff with Ukraine and by using an underground gas pipeline and deception tactics to covertly attack behind Ukrainian positions in Sudzha.^[10] Russian forces, including VDV and naval infantry elements, took almost two months since their seizure of Sudzha to advance roughly nine kilometers to the Kursk-Sumy Oblast international border — an average rate of about 200 meters per day.^[11]

Gerasimov made the first official Russian acknowledgement of North Korean troop participation in Russian operations in Kursk Oblast by thanking North Korean servicemembers for their assistance in Russian efforts to push Ukrainian forces out of the region. Gerasimov stated on April 26 that North Korean forces "provided significant assistance" in pushing Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast, in accordance with the Russian-North Korean Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.^[12] Gerasimov commended North Korean officers and soldiers for demonstrating "professionalism" and "fortitude, courage, and heroism" during military operations in Kursk Oblast. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated on April 26 that Russia would never forget its "friends" from North Korea.^[13] Neither Gerasimov nor Zakharova indicated what role, if any, North Korean forces would now play in supporting Russian military operations against Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump stated that the United States is no longer pursuing a concrete deadline for achieving a resolution to the war in Ukraine — a departure from the administration's previously stated goal of ending the war within its first 100 days.^[14] Trump told reporters on April 25 that the United States has "no deadline" to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine.^[15] Trump also stated on April 26 that there was "no reason" for Russia's strikes on civilian areas and reiterated a previously stated concern that "[Russian President Vladimir Putin] is just tapping me along" by disingenuously ceasefire and peace negotiations.^[16] Trump stated that Putin's actions make Trump think that "maybe [Putin] doesn't want to stop the war" and "has to be dealt with differently." Russian officials have repeatedly leveraged heightened US interest in negotiating a swift resolution to the war in Ukraine to make demands tantamount to Ukrainian surrender and incompatible with Trump's stated goal of achieving a stable and enduring peace in Ukraine.^[17] Russian forces have also conducted a string of strikes against civilian areas in recent weeks, including a devastating strike on Kyiv City on the night of April 23 to 24.^[18] Trump and Ukrainian President Zelensky met in Vatican

City on April 26 to discuss the ongoing peace talks.[19] Zelensky reported on April 26 that he and Trump discussed civilian safety, a full and unconditional ceasefire, and a lasting peace that prevents resumption of hostilities.[20] White House Communications Director Steven Cheung stated that Trump and Zelensky had a "very productive discussion."[21]

Russia is likely preparing to systematically integrate motorcycle usage into offensive operations in Ukraine for Summer and Fall 2025, likely to offset adept Ukrainian drone capabilities. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published footage on April 26 showing likely elements of the 299th (Airborne) VDV Regiment (98th VDV Division) practicing offensive and defensive tactics on motorcycles in groups of two to three people at a Russian training ground.[22] The video indicates that the Russian military is likely developing a tactical doctrine for systematic offensive motorcycle usage and may be preparing to issue an increased number of motorcycles to Russian personnel in Ukraine. Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Pavlo Shamshyn reported that Ukrainian intelligence noted that the Russian military is training its soldiers in combat tactics with motorcycles, suggesting that Russian forces will likely increasingly integrate motorcycles into offensive operations in Ukraine in Summer and Fall 2025.[23] Shamshyn noted that motorcycles allow Russian soldiers to enhance their speed and maneuverability, which is crucial for evading Ukrainian drone strikes, but that the loud noise of the motorcycle prevents the rider from hearing approaching Ukrainian drones. ISW has observed an increased trend of Russian units conducting mechanized and combined motorized assaults and transporting infantry with motorcycles and civilian vehicles throughout the frontline as Russian command continues to adapt its tactics to offset Ukrainian drone strikes and likely to mitigate the Russian military's equipment constraints resulting from high armored vehicle losses in Summer and early Fall 2024.[24] Russian forces notably recently advanced during a motorized assault near Bahatyr comprised entirely of motorcycles and civilian vehicles.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov claimed on April 26 that Russian forces pushed all Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.
- Ukraine's August 2024 incursion into Kursk Oblast successfully pinned some Russian combat power, including elite airborne (VDV) and naval infantry units, but its long-term effects remain unclear at this time.
- Gerasimov made the first official Russian acknowledgement of North Korean troop participation in Russian operations in Kursk Oblast by thanking North Korean servicemembers for their assistance in Russian efforts to push Ukrainian forces out of the region.
- US President Donald Trump stated that the United States is no longer pursuing a concrete deadline for achieving a resolution to the war in Ukraine — a departure from the administration's previously stated goal of ending the war within its first 100 days.
- Russia is likely preparing to systematically integrate motorcycle usage into offensive operations in Ukraine for Summer and Fall 2025, likely to offset adept Ukrainian drone capabilities.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk. Russian forces recently advanced near Novopavlivka, Kurkakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 25, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 25, 2025, 9:30pm ET

Ukrainian and European representatives reportedly presented the United States with a proposal to end the war in Ukraine during multilateral talks in London on April 23. *The Telegraph* reported on April 25 that the Ukrainian-European proposal contained five points about territory, security guarantees, negotiations, refusing Russian sovereignty over occupied Crimea, and the Ukrainian military and defense industrial base (DIB).[1] Reuters published the full text of the terms that Ukrainian and European officials reportedly developed in response to the US seven-point peace plan on April 25.[2] The proposal as presented by Reuters calls for a full, unconditional air, sea, and land ceasefire concurrently with immediate technical negotiations to implement the ceasefire, involving the United States and European countries; United States-led ceasefire monitoring with support from third countries; robust Ukrainian security guarantees absent Ukraine's NATO accession; and for Russia to unconditionally return illegally deported Ukrainian children and detained Ukrainian

civilians as well as engage in an "all-for-all" prisoner of war (POW) exchange. The proposal reportedly rejects restrictions on the Ukrainian military, calls for an ad hoc group of European states and willing non-European countries to guarantee Ukraine's security, and rejects restrictions on the deployment of any friendly forces to Ukraine.[3]

The Ukrainian-European proposal states that Russia and Ukraine will negotiate territorial issues only after the implementation of a full and unconditional ceasefire and that these negotiations will use the current frontline as a starting framework.[4] The Ukrainian-European proposal would reportedly provide Ukraine with "unhindered access" to the Dnipro River and control of the Kinburn Spit and Kakhovka Dam.[5] The proposal reportedly calls for Ukraine to regain control over the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) "with US involvement." The Ukrainian-European proposal also reportedly states that Ukraine's partners will work toward a consensus on NATO membership, and that Ukraine will pursue joining the European Union (EU).

The Ukrainian-European proposal reportedly calls for the United States and Ukraine to implement the US-Ukraine minerals deal and economic cooperation agreement. The proposal states that US sanctions on Russia may be subject to "gradual easing" if a sustainable peace is achieved and may resume if Russia violates a peace agreement. The proposal reportedly calls for Ukraine's full reconstruction and financial compensation, including using frozen Russian assets.

Reuters also published the full text of the seven-point peace proposal that US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff reportedly presented to Ukrainian and European officials in Paris on April 17, supporting earlier reporting about the US peace proposal.[6] Reuters reported that the US plan demands an immediate ceasefire and direct technical negotiations between Russia and Ukraine.[7] The US plan reportedly provides Ukraine with strong security guarantees from a coalition of European and willing non-European states but also calls for Ukraine to abandon efforts to join NATO while maintaining the option to pursue European Union (EU) membership. The US plan reportedly includes "de jure" US recognition of Russian control over occupied Crimea and de facto recognition of Russian control of Luhansk Oblast and parts of occupied Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Kherson Oblasts. **The recognition of de jure Russian sovereignty over Crimea or any other areas of Ukraine under occupation since 2014 would constitute a significant concession to Russia that should be balanced by a significant Russian concession in return.**

The US plan reportedly stipulates that Ukraine will regain territory in Kharkiv Oblast and the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), which the United States would operate and which would supply electricity to both Russia and Ukraine. The proposed US plan would return the Kakhovka Dam and Kinburn Spit to Ukraine and guarantee Ukrainian passage on the Dnipro River. The US plan reportedly states that Ukraine and the United States will implement a mineral deal and economic partnership agreement, calls for Ukraine's full reconstruction, and offers financial compensation to Ukraine, but does not specify the funding source. The US proposal reportedly calls for lifting sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014 and resuming US-Russian economic cooperation in the energy and industrial sectors.

The newly published Reuters document supports and clarifies earlier reporting by Axios and *The Telegraph* of the US seven-point proposal to Ukraine, but some details remain unclear.[8] The Reuters document affirms core details, such as territorial arrangements, Ukraine's non-accession to NATO, and the US-run operation of the ZNPP. The report also clarifies that Ukraine would regain control of the Kinburn Spit, the small part of Mykolaiv Oblast that Russia currently occupies, and the Kakhovka Dam, which spans between occupied and unoccupied Kherson Oblast. The Reuters document does not address Sumy Oblast, where Russian forces recently began conducting offensive operations, or how the United States and Ukraine would gain access to the ZNPP, given that the Kakhovka Reservoir and Dnipro River are natural barriers between current Ukrainian positions and the ZNPP. Russian forces would have to partially withdraw from either east (left) bank Kherson Oblast or permit a land bridge across the Kakhovka Reservoir under the US plan, but neither option inherently provides the strategic depth Ukraine would need to defend the ZNPP against further Russian aggression, as ISW has recently reported.[9]

US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on April 25, reportedly to secure a major Russian concession in a future peace deal. Witkoff met with Putin, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Presidential Special Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries Kirill Dmitriev, and Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov.[10] Ushakov stated that the meeting lasted three hours, included discussions about possibly resuming direct Ukrainian-Russian negotiations, and claimed that the meeting brought US and Russian positions about Ukraine and other unspecified issues "closer together."[11] US officials have not reported on the details of Witkoff's meeting with Putin as of the time of this publication.

Bloomberg reported on April 24, citing people familiar with the matter, that Witkoff planned to present a demand that Russia accept Ukraine's right to develop an adequately equipped army and defense industry as part of a peace agreement with Russia.[12] This reported US demand is contrary to the Kremlin's demand for Ukrainian demilitarization – a demand that the Kremlin first made of Ukraine and the West in December 2021.[13] Russia then sought to force Ukraine into demilitarization by launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the Kremlin reiterated demilitarization as a demand in the March 2022 Istanbul negotiations, whose protocols essentially demanded Ukraine's full capitulation to Russia and which the Kremlin has identified as its preferred basis for a peace deal in Ukraine.[14] Kremlin officials have repeatedly defined Ukrainian demilitarization and its other pre-war demands as prerequisites for a peace agreement, as these demands would allow Russia to launch renewed aggression from an advantageous position in the future.[15] Russia's acceptance of Ukraine's right to a developed military and defense industrial base would therefore be a significant Russian concession should the United States succeed in gaining Putin's agreement.

That the Kremlin is not formally demanding that Ukraine cede most or all of its territory to Russia at this time is not a significant Russian concession, however. The initial full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine aimed to seize Kyiv in February and March 2022 in order to force Ukraine to capitulate fully, depose the current Ukrainian government, and disarm the Ukrainian military, amounting to the total defeat of Ukraine. Russia failed to achieve this objective because the Ukrainian military, with limited Western support, defeated the Russian attack on Kyiv and stalled Russian offensives in the east and south. Ukrainian forces forced Russian forces to withdraw from Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy oblasts in early April 2022 and from most of Kharkiv Oblast and all of west-bank Kherson Oblast later in 2022.[16] Russian forces remain unable to launch an offensive operation that could seize Kyiv or recross the Dnipro River in southern Ukraine at this time, and spent 2024 fighting desperately to seize an area nine-tenths the size of Rhode Island. Russia does not have the military power to seize the rest of Ukraine absent a full-scale mobilization of Russian society, and possibly not then, as long as Western support to Ukraine continues.

The Kremlin has not abandoned its maximalist objectives, moreover. Kremlin mouthpieces, including Russian Security Council Secretary Dmitry Medvedev, have laid the rhetorical groundwork for Russia to eventually lay claim to most or all of Ukraine.[17] Russian officials have also doubled down on their demands for regime change in Ukraine and rhetoric intended to undermine the legitimacy of the current Ukrainian government as recently as April 24.[18] Both of these efforts in concert indicate that Putin retains his objective of controlling all of Ukraine, but is limited by Russia's inability to achieve this objective militarily.

Russian officials continue to intensify narratives used to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order to set conditions to justify future Russian aggression against European states and control European defense policy in the Kremlin's reflexive control campaign. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) published a report on April 25 entitled "80 Years After the Great Victory: The Shadow of Nazism Has Again Covered Europe," which accuses European states and officials of reviving Nazi ideology and creating policies that discriminate against Russian-speaking populations, especially in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.[19] Russian MFA Spokesperson Maria Zakharova amplified this report and claimed that European states are preventing Russia from achieving its long-held objectives of demilitarization and "denazification" of Ukraine due to this alleged support of Naziism.[20] Russian officials regularly invoke "denazification" to call for regime change in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Russian puppet government.[21] Zakharova specifically accused the Baltic States and Poland of justifying and reviving Nazism.

Russian officials have notably leveraged accusations of neo-Nazi ideology to justify Russia's invasions of Ukraine, and Russian officials leveraging these narratives against European states - especially the Baltics and Poland - supports ISW's assessment that Russia may be setting informational conditions to justify future aggression against these states as well.[22] Russian officials are likely attempting to discredit European states more broadly in order to deter them from providing further assistance to Ukraine and revitalizing their defense industries in order to set conditions for future Russian aggression against a weakened Europe.[23] ISW continues to assess that Russia remains committed to discrediting Europe in response to European leaders' reinvigorated commitment to rearming Europe in alignment with US President Donald Trump's policy goals.

Russian Ambassador to the United States Alexander Darchiev stated during the opening ceremony of an annual film festival commemorating Russia's Victory Day at the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., on April 24 that the Soviet-US military alliance formed during World War II should serve as an example of US-Russian relations today.[24] Darchiev's remarks indicate that the Kremlin aims to portray to its domestic and foreign audiences that US-Russian relations are on the mend and simultaneously exacerbate divisions between the United States and Europe.

Unknown actors assassinated the deputy head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, Lieutenant General Yaroslav Moskalik, in Balashikha, Moscow Oblast, on April 25.

Unknown actors detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) filled with shrapnel, rigged to a vehicle as Moskalik passed the car.[25] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused Ukraine of involvement in Moskalik's assassination.[26] Ukrainian officials have not commented on the attack as of this publication. The Ukrainian Security Services (SBU) claimed responsibility for assassinating the Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistant, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow on December 17, 2024, making this the second assassination of a Russian general in Moscow in the last five months.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian and European representatives reportedly presented the United States with a proposal to end the war in Ukraine during the multilateral talks in London on April 23.
- Reuters also published the full text of the seven-point peace proposal that US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff reportedly presented to Ukrainian and European officials in Paris on April 17, supporting earlier reporting about the US peace proposal.
- US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on April 25, reportedly to secure a major Russian concession in a future peace deal.
- That the Kremlin is not formally demanding that Ukraine cede most or all of its territory to Russia at this time is not a significant Russian concession, however.
- Russian officials continue to intensify narratives used to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order to set conditions to justify future Russian aggression against European states and control European defense policy in the Kremlin's reflexive control campaign.
- Unknown actors assassinated the deputy head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, Lieutenant General Yaroslav Moskalik, in Balashikha, Moscow Oblast, on April 25.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast. Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy and Kursk oblasts and near Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 24, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Grace Mappes, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 24, 2025, 8:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on April 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The official Kremlin spokesperson and the Russian Security Council secretary repeated a series of long-standing Russian demands that purposely preclude the establishment of a stable and enduring peace in Ukraine and set conditions for future Russian aggression from an advantaged position. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed in an interview with French news magazine *Le Point* published on April 23 that Russia's war goals have not changed since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that Russia will achieve these goals "peacefully or militarily."^[1] Peskov claimed that Russia would restart the war should "people...question the legitimacy" of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and stated that Russia has "no confidence" in the Ukrainian government. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu claimed in an interview to Kremlin newswire TASS published on April 24 that the Kremlin is "ready for a ceasefire, a truce, and peace talks" but only if these measures take Russia's interests into account and eliminate the "initial causes" of the war.^[2] Peskov defined Russia's unchanged war aims as Russian President Vladimir Putin's demands for regime change in Ukraine, the demilitarization of the Ukrainian military, and Ukraine's neutrality and Putin's claims that Ukraine cede all of Russia's illegally annexed territory in Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts to Russia.^[3] US President Donald Trump's reported recent seven-point proposal to end the war would notably not fulfill all of Putin's demands.^[4] Shoigu's claims about the "initial causes" of the war parallel Kremlin officials' consistent demand that any future peace settlement eliminate the "root causes" of the war, which Kremlin officials have claimed are NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and the Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.^[5]

Peskov and Shoigu continued to place conditions on Russia's agreement to Trump's proposed full ceasefire that would further Putin's goal of weakening the Ukrainian military, likely to prepare for future Russian aggression. Peskov claimed that Putin supports the idea of a full ceasefire but reiterated Putin's demand that European countries stop providing Ukraine with arms as a condition to Russia's agreement.[6] Shoigu similarly claimed that a ceasefire is possible as long as it does not allow Ukrainian forces to rest and regroup.[7] Peskov and Shoigu explicitly rejected the stipulation in Trump's reported proposal to end the war that would give Ukraine "a robust security guarantee" provided by a group of European states and possibly non-European states.[8] Shoigu claimed that European peacekeepers in Ukraine could lead to a direct clash between NATO and Russia, and Peskov claimed that Russia is against the idea of European peacekeepers in Ukraine because Ukrainian authorities "do not completely control" the Ukrainian military.[9] Peskov's false allegations about Zelensky's lack of legitimacy and the Ukrainian government's inability to control the country's military directly mirror Putin's long-standing narratives along these same lines.[10] These Kremlin narratives are part of efforts to set conditions for Russia to claim that any future peace settlement Russia signs with Zelensky is illegitimate, to renege on the agreement, and to relaunch its invasion – as Peskov explicitly stated Russia would do.

Peskov and Shoigu notably gave these interviews, containing similar narratives and talking points, to a Russian and French outlet – suggesting that the Kremlin is coordinating its messaging about Russia's commitment to achieving all of its war aims now and in the future to both international audiences in Europe and at home in Russia.

Kremlin officials continue to baselessly threaten NATO states for adhering to US President Donald Trump's objective that Europe take on more of its own defense requirements. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu claimed in an interview to Kremlin newswire TASS published on April 24 that Europe is preparing for a potential military conflict with Russia in three to five years. [11] Shoigu claimed that European states are building up their military presence near the western borders of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and are "not showing any readiness to deescalate the situation." Shoigu claimed that the European Union (EU) is trying to transform the EU into a "military organization aimed against Russia" and criticized the EU's efforts to develop Europe's defense industrial base (DIB). Shoigu claimed that the number of NATO military contingents deployed near Russia's western borders has increased by 2.5 times in the past year. Shoigu claimed that the number of military threats against Russia is growing, particularly as the Baltic states are building military bases on their own territory, Poland is purchasing armored vehicles, and various NATO states are modernizing their air defenses and purchasing American fighter jets. Shoigu complained that Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia are increasing their annual defense spending due to an "imaginary threat from the east." Shoigu claimed that the alleged threats to the security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Russia's "closest ally" Belarus remain in place and that Russia deployed Oreshnik ballistic missiles to Belarus due to these threats. Shoigu recalled that Russia's November 2024 amendments to its nuclear doctrine allows Russia to use nuclear weapons in the event of aggression against Russia or Belarus, including aggression with the use of conventional weapons. US President Donald Trump has persistently asked European states and NATO members to increase their defense spending.[12] Lavrov's and Peskov's excoriation of European states increasing investments in their defense - as Trump has requested - is a further indicator that Moscow's demands concerning Europe's future security architecture are incompatible with Trump's objectives for a strong and self-reliant Europe that contributes more equally to Europe's collective security.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed in an interview with French news magazine *Le Point* published on April 23 that Russia does not intend to attack anyone and that Russia did not and does not have any problems with new NATO members Finland and Sweden.[13] Peskov claimed that Finland is "little by little" building military infrastructure on its territory. Putin alleged that Russia is reacting to such moves by "taking steps to ensure its security" but "has no potential for conflict...neither in the Baltic countries nor in Finland." Peskov claimed that Russia has no territorial claims in the Baltic states, but Peskov claimed that Baltic authorities are discriminating against Russian citizens living there. Peskov proceeded to claim that Russia launched its first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 because Ukrainian authorities were allegedly trying to "exterminate" Russians in the country.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov similarly claimed that Russia had no intention of invading its neighbors on the eve of Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, and Peskov made a similar claim on the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[14] Peskov is notably using Kremlin narratives about alleged discriminations against Russian speakers in Ukraine to describe the Baltic states – a thinly veiled threat given Russia repeated use of Moscow's alleged need to protect its "compatriots abroad" to justify multiple Russian invasions of nearby states.[15] European states' efforts to increase their own defenses are in line with US President Donald Trump's push for Europe to shoulder more of its own defense requirements, including by increasing how much European NATO states spend on

defense annually. The European NATO states that Peskov and Shoigu highlighted in their complaints about Europe's alleged militarization – Finland, Poland, and the Baltics – are notably the most threatened due to their proximity to Russia. Helsinki, Finland; Tallinn, Estonia; and Riga, Lithuania are roughly 160 kilometers, 190 kilometers, and 215 kilometers from Russia's Leningrad and Pskov oblasts, respectively. Vilnius, Latvia and Warsaw, Poland are roughly 160 kilometers and 230 kilometers from Kaliningrad Oblast, respectively. Moscow, in contrast, is roughly 600 kilometers from the Russian-Latvian border – the closest NATO state border. Shoigu's thinly veiled nuclear threats against NATO are part of the Kremlin's broader reflexive control campaign to influence Western decision-making in Russia's favor and against Western states' own interests. Shoigu's nuclear threats are attempts to push European states to self-deter and reduce their buildups of their defenses – leaving NATO's eastern border largely undefended. These reflexive control efforts are in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2021 demand before launching his full-scale invasion of Ukraine that NATO not deploy any military forces to states that became NATO members after 1997, including Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.[16]

Peskov's and Lavrov's threatening statements against NATO members Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania parallel other Kremlin officials' statements likely intended to set information conditions to support Russian efforts to seize territory in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on April 14 that it is "dangerous" when "fascists seize lands that never belonged to anyone except the Russian Empire [and] Soviet Union" and do "disgusting things there." [17] Lavrov's statement indicates that the Kremlin views independent countries once colonized by the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire as rightfully part of modern-day Russia. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev also recently threatened Finland using narratives resembling those that the Kremlin has used to justify its invasions of Ukraine.[18]

Russian forces conducted a large series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine overnight on April 23 to 24, the largest strike series against Kyiv City thus far in 2025. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 215 drones and missiles at Ukraine, including 11 Iskander-M ballistic missiles from Bryansk, Voronezh, and Kursk oblasts; 37 Kh-101 cruise missiles from airspace over Saratov Oblast; six Iskander-K cruise missiles from occupied Donetsk Oblast; 12 Kalibr cruise missiles from the Black Sea; four Kh-59/Kh-69 cruise missiles from airspace over Belgorod Oblast; and 145 Shahed and decoy drones from Bryansk and Kursk oblasts; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[19] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 7 Iskander-M missiles, 31 Kh-101 missiles, 6 Kalibr missiles, 4 Kh-59/Kh-69 missiles, and 64 Shahed drones, and that 68 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian officials reported that Russia's strike series injured at least 80 Ukrainians and killed 9 people in Kyiv City alone, and damaged residential areas, energy infrastructure, and other buildings in five raions of the city.[20] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian strikes also damaged civilian, industrial, rail, and energy infrastructure in Zaporizhzhia City, and Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Poltava, Khmelnytskyi, and Sumy oblasts.[21]

Russian forces have adjusted their long-range strike tactics and weapons in recent weeks, likely to mitigate Ukrainian air defenses and inflict significant damage even when Ukrainian forces intercept some Russian drones and missiles.[22] Such adaptations disproportionately affect civilians, as ISW has previously noted.[23] US President Donald Trump stated in a post on Truth Social on April 24 that he is "not happy" with Russia's overnight strikes against Kyiv City, calling them "not necessary" and stating that Russia has "very bad timing." [24] Trump called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop such strikes and agree to his proposal to end the war.

Denmark announced a new military aid package to Ukraine for artillery ammunition procurement on April 23. Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen announced that Denmark will provide an additional 317 million Danish Kroner (approximately \$30.5 million) to Ukraine in 2025 to purchase artillery shells through Estonia.[25]

A Russian military court sentenced former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov to imprisonment, likely as part of an ongoing Kremlin effort to punish Russian military commanders who weaponized the information space to advance their political goals that undermine Putin's power vertical. The Tambov Garrison Military Court found Popov guilty of fraud and forgery of official documents on April 24 and sentenced Popov to five years in a low-security penal colony.[26] The Tambov Garrison Military Court also stripped Popov of his military rank and accolades and fined him 800,000 rubles (about \$9,613). Popov publicly appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 20, 2025, proclaiming his innocence and asking to return to military service in Ukraine in exchange for the suspension of his impending trial.[27] Putin may have first granted and later rejected Popov's appeal. Popov's lawyer, Sergey Buynovsky, reported on April

11 that Popov signed a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) agreeing to command a penal assault detachment fighting in Ukraine.[28] Buynovsky told Russian state media outlet *RBK* on April 24 that Russian authorities did not send Popov to the battlefield due to a "lack of vacancies" at the frontline.[29] The Kremlin relieved Popov of his command in July 2023 and later arrested him in May 2024 likely due to Popov's perceived disloyalty, attempted blackmail, and criticisms of the Russian MoD.[30] Russian ultranationalists, officials, and officers have been demanding Popov's release and return to the frontlines since his arrest. The Kremlin likely decided against deploying Popov to the frontlines to prevent him from leveraging his popularity and influence in the information space to pressure Putin.[31] The Kremlin appears to be prioritizing Putin's regime stability by sending a clear message that the Kremlin will not tolerate any actor's attempt to weaponize the information space to achieve a political objective that undermines Putin's total authority.

Key Takeaways:

- The official Kremlin spokesperson and the Russian Security Council secretary repeated a series of long-standing Russian demands that purposely preclude the establishment of a stable and enduring peace in Ukraine and set conditions for future Russian aggression from an advantaged position.
- Kremlin officials continue to baselessly threaten NATO states for adhering to US President Donald Trump's objective that Europe take on more of its own defense requirements.
- Russian forces conducted a large series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine overnight on April 23 to 24, the largest strike series against Kyiv City thus far in 2025.
- Denmark announced a new military aid package to Ukraine for artillery ammunition procurement on April 23.
- A Russian military court sentenced former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov to imprisonment, likely as part of an ongoing Kremlin effort to punish Russian military commanders who weaponized the information space to advance their political goals that undermine Putin's power vertical.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Belgorod and Sumy oblasts and near Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 23, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Anna Harvey, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45 pm ET on April 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The United States reportedly recently presented Ukraine with a seven-point proposal to end the war in Ukraine in which the United States would recognize Crimea as part of Russia and allow Russian forces to continue to occupy significant parts of southern and eastern Ukraine. Available reporting about the contents of the US proposal suggests that it marks a sudden and substantial change in the Trump administration's strategy for ending the war in Ukraine. *The Telegraph* and Axios reported on April 22 and 23 that sources familiar with the matter stated that the United States presented Ukraine with a proposal to end the war during the April 17 meeting in Paris and that the United States expected that the April 23 multilateral talks in London would discuss the proposal.[1] There have been no official statements about the reported US proposal. *The Telegraph* reported that the document contains seven points about an immediate ceasefire, Ukrainian-Russian talks, Ukraine's inability to join NATO, territory, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), the US-Ukrainian mineral deal, and US-Russian relations.[2] Axios and *The Telegraph* reported that the plan calls for the United States to "de jure" recognize Russian control of Crimea and "de facto" recognize Russia's occupation of most of the areas of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts that Russian forces currently occupy.[3] Russia would also reportedly have to withdraw from the parts of Kharkiv Oblast that Russian forces currently occupy. Axios stated that the plan would grant Ukraine "unimpeded passage" along the Dnipro River, with *The Telegraph* reporting that Ukraine would gain "unhindered access to the mouth" of the river. *The Telegraph* noted that the proposal states that Russian forces would withdraw from another unspecified area of Kherson Oblast.[4] The proposal calls for the ZNPP, which Russian forces currently occupy, to be "considered as Ukrainian territory" but under US operation.[5] The US-operated ZNPP would reportedly supply both Ukraine and Russia with electricity. The US proposal reportedly states that the United States would promise that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO, while Ukraine could still join the European Union (EU). The proposal would give Ukraine "a robust security guarantee" involving a group of European states and possibly non-European states, but the document does not offer details about how this "peacekeeping

"operation" would operate, nor mention US participation in this peacekeeping force. The United States would also reportedly lift all US sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014 and would enhance US-Russian economic cooperation, especially in the energy and industrial sectors. The proposal reportedly calls for Ukraine to receive compensation and assistance for reconstruction from an unspecified funding source.

The reported US proposal suggests that the Trump administration is seeking to simultaneously achieve a full ceasefire in Ukraine, conclude a peace settlement to end the war, and develop US-Russian economic relations – a sharp contrast to the timeline of events that the administration has called for in recent weeks. The White House stated on March 25 that Trump's "imperative that the killing on both sides of the [war] must stop" is a "necessary step toward achieving an enduring peace settlement" — demonstrating how the Trump administration viewed a full ceasefire as the first step toward securing a peace settlement.^[6] Ukraine agreed to the March 18 US-proposed full ceasefire along the frontline and agreed to the US-supported extension of the unilateral Russian Easter truce on April 21 — in sharp contrast to Russia, which refused to accept or extend these US-proposed and US-supported ceasefires.^[7] The White House also stated on April 15 that the United States "needs to see a ceasefire first" before developing US-Russian economic partnerships, and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reportedly stated in February 2025 that US sanctions on Russia would remain in place until Russia and Ukraine had reached a peace deal to end the war — in contrast to the reported US proposal that would simultaneously put a ceasefire in place in Ukraine, lift US sanctions against Russia, and develop US-Russian economic cooperation.^[8]

Significant details about the territorial swaps in the US proposal are unclear from the available reporting. Russian forces currently occupy a small part of Mykolaiv Oblast — the Kinburn Spit — and recently began conducting offensive operations into northern Sumy Oblast — two oblasts which the available reporting about the US proposal does not address.^[9] It is unclear whether Ukraine would gain access only to the mouth of the Dnipro River or a wider littoral area along the river's left bank given differences between reporting from *Axios* and *The Telegraph*. Details about the extent of the territory near the ZNPP on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River that would be considered Ukrainian are also unspecified, but Russian forces would have to withdraw from some territory in the area according to the US plan as Russian forces currently occupy significant portions of Zaporizhia Oblast behind the Dnipro River's east bank. The Dnipro River would nevertheless present itself as a significant barrier between the Ukrainian-controlled and US-operated ZNPP from the rest of the territory under Ukraine's control under the reported US plan, assuming Russian forces do not withdraw from territory around the Kakhovka Reservoir to permit a land bridge from Ukrainian-controlled Zaporizhia Oblast to the ZNPP. The location of such a strategically important facility close to the frozen frontline would greatly complicate Ukraine's ability to defend the ZNPP due to the lack of defensive depth.^[10] ISW previously conducted a terrain study and assessed that freezing the Russian war in Ukraine on anything like the current lines — particularly those in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts — enormously advantages Russia and increases the risks and costs to Ukraine and the West of deterring, let alone defeating, a future Russian operations against war against Ukraine.^[11]

Ukrainian officials reiterated Ukraine's continued commitment to the United States' March 2025 proposal for a full ceasefire as part of efforts to achieve a lasting peace. Zelensky recalled on April 22 that Ukraine supported and continues to support Trump's March 18 unconditional ceasefire proposal.^[12] Zelensky stated that Ukraine is ready to hold discussions "in any format" after the implementation of a ceasefire.^[13] Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak and Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov similarly stated on April 23 that the Ukrainian delegation in London discussed ways to achieve a full and unconditional ceasefire as a "first step" toward a peace settlement and that Ukraine is committed to Trump's peace efforts.^[14] Ukrainian Economic Minister Yulia Svyrydenko stated on April 23 that Ukraine is ready to negotiate and that a full ground, air, and sea ceasefire is a necessary first step toward peace.^[15]

Zelensky stated on April 22 that Ukraine does not legally recognize Russia's occupation of Crimea in accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution, which ensures Ukraine's territorial integrity and recognizes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as part of Ukraine.^[16] Svyrydenko also noted that Ukraine cannot agree to a settlement that grants Russia a "stronger foundation" to regroup and renew its aggression in the future. ISW continues to assess that freezing the front along the current lines enormously advantages Russia and increases the risks and costs to Ukraine and the West of deterring and defeating future Russian aggression.^[17] Russia's occupation of Crimea and Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts will continue to threaten Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa cities, the Ukrainian southwestern coast, and Ukrainian ships attempting to transit the western Black Sea.

Russian officials rejected aspects of Trump's reported peace plan. Russian Federation Council Chairperson Valentina Matvienko stated on April 23 that Russia will "never participate" in any negotiations that discuss the possible deployment of European troops to Ukraine and that such a

deployment is "unacceptable" to Russia, regardless of whether the peacekeeping forces deploy under the NATO framework or another "flag."^[18] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov gave an interview to French news magazine *Le Point* published on April 23 and similarly rejected the prospect of European peacekeepers in Ukraine.^[19] Peskov stated that Russia rejected the full ceasefire that Trump previously proposed because the ceasefire failed to meet all of Russia's demands, including that Ukraine cede all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts — all of which Russia has illegally declared annexed. Peskov claimed that the entirety of these four oblasts were "enshrined in our [Russian] Constitution as an integral part of Russia" and that the "war will end immediately" if Ukraine withdraws from these oblasts. Russian state-run and pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified Peskov's statements, as well as statements from other pro-Kremlin mouthpieces calling on Russia to refuse to give up any part of the four Ukrainian oblasts included in the Russian Constitution — in violation of international law and numerous treaties Russia previously signed with Ukraine.^[20]

Russian officials continue to give no indication that the Kremlin is willing to make any concessions of its own. Peskov has reiterated multiple times in the past weeks — including on April 23 — that details about peace proposals should not be publicly available, likely as part of efforts to keep the precise terms obfuscated in hopes of further delaying negotiations and extracting concessions.^[21] Russian officials have reiterated the Kremlin's demands in recent weeks, including Russia's rejection of European peacekeepers deploying to Ukraine, refusal to withdraw from any parts of occupied Ukraine, and territorial claims over areas of Ukraine that Russia does not currently occupy.^[22] Russian state media recently amplified Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo's call for additional Russian territorial control along the Dnipro River in Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts — including areas that Russian forces would have to withdraw from under the reported US proposal.^[23]

Senior US, Ukrainian, and European officials held bilateral and multilateral talks about support for Ukraine and ending the war in London on April 23, but officials cancelled the scheduled multilateral talks at the foreign minister level. The UK Foreign Office announced on April 23 that the ministerial meeting was postponed for unspecified reasons but that "official level talks" would continue.^[24] UK outlet SkyNews reported that the multilateral talks continued among senior officials but "at a much lower level" than planned.^[25] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov reported that he, Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak, and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha met with UK Foreign Minister David Lammy and UK Defense Minister John Healey in London about Ukrainian defensive capabilities and held a separate meeting with US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg on possible scenarios to end the war.^[26] The Ukrainian delegation also met with UK National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell, French Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonn, and German Chancellor's Advisor for Foreign and Security Policy Jens Plotner, and Umerov and Yermak reaffirmed Ukraine's commitment to a just and lasting peace, including to US President Donald Trump's peace initiative.^[27] Yermak stated that the April 23 meeting was a "first step" towards a full settlement process.^[28]

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff originally planned to attend the April 23 talks in London but pulled out no later than April 22.^[29] The *Washington Post* reported on April 23, citing a diplomat familiar with the talks, that European diplomats cancelled the foreign ministerial meeting after Rubio pulled out of the meeting.^[30] A US official and two European diplomats familiar with the matter told CNN on April 23 that Rubio did not attend the London talks because the Trump administration did not believe talks were "at a decisive point."^[31] A US official told Axios that "the decision was made" for Rubio to not travel to London after the United States observed indications that Ukrainian officials wanted to discuss a 30-day temporary ceasefire, as the Trump administration initially proposed in March 2025, rather than the most recent US proposal for an immediate and decisive settlement.^[32]

The US and Ukraine continue to take steps toward signing a joint mineral deal. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 22 that legal consultations between the US and Ukraine regarding the mineral deal are underway, though the date for signing the deal remains "unclear."^[33] US President Donald Trump told reporters on April 17 that the mineral deal could be signed as early as April 24.^[34] Ukrainian officials announced on April 17 that the United States and Ukraine signed a memorandum of intent outlining steps toward completing the bilateral mineral deal, but the document did not include a specific signing date.^[35]

Ukrainian forces likely conducted a drone strike against the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Republic of Tatarstan, where Russia assembles Iranian-provided Shahed drones. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, who often reports on successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian territory, stated on April 23 that it was "loud" at the Alabuga SEZ and implied that there were "somewhat successful" strikes in the area.^[36] Kovalenko noted that Russia produced over 6,000 Shahed drones and thousands of decoy drones at the Alabuga SEZ in 2024 and that Russia ordered the Alabuga SEZ to produce 8,000 to 10,000

Shaheds and 15,000 decoy drones in 2025.[37] Russian sources published footage purportedly showing a fire in Yelabuga, Republic of Tatarstan, near the Alabugza SEZ and showing Russian air defenses attempting to down drones in the area.[38] Ukrainian military observer Yuriy Butusov stated that five Ukrainian drones with 250-kilogram warheads struck the facility and that Russian forces only downed one drone.[39] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on April 23 that Russian forces shot down a drone over the Republic of Tatarstan.[40] ISW recently assessed that Russia is likely increasingly adapting its drones to overcome Ukraine's mobile fire groups that have proven successful at downing Shahed drones.[41]

Russia continues to use chemical weapons against Ukrainian forces and civilians in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), of which Russia is a signatory. Ukrainian Deputy Head of the Main Department of Anti-Mine Action, Civil Protection, and Environmental Safety Colonel Valeriy Veber reported on April 23 that Ukrainian forces recorded 767 cases of Russian forces using chemical weapons in March 2025 and 7,730 cases since February 2023.[42] The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 14 that Russian forces are dropping RG-Vo hand grenades with a type of riot control agent (RCA) onto Ukrainian positions near Shcherbakiv in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[43] Russian sources openly acknowledged that Russian forces were dropping RG-Vo grenades containing tear gas from drones as early as December 2023.[44] Ukrainian military officials also reported on April 16 and 17 that they identified a capsule with concentrated chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) gas, a type of RCA banned under the CWC, on Russian Shahed drones and that Russia may be using these drones to disperse poisonous substances among the civilian population.[45]

Key Takeaways:

- The United States reportedly recently presented Ukraine with a seven-point proposal to end the war in Ukraine in which the United States would recognize Crimea as part of Russia and allow Russian forces to continue to occupy significant parts of southern and eastern Ukraine. Available reporting about the contents of the US proposal suggests that it marks a sudden and substantial change in the Trump administration's strategy for ending the war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian officials reiterated Ukraine's continued commitment to the United States' March 2025 proposal for a full ceasefire as part of efforts to achieve a lasting peace.
- Russian officials rejected aspects of Trump's reported peace plan.
- Senior US, Ukrainian, and European officials held bilateral and multilateral talks about support for Ukraine and ending the war in London on April 23, but officials cancelled the scheduled multilateral talks at the foreign minister level.
- The US and Ukraine continue to take steps toward signing a joint mineral deal.
- Ukrainian forces likely conducted a drone strike against the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Republic of Tatarstan, where Russia assembles Iranian-provided Shahed drones.
- Russia continues to use chemical weapons against Ukrainian forces and civilians in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), of which Russia is a signatory.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova and Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 22, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, Grace Mappes, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on April 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The *Financial Times* (FT) reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin is willing to end the war in Ukraine on the current frontlines. Kremlin officials, including Putin, have repeatedly and explicitly emphasized that Russia maintains its territorial demands over all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, however, while also publicly signaling that Russia has greater territorial ambitions in Ukraine beyond these four oblasts. The FT reported on April 22 that sources familiar with the matter stated that Putin told US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff during their April 11 meeting that Russia could relinquish its claims to the Ukrainian-controlled parts of the four oblasts that Russia has formally laid claim to and illegally annexed.[1]

European officials briefed on the US efforts to end the war stated that Putin would probably use this to lure US President Donald Trump into accepting Russia's other demands and force these demands onto Ukraine as a fait accompli. Russia's "other demands" referenced by FT likely include Russia's public demands for Ukrainian neutrality, regime change, and demilitarization — Putin's pre-war demands that Kremlin officials have consistently reiterated throughout the war and during negotiations about possible ceasefires and a peace deal.[2]

Russian officials have recently repeated Putin's June 2024 demand that Ukraine cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts before Russia can agree to a ceasefire and peace negotiations.[3] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explicitly cited Putin's June 2024 speech on April 14, and Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergey Naryshkin claimed on April 15 that any future peace agreement must include the recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of the entirety of these four oblasts.[4] Russia passed constitutional amendments in October 2022 that defined the four oblasts as Russian territory, and Russian officials have recently reiterated how the Russian Constitution holds primacy over international law.[5] Russian officials have also repeatedly invoked the term "Novorossiya" when talking about Russian-occupied and Russian-claimed territory in southern Ukraine, with Putin most recently using the term on April 21.[6] Novorossiya is an invented region in Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all of southern and eastern Ukraine and is an "integral" part of Russia. A senior Russian occupation official, recently on April 21, called for Russia to control areas of southern Ukraine near the Dnipro River, including territory in oblasts that Russia has not formally claimed or illegally annexed.[7] Russian officials, including Putin, have also labelled Odesa City a "Russian city" that has nothing to do with Ukraine.[8] Kremlin newswire TASS has notably begun, as of April 2025, to characterize any Kremlin statements about Russian-claimed territory in Ukraine as about "Donbas and Novorossiya," likely as part of Kremlin efforts to set conditions for Russian society to expect Russia to achieve extensive territorial concessions in Ukraine.[9]

The Moscow Times reported that the Kremlin is attempting to use economic incentives to sway US-Russian talks about the war in Ukraine, as the Kremlin is not sincerely interested in US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war. ISW cannot independently verify Kremlin sources' statements, but recent Kremlin behavior is consistent with the *Moscow Times'* insider reporting. Independent Russian outlet the *Moscow Times* reported on April 21 that five current Russian government officials, including two diplomats and three sources close to the Kremlin who are employees of three major state-owned companies, stated that the Kremlin is looking for incentives to "hold...Trump's attention." [10] One current Russian government official stated that Russian authorities are working "in full swing" to prepare proposals for Trump across "key economic sectors." One source who has participated in the Kremlin discussions on the matter stated that Russia "needs to milk Trump as much as possible, dangling the possibility of a ceasefire like a carrot before him." A Russian diplomat stated that the Kremlin's priority is to "recalibrate" relations with the United States while keeping dialogue about the war in Ukraine "alive." The *Moscow Times* reported that the official Russian sources see two main scenarios that could unfold: either Russia agrees to a Trump-brokered ceasefire in exchange for concessions, such as limitations on US weapons supplies to Ukraine, or Russia will blame Ukraine should talks collapse.[11]

Russia has recently offered the United States economic incentives that are unrelated to Russia's war in Ukraine, likely as part of efforts to extract concessions from the United States about Russia's war in Ukraine.[12] Russian Presidential Aide Nikolai Patrushev, for example, called for the United States and Russia to jointly work to solve problems in the Arctic in an April 21 article in Russian business outlet *Kommersant*. [13] This Russian effort goes against the Trump administration's desired timeline of events, as the White House has stated that the United States "needs to see a ceasefire first" before developing US-Russian economic partnerships.[14] Kremlin officials have claimed that Russia is willing to negotiate to end the war in Ukraine while attempting to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress towards ending the war.[15] Putin, however, has rejected multiple full or temporary ceasefire offers that the United States and Ukraine have proposed. Putin rejected the March 18 US-Ukrainian proposed temporary ceasefire along the entire frontline; refused to extend the unilateral Russian Easter truce on April 21, despite both US and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's support for such an extension; and rejected Zelensky's recent proposal for a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure.[16] Putin has already started to question whether Ukraine would be able to receive military aid from its allies in the event of a temporary full ceasefire — possibly to set conditions to demand the cessation of United States and likely also European weapons supplies to Ukraine as a condition for accepting a full ceasefire.[17]

Any potential future Russian agreement to freeze the front short of Russia's full control of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts does not preclude future Russian aggression to achieve Russia's more extensive territorial demands, especially if the agreement stipulates a moratorium on Ukraine receiving Western military aid. A Russian diplomat reportedly

told the *Moscow Times* that "the situation on the ground will dictate the next moves" in US-Russian talks about the war and that "it is all about time, patience, and staying the course."^[18] The current frontlines do not provide the strategic depth that Ukraine will need to reliably defend against renewed Russian aggression, as Russian forces are just across the Dnipro River from Kherson City, roughly 25 kilometers from Zaporizhzhia City, and 20 kilometers from Kharkiv City.^[19] Russia has notably intensified its use of armored vehicles across the frontline and appears to have started a likely years' long effort to seize Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast - likely as part of efforts to gain as much territory as possible in eastern and southern Ukraine, particularly in the four oblasts to which Russia has formally laid claim.^[20] Russia may tactically and temporarily stop pushing for Putin's demands for the Ukrainian-controlled areas of the four illegally annexed oblasts in southern and eastern Ukraine in order to extract other concessions from the United States under the rubric of negotiations. Such concessions could be Russia's "other demands" of installing a pro-Russian government in Kyiv and drastically shrinking the Ukrainian military in order to decrease resistance against renewed Russian aggression. The Kremlin will likely exploit any ceasefire predicated on limitations on US weapons supplies to Ukraine to prepare for renewed aggression.

Kremlin officials continued efforts on April 22 to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress towards Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's proposed temporary ceasefire on strikes against civilian infrastructure. Zelensky reiterated on April 21 that Ukraine remains ready and willing to discuss Zelensky's recent proposal for a 30-day ceasefire on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure.^[21] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 22, after Zelensky's April 21 statement, that Ukraine has yet to respond to Russian President Vladimir Putin's repeated statements signaling Russia's willingness to discuss such a ceasefire with Ukraine and that Russia first needs to understand if Ukraine is ready for such discussions.^[22] Peskov claimed that there are no plans to discuss the proposed ceasefire and that Ukraine must remove its "obstacles" to contacts with Russia before bilateral discussions can begin, in reference to Zelensky's September 2022 decree banning negotiations with Putin after Putin's illegal annexation of parts of eastern and southern Ukraine.^[23] Zelensky has repeatedly signaled his willingness to negotiate with Russia in recent months, however.^[24] Peskov reiterated Putin's April 21 claims that Russia needs to "sort out" and study cases where there have been strikes against civilian infrastructure where military personnel were operating before agreeing to Zelensky's proposal.^[25] Peskov's April 22 claims are in line with the *Moscow Times'* reporting that the Kremlin will attempt to blame Ukraine should talks to end the war fall apart and that the Kremlin is "dangling the possibility of a ceasefire like a carrot before [Trump]."^[26]

The Kremlin continues to reject Trump's stated goal of achieving a ceasefire in Ukraine before a full peace settlement to end the war — in contrast to Ukraine's continued support for a general ceasefire. US President Donald Trump expressed hope on April 20 that Russia and Ukraine would make a deal this week, possibly referring to a general ceasefire agreement that would precede future peace negotiations.^[27] Zelensky stated on April 21 that a ceasefire "should be the first step towards a reliable and lasting peace" and that only after Ukraine and Russia demonstrate adherence to an agreed upon ceasefire can the parties establish the trust necessary to resolve "fundamental issues."^[28] Peskov claimed on April 22 that Russia and the United States maintain communication via several channels but that "it is probably not worth setting any strict time frames" or "trying to fit a viable settlement [to the war] into short time frame" as "the topic is so complex."^[29] Zelensky's and Peskov's statements continue to demonstrate Ukraine's willingness to adhere to Trump's desired plans to end the war and Russia's rejection of these desired plans.^[30]

Russian forces continue to innovate their long-range drone strike tactics in order to offset the effectiveness of Ukrainian mobile defense units. Russian milbloggers claimed on April 22 that Russian forces conducted a strike against Odesa City on April 21 with Geran-3 jet kamikaze drones (Russia's analogue to the Iranian Shahed-238), which reportedly has a maximum speed of 500 to 600 kilometers per hour.^[31] One milblogger claimed that the Geran-3 drone may have a new compact turbojet engine or may have a slightly modified version of the previous engine.^[32] Other milbloggers claimed that the Geran-3 drones flew at higher altitudes than previous drone models during the Odesa City strike, allowing them to avoid Ukrainian mobile defense units. The milbloggers claimed that Russian forces directed multiple Geran drones from different directions toward a single target in Odesa City and that the drones waited in a designated area near the target while other drones conducted additional reconnaissance for target adjustment. The drones then reportedly conducted a concentrated strike against the target, hitting simultaneously and from different directions. Ukrainian sources and German outlet *BILD* similarly reported in late March and early April 2025 that Russian forces are loitering long-range drones at high altitudes several kilometers from large Ukrainian cities and other targets before conducting synchronized strikes with multiple drones in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses.^[33] It is unclear if the Geran-3 that Russian forces used in the April 21 Odesa City strike is a new modified version, if Russian forces have only changed their tactics for employing the drone, or both. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on April 22 that Russia recently increased its production of Geran-type drones and has begun

using swarm tactics during drone strikes.[34] ISW previously reported that Russians started producing and using their own Shahed-131 and Shahed-136 analogues (which Russia calls Geran-1 and Geran-2, respectively) with imported Iranian components and using Iranian production licenses as early as summer 2023 and began producing the Geran-3 drone in early 2024.[35] ISW also recently collected reports that Russian forces have begun to equip Shahed drones with concentrated chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) gas (a type of riot control agent [RCA] banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention [CWC], to which Russia is a signatory), likely to inflict damage on Ukrainian forces or civilians even after Ukrainian troops shoot down the drones.[36] Ukrainian forces have proven highly effective at shooting down Russia's long-range drones using mobile air defense units, and Russia is likely looking for different ways to overcome these effective Ukrainian air defenders.[37] Russian forces will likely seek to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems by increasing the number of Shahed and Geran drones used in Russian strike packages, continuing to implement swarm strikes, and further adapting drones to penetrate Ukraine's air defenses to inflict maximum damage.

Russia is reportedly recruiting North Korean citizens to compensate for labor shortages in Russia, indicating that Russian-North Korean cooperation continues to deepen. Ryazan Oblast news outlet Ya62 reported on February 15 that Ryazan Oblast Telegram channels reported that over 100 North Korean women signed three-year contracts to work at one of the Ryazan Oblast warehouses of Russian retail giant Wildberries (the Russian equivalent of Amazon), but Ya62 noted that this information is unconfirmed.[38] Russian opposition student journal DOXA reported that there is a video circulated among Wildberries employees reportedly showing North Korean women at a Wildberries warehouse in Elektrostal, Moscow Oblast, and a local Telegram channel claimed on April 15 that former Wildberries employees reported there are "hundreds" of North Koreans working at the Elektrostal warehouse.[39] DOXA reported that a Wildberries representative did not confirm whether the workers in the Elektrostal video were North Korean but stated that Wildberries is working with a recruiting agency to attract workers from unspecified countries.[40] Russian milbloggers amplified much of this reporting on April 21 and 22 and praised Russia's and Wildberries' efforts to recruit North Korean workers for jobs in Russia to offset ongoing labor shortages.[41] The milbloggers praised North Korean migrants as better than migrants from Central Asian countries, claiming that North Korean migrants only work in Russia on short-term contracts instead of migrating permanently, are more "disciplined" and work harder for less pay and longer hours, are less biased against Russia, and "behave decently" — a reference to frequent Russian ultranationalist and xenophobic complaints that Central Asian migrant communities in Russia fail to assimilate into Russian cultural and legal norms. ISW has observed indicators that Russia is preparing for an influx of North Korean citizens to arrive in Russia, likely to either join the Russian workforce or join the Russian military, and ease some economic constraints of Russia's war effort.[42] Russian official data shows that 13,221 North Koreans entered Russia in 2024 — up to 12 times the number that entered Russia in 2023 — and that 7,887 of these North Koreans entered Russia on student visas, with the largest number entering Russia in the months immediately before the deployment of North Korean troops to Russia.[43] A significant increase in the number of North Koreans working in the Russian civilian sectors could free up Russia's civilian sector employees to work in the Russian defense industry or fight against Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- The *Financial Times* (FT) reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin is willing to end the war in Ukraine on the current frontlines. Kremlin officials, including Putin, have repeatedly and explicitly emphasized that Russia maintains its territorial demands over all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, however, while also publicly signaling that Russia has greater territorial ambitions in Ukraine beyond these four oblasts.
- The *Moscow Times* reported that the Kremlin is attempting to use economic incentives to sway US-Russian talks about the war in Ukraine as the Kremlin is not sincerely interested in US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war. ISW cannot independently verify Kremlin sources' statements, but recent Kremlin behavior is consistent with the *Moscow Times'* insider reporting.
- Any potential future Russian agreement to freeze the front short of Russia's full control of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts does not preclude future Russian aggression to achieve Russia's more extensive territorial demands, especially if the agreement stipulates a moratorium on Ukraine receiving Western military aid.
- Kremlin officials continued efforts on April 22 to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress towards Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's proposed temporary ceasefire on strikes against civilian infrastructure.
- The Kremlin continues to reject Trump's stated goal of achieving a ceasefire in Ukraine before a full peace settlement to end the war – in contrast to Ukraine's continued support for a general ceasefire.

- Russian forces continue to innovate their long-range drone strike tactics in order to offset the effectiveness of Ukrainian mobile defense units.
- Russia is reportedly recruiting North Korean citizens to compensate for labor shortages in Russia, indicating that Russian-North Korean cooperation continues to deepen.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 21, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

April 21, 2025, 6 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11am ET on April 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

[Note: The Ukrainian General Staff's 0800 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0800 on the previous day to 0800 on the current day, the 1600 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0000 to 1600, and the 2200 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0000 to 2200. Any reports of Russian ground activity in the Ukrainian General Staff's April 20, 2200 SITREP are by default an accusation of Russia's 30-hour unilateral Easter truce that started at 1800 Moscow time on April 19. ISW is unable to assess whether Russian attacks reported in the Ukrainian General Staff's April 21, 0800 SITREP occurred after the end of the truce.]

Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's April 20 proposal for a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure, declined Zelensky's offer to extend Putin's own 30-hour Easter truce, and attempted to justify recent Russian strikes against civilian targets in Ukraine. Zelensky stated on April 20 that Ukraine and Russia achieved a long-range strikes ceasefire between April 19 and 20 and during the day on April 20 and proposed a temporary ceasefire on long-range missile and drone strikes against civilian infrastructure for a minimum of 30 days, with the opportunity to extend the ceasefire beyond 30 days. [1] Putin announced the end of the Easter truce on April 21 and rejected Zelensky's proposed temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure while speaking to journalists, stating that Russia would need to "sort out" the proposed civilian infrastructure strikes moratorium.[2] Putin attempted to soften his rejection of Zelensky's ceasefire proposal by claiming that Russia and other unspecified actors need to study strikes against civilian targets where military personnel are operating and "make appropriate decisions." Putin did not suggest the possibility of creating independent monitoring mechanisms to determine the legitimacy of such strikes, and Russian officials have previously expressed disinterest in Western-led monitoring mechanisms as a condition of future ceasefires in Ukraine.[3] Putin also attempted to justify Russia's recent missile strikes against Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and to obfuscate his ongoing rejection of US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals. Putin acknowledged that Russian forces recently struck civilian infrastructure in Sumy City — likely referring to the April 13 Russian missile strike against Sumy City — but suggested that the reported presence of Ukrainian military personnel in Sumy City constituted a legitimate military target. [4] Putin claimed that Russian forces also targeted Ukrainian military personnel during a recent Russian strike against Odesa City.

Putin reiterated his rejection of the full ceasefire that Zelensky and the US have offered.

Zelensky reiterated on April 20 Ukraine's readiness to agree to a full and unconditional ceasefire for a minimum of 30 days.[5] Putin rejected the full ceasefire proposal on April 21, claiming that Ukraine was attempting to "seize the initiative and talk about expand[ing]" the ceasefire, and alleging that Russia would need to "carefully evaluate everything."
[6] Ukraine and the United States initially proposed a full ceasefire on March 13, and Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly rejected the proposal over the past five weeks.
[7] The US Department of State told *Reuters* on April 20 that the United States would welcome the extension of the Easter truce, however.
[8] US President Donald Trump expressed hope on April 20 that Russia and Ukraine would make a deal this week, possibly referring to a general ceasefire agreement that would precede future peace negotiations.
[9] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov appeared to respond to Trump's statement by stating that the Kremlin is not ready to discuss a time frame to end the war.
[10] Putin's continued rejection of the US-Ukrainian March 2025 proposed general ceasefire and the Kremlin's refusal to commit to any time frame to end the war highlight Putin's disinterest in ending the war via peace negotiations in the near term.
[11]

Putin's continued rejection of US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals runs counter to Trump's stated approach of first establishing a ceasefire and then negotiating a broader peace agreement and to Trump's goal of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Russian state media amplified Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo's calls for additional territorial concessions from Ukraine in areas to which Russia has not yet laid formal claim. Saldo stated on April 21 to Kremlin newswire TASS that the "return" of the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River is "fundamentally important" and an "absolute priority" for Russia.^[12] Saldo claimed that Ukrainian forces will continue efforts to use the east (left) bank of the river as a "lever of pressure" against Russia and that the presence of Ukrainian forces on the west bank hinders the resumption of shipping along the river. Saldo concluded that "the segment of the [Dnipro River] that passes through Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts must be completely under [Russian] control" so as to guarantee the development of infrastructure "associated with the river." Russian forces only currently occupy positions on the east bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts, yet Russian President Vladimir Putin has consistently demanded since June 2024 that Ukraine cede all of Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts to Russia.^[13] Saldo appears to be calling for additional Russian territorial claims along the river in central Dnipropetrovsk Oblast — an oblast that Russia has not formally claimed or illegally annexed. It is unclear how much territory along the banks of the river in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Saldo is claiming must be under Russian control or if Saldo is implying that Russian forces must occupy extensive territory east and northeast of the river such that Russia "completely control" the river and its immediate surrounding areas. Russian forces may want to control a minimum 25 kilometers of territory on both banks of the Dnipro River so as to prevent Ukrainian forces from conducting tube artillery strikes against the area.

Saldo's call for additional Russian territorial claims along the Dnipro River is consistent with other Kremlin official statements, as Russia continues to make extensive territorial demands of Ukraine while offering no concessions of its own. Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts are notably included in the amorphous, invented region of "Novorossiya" that Kremlin officials often claim is "integral" to Russia and invoke to make additional territorial claims in southern Ukraine.^[14] Putin invoked the term "Novorossiya" on April 21 at the "Service" All-Russian Municipal Award Ceremony, claiming that municipal workers are working in very difficult conditions "in the regions of Donbas and Novorossiya."^[15] Putin has previously instructed Russian forces to create "buffer zones" in areas of Ukraine to which Russia has not formally laid claim, including in Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts.^[16] Saldo's call for Russian control of areas in Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts along the Dnipro River to "guarantee the development of infrastructure" would be consistent with Putin's previous objectives concerning the creation of "buffer zones."

Kremlin officials continued to reiterate Russia's pre-war demands on April 21. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 21 that Ukraine's potential membership in NATO would threaten Russia's national interests and that this is one of the "root causes" of the war.^[17] Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that any peace settlement in Ukraine needs to eliminate the "root causes" of the war, including NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward.^[18] Saldo's and Peskov's statements demonstrate how Russian officials continue to claim that Russia's pre-war demands are non-negotiable while also making increasingly extensive territorial demands of Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's April 20 proposal for a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure, declined Zelensky's offer to extend Putin's own 30-hour Easter truce, and attempted to justify recent Russian strikes against civilian targets in Ukraine.
- Putin reiterated his rejection of the full ceasefire that Zelensky and the US have offered.
- Russian state media amplified Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo's calls for additional territorial concessions from Ukraine in areas to which Russia has not yet laid formal claim.
- Saldo's call for additional Russian territorial claims along the Dnipro River is consistent with other Kremlin official statements, as Russia continues to make extensive territorial demands of Ukraine while offering no concessions of its own.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman and Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 20, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Daria Novikov, Olivia Gibson, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, and Kateryna Stepanenko with William Runkel

April 20, 2025, 5:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11am ET on April 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

[Note: The Ukrainian General Staff's 0800 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0800 on the previous day to 0800 on the current day, and the 2200 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0000 to 2200. ISW is unable to assess whether Russian attacks reported in these SITREPs occurred after Russia's 30-hour unilateral Easter truce that started at 1800 Moscow time on April 19. The Ukrainian General Staff's 1600 SITREP appears to cover battlefield activity from 0000 to 1600, and any reports of Russian ground activity in the Ukrainian General Staff's April 20, 1600 SITREP are by default an accusation of truce violations.]

The snap Russian-proposed Easter truce underscores the necessity that the text of any ceasefire or peace agreement be publicly available, formally agreed to in advance by all parties, and include robust monitoring mechanisms. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported at 2000 local time April 20 that Russian forces in "all main frontline directions" conducted ground attacks and drone and artillery strikes against Ukrainian forces in violation of Russian President Vladimir Putin's 30-hour unilateral truce from 1800 Moscow time on April 19 to 0000 Moscow time on April 21.[1] Zelensky also stated on April 20 that Russian forces conducted attacks in the Siversk, Toretsk, and Zaporizhia directions and are conducting offensive operations most intensely in the Pokrovsk direction.[2] Zelensky's statement from 1600 local time April 20 also reported Russian truce violations in Kursk Oblast, although Zelensky stated earlier at 0000 local time April 20 that Putin did not extend the truce to Kursk or Belgorod oblasts.[3] Zelensky reiterated that an effective ceasefire agreement must provide monitoring mechanisms of potential violations and that Ukrainian forces will respond "symmetrically" to Russian assaults.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on April 20 that Russian forces had "strictly" observed the truce and claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted drone and artillery strikes against Russian positions and Russian-occupied settlements since the truce began.[5] Ukrainian and Russian sources noted that fighting abated but did not fully cease in some directions, including the Kupyansk, Pokrovsk, and Toretsk directions, and that fighting in other directions temporarily ceased around 1800 on April 19 but has since resumed with variable frequency and intensity.[6] NASA Fire Information for Resource Management (FIRMS) data shows satellite-detected heat anomalies along the frontline on April 20 that may suggest military activity, but ISW is unable to independently verify the specific reports of violations made by Russian or Ukrainian sources.

Zelensky reported that Russian forces did not conduct long-range strikes against Ukraine on the night of April 19 to 20 and during the day on April 20 and proposed a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure.[7] Zelensky stated that Ukraine and Russia achieved a long-range strikes ceasefire between April 19 and 20 and during the day on April 20 and such a ceasefire is the easiest to extend. Zelensky proposed a temporary ceasefire on long-range missile and drone strikes against civilian infrastructure for a minimum of 30 days, with the opportunity to extend the ceasefire beyond 30 days. Russia and Ukraine repeatedly accused each other of violating the temporary energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire, but Putin and other senior Russian officials have repeatedly rejected the March 13 joint US-Ukrainian 30-day full ceasefire proposal over the last five weeks.[8] A temporary civilian infrastructure strikes ceasefire agreement — and especially a general ceasefire agreement — would require robust monitoring mechanisms, public and formal terms, and a clearly defined time frame. The Kremlin may continue to leverage any vague future ceasefire agreements to obfuscate Russia's rejection of US and Ukrainian ceasefire proposals and to accuse Ukraine of violating such ceasefire terms.[9]

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Russia's systematic persecution of religious communities throughout occupied Ukraine, including against Christians. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on April 20 that Russian forces have killed or tortured 67 Ukrainian priests, pastors, and monks and destroyed 640 religious sites, most of which are Christian sites, since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.[10] ISW has previously reported on Russia's religious oppression in occupied Ukraine, including arbitrary detention and assassinations of Ukrainian clergy or religious leaders and the looting, desecration, and deliberate destruction of places of worship.[11] ISW has also reported at length on Russia's systematic repression of Orthodox Church of Ukraine and other religious minorities, particularly Ukrainian Protestants and Baptists, who have faced Russian brutality and other repressions throughout Ukraine.[12]

The Kremlin continues to repurpose narratives that Russian officials have repeatedly used to justify Russia's invasions of Ukraine in an effort to further militarize Russian society in the long term, likely in preparation for a potential future protracted conflict with NATO. Russian state journalist Pavel Zarubin asked Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov a question on April 20 about the EU's recommendation that European leaders refrain from attending Russia's May 9 Victory Day Parade in Moscow.[13] (Victory Day is Russia's principal patriotic holiday and commemorates the Soviet Union's contributions to victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War, known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War.) Lavrov accused the EU of stoking "neo-Nazi ideology" in Europe and stated that Russia "will make every effort to ensure that this ideology does not raise its head," and will destroy Nazism "once and for all." Lavrov's statements are part of a long-standing Kremlin effort to invoke the Soviet Union's contributions to victory over Nazi Germany and the wider mythos of the Great Patriotic War and vilify Europe and NATO. These efforts aim to exacerbate negative sentiments among Russia's population and drum up support for the militarization of Russian society in the long term.[14] The Kremlin has previously appealed to the mythos of the Great Patriotic War to persuade the Russian population that their increasing social and economic sacrifices for the Russian war effort in Ukraine can help achieve overwhelming victory.[15] Russian President Vladimir Putin and other high-ranking Kremlin officials regularly invoke the vague term of "denazification" to call for regime change in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government, and Putin leveraged claims that supposed Nazis control the Ukrainian government to justify the full-scale invasion in February 2022. [16] The Kremlin is increasingly employing the same playbook that it used against Ukraine towards Finland and former Soviet states, including Estonia and Moldova to justify its attempts to control independent countries and set informational conditions for possible future Russian aggression.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- The snap Russian-proposed Easter truce underscores the necessity that the text of any ceasefire or peace agreement be publicly available, formally agreed to in advance by all parties, and include robust monitoring mechanisms.
- Zelensky reported that Russian forces did not conduct long-range strikes against Ukraine on the night of April 19 to 20 and during the day on April 20 and proposed a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against civilian infrastructure.
- Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Russia's systematic persecution of religious communities throughout occupied Ukraine, including against Christians.
- The Kremlin continues to repurpose narratives that Russian officials have repeatedly used to justify Russia's invasions of Ukraine in an effort to further militarize Russian society in the long term, likely in preparation for a potential future protracted conflict with NATO.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk before the start of the Easter truce.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 19, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky proposed extending Russian President Vladimir Putin's 30-hour unilateral truce on Russian military operations in Ukraine to a complete and unconditional 30-day ceasefire. Putin ordered Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov to officially halt all Russian military actions in Ukraine on April 19, effective from 1800 Moscow time on April 19 until 0000 Moscow time on April 21.[1] Putin stated that Russia will "assume that the Ukrainian side will follow [Russia's] example" while ordering Russian forces to "be ready to repel possible violations of the truce" by Ukrainian forces. Zelensky responded to Putin's order later on April 19 and proposed that Russia and Ukraine extend Putin's 30-hour truce to a "complete and unconditional" 30-day ceasefire if Russian forces actually cease all military operations. [2] Zelensky stated that Ukraine will "mirror" Russia's response and accused Russia of imposing the 30-hour truce for "headlines" rather than demonstrating genuine confidence-building measures. Zelensky reported that, according to Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi, Russian forces continue assault operations and shelling in several unspecified areas of the frontline. This truce is unlikely to hold given that Russian forces appear to have continued limited offensive operations and indiscriminate shelling across the frontline in the first few hours of the truce and given Russia's continued rejection of a full ceasefire. The United States and Ukraine jointly proposed

implementing an immediate 30-day full ceasefire to Russia on March 13, but Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly rejected the proposal since then.[3]

Putin stated that the temporary truce will demonstrate whether Ukraine is willing to comply with agreements and participate in peace negotiations "aimed at eliminating the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis." [4] Russian officials regularly invoke the "root causes" phrase to allude to Russia's unyielding demands for NATO to abandon its open-door policy and for regime change in Ukraine. [5] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces will observe the Easter truce provided that Ukrainian forces reciprocate. [6] It is unlikely that Russian officials and military commanders effectively communicated plans to implement the temporary truce to frontline units or Ukrainian officials prior to Putin's announcement. Russia's prior well-evidenced behavior regarding the temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure indicates that Russian officials likely intend to continue making unsubstantiated allegations of Ukrainian truce violations. [7] Russia, in this sense, is likely leveraging its unilateral implementation of a temporary truce in Ukraine to introduce informational conditions that will act as a pretext to support Russia's continued efforts to undermine and discredit Ukraine. Russia may exploit unsubstantiated claims of Ukrainian truce violations to undermine support for the proposed peace framework that the United States presented in Paris, France, on April 17. Russia is also likely attempting to curry favor with the United States and portray itself as an agreeable negotiating partner in direct response to US President Donald Trump's recent remarks that the United States will reconsider its role in brokering peace in Ukraine, depending on how the peace process develops in the coming days. [8]

US officials are reportedly growing frustrated with the Kremlin's rejections of US proposals to end the war in Ukraine. The *New York Times* (NYT), citing European officials who were familiar with the US discussions in Paris on April 17, reported on April 18 that the US stance on a ceasefire remains largely the same but that Russian officials have "dragged their feet" and insisted on additional conditions for US President Donald Trump's proposed unconditional general ceasefire, including the "denazification" of Ukraine. [9] Russian President Vladimir Putin named "denazification" as one of his main goals in launching his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Russian officials have previously defined "denazification" as the "liquidation of those who instill" Russophobia in other people. [10] Putin and other Kremlin officials have since reiterated this demand for "denazification" to call for regime change in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government. [11] Axios reported on April 18 that two European diplomats stated that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told UK, German, and French diplomats that President Trump is "losing his patience" and may withdraw from the peace process if a peace deal is not concluded "soon." [12] Trump stated on April 18 that he hopes to conclude a peace deal in Ukraine "quickly" and that if either Ukraine or Russia "makes it very difficult," then "we're just going to take a pass." [13] CNN reported on April 18 that a source familiar with the Trump administration stated that the Trump administration is attempting to plan another meeting between US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Russian authorities to discuss the proposed framework. [14]

Ukraine and Russia conducted the largest prisoner of war (POW) exchange on April 19 since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on April 19 that Ukrainian authorities returned 277 Ukrainian POWs, comprised of members of the Ukrainian forces, National Guard, State Transport Service, and Border Guard, from Russian captivity. [15] Zelensky thanked the United Arab Emirates for mediating the POW exchange with Russia and noted that Ukrainian authorities have returned a total of 4,552 Ukrainian civilians and soldiers from Russian captivity since the start of the war in February 2022. The Russian MoD claimed on April 19 that Russia and Ukraine conducted a 246-to -246 POW exchange and that Russia transferred an additional 31 wounded Ukrainian POWs to Ukraine in exchange for 15 wounded Russian POWs. [16]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky proposed extending Russian President Vladimir Putin's 30-hour unilateral truce on Russian military operations in Ukraine to a complete and unconditional 30-day ceasefire.
- US officials are reportedly growing frustrated with the Kremlin's rejections of US proposals to end the war in Ukraine.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted the largest prisoner of war (POW) exchange on April 19 since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 18, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Daria Novikov, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Anna Harvey, and Karolina Hird with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 18, 2025, 8pm ET

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebenzya reiterated

Russian President Vladimir Putin's rejection of a general ceasefire in Ukraine. Nebenzya claimed on April 18 that discussing a general ceasefire in Ukraine is "unrealistic" and accused Ukraine of not observing the temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure over the last month.[1] Putin rejected the joint US-Ukrainian 30-day full ceasefire proposal during a phone call with US President Donald Trump on March 18, and senior Russian officials have reiterated Putin's rejection since then, attempting to deflect blame onto Ukraine and extract additional bilateral concessions from the United States.[2] ISW previously noted that any future general ceasefire agreement must include robust monitoring mechanisms, given the Kremlin's efforts to claim that Ukraine was violating the temporary strikes ceasefire without providing evidence, and that it is unclear if Russian officials will accept any meaningful monitoring mechanisms.[3]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced that the temporary ceasefire on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure ended on April 18.[4] Peskov responded to a question about whether Russia will resume strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities and claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin has not issued further instructions. Russian officials have not expressed any interest in extending the temporary strikes ceasefire and the actual terms of the ceasefire remain unclear due to the lack of formal, publicly available, joint ceasefire documents. Russian officials accused Ukraine of violating the temporary strikes ceasefire almost daily over the last month, but provided no evidence for most of these accusations.[5]

ISW previously assessed that Russia may intensify its long-range strikes against Ukraine following the end of the strikes moratorium, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned at an event for Ukrainian energy workers on April 17 that Russia may intensify strikes on Ukraine around Easter (April 20).[6] It remains unclear how the ending of the temporary strikes ceasefire may impact Russia's nightly strikes against Ukraine, as the specifics of Putin's previous order to stop strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure also remain unclear. Putin claimed to have issued an order to the Russian military immediately following his March 18 phone call with President Trump to stop strikes on energy infrastructure facilities, but Russian officials have provided no further context about the duration or other specifics of this supposed order.[7]

Kremlin mouthpieces continue to reject all US proposals to end the war in Ukraine that do not concede to all of Russia's demands for Ukraine, including regime change, demilitarization, and significant territorial concessions. Russian propagandist and RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan responded on April 18 to Bloomberg's report that the United States proposed freezing the war on the current frontlines, leaving occupied Ukraine "under Moscow's control," and taking Ukraine's NATO membership "off the table" as part of a plan to end the war and claimed that this plan is a "bad deal for Russia."^[8] Simonyan claimed that Russia should reject this plan because the plan does not include terms for Ukraine's "denazification" or a formal recognition of occupied Ukraine as part of Russia, and additionally does not include assurances that Europe will not deploy a potential European peacekeeping contingent to Ukraine. Simonyan also attempted to delegitimize Ukraine and the United States as negotiating partners and claimed that "there can be no negotiating with the insane" in reference to the plan and the Ukrainian government. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev urged the United States to "wash its hands" of the war in Ukraine and let Russia "figure it out faster" in a social media post on April 18.^[9]

Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have repeatedly stated that they are unwilling to accept any agreement that does not concede to all of Russia's territorial and political demands for Ukraine.^[10] US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff told the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) in an article published on April 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin has been "fixated" on territorial concessions during their bilateral meetings, indicating that Russian officials likely continue to reiterate their territorial and political demands about Ukraine both in public and in private.^[11] Russian officials have noted that Putin remains committed to accomplishing all his goals in Ukraine, which Putin has explicitly defined in part as the "denazification" and demilitarization of Ukraine.^[12] Russian officials often invoke the term "denazification" to call for regime change in Ukraine and to demand the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv. ISW previously noted that Russia demanded in the April 2022 Istanbul Protocol draft agreement that Ukraine shrink its

military beyond pre-2022 levels and commit to never fielding a military capable of defending the country against future Russian aggression.[13] Putin has also called for Ukraine to concede unoccupied territory to Russia, and Russian officials appear to be considering these demands as the Kremlin's standing guidance on negotiations.[14]

Russian officials' continued insistence on these demands has also set conditions for Russian society to expect these demands to be fulfilled in any conclusion of the war in Ukraine, and Kremlin mouthpieces stating explicitly that these demands must be met even in a peace deal favorable to Russia is a reflection of this long-term rhetorical line. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin maintains its long-standing goals in Ukraine, and Russian officials continue to indicate and explicitly state that they are unwilling to compromise on these goals.[15]

Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian demands for the elimination of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as a precondition for a peace agreement — a reference to Russia's initial war demands that directly contradict US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated during an April 17 phone call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio the Kremlin's demand that any US-Russian efforts to end the war in Ukraine must "comprehensively" address the so-called "root causes" of the war.[16] Lavrov has previously defined these so-called "root causes" as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and the Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[17] These so-called "root causes" are a reference to Russia's pre-war demands that effectively amount to Ukraine's full capitulation and the installation of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine.

Kremlin officials are likely engaging in bilateral discussions with US officials to maintain the appearance of being interested in good-faith peace negotiations, but Russian officials' commitment to their pre-war demands and other efforts to prolong negotiations continue to indicate otherwise.[18] Ukraine, however, continues to indicate it is willing to negotiate a lasting peace.[19] The US Department of State (DoS) reported on April 17 that Rubio told Lavrov that US President Donald Trump wants the war in Ukraine to end and that US negotiators presented and received an "encouraging" response to "outlines of a durable and lasting peace" at meetings between representatives of Ukraine and its Western partners in Paris on April 17.[20]

Ukrainian officials held bilateral talks with US officials and multilateral talks with Coalition of the Willing partners in Paris, France, on April 16 to 18 regarding peace negotiations. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff, and US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg met with Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha to discuss implementing first an unconditional ceasefire and then the broader process of establishing a just and enduring peace in Ukraine – fully in line with US President Donald Trump's stated timeline of negotiations to end the war.[21] The Ukrainian delegation reiterated Ukraine's long-standing commitment to working with the United States, Europe, and other partners to establish peace in Ukraine. Rubio stated on April 18 that the US delegation proposed a "framework" for ending the war to the Ukrainian representatives and noted that if the United States determines "within a matter of days" that the war in Ukraine can be resolved, then the United States is prepared to facilitate, but if not, then President Trump is "probably at a point where he's going to say, well, we're done."[22] It remains unclear what Rubio means, however.

The Ukrainian delegation also met with representatives of the United Kingdom, Germany, and France in the Coalition of the Willing framework to discuss the next steps for working towards peace in Ukraine.[23] The Ukrainian delegation reaffirmed its dedication to establishing an unconditional ceasefire. Coalition of the Willing and Ukrainian delegations agreed that a "complete and unconditional ceasefire should be the first stage on the path to sustainable peace in Ukraine."[24]

Ukrainian officials announced on April 17 that the United States and Ukraine signed a memorandum of intent to conclude a future bilateral mineral deal and enhance economic cooperation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on April 17 that Ukraine was ready to sign the memorandum of intent and proceed with the first steps towards the conclusion of a bilateral US-Ukrainian mineral deal.[25] Ukrainian Economic Minister Yulia Svyrydenko confirmed later on April 17 that Ukraine and the United States finalized and signed the memorandum of intent, and Ukraine's Ministry of Economy published the full text of the memorandum.[26]

Russian forces conducted a ballistic missile strike against civilian areas in Kharkiv City on April 18, the latest in a string of high-casualty Russian strikes against civilian areas in Ukraine in recent weeks. Ukrainian officials reported on April 18 that Russian forces struck a residential area in Kharkiv City with three Iskander-M ballistic missiles, killing at least one civilian, injuring at least 98,

and damaging at least 21 apartment buildings, 40 houses, a civilian enterprise, two schools, and two children's centers.[27] Kharkiv City Mayor Ihor Terekhov reported that the ballistic missiles were equipped with cluster munitions, which resulted in widespread damage.[28]

Russian forces have conducted several devastating strikes against Ukrainian cities since April 1. Russian ballistic missiles with cluster munition warheads struck Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, causing at least 89 casualties on April 4, and Russian Shahed drones struck Kharkiv City and caused 39 casualties on the same day.[29] Russian ballistic missiles struck Sumy City on April 13 and caused at least 100 casualties.[30] A Russian ballistic missile strike on Dnipro City on April 17 caused at least 31 casualties.[31] Russian forces have been adjusting their strike tactics in recent weeks to increasingly hit civilian areas, likely intending to take advantage of the ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes and Kremlin efforts to delay negotiations to intimidate Ukrainian civilians.[32]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on April 18 that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is supplying Russia with weapons and military materials.[33] Zelensky cited information from Ukrainian intelligence and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) indicating that the PRC has provided gunpowder and artillery to Russian forces and that PRC representatives are involved in weapons production within Russia. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian denied Zelensky's statement.[34]

ISW has recently observed indications that Russia and the PRC are deepening their cooperation, particularly regarding the war in Ukraine.[35] PRC military officials have reportedly visited the frontline in Ukraine to glean insights for future warfare, and the PRC government may be disinterested in combating Russia's reported direct recruitment of PRC citizens to serve in the Russian military for this reason.[36] A Russian company also reportedly collaborated with entities in the PRC to develop and produce attack drones for use in Ukraine as of September 2024.[37]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebenzya reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's rejection of a general ceasefire in Ukraine.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced that the temporary ceasefire on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure ended on April 18.
- Kremlin mouthpieces continue to reject all US proposals to end the war in Ukraine that do not concede to all of Russia's demands for Ukraine, including regime change, demilitarization, and significant territorial concessions.
- Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian demands for the elimination of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as a precondition for a peace agreement — a reference to Russia's initial war demands that directly contradict US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian officials held bilateral talks with US officials and multilateral talks with Coalition of the Willing partners in Paris, France, on April 16 to 18 regarding peace negotiations.
- Ukrainian officials announced on April 17 that the United States and Ukraine signed a memorandum of intent to conclude a future bilateral mineral deal and enhance economic cooperation.
- Russian forces conducted a ballistic missile strike against civilian areas in Kharkiv City on April 18, the latest in a string of high-casualty Russian strikes against civilian areas in Ukraine in recent weeks.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on April 18 that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is supplying Russia with weapons and military materials.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Lyman, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 17, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 17, 2025, 7:40 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on April 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian President Vladimir Putin's non-negotiable demands for extensive territorial concessions from Ukraine while noting that ongoing peace negotiations are unlikely to achieve results quickly. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 17 that negotiations regarding Ukraine are "progressing quite difficultly," that Ukraine and Europe are to blame for the lack of progress, and that Russia is focusing "for now" on its "contacts" with the United States.^[1] Peskov responded to a question about whether recognition of the Ukrainian territories that Russia has demanded is mandatory for ending the war, claiming that these regions are "integral" parts of Russia so "it is impossible to pose the question this way."^[2] Kremlin officials continue to reiterate Putin's demand that Ukraine cede territory — including parts of Ukraine that Russian forces do not currently occupy — to Russia while demonstrating Russia's unwillingness to compromise on these demands.^[3]

Russian forces recently conducted a roughly battalion-sized mechanized assault across a wide front in western Zaporizhia Oblast, representing an inflection in recently observed Russian mechanized assault tactics. Ukrainian military officials reported on April 17 that Ukrainian forces repelled a series of mechanized assaults by elements of the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Southern Military District [SMD]) that consisted of roughly a battalion's worth of equipment, including 320 personnel, 40 armored vehicles, three tanks, and about 10 buggies, along the Pyatykhatsky-Stepove-Lobkove-Mali Shcherbaky-Mala Tokmachka line (a frontage of roughly 40 kilometers) south and southwest of Orikhiv on the evening of April 16.^[4] Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed all three Russian tanks and 29 armored vehicles and killed or wounded 140 Russian soldiers.^[5] Geolocated footage of the assault indicates that Russian forces advanced along the T-0515 Orikhiv-Polohy highway south of Mala Tokmachka (southeast of Orikhiv).^[6] ISW has not observed any other geolocated footage as of this writing to indicate any further advances along the wide front of attack. Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn reported that Russian forces conducted a similar assault in western Zaporizhia Oblast on April 13 — likely in reference to a recent Russian reinforced company-sized mechanized assault in the Zaporizhia direction.^[7] Voloshyn reported that Russian forces spent months preparing for these assaults and have concentrated additional assault groups for possible future assaults. Ukrainian officials have warned of the possibility of intensified Russian offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast since November 2024.^[8]

Russian forces fighting in Ukraine since 2023 do not usually conduct mechanized assaults spread out across a wide front. Russian forces typically conduct mechanized assaults in singular frontal assaults in narrower and more limited areas, likely intending to break through Ukrainian defenses with a greater concentration of forces in a single area, or as part of turning movements to outflank and envelop Ukrainian positions.^[9] The tactical objective of this battalion-sized attack remains unclear, and the available footage and Ukrainian reporting indicates that Ukrainian forces defeated the attack. Russian forces may have intended for the April 16 mechanized assault to probe Ukrainian defenses to gauge the Ukrainian reaction and to detect possible weak points in Ukrainian positions ahead of future, more concentrated assaults. Elements of the 58th CAA may have been testing a different tactic, alternatively. ISW has not observed evidence to suggest that Russian forces elsewhere along the frontline recently have implemented similar mechanized assault tactics. The decision to dedicate roughly a battalion's worth of armored vehicles to a broad mechanized assault with likely minimal gains is notable given Russia's extensive armored vehicle losses in the war, dwindling Soviet-era armored vehicle stockpiles, and limited capacity to produce, refurbish, and repair armored vehicles.^[10]

Russian forces continue to intensify their usage of armored vehicles across the frontline amid continued negotiations to end the war. Commander of the Ukrainian National Guard, Brigadier General Oleksandr Pivnenko, reported on April 17 that Ukrainian forces repelled a reinforced company-sized mechanized assault in the Pokrovsk direction and that preliminary information confirms that Ukrainian forces destroyed 21 armored fighting vehicles, two other vehicles, and 96 motorcycles and killed and wounded over 240 Russian soldiers.^[11] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on the evening of April 17 that Russian forces launched an attack in the Pokrovsk direction and that Ukrainian forces destroyed the entire Russian grouping consisting of 115 pieces of equipment (likely including armored vehicles, other vehicles, and motorcycles), killed 200 Russian soldiers, and wounded 30 more.^[12] ISW has recently observed an increase in Russia's use of armored vehicles throughout the theater after mainly relegating armored vehicles to fire support roles and relying on infantry assaults to advance in late 2024 and early 2025.^[13] This intensification may be related to changing weather conditions and hardening terrain as Ukraine is coming out of its muddy *rasputitsa* season, the spring period in which melting frozen winter ground and spring rains degrade conditions for mechanized movement. This intensification may also be related to the Kremlin's continued insistence that Ukraine cede all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts to Russia and that the four oblasts be recognized as Russian territory.^[14]

The Kremlin is adopting increasingly threatening rhetoric towards Europe aimed at preventing Europe from supporting Ukraine and defending itself. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova warned on April 17 that Russia will consider any missile strike with German Taurus missiles against Russia to be Germany's direct participation in the war in Ukraine.[15] Zakharova also threatened Estonia, mirroring Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergey Naryshkin's recent threat that Poland and the Baltic States would be the "first to suffer" in the event of "NATO aggression" against Russia or Belarus.[16] The Kremlin has repeatedly used similar threats against Western states sending military aid to Ukraine as part of Russia's wider reflexive control campaign to influence Western decision-making and deter aid to Kyiv, including nearly identical threats against the US regarding allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with ATACMS.[17] The Kremlin likely seeks to portray European efforts to augment both European and Ukrainian defensive capabilities as provocative in order to push European countries into self-deterring from providing Ukraine with additional military support and bolstering European defensive capabilities.

Russia is increasingly adapting its drones to facilitate chemical weapons strikes against the frontline and rear areas of Ukraine — in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), of which Russia is a signatory. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command and Center for Countering Disinformation reported on April 16 and 17 that Ukrainian authorities identified a capsule with concentrated chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) gas, a type of riot control agent (RCA) banned under the CWC, on Russian Shahed drones and that Russia may be using these drones to disperse poisonous substances among the civilian population.[18] The Center for Countering Disinformation noted that reports that Russian forces are coating Shahed drones with poisonous substances are unconfirmed.[19] Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Vadym Filashkin similarly reported on April 16 that Russian forces had equipped Shahed drones that fell in Donetsk Oblast with capsules filled with "concentrated irritant gas."[20] Filashkin urged Ukrainian citizens to not approach downed Shahed debris and noted that Russian forces have previously equipped Shaheds with grenades with delayed detonation mechanisms. Russian forces have reportedly extensively used CS gas in grenades dropped from drones on Ukrainian positions throughout the frontline and have reportedly equipped Shaheds with cluster munitions.[21] Ukrainian forces have proven effective at shooting down Shahed drones, and Russia likely seeks to equip Shahed drones with weapons to still cause damage even when Ukrainian forces shoot down the drones before striking their intended targets.[22] These Russian adaptations are highly likely to cause disproportionate damage to civilians, however.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that the United States and Ukraine are making progress towards signing a bilateral mineral deal. Zelensky stated on April 16 that the Ukrainian team working with the United States on the mineral deal has achieved "good results" and that the parties have almost finalized the "basic legal matters."^[23]

European countries continue to increase their domestic defense production, including in support of Ukraine. German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger stated on April 17 that the Rheinmetall AG Unterlub plant will produce 350,000 artillery shells in 2025 — 150,000 more than the 200,000 originally planned for 2025 — and that the company has so far invested about €600 million (roughly \$682 million) in the Unterlub site.[24] Papperger stated that he expects Rheinmetall to earn €300 billion (roughly \$340 billion) in sales in the next five years (until roughly 2030). The Czech engineering company PBS Group announced on April 16 that it will increase its production capacity of aircraft jet engines by 220 percent in 2025 in response to increased demand from global customers, including Ukraine.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials continue to reiterate Russian President Vladimir Putin's non-negotiable demands for extensive territorial concessions from Ukraine while noting that ongoing peace negotiations are unlikely to achieve results quickly.
- Russian forces recently conducted a roughly battalion-sized mechanized assault across a wide front in western Zaporizhia Oblast, representing an inflection in recently observed Russian mechanized assault tactics.
- The Kremlin is adopting increasingly threatening rhetoric towards Europe aimed at preventing Europe from supporting Ukraine and defending itself.
- Russia is increasingly adapting its drones to facilitate chemical weapons strikes against the frontline and rear areas of Ukraine — in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), of which Russia is a signatory.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that the United States and Ukraine are making progress towards signing a bilateral mineral deal.
- European countries continue to increase their domestic defense production, including in support of Ukraine.

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Novopavlivka, and Velyka Novosilka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 16, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

April 16, 2025, 5:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15am ET on April 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The White House reiterated that the United States will not engage in economic agreements with Russia until Russia agrees to a ceasefire, amid continued Russian efforts to deflect blame onto Ukraine for the Kremlin's rejection of such a ceasefire. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated that Trump made it "very clear" that US-Russian economic partnerships could be an incentive for Russia to end its war against Ukraine, but that the United States "needs to see a ceasefire first" — likely in reference to a temporary or permanent full ceasefire in Ukraine.^[1] The Trump administration has previously characterized a temporary full ceasefire as a "necessary step" toward achieving an enduring peace settlement in Ukraine.^[2] Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected the joint US-Ukrainian 30-day full ceasefire proposal when Trump called Putin on March 18, and senior Russian officials have reiterated Putin's rejection since then by attempting to deflect blame onto Ukraine and secure additional bilateral concessions from the United States.^[3] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 16 that Ukraine's decision to extend martial law and continue general mobilization until August 6, 2025 is an attempt to preserve Ukraine's "unstable structure" and implied that Ukraine's ban on negotiations with Russia is inhibiting progress towards ending the war.^[4] The Ukrainian government is legally prohibited from lifting martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine, however. Russian authorities also appear to be intensifying their recruitment efforts, suggesting that the Kremlin intends to sustain its current force generation efforts for some time, peace talks notwithstanding.^[5] The Kremlin is continuing efforts to blame Ukraine for the lack of progress towards Trump's desired full ceasefire. Ukraine has already agreed to Trump's temporary full ceasefire proposal, while Kremlin officials have consistently reiterated that Russian President Vladimir Putin's non-negotiable demands for regime change in Ukraine, extensive territorial concessions, and limitations on Ukraine's military that would render Ukraine defenseless as conditions must be met before Russia can agree to a future ceasefire.^[6]

Russia is reportedly heavily dependent on North Korean artillery ammunition as North Korea continues to learn lessons from Russia's war against Ukraine. Reuters published a joint investigation with UK-based research organization Open Source Center (OSC) on April 15 detailing the extent of Russia's dependence on North Korean artillery and the evolution of North Korean forces' participation in fighting alongside Russian forces.^[7] Reuters and the OSC tracked 64 shipments from North Korea to Russia from September 2023 to March 2025 that involved 16,000 containers carrying millions of North Korean artillery rounds and recorded a shipment from North Korea as recently as March 17, 2025. Reuters and the OSC reported that four Russian-flagged ships — the *Angara*, *Maria*, *Maia-1*, and *Lady R* cargo ships — transported the ammunition from North Korea's port of Rajin to the Russian ports of Vostochny and Dunai. Reuters reviewed Russian military documents of everyday Russian artillery usage that showed that some Russian units depended on North Korean artillery shells for half or more of their shells used in daily fire missions. Reuters reported that an unspecified Russian unit fighting in Zaporizhia Oblast reported that nearly 50 percent of its 152mm D-20 howitzer rounds and 100 percent of its 122mm rockets fired came from North Korea. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) told Reuters that North Korea has provided Russia with three million artillery rounds and an unspecified number of mortar rounds since mid-2023 and that half of all of Russia's artillery rounds come from North Korea. The GUR also stated that North Korea supplied Russia with 148 KN-23 and KN-24 ballistic missiles as of January 2025.

Ukrainian military commanders and intelligence continue to indicate that North Korean forces have innovated their training and battlefield tactics following their participation in Russia's war. A Ukrainian regimental commander fighting in Kursk Oblast told Reuters that 3,000 additional North Korean forces that arrived in Kursk Oblast in mid-February 2025 were better prepared and more "adapted to modern combat" than the original contingent of North Korean forces that began fighting alongside Russian forces in November 2024.^[8] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Chernyak stated on April 15 that North Korean forces have changed tactics from conducting assaults in large groups to attacking in groups of

one or two people, have learned drone and electronic warfare (EW) tactics, and are successfully using Russian weapons and tactics on the battlefield.[9] Chernyak indicated that Russian and North Korean forces are somewhat compensating for language barriers that were causing friction during combat operations, as North Korean forces now receive orders and conduct assaults without communicating with Russian units.

Russian authorities recently detained former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov, likely as part of the Kremlin efforts to scapegoat Kursk Oblast officials for their failure in responding to Ukraine's August 2024 incursion into Kursk Oblast. Russian law enforcement officials told Kremlin newswire TASS on April 16 that Russian authorities detained Smirnov and former Kursk Oblast Vice Governor Alexei Dedov on suspicions of fraud and will seek their arrests.[10] Russian law enforcement authorities claimed that Smirnov and Dedov are under investigation for embezzling funds from the state-owned Kursk Oblast Development Corporation (KODC) meant for constructing defensive fortifications in the Kursk Oblast border area.[11] Russian authorities previously detained KODC executives in December 2024 on similar charges of embezzlement, in what ISW assessed at the time to be a concerted Kremlin effort to scapegoat Kursk Oblast officials for failing to repel Ukraine's incursion.[12] Russian officials notably arrested former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov in May 2024 on similar charges of embezzling funds dedicated to constructing fortifications due to his perceived disloyalty and criticisms of the Russian military high command.[13]

Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced Smirnov as Kursk Oblast Governor with then Russian State Duma Information Policy Committee Head Alexander Khinshtein on December 5, 2024, and claimed that Smirnov resigned "at his own request."[14] Senior Russian officials emphasized in December 2024 that Putin appointed Khinshtein because Smirnov did not adequately communicate with or support Kursk Oblast residents regarding housing issues but did not accuse Smirnov of corruption at that time.[15] ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin refrained from replacing Smirnov directly following the Ukrainian incursion or during Russian regional elections, likely in support of efforts to downplay the societal impacts of the incursion.[16] The Kremlin likely detained Smirnov and Dedov now since Russian forces have mostly pushed Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast.[17]

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces recently executed at least one unarmed Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) near Rozdolne (northeast of Velyka Novosilka). The Ukrainian General Prosecutor's Office and Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported on April 16 that there is footage of Russian forces taking three Ukrainian servicemembers prisoner near Rozdolne on April 11 and executing one of the unarmed Ukrainian POWs.[18] ISW has observed a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025 and continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to conduct these executions in violation of international law.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- The White House reiterated that the United States will not engage in economic agreements with Russia until Russia agrees to a ceasefire, amid continued Russian efforts to deflect blame onto Ukraine for the Kremlin's rejection of such a ceasefire.
- Russia is reportedly heavily dependent on North Korean artillery ammunition as North Korea continues to learn lessons from Russia's war against Ukraine.
- Russian authorities recently detained former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov, likely as part of the Kremlin efforts to scapegoat Kursk Oblast officials for their failure in responding to Ukraine's August 2024 incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces recently executed at least one unarmed Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) near Rozdolne (northeast of Velyka Novosilka).
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 15, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30 am ET on April 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Two high-ranking members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle reiterated Putin's June 2024 non-negotiable demands that any resolution of the war in Ukraine must result in

regime change, extensive territorial concessions, and long-term limitations on Ukraine's military after US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff's April 11 meeting with Putin. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergey Naryshkin claimed on April 15 that any future peace agreement ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine must include terms concerning Ukraine's neutrality; the demilitarization and "denazification" of the Ukrainian state; the abolition of Ukrainian laws that allegedly discriminate against Russian-speakers in Ukraine; and the recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of all of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[1] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed to Russian state business outlet *Kommersant* on April 14 that the current Ukrainian government is "unconstitutional" and that Russia "cannot give [Russian speakers living in occupied Ukraine] up" following the illegal and sham referendums Russia conducted in the four oblasts to join Russia in Fall 2022.[2] Lavrov reiterated that Putin "very clearly outlined" Russia's demands for a future peace agreement to end the war during Putin's speech on June 14, 2024, and stated that these June 2024 demands were "not some kind of request." Lavrov stated that there are "no secrets" about Russia's demands and reiterated the importance of addressing the "root causes" of the war in a future peace agreement.

Russian officials are using Putin's June 2024 speech as the Kremlin's current standing guidance on negotiations and the resolution of the war in Ukraine. Putin demanded on June 14, 2024 that Ukrainian forces must "completely withdraw" from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and that Ukraine must officially abandon its goal of joining NATO (by amending its constitution in which that goal is enshrined) before Russia can agree to a future ceasefire and peace negotiations.[3] Putin stated that Russia is prepared to begin negotiations with Ukraine as soon as Ukraine agrees to withdraw from the entirety of the four oblasts. Putin also demanded that the international community recognize the four illegally annexed and occupied oblasts as part of Russia and lift all Western sanctions against Russia in the event of a resolution to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin reiterated his calls for Ukraine to agree to full demilitarization and "denazification" and abandon its aspirations to join any external security blocs. These demands would preclude the bilateral security agreements Ukraine has negotiated and is negotiating with several European states.

Putin and other Kremlin officials have routinely issued these same demands, including by using vague language to obfuscate Russia's most extreme demands.[4] Russian officials, including Putin, use this language to articulate their overarching demand that the West acknowledge Russia's illegal annexation of occupied Ukraine and force Ukraine to concede not only territory but also its future sovereignty and ability to defend itself. Kremlin officials have consistently demanded that:

- **Ukraine must demilitarize.** Putin named "demilitarization" as one of the main goals of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and stated on July 4, 2024, that Ukraine should undergo "irreversible" "demilitarization" in the event of a future ceasefire.[5] Russia demanded in the April 2022 Istanbul Protocol draft agreement that Ukraine shrink its military beyond pre-2022 levels and commit to never fielding a military capable of defending the country against future Russian aggression.[6] Russia demanded in the protocol that the Ukrainian military should be confined to fewer than 85,000 active-duty personnel, fewer than 15,000 National Guard personnel, and fewer than 1,400 tanks and armored vehicles. The pre-2022 Ukrainian military had 196,600 active-duty personnel, 60,000 National Guard personnel, and over 3,000 tanks and armored vehicles.
- **Ukraine must "denazify" and install a "legitimate" government.** Putin named "denazification" as another of the main goals of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Russian officials have previously defined "denazification" as the "liquidation of those who instill" Russophobia in other people.[7] Russian officials often invoke the term "denazification" to call for regime change in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv. Putin has routinely labeled all Ukrainian governments since 2014 as "illegitimate" and claimed on January 28 that Russia will not view any agreements it concludes with the current Ukrainian government as binding.[8]
- **Ukraine must abandon its aspirations to join NATO or any security bloc in the future.** Putin's demand for Ukraine's "neutrality" remains one of the central justifications for his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[9] Russia demanded in the Istanbul Protocol draft agreement that Ukraine amend its constitution to remove the provision committing Ukraine to NATO membership and add a neutrality provision that would ban Ukraine from joining any military alliances, concluding military agreements, or hosting foreign military personnel or systems in Ukraine.[10]

- **Ukraine must concede occupied Ukrainian territory and "Novorossiya" to Russia.** Putin stated on June 14, 2024, that Russia will not be content with ending the war on the lines it currently holds and explicitly called for Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the non-occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts as a prerequisite for any sort of "peace" negotiations with Ukraine.[11] Kremlin officials have indicated that they have territorial ambitions beyond the administrative borders of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and often invoke the term "Novorossiya" (an amorphous, invented region in Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all of southern and eastern Ukraine and is an "integral" part of Russia) to lay claim to other areas of eastern and southern Ukraine, including Dnipro Petrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts.[12]

- **Any resolution of the war must address the war's "root causes."** Lavrov has repeatedly defined the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to expand into eastern Europe and along Russia's borders in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[13] Russian officials have leveraged claims that Ukraine has mistreated Russian speakers to justify Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory.

Kremlin officials continue to set informational conditions to demand that Ukraine surrender territory that Russia does not currently occupy and to justify Russia's ambitions of asserting control over independent countries, including NATO member states. Lavrov told *Kommersant* on April 14 that Russia and the United States have not agreed on any "key parameters" of a potential agreement to end the war in Ukraine.[14] Lavrov stated that Putin's June 2024 demand that Ukraine cede all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblast — including the territory that Russia does not currently occupy — continue to serve as the basis of Russia's negotiating position.[15] Lavrov referred to Russia's claimed territory in Ukraine as Donbas and Novorossiya. Lavrov claimed that the Ukrainian government "does not represent Crimea, Donbas, or Novorossiya" or "a number of other territories that still remain under the control of [Ukraine]."¹⁶ Lavrov specifically claimed that the Ukrainian government does not represent residents in Odesa City and that Russia built Odesa City and "many other" cities in Ukraine. Putin recently claimed that "Novorossiya" is an integral part of Russia, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has defined "Novorossiya" as all of eastern and southern Ukraine, including Kharkiv, Dnipro Petrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts.[16] Putin claimed in 2023 that Odesa City, Crimea, and the entire "Black Sea region" have nothing "to do with Ukraine."^[17] Lavrov's continued amplification of these claims indicates that Russia aims to occupy even more of Ukraine than the territory that Russia is currently demanding, despite engaging in ongoing negotiations with the United States ostensibly to end the war in Ukraine.

Lavrov also indicated Russia's desire to seize territory in countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia — including NATO member states. Lavrov claimed that it is "dangerous" when "fascists seize lands that never belonged to anyone except the Russian Empire [and] Soviet Union" and do "disgusting things there." Lavrov's statement indicates that the Kremlin views independent countries once colonized by the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire as rightfully part of modern-day Russia. Moldova and NATO members Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were part of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire, and NATO member Finland and large parts of NATO member Poland were part of the Russian Empire. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev recently threatened Finland using narratives resembling those that the Kremlin has used to justify its invasion of Ukraine, and Putin and other Russian officials are attempting to use Russia's previous colonization efforts to set informational conditions and justify future aggression against NATO states.[18]

Naryshkin threatened a Russian attack against NATO states in response to NATO states building up their defenses in line with US President Donald Trump's push for Europe to increase its own defense capabilities. Naryshkin claimed on April 15 that NATO states are strengthening their positions on their borders with Belarus and Russia, including Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast.[19] Naryshkin claimed that Poland and the Baltic states "should understand" that the "first to suffer" in the event of "NATO aggression" against the Union State of Russia and Belarus will be the Polish and Baltic political circles that have spoken about building up their defenses along their borders with Belarus and Kaliningrad Oblast — although Naryshkin claimed that Russia "will certainly" inflict damage on the entire NATO bloc in this event.[20] Naryshkin claimed that European states, such as France, the UK, and Germany, are escalating the war in Ukraine, so Russia "needs to act preemptively" and "is ready for this."^[21] Russian officials, including Putin, repeatedly threatened NATO in 2023 and 2024.^[22] Naryshkin appears to be claiming that European efforts to shoulder more of Europe's own defense requirements and to defend against future Russian aggression — in line with Trump's calls for such efforts — are allegedly provocative and escalatory.

Lavrov reiterated Putin's rejection of Trump's proposal for a 30-day full ceasefire.[23] Putin rejected Trump's temporary full ceasefire on March 13, questioning whether Ukraine would be allowed to continue to mobilize forces, train newly mobilized soldiers, and receive military aid from its partners and allies and questioning the control and verification measures of a temporary ceasefire — questions which Lavrov reiterated on April 15.[24] Lavrov attempted to blame Ukraine for the lack of a full ceasefire, claiming that Ukraine "loves to lie."[25] Russian officials, led by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), have accused Ukraine of violating the temporary energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire almost every day since March 29 while offering no evidence of such violations, and the Kremlin appears to be using these unsubstantiated claims to also refuse Trump's temporary full ceasefire proposal.[26] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted on April 14 that Ukraine accepted Trump's temporary full ceasefire proposal over one month ago.[27]

Russia may recognize the end of the 30-day energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire soon and intensify its long-range strikes against Ukraine, but the exact parameters of the ceasefire — including its end date — remain unclear. *Kommersant* asked Lavrov to comment on how neither the temporary ceasefire against energy infrastructure strikes nor the temporary ceasefire in the Black Sea are "fully in effect."^[28] Lavrov responded, claiming "there are no such agreements," but then proceeded to discuss Putin's rejection of Trump's proposed 30-day full ceasefire. It remains unclear if Lavrov's response was about the temporary strikes ceasefire and proposed Black Sea ceasefire or the proposed temporary full ceasefire. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 15 that the Kremlin would clarify the end date of the 30-day energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire with the Russian MoD and noted that "everything will depend on further orders from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [Putin]."^[29] Russian officials have routinely claimed almost every day since March 18 without evidence that Ukraine has violated the temporary energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire.^[30] Naryshkin also claimed on April 15, without evidence, that Ukraine has been conducting strikes on energy infrastructure "almost every day" since March 18.^[31] Russian forces may intensify long-range strikes against Ukraine in the coming days as the ceasefire comes to an end.

Ukraine's National Guard announced on April 15 the formation of two new army corps on the basis of two existing brigades, amid Ukraine's continued efforts to transition to a corps structure.^[32] The 1st "Azov" Corps of the National Guard stated on April 15 that it will consist of four existing brigades and one new brigade.^[33] Ukraine has yet to announce details about the second new corps. Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff Major General Andriy Hnatov stated on April 15 that the Ukrainian military is staffing new corps with commanders who have combat experience and that corps will become the main component for conducting operations.^[34] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine's efforts to form an echelon between Ukraine's brigades and operational groups of forces and to strengthen the army corps staff structure will likely improve Ukrainian command and control for Ukrainian brigades and help facilitate more effective operations.

Key Takeaways:

- Two high-ranking members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle reiterated Putin's June 2024 non-negotiable demands that any resolution of the war in Ukraine must result in regime change, extensive territorial concessions, and long-term limitations on Ukraine's military after US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff's April 11 meeting with Putin.
- Kremlin officials continue to set informational conditions to demand that Ukraine surrender territory that Russia does not currently occupy and to justify Russia's ambitions of asserting control over independent countries, including NATO member states.
- Naryshkin threatened a Russian attack against NATO states in response to NATO states building up their defenses in line with US President Donald Trump's push for Europe to increase its own defense capabilities.
- Lavrov reiterated Putin's rejection of Trump's proposal for a 30-day full ceasefire.
- Russia may recognize the end of the 30-day energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire soon and intensify its long-range strikes against Ukraine, but the exact parameters of the ceasefire — including its end date — remain unclear.
- Ukraine's National Guard announced on April 15 the formation of two new army corps on the basis of two existing brigades, amid Ukraine's continued efforts to transition to a corps structure.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Velyka Novosilka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

April 14, 2025, 5:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on April 14. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 15 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces appear to be leveraging redeployed elements of the 8th Combined Arms Army to close the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk and level the frontline as part of ongoing Russian efforts to attack Kostyantynivka from the south. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on April 14 that elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) recently seized Oleksandropil, Panteleimonivka, and Valentynivka (all southwest of Toretsk) and pushed Ukrainian forces from positions east of the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynopil highway.[1] Russian milbloggers also claimed on April 13 and 14 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from positions east of the H-20 highway, seized Valentynivka, and are attacking Sukha Balka (north of Valentynivka).[2] Mashovets stated that elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA) continue to attack north of Vozdvyzhenka (west of Oleksandropil and east of Pokrovsk) in the direction of Nova Poltavka and Novoolenivka (both northeast of Pokrovsk and west of Toretsk).[3] Russian milbloggers recently credited elements of the 68th Tank Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division) with seizing Panteleimonivka and Oleksandropil and elements of the 242nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division) with seizing Kalynove (east of Pokrovsk).[4]

The Russian military command redeployed elements of the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions in February 2025 and likely intended to leverage these redeployments to break out of Toretsk and advance towards Kostyantynivka along or parallel to the T-0516 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway.[5] Elements of the Russian 51st CAA (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], SMD) previously operating in these two areas failed to break through Ukraine's defense in Fall 2024 and Winter 2024-2025, likely prompting the Russian military command to introduce elements of the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions – potentially prematurely – into combat in order to maintain the operational tempo in these areas. Russian forces marginally advanced along the frontline between Vozdvyzhenka (northeast of Pokrovsk) and Sukha Balka in February and March 2025, but have made more tactically significant advances near Kalynove and along the Sukha Balka-Oleksandropil line since early April 2025.[6] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces may aim to eliminate the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk in order to level out their southern flank ahead of a planned push on Kostyantynivka, and recent Russian redeployments and tactical activity supports this assessment.[7] Russian forces likely intend to leverage advances southwest of Toretsk to push along the H-20 highway and facilitate deeper advances northeast of Pokrovsk along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway toward Kostyantynivka. Russian forces must break out of Toretsk, Chasiv Yar, advance toward Kostyantynivka broadly from the east, or advance roughly 24 kilometers from Pokrovsk along the T-0504 highway to Kostyantynivka's southwestern flank before Russian forces will pose any notable threat to seizing Ukrainian positions in Kostyantynivka, and a Russian offensive to seize the city or Ukraine's wider fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast would likely be a years' long effort – assuming that the West continues to bolster Ukraine's defense.[8]

Russian forces appear to be intensifying their use of armored vehicles throughout the theater after mainly relegating armored vehicles to fire support roles and relying on infantry assaults to advance in late 2024 and early 2025. Ukrainian Luhansk Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Dmytro Zaporozhets stated on April 13 that Ukrainian forces repelled a reinforced company-sized Russian mechanized assault toward Stupochky (south of Chasiv Yar) and Klishchiivka (southeast of Chasiv Yar) with 13 armored vehicles, several civilian vehicles, and an unspecified number of motorcycles on April 12.[9] A Ukrainian brigade operating in the Novopavlivka direction published footage on April 14 showing Russian forces conducting a reinforced company-sized mechanized assault with over 20 armored vehicles, including over 10 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and several tanks.[10] The Ukrainian brigade stated that Russian forces attempted to advance in a wave of motorcycles ahead of the attacking armored vehicles to swiftly reach Ukrainian positions. Another Ukrainian brigade operating nearby stated that the Russian assault occurred near Vilne Pole (northwest of Velyka Novosilka) and that Ukrainian forces destroyed two tanks and 12 IFVs.[11] The Ukrainian National Guard published footage on April 14 showing Russian forces conducting a reinforced company-sized mechanized assault with three tanks, 18 IFVs, an unspecified number of MT-LB armored fighting vehicles (AFVs), and 41 motorcycles in an unspecified area of the Zaporizhia

direction.[12] The Ukrainian National Guard reported that Ukrainian forces repelled the assault and destroyed two IFVs and one AFV.

Russian forces have been augmenting mechanized assaults with civilian vehicles, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) since late Fall 2024 after limiting their use of armored vehicles across the entire frontline, likely due to concerns about unsustainable armored vehicle losses in Summer and early Fall 2024.[13] Russian forces largely relied on small infantry groups to advance in Ukraine and used armored vehicles to transport infantry to the frontline and as fire support for infantry assaults in late Fall 2024 through Winter 2024-2025.[14] Russian forces continue to attack in small infantry groups along the frontline but may be recommitting armor to frontline assault operations as part of a general intensification along the entire frontline. Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov noted on April 14 that Russian forces are using more civilian vehicles in the Pokrovsk direction due to their high degree of maneuverability for evading Ukrainian drones compared to slower armored vehicles.[15] Trehubov reported that Ukrainian drone operations are rendering Russian armored vehicle usage ineffective in the Pokrovsk direction, which is consistent with a long-term trend of Ukrainian drones discouraging Russian armored vehicle usage in this direction.[16] ISW has previously assessed that Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) cannot produce new armored vehicles and artillery systems at rates that can offset Russia's current tempo of losses in the medium-to long-term, and Russian forces are likely using these alternative civilian vehicles in assault operations to bolster mechanized assaults amid concerns about dwindling supplies of Soviet-era armored vehicles.[17] The recent intensification in Russian armor usage suggests that the Russian military command may be growing less concerned about dwindling armored vehicle stores or at least may be willing to accept additional armored vehicle losses if Russian forces can secure additional gains before a possible future ceasefire.

A Russian military court recently decided to keep former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov in custody after reports that Popov would command a penal assault detachment in Ukraine. Kremlin newswire TASS stated on April 11 that the Second Western District Military Court rejected an appeal against a February 28 ruling that changed Popov's house arrest to two months of pre-trial detention.[18] Russian ultranationalist outlet *Tsargrad* claimed on April 11 that Popov's lawyer stated that Russian authorities had not yet considered Popov's petition to suspend court proceedings and send Popov to fight in Ukraine.[19] Popov's lawyer stated on April 9 that Popov signed a military service contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and would return to military service in Ukraine in exchange for the suspension of his impending criminal trial.[20] A Russian security official stated to Russian state business outlet *Kommersant* on April 9 that Popov would assume command of an unspecified "Storm Z" penal detachment operating in Ukraine. Popov publicly appealed to Putin in March 2025 to reinstate him in active military service, and Popov's support base, particularly within the Russian ultranationalist and veteran communities, widely supported the appeal. The court's seeming reversal of the decision to send Popov to the war in Ukraine suggests that the Kremlin continues to struggle to respond to situations in which the Kremlin's desired outcome is at odds with that of the Russian ultranationalist and veteran communities. The Kremlin may be conflicted about how to punish Popov for weaponizing the information space in July 2023 when he attempted to reverse his removal from command. The Kremlin likely fears that allowing Popov to return to the battlefield at his request would set a precedent in which popular commanders and officials could threaten to blackmail the Kremlin into accepting their demands.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces appear to be leveraging redeployed elements of the 8th Combined Arms Army to close the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk and level the frontline as part of ongoing Russian efforts to attack Kostyantynivka from the south.
- Russian forces appear to be intensifying their use of armored vehicles throughout the theater after mainly relegating armored vehicles to fire support roles and relying on infantry assaults to advance in late 2024 and early 2025.
- A Russian military court recently decided to keep former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov in custody after reports that Popov would command a penal assault detachment in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Siversk and Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Siversk, Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 13, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on April 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that ongoing US-Russian negotiations are unlikely to result in "lightning-fast results," contrary to US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving a general ceasefire and lasting peace agreement in Ukraine in the near future. Peskov told Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on April 13 that "everything is moving very well" regarding US-Russian bilateral talks and discussions about the war in Ukraine but that there will likely not be immediate results.^[1] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Second Department of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Director Alexei Polishchuk gave an interview to Russian state media group *Rossiya Today* (RT) and stated that Russia is willing to engage in negotiations that "take into account the modern realities" of the war and eliminate the "root causes" of Russia's war in Ukraine.^[2] Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that any peace process in Ukraine must address these so-called "root causes."^[3] Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov previously defined "root causes" as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and Ukraine's alleged discrimination against Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine.^[4] These so-called "root causes" are a reference to Russia's pre-war demands that effectively amount to Ukraine's full capitulation and the installation of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine.^[5] Peskov's and Polishchuk's comments also reflect the Kremlin's continued rejection of President Trump's stated approach of first establishing a ceasefire and then negotiating a broader peace agreement and the Kremlin's commitment to war aims that are incompatible with President Trump's goal of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Any future general ceasefire or peace agreement must include robust monitoring mechanisms, given the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to portray Ukraine as violating the long-range energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire without providing evidence of these strikes and despite the lack of public details about the ceasefire's terms. It remains unclear what monitoring mechanisms the West could leverage to enforce and monitor a future general ceasefire or if the Kremlin would accept any such mechanisms. Peskov and Polishchuk reiterated ongoing Russian claims on April 13 that Ukraine is violating the temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure.^[6] Russian officials, led by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), have accused Ukraine of violating the temporary ceasefire almost every day since March 29 but have not provided evidence to substantiate most of these claims.^[7] Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that Ukrainian forces are striking energy infrastructure along Ukraine's northern border with Russia, although it remains unclear if strikes with tactical first-person view (FPV) drones or routine shelling would be a violation of the energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire as the terms of the ceasefire are publicly unclear. Russian officials appear to be weaponizing the vague conditions of the ceasefire and exploiting the absence of independent monitoring mechanisms to flood the information space with unsubstantiated claims about supposed Ukrainian ceasefire violations.

Russian officials may attempt to flood the information space with unsubstantiated claims of Ukrainian ceasefire violations in the future if a general ceasefire does not include robust independent monitoring mechanisms. Russian forces may conduct false flag attacks along the frontline in the event of a future general ceasefire in order to accuse Ukraine of violating the ceasefire and justify reigniting the conflict. ISW has previously assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin's claims that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate are setting conditions to legitimize future Russian ceasefire violations.^[8] The Kremlin is weaponizing the lack of monitoring mechanisms for the temporary energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire, and any future general ceasefire must have more robust monitoring mechanisms to deter, adjudicate, or at least properly record future violations.

It is unclear if Russian officials will agree to any meaningful monitoring mechanisms, however, as Russian officials continue to reject the possible future deployment of a European peacekeeping contingent to Ukraine.^[9] Polishchuk responded to a question about whether Russia will agree to sending peacekeepers to Ukraine on April 13 and stated that peacekeeping deployments are "not on the agenda."^[10] Polishchuk insinuated that Russia and Ukraine must conclude a peace or ceasefire agreement before considering the issue of peacekeepers and claimed that the French- and British-led "Coalition of the Willing" is attempting to intervene in Ukraine by forming what it is calling a "reassurance force." Polishchuk accused the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of falsifying reports on Russian violations of the Minsk agreement between 2014 and 2022, despite indications that Russia itself maintained significant influence over the OSCE and seriously hindered the OSCE's monitoring and enforcement mandates during this time.^[11] The Kremlin's ongoing refusal to engage with US and European proposals to establish a peacekeeping force in Ukraine and Polishchuk's accusation that the OSCE has previously acted in Ukraine's — and not Russia's — favor underscores the Kremlin's continued unwillingness to

accept any kind of monitoring mechanisms that could undermine Russia's ability to attack Ukraine again in the future.

Russian officials continue to weaponize the vague terms of the current ceasefire on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure and ongoing ceasefire negotiations in an effort to falsely portray Ukraine- and not Russia- as unwilling to engage in constructive dialogue. Peskov claimed on April 13 that Ukraine is "either unable or unwilling to" honor the terms of the moratorium on energy strikes between Russia and Ukraine.[12] Polischuk also claimed without evidence that Ukrainian forces have violated the moratorium on energy strikes over 60 times since Russia asserted that the agreement entered into force on March 18 and are striking or attempting to strike Russian energy facilities "several times a day." [13] Polischuk claimed that Ukrainian authorities have either failed to order Ukrainian forces to halt strikes against Russian energy facilities or that Ukrainian forces are simply ignoring such an order and insinuated that the Ukrainian government may not be in full control of the Ukrainian military. Polischuk's and Peskov's statements reinforce the Kremlin's effort to portray Russia as open to negotiations and committed to honoring agreements, while portraying Ukraine as the intransigent party. ISW continues to observe instances in which Russian actions and official statements contradict this professed willingness to engage in good faith negotiations, even as Ukrainian officials consistently emphasize their openness to dialogue and their readiness to offer compromises in future peace agreements.[14]

Russian forces conducted a devastating ballistic missile strike against Sumy City on April 13, causing more than 100 casualties. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces struck the center of Sumy City with two missiles on the morning of April 13, killing at least 34 civilians and injuring at least 118.[15] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov reported that elements of the Russian 112th Missile Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) and 448th Missile Brigade (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], MMD) launched the two Iskander-M/KN-23 ballistic missiles that struck Sumy City from near Liski, Voronezh Oblast and Lezhenki, Kursk Oblast.[16] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that the Russian missiles were equipped with cluster warheads. [17] Images and footage of the aftermath show fires, casualties, and extensive damage in central Sumy City.[18] The BBC Russian Service reported that Russian forces struck the Sumy State University's Congress Center and noted that locals reported that the Congress Center hosts various classes and clubs, including classes for children.[19]

US Special Envoy for Ukraine and retired General Keith Kellogg condemned the Russian ballistic missile strike against Sumy City and stated that the strike "crosses any line of decency." [20] US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink acknowledged that Russian forces used ballistic missiles equipped with cluster warheads against Sumy City and expressed condolences.[21] UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, European Council President Antonio Costa, European Commission Vice President Kaja Kallas, EU Ambassador to Ukraine Katarina Maternova, French President Emmanuel Macron, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics, Moldovan President Maia Sandu, Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna, Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen, Spanish Ambassador to Ukraine Ricardo Lopez-Aranda, the Irish Embassy in Ukraine, and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and a host of other Western officials condemned the Russian strike against Sumy City.[22]

Ongoing milblogger complaints about the Russian military's conduct of the war in Ukraine reinforce ISW's assessment that Russian tactics will degrade Russia's manpower and materiel resources and contribute to slowing Russian advances along the frontline. A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor claimed on April 12 that the Russian military command is using a "thousand cuts" tactic against Ukraine to the detriment of Russian forces and complained that deploying poorly equipped and poorly trained Russian infantry to attack Ukrainian defensive positions only results in marginal gains and heavy losses.[23] The milblogger argued that the Russian military command is attempting to present high manpower and materiel losses as necessary by falsely portraying the preceding combat engagements as evidence of Russia's coordinated "grinding" down of Ukrainian defenses.[24] The milblogger claimed on April 12 and 13 that the Russian military command is ignoring the fact that Russian forces are facing shortages of materiel necessary for offensive operations, which contributes to issues conducting assaults and to the failure of small group assaults along the frontline in Ukraine.[25] The milblogger claimed that frontline Russian commanders are under significant pressure from their superiors to conduct more infantry assaults, do not have sufficient time to plan new assault routes, and that some frontline commanders order assaults simply to be able to report something back to their superiors. ISW previously assessed that these grinding assaults will likely degrade available Russian manpower and materiel significantly enough that Russian forces will have to decrease offensive tempo on lower-priority sectors of the front.[26] The milblogger speculated that Russian forces are in a self-perpetuating cycle, where poorly trained infantry killed or injured in failed assault attempts are replaced with similarly poorly trained infantry, who are again sent into

doomed assaults.[27] The milblogger's claims reflect the general trend of slowing Russian advances along the frontline recently and highlight some of the critical issues that Russian forces will have to address if they intend to make significant territorial gains or conduct more sophisticated offensive operations in Ukraine in the future.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that ongoing US-Russian negotiations are unlikely to result in "lightning-fast results," contrary to US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving a general ceasefire and lasting peace agreement in Ukraine in the near future.
- Any future general ceasefire or peace agreement must include robust monitoring mechanisms, given the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to portray Ukraine as violating the long-range energy infrastructure strikes ceasefire without providing evidence of these strikes and despite the lack of public details about the ceasefire's terms. It remains unclear what monitoring mechanisms the West could leverage to enforce and monitor a future general ceasefire or if the Kremlin would accept any such mechanisms.
- Russian officials continue to weaponize the vague terms of the current ceasefire on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure and ongoing ceasefire negotiations in an effort to falsely portray Ukraine- and not Russia- as unwilling to engage in constructive dialogue.
- Russian forces conducted a devastating ballistic missile strike against Sumy City on April 13, causing more than 100 casualties.
- Ongoing milblogger complaints about the Russian military's conduct of the war in Ukraine reinforce ISW's assessment that Russian tactics will degrade Russia's manpower and materiel resources and contribute to slowing Russian advances along the frontline.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced near Kharkiv City, Borova, and Chasiv Yar.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 12, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30 am ET on April 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg expressed support on April 11 for the deployment of an allied "reassurance force" in rear areas of western Ukraine after a possible future ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia.[1] The *Times* reported on April 11 that Kellogg expressed support for a "partition" of Ukraine between European, Ukrainian, and Russian forces; the deployment of a European "reassurance force" in western Ukraine; and establishing an 18-mile-wide "demilitarized zone" along the current frontline.[2] Kellogg clarified later on April 11 that he supports the presence of a "reassurance force" that does not include US troops to support Ukrainian sovereignty, but that none of his statements during the interview suggested "a partitioning of Ukraine."[3] Kellogg noted that the *Times* misrepresented some of his statements referencing possible areas of responsibility (AORs) of a future European "reassurance force."

Kellogg's clarification regarding the deployment of a "reassurance force" in Ukraine's rear areas is consistent with several statements from Ukrainian and European leaders about a possible future peacekeeping contingent deployed to Ukraine. Ukrainian Commander in Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on April 9 that a putative peacekeeping contingent would not deploy to the frontline.[4] European Commission Vice President Kaja Kallas stated on April 10 that a future peacekeeping contingent would be likely to deploy not to the frontline but rather deeper within Ukraine or even outside of Ukraine.[5] Bloomberg reported on April 10 that UK Defense Secretary John Healey and French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu stated that the Coalition of the Willing aims to develop more detailed plans within the next two weeks about how the coalition will help secure Ukrainian

airspace, coastline, and land.[6] People familiar with the matter told *Bloomberg* that the coalition hopes that the United States will agree to "backstop" any future European deployments to Ukraine with air power, border surveillance, and intelligence.

Russian state-owned and pro-Kremlin media amplified a Russian official's blanket rejection of any peacekeeping force in Ukraine on April 12. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Ambassador-at-Large Rodion Miroshnik responded to Kellogg's statements on April 12 and reiterated the Kremlin's objection to the presence of any peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine following a possible future ceasefire or peace agreement because a peacekeeping force would preserve the "level of toxicity" that supposedly prompted Russia to launch its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. [7] Russian state-owned and pro-state media widely amplified Miroshnik's statement.[8] Kremlin officials have repeatedly rejected the idea of a possible future peacekeeping force in Ukraine or any European involvement in post-war Ukraine.[9] Miroshnik's accusation of "toxicity" in Ukraine is an indirect reference to the Kremlin's continued demands that any conclusion to the war in Ukraine must address Russia's so-called "root causes" of the war. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov previously defined Russia's perceived "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and the Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[10] Russian officials frequently directly invoke these "root causes" to justify Russia's continued war effort and pre-war demands amounting to total Ukrainian capitulation, and Miroshnik's April 12 statement is an indirect restatement of this concept.[11]

Russian forces have resumed a more typical strike pattern in late March and early April 2025 after a temporary spike in the size of Russian long-range strike packages in mid-February and early March 2025. Russian forces conducted notably larger strike packages in mid-February and early March 2025 but have launched strike packages more comparable to trends last observed in January and early February 2025, albeit using fewer missiles, in recent weeks. Russian forces notably conducted no strikes against Ukraine on April 7 - the day after conducting their largest strike in over a month on April 6 — but have since resumed daily strikes.[12] Russian officials have thus far refused to engage with or have outright rejected the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire that US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff presumably proposed to Russian President Vladimir Putin during a meeting on March 13.[13] The proposed long-range strikes ceasefire on energy infrastructure would not require Russia to cease all long-range drone and missile strikes, but the proposed general ceasefire along the current frontline and in the air and sea would likely require Russia to end all strikes on Ukraine. Russian forces are likely delaying negotiations on a general ceasefire in order to continue making gains along the frontline in Ukraine and continue devastating long-range strikes against Ukrainian defense industrial and civilian areas in order to intimidate civilians and undermine Ukraine's ability to defend itself against future Russian aggression.

Russian forces have reportedly adjusted their long-range strike tactics in recent weeks, likely as part of an effort to inflict significant damage with strike packages of sizes similar to those they had been using earlier in the year and to intimidate Ukrainian civilians. Ukrainian sources and German outlet *BILD* reported in late March and early April 2025 that Russian forces are loitering long-range drones at high altitudes several kilometers from large Ukrainian cities and other targets before conducting synchronized strikes with multiple drones.[14] Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces are flying Shahed drones in the densest possible formations in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems and that Russian forces concentrate a group of 10 to 15 Shahed drones outside of a city before striking the city. Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reported on April 6 that Russian forces are constantly modernizing their Shahed drones, ballistic missiles, and strike tactics, complicating Ukrainian forces' ability to shoot them down.[15] Russian forces previously launched Shahed long-range drones in a series of waves against various targets each night, and this reported effort to operate drones in denser formations suggests that Russian forces believe this new tactic will overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses more effectively.

People's Republic of China (PRC) military officials reportedly visited the frontline in Ukraine to glean insights for future warfare amid reports that at least 155 Chinese nationals are fighting in Ukraine. An unnamed former Western intelligence official told *Reuters* in an article published on April 11 that the PRC authorized an unspecified number of PRC military officers to visit the frontline in

Ukraine alongside the Russian military to gain tactical insights from the war in Ukraine but did not specify when these visits may have occurred.[16] ISW cannot independently verify this report. Two unnamed US officials familiar with US intelligence and the former Western intelligence official told *Reuters* that roughly 100 to 200 Chinese nationals are fighting for the Russian military as "mercenaries" independent from the Chinese government. The sources further noted that the Chinese fighters appear to have minimal training and are not having any discernable impact on Russian military operations. ISW has observed reports that these Chinese nationals likely signed contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) of their own accord rather than at the direction of PRC officials.[17] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky recently reported that Ukrainian intelligence discovered that at least 155 Chinese nationals were fighting for the Russian military in Ukraine.[18] PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian recently stated that the PRC MFA is unaware of the more than 155 Chinese nationals fighting in Ukraine, however.[19] *The Guardian* recently reported that Russian entities are actively operating recruitment campaigns across several Chinese social media networks, further suggesting that the PRC government may be aware of Russian military recruitment efforts targeting Chinese citizens and may be disinterested in combating these efforts.[20]

Ukraine's European partners announced additional military aid packages within the context of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting on April 11. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on April 11 that Norway will provide 100 million euros (roughly \$113 million) of financing for the United Kingdom's (UK) 450-million-pound (roughly \$588 million) drone and repair aid package to Ukraine.[21] The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on April 3 that it will provide Ukraine with an additional military aid package worth 6.7 billion Danish kroner (over \$1 billion) between 2025 and 2027.[22] The Danish aid package will provide Ukraine with air defense, artillery systems, and ammunition, support the drone and information technology (IT) coalitions, and support the development of a financial framework for Ukraine's Air Force.[23] Norwegian Defense Minister Tore Sandvik stated that Norway will allocate an additional 10 billion Norwegian kroner (roughly \$938 million) for joint Norwegian-Baltic training and provisioning of a new Ukrainian brigade.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- US Special Envoy to Ukraine General Keith Kellogg expressed support on April 11 for the deployment of an allied "reassurance force" in the rear areas of western Ukraine after a possible future ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia.
- Russian state-owned and pro-Kremlin media amplified a Russian official's blanket rejection of any peacekeeping force in Ukraine on April 12.
- Russian forces have resumed a more typical strike pattern in late March and early April 2025 after a temporary spike in the size of Russian long-range strike packages in mid-February and early March 2025.
- People's Republic of China (PRC) military officials reportedly visited the frontline in Ukraine to glean insights for future warfare amid reports that at least 155 Chinese nationals are fighting in Ukraine.
- Ukraine's European partners announced additional military aid packages within the context of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting on April 11.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kurakhove, and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 11, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan

April 11, 2025, 6:30 pm ET

Ukraine's European partners announced new military aid during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting on April 11. German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius

announced on April 11 that Germany will provide Ukraine with four IRIS-T air defense systems, 33 missiles for the systems, 120 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), 25 Marder infantry fighting vehicles, 15 Leopard tanks, 14 artillery systems, and 130,000 155mm artillery shells.[1] Pistorius stated that Germany recently provided 30 Patriot missiles to Ukraine as well. The German Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on April 11 that Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) are establishing an electronic warfare (EW) coalition for Ukraine.[2] The UK MoD announced a military aid package worth 450 million pounds (about \$588 million) drones, radars, and anti-tank mines.[3] Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur stated that Estonia will deliver 10,000 155mm artillery shells and 750,000 rations packages to Ukraine; Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Brekelmans stated that the Netherland will provide 150 million euros (about \$170 million) to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses; and Lithuanian Defense Minister Dovilė Šakalienė announced that Lithuania will allocate 20 million euros (about \$22 million) to Ukraine for the purchase of ammunition.[4]

US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev in St. Petersburg on April 11 to discuss the war in Ukraine.[5] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that the Putin-Witkoff meeting would continue discussions about the war in Ukraine, that Putin would listen to the points that Witkoff delivers from US President Donald Trump, and that the meeting is a good chance for Russia to convey its "main concerns" to Trump via Witkoff.[6] Peskov claimed that the officials may discuss a future meeting between Trump and Putin and that Trump and Putin could "theoretically" have a phone call following the Putin-Witkoff meeting.[7] Peskov claimed that one should not "expect any breakthroughs" during the Putin-Witkoff meeting and that Russia and the United States are in the process of normalizing relations and "searching" for a way to settle the war in Ukraine.[8] Peskov claimed that the Putin-Witkoff meeting and the April 10 US-Russian bilateral meeting in Istanbul are not related but are "two different tracks with one common process."[9] White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated on April 11 that the Putin-Witkoff meeting is another step in the negotiating process toward a ceasefire and an "ultimate peace deal" in the war in Ukraine.[10] Dmitriev stated that his meeting with Witkoff was "productive."[11]

Kremlin officials continue to demonstrate Russia's unwillingness to make territorial compromises in Ukraine in a future peace settlement. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated on April 11, following a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) foreign ministers meeting in Almaty, that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will have to accept territorial concessions and that it is "impossible" for Ukraine to return to its 1991 borders – Ukraine's internationally recognized borders.[12] Lavrov attempted to deflect blame for Russia's intransigence onto Zelensky and Ukraine's alleged mistreatment of Russian speakers in Ukraine. The Kremlin continues to explicitly demonstrate its unwillingness to make compromises and cede Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine as part of any future peace negotiations – in contrast to Ukrainian officials who have expressed their willingness to make territorial compromises in a future peace agreement.[13] Russian President Vladimir Putin has even demanded that Ukraine cede territory in Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy and claimed that Mykolaiv and Kharkiv oblasts are "historically Russian lands."[14]

Russian authorities continue efforts to extract concessions from the United States as part of ongoing bilateral US-Russian negotiations while delaying progress towards peace in Ukraine. Lavrov claimed on April 11 that commercial air services between Russia and the United States should only resume as the "consequence" of the United States lifting sanctions imposed on Russian state-owned airline Aeroflot.[15] Lavrov claimed that the United States agreed to Russia's proposal during talks in Riyadh on February 27, but that the United States has not taken any corresponding action. Lavrov's recent statements demanding sanctions relief from the United States directly contradict CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev's April 3 statements on Fox News that Russia is not requesting sanction relief and further showcases the Kremlin's inconsistent messaging.[16]

Ukrainian sources continue to speculate about which directions Russian forces will prioritize in Spring and Summer 2025. ISW is updating the axis sections in its Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment to reflect shifting Russian operational efforts along the frontline. Ukrainian Presidential Office Deputy Head Pavlo Palisa told Reuters on April 10 that Russian forces will likely intensify offensive operations in Ukraine in April and May 2025 and that Russia will continue to prioritize offensive operations in the Pokrovs'k direction in coming months.[17] Palisa noted that Russian forces could also attempt to advance near Kupyansk, Lyman, or Novopavlivka in eastern Ukraine or towards Zaporizhzhia City in southern Ukraine but reiterated that he assesses that the Pokrovs'k direction will be Russia's "absolute priority." A source in the Ukrainian General Staff told BBC's Ukraine Service on April 11 that Russian forces intend to create a buffer zone in northern Sumy Oblast and threaten Sumy City in the coming months.[18]

Russian forces are currently attempting to advance throughout the frontline in northern, eastern, and southern Ukraine, although Russian forces currently appear to be prioritizing the Toretsk and Novopavlivka directions. ISW recently noted that Russian forces appear to be pursuing several diverging tactical efforts in the Pokrovsk direction, and ISW is reorganizing the eastern axis section in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment to account for the concerted Russian push towards Novopavlivka.[19] Russian forces also appear to be conducting a concerted offensive operation aimed at advancing further into northern Sumy Oblast in the direction of Sumy City after eliminating most of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast in March 2025.[20] ISW will continue reporting on Russian offensive operations in northern Sumy Oblast and possible future activity along Ukraine's northern border in the new Northern axis section in the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to emphasize Russia's large-scale and long-term investments in Russia's navy and naval strategic nuclear forces. Putin held a meeting on April 11 to discuss Russia's development strategy for the Russian Navy through 2050.[21] Putin claimed that the Russian Navy plays a "vital role" in ensuring Russia's security and defense and in protecting Russia's national interests in the "World Ocean." Putin stated that one of Russia's priority tasks is to strengthen its naval strategic nuclear forces. Putin stated that Russia has allocated "significant funds" towards constructing 49 vessels in the past five years and that Russia has allocated 8.4 trillion rubles (about \$100.9 billion) toward the construction of new vessels in the coming decade. Putin noted that Russia has introduced four Borei-A class nuclear submarines and four Yasen-M class nuclear submarines into the navy between 2020 and 2024.

Putin specifically highlighted the Zircon cruise missile, claiming that the missile has a range of over 1,000 kilometers and a speed of nearly Mach 10. Putin also called for Russia to develop ship-based unmanned aircraft systems and unmanned underwater and surface boats and to integrate these unmanned systems into a "single reconnaissance and strike [system], linked to [Russia's] satellite group." Russian forces have launched a limited number of Zircon cruise missiles in ground attack mode against Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces have successfully shot down some of the Zircon missiles. [22]

Russian forces recently executed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued reports of systematic executions of Ukrainian POWs across the theater of war. The Associated Press (AP) reported on April 10 that it obtained a video from Ukrainian and Russian drones showing Russian soldiers executing Ukrainian POWs surrendering in Pyatykhatky (northwest of Robotyne).[23] Ukrainian officials reacted to the footage confirming the executions and reiterated that Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs are "systematic."[24] ISW observed a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025 and continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling subordinates to execute Ukrainian POWs in violation of international law.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's European partners announced new military aid during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting on April 11.
- US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev in St. Petersburg on April 11 to discuss the war in Ukraine.
- Kremlin officials continue to demonstrate Russia's unwillingness to make territorial compromises in Ukraine in a future peace settlement.
- Russian authorities continue efforts to extract concessions from the United States as part of ongoing bilateral US-Russian negotiations while delaying progress towards peace in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian sources continue to speculate about which directions Russian forces will prioritize in Spring and Summer 2024. ISW is updating the axis sections in its Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment to reflect shifting Russian operational efforts along the frontline.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to emphasize Russia's large-scale and long-term investments in Russia's navy and naval strategic nuclear forces.
- Russian forces recently executed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid continued reports of systematic executions of Ukrainian POWs across the theater of war.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Siversk, Novopavlivka, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian opposition media provided additional details regarding Russia's efforts to recruit Chinese citizens to serve in Ukraine following Ukrainian reports about Chinese nationals fighting in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 10, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Daria Novikov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on April 10. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 11 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 9 that Ukraine is interested in purchasing a large package of weapons from the United States, possibly within the framework of a future US-Ukraine mineral deal, as part of Ukrainian efforts to obtain security guarantees that would deter a future Russian invasion.[1] Zelensky stated on April 9 that Ukraine recently proposed to the United States that Ukraine purchase "30 to 50 billion" (likely USD) worth of air defense and weapons systems from the United States and that Ukraine is prepared to purchase these systems itself — either through direct payment to the United States or through the fund established by the potential US-Ukrainian minerals deal.[2] Zelensky stated that he recently told US President Donald Trump that Ukraine wants to buy at least 10 air defense systems to "help [Ukraine] after the end of the war" and that Ukraine will consider the provision of these air defense and weapons systems as a "security guarantee."^[3] ISW continues to assess that a strong Ukrainian military backed by Western security guarantees remains the most vital component of a stable post-war European security architecture, guaranteeing a sustainable peace in Ukraine and deterring future Russian aggression.[4]

Russia's continued unsubstantiated accusations of Ukrainian violations of the energy strike ceasefire —despite the lack of any publicly available official ceasefire agreement — demonstrate how Russia will likely act in the event that Russia accepts the ground ceasefire to which Ukraine and the United States have already agreed. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed without evidence on April 9 that Ukrainian forces struck energy infrastructure in "Russian regions" 32 times between April 4 and 7.[5] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also claimed without evidence on April 10 that Ukraine conducted 11 strikes against energy facilities in occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts; Krasnodar Krai; and Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod oblasts in the past day.[6] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces struck energy facilities in the Russian near rear and rear in occupied Ukraine, including in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast (roughly six kilometers from the frontline) and Holoprystanskyi Raion, Kherson Oblast (just south of the Dnipro River and inclusive of areas immediately on the east [left] bank of the Dnipro River). It is unclear if frontline energy infrastructure in the Russian near rear and rear are covered under the strikes ceasefire as the terms of the agreement have not been published. ISW continues to assess that Russian officials are using the lack of a clearly defined and public ceasefire agreement to cast Ukraine as a disingenuous participant in the peace negotiation process.^[7] Russian officials' continued insistence that Ukraine is violating the ceasefire underscores the importance of a signed and publicly available ceasefire agreement that includes monitoring and adjudication processes -elements that will be even more important in the potential future ground ceasefire to which the United States and Ukraine have already agreed.

Russia continues to use bilateral talks with the United States to delay negotiations about the war in Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin remains uninterested in serious peace negotiations to end the war. The US Department of State (DoS) reported that US and Russian delegations met in Istanbul on April 10 to discuss the finalization of "an understanding to ensure the stability of diplomatic banking for Russian and US bilateral missions."^[8] The US DoS stated that the US delegation reiterated concerns about the current Russian policy prohibiting the US Embassy in Moscow from employing local staff, which the United States sees as a barrier to the embassy's stable and sustainable staffing. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on April 10 that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the US DoS would only discuss bilateral relations and would not discuss Ukraine.^[9] Russian Ambassador to the United States Alexander Darchiev stated on April 10 that the United States and Russia agreed to measures to facilitate the movement of diplomats and accelerate the granting of diplomatic visas.^[10] Darchiev also stated that the Russian delegation prioritized discussions about the return of confiscated Russian diplomatic property in the United States.^[11] Russia continues to use bilateral talks with the United States to discuss issues unrelated to the war in Ukraine, even as US President Donald Trump continues efforts to achieve the temporary ground ceasefire upon which both the United States and Ukraine have agreed.^[12] The talks in Istanbul suggest that Russia is using diplomatic engagements with the United States to distract from the war and to obfuscate its own disinterest in productive peace negotiations.

Russia is reportedly using social media and financial incentives to recruit Chinese nationals to voluntarily join the Russian military. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 9 that Ukrainian authorities have identified 155 Chinese citizens fighting with Russian forces in Ukraine but that there are likely many more.[13] Zelensky stated that Chinese nationals are fighting as part of the Russian 70th and 71st motorized rifle regiments (both of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) and the 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD). Elements of the 70th and 71st motorized rifle regiments are currently operating in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and elements of the 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment are reportedly operating in the Toretsk direction.[14] Zelensky stated that Russian forces are posting advertisements on TikTok and other Chinese social networks to recruit Chinese citizens and that the Chinese nationals traveled to Moscow, where they underwent medical examinations and one to two months of military training before deploying to Ukraine.[15] Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported on April 9 that a Russian representative directly recruited one of the Chinese citizens, whom Ukrainian forces recently captured in Ukraine, in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and that the Chinese citizen signed a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) upon arriving in Moscow in February 2025.[16] The SBU reported that another captured Chinese citizen went to Russia for tourism in December 2024 and signed an MoD contract after seeing an internet advertisement offering two million rubles (about \$24,000) for joining the Russian military. Ukrainian outlet *Kyiv Independent* reported on April 9 that it viewed a Ukrainian intelligence document that stated that at least 163 Chinese citizens are serving in the Russian military as of early April 2025.[17] The *Kyiv Independent* reported that another document showed photos and passport details of 13 Chinese citizens fighting in the Russian military as of April 2. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian stated on April 10 that the PRC MFA is unaware of the more than 155 Chinese citizens fighting with Russian forces in Ukraine.[18]

Russian forces reportedly recently executed a wounded Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) in the Lyman direction. A source reportedly affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence reported on April 8 that Russian sources published footage of two soldiers of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) executing a wounded Ukrainian soldier near Katerynivka (northeast of Lyman) recently on an unspecified date.[19] ISW has observed a sharp increase in credible reports and footage of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout 2024 and 2025 and continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling subordinates to execute Ukrainian POWs in violation of international law.[20]

The Kremlin continues to use narratives it has historically used against Ukraine to set conditions to justify possible future aggression against Estonia. Russian MFA Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused Estonia of conducting a "hunt" against Orthodoxy, and the MFA amplified the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Holy Synod's accusations of Estonia's persecution and oppression against Orthodox followers.[21] The Russian MFA and ROC claims come after the Estonian Parliament on April 9 passed amendments to the Churches and Congregations Act that would legally force the Estonian Orthodox Church to sever its affiliation with the ROC — Moscow Patriarchate (MP).[22] ISW has extensively reported on the Kremlin's use of the ROC as a tool for its hybrid operations, particularly in occupied Ukraine and in former Soviet Union states, in order to repress religious freedom and promote pro-war and pro-Kremlin ideology.[23] The Kremlin has long been setting information conditions for hybrid operations against the Baltic states in the name of protecting Russian "compatriots abroad," including against religious-based persecution, and may seek to combine and intensify these rhetorical efforts should Estonia codify these amendments into law.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 9 that Ukraine is interested in purchasing a large package of weapons from the United States, possibly within the framework of a future US-Ukraine mineral deal, as part of Ukrainian efforts to obtain security guarantees that would deter a future Russian invasion.
- Russia's continued unsubstantiated accusations of Ukrainian violations of the energy strike ceasefire - despite the lack of any publicly available official ceasefire agreement – demonstrate how Russia will likely act in the event that Russia accepts the ground ceasefire to which Ukraine and the United States have already agreed
- Russia continues to use bilateral talks with the United States to delay negotiations about the war in Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin remains uninterested in serious peace negotiations to end the war.
- Russia is reportedly using social media and financial incentives to recruit Chinese nationals to voluntarily join the Russian military.
- Russian forces reportedly recently executed a wounded Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) in the Lyman direction.

- The Kremlin continues to use narratives it has historically used against Ukraine to set conditions to justify possible future aggression against Estonia.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- A Russian insider source claimed that Russian authorities are preparing a dedicated position in Russian regional governments that will oversee veterans' affairs, and the federal government may include similar positions in the future.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 9, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 9, 2025, 7:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on April 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continue to marginally advance in the Sumy-Kursk Oblast border area, but the Russian force grouping in the area will likely be unable to launch a major offensive operation against Sumy City in the near term without receiving significant reinforcements. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated during an interview with Ukrainian outlet LB UA published on April 9 that Russian forces have intensified assaults in "all main directions" and begun offensive operations in Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts.^[1] ISW has observed gradual but consistent Russian gains and attacks along the Volodymyrivka-Zhuravka-Novenke line (north to northeast of Sumy City) in northern Sumy Oblast and ongoing Russian efforts to push Ukrainian forces from remaining positions south of Sudzha in southern Kursk Oblast since early March 2025.^[2] Russian forces made rapid advances in Kursk Oblast in early March 2025 as the United States temporarily paused intelligence sharing with Ukraine, but Russian gains slowed as Ukrainian forces retreated into Sudzha and later resumed use of HIMARS long-range strike systems.^[3] Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from Sudzha in mid-March 2025 but have continued to attack the remaining Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast while starting attacks into northern Sumy Oblast over the past month.^[4]

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on April 9 that elements of the Russian 76th Airborne (VDV) Division and 83rd VDV Brigade recently seized Basivka (south of Novenke) and are attempting to advance towards Loknya (further south of Novenke) and interdict the H-07 Yunkivka-Sudzha highway.^[5] Mashovets stated that unspecified Russian units are also attacking in the Volodymyrivka-Veselivka area (north of Sumy City) and are trying to advance toward and merge at the Russian salient near Basivka. Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 106th VDV Division and 11th VDV Brigade are attacking from Gogolevka and near Oleshnya (both west of Sudzha) in Kursk Oblast and the Sudzha checkpoint along the international border, and that elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) and 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) with support from North Korean troops are pushing Ukrainian forces from any remaining positions near Guyevo and Gornal (both south of Sudzha). Russian milbloggers claimed on April 8 and 9 that Russian forces have marginally advanced in eastern Oleshnya and southeast of Guyevo in Kursk Oblast.^[6]

Mashovets estimated that there are roughly 62,000 to 65,000 Russian troops and border guards currently operating in Kursk Oblast, and Syrskyi estimated in January 2025 that Russian forces had concentrated roughly 67,000 Russian troops and 11,000 North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast.^[7] Russian forces have likely sustained some losses during intensified attacks in March and early April 2025, and ISW has observed several claims that elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade redeployed from Kursk Oblast to Belgorod Oblast in order to respond to ongoing Ukrainian attacks in northwesternmost Belgorod Oblast.^[8] The Russian military command does not appear to be significantly bolstering its force grouping in Kursk Oblast — which would be a leading indicator for a larger offensive operation against Sumy Oblast — and in fact appears willing to redeploy small numbers of troops away from the Sumy effort — suggesting that the command believes that it can achieve its operational goals with the forces it has already gathered in Kursk Oblast.

The Russian military command is likely attempting to form a buffer zone along the international border in Sumy Oblast, although Russian commanders may intend to press further into Sumy Oblast and towards Sumy City in the future. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces would

not attempt to advance further into northern Sumy Oblast or attack Sumy City so long as Ukrainian forces maintained their salient in Kursk Oblast.[9] Recent Russian attacks into northern Sumy Oblast indicate that the Russian military command may attempt to capitalize on the collapse of the Ukrainian Kursk Oblast salient in order to create a buffer zone in Sumy Oblast or launch an offensive on Sumy City. Russian President Vladimir Putin asked Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov during a visit to a Russian command post in Kursk Oblast on March 12 to "think in the future about creating a security zone" along the Ukrainian-Russian international border.[10] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested that Russia form a similar buffer zone in Kharkiv Oblast in order to justify the Russian offensive into northern Kharkiv Oblast in March 2024, and Putin's statement indicates that the Russian military command is either considering or actively working towards creating a buffer zone in northern Sumy Oblast.[11]

Putin likely intends to use a buffer zone in northern Sumy Oblast and an offensive towards Sumy City to justify expanding his claims over Ukrainian territory. Russian officials are currently demanding that Ukraine cede unoccupied territory in Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts as part of a future peace agreement to end the war, and Russian officials have previously claimed that Mykolaiv Oblast (which Russia occupies a minuscule part of on the Kinburn Spit) and Kharkiv Oblast (which Russia occupies limited areas of) are "historically Russian lands."[12] Putin may intend to leverage further advances in Sumy Oblast and pressure on Sumy City to demand that Ukraine cede part of Sumy Oblast to Russia during future peace negotiations. The Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast is unlikely to be sufficiently combat capable to seize a major Ukrainian city after eight months of combat operations unless it receives significant reinforcements from another frontline area — which would require Russia to abandon a major operational effort in another area of Ukraine and possibly leave that area vulnerable to Ukrainian forces — and is therefore unlikely. Russian forces likely intend to establish a limited and defensible "buffer zone" in northern Sumy Oblast and advance within artillery range of Sumy City in order to pressure the city and make it uninhabitable for civilians. The Russian military command may also intend to establish limited, defensible positions in northern Sumy Oblast and then transfer these forces to reinforce other operational efforts in Ukraine, although the informational and political pressure that a push on Sumy City could generate may be more enticing for Putin than advances in other frontline areas.

Russia continues to utilize North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast, but ISW has not yet observed indications that North Korean troops are operating as combat forces in Ukraine. Syrskyi stated that Ukraine has observed at least two waves of North Korean forces training and replenishing their forces, presumably on the frontline or in near-rear areas, and that North Korean forces continue to operate against Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast.[13] Syrskyi noted that North Korean forces are improving their training, weapons, and equipment after suffering significant losses in battle and that North Korean forces have "effectively switched to the standards of the Russian military." Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported that up to four "brigades" of North Korean forces — which Mashovets reported as roughly equivalent to two motorized rifle brigades — are operating in Kursk Oblast.[14] Mashovets reported that Russian forces either use North Korean forces to reinforce Russian assault units or allocate North Korean forces to separate areas for operations in their regular units, usually at the company to battalion levels. The presence of North Korean forces in occupied Ukraine or on the frontline within Ukraine would be a notable inflection in the degree of North Korean participation in the war. North Korean forces fighting in Ukraine itself would likely mark a decision point for Western and Pacific countries concerned about North Korean escalation in the war in Ukraine and the continued combat experience North Korean forces gain fighting alongside Russian forces.[15]

Syrskyi stated that there are currently 623,000 Russian military personnel fighting against Ukraine.[16] Syrskyi stated that Russian forces are "increasing the number" of personnel in Ukraine by 8,000 to 9,000 new personnel per month through contract recruitment and that the Russian force grouping fighting against Ukraine increased from about 603,000 on January 1, 2025 to 623,000 just over three months later. Syrskyi attributed these recruitment numbers to the financial incentives that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian federal subjects have offered to Russians who sign contracts with the Russian MoD. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Head Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated on March 3 that there were 620,000 Russian soldiers operating against Ukraine and that there were about 580,000 Russian soldiers operating against Ukraine in November 2024.[17]

Syrskyi also spoke about Ukraine's efforts to further develop its tactical and long-range drone capabilities. Syrskyi stated that Ukraine has developed long-range strike drones with ranges of over 1,700 kilometers and noted that a Ukrainian drone recently struck a Russian Tu-22M3 long range bomber worth \$100 million as it landed at a Russian airbase after a combat operation. Syrskyi reported that Ukrainian forces have also developed tactical fiber-optic strike drones with a range of up to 20 kilometers and that Ukraine plans to scale up production of these drones over the next one to three months (until about July 2025). Syrskyi noted that Ukraine continues to develop its Unmanned

Systems Forces and that Ukrainian brigades are integrating drone units. Ukrainian frontline and long-range drones are crucial parts of Ukraine's defensive capabilities, and Ukrainian forces have leveraged these drones to defend against Russian offensive operations and inflict significant economic cost on Russia's war effort.[18] Syrskyi noted that long-range Ukrainian strikes against Russian ammunition arsenals forced Russian forces to roughly halve the number of artillery shells fired in Ukraine daily to around 20,000 and that Russian forces currently fire 27,000 to 28,000 artillery rounds per day. ISW has also observed Russian milblogger complaints that frontline Ukrainian drone operations have blunted recent Russian offensive operations south of Pokrovsk, and Ukrainian drone reconnaissance and strikes have inflicted heavy Russian vehicle losses throughout 2024.[19]

The People's Republic of China (PRC) denied sending military personnel to fight in Ukraine following Ukrainian reports of Chinese nationals fighting alongside Russian forces. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian stated on April 9 that the PRC did not deploy military personnel to fight alongside Russian forces in Ukraine, emphasizing that the PRC consistently urges its citizens to avoid involvement in armed conflicts.[20] Lin noted that the PRC is currently verifying the situation with Ukrainian authorities. Lin's statement comes amid official Ukrainian reports on April 8 that Ukrainian forces captured several Chinese "fighters" who were fighting for Russia near Bilohorivka (east of Siversk) and Tarasivka (northeast of Pokrovsk) in recent attacks and that there are likely more PRC citizens in the Russian military.[21] A Ukrainian brigade confirmed on April 9 that its soldiers were responsible for capturing the PRC citizens fighting in Ukraine.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continue to marginally advance in the Sumy-Kursk Oblast border area, but the Russian force grouping in the area will likely be unable to launch a major offensive operation against Sumy City in the near term without receiving significant reinforcements.
- The Russian military command is likely attempting to form a buffer zone along the international border in Sumy Oblast, although Russian commanders may intend to press further into Sumy Oblast and towards Sumy City in the future.
- Russia continues to utilize North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast, but ISW has not yet observed indications that North Korean troops are operating as combat forces in Ukraine.
- Syrskyi stated that there are currently 623,000 Russian military personnel fighting against Ukraine.
- Syrskyi also spoke about Ukraine's efforts to further develop its tactical and long-range drone capabilities.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) denied sending military personnel to fight in Ukraine following Ukrainian reports of Chinese nationals fighting alongside Russian forces.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces advanced near Kupyansk, Lyman, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian federal government and Russian federal subjects are increasingly focused on veteran rehabilitation and reintegration.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 8, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30 am ET on April 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces recently captured Chinese nationals fighting in the Russian military in several areas of Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on April 8 that Ukrainian forces captured several Chinese "fighters" who were fighting for Russia near Bilohorivka (east of Siversk) and Tarasivka (northeast of Pokrovsk) in recent attacks and that Ukrainian intelligence indicated that there are "significantly more Chinese nationals" in the Russian military.[1] Zelensky noted that Ukrainian forces came into contact with a group of six Chinese fighters during several recent attacks and captured two. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha stated that the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) summoned the Chinese charge d'affairs in response to the incident. [2] US Department of State Spokesperson Tammy Bruce characterized the Chinese nationals'

involvement as "disturbing" on April 8 and stated that "China is a major enabler of Russia" that "provides nearly 80 percent of the dual use items Russia needs to sustain the war."^[3]

ISW has observed reports of various unspecified Russian entities recruiting vulnerable migrant workers into the Russian military to fight in Ukraine both in Russia and abroad. Indian authorities revealed in 2024 that unspecified Russian entities were managing a human trafficking network that lured Indian citizens to Russia under false pretenses and then coerced them into signing military contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense to fight in Ukraine.^[4] Indian and Russian authorities partnered to repatriate Indian citizens who had involuntarily joined the Russian military in October 2024, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) could demonstrate that its government was not involved in the participation of its citizens in this war by undertaking a similar effort in the future.^[5] Beijing has not yet offered any formal response to these reports.

Russian and US authorities announced a second round of US-Russia bilateral discussions focused on normalizing diplomatic missions but not on discussing the ceasefire agreements offered jointly by the US and Ukraine will be held in Istanbul on April 10. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on April 8 that Russian Ambassador to the United States Alexander Darchiev and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Sonata Coulter will lead their respective delegations and that the meetings will follow the same format as the February 27 meeting.^[6] Unnamed diplomatic sources told Russian outlet RBK that the discussions will be held on April 10.^[7] US Department of State Spokesperson Tammy Bruce confirmed that the bilateral discussions will occur on April 10 and will solely focus on normalizing US and Russian diplomatic operations and that discussions about Ukraine are not on the agenda.^[8] The Kremlin continues to demonstrate its refusal to substantively engage with the United States on proposed ceasefire agreements and future peace negotiations in Ukraine.^[9]

Russian forces are currently pursuing three distinct tactical objectives in the Pokrovsk direction, but Ukrainian drone operations and localized counterattacks are continuing to complicate Russian advances in the area. Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov stated on April 7 that Russian forces are trying to cut the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway northeast of Pokrovsk, bypass Pokrovsk from the west, and attack in the Novopavlivka (southwest of Pokrovsk) direction.^[10] Russian forces are making limited gains northeast of Pokrovsk toward the T-0504 highway and southwest of Pokrovsk toward Novopavlivka but appear to be struggling to advance immediately south and southwest of Pokrovsk — where Ukrainian forces have focused most of their counterattacks in February, March, and early April 2025.^[11]

Russian advances northeast of Pokrovsk support both the ongoing Russian effort to envelop Pokrovsk from the east and west and the effort to pressure Kostyantynivka from the south by advancing along the T-0504 highway and eliminating the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk.^[12] The Russian military command reportedly introduced additional units to offensive operations east and northeast of Pokrovsk in early 2025, but Russian forces have only made marginal gains toward Kostyantynivka (northeast of Pokrovsk) in recent months. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that Russia redeployed elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) near Vozdvyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk) in January 2025 and elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) to the area in February 2025.^[13] The Russian military command likely intended to leverage these units and elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA) in Toretsk to exploit anticipated Russian breakthroughs in these areas and make significant advances towards Kostyantynivka.^[14] Russian units previously operating in these two areas failed to breakthrough Ukraine's defense and culminated as the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions arrived near Vozdvyzhenka and in Toretsk respectively, however, prompting the Russian military command to prematurely introduce the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions into combat in order to maintain their operational tempo in these areas. Russian forces have not made significant advances northeast of Pokrovsk as a result and only advanced five to seven kilometers north of Vozdvyzhenka over the last two months. Russian forces recently advanced beyond the western outskirts of Toretsk and southwest of Toretsk near Panteleimonivka and Oleksandropil, and Russian forces may allocate additional troops and reprioritize offensive operations northeast of Pokrovsk if Russian forces begin to make more significant advances from Toretsk toward Kostyantynivka.^[15]

The situation immediately south and southwest of Pokrovsk remains extremely dynamic amid intensified Russian offensive operations and localized Ukrainian counterattacks and drone operations in the area. Russian forces intensified offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction in mid-March 2025 aimed at enveloping Pokrovsk and seizing Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad (just east of Pokrovsk) but have not made significant advances since late Fall 2024 due to localized Ukrainian counterattacks and drone operations in the area.^[16] Geolocated footage published on April 8 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced west of Kotlyne (southwest of Pokrovsk),

and additional geolocated footage published on April 7 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced in northeastern Shevchenko (south of Pokrovsk).[17] The deputy commander of a Ukrainian drone detachment operating in the area stated on April 8 that Russian forces are attacking "non-stop" in the Pokrovsk direction and occasionally attack with armored vehicles.[18] Ukrainian forces began localized counterattacks and made marginal advances south of Pokrovsk near Shevchenko and Pishchane and southwest of Pokrovsk near Kotlyne and Nadiivka in late January and early-to-mid February 2025.[19] Ukrainian forces have not been able to establish enduring positions in the area, however, and Russian forces have slowly retaken most of Ukraine's marginal advances south and southwest of Pokrovsk in recent weeks. Ukrainian forces are continuing to conduct sporadic, localized counterattacks in the area, likely in an effort to complicate Russian advances and threaten Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in the Russian salient immediately southwest of Pokrovsk.

Russian forces continue to deplete manpower and materiel in unsuccessful mechanized assaults and ongoing infantry assaults with armored vehicle support further southwest of Pokrovsk. A Ukrainian tactical group operating in the Pokrovsk direction reported on April 8 that Russian forces recently conducted a company-sized mechanized assault near Yasenove (southwest of Pokrovsk) in an attempt to seize Bohdanivka, Troitske, and Horikhove (all west of Yasenove) and that Ukrainian forces destroyed two tanks, two armored personnel carriers, four all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), four motorcycles, and 50 Russian troops during the assault.[20] Additional geolocated footage published on April 7 shows that Ukrainian forces repelled another company-sized Russian mechanized assault near Sribne (southwest of Pokrovsk) on April 6 and damaged three armored vehicles and five tanks during the assault.[21] The commander of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Pokrovsk direction stated on April 8 that Russian forces have recently begun using more armored vehicles in the area but have also resorted to using motorcycles and golf carts to make advances.[22] The spokesperson of another Ukrainian brigade operating in the area stated on April 2 that Russian equipment losses have tripled in the area since the start of negotiations (likely referring to mid-February 2025).[23] Russian forces have advanced marginally closer to the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk administration border as a result of mechanized assaults in the area in recent weeks, particularly west of Preobrazhenka (southwest of Pokrovsk), but Russian forces have not advanced the remaining three kilometers into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast as of this report.[24]

Russian forces have only made marginal advances throughout the Pokrovsk direction due to localized Ukrainian counterattacks and improved integration of Ukrainian ground and drone forces. The Russian military command has historically struggled to conduct and connect multi-directional offensive operations in Ukraine, and Ukrainian drone operations are further complicating this effort. Russian milbloggers have repeatedly claimed that Ukrainian drones have low altitude air superiority and are forcing Russian forces to conduct rotations on foot over 10 kilometers and complicating Russian supplies of ammunition, water, and gasoline.[25] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones are preventing Russian forces from operating more than three kilometers north and west of Selydove (currently 10 kilometers south and 30 kilometers east of the frontline) and that Ukrainian drones are monitoring and restricting access to all roads in this direction.[26] A Ukrainian battalion command operating in the Pokrovsk direction reported in February 2025 that Ukrainian drone operators hold some areas of their defense lines in the Pokrovsk direction almost completely independently from infantry support.[27] ISW previously noted that Ukrainian drone operations have been key in defending against Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction and throughout the frontline over the last year, although Ukraine must address its morale, force generation, and training issues to completely stall the Russian advance in Donetsk Oblast.[28]

Russian forces have spent the last 13 months and lost over five divisions' worth of tanks and thousands of troops attacking towards Pokrovsk and trying to seize the town. Ongoing Russian offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk and attack Kostyantynivka highlight Russian President Vladimir Putin's determination to seize all of Ukraine through military means at whatever cost if he cannot do so through negotiations. Trehubov estimated in February 2025 that Russian forces were losing 14,000 to 15,000 casualties, including roughly 7,000 killed in action (KIA), each month in the Pokrovsk direction — suggesting that Russian forces lost up to 45,000 casualties in the Pokrovsk direction in the first three months of 2025.[29] The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Toretsk direction stated that Russian forces have lost over 15,000 Russian KIA in Toretsk since mid-July 2024 and estimated that Russian forces have lost over 50,000 total casualties in this direction.[30] ISW previously reported that Russian forces had lost at least five divisions' worth of armored vehicles and tanks in Pokrovsk Raion as of early October 2024, and Russian forces have only sustained further losses over the last six months.[31] ISW has previously assessed that Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) cannot produce new armored vehicles and artillery systems at rates that can offset Russia's current tempo of losses in the medium- to long-term.[32] Russian forces temporarily fielded fewer armored vehicles in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove direction in late 2024, likely in response to concerns about dwindling armored vehicle supplies, although the recent uptick in

Russian armored vehicle use in these areas highlights Russia's desperation to make further gains at any cost. Future Russian attacks on and into Pokrovsk and Kostyantynivka would only generate greater manpower and materiel losses if the Russian military is even capable of conducting such operations after having suffered significant armored vehicle and personnel losses over the last three years of fighting.

Putin and the Russian military command appear determined to seize Pokrovsk and attack Kostyantynivka despite these losses, however. Ongoing Russian attacks towards Kostyantynivka from several directions highlight Russia's ongoing efforts to seize the fortress belt, despite the fact that an offensive operation against the wider Ukrainian fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast would likely take Russian forces several years to complete, assuming that the West continues to provide aid to Ukraine. [33] ISW previously assessed that Russian commanders are likely willing to undertake these long-term operations because they are operating under the assumption or with direct knowledge that Putin does not intend to end the war in Ukraine in the near future.[34] Putin has previously articulated a theory of victory that assumes that the Russian military will be able to continue gradual, creeping advances in Ukraine indefinitely and has repeatedly indicated that he has no interest in a resolution of the war on any terms but those he dictates.[35] The US Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) 2025 Annual Threat Assessment assessed in March 2025 that Putin remains committed to pursuing Ukrainian surrender through both diplomatic and military means.[36] ISW continues to assess that Putin has no interest in ending the war and intends to continue fighting until he accomplishes his objectives in Ukraine, which are the toppling of the current Ukrainian government and the categorical destruction of the Ukrainian military.[37]

Russian forces renewed long-range missile and drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on April 7 to 8 following a brief pause on April 6 to 7.[38] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile from Kursk Oblast and 46 Shahed and decoy drones from the direction of Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai.[39] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed nine drones over northern and eastern Ukraine and that 31 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian sources reported that the Iskander-M missile struck a recreation center in Vysoky, Kharkiv Oblast.[40] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces also struck Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk oblasts.[41]

Russian forces continue to innovate with long-range Shahed strike drone tactics to maximize the impact of strikes against Ukraine. Ukrainian military journalist and aviation expert Vadim Kushnikov gave an interview to Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* published on April 8 noting that Russian forces are now attempting to fly Shahed drones in the densest possible formations to hit targets simultaneously, whereas Russian forces previously dispersed Shahed drones widely to make it more difficult for Ukrainian air defenses to intercept the drones.[42] Kushnikov stated that Russian forces will concentrate a group of 10 to 15 Shahed drones outside of a city before striking the city, and that Russian forces launch a set number of drones, accumulate them in a group, and fly the drones along a set route in that formation. German outlet *BILD* recently reported that Russian forces have altered their strike drone tactics and are loitering drones several kilometers from their targets at high altitudes before conducting synchronized strikes with multiple drones.[43] Kushnikov stated that Russian forces have also increased the number of drone launch sites from three to five and are focusing on Ukrainian targets closer to the border in northeastern Ukraine, giving Ukrainian air defenses less time to react and intercept the drones. Kushnikov noted that Ukrainian forces are developing countermeasures against Russian drone strikes, including using first person view (FPV) drones as interceptors along with combat lasers. Russian forces may be leveraging increased Shahed production rates to facilitate denser and more focused strike tactics as part of ongoing Russian efforts to innovate their long-range strike packages.[44]

European states continue to provide financial and military aid to Ukraine. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Prime Minister's Office announced on April 7 that Norway will provide four billion kroner (approximately 365.3 million USD) in grants to Czechia's artillery ammunition initiative for Ukraine in 2025, as well as one billion kroner to the European Peace Facility (EPF) financing mechanism.[45] The Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever stated on April 8 that the Belgian government will allocate one billion euros to Ukraine in 2025.[46] De Wever also stated that Belgium will deliver two F-16s to Ukraine in 2025 to be used for spare parts and will deliver at least two operational F-16s to Ukraine in 2026.[47] De Wever stated that Ukrainian and Belgian military industrial companies signed four unspecified contracts and that Belgian entities are interested in starting the production of unspecified weapons in Ukraine.[48]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced an initiative ostensibly aimed at securing medical treatment and rehabilitation for wounded Russian troops, but the MoD may weaponize this initiative against wounded servicemembers in practice. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov signed a decree on April 8 ordering the establishment of mobile medical commissions to

examine wounded Russian forces in frontline positions and identify soldiers requiring treatment and rehabilitation.[49] The Russian MoD noted that the mobile medical commissions will include senior medical specialists, surgeons, therapists, neurologists, and nurses. Russian authorities may be introducing this initiative to portray that the MoD is working to resolve long-standing front-line issues related to the pervasive allegations of abuse of wounded Russian personnel.[50] Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn stated that Russian military command is currently forming a battalion of mobilized prisoners with incurable diseases to conduct future assaults in the Zaporizhia direction.[51] Ukrainian officials have repeatedly reported that the Russian military command is sending wounded and medically unfit soldiers on assaults to draw Ukrainian fire and expose Ukrainian positions before better trained Russian forces attack.[52] Belousov could issue an order to stop all such abuses if the Russian MoD prioritized addressing this issue. The Kremlin may also be attempting to mitigate budgetary concerns by centralizing control over medical evaluations for wounded servicemembers and possibly limiting the number of future veterans of the war in Ukraine who qualify for state support.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces recently captured Chinese nationals fighting in the Russian military in several areas of Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian and US authorities announced a second round of US-Russia bilateral discussions focused on normalizing diplomatic missions but not on discussing the ceasefire agreements offered jointly by the US and Ukraine will be held in Istanbul on April 10.
- Russian forces are currently pursuing three distinct tactical objectives in the Pokrovsk direction, but Ukrainian drone operations and localized counterattacks are continuing to complicate Russian advances in the area.
- Russian advances northeast of Pokrovsk support both the ongoing Russian effort to envelop Pokrovsk from the east and west and the effort to pressure Kostyantynivka from the south by advancing along the T-0504 highway and eliminating the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk.
- The situation immediately south and southwest of Pokrovsk remains extremely dynamic amid intensified Russian offensive operations and localized Ukrainian counterattacks and drone operations in the area.
- Russian forces continue to deplete manpower and materiel in unsuccessful mechanized assaults and ongoing infantry assaults with armored vehicle support further southwest of Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces have only made marginal advances throughout the Pokrovsk direction due to localized Ukrainian counterattacks and improved integration of Ukrainian ground and drone forces.
- Russian forces have spent the last 13 months and lost over five divisions' worth of tanks and thousands of troops attacking toward Pokrovsk and trying to seize the town. Ongoing Russian offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk and attack Kostyantynivka highlight Russian President Vladimir Putin's determination to seize all of Ukraine through military means at whatever cost if he cannot do so through negotiations.
- Russian forces renewed long-range missile and drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on April 7 to 8 following a brief pause on April 6 to 7.
- Russian forces continue to innovate with long-range Shahed strike drone tactics to maximize the impact of strikes against Ukraine.
- European states continue to provide financial and military aid to Ukraine.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced an initiative ostensibly aimed at securing medical treatment and rehabilitation for wounded Russian troops, but the MoD may weaponize this initiative against wounded servicemembers in practice.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Belgorod oblasts and near Lyman, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- The Kremlin is considering passing a bill that may incentivize volunteer recruitment for conscription-age men ages 18 to 30 years old.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 7, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, Christina Harward, Anna Harvey, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

April 7, 2025, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on April 7. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 8 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin continues to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government as part of efforts to claim that Ukraine is not a legitimate negotiating partner and to demand Ukrainian regime change and demilitarization. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 7 that Russian President Vladimir Putin supports the idea of a ceasefire in Ukraine but claimed that several issues "are hanging in the air."^[1] Peskov claimed that these issues include the "lack of control" over the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian government's alleged inability to control the actions of unspecified extremist and nationalist units that "simply do not obey" the Ukrainian government's orders. Peskov claimed that these units are connected to "plans for the further militarization" of Ukraine. Peskov is promoting Putin's March 28 narrative falsely claiming that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate and incapable of combatting neo-Nazi groups, which Putin claimed have the "actual power in their hands."^[2] These Kremlin statements are part of a broader effort to undermine the Ukrainian government's legitimacy and repackage Russia's long-standing demands for regime change and demilitarization in Ukraine. Putin and other Russian officials previously temporarily paused promoting claims about Ukraine's alleged illegitimacy following Putin's phone call with US President Donald Trump on February 12, but later resumed these claims on March 28.^[3] Trump recently expressed dissatisfaction with Putin's disparaging remarks attacking Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy and expressed a willingness to impose additional sanctions on Russia if the United States and Russia are unable to "make a deal."^[4]

Ukrainian officials did not report any Russian long-range missile or drone strikes on the night of April 6 to 7 or during the day on April 7 following Russia's largest strike package in over a month on the night of April 5 to 6. It remains unclear why the Russian forces did not conduct any long-range strikes, after having done so daily since December 12, 2024.^[5] Russia used the large-scale missile and drone strike series on the night of April 5 to 6 to experiment with its strike packages to increase their effectiveness, and Russia may be preparing to conduct another large-scale strike package in near future.^[6]

Ukraine's European allies continue to ramp up domestic materiel production and address shortages inhibiting artillery ammunition production. German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced on April 7 that the company will acquire and repurpose German nitrocellulose producer "Hagerdorn-NC" for weapons production as part of ongoing efforts to increase Rheinmetall's capacity for manufacturing ammunition propellants, particularly for 155mm artillery shells.^[7] Nitrocellulose, also known as guncotton, is a crucial component of propellants for modern artillery ammunition and other munitions that use gunpowder.^[8] Rheinmetall currently produces nitrocellulose at facilities in Switzerland, Spain, and South Africa and plans to increase its production of gunpowder by over 50 percent by 2028.^[9] Rheinmetall subsidiary Nitrochemie Aschau — which produces nitrocellulose, other gunpowder components, and dynamite — has increased its production capacity by 60 percent since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and plans for another 40 percent increase by mid-2025.^[10] Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger and Saab CEO Micael Johansson warned in April 2024 that the People's Republic of China (PRC) supplied an overwhelming majority of European ammunition components, including those necessary for nitrocellulose, resulting in bottlenecks inhibiting European artillery ammunition production.^[11] Bloomberg reported in March 2025 that Rheinmetall expanded its sourcing of cotton linters — a key component for nitrocellulose production that faced a critical shortage in Spring 2024 — from Europe and countries friendly to the European Union (EU) and built up a stockpile of several years' worth of linters.^[12] NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte told CBS News on April 7 that he has urged US and European leaders to ramp up defense spending and defense industrial production amid concerns of future Russian aggression against Europe.^[13] Rutte noted that NATO states combined manufacture four times fewer ammunition rounds than Russia manufactures on its own, despite the fact that NATO's combined economy is 20 times larger than Russia's.

Russian authorities likely facilitated the removal of a prominent Russian insider source from Telegram as part of continued efforts to crack down on the Russian information space. Russian insider channel VChK-OGPU-Reserve claimed on April 7 that Telegram administrators deleted the original VChK-OGPU channel and several other channels at the behest of Russian authorities.^[14] The other affected channels reportedly include pro-Ukrainian channels and channels publishing information about Kursk Oblast and migrants in Russia — two topics the Kremlin has previously sought to censor.^[15] Telegram denied taking down the VChK-OGPU channel and stated that the channel's administrators deleted their own channel.^[16] Other Russian sources claimed that only Telegram has the ability to take down the channel, and one milblogger claimed that the VChK-OGPU administrators may have fallen victim to a phishing scam — a claim which the VChK-OGPU-Reserve channel denied.

[17] *VChK-OGPU* is reportedly affiliated with Russian law enforcement and has offered purported insights into Kremlin factional dynamics, internal assessments of Russian government policies, significant changes in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), and leaks of information regarding the MoD and Russian military.[18] Russian authorities arrested an alleged administrator of *VChK-OGPU* in February 2023 and designated the *VChK-OGPU* channel a "foreign agent" in July 2024 at a time when the Kremlin was intensifying its effort to deanonymize Russian Telegram channels and take more direct control over the Russian information space.[19] The Kremlin, if responsible for the channel's removal, is likely aiming to exert control over the remaining facets of the Russian information space that publish criticisms of the Kremlin or information deemed sensitive. Many Russian ultranationalist milbloggers responded positively on April 7 to the removal of the *VChK-OGPU* channel, demonstrating the extent to which the Kremlin has already coopted much of the ultranationalist information space and conditioned many milbloggers to accept and promote the Kremlin's censorship.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin continues to deny the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government as part of efforts to claim that Ukraine is not a legitimate negotiating partner and to demand Ukrainian regime change and demilitarization.
- Ukrainian officials did not report any Russian long-range missile or drone strikes on the night of April 6 to 7 or during the day on April 7 following Russia's largest strike package in over a month on the night of April 5 to 6.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to ramp up domestic materiel production and address shortages inhibiting artillery ammunition production.
- Russian authorities likely facilitated the removal of a prominent Russian insider source from Telegram as part of continued efforts to crack down on the Russian information space.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and near Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to use its "Time of Heroes" program to militarize regional governments and society in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 6, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mapes, Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan

April 6, 2025, 5:00 pm ET

The rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has been steadily declining since November 2024, in part due to successful Ukrainian counterattacks in eastern Ukraine. The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on April 5 that Russian forces advanced 143 square kilometers in Ukraine in March 2025 as Ukrainian forces conducted successful tactical counterattacks in the Pokrovsk direction.[1] The UK MoD reported that the rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has decreased each month since November 2024, as Russian forces seized roughly 730 square kilometers in November 2024, 393 square kilometers in December 2024, 326 square kilometers in January 2025, and 195 square kilometers in February 2025.[2]

ISW has observed geolocated footage to concur in the assessment that the monthly rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has decreased since November 2024.[3] ISW has observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces in Ukraine gained roughly 627 square kilometers in November 2024, 569 square kilometers in December 2024, 427 square kilometers in January 2025, 354 square kilometers in February 2025, and 203 square kilometers in March 2025. The UK MoD likely uses a different methodology or sources to assess Russian advances in Ukraine, but the UK MoD's report is consistent with evidence ISW has observed of decreasing monthly Russian advances between November 2024 and March 2025. Ukrainian forces have conducted localized counterattacks in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions in recent weeks, regaining lost positions in these areas and contributing to slowing Russian advances in Ukraine.[4]

Russian forces conducted the largest series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine in nearly a month on the night of April 5 and 6.[5] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that preliminary data states that Russian forces launched nine Kh-101/Kh-55SM cruise missiles from Tu-95MS aircraft from the airspace over Saratov Oblast; eight Kalibr cruise missiles from the Black Sea; six Iskander-M ballistic missiles from Bryansk Oblast; and 109 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Bryansk City; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[6] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed six Kh-101/Kh-

55SM cruise missiles, six Kalibr missiles, one Iskander-M ballistic missile, and 40 Shahed drones and that 53 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces struck residential and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kirovohrad, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, and Mykolaiv oblasts and that five Iskander-M ballistic missiles struck Kyiv Oblast.[7]

Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reported on April 6 that Russian forces are changing their strike tactics and constantly modernizing their Shahed drones and ballistic missiles, complicating Ukrainian forces' ability to shoot them down.[8] Ihnat noted that the US Patriot air defense system is effective against ballistic missiles. Russian forces have repeatedly experimented with different strike packages in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses and ensure that Russian missiles – particularly the ballistic missiles that are more difficult for Ukrainian air defenses to shoot down – are able to reach their intended targets.[9] Russian forces likely launched missiles and drones on the night of April 5 to 6 from various locations in the Black Sea, Russia, and occupied Crimea, as part of these experimentation efforts.

Ukrainian officials highlighted the fact that Russia is leveraging its naval vessels in the Black Sea to conduct missile strikes against Ukraine as Russia continues to stall the Black Sea moratorium on military operations that Ukraine and the United States have jointly proposed. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 6 that Russian forces launched missiles from the Black Sea during the April 5 to 6 overnight strike and that Ukraine's partners have identified the Russian vessels and launch sites involved.[10] Zelensky stated that Russia has not agreed to the Black Sea moratorium on military operations in order to maintain its ability to strike Ukraine from the Black Sea. Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated that Russia launched a total of 10 Kalibr cruise missiles from an unspecified frigate and submarine, marking the fourth time in the past four months that Russia has used ships to launch missiles at Ukraine.[11]

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on March 25, after the United States and Ukraine first proposed the temporary Black Sea moratorium, that all Russian military vessels' movement "outside of [the] eastern part of the Black Sea" will constitute a violation of the spirit of this agreement. [12] It is unclear from where Russian forces launched the Kalibr missiles during the April 5 to 6 strike and where the boundary of the "eastern part of the Black Sea" lies. The United States, Ukraine, and Russia continue to negotiate the exact terms of a temporary moratorium in the Black Sea, as Russia continues to hold its moratorium talks with the United States hostage in an effort to extract sanctions relief from the West – a demand that European officials have refused and that is not necessary to implement the maritime truce.[13]

The Kremlin is attempting to portray Ukraine as consistently violating the proposed temporary ceasefire on strikes against energy infrastructure without providing evidence, in stark contrast to the pattern of Russian reporting about successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian energy infrastructure prior to the ceasefire proposal. Russian authorities, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), have consistently made detailed claims about Ukraine's alleged violations of the temporary ceasefire since the start of discussions about the ceasefire.[14] Russian officials repeatedly downplayed successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian energy infrastructure prior to the start of discussions about the energy infrastructure ceasefire. Russian local and regional officials would previously often claim that Russian forces repelled all Ukrainian drone strikes or that "debris" from downed drones damaged infrastructure facilities, despite geolocated footage showing hits or subsequent fires at energy infrastructure facilities in Russia, and would only occasionally admit to successful Ukrainian strikes when the resulting damage was high.[15]

ISW has neither observed local or regional Russian official reporting about Ukrainian strikes against Russian energy infrastructure nor footage of such strikes that would corroborate the Russian MoD's or MFA's repeated claims of Ukrainian ceasefire violations. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly denied Kremlin claims that Ukraine is striking Russian energy infrastructure. The Kremlin likely aims to undermine Ukraine's credibility and prolong ongoing negotiations about the energy infrastructure ceasefire, the Black Sea moratorium, and a frontline ceasefire.

Key Takeaways:

- The rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has been steadily declining since November 2024, in part due to successful Ukrainian counterattacks in eastern Ukraine.
- Russian forces conducted the largest series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine in nearly a month on the night of April 5 and 6.

- Ukrainian officials highlighted the fact that Russia is leveraging its naval vessels in the Black Sea to conduct missile strikes against Ukraine as Russia continues to stall the Black Sea moratorium on military operations that Ukraine and the United States have jointly proposed.
- The Kremlin is attempting to portray Ukraine as consistently violating the proposed temporary ceasefire on strikes against energy infrastructure without providing evidence, in stark contrast to the pattern of Russian reporting about successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian energy infrastructure prior to the ceasefire proposal.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Sumy oblasts and near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 5, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on April 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

European and NATO officials emphasized that a strong Ukrainian military backed by European security guarantees remains the most effective deterrent against future Russian aggression to ensure long-term peace in Ukraine and Europe. NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte gave an interview to Ukrainian outlet *New Voice* on April 5 and stated that the "first level" of security guarantees for Ukraine should be the Ukrainian military, which Rutte stated is the "first line of defense in deterrence."^[1] Rutte added that Ukraine's European partners, including France, the United Kingdom, and Italy, are also looking for ways to provide security guarantees to Ukraine following the conclusion of a peace agreement. The French General Staff similarly emphasized that the Ukrainian military is Ukraine's primary security guarantee for a lasting peace.^[2] The French General Staff added that France and the UK will work to define and develop "reassurance operations" to deter Russia from future aggression after the implementation of a peace deal. ISW continues to assess that a strong Ukrainian military backed by Western security guarantees remains the most vital component of a post-war European security architecture, guaranteeing a sustainable peace in Ukraine and deterring future Russian aggression.^[3] Russian demands for Ukraine's "demilitarization" such that Ukraine is unable to defend itself against future Russian aggression are counter to US President Donald Trump's efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Ukraine's European partners continue preliminary technical discussions about a possible future peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine. Delegations from the British and French general staffs met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian military leaders on April 4 and 5 in Kyiv to discuss details about how the first contingent of partner state forces could deploy to Ukraine.^[4] Zelensky stated that the meetings resulted in "tangible details" about this possible deployment, established Ukraine's needs, and identified geographical vulnerabilities that may require support.^[5] Zelensky stated that the group still needs to decide where the forces would deploy, their responsibilities, and their authority to respond in case of a breach of a future peace agreement.^[6] Zelensky stated that it might take one month or longer to finalize additional details and that the group would meet weekly. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stated to Ukrainian outlet *New Voice* on April 5 that it is best to wait to deploy peacekeepers to Ukraine until after the conclusion of a peace agreement but that countries need to keep developing ideas now to implement after peace is achieved.^[7]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck the only plant in Russia that produces fiber optic cables that are vital for Russian forces' fiber optic drones. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on April 5 that unspecified drones hit the Fiber Optic Systems plant in Saransk, Republic of Mordovia.^[8] Kovalenko stated that the plant produces materials for control, communication, and data transmission systems, including drone control in the Russian military. Geolocated footage published on April 5 shows an explosion and fire in Saransk.^[9] The Fiber Optic Systems plant is the first and only plant manufacturing optical fiber in Russia.^[10] A Russian insider source claimed that the plant produces all the Russian military's fiber optic cables.^[11] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces shot down three drones over the

Republic of Mordovia overnight, and the Republic of Mordovia Head Artyom Zdunov claimed that a drone struck an enterprise in the republic.[12] ISW cannot independently verify the damage to the Fiber Optic Systems plant, but successful Ukrainian strikes against the enterprise would likely reduce the Russian military's ability to supply troops with fiber optic cables to use with first-person view (FPV) drones on the battlefield.

Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on April 5 that sources in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that the SBU conducted drone strikes against the Promsintez enterprise in Chapayevsk, Samara Oblast on the night of April 4 to 5, causing at least 20 explosions and several fires.[13] The sources reported that Promsintez produces industrial explosives, including ammonal, ammonite, and granulite, and that the plant stopped operations after the strike. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed six drones over Samara Oblast overnight, and Samara Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Fedorishchev claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against an industrial enterprise in Chapayevsk, causing a fire.[14]

Ukraine's European partners continue to provide technical support to Ukraine. *Reuters* reported on April 4 that French commercial satellite communications provider Eutelsat CEO Eva Berneke stated that Eutelsat has been providing Ukraine with its high-speed satellite internet service for roughly one year funded by the German government.[15] Berneke stated that there are fewer than 1,000 terminals connecting Ukraine to Eutelsat's network but that Eutelsat hopes to increase the number of terminals to between 5,000 and 10,000 "within weeks." Eutelsat Spokesperson Joanna Darlington added that it is unclear whether the EU collectively or individual states will fund additional Eutelsat efforts for Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- European and NATO officials emphasized that a strong Ukrainian military backed by European security guarantees remains the most effective deterrent against future Russian aggression to ensure long-term peace in Ukraine and Europe.
- Ukraine's European partners continue preliminary technical discussions about a possible future peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck the only plant in Russia that produces fiber optic cables that are vital for Russian forces' fiber optic drones.
- Ukraine's European partners continue to provide technical support to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk and in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 4, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, Nate Trotter, Anna Harvey, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

April 4, 2025, 7:10pm ET

CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev gave several interviews with American news outlets on April 3 and presented views that contradict the current Kremlin line on Ukraine. The Kremlin remains unwilling to commit to a general ceasefire in Ukraine, continuing to reject the ground ceasefire that US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have offered. Dmitriev spoke with Fox News and Newsmax while visiting Washington, DC, and attempted to paint Russia as an attractive market for American

investment, claiming that the Russian economy is strong and growing despite Western sanctions.[1] Dmitriev also claimed that Russia is ready to collaborate with the United States on unspecified projects involving the Arctic, rare earth minerals, and liquified natural gas (LNG). Dmitriev has recently been at the forefront of Kremlin efforts to undermine the proposed US-Ukraine mineral deal by promoting potential US-Russia mining projects and other avenues of economic and financial cooperation, as ISW previously reported.[2] Dmitriev notably claimed that Russia "is not asking for lifting of sanctions" and "not making any preconditions for specific sanction relief" in response to a question about whether Russia considers sanctions relief a necessary precondition to a ceasefire agreement.[3] The Kremlin, in contrast, has explicitly demanded sanctions relief from the United States as a precondition for entering into a Black Sea strikes ceasefire.[4]

Dmitriev made several other statements that diverge from recent statements by other Kremlin officials, for example, saying that "some security guarantees may be possible" for Ukraine.[5] ISW recently assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not accept Western-backed security guarantees for Ukraine because their acceptance will represent a major concession, and the Kremlin has rejected the idea of making any concessions on its maximalist territorial and security demands from Ukraine.[6] Dmitriev's attempt to present Russia's interests in Ukraine as predominantly economic and financial is also disingenuous. Kremlin officials frequently make demands to address the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine (NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and Ukraine's alleged violations of the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine) as preconditions for any sort of peace agreement.[7] The Kremlin's negotiating position has not changed despite Dmitriev's attempts to soften and deflect from Moscow's demands, and Dmitriev is attempting to use the promise of financial benefits to distract from the Kremlin's continued intransigence in negotiations about Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on April 4 that the US is closely monitoring Russia's actions in Ukraine and hopes that Russia is "serious" about resolving the war rather than simply dragging out negotiations.[8] Rubio noted that, while the United States remains optimistic about facilitating a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine, it will consider implementing additional sanctions against Russia and may reassess its role in the negotiations and its support for Ukraine if Russia proves to be "unserious" and undermines the negotiation processes. Rubio met Dmitriev on April 4 to convey this message directly.[9] ISW continues to assess that Russia is not genuinely interested in negotiations but is instead prolonging the negotiation process to extract concessions and maximize territorial gains, while it continues to pursue its maximalist ambitions of total Ukrainian capitulation rather than engaging in good-faith negotiations or offering compromises.[10]

A Russian ballistic missile struck a residential area in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast on April 4, killing at least 16 people, including children.[11] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the missile damaged residential buildings and a playground, amongst other civilian infrastructure.[12] Kryvyi Rih Military Administration Head Oleksandr Vilkul reported that the strike damaged 29 apartment buildings and damaged the gas supply to some nearby areas.[13] ISW previously noted that continued Russian strikes on Ukraine's critical and civilian infrastructure under the cover of the ceasefire on energy strikes are detrimental to the establishment of a sustainable and lasting peace in Ukraine.[14]

Russia continues to employ strike packages predominantly comprised of drones amid reports that it is growing its missile stockpile. Ukrainian military analyst Oleksandr Kovalenko noted in an April 2 report that Russia used 83 missiles in total throughout March 2024, the lowest number of missiles used in a month since February 2022.[15] Kovalenko assessed that Russian forces are focusing on singular, massive missile strikes accompanied by drone waves, an approach that has hindered Ukraine's ability to intercept incoming missiles. An analysis done by *The Telegraph* found that the number of Russian drone strikes against Ukraine rose by over 50 percent since February 2025 compared to January 2025, partially as a result of Russian efforts to use massive drone strikes to secure concessions from Ukraine during ongoing negotiations with the United States.[16] An unspecified NATO official stated on April 3 that NATO intelligence indicates that Russia is producing a significant number of missiles domestically and purchasing additional missiles from North Korea to increase missile stockpiles in preparation for future large-scale missile strikes against Ukraine.[17] These assessments are consistent with ISW's observation of recent Russian strike packages, which were composed predominantly of drones.

The Ukrainian Air Force reported on April 4 that Russian forces launched 78 Shahed and decoy drones from the direction of Bryansk and Kursk oblasts; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai overnight on April 3 to 4.[18] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 42 drones over the northern, eastern, and central parts of Ukraine and that 22 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported that drone strikes damaged civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[19]

Ukrainian railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia signed two contracts with Chinese rail producers in January 2025 as part of efforts to support the development and repair of Ukrainian rail infrastructure. Ukrzaliznytsia announced the agreements on April 4 and reported that People's Republic of China (PRC) producers will provide Ukrzaliznytsia with 32 thousand tons of rail, which is enough to build or repair about 245 kilometers of railway.[20] The first 16 thousand tons of rail are expected to ship from the PRC sometime in April and arrive within three months. Ukraine's railway network spans about 19,772 kilometers.[21] These contracts are the result of Ukrzaliznytsia's first open-bid competition since 2021 and indicate Chinese interest in some level of direct economic cooperation with Ukraine.

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi had reiterated on April 1 that the PRC is willing to play a "constructive role" in ending the war in Ukraine, which is consistent with previous PRC efforts to pose as a neutral mediator despite its growing ties with Russia.[22] A Russian milblogger expressed frustration with the PRC's refusal to fully realize Moscow's desired "no-limits" partnership with the PRC on April 4, claiming that Ukraine is flaunting its cooperation with "Russia's partner."[23] The Russian milblogger also noted that this deal reflects PRC's "real" attitude towards Russia to be of a "nothing personal, just business" nature, and warned that Russia should not expect "self-sacrifice" from the PRC's government.

Russia is reinforcing its strategic ties with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) juntas in a concerted effort to enhance Russian influence in Africa. Russia, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso agreed on April 3 at an AES summit in Moscow to establish a strategic partnership and strengthen the recently established AES joint armed forces, making Russia the first country to recognize the trilateral joint forces established on July 6, 2024.[24] Russia and AES member states expressed a willingness to jointly combat regional instability and enhance ongoing counterterrorism efforts, with Russia agreeing to provide modern weapons and military training for a planned 5,000-strong joint force that will deploy to the central Sahel region.[25] Bloomberg reported on April 3 that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Russia will utilize military instructors already in the area to conduct such training – likely referring to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Africa Corps, which transported large convoys of equipment into Mali via Guinea in 2025.[26] Russia and the AES also agreed to cooperate in the fields of infrastructure, trade, economics, investment, and banking.[27]

Russia's support for the AES is a long-term strategic endeavor aimed at advancing the Kremlin's geopolitical goals of undermining Western influence in Africa and threatening NATO's southern flank, as the Critical Threats Project's Africa File has routinely assessed.[28] Russia's leading role in AES's military training and weapons procurement may yield additional lucrative benefits in the form of either plausibly deniable illicit or legitimate resource concession agreements that would grant the Kremlin access to the energy- and mineral-rich region with potentially vast amounts of gold, uranium, and other valuable natural resources.

Key Takeaways:

- CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev gave several interviews with American news outlets on April 3 and presented views that contradict the current Kremlin line on Ukraine.
- The Kremlin remains unwilling to commit to a general ceasefire in Ukraine, continuing to reject the ground ceasefire that US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have offered.
- US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on April 4 that the US is closely monitoring Russia's actions in Ukraine and hopes that Russia is "serious" about resolving the war rather than simply dragging out negotiations.
- A Russian ballistic missile struck a residential area in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast on April 4, killing at least 16 people, including children.
- Russia continues to employ strike packages predominantly comprised of drones amid reports that it is growing its missile stockpile.
- Ukrainian railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia signed two contracts with Chinese rail producers in January 2025 as part of efforts to support the development and repair of Ukrainian rail infrastructure.
- Russia is reinforcing its strategic ties with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) juntas in a concerted effort to enhance Russian influence in Africa.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk. Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- The Russian military reportedly continues to expand its conventional force end-strength.

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

April 3, 2025, 6:50 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:45am ET on April 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia seeks to leverage ongoing ceasefire and future peace negotiations to seize large amounts of territory in Ukraine and install a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv but will likely continue military operations in Ukraine if the Kremlin is unable to achieve a full Ukrainian surrender through diplomacy. Bloomberg reported on April 3, according to sources in Moscow familiar with the matter, that the Kremlin is "counting on US President Donald Trump to deliver an acceptable peace deal in Ukraine," but is prepared to continue the war if it is not able to secure its goals through negotiations with the United States.^[1] The sources also claimed that the Kremlin is not concerned by Trump's recent statement that the United States is willing to introduce additional sanctions targeting Russian oil and secondary sanctions against buyers of Russian oil if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not make progress towards a general ceasefire.^[2] The US Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) 2025 Annual Threat Assessment stated that Russia is leveraging its control of the theater-wide initiative and ongoing political and information efforts amid negotiations to end the war in Ukraine to achieve significant concessions from Ukraine and the West.^[3] The ODNI report assessed that Putin is "probably" more willing to incur the risks of a longer war than to agree to an end to the war that is unfavorable to Russia. The ODNI report further assessed that Putin "appears resolved and prepared to pay a very high price to prevail in what he sees as a defining time in Russia's strategic competition with the United States, world history, and his personal legacy." The ODNI assessment that Putin remains committed to pursuing Ukrainian surrender through both diplomatic and military means is consistent with ISW's assessment that Putin is leveraging ongoing negotiations to secure additional concessions from Ukraine and the West as part of its long-term pursuit of total Ukrainian surrender.^[4]

Russia is facing significant military and economic challenges that could seriously compromise Russia's ability to wage its war in Ukraine, factors that could increase the Kremlin's desire to accomplish its objectives in a mediated ceasefire or peace negotiation in the short-term if possible. The ODNI report assessed that Russia has suffered significant casualties in Ukraine and that Russia must contend with the poor quality of its new recruits.^[5] The ODNI report assessed that the Russian economy is facing significant challenges as Russia continues to balance resource allocation between defense industrial production and civilian sectors. US European Command (EUCOM) Commander and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher Cavoli stated on April 3 that Russian forces have lost over 4,000 tanks in Ukraine.^[6] Cavoli stated that Russia started the war with a total of 13,000 tanks and are "starting to approach near the end" of the viable tanks in storage. Cavoli noted that Russia has expanded its capability to produce shells, cruise missiles, and first-person view (FPV) drones and that Russia is preparing either to continue offensive operations in Ukraine or to launch a future campaign against a NATO member state. Cavoli stated that the war in Ukraine has "distorted" the Russian economy and "turbocharged" the Russian defense industry at the expense of Russia's civilian economic sector and that it may be difficult for Russia to "unwind" this imbalance. Cavoli assessed that Russia will be able to replace the significant personnel losses incurred in Ukraine ahead of a future conflict in Europe but noted that Russia's ability to replace materiel losses is contingent on Ukraine's ability to inflict greater losses. ISW previously noted that Russia's ongoing and forecasted economic struggles are closely tied to Russian losses on the battlefield and that it is not possible for the United States or the wider West to exert maximum pressure on Russia with economic tools alone.^[7] The United States can leverage Russian vulnerabilities and achieve a stronger negotiating position by continuing — or increasing — military aid to Ukraine such that Ukrainian forces can continue to inflict significant manpower and materiel losses on Russia.

The US Treasury Department announced on April 2 that the United States lifted sanctions on Karina Rotenberg, the wife of Russian businessman and oligarch Boris Rotenberg.^[8] The Treasury Department did not provide an explanation for lifting sanctions against Karina Rotenberg. Boris Rotenberg, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is the co-owner of the Stroygazmontazh group — Russia's largest construction company for gas pipelines and electrical power supply lines.^[9] The US first sanctioned Boris Rotenberg in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.^[10]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia seeks to leverage ongoing ceasefire and future peace negotiations to seize large amounts of territory in Ukraine and install a pro-Russian puppet government in Kyiv but will likely continue military operations in Ukraine if the Kremlin is unable to achieve a full Ukrainian surrender through diplomacy.
- Russia is facing significant military and economic challenges that could seriously compromise Russia's ability to wage its war in Ukraine, factors that could increase the Kremlin's desire to accomplish its objectives in a mediated ceasefire or peace negotiation in the short-term if possible.
- The US Treasury Department announced on April 2 that the United States lifted sanctions on Karina Rotenberg, the wife of Russian businessman and oligarch Boris Rotenberg.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Pokrovsk. Russian forces advanced in Kursk and Belgorod and near Lyman, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- The Russian State Duma adopted a bill on April 3 to grant veteran status to Russian military personnel and volunteer formations that fought in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 2, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Daria Novikov, Anna Harvey, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

April 2, 2025, 6:15 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on April 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials are continuing to exploit the temporary energy infrastructure ceasefire's vague or unfinalized terms. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 2 that the temporary energy infrastructure ceasefire is in effect and that Russia is adhering to the ceasefire.^[1] Peskov claimed that Ukraine has "not joined" the temporary ceasefire "essentially" and that Russia intends to discuss this with the United States. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on April 1 that Russia forwarded a list of Ukraine's alleged ceasefire violations to US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the United Nations (UN), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).^[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on April 2 that Ukrainian forces are "systematically" conducting drone and artillery strikes against Russian energy infrastructure.^[3] The exact contours of the temporary energy infrastructure ceasefire remain unclear, and Ukraine and Russia do not appear to have formally agreed on the list of objects covered in the ceasefire or the types of strikes prohibited. ISW previously noted that it is unclear if the temporary ceasefire prohibits striking energy infrastructure with shorter-range tube or rocket artillery.^[4] It is also unclear how Ukraine could violate a temporary ceasefire that it has "not joined."

US officials reportedly continue to acknowledge Russian President Vladimir Putin's unwillingness to commit to a general ceasefire in Ukraine. Two US officials familiar with the matter told *Reuters* on April 1 that senior Trump administration officials have discussed the likelihood that the United States will not be able to secure a long-term peace agreement in Ukraine in the coming months and are preparing new plans to pressure Russia and Ukraine into an agreement.^[5] The sources noted that Trump administration officials acknowledged that Putin is actively resisting US efforts to accomplish a peace agreement in Ukraine and used a series of meetings and calls over the weekend of March 29-30 to discuss possible mechanisms to bring Russia to the negotiating table. A senior US official stated that the Trump administration is considering levying additional tariffs and sanctions against Russia. Another source familiar with the discussions similarly told *Fox News* on April 1 that US President Donald Trump believes that Putin is "slow-rolling" negotiations on a general ceasefire in Ukraine and that the Trump administration is considering increasing sanctions against Russia in order to force Putin to the negotiating table.^[6] Trump recently told *NBC News* that he is considering additional sanctions against Russian oil and stated during a press conference on March 30 that there is an unspecified "psychological deadline" for Russia to agree to a general ceasefire agreement.^[7] ISW previously noted that it is not possible for the United States or the wider West to exert maximum pressure against Russia with economic tools alone as Russia's ongoing and forecasted future economic struggles are closely tied to Russian military losses on the battlefield.^[8] The United States can leverage Russian vulnerabilities and achieve a stronger negotiating position by continuing — or increasing — military aid to Ukraine such that Ukrainian forces can continue to inflict significant manpower and materiel losses on Russia.

CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev will reportedly meet with US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff in Washington, D.C. on April 2. Unnamed US officials and other unspecified sources familiar with Dmitriev's trip told CNN on April 1 that Dmitriev will meet with Witkoff later this week in Washington, D.C., and sources told CNN and CBS that the US government temporarily lifted sanctions against Dmitriev in order to grant him a visa to visit the United States.[9] Sources told CBS on April 2 that Dmitriev will meet with Witkoff on April 2, but the Trump administration has not published information about the meeting.[10] It is unclear if the meeting has occurred as of this publication. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on April 2 that Dmitriev's visit to Washington, D.C. is possible, and Dmitriev inconclusively responded to US reporting on his possible visit with "maybe."[11]

The Russian military command reportedly began reorganizing the motorized rifle brigades of the 51st and 3rd combined arms armies (CAAs) such that each army would have three rifle divisions or motorized rifle divisions, likely in an effort to improve the CAAs' administrative structure, especially over larger numbers of unmechanized riflemen. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on April 2 that the Russian military command may be reorganizing the motorized rifle brigades of the 51st CAA (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], Southern Military District [SMD]) and 3rd CAA (formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] AC, SMD) such that both armies would have three "motorized" rifle divisions each.[12] The 51st CAA currently includes six motorized rifle brigades on paper: the 1st, 5th, 9th, 110th, 114th, and 132nd motorized rifle brigades. The 3rd CAA also includes six motorized rifle brigades on paper: the 4th, 6th, 7th, 85th, 88th, and 123rd motorized rifle brigades. Mashovets stated that some unspecified brigades in the 51st and 3rd CAAs are already staffed at levels significantly higher than a typical brigade, at least on paper.[13] Mashovets noted that the brigades are already operating at the front and have control over a number of other units – usually rifle or motorized rifle regiments and battalions – attached to the brigade. Mashovets stated that "it is assumed" that each of the new motorized rifle divisions in the 51st and 3rd CAAs will consist of two assault regiments, two "reinforcement" regiments, and an artillery regiment as well as organic logistics support units at the division-level, but that the divisions' are unlikely to have combat engineer or anti-aircraft missile units at the regimental level, as is normal for most Russian motorized rifle divisions. Mashovets stated that the Russian military command plans to create the 1st, 110th, and 132nd motorized rifle divisions within the 51st CAA. Mashovets stated that the Russian military command plans to form the 132nd Motorized Rifle Division on the basis of the 101st and 109th motor rifle regiments and plans to consolidate the 269th, 270th and 272nd rifle battalions into the 103rd Rifle Regiment. Mashovets stated that the only truly mechanized "motorized rifle" unit in the 132nd Motorized Rifle Division will be the 1436th Motorized Rifle Regiment. Mashovets stated that it is unclear if each new division will include a tank regiment and that the situation with tanks "will be very tense," likely given Russia's shortage of main battle tanks. Mashovets stated that the Russian military command may be making these changes to improve the organizational and staff structure in the 51st and 3rd CAAs in order to "streamline" their command and control processes. Mashovets stated that these changes are unlikely to significantly increase the number of troops in the CAAs or their combat capabilities beyond that of an army corps.[14] ISW has not observed other reports of the Russian military command restructuring the 51st and 3rd CAAs.

The Russian military command reorganized the 1st DNR AC and 2nd LNR AC into the 51st and 3rd CAAs, respectively, in Summer 2024 as part of wider efforts to integrate irregular forces into the Russian Armed Forces.[15] Elements of the 51st CAA are currently operating in the Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions, and elements of the 3rd CAA are currently operating in the Siversk and Chasiv Yar directions and in Belgorod Oblast.[16] The Russian military command has especially attempted to leverage elements of the 51st CAA in offensive operations in the Kurakhove, Pokrovsk, and Toretsk directions in recent months.[17] Most CAAs in the Russian military include less than three divisions, with only the 1st Guards Tank Army (GTA, Moscow Military District [MMD]) including three divisions.[18] Mashovets' report suggests that the Russian military does not seek to equip the divisions of the 51st and 3rd CAAs to a normal Russian motorized rifle division's the full doctrinal end strength, suggesting that the restructuring is in response to specific command and control of force structure challenges afflicting the former DNR 1st and LNR 2nd Army Corps given their hasty reorganization into CAAs.[19]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 1 that Russian forces in Ukraine are continuing to use ammunition equipped with chemical agents prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).[20] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces recorded 767 cases of Russian forces using regulated K-51 and RG-VO grenade launchers to launch munitions containing chemical agents and ammunition containing unspecified hazardous chemicals that are banned under the CWC in March 2025. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces have used banned chemical agents a total of 7,730 times since February 2023.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials are continuing to exploit the temporary energy infrastructure ceasefire's vague or unfinalized terms.
- US officials reportedly continue to acknowledge Russian President Vladimir Putin's unwillingness to commit to a general ceasefire in Ukraine.
- CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev will reportedly meet with US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff in Washington, D.C. on April 2.
- The Russian military command reportedly began reorganizing the motorized rifle brigades of the 51st and 3rd combined arms armies (CAAs) such that each army would have three rifle divisions or motorized rifle divisions, likely in an effort to improve the CAAs' administrative structure, especially over larger numbers of unmechanized riflemen.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported on April 1 that Russian forces in Ukraine are continuing to use ammunition equipped with chemical agents prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovska, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovska, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian authorities continued efforts to solidify their control over the Russian information space and discourage critique of the Russian military's conduct of the war in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 1, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Daria Novikov, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Anna Harvey, Karolina Hird, and George Barros with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:30 am ET on April 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces are reportedly continuing to shell Ukrainian energy infrastructure amid ongoing negotiations over details of the ceasefire agreement on energy infrastructure strikes, indicating that Russia may be exploiting the ceasefire's vague or unfinalized terms to strike Ukrainian energy infrastructure with shorter-range artillery, but not longer-range cruise missiles or one-way strike drones. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha and Kherson Oblast Military Administration Head Oleksandr Prokudin stated on April 1 that Russian forces shelled energy infrastructure in Kherson City on the morning of April 1, leaving at least 45,000 Kherson residents without electricity.^[1] Sybiha stated on April 1 that Russian forces have recently violated the energy infrastructure ceasefire several times.^[2] The ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes is reportedly a moratorium on long-range strikes, but it remains unclear whether the moratorium's terms prohibit striking energy infrastructure with shorter-range tube or rocket artillery.^[3] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 11 that Ukraine proposed a "temporary ceasefire in the sky" that would include "missile, bomb, and long-range drone" strikes.^[4] US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials reached some agreements for a temporary ceasefire on strikes against energy infrastructure on March 25 but not provide details on whether the ceasefire is exclusively limited to longer-range weapons.^[5] Russian forces will likely continue to leverage their positions along the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River and other frontline areas to shell and destroy Ukrainian energy infrastructure in rear areas unless the energy infrastructure ceasefire includes provisions against such shelling. Russian shelling against Ukrainian energy infrastructure violates the spirit of the ceasefire and US President Donald Trump's intention to utilize the energy infrastructure ceasefire as a confidence-building measure to work towards a general ceasefire in the future. Ukrainian, Russian, and US officials have yet to formalize the ceasefire or present its exact terms.

Senior Russian officials continue to reiterate the Russian demand for the elimination of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as a precondition for a peace agreement — a reference to Russia's initial war demands that directly contradict US President Donald Trump's goal to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed on April 1 that the Trump administration is attempting "some kind of scheme" to first achieve a ceasefire and then move to "other models and schemes" to end the war.^[6] Ryabkov further claimed that the Trump administration's plan to resolve the war in Ukraine does not address the "root causes" of the war and that Russia, therefore, cannot accept the US proposal. Senior Russian officials have repeatedly defined these root causes as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and Ukraine's alleged violations of the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine.^[7] The Kremlin's demands to address these so-called "root causes" amount to a demand for the full capitulation of Ukraine with the installation of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and long-term commitments of Ukrainian neutrality — the same demands Putin has made since before the full-scale invasion in February 2022.^[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin recently intensified efforts to portray

the current Ukrainian government as illegitimate and unable to engage in negotiations to end the war in Ukraine in an effort to undermine Ukraine's role as a legitimate participant in discussions about the resolution of the war.[9] Putin and Russian diplomats made thinly veiled demands in late March 2025 for regime change in Ukraine by having external parties establish a "temporary international administration" in Ukraine under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).[10] US Department of State Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on March 31 that Trump did not appreciate Russia's suggestion to establish a "temporary administration" in Ukraine.[11] Bruce also noted that Trump understands that negotiations will "require both Russia and Ukraine to make tough decisions and compromises." Russia has so far refused to make any concessions and rejected the US-Ukrainian 30-day general ceasefire when Trump called Putin on March 18.

Russian forces are expanding their bridgehead northeast of Lyman as part of a mutually reinforcing effort to create conditions for the seizure of Borova and Lyman in the coming months. Footage published on March 28 and geolocated on April 1 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Novolyubivka (northeast of Lyman) and likely seized Novolyubivka itself.[12] Russian forces recently made confirmed advances southeast of Nove (west of Novolyubivka), and Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on March 31 that Russian forces advanced to the southern outskirts of Katerynivka (northwest of Novolyubivka).[13] Russian forces advanced across the Zhrebets River onto the west (right) bank in early January 2025 and have slowly expanded their bridgehead on the right bank over the last three months.[14] Russian forces began efforts to push Ukrainian forces from their positions on the east (left) bank of the Zhrebets River in late 2023 and have only recently established a relatively stable bridgehead from which Russian forces can launch further offensive operations.[15] Russian milbloggers and Mashovets have consistently credited elements of the Russian 144th and 3rd motorized rifle divisions (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) with making the initial advances onto the west bank and then expanding this bridgehead.[16]

Russian forces appear to be leveraging a significant manpower advantage to make advances in the area. The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Lyman direction stated on March 31 that Russian forces have almost exclusively conducted infantry assaults in the area since January 2025 and rarely use armored vehicles in the area.[17] ISW has also not observed footage of any notable Russian mechanized assaults in the area in 2025. Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces stated on March 31 that Russian forces intensified infantry attacks in the Lyman direction and have significantly more infantry in the area, mostly including well-trained contract servicemembers (*kontraktniki*).[18] Another Ukrainian brigade operating in the Lyman direction stated on March 24 that Russian forces have a 10-to-one manpower advantages over Ukrainian forces in some areas of this direction.[19] The Russian military command appears to be reinforcing and replacing manpower losses among frontline units of the 3rd and 144th motorized rifle divisions, as these formations have been in the area since at least 2023 and do not appear to have withdrawn for rest and reconstitution at any point.[20]

Russian forces can leverage their expanded bridgehead northeast of Lyman to support the seizure of Borova or Lyman in the coming months. Russian forces initially focused on advancing from Ivanivka towards Kolodyazi (southwest of Ivanivka) in the general direction of Lyman but recently appear to have refocused their efforts on advancing northwest of Ivanivka towards Nove and Katerynivka in the general direction of Borova.[21] A Russian milblogger claimed on April 1 that Russian forces are attempting to connect their bridgehead near Novolyubivka with a smaller bridgehead on the west bank near Makiivka (approximately eight kilometers away).[22] Russian forces may be attempting to unite these bridgeheads to create a stable salient to support attacks southeast of Borova. Russian forces have recently struggled to advance east and southeast of Borova after advancing northeast of the settlement in January 2025, and the Russian forces may be creating the salient northeast of Lyman to support future offensive operations against the southern tip of the Novoserhiivka-Druzhelyubivka-Novyi Myr line (east to southeast of Borova).[23] The Russian military command may attempt to outflank Ukrainian defenses in these settlements in order to force Ukrainian troops to withdraw and enable Russian advances east of and into Borova in the coming months.

Russian forces may also attempt to leverage the expansion of the bridgehead on the west bank of the Zhrebets River near Ivanivka to support future Russian operations to seize Lyman. Russian forces may attempt to advance toward Karlivka from Nove and toward Drobyshev from Kolodyazi in an effort to establish defensible positions along the Karlivka-Shandryholove-Drobyshev line (on the east bank of the Nitrius River). Russian forces could attempt to leverage such advances along the Nitrius River to challenge Ukrainian positions in Lyman from the northeast. Russian forces may also simultaneously attempt to intensify offensive operations near Torske (east of Lyman) to push on Lyman from the east. Further Russian advances towards Borova and Lyman are part of an enduring Russian effort to push Ukrainian forces from positions on the east bank of the Oskil River and attack further into

western Kharkiv Oblast and set conditions to attack the Ukrainian fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast from the north.[24]

Russian forces may also leverage their bridgehead northeast of Lyman to seize the remaining one percent of Luhansk Oblast under Ukrainian control and complete Russia's long-standing goal of seizing the entirety of Luhansk Oblast. Russian forces have been trying to seize the last one percent of Luhansk Oblast (about 266 square kilometers) since late November 2024. Russian forces first seized the entirety of Luhansk Oblast on July 3, 2022, but Ukrainian forces later pushed Russian forces back from the Luhansk Oblast administrative border during Ukraine's Fall 2022 counteroffensive.[25] Russian officials have long cited the seizure of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as a goal of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and have repeatedly demanded international recognition of Russia's annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts as a condition of peace, although Russian forces do not fully control any of these oblasts.[26] The Kremlin would likely exploit the second seizure and retention of Luhansk Oblast to gain leverage during ongoing ceasefire negotiations and future peace negotiations, which ISW continues to assess as a key motivating factor for Russian forces recently intensified ground activity in Ukraine.[27] The Kremlin could also leverage the seizure of Luhansk Oblast as a significant victory to its domestic audience and to justify years of brutal personnel losses in Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that Russian officials are intentionally stalling the ceasefire and peace negotiations in hopes of gaining more territory to leverage during future peace negotiations.[28]

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on April 1 to raise salaries for Russian governors starting January 2026, aligning the pay with that of Russia's deputy prime ministers. [29] The delayed salary increase in 2026 likely seeks to further secure loyalty from regional leaders amid Russia's continued uncertainty about Russia's future, in particular, Russia's sustained war efforts and the Russian economy's macroeconomic health. The decision to implement this change in 2026 as opposed to immediately could provide the Kremlin time to rebalance its budget and gather resources to sustain the spending increase, as the Russian government already approved Russia's 2025 budget in late 2024. Putin signed a decree in December 2024 approving the 2025 federal budget and the 2026–2027 draft federal budget, which would prioritize spending on Russia's national security and defense.[30] Putin did not sign such a decree sooner likely due to Russia's ongoing economic strain from the war in Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia. Russia continues to face staggering costs required to maintain its war effort against Ukraine, with mounting economic strain, labor shortages, and systemic corruption threatening the sustainability of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB).[31]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are reportedly continuing to shell Ukrainian energy infrastructure amid ongoing negotiations over details of the ceasefire agreement on energy infrastructure strikes, indicating that Russia may be exploiting the ceasefire's vague or unfinalized terms to strike Ukrainian energy infrastructure with shorter-range artillery but not longer-range cruise missiles or one-way strike drones.
- Senior Russian officials continue to reiterate the Russian demand for the elimination of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as a precondition for a peace agreement – a reference to Russia's initial war demands that directly contradict US President Donald Trump's goal to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine.
- Russian forces are expanding their bridgehead northeast of Lyman as part of a mutually reinforcing effort to create conditions for the seizure of Borova and Lyman in the coming months.
- Russian forces can leverage their expanded bridgehead northeast of Lyman to support the seizure of Borova or Lyman in the coming months.
- Russian forces may also leverage their bridgehead northeast of Lyman to seize the remaining one percent of Luhansk Oblast under Ukrainian control and complete Russia's long-standing goal of seizing the entirety of Luhansk Oblast.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on April 1 to raise salaries for Russian governors starting January 2026, aligning the pay with that of Russia's deputy prime ministers.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Belgorod oblasts and in the Lyman, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 31, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, Olivia Gibson, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Anna Harvey, and George Barros

March 31, 2025, 6:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:50am ET on March 31. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US President Donald Trump stated on March 30 that there is an unspecified "psychological deadline" for Russia to agree to a general ceasefire amid continued Russian efforts to hold the temporary ceasefire in the Black Sea hostage to stall efforts toward a general ceasefire and extract additional concessions from the West. Trump responded to a question on March 30 about whether there is a deadline for Russian President Vladimir Putin to agree to a ceasefire for land warfare and stated that "it's a psychological deadline."^[1] Trump added that "if I think [Russia] is tapping [the United States] along, I will not be happy about it."^[2] Finnish President Alexander Stubb stated on March 30 that he proposed April 20 as a potential deadline for a "full ceasefire without any conditions" during his meeting with Trump on March 29.^[3] Russia is unlikely to agree to a "full ceasefire without any conditions" within three weeks given that Russia has demanded that the West provide some sanctions relief as a precondition for a temporary Black Sea ceasefire. The Kremlin stated on March 25 that it will not implement the agreed ceasefire in the Black Sea until the United States lifts sanctions on Russian state-owned agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations involved in international food and fertilizer trade, and *Bloomberg* reported on March 28 that Russia is demanding that the European Union (EU) reconnect the Rossekhobank to the SWIFT international banking system as a precondition to implementing a Black Sea ceasefire as a test to determine whether the United States will engage with Russia's demands and encourage European partners to support sanctions relief.^[4] The United States and Ukraine proposed on March 11 temporary ceasefires on energy infrastructure strikes and in the Black Sea, and Ukrainian and US officials have continued to negotiate the terms of these ceasefires in the three weeks since March 11 — indicating the ceasefires' terms are not yet fully codified.^[5] It is also unlikely that the United States, Ukraine, and Russia could negotiate the terms of a general ceasefire within the next three weeks.

Russian officials continue efforts to undermine the proposed US-Ukrainian mineral deal by promoting potential US-Russian rare earth mining projects. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 31 that US companies are interested in joint rare earth metals mining projects with Russia and that these projects are the first step to improving bilateral relations, although the United States and Russia have not yet signed any documents concerning rare earth metals.^[6] Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) CEO Kirill Dmitriev told Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestia* on March 31 that Russian and US officials have started discussions about joint rare earth mineral projects.^[7] Dmitriev also told the BBC's *Russian Service* on March 30 that US-Russian economic cooperation should be a primary focus if the United States wants to end the war in Ukraine but that such cooperation would only begin after the conclusion of peace negotiations.^[8] The Kremlin is attempting to undermine the Trump administration's objectives of linking US and Ukrainian economic interests through the US-Ukraine mineral deal by presenting Russia as a rare earth commodities trader superior to Ukraine. The Trump administration seeks to use the US-Ukrainian deal to establish concrete US economic interests in Ukraine as part of US efforts to transition Ukraine from solely a military aid recipient to also an economic partner.^[9] The kind of economic cooperation that Russia seeks with the United States would not deter Russia from invading Ukraine again in the future and will fail to advance the Trump administration's objectives of economically linking the US and Ukraine. Such cooperation would also accelerate Russian military reconstitution faster than it would otherwise. Russia's access to minerals in occupied Ukraine will likely augment the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) ability to access Ukraine's minerals. Russia has notably partnered with the PRC to extract Russian rare earth commodities since at least 2005.^[10] Russian companies are also involved in current and potential deposit exploration projects in various African countries.^[11] ISW continues to assess that Russia is using economic incentives that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine to extract concessions from the United States about the war in Ukraine.^[12] These concessions would give away leverage that is crucial to US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving an enduring and mutually beneficial peace in Ukraine.

The Kremlin continues efforts to sow division between the United States and Europe. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused "almost the entire European West" of attempting to prolong the war in Ukraine and contributing to the "rehabilitation of Nazism," and continued to falsely portray the Ukrainian government as neo-Nazis during an interview on March 30.^[13] Lavrov claimed that Europeans "unleashed" "all the tragedies of humanity before 1939, including World War II" and that elites currently in power in most European Union (EU) and NATO countries retain the "instincts" to bring about these tragedies. Director of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Organizations Department, Kirill Logvinov, reiterated to Kremlin newswire TASS on March 31 that

Russia continues to view a European peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine as unacceptable and criticized ongoing UK and French efforts to create such a contingent.[14] Logvinov similarly blamed European countries, specifically European elites, of causing the war in Ukraine and seeking to extend the war. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev similarly criticized European countries for alleged "Russophobia" about the war and threatened Europe with Russian missiles.[15] Medvedev routinely makes extreme statements aimed at persuading Western states to act according to Russia's interests.[16] These statements are part of the Kremlin's broader efforts to falsely portray European countries as seeking to prolong the war in contrast to ongoing US efforts to secure interim ceasefires and eventually a full peace in Ukraine. This rhetoric is aimed at undermining Western unity in supporting Ukraine.[17]

Ukraine's European allies continue to provide financial and military aid to Ukraine. The Dutch Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 30 that the Netherlands is allocating 500 million euros (roughly \$541 million) for Ukraine's Drone Line project that aims to integrate drone and ground operations in the Ukrainian military.[18] The Dutch MoD stated that this package is part of the Netherlands' two billion euros (roughly \$2 billion) accelerated support package in 2025. Sweden announced on March 31 its largest military aid package to Ukraine to date, worth roughly 16 billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$1.6 billion) to strengthen Ukraine's air defense, artillery, satellite communications, and naval capabilities.[19] The package includes 9.2 billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$920 million) for the supply of materiel from the defense industrial bases (DIBs) of Sweden, other Nordic states, and European states; over five billion Swedish kronor (roughly \$500 million) in financial donations to the Ukraine Defense Contact Group; and roughly 500 million Swedish kronor (roughly \$50 million) worth of materiel donated from the Swedish military.

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump stated on March 30 that there is an unspecified "psychological deadline" for Russia to agree to a general ceasefire amid continued Russian efforts to hold the temporary ceasefire in the Black Sea hostage to stall efforts toward a general ceasefire and extract additional concessions from the West.
- Russian officials continue efforts to undermine the proposed US-Ukrainian mineral deal by promoting potential US-Russian rare earth mining projects.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to sow division between the United States and Europe.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to provide financial and military aid to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Sumy oblasts and near Kupyansk, Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russia is reportedly struggling to restore what few tanks remain in its stocks.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 30, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Daria Novikov, and George Barros with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

March 30, 2025 4:15 pm ET

US President Donald Trump expressed willingness to introduce additional sanctions targeting Russian oil and secondary sanctions against buyers of Russian oil if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not make progress towards a general ceasefire, including a ceasefire for land warfare in the near future. Trump stated during a phone call with NBC News on March 30 that he is "angry and pissed off" at Putin for disparaging Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy as the leader of Ukraine.[1] Trump stated that if the United States and Russia are unable to "make a deal" – possibly referring to a general ceasefire or long-term peace in Ukraine – then the United States will place secondary sanctions on all "oil coming out of Russia." Trump stated that the United States will put a "25 percent tariff on all oil, a 25- to 50-point tariff on all [Russian] oil." Trump stated that the United States will not allow companies or countries that purchase Russian oil to "do business" in the United States and that the United States could begin imposing secondary sanctions within the next month if Russia, Ukraine, and the United States do not conclude a ceasefire agreement. Trump stated that he will speak with Putin at an unspecified time later this week. Putin reiterated long-standing Russian claims that Zelensky is the illegitimate leader of Ukraine on March 28.[2]

ISW previously noted that the Kremlin's ongoing effort to characterize the Ukrainian government as an illegitimate negotiating partner casts serious doubt on the Kremlin's willingness to negotiate in good

faith about a settlement of the war and sets informational conditions for Russia to violate any future peace agreement on the grounds that the Ukrainian government had no legal right to conclude it.[3]

A Russian diplomat provided additional details following Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent thinly veiled demand for regime change in Ukraine by having external parties establish a "temporary international administration" in Ukraine under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Russian Permanent Representative to the European Union Kirill Logvinov presented a detailed plan to Kremlin newswire TASS on March 30 that supports Putin's recent demand for the UN, United States, and European countries to establish a temporary government in Ukraine in the near future.[4] Logvinov argued that the UN should reach an agreement between the parties to the conflict following the implementation of a ceasefire, either directly or indirectly through intermediaries, on the appropriate transfer of power to the UN. Logvinov suggested that one of the parties, mediators, or the UN Secretary General should submit an official appeal that the UN establish a temporary internal administration in Ukraine. Logvinov specified that the UN Security Council (UNSC), particularly its permanent members, must support the mandate and that any UNSC member can submit a draft proposal on the composition and funding of the temporary government. Logvinov stated that the UN Secretary General should then prepare a report on the temporary administration, particularly noting staffing and budgetary guidelines, after which the UNSC should consider any proposals and submit a final decision on the interim government. Logvinov noted that the final proposal must also "receive the support of the members of the [UNSC], namely the permanent ones." Logvinov's proposal would notably allow Russia (a permanent member of the UNSC) to submit a proposal on the interim Ukrainian government and to veto any proposal that Russia considers unfavorable and would bar Ukraine from any role in the final approval process.

Logvinov and TASS are supporting Putin's recent effort to inject a new demand into discussions about the resolution to the war that is consistent with the Kremlin's long-standing effort to ensure the installation of a government friendly to Russia in Ukraine. The Kremlin is also attempting to dictate the sequencing and processes surrounding the demand while holding the ceasefire negotiation hostage to extract additional concessions from the West. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres rejected Putin's proposal to establish a temporary administration in Ukraine and stated that Ukraine has a legitimate government that must be respected on March 28.[5]

Russian forces struck a military hospital and civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv City on the night of March 29 to 30. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched one ballistic missile from Rostov Oblast and 111 Shahed and decoys from Kursk and Bryansk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[6] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 65 drones over northern, southern, eastern, and central Ukraine and that 34 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian Shahed drones struck a military hospital and civilian buildings in Kharkiv City.[7] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger agreed on March 29 with a recent report from German outlet *Bild* that Russian forces have altered their long-range drone strike tactic and now have drones loiter several kilometers from their targets at high altitudes before conducting synchronized strikes with multiple drones.[8] The milblogger further speculated that these tactics have facilitated recent Russian drone strikes on Kharkiv, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 30 that it will establish a Space Policy Department.[9] The Ukrainian MoD stated that the Space Policy Department will serve as a single point of contact for domestic and foreign developers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and international partners. The Ukrainian MoD announced a ten-year roadmap to develop the space sector that includes conducting an audit of space infrastructure to identify Ukraine's critical needs and developing domestic satellite and space technology capabilities to integrate into and augment existing Ukrainian defense systems.

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump expressed willingness to introduce additional sanctions targeting Russian oil and secondary sanctions against buyers of Russian oil if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not make progress towards a general ceasefire, including a ceasefire for land warfare in the near future.
- A Russian diplomat provided additional details following Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent thinly veiled demand for regime change in Ukraine by having external parties establish a "temporary international administration" in Ukraine under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).
- Russian forces struck a military hospital and civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv City on the night of March 29 to 30.

- The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 30 that it will establish a Space Policy Department.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 29, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15 am ET on March 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Ukrainian and US officials continue to negotiate the terms of temporary ceasefires on Black Sea operations and energy infrastructure strikes, indicating the ceasefires are not yet fully codified. Ukraine's Ministry of Energy reported on March 26 that Ukraine and the United States agreed on a list of energy facilities that Russia must stop striking during an energy infrastructure ceasefire but that the US-Ukraine list is at odds with Russia's demands.^[1] The Ministry stated that Russia's list does not prohibit strikes on Ukrainian oil and gas facilities — although the Kremlin reported that the ceasefire protects Russian oil and gas facilities from strikes. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on March 28 that Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov will present US officials with evidence of Russian ceasefire violations during Umerov's upcoming trip to the United States.^[2] The exact terms of the energy infrastructure ceasefire remain unclear, as an official trilateral statement or agreement has not been released.

Zelensky stated that Turkey, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States, France, Romania, and Bulgaria could act as potential ceasefire monitors, including a Black Sea moratorium, but stated that all sides "will" hold internal and international consultations regarding "readiness" to conduct monitoring.^[3] US Vice President JD Vance stated on March 28 that the United States and Ukraine have "obviously" achieved an energy infrastructure ceasefire and were "almost done" negotiating a maritime ceasefire.^[4] US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials all appear to be under the impression that an energy infrastructure ceasefire is currently active despite the lack of a formal trilateral agreement or any apparent agreement on the exact terms of the ceasefire.^[5]

The Kremlin appears to be using the Black Sea ceasefire negotiations with the United States to test the extent to which Russia can extract concessions from the West, as the implementation of a maritime truce would not require any sanctions relief. Bloomberg reported on March 28 that Russia is demanding the European Union (EU) reconnect the Russian Agricultural Bank (Rosselkhozbank), one of Russia's largest banks, to the SWIFT international banking system as a precondition to implementing a Black Sea truce with Ukraine and as a test to determine whether the United States will engage with Russia's demands and encourage European partners to support sanctions relief.^[6] Unspecified sources close to the Kremlin said Russia is gauging what it can secure from the Trump Administration regarding sanctions in the negotiation processes and is viewing initial success on a Russian reconnection to SWIFT as a precursor to achieving broader sanctions relief in the future. Russia appears to be exploiting the ceasefire negotiations process in an effort to extract concessions from the West, possibly as a tactic to gain leverage for future negotiations and improve its economic situation after three years of diplomatic and economic isolation from the West. Russia, the United States, and Ukraine could implement a Black Sea truce without sanctions relief — as Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey did during the Black Sea Grain Initiative in 2022 and 2023.^[7] European leaders advised European countries on March 27 to refrain from lifting any sanctions against Russia as Russia continues to occupy and wage war against Ukraine.^[8]

European allies continue to provide financial and materiel support to Ukraine and agreed to expand intelligence sharing with Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on March 28 that European countries agreed at the "Coalition of the Willing" summit in Paris on March 27 to expand Ukraine's access to European intelligence, relevant technologies, and satellites and that several unspecified European countries agreed to grant Ukraine an unspecified degree of access to their ammunition stockpiles.^[9] Zelensky noted that Ukraine also agreed with unspecified partners on air defense production licenses, investments in Ukraine's production of drones and missiles, and to continue to work toward artillery licensing. It remains unclear whether the agreed upon licenses stipulate domestic production in Ukraine or foreign production elsewhere in Europe. Zelensky stated that the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany will organize a Ramstein meeting in April 2025. French President Emmanuel Macron pledged on March 26 to provide Ukraine with an additional military aid package valued at 2 billion euros (roughly \$2.1 billion) that will include anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, air defense missiles, armored vehicles, drones, and additional Mirage fighter jets.^[10]

Sweden instructed its armed forces on March 28 to allocate a total of 80 million Swedish Kronor (roughly \$7.5 million) to Ukraine's Demining and Drone coalitions.[11] The Danish Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 27 that Denmark pledged an additional 300 million Danish Kroner (roughly \$43.5 million) to a Ukrainian innovation fund that will focus on, among other things, further developing electronic warfare (EW) and drone capabilities.[12]

Russian forces are reportedly poised to intensify offensive operations in several areas of the frontline in Spring and Summer 2025 in hopes of influencing ongoing ceasefire and peace negotiations. The Associated Press (AP), citing Ukrainian officials, reported on March 29 that Russian forces are preparing to launch a new offensive operation in an unspecified sector of the frontline in the coming weeks in order to maximize pressure on Ukraine and increase Russia's leverage in ongoing ceasefire negotiations.[13] Two diplomats from the Group of Seven (G7) countries told AP that they agree with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's recent warnings that Russia is preparing for intensified ground operations in Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[14] Two Ukrainian commanders stated that Russian forces have recently intensified reconnaissance missions along the frontline and offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction. Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov told AP that Russian forces have "recovered" after conducting a temporary operational pause in the Pokrovsk direction in early March 2025. A Ukrainian servicemember stated that Ukrainian intelligence has observed indicators of a significant Russian force grouping near Selydove (south of Pokrovsk). A Ukrainian battalion commander operating in the Donetsk Oblast told AP that there are concerns that Russia may redeploy forces from the Kursk Oblast to other areas of the frontline, such as the Pokrovsk direction.

ISW has recently observed intensifications in Russian offensive operations in the Lyman, Pokrovsk, and Orikhiv directions and ongoing Russian offensive operations in northern Sumy Oblast aimed at pushing Ukrainian forces from remaining positions in Kursk Oblast.[15] Russian forces have yet to make tactically significant advances in these directions as a result of the intensified activity, and ISW continues to observe localized Ukrainian counterattacks in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions. Russian forces have at minimum advanced within three kilometers of the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary in two areas of the Pokrovsk direction, and the Kremlin will likely leverage future Russian advances into southeasternmost Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to sow chaos and fear within the information space.[16] The Russian military command is unlikely to redeploy forces from Kursk Oblast if Russia intends to conduct a concerted offensive operation to seize or advance closer to Sumy City, and Russia likely does not have enough readily deployable operational-level reserves to conduct significant offensive operations against Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia cities without redeploying forces already committed to other areas of the frontline.

It is unlikely that the Russian military is capable of conducting three significant offensive efforts against major Ukrainian cities even after conducting such redeployments, as Russia has suffered significant armored vehicle and personnel losses over the last three years of fighting and has not demonstrated the ability to conduct complex operations involving multiple simultaneous axes of advance since Winter 2022. The Kremlin has thus far appeared unable to generate enough new recruits via ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts to significantly increase the Russian force grouping in Ukraine or Russia's strategic- and operational-level reserves available to enter combat in Ukraine — unless Russian President Vladimir Putin chooses to conduct a deeply unpopular partial reserve call up in the near future, which currently appears unlikely.[17] ISW has not observed open-source reports of significant Russian redeployments to the Sumy, Kharkiv, or Zaporizhia directions — which would indicate preparation for a renewed offensive effort in these areas — as of this report and will continue to report on any notable Russian redeployments, though Russian forces may have conducted rotations not observed in open-source reporting. Russian forces may be attempting to advance within artillery range of these cities, however, ahead of a possible ground ceasefire in order to make civilian life in these settlements untenable or prepare for ground operations until a ceasefire is established. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin would likely use any gains into oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy to gain leverage in future peace negotiations and justify future Russian demands for Ukraine to cede additional territory to Russia, including territory that the Kremlin currently does not demand beyond Crimea, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Luhansk, and Donetsk oblasts.[18]

Russia continues to target civilian infrastructure in Ukraine amid reports of shifting and more deadly Russian strike tactics. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on March 29 that Russian forces launched 172 Shahed and other strike and decoy drones from the direction of Kursk City; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea overnight on March 28 to 29.[19] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 94 drones and that 69 decoy drones became "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Kryvyi Rih Military Administration Head Oleksandr Vilkul reported on March 29 that Russian forces also launched ballistic missile strikes against Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[20] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian strikes damaged a hotel-restaurant complex, houses, and buildings in Dnipro

City, killing and injuring civilians.[21] ISW continues to assess that Russia is targeting Ukrainian critical and civilian infrastructure under the cover of the ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes, contradicting US President Donald Trump's stated objective of using the temporary ceasefire to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine.[22]

Russian forces are reportedly employing more advanced long-range drones, complicating Ukrainian air defense operations and allowing more drones to penetrate Ukraine's air defense umbrella. German outlet *BILD* reported on March 28 that Russia has intensified and adjusted its use of long-range strike drones, making it increasingly difficult for Ukrainian forces to intercept them. [23] *BILD* noted that more Russian drones have recently been successfully breaching the Ukrainian air defense umbrella and that Russian forces have altered their tactics and are now having drones loiter several kilometers from their targets at high altitudes before conducting synchronized strikes with multiple drones. Ukrainian officials have yet to comment on any changes in Russian strike tactics.[24]

Zelensky ordered Ukraine's Ministry of Defense (MoD) and General Staff to establish a new aviation chain of command within the Ukrainian General Staff and conduct widespread aviation management reform to strengthen Ukraine's air capabilities. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on March 28 that Ukraine's MoD and General Staff initiated a large-scale reform of aviation management and established a new aviation chain of command within the Ukrainian General Staff with the aim of optimizing the development of Ukraine's air capabilities.[25] Zelensky appointed Oleksandr Kozenko as Deputy Defense Minister for Aviation tasked with heading the new effort.[26] Zelensky noted that Kozenko has been involved in integrating the F-16 and Mirage aircraft into the Ukrainian Air Force. Zelensky also appointed Major General Oleksiy Marchenko as Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Combat Aviation, Brigadier General Serhiy Holubtsov as Deputy Commander of the Air Force, and Colonel Oleksandr Dyakiv as Commander of Aviation and Deputy Commander of the Air Force. Ukrainian officials have not elaborated on the structure of the new chain of command or how it may impact interaction between Ukrainian air and ground forces in joint operations.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian and US officials continue to negotiate the terms of temporary ceasefires on Black Sea operations and energy infrastructure strikes, indicating the ceasefires are not yet fully codified.
- The Kremlin appears to be using the Black Sea ceasefire negotiations with the United States to test the extent to which Russia can extract concessions from the West, as the implementation of a maritime truce would not require any sanctions relief.
- European allies continue to provide financial and materiel support to Ukraine and agreed to expand intelligence sharing with Ukraine.
- Russian forces are reportedly poised to intensify offensive operations in several areas of the frontline in Spring and Summer 2025 in hopes of influencing ongoing ceasefire and peace negotiations.
- Russia continues to target civilian infrastructure in Ukraine amid reports of shifting and more deadly Russian strike tactics.
- Russian forces are reportedly employing more advanced long-range drones, complicating Ukrainian air defense operations and allowing more drones to penetrate Ukraine's air defense umbrella.
- Zelensky ordered Ukraine's Ministry of Defense (MoD) and General Staff to establish a new aviation chain of command within the Ukrainian General Staff and conduct widespread aviation management reform to strengthen Ukraine's air capabilities.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and near Pokrovsk. Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced the launch of the "Indra Navy 2025" exercises in Chennai, India.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 28, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, and George Barros with William Runkel

March 28, 2025, 5:15 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin is reintensifying efforts to portray the current Ukrainian government as illegitimate and unable to engage in negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. Putin reiterated longstanding boilerplate rhetoric during a visit to a Russian submarine command post in Murmansk Oblast on March 27, claiming that "Nazis" and people with "neo-Nazi views" have significant influence in the Ukrainian government and that "neo-Nazi groups" have the "actual power in their hands" in Ukraine.[1] Putin reiterated claims that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is illegitimate because Ukraine did not hold presidential elections in 2024 and additionally alleged that all Ukrainian civil authorities are therefore illegitimate since the president appoints regional officials. The Ukrainian Constitution explicitly prohibits elections during periods of martial law and invasion by a hostile country, however.[2] Putin claimed that "neo-Nazi formations" are ruling Ukraine in the absence of a legitimate Ukrainian government and questioned how Russia can negotiate with these groups. Putin has previously characterized the Ukrainian government as illegitimate in an effort to justify Russia's unwillingness to engage in good faith negotiations to end the war and has consistently identified "denazification" – a phrase the Kremlin uses to make its demand for the removal of the Ukrainian government and the installation of a pro-Russian puppet regime – as a goal of his full-scale invasion since February 2022.[3]

Putin repeatedly accused Zelensky of being the illegitimate leader of Ukraine ahead of Putin's February 12 phone call with US President Donald Trump, but has made these accusations much less frequently in recent weeks.[4] Putin notably implicitly acknowledged Zelensky as the legitimate president of Ukraine and Russia's future negotiating partner for the first time in late February 2025, and Putin's March 27 statement appears to be a reinternification of his accusations designed to undermine Zelensky's legitimacy.[5] ISW previously noted that the Kremlin's ongoing effort to characterize the Ukrainian government as an illegitimate negotiating partner casts serious doubt on the Kremlin's willingness to negotiate in good faith about a settlement of the war and sets informational conditions for Russia to violate any agreement reached on the grounds that the Ukrainian government had no legal right to conclude it.[6]

Putin reiterated his demand for the elimination of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine as a precondition for a peace agreement – a reference to Russia's initial war demands that directly contradict US, European, and Ukrainian efforts to achieve a just and sustainable resolution to the war. Putin claimed that Russia is committed to ending the war in Ukraine but only if a peace agreement addresses the "root causes" of the war.[7] Senior Russian officials have repeatedly defined these root causes as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and Ukraine's alleged violations of the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine.[8] The Kremlin's demands to address these so-called "root causes" amount to a demand for full Ukrainian capitulation with the installation of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and commitments of Ukrainian neutrality – the same demands Putin has made since before the full-scale invasion.

Putin is attempting to inject a new demand aligned with the Kremlin's long-standing efforts to undermine the Ukrainian government's legitimacy into discussions about the resolution of the war. Putin proposed that the United Nations (UN), United States, and European countries install a temporary administration in Ukraine that would hold democratic elections to bring to power "a viable government that enjoys the people's trust." [9] Putin claimed that a temporary Ukrainian government would allow Russia to "begin negotiations [with the new Ukrainian administration] on a peace treaty" and "sign legitimate documents that will be recognized throughout the world." White House National Security Council Spokesperson James Hewitt rightly dismissed Putin's proposal to impose a temporary administration over Ukraine, stating that the Ukrainian Constitution and the Ukrainian people determine Ukraine's governance.[10] UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also rejected Putin's proposal and stated that Ukraine has a legitimate government that must be respected.[11]

Putin's new demand for an interim government in Ukraine as a precondition for peace negotiations demonstrates how the Kremlin continues to hold negotiations hostage and is attempting to extract additional concessions from the West following the progress made in the ongoing ceasefire negotiations. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin remains committed to its goal to prolong any negotiations for a temporary frontline ceasefire or permanent peace agreement in order to continue making incremental gains on the battlefield and establish favorable conditions to pursue Ukraine's complete capitulation.[12]

The Kremlin appears to be renewing efforts to reorganize Russia's five naval infantry brigades into divisions. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on March 28 that the Russian General Staff approved a program to reorganize the Russian naval infantry forces from brigades into divisions. [13] Putin stated that two brigades, including the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), will become divisions in 2025, that two more brigades will become divisions in 2026, and that the final brigade will become a division in 2027. Putin also appointed the commander of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, Major General Mikhail Gudkov, to deputy commander of the Russian Navy on March 28. There are currently five naval infantry brigades in the Russian military: the Pacific Fleet's 40th and

155th naval infantry brigades, the Baltic Fleet's 336th Naval Infantry Brigade, the Northern Fleet's 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, and the Black Sea Fleet's 810th Naval Infantry Brigade.[14] Former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced in December 2022 that Russia intended to form 17 new maneuver divisions, including the expansion of five existing naval infantry brigades into five divisions. [15] Shoigu stated in January 2023 that Russia intended to only form 12 new maneuver divisions by 2026, however, and did not mention the five naval infantry formations.[16] Putin appears to be renewing this effort, indicating that Russia is likely working to form 17 maneuver divisions over several years.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 27, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, and Karolina Hird with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 27, 2025, 5:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15am ET on March 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on March 26 that discussions are ongoing about the details of the temporary ceasefire agreements on energy infrastructure strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea. Zelensky stated on March 26 that Ukraine, the United States, and Russia must still resolve unspecified "technical" issues related to the temporary ceasefire agreements on energy infrastructure strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea but did reach agreements on these ceasefires during talks in Saudi Arabia on March 24 and 25.[1] Zelensky added that the Ukrainian, US, and Russian technical teams have not yet determined the monitoring mechanisms for temporary ceasefires on energy infrastructure strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea, which makes it difficult to assess Russia's compliance.[2] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on March 25 that Ukraine regards any movement of Russian military vessels outside of the eastern part of the Black Sea as a violation of the "commitment to ensure safe navigation of the Black Sea."^[3] The Kremlin, however, said on March 25 that it will not implement the agreed ceasefire in the Black Sea until the United States lifts sanctions on Russian state-owned agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations involved in international food and fertilizer trade.[4] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio acknowledged on March 26 that the European Union (EU) must be involved in lifting sanctions on Russia.^[5] European Commission Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Anitta Hipper stated on March 26 that the EU would consider lifting or amending sanctions against Russia only if Russia "end[s] its unprovoked aggression in Ukraine" and "unconditionally withdraw[s]" all Russian forces from Ukraine.^[6]

Russia continues to strike Ukrainian critical and civilian infrastructure under the cover of the ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes — which is not in line with US President Donald Trump's goal of using the temporary ceasefire to facilitate a lasting peace in Ukraine. Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi stated on March 27 that neither Ukraine nor Russia struck each other's energy facilities since March 25, although the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused Ukraine of violating the ceasefire agreement on the nights of March 25 to 26 and 26 to 27.^[7] The temporary ceasefire does not include protections for civilian or non-energy critical infrastructure, and Russian forces have intensified strikes against these objects in recent days.^[8] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that on the night of March 26 to 27, Russian forces launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile from Voronezh Oblast and 86 Shahed and other drones from Kursk City; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.^[9] The Ukrainian Air Force reported Ukrainian forces downed 42 drones and that 26 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference and Ukrainian officials reported that Russian strikes damaged civilian infrastructure in Dnipro, Sumy, and Kharkiv cities.^[10] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated on March 24 that Russia is intentionally targeting populated cities with drones in order to destroy infrastructure and terrorize the local civilian population.^[11] Russian forces have repeatedly conducted large strikes against civilian areas in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast; Dobropillya, Donetsk Oblast; and Zolochiv, Kharkiv Oblast and port infrastructure in Odesa City since early March 2025 amid discussions of a temporary ceasefire.^[12] The Trump administration has previously characterized a temporary general ceasefire (which Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly rejected) as a "necessary step" toward achieving an enduring peace settlement.^[13] Continued Russian strikes on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, even under the conditions of an alleged ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes, will be detrimental to the establishment of a sustainable peace in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the March 19 to 20 Ukrainian drone strike against Russia's Engels Airbase destroyed a large number of cruise missiles and strategic fuel reserves as Ukrainian officials reported that Russia is prioritizing the production of high-precision missiles. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 27 that the Ukrainian drone strike destroyed 96 air-launched cruise missiles and that Russian forces intended to use these missiles in at least three separate strike series against Ukraine on unspecified dates in March and April 2025.[14] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko noted on March 20 that the Engels Airbase stored Kh-101 cruise missiles, suggesting that many or all of the 96 destroyed missiles were Kh-101s.[15] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Engels Airbase drone strike also destroyed significant aviation fuel reserves that supplied Russian forces operating in Ukraine.[16] Russian forces have frequently used Kh-101 cruise missiles in overnight strike series against Ukraine and notably hit the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in central Kyiv with a Kh-101 missile in July 2024.[17] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Head Major General Vadym Skibitskyi told Ukrainian state news outlet *Ukrinform* on March 26 that Russia is producing high numbers of Kh-101 and Kaliber cruise missiles and Iskander ballistic missiles to replenish its stockpiles and augment their strike packages with more accurate missiles with higher payloads.[18] Skibitskyi reported that Russia is also producing Kinzhal ballistic missiles and Zirkon hypersonic missiles.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia is preparing for a spring offensive in Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts. Zelensky told French outlet *Le Figaro* on March 26 that Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to delay ongoing peace negotiations to buy time for an offensive against Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts in Spring 2025.[19] Zelensky noted that Russian forces wanted to conduct these offensive operations in Fall 2024 but that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024 spoiled this plan. Zelensky warned on March 15 and 18 that Russian forces may be preparing for intensified ground operations in Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts, although Ukrainian officials have expressed doubts about Russian forces' ability to conduct successful offensive operations in these areas, particularly against Sumy City.[20] Sumy City had a population of 256,000 in 2022 and is roughly 30 kilometers from the frontline. Putin also recently told Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov to "think in the future about creating a security zone" along the Ukrainian-Russian international border, including in Sumy Oblast.[21] Russian forces have been conducting intensified ground assaults within northern Sumy Oblast since early March 2025 as part of their effort to push Ukrainian forces from remaining positions in Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi visited Ukrainian forces in Sumy Oblast on March 27 and reported that Russian attacks have intensified in recent days.[22] These Russian assaults are not part of a new offensive effort in Sumy Oblast, although Russian forces could use new positions and momentum gained in the Sumy Oblast border area to support a potential spring offensive operation in northern Sumy Oblast. Russian forces remain unlikely to conduct a successful offensive operation to seize Sumy City but would likely leverage future offensive operations into Sumy Oblast and other oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy to demand that Ukraine cede additional territory to Russia, particularly amid discussions of a potential future peace in Ukraine.[23]

Ukraine's European allies met in Paris for a Coalition of the Willing summit on March 27 to discuss their ongoing support for Ukraine, a monitoring system to ensure ceasefire compliance, and the possible deployment of a "deterrent force" in Ukraine.[24] Leaders and representatives from 30 countries including the UK, Ukraine, France, and Germany discussed strengthening Ukraine's military and defense industrial base (DIB) to deter future Russian aggression and ensure Ukraine is in the strongest possible position amid ongoing negotiations with Russia.[25] French President Emmanuel Macron stated that coalition members are developing a plan to send "reassurance forces" to "strategic locations" in Ukraine in the event of a peace treaty with Russia.[26] Macron stated that these forces will aim to deter potential Russian aggression against Ukraine and help train Ukrainian forces but will not serve as peacekeepers or be stationed on the frontlines to monitor possible ceasefires.[27] Macron stated that France and the UK will soon send a joint military delegation to Ukraine to assist in long-term Ukrainian military planning.[28] Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reiterated that European countries should not lift sanctions against Russia as Russia continues to occupy and wage war against Ukraine.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on March 26 that discussions are ongoing about the details of the temporary ceasefire agreements on energy infrastructure strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea.**
- **Russia continues to strike Ukrainian critical and civilian infrastructure under the cover of the ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes — which is not in line with US President Donald Trump's goal of using the temporary ceasefire to facilitate a lasting peace in Ukraine.**

- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the March 19 to 20 Ukrainian drone strike against Russia's Engels Airbase destroyed a large number of cruise missiles and strategic fuel reserves as Ukrainian officials reported that Russia is prioritizing the production of high-precision missiles.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia is preparing for a spring offensive in Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts.
- Ukraine's European allies met in Paris for a Coalition of the Willing summit on March 27 to discuss their ongoing support for Ukraine, a monitoring system to ensure ceasefire compliance, and the possible deployment of a "deterrent force" in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Sumy oblasts; near Lyman, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk; and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Volunteer Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy of Russia (DOSAAF), which promotes patriotic and military education and has been involved in Russian volunteer recruitment efforts, elected Denis Dobraykov as the new DOSAAF Chairperson on March 27.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 26, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Daria Novikov, and Kateryna Stepanenko with Nate Trotter

March 26, 2025, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on March 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The details of the ceasefire agreements on energy strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea that US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials reached on March 24 and 25 remain unclear.

Russia and Ukraine appear to agree that a ceasefire against strikes on energy infrastructure is active as of March 25, but US and Ukrainian statements continue to make clear that technical negotiations are ongoing.^[1] Ukrainian Presidential Office Deputy Head Pavlo Palisa stated on March 26 that Ukraine is still working to develop monitoring mechanisms for the ceasefires, which is consistent with US, Russian, and Ukrainian statements on March 25 jointly agreeing to develop measures to implement the energy infrastructure ceasefire.^[2] Palisa stated that both ceasefires on Black Sea operations and strikes against energy infrastructure came into force upon the publication of the joint US-Ukrainian statement on March 25.^[3] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 26 that Russian forces are implementing Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 18 order to adhere to the ceasefire on energy infrastructure strikes.^[4] The absence of officially published joint texts of the agreements that Ukraine and Russia signed continues to make evaluating the specifics of these ceasefires difficult, and the ceasefire terms remain unclear.^[5]

Russia and Ukraine exchanged accusations of strikes and ceasefire violations, although the ceasefire terms remain unclear. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused Ukrainian forces of attempting to strike energy infrastructure in Kursk Oblast on March 25, gas infrastructure in occupied Crimea overnight on March 25 to 26, and electrical infrastructure in Bryansk Oblast on March 26.^[6] The Ukrainian General Staff responded on March 26 and denied the Russian MoD's accusations.^[7] Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexander Khinshtein, Crimea occupation head Sergei Aksyonov, and Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz notably did not report Ukrainian drone strikes in their respective regions. Russian governors and occupation officials typically publicly announce when Ukrainian drones attempt to strike infrastructure in their regions. Ukrainian Presidential Communications Advisor Dmytro Lytvyn stated on March 25 that Russian forces have conducted eight strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities since March 18, when Putin claimed to have ordered the Russian military to stop strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure facilities.^[8] Ukrainian officials have reported that Russian overnight strike series have damaged civilian infrastructure across Ukraine almost every night since March 18 but have not specified which strikes specifically damaged energy infrastructure.^[9]

Russian officials explicitly rejected US President Donald Trump's recent suggestion that the United States could be involved in operating the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). Trump stated on March 19 during a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that the United States is interested in taking control of the ZNPP, which Russian forces currently occupy — implying that Russia would have to cede this territory in Zaporizhia Oblast before the United States can take control of the ZNPP.^[10] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated on March 26 that the transfer of the ZNPP's territory or control over it to Ukraine or any other country is "impossible" and that the possibility of Russia jointly operating the ZNPP with any

country is "unacceptable."^[11] The Russian MFA added that it would be "absurd" to allow any international organization to help operate the ZNPP. The Russian MFA attempted to justify Russia's illegal occupation of the ZNPP by claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin's October 2022 decree legally brought the ZNPP under Russian jurisdiction. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak also stated on March 26 that Russia is not considering jointly operating the ZNPP with the United States.^[12] The Kremlin routinely falsely portrays itself as the only safe operator of the ZNPP, despite having endangered the ZNPP since Russian forces occupied the area in March 2022.^[13] Russia has notably stored military equipment near the ZNPP reactors and in the turbine halls and used ZNPP grounds to launch strike drones.^[14] The Kremlin also routinely accuses Ukraine of endangering the ZNPP and may attempt to intensify these narratives to spoil ongoing US-Ukrainian negotiations.^[15]

The European Union (EU) will likely maintain sanctions on Russia despite Russian demands for Western sanctions relief as preconditions for a temporary ceasefire with Ukraine in the Black Sea. European Commission's Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Anita Hipper stated on March 26 that the EU would consider lifting or amending sanctions against Russia if Russia "end[s] its unprovoked aggression in Ukraine" and "unconditional[y] withdraw[s]" all Russian forces from Ukraine.^[16] Hipper's statement is likely a response to the Kremlin's recent demand that it will not implement the terms of the ceasefire in the Black Sea with Ukraine until the US lifts sanctions on Russian state-owned agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations involved in international food and fertilizer trade.^[17] The United States will likely require EU cooperation in order to lift some sanctions and restrictions on Russian agricultural, financial, and trade entities to reconnect Russia to international agricultural and fertilizer markets.

Key Takeaways:

- The details of the ceasefire agreements on energy strikes and maritime operations in the Black Sea that US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials reached on March 24 and 25 remain unclear.
- Russia and Ukraine exchanged accusations of strikes and ceasefire violations, although the ceasefire terms remain unclear.
 - Russian officials explicitly rejected US President Donald Trump's recent suggestion that the United States could be involved in operating the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).
 - The European Union (EU) will likely maintain sanctions on Russia despite Russian demands for Western sanctions relief as preconditions for a temporary ceasefire with Ukraine in the Black Sea.
 - Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast, near Toretsk, Velyka Novosilka, and in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast.
 - Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and near Toretsk.
 - Russia continues reorganize drone detachments into new units likely as part of an ongoing effort to establish the Russian Unmanned Systems Force (USF).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 25, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Daria Novikov, George Barros with Nate Trotter

US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials reached some agreements for temporary ceasefires on strikes against energy infrastructure and in the Black Sea. The details of these ceasefires remain unclear and evaluating the ceasefires' specifics in the absence of officially published joint texts of the agreements signed by Russia and Ukraine remains difficult. The White House issued one readout about the outcomes of the US-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia from March 24 and another about the US-Ukrainian talks from March 25.^[1] The Kremlin and Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov each issued separate statements for Russia and Ukraine.^[2] The American, Russian, and Ukrainian statements share some commonalities but differ from each other significantly in other regards. The US readouts, the Kremlin readout, and Umerov commonly stated that the United States, Ukraine, and Russia "agreed to develop measures for implementing" US President Donald Trump's, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's "agreement to ban strikes against energy facilities of Russia and Ukraine."^[3] Zelensky stated that Ukraine also gave the United States a list of "strategic infrastructure objects" that Ukraine would like protected under a strikes ceasefire.^[4] This list is not explicitly mentioned in the US or Russian readouts. The Kremlin

later issued a list of Russian and Ukrainian facilities that Russian and American delegations agreed fall under the temporary ceasefire on strikes on the energy system.^[5] The Kremlin stated that the list includes oil refineries; oil and gas pipelines and storage facilities, including pumping stations; electricity generation and transmission infrastructure, including power plants, substations, transformers, and distributors; nuclear power plants; and hydroelectric dams. It is unclear if the Russian list of objects is the same list of "strategic infrastructure objects" that Zelensky mentioned. The Kremlin stated that the temporary ceasefire is valid for 30 days starting from March 18, 2025, meaning that the ceasefire will by default expire on April 17, 2025, unless Russia and Ukraine mutually agree to renew it. The Kremlin stated that Russia and Ukraine have the right to consider themselves free from the obligations of the agreement if one of the parties violates the agreement. The mechanisms to monitor and address allegations of violations remain unclear. The Kremlin's list notably only includes energy infrastructure facilities, and it remains unclear whether discussions regarding Zelensky's list of other non-energy facilities that he wants protected under the ceasefire are still ongoing or whether the Kremlin has rejected Zelensky's proposal. Umerov also stated that Ukraine is ready to "ready to organize a separate meeting at the technical level to begin work on implementation mechanisms" for the strikes and Black Sea ceasefires and that "at this point, all parties are going to brief the relevant leadership, and we will announce the dates and times soon."^[6] **The Kremlin's and Umerov's statements suggest that Russia and Ukraine may not yet be in agreement about whether the ceasefire has gone into effect or not as of March 25.**

The US readouts of its bilateral meetings in Saudi Arabia and Umerov noted that the United States, Ukraine, and Russia "agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea."^[7] The Kremlin readout of the US-Russian talks similarly stated that the United States and Russia agreed to such measures as part of a "Black Sea Initiative," but added that there need to be "appropriate control measures through inspection of such vessels."^[8] Umerov uniquely added that all Russian military vessels movement "outside of [the] eastern part of the Black Sea" will constitute a violation of the spirit of this agreement and that Ukraine will regard such movement as a violation of the commitment to ensure the safe navigation of the Black Sea and a threat Ukraine's national security.^[9] Umerov stated that Ukraine will be able to exercise its right to self-defense in the event of such violations.

All readouts of the March 23 to 25 bilateral meetings noted that the parties "welcome the good offices of third countries with a view toward supporting the implementation of the energy and maritime agreements" and that all parties "will continue working toward achieving a durable and lasting peace."^[10] (Turkey notably helped facilitate the July 2022 grain deal by inspecting commercial vessels transporting foodstuffs in the Black Sea.)^[11] The White House and Umerov stated that the United States and Ukraine "agreed that the United States remains committed to helping achieve prisoners of war (POWs) exchanges, the release of civilian detainees, and the return of forcibly transferred Ukrainian children."^[12]

Putin continues to reject Trump's and Zelensky's proposed temporary frontline ceasefire, despite agreeing to some form of ceasefire for strikes on energy infrastructure and in the Black Sea. Putin's persistent stalling and intransigence are inhibiting Trump's efforts to secure a lasting and stable peace settlement. The US readouts for both its meetings with Russian and Ukrainian delegations noted that Trump's "imperative that the killing on both sides" of the war must stop, "as the necessary step toward achieving an enduring peace settlement" — likely in reference to the unconditional 30-day general ceasefire on the frontline that Trump and Zelensky have already agreed upon, but that Putin rejected on March 18.^[13]

The Kremlin stated that it will not implement the agreed ceasefire in the Black Sea until the United States lifts sanctions on Russian state-owned agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations involved in international food and fertilizer trade. ^[14] The Kremlin stated that unspecified actors — presumably the United States — must also reconnect Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations to SWIFT and lift restrictions on trade finance transactions. Additionally, they must lift sanctions restricting companies producing and exporting food and fertilizers and their insurance companies, lift restrictions on servicing ships in ports and sanctions against ships operating under the Russian flag involved in trading food and fertilizer products, and lift restrictions on supplying agricultural machinery and other tools used in food and fertilizer production to Russia. The United States did not provide Russia such demanded sanctions relief when Ukraine and Russia agreed to the grain deal in July 2022.^[15] The White House and Kremlin readouts of the US-Russian meetings noted that the "United States will help restore Russia's access to the world market for agricultural and fertilizer exports, lower maritime insurance costs, and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions," but the US readout notably did not include explicit language suggesting that Russia's acceptance and adherence to the Black Sea ceasefire would be conditional on preliminary US sanctions relief.^[16] The United States will likely require European Union (EU) cooperation in order to lift some sanctions and restrictions on

Russian agricultural, financial, and trade entities to reconnect Russia to international agricultural and fertilizer markets.[17] US President Donald Trump responded to a question about the United States lifting some sanctions on Russia before Russia implements measures in the Black Sea and stated that the US is considering lifting some sanctions against Russia.[18] Establishing the initial grain deal in July 2022 did not require any sanctions relief, and reinstating the grain deal likely similarly does not require preliminary sanctions relief.[19] Establishing a temporary ceasefire in the Black Sea does not require preliminary sanctions relief.

The Kremlin's official statements are vague, stipulate requirements for the ceasefire that neither the United States nor Ukrainian official statements mention, and leave room for disagreement among the parties that would be involved in interpreting the agreements, lifting sanctions, and monitoring potential violations. The official Kremlin statement is vague on the specific sanctions and restrictions the Kremlin is demanding that the West preliminarily lift and the specific financial organizations and companies involved. The Kremlin statement also does not specify the actors that will interpret the parameters of these restrictions, monitor lifting these restrictions, and verify all parties' compliance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine, Russia, and the United States issued separate statements because the US-Ukrainian meetings did not discuss US-Russian efforts to assist in restoring Russian access to agricultural and trade markets.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- US, Ukrainian, and Russian officials reached some agreements for temporary ceasefires on strikes against energy infrastructure and in the Black Sea. The details of these ceasefires remain unclear and evaluating the ceasefires' specifics in the absence of officially published joint texts of the agreements signed by Russia and Ukraine remains difficult.
- The Kremlin's and Umerov's statements suggest that Russia and Ukraine may not yet be in agreement about whether the ceasefire has gone into effect or not as of March 25.
- Putin continues to reject Trump's and Zelensky's proposed temporary frontline ceasefire, despite agreeing to some form of ceasefire for strikes on energy infrastructure and in the Black Sea. Putin's persistent stalling and intransigence are inhibiting Trump's efforts to secure a lasting and stable peace settlement.
- The Kremlin stated that it will not implement the agreed ceasefire in the Black Sea until the United States lifts sanctions on Russian state-owned agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank and other unspecified financial organizations involved in international food and fertilizer trade.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Kursk-Sumy Oblast border area, near Toretsk, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian military continues to deny rotations to soldiers who have been fighting in the war in Ukraine for years.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 24, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mapes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

March 24, 2025, 5:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15am ET on March 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US and Russian delegations met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24 following US-Ukrainian talks on March 23 about the details of temporary ceasefires on long-range strikes and in the Black Sea. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 23 that the US-Ukrainian talks are "more technical in nature."^[1] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on March 23 that the US-Ukrainian talks discussed proposals for the safety of energy and infrastructure facilities and that the talks were "productive and focused."^[2] A source familiar with the bilateral negotiations in Saudi Arabia told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* that the Russian-US meeting on March 24 will consider the ceasefire agreements that Ukraine agreed to on March 23.^[3] The source stated that the discussions focused on moratoriums on strikes against energy facilities and civilian infrastructure and attacks in the Black Sea. Ukrainian Presidential Office Advisor Serhii Leshchenko stated that the US-Ukrainian talks concerned a ceasefire against strikes on Russian "facilities at seas and rivers" and against

Ukrainian ports in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts.[4] Leshchenko stated that the Ukrainian delegation will hold additional discussions with the US delegation following the US–Russian talks on March 24.[5] *Suspiro* reported that the US delegation in the US–Russian talks includes State Department Policy Planning Director Michael Anton, US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg, and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and that the Russian delegation includes Russian Federation Council International Affairs Committee Chairperson Grigory Karasin and Advisor to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Colonel General Sergei Beseda.[6] Saudi Arabian state-owned outlet *Al Arabiya* reported that US National Security Council member Andrew Peek is also participating in the US delegation in the US–Russian talks.[7] Kremlin wire *TASS* reported that the US and Russian delegations will release a joint statement on March 25.[8] ISW will report on the details of the various bilateral talks as information becomes available in the coming days.

Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Demidovka along the international border in northwestern Belgorod Oblast amid ongoing Ukrainian attacks in the area. Geolocated footage published on March 24 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in central Demidovka (northwest of Belgorod City).[9] Russian milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces advanced into southern Demidovka but denied that Ukrainian forces seized the settlement.[10] Ukrainian forces began limited attacks into northwestern Belgorod Oblast on March 18 and have made marginal advances towards Grafovka (southeast of Demidovka) and Prileseye (south of Demidovka) over the last six days.[11] Russian milbloggers claimed on March 24 that Ukrainian forces also began attacking towards Popovka (west of Demidovka).[12] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and some armored vehicles and attacking in small infantry groups.[13] Russian sources claimed that Russia redeployed border guards, Chechen Akhmat forces, elements of the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces, and elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) to respond to the Ukrainian attacks in northwestern Belgorod Oblast.[14] ISW will not offer an assessment of Ukraine's intent behind these attacks at this time.

Ukrainian forces appear to be leveraging long-range strikes to complicate Russian logistics and command and control (C2) in the area. Ukrainian forces recently conducted two strikes on Russian command posts in western Belgorod Oblast, destroying communications equipment.[15] Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) reported on March 24 that Ukrainian forces downed four Russian helicopters over Belgorod Oblast.[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces recently struck a bridge near Grafovka and another bridge near Nadezhevka (east of Grafovka), likely to complicate Russian logistics in the area.[17] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian drone strikes, shelling, and HIMARS strikes are also complicating Russian forces' ability to hold some positions in the area.[18]

The Kremlin is recirculating existing narratives aimed at undermining support for Ukraine amid the negotiations in Riyadh and likely remains uninterested in conducting meaningful negotiations to end the war. Kremlin officials are likely attempting to capitalize on the current lack of available details about the US–Ukrainian and US–Russian discussions in Riyadh on March 23 and 24. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of being "well-bred Nazis" who lack agency as part of Kremlin efforts to justify the Kremlin's demand of "denazification" — or regime change and the installation of a pro-Russian proxy government in Kyiv — as a condition to end the war in Ukraine. [19] Lavrov also reiterated claims accusing European countries of seeking to prolong the war in Ukraine, likely to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused Ukraine of violating the proposed moratorium on energy strikes, despite the fact that the proposed moratorium agreement and its contours are not yet finalized and are currently under discussion in Riyadh.[20] Peskov and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova attempted to temper domestic expectations for the ongoing talks, stating that there is no need to expect breakthroughs and there is still a lot of work to do on technical issues.[21] These statements continue to signal to the domestic Russian audience that Russians should not expect a meaningful peace in Ukraine in the near term and support Kremlin condition-setting for a protracted war effort.[22]

Recent statements by Russian diplomats and academics indicate that the Kremlin likely aims to prioritize bilateral discussions with the United States over talks to end the war in Ukraine and will set this expectation within Russian society. Russian State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Vyacheslav Nikonov recently told the *New York Times* (NYT) that Russian President Vladimir Putin sees bilateral Russian-US relations as "more important than the question of Ukraine."^[23] Other Russian officials and voices indicated to the NYT that it is more important for Russia to accomplish its goals in bilateral US–Russian relations regarding alleviating sanctions pressure, constraining NATO, and seeking a "broader deal" — which likely includes US–Russian bilateral terms — before agreeing to any ceasefire in Ukraine.^[24]

Russia continues to persecute religious minorities, especially Evangelical Christian communities in occupied Kherson Oblast as part of a wider campaign in occupied Ukraine aimed at destroying independent Ukrainian national and religious identities. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 23 that Russian occupation officials are forcibly converting and reconsecrating Ukrainian churches into the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) in occupied Kherson Oblast.[25] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that ROC MP priests watch Russian occupation officials torture Ukrainian Protestant Christian believers and force Ukrainian children to pray for the "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) — a Kremlin-promoted geopolitical concept with amorphous parameters that broadly encompasses Russian language, culture, Orthodoxy, and media. ISW has previously reported on Russia's religious oppression in occupied Ukraine, including arbitrary detention and assassinations of Ukrainian clergy or religious leaders and the looting, desecration, and deliberate destruction of places of worship.[26] ISW has also reported at length on Russia's systematic repression of Ukrainian Orthodox communities and other religious minorities, particularly Ukrainian Protestants and Baptists who have faced Russian brutality and other repressions throughout southern Ukraine.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- US and Russian delegations met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24 following US-Ukrainian talks on March 23 about the details of temporary ceasefires on long-range strikes and in the Black Sea.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Demidovka along the international border in northwestern Belgorod Oblast amid ongoing Ukrainian attacks in the area.
- The Kremlin is recirculating existing narratives aimed at undermining support for Ukraine amid the negotiations in Riyadh and likely remains uninterested in conducting meaningful negotiations to end the war.
- Russia continues to persecute religious minorities, especially Evangelical Christian communities in occupied Kherson Oblast as part of a wider campaign in occupied Ukraine aimed at destroying independent Ukrainian national and religious identities.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian forces are reportedly failing to adequately provision first person view (FPV) drone units amid ongoing efforts to centralize Russian drone operations under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 23, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mapes, Olivia Gibson, Christina Harward, and George Barros with William Runkel

March 23, 2025, 4:30 pm ET

US and Ukrainian officials are meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on the evening of March 23 to discuss the contours of the temporary moratorium on long-range strikes and a possible temporary maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea. An unnamed US official told the *Financial Times* (FT) on March 23 that the talks will cover the technical aspects of the temporary strikes moratorium, including monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Heorhiy Tykhyi added that the talks will define the scope of this ceasefire. [1] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov is leading the Ukrainian delegation, which also includes Ukrainian Presidential Office deputy heads Pavlo Palisa and Ihor Zhovka, Deputy Energy Minister Mykola Kolisnyk, MFA State Secretary Oleksandr Karasevich, and several unspecified military officers.[2] FT reported that the US delegation includes US National Security Council member Andrew Peek and State Department Policy Planning Director Michael Anton.[3] A Ukrainian official told the *New York Times* (NYT) that the US and Ukrainian delegations may hold additional talks on March 24 depending on the progress of negotiations.[4] The US-Ukrainian meeting is ongoing as of this publication and ISW will report on the details of the talks in-depth on March 24.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that there is tension between Russian Central Bank Chairperson Elvira Nabiullina and the Kremlin over Russia's high interest rate and wartime monetary policies. A Russian insider source claimed on March 23 that the Russian Federation Council Accounts Chamber (the Russian Federation's highest audit body) recently initiated an audit of the Russian Central Bank to investigate its monetary policy from 2022 to 2024 and the impact of the interest rate on inflation, budget expenditures, and investment.[5] The source claimed that the investigation is "effectively" an attack on Nabiullina. The insider source claimed that a group of

lobbyists from large Russian businesses seek interest rate reductions. ISW cannot independently verify this insider source's claim and has not observed other reporting about the alleged audit.

Russian inflation has been rising due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the Russian Central Bank decided in December 2024 to maintain the key interest rate at 21 percent – the highest Russian interest rate since 2003 – as part of efforts to curb growing inflation rates.[6] The Russian Central Bank's interest rate through 2025 has remained relatively conservative despite significant and growing inflationary pressures.[7] The Kremlin has claimed in recent months that the inflation rate is about nine to 10 percent, but these figures are likely far below the actual inflation rate, which is likely closer to 20 to 25 percent.[8] Russia's current interest rate should likely be higher, and the Kremlin likely pressured the Central Bank to keep the rate at 21 percent when the Central Bank should have increased it to curb inflation.[9]

Russian President Vladimir Putin has also attempted to shift blame for the rising inflation rate on the Central Bank, and on Nabiullina in particular. This was likely in an effort to draw the ire of the Russian business community away from the Kremlin and onto her, although Nabiullina likely has not been able to exercise fully independent monetary policy. The audit on the Central Bank may be part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to apply political pressure on the bank to prevent further interest rate hikes beyond the current rate of 21 percent, manage the expectations and frustrations of the Russian business community, and further the Kremlin's narrative about Russia's economic stability. The Kremlin's continued manipulation of the Central Bank's decisions is likely hampering the Russian government's ability to enact sound wartime monetary policies.

Key Takeaways:

- US and Ukrainian officials are meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on the evening of March 23 to discuss the contours of the temporary moratorium on long-range strikes and a possible temporary maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea.
- Unconfirmed reports suggest that there is tension between Russian Central Bank Chairperson Elvira Nabiullina and the Kremlin over Russia's high interest rate and wartime monetary policies.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 22, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff uncritically amplified a number of Russian demands, claims, and justifications regarding the war in Ukraine during an interview on March 21. Witkoff told American media personality Tucker Carlson in an interview published on March 21 that Russia "100 percent" does not want to invade Europe and that Russia "does not need to absorb Ukraine."^[1] Witkoff stated that Russia "reclaimed" five regions in Ukraine — Crimea and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts — and that Russia "has gotten what [it] wants" and will not want more. The Kremlin has repeatedly and falsely claimed that Crimea and these four oblasts are Russian territory contrary to international law, and Witkoff's statement about Russia "reclaiming" these areas (which Russia has illegally occupied and annexed) amplifies the Kremlin's justifications for its expansionist territorial demands and multiple invasions of Ukraine.

Vladislav Surkov, a former close adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, recently reiterated a number of longstanding Kremlin claims and ambitions that directly contradict Witkoff's assertions in an interview with French media aimed at Western audiences. Surkov previously served as a long-time close advisor to Putin and organized protests in Crimea against the Ukrainian government in 2014.^[2] Surkov also oversaw the Kremlin's 2014-2015 project to promote the creation of "Novorossiya" (an amorphous, invented region in Ukraine that Kremlin officials have claimed includes all of southern and eastern Ukraine and is an "integral" part of Russia) in eastern Ukraine.^[3] Putin relieved Surkov of his duties as Presidential Aide in February 2020.^[4] Surkov stated in an interview with French outlet *L'Express* on March 19 that a Russian victory in Ukraine would be the "military or military and diplomatic crushing of Ukraine" and the "division of this artificial quasi-state into its natural fragments."^[5] Surkov stated that Russia will achieve this strategic objective — which Surkov stated has not changed since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 — even if there are "maneuvers, slowdowns, and pauses along the way." Surkov stated that the return of Ukraine to Russia's desired and self-defined sphere of influence has been a Russian

objective since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Surkov claimed that "Ukraine is an artificial political entity" consisting of "at least" three regions — the "Russian" southern and eastern Ukraine, the "Russian-non-Russian" central area, and the "anti-Russian" west. Surkov claimed that Russia's war in Ukraine "will separate the Russians and the anti-Russians" and will "confine" the "anti-Russians" to their "historical territory" such that they "stop spreading across Russian soil." Surkov claimed that "perhaps" Ukraine will exist as a "real state" in the future but as a much smaller entity. Surkov implied that Europe will be involved in the future partitioning of Ukraine, claiming that "a balanced division of Ukraine will have to include a share for Brussels." Surkov responded to a question about how he sees Russian borders, stating that the ideology of the Russian World (*Russkiy Mir*) "has no borders" and exists "everywhere there is Russian influence," including cultural, military, economic, ideological, or humanitarian influence. Surkov claimed that Russia's influence varies across regions in the world, but "is never zero." Surkov claimed that Russia "will spread out in all directions." The Kremlin has repeatedly used the idea of the Russian World to justify Russian military interventions into former Soviet states and to claim that areas of the former Soviet Union and Russian Empire are historical Russian territories.^[6] **Surkov's statements about Russia's claims over southern and eastern Ukraine and the future expansion of *Russkiy Mir* are in direct contrast to Witkoff's statement that Russia has no territorial ambitions beyond Crimea and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.**

Surkov's statements are consistent with those made by Putin and senior Russian officials, who have recently and repeatedly stated that Russia intends to bring Ukraine under Russian control and establish suzerainty over neighboring countries in order to weaken the West and strengthen Russia's global influence. Senior Russian officials have recently reiterated that any future peace settlement must address the "root causes" of the war, which Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov defined as recently as March 10, 2025, as the alleged "threats to Russia's security from the Ukrainian and Western directions in general" that are due to NATO's eastward expansion and the Ukrainian government's alleged "extermination" of everything that is "connected with Russia and the *Russkiy Mir*," including Russian language, culture, Orthodoxy, and media.^[7] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko acknowledged on March 17, 2025, that Russia's demands for Ukrainian neutrality and NATO's refusal to allow Ukraine into the alliance are the same demands that Russia made in 2021 before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[8] Putin's 2021 demands also stipulated that NATO commit to not accepting any countries as new members and that NATO not deploy any military forces to states that became NATO members after May 1997; would ban any NATO military activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia; would ban deployments of intermediate-range missiles in areas that could reach Russian or NATO state territory; and would ban the United States from deploying intermediate-range missiles in Europe or nuclear missiles outside of US territory.^[9] The Kremlin has used the "*Russkiy Mir*" narrative for decades to justify Russian aggression in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova and to set conditions to influence independent countries once colonized by the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire.^[10] Putin and other senior Russian officials have repeatedly propagated pseudo-history to deny Ukrainian statehood and nationhood and have falsely asserted that Ukraine's Western neighbors have legitimate claims to Ukrainian territory in an effort to sow division between Ukraine and Europe.^[11] Putin has recently reamplified Russia's territorial demands that Ukraine cede all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, including areas that Russian forces do not currently occupy, amid ongoing bilateral US-Russia negotiations.^[12] **Putin and other Russian officials have also recently reamplified Russian narratives that "Novorossiya," which Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has defined as all of eastern and southern Ukraine including Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts, is an "integral" part of Russia.**^[13] Putin has used the term "Novorossiya" to refer to eastern and southern Ukraine since 2014 to set informational conditions to justify Russia's occupation and territorial ambitions and claimed in 2023 that Odesa City, Crimea, and the entire "Black Sea region" have nothing "to do with Ukraine."^[14]

Witkoff uncritically repeated several inaccurate Russian claims regarding the status of the Ukrainian territories that Russia illegally occupies. Witkoff claimed during the March 21 interview that Russian-occupied Crimea, Donbas, and Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts are "Russian-speaking" and that "there have been referendums [in these regions] where the overwhelming majority of people have indicated that they want to be under Russian rule."^[15] Russia has long used similar claims to justify its unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, having used the claim that Russia needs to "protect Russian-speakers" in eastern Ukraine to justify the launch of its full-scale invasion in 2022.^[16] Russia has routinely undermined its own myth of "protecting Russian speakers" in Ukraine, however, destroying predominantly Russian-speaking cities in eastern Ukraine, killing Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and deporting Russian-speaking Ukrainian children to Russia in violation of international law.^[17] The Russian invasions of Ukraine have never been about protecting Russian speakers.^[18]

The assertion that the "overwhelming majority" of Ukrainians living under Russian occupation want to be under Russian control is also demonstrably false. Russian manipulations and coercive control

tactics in occupied Ukraine are inconsistent with the claim that all residents of occupied Ukraine "want" to be part of Russia. Russia staged sham referendums in Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014 and then in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts in 2022 in an attempt to claim that most of the population "voted" to be annexed by Russia.^[19] These referendums were all conducted under an intense Russian military presence and without legitimate election observers, and Russian authorities likely falsified attendance statistics and manipulated ballots.^[20] Annexation referendums in 2022 did not account for the millions of Ukrainians who fled their homes to avoid living under Russian occupation.^[21] Russian forces used physical intimidation to force Ukrainian civilians to vote for annexation during the 2022 referendums, with reports from occupied Zaporizhia Oblast suggesting that Russian occupation authorities instituted "at-home" voting in order to allow Russian security forces to enter the homes of Ukrainians and threaten them into voting for annexation at gunpoint.^[22] Russian occupation officials also made their provision of humanitarian aid and basic necessities contingent on Ukrainians voting for annexation in the 2022 referendums.^[23]

Russian demographic manipulations and mass indoctrination in occupied Ukraine are also at odds with the claim that Ukrainians living under occupation want to be under Russian control. Russian occupation administrators have had to institute coercive measures to force residents into obtaining Russian passports, threatening to deny Ukrainians access to basic services and medical care — demonstrating that there is no mass support in occupied Ukraine for Russian citizenship offers.^[24] The extent of Russian pressure on populations in occupied areas is another strong indicator that residents of these areas do not want to be part of Russia but must be coerced to "Russify" — something that should be unnecessary among people who already identify as Russians. Russia has also embarked on a state-directed effort to deport Ukrainians from occupied Ukraine and to import Russians to live in occupied Ukraine, using manipulated demographic data to create the impression that there are more people willingly living in occupied areas.^[25] Russia would not have to forcibly deport millions of Ukrainians to Russia if these Ukrainians actually wanted to be part of Russia.^[26]

Witkoff's statements undermine US President Donald Trump's stated desired end state for the war in Ukraine that achieves an enduring peace and is in the best interests of the United States, Ukraine, and Europe. Trump has said that the United States will try to return as much territory to Ukraine as possible.^[27] Trump also recently stated that the United States is interested in taking control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), which Russian forces currently occupy — implying that Russia would have to cede this territory in Zaporizhia Oblast before the United States can take control of the ZNPP.^[28] Witkoff's March 21 presentation of Russia's territorial demands for the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts — including areas of these four oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy — undermines Trump's efforts to achieve a resolution to the war favorable to US interests. Ceding territory in these four oblasts to Russia — either along the current frontlines or along the oblasts' administrative boundaries — would not provide Ukraine with the defensible lines required to reliably defend against renewed Russian aggression in the future, hindering Trump's stated objective of securing a lasting, sustainable peace in Ukraine.^[29] Witkoff also claimed that Ukrainian officials have "conceded" that Ukraine will not be a member of NATO — a preemptive US concession to Russia on one of the Kremlin's main demands as Russia continues to make no concessions in return. Witkoff's statements appear to yield to multiple Kremlin demands before the start of official negotiations for a peace settlement, ceding valuable US and Ukrainian leverage over Russia in future negotiations that the United States will need in order to achieve Trump's desired end to the war.

Key Takeaways:

- **US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff uncritically amplified a number of Russian demands, claims, and justifications regarding the war in Ukraine during an interview on March 21.**
- **Vladislav Surkov, a former close adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, recently reiterated a number of longstanding Kremlin claims and ambitions that directly contradict Witkoff's assertions in an interview with French media aimed at Western audiences.**
- **Surkov's statements are consistent with those made by Putin and senior Russian officials, who have recently and repeatedly stated that Russia intends to bring Ukraine under Russian control and establish suzerainty over neighboring countries in order to weaken the West and strengthen Russia's global influence.**
- **Witkoff uncritically repeated several inaccurate Russian claims regarding the status of the Ukrainian territories that Russia illegally occupies.**
- **Witkoff's statements undermine US President Donald Trump's stated desired end state for the war in Ukraine that achieves an enduring peace and is in the best interests of the United States, Ukraine, and Europe.**

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovska, and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk and Pokrovska and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to innovate new ways to leverage conscripts to increase the pool of servicemembers eligible for military service in the future.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 21, 2025

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Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on March 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is weaponizing ongoing ceasefire negotiations and deliberately misrepresenting the status and terms of a future ceasefire agreement in order to delay and undermine negotiations for a settlement to the war. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on March 21 that Ukrainian forces blew up the Sudzha gas distribution station in Kursk Oblast while withdrawing on the night of March 20 to 21 in order to discredit Russian President Vladimir Putin's "peace initiatives" and to provoke Russia.^[1] The Ukrainian General Staff denied the Russian MoD's claim and stated that Russian forces shelled the station, causing a fire.^[2] The Ukrainian General Staff warned that Russian authorities are attempting to mislead the international community and discredit Ukraine. Footage published on March 21 shows a fire at the station, although ISW cannot independently verify the cause of the fire.^[3] Russian officials seized on the fire to claim falsely that Ukrainian forces violated the proposed 30-day ceasefire banning Russian and Ukrainian strikes on civilian and energy facilities, which is not yet formally in effect and terms of which remain disputed.^[4] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russian forces are "implementing" an order from Putin to refrain from striking Ukrainian energy infrastructure in accordance with the US ceasefire proposal.^[5] Russian milbloggers observed that the ceasefire proposal has not come into force yet, however, and acknowledged that Russia has continued nightly strikes on Ukraine, including Ukraine's port infrastructure in Odesa Oblast, in recent days.^[6] Founder of the Kremlin-awarded *Rybar* telegram channel, Mikhail Zvinchuk, recently published a video of himself mocking US officials for believing that Russia is currently or intends to commit to the proposed temporary ceasefire in the area.^[7] The exact contours of Putin's supposed order or a future moratorium on energy and infrastructure strikes between Russia and Ukraine remain unclear as of this report.

Kremlin officials are leveraging narratives about Ukrainian strikes and combat operations in Russian territory to justify rejecting peace negotiations with Ukraine and continuing the war to a domestic Russian audience. Peskov claimed in reaction to the Sudzha gas distribution station fire that Ukraine's denial of blowing up the station "shows how much one can believe and trust" Ukrainian officials.^[8] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova asked how the United States will "manage" Ukraine given Ukraine's alleged violation of the moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes (that has yet to be finalized and implemented).^[9] Zakharova's and Peskov's comments are an effort to revive the narrative that Ukraine is the aggressor in this war, that Ukraine only acts under guidance or pressure from the West, and that the war in Ukraine is an existential risk to the Russian state to which Russia must respond.^[10] Russian authorities have also revived narratives accusing Ukrainian forces of targeting Russian nuclear power plants and committing war crimes against Russian civilians to undermine Ukraine's credibility and heighten the invented existential threat to domestic audiences. The Russian Investigative Committee published a summary on March 21 of ongoing criminal investigations, cases, and convictions of Ukrainian soldiers and high-level commanders for allegedly targeting the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) and civilians in strikes.^[11] ISW recently assessed that the Kremlin was preparing to intensify narratives accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay talks about temporary ceasefire proposals.^[12]

The Kremlin has pushed these narratives consistently throughout the war in an attempt to distract from Russia's actions. Russian forces have committed numerous war crimes on the battlefield and in occupied Ukraine and have endangered the occupied Zaporizhzhia NPP (ZNPP) by militarizing it, and a Russian long-range Shahed drone struck the containment structure of the Chernobyl NPP's Reactor No. 4 on February 14.^[13] The Kremlin may seek to leverage its narratives falsely portraying Ukraine as recklessly endangering Russian NPPs and being an unsafe operator of the ZNPP to spoil US-

Ukrainian bilateral talks, given recent US and Ukrainian official statements about possible US involvement in Ukrainian energy infrastructure, including the Russian-occupied ZNPP.[14]

US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated that US officials will conduct "shuttle diplomacy" to engage bilaterally with both Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Kellogg stated during an interview on March 20 that US technical teams will conduct "proximity talks," which Kellogg described as "shuttle diplomacy between rooms," in Riyadh with Ukrainian and Russian delegations.[15] CBS Senior Correspondent Jennifer Jacobs reported on March 21 that sources familiar with the matter stated that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz will not attend the upcoming discussions in Riyadh.[16] Jacobs reported that US technical teams intend to meet with the Ukrainian delegation on March 23, the Russian delegation on March 24, and may meet with the Ukrainian delegation again later on March 24 if there is significant progress. Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministry representatives will also not participate in the Riyadh meetings.[17] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 21 that the Ukrainian delegation will present a list of Ukrainian facilities that the strikes moratorium should protect.[18] US and Russian officials previously stated that the March 24 Riyadh meeting will focus on achieving a temporary maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea and laying the groundwork for a "full ceasefire." [19]

Russia continues to strengthen its bilateral relations with North Korea, despite growing warnings from the US against deeper Russian-North Korean cooperation. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu traveled to North Korea on March 21 and met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, likely to discuss Russian-North Korean ties.[20] US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce condemned North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine on March 19, noting that North Korean support to Russia fuels and exacerbates the war in Ukraine. [21] Ukrainian and other Western officials have also continuously noted that North Korean involvement in Russia's offensive operations in Kursk Oblast and broader cooperation with Russia has particularly enhanced North Korea's military capabilities, posing potential security risks in the Asia-Pacific region. [22]

Russian officials also continue to deepen ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Head Alexander Bortnikov met with PRC Security Minister Wang Xiaohong in Beijing on March 21 to discuss Russia-PRC bilateral relations.[23] Wang noted that the PRC is prepared to support multi-level meetings between Russian and Chinese law enforcement agencies and security services and to strengthen partnership in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. ISW has observed that the PRC has supported Russia's war effort in Ukraine through sanctions evasion, rhetoric, and even direct military aid while posturing itself as a neutral actor and mediator to end the conflict.[24]

Ukraine's European allies continue efforts to provide Ukraine with military assistance and bolster Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB). Ukrainian Strategic Industries Minister Herman Smetanin announced on March 20 that an unspecified Ukrainian defense enterprise signed an agreement with Norwegian-Finnish ammunition manufacturer NAMMO to deepen bilateral defense industrial cooperation and create a joint venture for 155mm artillery shell production in Ukraine.[25] *Deutsche Welle* (DW) reported on March 21 that Germany's Bundestag Budget Committee and both houses of parliament approved an additional 3 billion euros (roughly \$3.3 billion) in military aid for Ukraine, in addition to Germany's pledged amount of 4 billion euros (roughly \$4.3 billion), for Ukraine in 2025 and 8.3 billion euros (roughly \$8.9 billion) pledged from 2026 to 2029.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin is weaponizing ongoing ceasefire negotiations and deliberately misrepresenting the status and terms of a future ceasefire agreement in order to delay and undermine negotiations for a settlement to the war.
- Kremlin officials are leveraging narratives about Ukrainian strikes and combat operations in Russian territory to justify rejecting peace negotiations with Ukraine and continuing the war to a domestic Russian audience.
- US Special Envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated that US officials will conduct "shuttle diplomacy" to engage bilaterally with both Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Russia continues to strengthen its bilateral relations with North Korea, despite growing warnings from the US against deeper Russian-North Korean cooperation.
- Russian officials also continue to deepen ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Ukraine's European allies continue efforts to provide Ukraine with military assistance and bolster Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast. Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- Ukrainian and Western defense officials estimated that the Russian monthly casualty rate is between 20,000 and 35,000 servicemembers.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 20, 2025

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Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against Engels Airbase in Saratov Oblast on the night of March 19 to 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 20 that elements of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), Unmanned Systems Forces, Special Operations Forces (SSO), and other Ukrainian forces struck the Engels Airbase in Saratov Oblast causing a fire, explosions, and a secondary detonation of ammunition in the vicinity of the airfield.^[1] Geolocated footage and other footage published on March 20 show an explosion and fire at the Engels Airbase.^[2] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces use Engels Airbase to conduct missile strikes against Ukraine, and an SBU source told Ukrainian news outlet *Suspilne* that Engels is a key base for Russian strategic aviation, housing Tu-95MS, Tu-22M3, and Tu-160 strategic bombers as well as FAB and KAB glide bombs and cruise missiles storage facilities.^[3] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that the Ukrainian strike destroyed a large number of Russian Kh-101 cruise missiles that Russian forces use in nightly strikes against Ukraine.^[4] Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin claimed on March 20 that Ukrainian forces conducted the "most massive drone strike of all time" against Saratov Oblast and that Ukrainian drones struck civilian infrastructure near Engels and caused a fire near the base.^[5]

Russia, Ukraine, and the United States have not yet concluded the details of the moratorium against energy infrastructure strikes. The Ukrainian strike against Engels Airbase would not have been subject to this moratorium in any event because it is a military target. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova absurdly accused Ukraine of violating the Russia-Ukraine 30-day moratorium on strikes against "energy infrastructure" by targeting the Engels Air Base.^[6] Russian forces notably conducted strikes against Ukrainian energy and other infrastructure on both nights since Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 18 statements agreeing to the moratorium.^[7]

The Kremlin announced that Russia and the United States will hold another round of talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24, and it is unclear whether these talks will include Ukraine. Russian Presidential Aide for International Affairs Yuriy Ushakov announced on March 20 that Russian Federation Council International Affairs Committee Chairperson Grigory Karasin and the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Director's advisor, Colonel General Sergei Beseda, will lead the Russian delegation in bilateral discussions on the technical details of a possible maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea with US officials in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24.^[8] Beseda served as the Director of the FSB's Fifth Directorate, which is officially tasked with overseeing operational information and international relations, from 2009 to 2024.^[9] Karasin worked in Russia's MFA from the 1970s to 2019 and served as a Deputy Foreign Minister in 1996 and from 2005 to 2019, when Karasin joined the Federation Council.^[10] Karasin has headed the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs since 2021. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated on March 20 that Russian MFA representatives will not participate in the March 24 talks in Riyadh.^[11] US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on March 19 in response to a question about whether these talks will be bilateral or trilateral that it is "still being discussed or arranged."^[12]

Kremlin officials continue to amplify narratives indicating that Putin remains committed to his long-standing goal of conquering Ukraine and is attempting to leverage upcoming ceasefire negotiations to secure preemptive concessions from Ukraine and the United States. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu reiterated claims on March 20 that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate and that Ukrainian authorities must repeal the September 2022 decree banning negotiations with Putin before Ukraine and Russia can discuss the end of the war.^[13] Shoigu also claimed that Ukraine must change its constitutional clauses regarding "territorial integrity." The Ukrainian Constitution recognizes occupied Crimea and Sevastopol and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts as Ukrainian and forbids the Ukrainian government from amending the constitution if the amendment is "oriented towards the liquidation of [Ukraine's] independence or violation of [Ukraine's] territorial indivisibility."^[14] Shoigu is likely calling for Ukrainian authorities to

amend the constitution in order to allow Ukraine to recognize Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of occupied Ukraine.

Russian authorities have repeatedly mischaracterized the Ukrainian Constitution in order to legitimize Russian calls for regime change in Ukraine and to justify Putin's ongoing efforts to delay peace negotiations and blame Ukraine for the lack of progress toward peace. Putin claimed that there are "serious risks" associated with Ukraine's "inability to negotiate" in the Kremlin readout of his March 18 call with US President Donald Trump, possibly referring to Putin's previous claims about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's supposed illegitimacy.[15] The Ukrainian Constitution bars the government from holding elections or amending the Ukrainian Constitution in times of martial law, and the Ukrainian government cannot legally lift martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine.[16]

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) appears to be amplifying Kremlin narratives and lending credibility to some of the Kremlin's demands. The CCP-operated English language *China Daily* outlet stated in an editorial published on March 19 that the West's unwillingness to halt all military and intelligence support to Ukraine in response to Putin's March 18 demand has "complicat[ed] the path of peace."[17] The editorial states that "no country should build its security on the insecurity of another." The Kremlin reported that Putin demanded that the West stop all military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine as a "key condition" for working towards ending the war during his March 18 call with Trump.[18] Putin has made similar demands for Ukraine to reject foreign military assistance and abandon its aspirations to join an external security bloc — particularly NATO — since the beginning of the war, and the *China Daily*'s editorial appears to be at least in part justifying Putin's long-standing demand that the West cut all military aid to Ukraine.[19]

Kremlin officials are also working to exacerbate tension between the United States and its European allies in order to break Western support for Ukraine and undermine the NATO alliance. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 20 that Europe's "plans to militarize" are "clearly at odds with" Putin's and Trump's efforts to pursue peace in Ukraine and that Europe has become a "war party."[20] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on March 7 that Europe is a "militarized union" that is "deliberately fueling" escalation between the West and Russia.[21] Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebenzya and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov have also recently framed European countries (in contrast with the United States) as aggressive towards Russia, indicating a new Kremlin effort to drive a wedge between the United States and Europe.[22]

Putin continues to condition domestic Russian audiences to prepare for a protracted war in Ukraine rather than a sustainable peace built on compromise. Putin's and other Kremlin officials' statements in recent days and weeks perpetuating narratives about the difficulty of negotiations, the illegitimacy of Ukrainian officials, and US-European divisions reinforce messaging that Russia expects a prolonged war in Ukraine and peace only on Russian terms. Putin also reportedly directly told Russian businessmen to prepare for a protracted war. Russian business journalists Farida Rustamova and Maxim Tovkaylo reported on March 20 that Putin held a private meeting with Russian businessmen at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Congress ahead of Putin's call with Trump on March 18.[23] Rustamova and Tovkaylo cited two sources at the meeting and one source with knowledge of the meeting as saying that Putin told the businessmen that negotiations to end the war would be slow and difficult and advised the businessmen "not to be naive" given the people and issues involved in negotiations.[24] Putin also publicly stated at the congress that Russia should not expect the West to lift sanctions quickly.[25] The Kremlin has long broadcasted Russian demands for territorial and security concessions beyond the current frontlines as a return on investment for the Russian people to justify the war effort to its domestic audience.[26] Putin and other Kremlin officials will likely continue messaging to domestic audiences that the war in Ukraine remains a protracted Russian effort and that Russia will not make peace in Ukraine quickly.

The Kremlin is intensifying efforts to change the demographic makeup of occupied Ukraine in order to legitimize Putin's claim over occupied areas. Putin signed a decree on March 20 mandating that Ukrainian civilians who are "illegally" living in Russia and occupied Ukraine must "regulate their legal status" or leave Russia and occupied Ukraine by September 10, 2025.[27] The Kremlin has conducted a thorough passportization campaign to coerce Ukrainians living under occupation into obtaining Russian citizenship in efforts to legitimize Russia's territorial claims over occupied areas and tighten control over local populaces.[28] The Kremlin has also conducted Russian repopulation campaigns to artificially decrease the number of Ukrainians living in occupied Ukraine and inflate the number of Russians in these areas.[29] Putin's March 20 decree also obliges "foreigners," presumably including those with Ukrainian citizenship, and stateless persons entering occupied Ukraine to take Russian medical exams and blood tests.[30] The Kremlin has historically used these tests to obtain personal data to later exert pressure on Ukrainians to comply with

occupation authorities and serve in the Russian military, as well as to forcibly deport Ukrainian children to Russia.[31]

The Kremlin also continues Russifying Ukrainian children in occupied areas to further the destruction of Ukrainian national and cultural identity and to portray Russia as the humane governor of occupied Ukraine. Kremlin Children's Rights Ombudsman Maria Lvova-Belova met with Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin on March 20 and claimed that occupation authorities sent 127 ill Ukrainian children to medical treatment in unspecified locations, likely including in Russia, and that 1,346 Ukrainian children participated in the "Day After Tomorrow" social adaptation project for youths.[32] Lvova-Belova stated that occupation officials opened two youth centers in occupied Makiivka and Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast, and that these centers often host social events for youths, including Ukrainian minors under Russian guardianship.[33] The Kremlin has frequently used forced deportations of Ukrainian children and youth social organizations to indoctrinate Ukrainian children into Russian military-patriotic education and eradicate their Ukrainian identities.[34] Lvova-Belova also proposed that Pushilin create a social system to place 500 Ukrainian children who are currently in state custody in occupied Donetsk Oblast with Russian families and noted that many of these children have relatives who can take in the children.[35] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky recently stated that Ukraine will not compromise on the return of Ukrainian children to unoccupied Ukraine, and the US-Ukrainian joint statement agreeing on a 30-day ceasefire similarly emphasized the importance of returning forcibly deported Ukrainian children.[36] The Kremlin's continued efforts to forcibly deport and indoctrinate Ukrainian children — instead of working with Ukrainian authorities to return these children to Ukraine — underscores how committed the Kremlin remains to eradicating Ukrainian identity and strengthening its claim over occupied Ukraine.

Kremlin officials continue advertising the possibility of future economic cooperation with the United States, likely to extract preemptive concessions from the United States in ceasefire or peace negotiations. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on March 20 that it obtained a copy of a letter in which Russian Federation Council Committee on Economic Policy Chairperson Andrei Kutepov proposed to Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov the creation of a rare earth metals fund for cooperation with foreign investors.[37] TASS claimed that the letter states that Russian actors will control the fund and will prevent foreign investors from holding shares directly in foreign projects but will still compensate them.[38] TASS reported that Kutepov first wrote the letter following a December 2024 meeting on subsoil licensing. TASS's decision to platform this letter only now amid ongoing US-Ukrainian talks about a mineral deal indicates that Russian state media likely intended for this letter to offer a more enticing deal to the United States and spoil the US-Ukrainian deal. Senior Russian officials, including Putin, have also recently emphasized economic incentives for the United States, likely in return for concessions favorable to Russia.[39] Trump noted during his March 18 call with Putin that the United States and Russia can conclude "enormous economic deals" after there is peace in Ukraine.[40]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and President Trump spoke about investments in Ukraine's energy infrastructure during their call on March 19. Zelensky reported on March 19 that the two leaders discussed how the United States can help restore the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).[41] Zelensky indicated to Trump that Ukraine is open to US investment in Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including the ZNPP, but reiterated on March 20 that "all nuclear power plants belong to the people of Ukraine."^[42] US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on March 19 that Trump believes a US company's ownership of Ukraine's nuclear power plants and energy facilities would be an effective deterrent against future Russian strikes and would contribute to a positive economic partnership between Ukraine and the United States that would increase Ukraine's economic viability.^[43]

US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce condemned North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine on March 19 and expressed concern about Russian support to North Korea.^[44] Bruce emphasized that North Korea's military cooperation with Russia, including troop deployments, fuels and exacerbates the war in Ukraine. Bruce stressed that both Russia and North Korea bear responsibility for perpetuating the war in Ukraine and called for an end to military support by both sides. North Korea has supplied Russia with Kn-23 ballistic missiles, artillery shells, and personnel in its ongoing effort to support Russia's war against Ukraine.^[45] Ukrainian and other Western officials have previously noted that North Korean involvement in Russia's offensive operations in Kursk Oblast and broader cooperation with Russia has particularly enhanced North Korea's military capabilities, possibly posing security risks in the Asia-Pacific region.^[46]

Ukraine's allies continue to provide financial and material military assistance to Ukraine, including funds from frozen Russian assets in Europe. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on March 20 that Ukraine recently received "several" additional F-16s from unspecified partners.^[47] The European Commission announced on March 20 that its exceptional Macro-Financial

Assistance (MFA) loan program issued Ukraine the second tranche of funds with revenue generated from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets worth one billion euros (roughly \$1.08 billion).[48] The loan is part of the G7-led Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) loans initiative which plans to provide 45 billion euros (roughly \$48.8 billion) in financial support to Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against Engels Airbase in Saratov Oblast on the night of March 19 to 20.
- Russia, Ukraine, and the United States have not yet concluded the details of the moratorium against energy infrastructure strikes. The Ukrainian strike against Engels Airbase would not have been subject to this moratorium in any event because it is a military target.
- The Kremlin announced that Russia and the United States will hold another round of talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 24, and it is unclear whether these talks will include Ukraine.
- Kremlin officials continue to amplify narratives indicating that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains committed to his long-standing goals of conquering Ukraine and is attempting to leverage upcoming ceasefire negotiations to secure preemptive concessions from Ukraine and the United States.
- Kremlin officials are also working to exacerbate tension between the United States and its European allies in order to break Western support for Ukraine and undermine the NATO alliance.
- Putin continues to condition domestic Russian audiences to prepare for a protracted war in Ukraine rather than a sustainable peace built on compromise.
- The Kremlin is intensifying efforts to change the demographic makeup of occupied Ukraine in order to legitimize Putin's claim over occupied areas.
- The Kremlin also continues Russifying Ukrainian children in occupied areas to further the destruction of Ukrainian national and cultural identity and to portray Russia as the humane governor of occupied Ukraine.
- Kremlin officials continue advertising the possibility of future economic cooperation with the United States, likely to extract preemptive concessions from the United States in ceasefire or peace negotiations.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump spoke about investments in Ukraine's energy infrastructure during their call on March 19.
- US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce condemned North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine on March 19 and expressed concern about Russian support to North Korea.
- Ukraine's allies continue to provide financial and material military assistance to Ukraine, including funds from frozen Russian assets in Europe.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka
- Russia may extend military veteran status to Russian milbloggers and military correspondents covering the war in Ukraine, likely in an effort to further coopt and appease the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 19, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 19, 2025, 8:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30 pm ET on March 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia and Ukraine have not formally announced the implementation of the temporary long-range strikes ceasefire. Ceasefires take time to negotiate, execute, and monitor and require both sides to agree to cease attacks on specified targets at a specific time and date. Ceasefires also require both sides to agree to mechanisms to monitor the ceasefire and to address allegations of violations. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 19 that if Russia and Ukraine come to a temporary strikes ceasefire agreement, then Ukraine will prepare a list of "civilian objects,

energy objects, infrastructure objects" to give to Ukraine's partners — indicating that Russia and Ukraine have not finalized the details of which targets would be off limits or agreed on an implementation date.[1]

Official American, Ukrainian, and Russian statements indicate that the parties to the ceasefire have not yet finalized the details of the agreement. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on March 19 that the temporary ceasefire only applies to "energy infrastructure facilities," and Kremlin newswire TASS reported that Peskov declined to comment on the White House statement — likely referring to the March 18 White House statement following the call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin — that the ceasefire applied to "energy and infrastructure." [2] Trump told the *Washington Examiner* on March 18 after his call with Putin that Russia agreed to "an immediate ceasefire on energy and infrastructure." [3] US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff similarly stated on March 18 after the call that the temporary ceasefire covers "energy and infrastructure in general." [4] The Trump administration's statement following Trump's March 19 call with Zelensky stated that Trump and Zelensky "agreed on a partial ceasefire against energy." [5] Zelensky stated on March 19 that Ukraine is "ready to implement" a ceasefire on strikes against "energy and civilian infrastructure." [6]

Russian President Vladimir Putin is adding confusion about the timing and details of the ceasefire in an attempt to falsely blame Ukraine for violating the ceasefire before both countries have officially implemented the agreement. The Kremlin is attempting to posture Russia as already adhering to the temporary ceasefire while claiming that Ukraine is violating the ceasefire — even though both parties have not agreed on the details of the agreement or officially implemented the ceasefire. The Kremlin readout of the March 18 phone call between Putin and Trump stated that Putin "immediately gave the Russian military" an order that "corresponded" with his "positive response" to Trump's temporary ceasefire proposal. [7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that seven Russian drones were en route to striking Ukrainian energy facilities connected to defense industrial enterprises in Mykolaiv Oblast when Putin issued the order to the Russian military. [8] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces received orders to "neutralize" the drones and that Russian forces used Pantsir air defense systems to down six drones and that a Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) fighter jet destroyed the other. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 18 to 19, and Zelensky noted on March 19 that Russian drones had struck a hospital in Sumy Oblast and unspecified areas in Donetsk Oblast. [9] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian drones struck an oil transshipment facility in Krasnodar Krai following the Trump-Putin call and attempted to frame the Ukrainian strike as a violation of the ceasefire agreement. [10] Russian claims that Russia adhered to the ceasefire by abstaining from conducting strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure and that Ukraine violated the ceasefire are inaccurate as Russia and Ukraine have not yet officially implemented the agreement. Such Russian claims are attempts to take advantage of the lack of clarity about the details of the ceasefire that the Kremlin is injecting. **Putin's attempt to confuse and manipulate the temporary strikes ceasefire and blame Ukraine for violations even before the agreement has come into effect is an indicator of how Putin will likely exploit any future agreements.**

The Kremlin continues to contradict Trump's report of his call with Putin on March 18. The Kremlin readout of the call stated that Putin called for a halt to all foreign military aid to Ukraine. [11] Peskov claimed on March 19 that Putin and Trump "touched upon" the topic of continuing military aid to Ukraine in their call. [12] Trump stated on March 18 that he and Putin "did not talk about aid at all." [13]

The Kremlin continues to demand that Ukraine cede Ukrainian territory that Russia does not currently occupy and to set conditions to make further territorial demands. Russian business outlet *Kommersant* reported on March 18 that its sources said that Russian President Vladimir Putin stated at a private meeting with the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Congress on March 18 that Russia would not claim "Odesa and other territories" if unspecified countries — likely Ukraine, the United States and/or European countries — recognize Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea as part of Russia. [14] Putin and other Russian officials have recently reiterated their ongoing demand that Ukraine surrender the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, including areas that Russian forces do not currently occupy. [15] The Kremlin may have intentionally leaked Putin's statement to *Kommersant* in an attempt to portray Russia's extreme demands to seize the entirety of the four oblasts as reasonable and less extreme than alternatives. Putin recently claimed that "Novorossiya" is an integral part of Russia, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov defined "Novorossiya" as all of eastern and southern Ukraine — including Odesa Oblast. [16] Putin has repeatedly referred to parts of occupied Ukraine as "Novorossiya," having most recently thanked employees of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office in "Donbas and Novorossiya" during a March 19 address to Prosecutor General's Office's Board. [17] Putin has also claimed that Odesa City is a "Russian city." [18] Putin and other senior Kremlin officials

continue to set informational conditions to demand that Ukraine cede more territory to Russia as Russian forces continue to push in areas that Russia has not yet formally demanded. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 18 that Russian forces are concentrating in Kursk Oblast on the border with Sumy Oblast and may be preparing new attacks on Sumy, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts.^[19] ISW continues to assess that Russia would likely leverage attacks into oblasts that Russian forces do not currently occupy to fabricate justifications for demands that Ukraine cede additional territory to Russia.

The United States, Ukraine, and Europe continue to agree that Ukraine and Europe must be involved in peace negotiations to end the war, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to exclude Ukraine and Europe from such negotiations. Bloomberg reported on March 18, citing people familiar with the matter, that US officials told European officials that the EU must be involved in any future peace agreement since the Kremlin wants the EU to lift its sanctions on Russia as part of a peace deal. The sources stated that the United States told the EU that America's first priority is "to stop the fighting," after which the United States will discuss "potential security arrangements" for Ukraine.^[20] US President Donald Trump told the *Washington Examiner* on March 18 after his call with Putin that both Russia and Ukraine would have to agree to a "full ceasefire and a [peace] deal."^[21] Trump's statement rejects Putin's calls for ongoing negotiations about a ceasefire and future peace negotiations to occur in "bilateral mode" between the United States and Russia.^[22]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on March 19. Ukraine and Russia each exchanged 175 POWs, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Russia returned an additional 22 severely wounded Ukrainian soldiers.^[23] Zelensky thanked the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for mediating the exchange.^[24] The Kremlin initially announced the POW exchange following Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 18 call with US President Donald Trump, during which Putin claimed that Russia would transfer an additional 23 seriously wounded Ukrainian servicemembers in a "gesture of goodwill."^[25]

The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, described recent Russian deception tactics that may amount to acts of perfidy — a war crime under the Geneva Convention. Alaudinov claimed in a March 19 interview with Kremlin newswire TASS that Russian forces recently used blue electrical tape identification marks during an operation in which Russian forces used an underground pipeline to covertly attack behind Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast and noted that Ukrainian forces also use blue electrical tape.^[26] Alaudinov claimed that Russian forces used the blue tape in order to "prevent the Ukrainian military from understanding what was happening" and so that Ukrainian forces "would think that their own units were advancing." Alaudinov noted that Ukrainian drone operators would have "seen people with blue electrical tape" and would have "decided that these were their own units." Alaudinov claimed that Russian forces were attempting to "create panic in [Ukrainian ranks]" allowing Russian force to "inflict maximum damage" while Ukrainian forces "were sorting it out." Alaudinov claimed that Russian forces "were supposed to have blue tape for the first 24 hours of the operation and then change it to red [tape]" — which Russian forces use for identification marks. The Geneva Convention defines perfidy as "acts inviting the confidence of an adversary to lead him to believe that he is entitled to, or is obliged to accord, protection under the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, with intent to betray that confidence."^[27]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia and Ukraine have not formally announced the implementation of the temporary long-range strikes ceasefire.
- Official American, Ukrainian, and Russian statements indicate that the parties to the ceasefire have not yet finalized the details of the agreement.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin is adding confusion about the timing and details of the ceasefire in an attempt to falsely blame Ukraine for violating the ceasefire before both countries have officially implemented the agreement.
- The Kremlin continues to contradict Trump's report of his call with Putin on March 18.
- The Kremlin continues to demand that Ukraine cede Ukrainian territory that Russia does not currently occupy and to set conditions to make further territorial demands.
- The United States, Ukraine, and Europe continue to agree that Ukraine and Europe must be involved in peace negotiations to end the war, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to exclude Ukraine and Europe from such negotiations.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on March 19.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, described recent

Russian deception tactics that may amount to acts of perfidy — a war crime under the Geneva Convention.

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Belgorod Oblast and near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian milbloggers argued that the Russian government should give military awards and social benefits to military instructors and Russian defense industrial base (DIB) employees.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 18, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 18, 2025, 6:00 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not accept the US-Ukrainian proposal for a temporary ceasefire along the frontline and reiterated his demands for a resolution to the war that amount to Ukrainian capitulation.[1] Putin and US President Donald Trump held a phone call on March 18.[2] The Kremlin's official readout of the call stated that Putin emphasized the need to address the "root causes" of the war.[3] Russian officials have repeatedly defined these root causes as NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's alleged violations of the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine. Russian officials' calls for the elimination of these "root causes" amount to Russian demands for Ukraine's permanent neutrality and the installation of a pro-Russian government in Kyiv.[4]

Putin demanded on March 18 that Ukraine stop mobilizing (i.e. recruiting and training) forces during a potential temporary ceasefire. Putin also called for a halt to all foreign military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine but did not discuss Russia's military support from North Korea, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iran.[5] Putin claimed that Russia and the United States should continue their efforts toward a peace settlement in "bilateral mode," excluding Ukraine or Europe from future negotiations about the war in Ukraine. Putin's demands on the March 18 call parallel the demands he made on March 13.[6]

ISW continues to assess that Putin is attempting to hold the temporary ceasefire proposal hostage in order to extract preemptive concessions ahead of formal negotiations to end the war.[7] ISW also continues to assess that Putin's demands for the removal of the legitimate government of Ukraine, the weakening of the Ukrainian military such that it cannot defend against future Russian aggression, and the denial of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence remain unchanged.[8] The persistence of Putin's demands for Ukraine's capitulation demonstrates that Putin is not interested in good-faith negotiations to pursue Trump's stated goal of achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Trump and Putin agreed on a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure, but the exact contours of the moratorium remain unclear at this time. The Kremlin stated that Putin accepted Trump's proposal for a 30-day moratorium on strikes against "energy infrastructure" and that Putin "immediately gave the Russian military the corresponding order," whereas the White House stated that Putin and Trump agreed to "an energy and infrastructure ceasefire." [9] It is unclear which targets are explicitly prohibited under the 30-day moratorium given the difference in language between the two readouts of the call.

The Kremlin also stated that Putin "informed" Trump that Russia and Ukraine will each exchange 175 prisoners of war (POWs) on March 19 and that Russia will also transfer 23 seriously wounded Ukrainian soldiers, whom Putin claimed are currently undergoing medical treatment in Russian hospitals, as a "gesture of goodwill." The March 11 US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal stated that Ukrainian and American delegations discussed POW exchanges as part of the peace process, particularly during a potential temporary ceasefire on the frontline.[10] The White House stated on March 18 that Russia and the United States will "immediately" begin negotiations in an unspecified country in the Middle East about a temporary maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea, a "full ceasefire," and a permanent peace settlement.[11] The Kremlin stated that the United States and Russia are creating "expert groups" to continue efforts to achieve a peace settlement "in bilateral mode."^[12]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky endorsed the Trump-Putin energy strikes moratorium agreement on March 18 and said that Ukraine expects to receive additional information from Trump about the proposal.[13] Zelensky stated that Ukraine would not accept a situation in which Russia strikes Ukrainian energy infrastructure and Ukraine is unable to respond.

Putin continues to hold the temporary ceasefire hostage, likely to extract further concessions from US President Donald Trump and delay or spoil negotiations for an enduring peace in Ukraine. Putin rejected a temporary ceasefire in the Black Sea but agreed to participate in negotiations on such an agreement, which Putin will likely use to delay or spoil negotiations for a permanent peace agreement.[14] Putin also did not accept the US-Ukrainian temporary frontline ceasefire and continued to cite concerns that call back to his pre-war demands amounting to Ukraine's total capitulation and regime change. The Kremlin readout stated that Putin and Trump discussed the development of bilateral economic and energy cooperation, though White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated that future US-Russian relations would include "enormous economic deals...only when peace has been achieved."[15]

Putin spoke at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Congress before his call with Trump on March 18 and claimed that some Western companies that left Russia following the February 2022 full-scale invasion now seek to return or are taking steps to return to Russia and that Russia will consider this return through the lens of prioritizing Russian businesses.[16] Putin ordered the Russian Cabinet of Ministers to create a procedure for Western businesses to return to Russia.[17] Putin is likely attempting to bypass the Trump administration's stated conditions of concluding economic deals after achieving peace in Ukraine by extracting concessions for sanctions relief or other economic concessions in preliminary talks for a temporary ceasefire in Ukraine, as other Kremlin officials have attempted in recent weeks.[18]

Russian forces recently advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid intensified Russian offensive operations in the area, likely as part of efforts to leverage Russia's deliberate stalling of the temporary ceasefire proposal to make battlefield gains. Geolocated footage published on March 18 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in eastern Stepove (east of Kamyanske). [19] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces marginally advanced southeast of Shcherbak (east of Kamyanske), north of Pyatykhakty (southeast of Kamyanske), and toward Lobkove (southeast of Kamyanske).[20] Russian forces continued attacking near Mali Shcherbak (east of Kamyanske), Shcherbak, Stepove, and Lobkove on March 18.[21] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 247th and 108th airborne (VDV) regiments (both of the 7th VDV Division) are responsible for recent Russian advances along the Shcherbak-Stepove-Pyatykhakty line.[22]

Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladislav Voloshyn stated on March 17 that Russian forces have become more active in the Zaporizhia direction and are taking advantage of improving weather.[23] Voloshyn noted that mud is drying out, and trees are regaining their foliage, so Russian forces are trying to improve their tactical positions by attacking in assault groups of five to seven people. Voloshyn also noted that the number of first-person view (FPV) drones that Russian forces use per day has increased in March 2025 by about 50 drones to about 400 to 420 drones per day.

Russian forces are likely intensifying offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast to push towards Zaporizhzhia City amid continued Kremlin demands that Ukraine cede all of Zaporizhia Oblast to Russia.[24] Russian forces are also likely trying to draw and fix Ukrainian forces to additional areas of the frontline to allow Russian forces to prioritize certain efforts and make grinding gains across the theater as the weather improves and Russia protracts negotiations.

Ukrainian officials warned in November 2024 about a possible intensification of Russian activity in the Zaporizhia direction, and Russian milbloggers began claiming in late February 2025 that Russian forces intensified activity northwest of Robotyne, especially near Pyatykhakty and Kamyanske.[25] Russian forces have only attempted occasional localized offensive operations west of Orikhiv since the Summer 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive.[26] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on February 7 that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast forced the Russian military command to redeploy forces from southern Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, preventing Russian forces from launching the attack on Zaporizhzhia City they had been planning.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin did not accept the US-Ukrainian proposal for a temporary ceasefire along the frontline and reiterated his demands for a resolution to the war that amount to Ukrainian capitulation.**
- **Trump and Putin agreed on a temporary moratorium on long-range strikes against energy infrastructure, but the exact contours of the moratorium remain unclear at this time.**
- **Putin continues to hold the temporary ceasefire hostage, likely to extract further concessions from US President Donald Trump and delay or spoil negotiations for an enduring peace in Ukraine.**

- Russian forces recently advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast amid intensified Russian offensive operations in the area, likely as part of efforts to leverage Russia's deliberate stalling of the temporary ceasefire proposal to make battlefield gains.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Lyman, Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk directions. Ukrainian and Russian forces both recently advanced in the Kurakhove direction.
[CORRECTED]
- The Russian military is reportedly increasing the number of its information and psychological operations units.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 17, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to have been partially successful in holding the ceasefire proposal hostage as part of his efforts to extract preemptive concessions from US President Donald Trump in negotiations to end the war. Trump stated on March 17 that he plans to speak with Putin on March 18 and "want[s] to see if [he and Putin] can bring the war to an end."^[1] Trump added that he and Putin will "be talking about land," "power plants," and "dividing up certain assets."^[2] The United States and Ukraine agreed on March 11 to a 30-day ceasefire proposal that is contingent on Russia's "acceptance and concurrent implementation."^[3] The proposal stated that Ukraine and the United States intend to name their negotiating teams and immediately begin negotiations toward an enduring peace — noting the distinction between the temporary ceasefire and future negotiations on a peace settlement. Putin rejected the temporary ceasefire proposal on March 13 and claimed that the cessation of hostilities "should be such that it would lead to long-term peace and eliminate the initial causes" of the war.^[4] Putin thus rejected one of the main principles of the US-Ukrainian proposal — that the temporary ceasefire precedes formal negotiations to end the war. The US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal noted that the United States and Ukraine discussed the return of prisoners of war (POWs), detained civilians, and forcibly deported Ukrainian children — all of which will require future talks with Russia. The US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal did not mention talks with Russia about Ukrainian territory, energy infrastructure, or assets. Putin also suggested on March 13 that he may call Trump to discuss "issues" involved in the ceasefire proposal, such as Ukraine's continued ability to mobilize forces and receive military aid from partners and allies — issues notably not included in the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal. Putin is attempting to change the sequence of talks in order to push Trump into making preemptive concessions on issues that are not part of the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire but are part of Russia's war aims. The acceptance of these Russian demands in the context of negotiations for an immediate ceasefire would cede valuable US and Ukrainian leverage during future negotiations to secure a lasting peace in Ukraine.

Russian officials continue to demonstrate that Russia's aim of destroying Ukrainian sovereignty remains unchanged since before Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko claimed in an interview with Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestiya* on March 17 that Russia continues to demand that Ukraine be a neutral state and that NATO states refuse to accept Ukraine as a member.^[5] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha stated to *RBK Ukraine* on March 17 that no country should have a "veto" over Ukraine's choice to participate in alliances, including the EU or NATO.^[6] Sybiha noted that Ukraine's NATO aspirations are enshrined in the Ukrainian Constitution and reflect a "strategic choice of the Ukrainian people." A Russian "veto" of Ukraine's choices about these matters would amount to a denial of Ukraine's ability to make choices about its alliances and security arrangements as a sovereign and independent state. Grushko acknowledged during his interview that Russia's demands for Ukrainian neutrality and NATO's refusal to allow Ukraine into the alliance are the same demands that Russia made in 2021 before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine — demonstrating how Russia's demands to destroy Ukraine as an independent, sovereign state have remained unchanged.^[7]

The Kremlin continues to reject the prospect of European peacekeepers in Ukraine, in opposition to US and Ukrainian positions on the matter and impeding the establishment of a stable, lasting peace to end the war. Grushko stated on March 17 that Russia will not accept peacekeepers from the EU, NATO, or individual Western states in post-war Ukraine as Russia considers all of these possible peacekeeping contingents to be "NATO contingents."^[8] Grushko claimed that any talks about future international peacekeeping missions in Ukraine should only occur after the conclusion of the final peace agreement to end the war and only if parties to the peace agreement agree that the peace agreement requires international support. The Kremlin appears to be

trying to dictate the timing and sequence of talks, demanding that final peace talks precede any discussions about peacekeeping missions in post-war Ukraine.[9] Russia continues to make clear its rejection of any European involvement in post-war Ukraine — in contradiction to US and Ukrainian positions on the matter. Trump stated on February 26 that Europe should be responsible for security guarantees for Ukraine, and the joint US-Ukrainian March 11 statement outlining the temporary ceasefire proposal stated that Ukraine reiterated its positions that European partners should be involved in the peace process.[10] Sybiha stressed the importance of European support to assist in monitoring and enforcing the terms of a permanent ceasefire in Ukraine and noted that Ukraine is already discussing specific details with those European countries willing to deploy peacekeeping forces to Ukraine.[11] Significant European involvement in post-war Ukraine is critical for any peace settlement that aims to establish an enduring peace in Ukraine.

A strong Ukrainian military backed by security guarantees remains the most important component of a sustainable peace in Ukraine and deterrence of future Russian aggression. Sybiha emphasized that there can be no restriction on Ukraine's defensive capabilities or military strength in any future peace agreement and that Ukraine must keep working towards a self-sufficient defense industrial sector to deter further Russian aggression.[12] Sybiha, responding to a question about Ukraine's fundamental stipulations in "any" future negotiations, stated that Ukraine will not compromise its territorial integrity and sovereignty and "will never recognize occupied territories." Discussions on the permanent status of occupied Ukrainian territory should properly only be a part of negotiations on a permanent settlement of the war.

The United States announced its withdrawal from war crimes monitoring agencies related to the war in Ukraine — essentially a unilateral concession to Russia with no Russian concessions in return. The *New York Times*, citing an internal letter from the US Department of Justice (DoJ), reported on March 17 that the US DoJ notified the International Center for the Prosecution of Crimes of Aggression (ICPA) against Ukraine that the United States would withdraw from the organization by the end of March 2025 after having participated in the organization since November 2023.[13] The EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), the ICPA's parent organization, confirmed to *SkyNews* that the United States is withdrawing from the ICPA.[14] The ICPA is responsible for investigating the leaders directly accountable for crimes committed in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[15] The *New York Times* also reported that the Trump administration intends to scale back the US DoJ's War Crimes Accountability Team (WarCAT), which the US DoJ established in 2022 to coordinate the DoJ's efforts to hold Russians accountable for war crimes committed in Ukraine.[16]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Anatoliy Barhylevych with Major General Andriy Hnatov on March 16.[17] Zelensky appointed Hnatov to Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff on January 26, 2025, and Hnatov previously served as the Khortytsia Group of Forces Commander and Joint Forces Commander. [18] Zelensky appointed Barhylevych to serve as the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s Inspector General, who monitors compliance with military standards and reform processes.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to have been partially successful in holding the ceasefire proposal hostage as part of his efforts to extract preemptive concessions from US President Donald Trump in negotiations to end the war.
- Russian officials continue to demonstrate that Russia's aim of destroying Ukrainian sovereignty remains unchanged since before Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022.
- The Kremlin continues to reject the prospect of European peacekeepers in Ukraine, in opposition to US and Ukrainian positions on the matter and impeding the establishment of a stable, lasting peace to end the war.
- A strong Ukrainian military backed by security guarantees remains the most important component of a sustainable peace in Ukraine and deterrence of future Russian aggression.
- The United States announced its withdrawal from war crimes monitoring agencies related to the war in Ukraine — essentially a unilateral concession to Russia with no Russian concessions in return.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Anatoliy Barhylevych with Major General Andriy Hnatov on March 16.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Velyka Novosilka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian occupation officials continue to develop analogues to the federal "Time of Heroes" programming in occupied Ukraine as part of long-term efforts to integrate

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 16, 2025

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Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 16, 2025, 5:45pm ET

US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz stated on March 16 that Ukraine will receive unspecified security guarantees in exchange for unspecified territorial concessions.^[1] Waltz also stated that the United States is considering "the reality of the situation on the ground" in diplomatic talks when discussing an end to the war in Ukraine.^[2] It is not clear exactly what Waltz meant by "the reality of the situation on the ground." Russian officials have frequently used the narrative that any negotiations must consider the "realities on the ground" to refer to the current frontline in Ukraine and their claims of the inevitability of further Russian battlefield gains.^[3] Waltz's acknowledgement that Ukraine will receive unspecified security guarantees is a key aspect of achieving US President Donald Trump's stated goal of securing a lasting peace in Ukraine, but stopping hostilities on indefensible lines would limit the effectiveness of security guarantees.

The current frontlines do not provide the strategic depth that Ukraine will need to reliably defend against renewed Russian aggression. Russian forces are just across the Dnipro River from Kherson City, roughly 25 kilometers from Zaporizhzhia City, and 30 kilometers from Kharkiv City. Russian troops on the Dnipro River could use a ceasefire to prepare for the extremely difficult task of conducting an opposed river crossing undisturbed, significantly increasing the likelihood of success in such an endeavor. Stopping a well-prepared, major mechanized offensive cold is extremely rare in war, which means that a renewed Russian assault would likely threaten both Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia cities, as well as key cities in the Donetsk "fortress belt," almost immediately. Russia is constructing a large highway and railway aimed at connecting major cities in occupied Ukraine and Russia, which will reinforce Russia's hold on occupied Ukraine and Russia's ability to transport and supply Russian forces operating in Ukraine in the event of a future Russian offensive in southern Ukraine.^[4]

The US and Europe would likely need to provide military aid to Ukraine more rapidly, in much larger volumes, and at higher cost the closer the ultimate ceasefire lines are to the current frontline. Ukraine would likely need an even larger military with greater capabilities to play its critical role in deterring and, if necessary, defeating future aggression along current frontline (both within Ukraine and along Ukraine's international border with Russia) that is over 2,100 kilometers long. Enforcing a ceasefire along the current frontline would also require the commitment of large numbers of Western forces. Helping Ukraine regain strategically critical territory, as Trump has suggested he intends to do, could significantly reduce the cost and difficulty of securing a future peace.^[5] A ceasefire along more defensible positions would also place Russian forces in a more disadvantaged position for renewed offensive operations, making future Russian aggression less likely.

Russian officials maintain their maximalist territorial claims over all occupied Ukraine and significant parts of unoccupied Ukraine, however. Senior Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, have consistently demanded that Ukraine surrender the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts, including areas that Russian forces do not already occupy, and have reiterated these claims in recent weeks.^[6] Russian state media has also recently amplified similar sentiments from Kremlin-affiliated mouthpieces.^[7] Putin recently claimed that "Novorossiya" is an integral part of Russia, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov defined "Novorossiya" as all of eastern and southern Ukraine including Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts.^[8] Russia currently occupies a small portion of Kharkiv Oblast and the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast, and Russian forces are advancing towards the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border. Continued Kremlin statements demanding that Ukraine cede unoccupied Ukrainian territory indicate that the Kremlin and Putin remain committed to these territorial goals despite ongoing negotiations.

Russian officials have given no public indications that they are willing to make concessions on their territorial or security demands of Ukraine. Accepting Western-backed security guarantees for Ukraine would be a significant concession for Putin. Putin has repeatedly called for Ukraine to permanently abandon its goals of joining NATO or any security bloc and to reject future offers of foreign military assistance, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently claimed that Russia will reject the future deployment of any European peacekeepers to Ukraine and consider any such deployment as the "direct, official, undisguised involvement of NATO countries" in the war.^[9] Russian

officials also appear to be generating increased support for their demands in Russian society despite the costs of Russia's protracted war effort, and Putin likely remains committed to securing a return for Russia's investment in the war he regards as sufficient.[10] Putin and Kremlin officials have been regularly broadcasting their demands for Ukrainian territorial and security concessions beyond the current frontlines to the Russian people, underscoring how unlikely Putin is to abandon his ambitions in Ukraine even after a ceasefire.

Russia continues to seize on diplomatic engagements with the United States to normalize its war demands. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke on the phone on March 15 and discussed next steps in discussions about a peace agreement in Ukraine.[11] Rubio and Lavrov agreed to continue working toward restoring dialogue between the United States and Russia. The US Department of State's and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' readouts differ, however. Russian readouts emphasized that Rubio and Lavrov discussed implementing "mutual understandings" that were reached during the February 18 bilateral meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, but did not mention more recent US-Russian diplomatic engagements, whereas the US State Department's did not refer to "mutual understandings" reached in Riyadh.[12] This discrepancy in messaging indicates that the Kremlin is seizing specifically on the Riyadh meeting as part of ongoing narrative efforts to portray the United States and Russia as in complete agreement on how to settle the war in Ukraine and to draw attention away from Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent rejection of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal.

The United Kingdom (UK) convened a virtual Coalition of the Willing summit on March 15 to reiterate support for Ukraine and discuss plans for peace. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer chaired a virtual meeting with 29 international leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and officials from Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, who have agreed to continue pressuring Russia, supplying military aid to Ukraine, and tightening economic restraints on Russia "to weaken Putin's war machine and bring him to the [negotiating] table."[13] Starmer stated that the Kremlin's delay over the US ceasefire proposal contradicts Putin's stated desire for peace.[14]

An unnamed military source told *The Sunday Times* on March 16 that 35 countries within the coalition have agreed to supply weapons, logistics, and intelligence support aimed at deterring Putin from resuming offensive operations in the future.[15] *The Sunday Times* reported on March 16 that Starmer outlined plans to deploy a Western peacekeeping contingent of over 10,000 troops to Ukraine, and an unnamed senior official told the outlet that officials are working at an "unprecedented" speed to establish the contingent. Starmer stated that the coalition will reconvene on March 20 to accelerate efforts to support a potential peace deal in Ukraine.[16]

Key Takeaways:

- US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz stated on March 16 that Ukraine will receive unspecified security guarantees in exchange for unspecified territorial concessions.
- The current frontlines do not provide the strategic depth that Ukraine will need to reliably defend against renewed Russian aggression.
- Russian officials maintain their maximalist territorial claims over all occupied Ukraine and significant parts of unoccupied Ukraine, however.
- Russian officials have given no public indications that they are willing to make concessions on their territorial or security demands of Ukraine.
- Russia continues to seize on diplomatic engagements with the United States to normalize its war demands.
- The United Kingdom (UK) convened a virtual Coalition of the Willing summit on March 15 to reiterate support for Ukraine and discuss plans for peace.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova and Russian forces advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Velyka Novosilka.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues efforts to posture as solving issues with the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 15, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros

March 15, 2025, 3:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:00 am ET on March 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian milbloggers and Ukrainian officials continue to deny Russian President Vladimir Putin's unsubstantiated claim that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers published maps on March 14 and 15 showing Russian and Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast that do not indicate Russian forces have encircled Ukrainian forces, and two Russian milbloggers explicitly denied Putin's claim that Russian forces encircled a significant number of Ukrainian forces in the area on March 13 and 14.[1] One milblogger characterized Putin's claims as a narrative intended to influence US President Donald Trump ahead of peace negotiations.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted that Russian forces are unsuccessfully attempting to encircle Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast, that no encirclement currently exists, and stated that Putin is attempting to delay discussion of the US-Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposal by spreading these claims.[3] Independent Ukrainian sources also denied Putin's claims about Russian encirclements of Ukrainian forces and noted that Ukrainian forces maintain the ability to maneuver from their remaining positions in Kursk Oblast despite a difficult tactical situation.[4] ISW has still not observed any Russian milblogger claims or geolocated footage suggesting that Russian forces have encircled Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian forces appear to maintain egress routes across the international border from their positions in Kursk Oblast as of this publication.

Russian forces continued offensive operations in Kursk Oblast but have not completely pushed Ukrainian forces out of the area as of this publication. Geolocated footage published on March 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in western Basivka (northeast of Sumy City in Sumy Oblast).[5] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed on March 15 that Russian forces seized Zaoleshenka (immediately west of Sudzha) and Rubanshchina (west of Sudzha), but ISW has not observed evidence to assess that Russian forces have seized the entirety of these settlements.[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Gogolevka (west of Sudzha) and are clearing Guyevo (south of Sudzha).[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain positions near Oleshnya and Gornal (both southwest of Sudzha).[8] Russian forces continued attacking near Rubanshchina, Gogolevka, and Guyevo.[9] Elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade are reportedly operating near Gogolevka, and elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) are reportedly operating near Guyevo.[10]

Ukrainian officials expressed concern about Russian ground operations in northern Sumy Oblast but doubt Russia's ability to conduct an effective concerted offensive operation against Sumy City. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the Russian military is accumulating forces along Ukraine's eastern border, indicating Russia's interest in "striking" Sumy Oblast.[11] Zelensky may be referring to Russian efforts to advance far enough into northern Sumy Oblast to get within artillery range of Sumy City. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Russian forces are preparing for more "active actions" in the Sumy Oblast border area and to "strike" Sumy Oblast but not conduct an offensive operation against Sumy City.[12] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian assault groups and sabotage and renaissance groups continue to operate along the Sumy Oblast border and are attempting to advance into Ukraine.[13]

The Kremlin is likely preparing to intensify a narrative that accuses Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast in an attempt to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay straightforward discussions about the 30-day ceasefire that US President Donald Trump proposed to Putin. Russian President Vladimir Putin, other facets of the Russian government, Russian state media, and pro-Kremlin mouthpieces have recently intensified claims accusing Ukrainian forces of committing war crimes in Kursk Oblast during their seven-month incursion. Putin asked on March 13, in reaction to the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal, whether Russia should let Ukrainian forces leave Kursk Oblast "after they committed a lot of crimes against civilians" and reiterated claims on March 14 that Ukrainian forces committed "terrorism" in Kursk Oblast.[14] The Russian Investigative Committee announced on March 12 that it is opening investigations into alleged Ukrainian war crimes in areas of Kursk Oblast that endured heavy fighting and announced the conviction of two Ukrainian soldiers for alleged "terrorism" and "war crimes" in Kursk Oblast on March 14.[15] Russian ultranationalist voices, including those with Kremlin affiliations, have been amplifying Putin's statements and Russian state media claims accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes, including executing civilians in Kursk Oblast, more frequently in recent days.[16] Russian state media has amplified pro-Kremlin voices, including Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein, accusing Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast since the start of the incursion in August 2024 but has intensified these efforts since February 2025.[17] These claims are unsubstantiated.

Putin likely intends to use this narrative falsely portraying Ukrainian forces as brutal war criminals - as the Kremlin did in late 2021 and 2022 to justify Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine - to spoil or delay discussions about a 30-day ceasefire, especially when contrasted with Putin's efforts to portray himself as a merciful leader.[18] Russian ultranationalist voices used Putin's and Russian state

media's allegations of Ukrainian war crimes to support their calls for Russia to reject any ceasefire in Ukraine whatsoever and to justify the brutal treatment of Ukrainian forces on the battlefield.[19] ISW has frequently reported on the sharp uptick of confirmed Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield in 2024 and early 2025 likely under orders from the Russian military command, and ISW observed a report of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs near Sudzha on March 13.[20]

Russian forces conducted drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 14 to 15, including conducting their third double-tap strike against Ukraine in the past week. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on March 15 that Russian forces launched two Iskander-M ballistic missiles from Kursk Oblast and 178 Shahed and decoy drones from Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea. [21] Ukrainian forces downed 130 drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Kirovograd, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts and 38 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that two ballistic missiles struck Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones struck civilian and critical infrastructure in Chernihiv and Sumy cities and Chornomorsk, Odesa Oblast.[22] Ukraine's State Emergency Service reported on March 15 that Russian forces conducted three drone strikes each one hour apart on a residential area of Bohoduhiv, Kharkiv Oblast, likely in an effort to injure and kill Ukrainian first responders in the area.[23] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces conducted double tap strikes against Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast with missiles on the night of March 11 to 12 and a hospital in Zolochiv, Kharkiv Oblast with drones on the night of March 13 to 14.[24]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed the official Ukrainian delegation to "engage with Ukraine's international partners" in the negotiation process to end the war on March 15. Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak will lead the delegation, and the delegation will also include Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha, Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, and Deputy Presidential Administration Head Pavlo Palisa.[25] This is the same delegation who attended the US–Ukrainian meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on March 11.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian milbloggers and Ukrainian officials continue to deny Russian President Vladimir Putin's unsubstantiated claim that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations in Kursk Oblast but have not completely pushed Ukrainian forces out of the area as of this publication.
- Ukrainian officials expressed concern about Russian ground operations in northern Sumy Oblast but doubt Russia's ability to conduct an effective concerted offensive operation against Sumy City.
- The Kremlin is likely preparing to intensify a narrative that accuses Ukrainian forces of war crimes in Kursk Oblast in an attempt to discredit the Ukrainian military, erode Western support for Ukraine, and spoil or delay straightforward discussions about the 30-day ceasefire that US President Donald Trump proposed to Putin.
- Russian forces conducted drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 14 to 15, including conducting their third double-tap strike against Ukraine in the past week.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed the official Ukrainian delegation to "engage with Ukraine's international partners" in the negotiation process to end the war on March 15.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 14, 2025

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Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 14, 2025, 7:15 pm ET

ISW has observed no geolocated evidence to indicate that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast or elsewhere along the frontline in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed during a press conference on March 13 that

Russian forces have "isolated" Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast and that it is "impossible" for small groups of Ukrainian forces to withdraw from positions in Kursk Oblast.[1] Putin claimed that Ukrainian forces will not be able to leave Kursk at all "if" Russian forces can conduct a "physical blockade" in the coming days. Putin stated during a Russian Security Council meeting on March 14 that Russian forces have "blocked" unspecified Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast.[2] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 14 that Russian authorities are fabricating claims about the alleged "encirclement" of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast in order to influence the political and informational scene.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces have regrouped and withdrawn to more advantageous defensive positions in Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces are not under threat of encirclement.

Russian milbloggers have also not coalesced around claims that Russian forces have encircled or "blocked" a significant number of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast in recent days, but milbloggers may alter their reporting to mirror Putin's claims in the coming days. Some Russian milbloggers claimed on March 12 and 13 that Russian forces encircled an unspecified number of Ukrainian forces in an unspecified area of Kursk Oblast, but many Russian milbloggers published maps on March 13 and 14 acknowledging that Ukrainian forces have viable egress routes into Sumy Oblast from their remaining positions in Kursk Oblast.[4] At least one Russian milblogger explicitly questioned claims that Russian forces encircled Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast on March 12, and another complained on March 12 that Russian forces are unable to encircle Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast because Russian forces cannot conduct rapid, mechanized breakthroughs into rear Ukrainian areas.[5]

Putin claimed in October 2024 that Russian forces "encircled" 2,000 Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast, but ISW never observed any Russian milblogger claims or geolocated footage to substantiate Putin's October 2024 claim.[6] Putin has repeatedly failed to acknowledge that the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast extends from the Ukrainian-Russian international border and that Ukrainian forces can transit the sections of the border under Ukrainian control.

Putin seized on a statement by US President Donald Trump about the supposed encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast to distract from his recent rejection of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal. President Trump stated in a post on Truth Social on March 14 that Russian forces have "completely surrounded" "thousands" of Ukrainian forces, presumably in Kursk Oblast, and called on Putin to "spare" their lives.[7] Putin responded directly to Trump's request during the March 14 security council meeting and claimed that Russian forces will guarantee the "life and decent treatment" of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast if Ukrainian forces surrender.[8] Putin reiterated unsubstantiated claims that Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast have committed crimes against Russian civilians in the area and said that Russia considers the Ukrainian incursion an act of "terrorism." Putin claimed that Ukrainian authorities must order Ukrainian forces to surrender in order for Russia to implement Trump's request. Putin is attempting to present himself as a reasonable and merciful leader whom President Trump can engage with and to generate a new narrative to distract from Putin's decision to reject the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal on March 13.[9]

Kremlin statements following Putin's meeting with US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff on March 13 underscore Putin's rejection of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal and continued unwillingness to engage in good faith negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Putin received Witkoff in Moscow on the evening of March 13 and reiterated that Putin "supports Trump's position on the settlement in Ukraine" but that there are "questions that need to be answered together."[10] Peskov said that Putin gave Witkoff information to pass to Trump and that Russia and the United States understand that Putin and Trump need to have a conversation and will determine the details of a Putin-Trump phone call in the future.[11] Neither the Kremlin nor the US government have provided further details about this meeting as of this report.

Peskov's emphasis on a direct Putin-Trump call and Putin's continued refusal to accept the US-Ukrainian proposed ceasefire suggests that Putin likely intends to distract from and prolong any negotiations for a future ceasefire in Ukraine. Putin's recent calls for a direct phone call with Trump are only the latest development in Putin's efforts to posture Russia and the United States as equal on the global stage.[12] Russian insider sources recently claimed that Putin aims to protract negotiations about a possible temporary ceasefire, and Putin's recent public statements are consistent with these insider claims.[13] Leaked documents from a think tank close to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB)'s Fifth Service reportedly state that the Kremlin is unwilling to accept a ceasefire in Ukraine before 2026.[14] ISW assessed on March 12 that these Russian insider source leaks may have been intentional and part of a Russian negotiating strategy that aims to push the United States to renegotiate its deal with Ukraine on the temporary ceasefire.[15]

US intelligence reportedly continues to assess that Putin is unwilling to end the war in Ukraine and remains committed to conquering Ukraine, which is consistent with ISW's long-term assessment of

Putin's objectives in Ukraine and unwillingness to negotiate in good faith. The *Washington Post*, citing unspecified people familiar with the matter, reported that classified US intelligence reports assess that Putin remains committed to his goal of dominating Ukraine.[16] The *Washington Post* reported that a US intelligence assessment dated March 6, 2025, concluded that Putin remains determined to "hold sway" over Ukraine. Current and former US officials told NBC on February 18 that intelligence from the United States and US allies shows that Putin still aims to control all of Ukraine and that there is no intelligence suggesting that Putin is ready for a peace deal.[17] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin maintains its long-standing goals in Ukraine, which amount to Ukraine's full capitulation, and the Kremlin has maintained its expansionist rhetoric despite recent talks with the Trump administration about peace in Ukraine.[18]

Russian forces marginally advanced towards the international border in Kursk Oblast on March 14, but Ukrainian forces still maintain limited positions in Kursk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on March 13 indicates that Russian forces advanced within Zaoleshenka (immediately west of Sudzha).[19] Russian forces likely also seized Goncharovka (west of Sudzha), given that NASA Fire Information for Resource Management (FIRMS) data from March 14 indicates heavy fighting in the area and that Russian sources recently claimed that Russian forces seized the settlement.[20] Other Russian sources continued to claim that Russian forces seized Zaoleshenka, Goncharovka, and Rubanshchina (west of Sudzha), and that Russian forces advanced near Guyevo (south of Sudzha) and up to the southern outskirts of Oleshnya (southwest of Sudzha along the international border).[21] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have not yet entered Gogolevka (southwest of Sudzha along the international border), and another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also maintain positions within Oleshnya, Guyevo, and Gornal (southwest of Guyevo along the international border).[22] Russian forces continued ground attacks near Kurilovka (south of Sudzha), and a milblogger claimed that Russian forces are regrouping for further advances within Kursk Oblast.[23] Elements of the Russian "Kurskiye Vityaz" Assault Battalion, reportedly of the "Pyatnashka" International Volunteer Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], Southern Military District [SMD]), are reportedly operating near Sudzha, and elements of the 1st Battalion of the Russian 9th Motorized Rifle Regiment (18th Motorized Rifle Division, 11th AC, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly operating near Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha).[24]

Russian forces also reportedly continued to advance in northern Sumy Oblast. Ukraine's State Border Service Spokesperson Andriy Demchenko stated on March 14 that small Russian assault groups are continuing to attack into northern Sumy Oblast and are trying to advance towards Novenke and Zhuravka (both northeast of Sumy City).[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced east of Novenke and into northern Basivka (northeast of Sumy City).[26] A Russian milblogger reiterated claims on March 14 that Russian forces may attempt to create a "sanitary zone" in Sumy Oblast in the future.[27] Ukraine's Pivnich (Northern) Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Vadym Mysnyk responded to recent speculation about the possibility of a Russian cross border attack into Chernihiv Oblast and stated that Ukrainian forces have the situation along the international border in Chernihiv Oblast under control and that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups have operated in the area "for a long time." [28]

Consistent Ukrainian strikes against Russian air defense assets are reportedly allowing Ukrainian long-range drones to increasingly penetrate the Russian air defense umbrella in deep rear areas, including in Moscow Oblast. Krasnodar Krai authorities reported that Ukrainian drone strikes hit the Tuapse Oil Refinery overnight and caused a fire at one of the oil tanks that burned an area of over 1,000 square meters.[29] Geolocated footage published on March 14 shows a burning oil depot in Tuapse.[30] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that the Tuapse Oil Refinery is one of Russia's largest refineries and can process up to 12 million tons of oil per year, supporting Russian military needs in southern Russia and in the Black Sea.[31] Kovalenko stated that Ukrainian drone strikes also damaged multiple unspecified facilities in Moscow Oblast on the morning of March 14. Russian authorities and sources claimed that downed Ukrainian drones damaged residential areas in Moscow Oblast while en route to Moscow City and did not report damage to other facilities, however.[32] Footage published on March 14 shows a drone striking a building near the 333rd Combat Training Center in Mulino, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.[33] Elements of the Russian 47th Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army [GTA, Moscow Military District [MMD]]) are also based in Mulino.[34] Sources in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) told Ukrainian state-news outlet Ukrinform on March 14 that SBU drones recently struck gas compressor stations in Saratov and Tambov oblasts and a storage facility for S-300/S-400 air defense missiles near Radkovka, Belgorod Oblast.[35]

Kovalenko stated that Ukrainian drones were able to successfully infiltrate Moscow City's airspace and strike infrastructure in the area despite Russia's efforts to concentrate air defenses around Moscow Oblast.[36] Kovalenko suggested that Russian authorities have concentrated air defense systems around Moscow City at the expense of other areas in Russia due to a significant shortage of radars and air defense systems. Kovalenko noted that Ukrainian drone strikes have destroyed a significant number of air defense systems and radars both along the front line and within rear areas in Russia and in occupied Ukraine, highlighting that tactical Ukrainian drone strikes have likely significantly degraded Russia's ability to effectively defend strategic-level military and industrial assets in deep rear areas.

The Ukrainian military reorganized the Ukrainian 3rd Separate Assault Brigade into the 3rd Army Corps, further showcasing Ukraine's force efforts to transition to a corps structure. Ukraine's 3rd Separate Assault Brigade announced on March 14 that the Ukrainian military command restructured the unit as the 3rd Army Corps.[37] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on February 3 that Ukraine started implementing organizational reforms to transition the Ukrainian military into a "corps structure." [38] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine's efforts to form an echelon between Ukraine's brigades and operational groups of forces and create a command staff headquarters at this new intermediary echelon will likely improve command and control for Ukrainian brigades and facilitate more effective operations.

Ukraine's European allies continue to provide military assistance and technical support and demonstrate interest in strengthening bilateral cooperation. Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson announced on March 13 an artillery package for Ukraine worth three billion Swedish Kroner (roughly \$300 million), including 18 additional Archer artillery systems, five ARTHUR counter-battery radar systems, and financial support for the Ukrainian shell initiative and domestic artillery production. [39] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov signed a bilateral agreement with Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles on March 14 to strengthen defense cooperation and support Ukrainian military training.[40] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Dutch Representative Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius to discuss the US-Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposal and possible future supply of F-16 jets, drones, and ammunition and Dutch support in further developing Ukrainian weapons production.[41]

Key Takeaways:

- ISW has observed no geolocated evidence to indicate that Russian forces have encircled a significant number of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast or elsewhere along the frontline in Ukraine.
- Putin seized on a statement by US President Donald Trump about the supposed encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast to distract from his recent rejection of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal.
- Kremlin statements following Putin's meeting with US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff on March 13 underscore Putin's rejection of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal and continued unwillingness to engage in good faith negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.
- Russian forces marginally advanced towards the international border in Kursk Oblast on March 14, but Ukrainian forces still maintain limited positions in Kursk Oblast.
- Consistent Ukrainian strikes against Russian air defense assets are reportedly allowing Ukrainian long-range drones to increasingly penetrate the Russian air defense umbrella in deep rear areas, including in Moscow Oblast.
- The Ukrainian military reorganized the Ukrainian 3rd Separate Assault Brigade into the 3rd Army Corps, further showcasing Ukraine's force efforts to transition to a corps structure.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to provide military assistance and technical support and demonstrate interest in strengthening bilateral cooperation.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Toretsk and near Siversk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 13, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 13, 2025, 9:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15 pm ET on March 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected the ceasefire proposal that the United States and Ukraine recently agreed upon in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and offered an alternative proposal that undermines US President Donald Trump's stated goal of securing a lasting peace in Ukraine. Putin claimed on March 13 that he "agrees" with the temporary ceasefire proposal and that the "idea itself is correct" but that the cessation of hostilities "should be such that it would lead to long-term peace and eliminate the initial causes" of the war.^[1] Putin thus rejected one of the main principles of the US-Ukrainian proposal — that the temporary ceasefire precede formal negotiations to end the war. ^[2] Putin also claimed that there are questions that "require painstaking research from both sides." Putin questioned several aspects of the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal. Putin asked what would happen to the remaining Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and whether Ukraine would be allowed to continue to mobilize forces, train newly mobilized soldiers, and receive military aid from its partners and allies. Putin questioned the control and verification measures of a temporary ceasefire and who would give the orders to stop fighting. Putin suggested that he may call President Trump to discuss the "issues" involved in the ceasefire proposal. Putin postured military strength during his rejection of the ceasefire proposal, highlighting recent Russian successes in pushing Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast and claiming that Russian forces are advancing in "almost all areas of combat."

Putin's rejection of the ceasefire is consistent with March 12 reports from Russian insider sources about the Kremlin's likely response to the proposal.^[3] Bloomberg reported on March 12 that sources familiar with the Kremlin's thinking and the situation stated that Putin will "stretch the timeline" for agreeing to the temporary ceasefire in order to ensure that his stipulations "are taken into account." A source close to the Kremlin stated that Russia may demand a halt to weapons supplies to Ukraine as a condition of the temporary ceasefire. Russian opposition outlet Verstka reported on March 12 that a source close to the Russian Presidential Administration stated that the Kremlin would "formally" give a "positive response" to the temporary ceasefire proposal but would also demand "impossible conditions" to which Ukraine cannot agree. The source stated that Putin wants to remove Ukraine from talks so that Russia can engage in negotiations with the United States alone while also "correcting the situation on the front" to strengthen Russia's negotiating position. ISW assessed on March 12 that these Russian insider source leaks may have been intentional and part of a Russian negotiating strategy that aims to push the United States to renegotiate its deal with Ukraine on the temporary ceasefire.^[4] Putin's response to the ceasefire offer suggests that they may also have been at least partially accurate.

Putin is offering an alternative ceasefire agreement that is contrary to the intentions and goals of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal. The US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal calls for a renewable 30-day cessation of combat operations along the entire frontline, a moratorium on long-range missile and drone strikes, and a cessation of operations in the Black Sea.^[5] The proposal allows for Russia and Ukraine to extend the ceasefire and assumes the continuation of US intelligence sharing and US and other military assistance to Ukraine. The US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal was explicitly aimed at allowing Russia and Ukraine to demonstrate their willingness to make peace and separates the temporary ceasefire from future negotiations to end the war.

Putin's envisioned ceasefire agreement would grant Russia greatly disproportionate advantages and set conditions for the Kremlin to renew hostilities on terms extremely favorable to Russia. Putin's envisioned ceasefire agreement would likely require the United States and Ukraine's other supporters to pause military assistance to Ukraine and require Ukraine to stop recruiting and training personnel. Such a ceasefire agreement would begin to disarm Ukraine if renewed for a long period of time by preventing its military from reconstituting, training, and equipping itself and would cause Ukraine and the West to surrender significant leverage to Russia. Putin did not suggest that Russia would also cease military recruitment efforts, the production of military equipment, and the receipt of military aid from Russia's allies. Russia's ability to continue these measures during a potential ceasefire while preventing Ukraine from doing so would allow Russia to resume offensive operations with better manned and equipped units at a time of its choosing. Russian forces are currently on the offensive across the theater, as Putin observed, so demands that would prevent Ukrainian forces from reconstituting can only be intended to preserve or enhance Russia's ability to resume the offensive at a later date. Such demands would seem a clear indication that Putin is not, in fact, committed to making peace.

Putin's attempts to introduce a new ceasefire agreement on terms that asymmetrically benefit Russia ignore Trump's stated intention that the ceasefire set conditions for negotiations toward a more comprehensive peace agreement in the future. An agreement along the lines Putin appears to be offering would undermine the Trump administration's stated objective of bringing about a sustainable peace in Ukraine, would reinforce Putin's belief that Russia can militarily defeat Ukraine, and would

incentivize Putin to resume military operations against Ukraine rather than making any concessions in formal negotiations to end the war.

Putin is holding the ceasefire proposal hostage and is attempting to extract preemptive concessions ahead of formal negotiations to end the war. Putin refused to accept the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal on its own terms and is instead demanding additional conditions that would contribute directly to the Kremlin's war aims. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on March 11 that the US will "know what the impediment is to peace" in Ukraine if Putin rejected the ceasefire proposal.[6] ISW continues to assess that Putin is disinterested in good faith peace negotiations to end the war.[7] Putin remains committed to accomplishing his long-term goals of installing a pro-Russian puppet regime in Ukraine, undermining Ukraine's ability to defend itself against future Russian aggression and preventing Ukraine's accession to NATO. **Putin's rejection of the ceasefire proposal underscores Putin's commitment to securing his objectives in Ukraine, particularly Ukraine's demilitarization, and disinterest in any pause in fighting that does not result in Ukrainian capitulation or at least set conditions for a successful renewal of Russian offensive operations in the future.**

Russian forces continue to clear Ukrainian forces from Sudzha and its environs as Russian troops advance closer to the border in Kursk Oblast slowed on March 13 compared to recent days. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on March 12 that he ordered Ukrainian forces to withdraw from some unspecified positions within the Kursk salient and move to more advantageous defensive positions in Kursk Oblast in order to save Ukrainian lives.[8] The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, claimed that Russian forces seized and cleared Sudzha and are attacking the remaining settlements along the international border.[9] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are clearing Sudzha and seized Podol (immediately south of Sudzha), Goncharovka (just west of Sudzha), Zaolenchenko (just northwest of Sudzha), Rubanshchina (west of Sudzha), and Molovo (south of Sudzha).[10] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing towards Oleshnya (southwest of Sudzha immediately on the Russian-Ukrainian border) and that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in Oleshnya, Gogolevka (northeast of Oleshnya), Guyevo (south of Sudzha), and Gornal (southwest of Guyevo immediately on the Russian-Ukrainian border). [11] A Russian milblogger continued to claim that renewed Ukrainian HIMARS strikes are slowing the rate of Russian advances south of Sudzha.[12] Drone operators from the "Rubikon" Center for Advanced Unmanned Technologies are reportedly operating near Sudzha.[13]

Russian forces also marginally advanced in northern Sumy Oblast. Geolocated footage published on March 12 indicates that Russian forces advanced northwest of Basivka (northeast of Sumy City).[14] Syrskyi stated that Russian airborne (VDV) and Spetsnaz forces are attacking along the international border and attempting to advance further into Sumy Oblast.[15] Ukraine's State Border Service Spokesperson Andriy Demchenko stated on March 12 that Russian forces are attempting to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along the international border near Novenke (northeast of Sumy City).[16] A Ukrainian source affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence stated on March 13 that Russian forces are using all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in northern Sumy Oblast and are attempting to leverage their manpower advantage to advance in the area.[17] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are counterattacking near Zhuravka, Basivka, and Novenke (all northeast of Sumy City).[18]

Russian milbloggers theorized on March 13 that Russian forces may launch an organized offensive operation into northern Sumy Oblast in the coming weeks and months and may also attack into Chernihiv Oblast — in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 12 statements.[19] One Russian milblogger claimed that an offensive into Sumy Oblast would significantly strengthen Russia's position in future peace negotiations.[20] Putin asked Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov during a visit to a Russian command post in Kursk Oblast on March 12 to "think in the future about creating a security zone" along the Ukrainian-Russian international border.[21] Putin and other Kremlin officials previously justified Russia's offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast as an attempt to establish a "buffer zone" to protect Belgorod City from Ukrainian shelling.[22] Putin may assess that Russian forces can make significant advances into northern Ukraine following their relatively quicker advances in Kursk Oblast over the previous week, despite the fact that Russian forces have failed to make significant advances in northern Kharkiv Oblast over the last ten months.

Kremlin officials continue to use narratives similar to those that the Kremlin has used to justify its invasions of Ukraine to set informational conditions to justify future aggression against NATO member states. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev claimed in an interview with Russian national security-focused magazine *National Defense* published on March 13 that NATO "traditionally" uses threats as its main instrument in interstate

relations and that NATO's "European wing" is continuing its policy on "blocking" Russia in the Baltic region. Patrushev claimed that the United Kingdom (UK) is "orchestrating" NATO's "aggravation of the situation" as part of efforts to disrupt negotiations on Ukraine and Russian and American attempts to normalize their bilateral relations. Patrushev also claimed that the Finnish population, unlike Finnish authorities, is friendly to Russia and that the UK has approved Finnish authorities to "do everything to deprive their country [Finland] of its sovereignty." Patrushev threateningly claimed that the Gulf of Finland has a historical "geographic affiliation with Russia" and that "it should not be forgotten that Finland was part of the Russian Empire." Patrushev claimed that the Russian Empire "respected" and "preserved" the Finnish people and language in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Patrushev appeared to try to compare Russia's current war against Ukraine to the Soviet-Finnish Winter War in 1939–1940. Patrushev claimed that Finnish attempts to seize Soviet lands and "actively militarize" created a threat to the USSR and that Finland was "indiscriminately exterminating" the Slavic population in Karelia. Patrushev claimed that the West is "again turning [Finland] into a springboard" for aggression against Russia. The Kremlin has used similar false narratives about the Ukrainian government's discrimination of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine and the military threats that Ukraine supposedly poses to Russia in order to justify Moscow's invasions of Ukraine. Patrushev's claims that the UK is "orchestrating" Finland's and the Baltic states' allegedly threatening behavior are likely part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to drive wedges between the United States and Europe and to weaken NATO.^[23] The Kremlin appears to be using the same general narrative playbook that it has used against Ukraine and other former Soviet states but is adjusting its narratives to exploit any tensions among Western states.

Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) in violation of international law. Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on March 13 that there is footage of Russian forces allegedly executing five unarmed Ukrainian POWs in an unspecified area.^[24] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported on March 13 that there is footage reportedly filmed near Kazachya Loknya (north of Sudzha in Kursk Oblast) showing five deceased Ukrainian POWs.^[25] ISW has observed and reported on numerous instances of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs along the frontline in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast and continues to assess that this is a systemic trend in the Russian military and that Russian commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct such atrocities.^[26]

Russia will likely expand its permanent military basing in Belarus to enhance Russia's force posture against NATO's eastern flank. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met in Moscow on March 13 and ratified the Russian-Belarus Union State treaty on security guarantees.^[27] The treaty permits Russia to establish military bases and infrastructure in Belarus.^[28] Putin noted that the treaty on security guarantees defines Russia's and Belarus' mutual allied obligations to ensure their defense and security using "the entire available arsenal of forces and means." Putin noted that Russia has deployed a joint Regional Group of Forces, modern Russian defense systems, and tactical nuclear weapons to Belarusian territory — all of which Putin claimed "reliably covers" the western borders of Belarus and Russia. ISW forecasted in 2021 that Russia may deploy a permanent Russian force presence in Belarus in order to increase Russia's capacity to threaten NATO's eastern flank and continues to assess that the Kremlin is using the Union State framework to advance its strategic effort to de facto annex Belarus.^[29]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected the ceasefire proposal that the United States and Ukraine recently agreed upon in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and offered an alternative proposal that undermines US President Donald Trump's stated goal of securing a lasting peace in Ukraine.
- Putin is offering an alternative ceasefire agreement that is contrary to the intentions and goals of the US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal.
- Putin's envisioned ceasefire agreement would grant Russia greatly disproportionate advantages and set conditions for the Kremlin to renew hostilities on terms extremely favorable to Russia.
- Putin is holding the ceasefire proposal hostage and is attempting to extract preemptive concessions ahead of formal negotiations to end the war.
- Russian forces continue to clear Ukrainian forces from Sudzha and its environs as Russian troops advance closer to the border in Kursk Oblast slowed on March 13 compared to recent days.
- Russian milblogger theorized on March 13 that Russian forces may launch an organized offensive operation into northern Sumy Oblast in the coming weeks and months and may also attack into Chernihiv Oblast — in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 12 statements.

- Kremlin officials continue to use narratives similar to those that the Kremlin has used to justify its invasions of Ukraine to set informational conditions to justify future aggression against NATO member states.
- Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) in violation of international law
- Russia will likely expand its permanent military basing in Belarus to enhance Russia's force posture against NATO's eastern flank.

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Lyman, Siversk, and Toretsk.
- Russia continues its crypto-mobilization efforts against the backdrop of US efforts to start the negotiation process to end the war.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 12, 2025

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Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, Daria Novikov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

March 12, 2025, 8:00 pm ET

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov offered a vague response on March 12 to the US-Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposal. Peskov responded to a question about Russia's response to the joint temporary ceasefire proposal, stating that "we don't want to get ahead of ourselves."^[1] Peskov stated that Russia expects US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz to inform the Kremlin about the details of the US-Ukrainian negotiations.^[2] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on March 12 that its sources in the Russian government stated that the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal surprised the Kremlin, and a source close to the Russian presidential administration stated that the Kremlin expected the United States to discuss such a proposal with Russia in private before publicly announcing it, thereby providing the Kremlin time to formulate a prepared response.^[3]

Russian President Vladimir Putin may hold hostage the ceasefire proposal to which Ukraine has agreed in order to extract preemptive concessions before formal negotiations to end the war have started. *Reuters* reported on March 12 that senior Russian sources stated that a deal on the temporary ceasefire would have to "take into account" Russia's advances on the battlefield and "address [Russia's] concerns."^[4] *Bloomberg* reported on March 12 that sources familiar with the Kremlin's thinking and the situation stated that Putin will "stretch the timeline" for agreeing to the temporary ceasefire in order to ensure that his stipulations "are taken into account."^[5] A source close to the Kremlin stated that Russia may demand a halt to weapons supplies to Ukraine as a condition of agreeing to the temporary ceasefire, but did not specify whether such a halt would include all international weapons provisions to Ukraine or only those from select countries. Suspending US or other military assistance to Ukraine during a ceasefire would be extremely advantageous to Russia, which continues to receive critical supplies and assistance from Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China.^[6] Such an enormous concession would also destroy US leverage in future negotiations, in addition to violating the conditions under which Ukraine agreed to the ceasefire in the first place.^[7]

Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on March 12 that a source close to the Russian Presidential Administration stated that the Kremlin would "formally" give a "positive response" to the temporary ceasefire proposal but would also demand "impossible conditions" to which Ukraine cannot agree.^[8] The source stated that Putin wants to remove Ukraine from talks so that Russia can engage in negotiations with the United States alone while also "correcting the situation on the front" to strengthen Russia's negotiating position. The source added that the conditions of the temporary ceasefire "must suit Russia" and that Russia's agreement to a temporary ceasefire during which Ukraine continues to receive weapons and financing from its partners and allies is "stupid." These leaks may be intentional and part of a Russian negotiating strategy that aims to push the United States to renegotiate its deal with Ukraine on the temporary ceasefire.

Senior US and Ukrainian officials have said that the purpose of the temporary ceasefire is for Russia and Ukraine to demonstrate their willingness for peace and that the temporary ceasefire and negotiations to end the war are separate matters, whereas the Kremlin may intend to conjoin them. The US-Ukrainian joint statement announcing the temporary ceasefire proposal on March 11 noted that Ukraine and the United States intend to name their negotiating teams and

immediately begin negotiations toward an enduring peace — noting the distinction between their March 11 temporary ceasefire proposal and future peace negotiations.[9] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on March 11 following the US-Ukrainian talks in Jeddah that the best goodwill gesture Russia can give would be to accept the ceasefire proposal and that if Russia says no, "then we'll know the impediment to peace." [10] Rubio characterized Ukraine's agreement to the ceasefire as the "kind of concession you would need to see in order to end the conflict." [11] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 12 that Ukraine will use the 30-day ceasefire to prepare agreements with partners regarding a sustainable peace and long-term security guarantees. [12] The Kremlin's reported intention to make demands supporting its overall war objectives before agreeing to the temporary ceasefire violates the stated purpose of the ceasefire and the sequence of negotiations that US President Donald Trump has laid out. If the Kremlin holds the ceasefire hostage to demand preemptive concessions while continuing to pursue battlefield victories, that would strongly indicate that Russia lacks any urgency about ending the war and is uninterested in making any meaningful concessions.

Russian insider reports about the demands that the Kremlin may make before agreeing to the temporary ceasefire are in line with Russian officials' public statements in the past months.

Putin outlined in June 2024 — and reiterated in December 2024 — his prerequisite demands for agreeing to a ceasefire. [13] These demands include the full Ukrainian withdrawal from the territory in Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts that Russian forces currently do not occupy and Ukraine's official abandonment of its goal of joining NATO. Kremlin officials have repeatedly insisted that any peace negotiations to take into consideration the "realities on the ground," and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov notably claimed on February 24 that Russia would only stop military activity in Ukraine when peace negotiations bring about a "solid, stable result that suits Russia" and account for the "realities" of the battlefield. [14] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Russian state newswire RIA Novosti on February 24 that Russia will not agree to a ceasefire that does not address the "root causes" of the war. [15] Kremlin officials, including Putin, have repeatedly claimed that any peace agreement must take into account the "root causes" of the war, which the Kremlin has defined as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine. [16]

A leaked February 2025 document from a think tank close to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) that outlined a possible Kremlin negotiating strategy is largely in line with the Kremlin's recent public rhetoric and the March 12 Russian insider source reports. The *Washington Post* reported on March 12 that a European intelligence service obtained a document from a Russian think tank close to the Russian FSB's Fifth Service (which oversees operations in Ukraine among other things) written in the week before the February 18 US-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia. [17] The document states that a peace settlement to the war in Ukraine "cannot happen before 2026," rejects the deployment of peacekeepers to Ukraine, and calls for recognition of Russia's sovereignty over occupied Ukraine. The document calls for the creation of a buffer zone on the international Ukrainian-Russian border, including near Bryansk and Belgorod oblasts, and a "demilitarized zone" in southern Ukraine near Odesa Oblast and occupied Crimea. The document also states that Russia needs to "completely dismantle" the current Ukrainian government and rejects a possible Ukrainian commitment to not join NATO or to hold elections that include pro-Russian parties as insufficient measures. The document rejects any US plans to continue supplying weapons to Ukraine after any future peace deal and any Ukrainian plans to maintain its current number of military personnel. The document outlines ways in which Russia can strengthen its negotiating position by exacerbating tensions between the United States and both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the EU. The document also calls for Russia to grant the United States access to Russian-controlled minerals in occupied Ukraine and for the Kremlin to focus on normalizing its relations with the United States by restoring embassy functions and appointing Alexander Darchiev as the Russian Ambassador to the United States.

The Kremlin has followed through with many of the document's suggestions in recent weeks. Kremlin officials have recently rejected the possible deployment of European peacekeepers to Ukraine, have identified the 2022 peace negotiations in Istanbul (that would have effectively disarmed Ukraine, banned Ukraine from receiving any foreign weapons, and forced Ukraine to commit never to participate in military blocs), and have offered to sign investment deals with the United States to extract minerals in Russia and occupied Ukraine. [18] Recent Russian rhetoric has also increasingly attempted to drive wedges between the United States and Europe. [19] Putin asked Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov during a visit to a Russian command post in Kursk Oblast on March 12 to "think in the future about creating a security zone" along the Ukrainian-Russian international border. [20]

US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Ratcliffe and Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergey Naryshkin had a phone call on March 11 amid talks about the war in Ukraine. The SVR Press Bureau reported about the call on March 12 and claimed that Naryshkin and

Ratcliffe agreed to maintain regular contacts to help "ensure international stability and security" and "reduce confrontation" in bilateral relations.[21]

Russian forces recently seized Sudzha amid continued Russian assaults in Kursk Oblast on March 12. Geolocated footage published on March 12 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Sudzha and advanced to southern Zaoleshenka (immediately northwest of Sudzha).[22] A Ukrainian source reportedly affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence stated on March 12 that Ukrainian forces have started withdrawing from Sudzha.[23] Russian milbloggers credited elements of the 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), and 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate [GRU]) with the seizure of Sudzha and claimed that Russian forces are conducting clearing operations in the settlement.[24] Geolocated footage published on March 11 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced west of Basivka (west of Sudzha across the international border in Sumy Oblast).[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near Sverdlikovo (northwest of Sudzha), west of Kazachya Loknya (north of Sudzha), within Zaoleshenka, within southeastern Goncharovka (just west of Sudzha), west of Kurilovka, north of Guyevo (both south of Sudzha), and southwest of Zhuravka (west of Sudzha in Sumy Oblast) and west Oleksandriia (south of Sudzha in Sumy Oblast).[26] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continued near Zaoleshenka, Goncharovka, and Guyevo and just across the international border in Sumy Oblast near Zhuravka, Novenke, and Basivka (all west of Sudzha).[27] A Russian milblogger called for Russian forces to create a buffer zone — likely in Sumy Oblast — after Russian forces push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast.[28]

Russian milbloggers claimed on March 12 that Ukrainian forces conducted HIMARS strikes against Russian forces in Kursk Oblast.[29] ISW cannot independently verify these Russian claims, however. Western media reported on March 5 that the Trump administration specifically suspended intelligence sharing supporting target designation for Ukrainian HIMARS strikes, and US and Ukrainian officials confirmed on March 11 that the United States restarted intelligence sharing with Ukraine.[30]

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited a Russian military command post in Kursk Oblast for the first time since Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024 — demonstrating Putin's desire to use Russia's seizure of Sudzha to project military success and strength against the backdrop of the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal. Putin visited a command post in Kursk Oblast and heard reports from Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov.[31] Gerasimov specifically commended elements of the "Veterany" Assault Detachment (Russian Volunteer Corps), 11th VDV Brigade, 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, LMD), and "Akhmat" Spetsnaz Detachment for conducting the operation in which Russian forces used an underground pipeline to covertly attack behind Ukrainian positions in Sudzha. Putin thanked elements of the 76th and 106th VDV divisions, 11th and 83rd VDV brigades, 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 810th Naval Infantry brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 177th Naval Infantry Brigade (Caspian Flotilla), 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]), 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, LMD), 1220th Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, Moscow Military District [MMD]), "Akhmat" Spetsnaz, and "Veterany" Assault Detachment for their efforts in Kursk Oblast. Putin acknowledged that Russian forces have yet to completely push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast and stated that Russian forces must seize all of Kursk Oblast "in the shortest possible time."

This is only the second time that Putin has visited Russian forces on the frontline since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Putin visited the Russian "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces' headquarters in occupied Kherson Oblast and the "Vostok" Rosgvardia headquarters in occupied Luhansk Oblast in April 2023.[32] Putin wore a military uniform during his visit to the Kursk Oblast headquarters — a notable move as he wore a suit in his April 2023 visits to the frontline. Putin is likely trying to posture himself as an engaged wartime leader and to include himself among the Russian military-political leaders responsible for recent Russian advances in Kursk Oblast.[33] Putin is also likely attempting to portray himself as a strong and effective military commander ahead of US-Russian meetings, including a meeting with US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff on March 13 during which the delegations will likely discuss the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal.

Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov offered a vague response on March 12 to the US-Ukrainian 30-day ceasefire proposal.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin may hold hostage the ceasefire proposal to which Ukraine has agreed in order to extract preemptive concessions before formal negotiations to end the war have started.

- Senior US and Ukrainian officials have said that the purpose of the temporary ceasefire is for Russia and Ukraine to demonstrate their willingness for peace and that the temporary ceasefire and negotiations to end the war are separate matters, whereas the Kremlin may intend to conjoin them.
- Russian insider reports about the demands that the Kremlin may make before agreeing to the temporary ceasefire are in line with Russian officials' public statements in the past months.
- US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Ratcliffe and Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergey Naryshkin had a phone call on March 11 amid talks about the war in Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently seized Sudzha amid continued Russian assaults in Kursk Oblast on March 12.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin visited a Russian military command post in Kursk Oblast for the first time since Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024 — demonstrating Putin's desire to use Russia's seizure of Sudzha to project military success and strength against the backdrop of the US-Ukrainian temporary ceasefire proposal.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Borova, Toretsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 11, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

The United States and Ukraine agreed on March 11 to an immediate 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine contingent on Russia's agreement, and the United States reportedly restarted intelligence sharing and military aid.^[1] US and Ukrainian representatives met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on March 11 for bilateral talks and agreed to the ceasefire proposal, which the United States will soon propose to Russia. The US-Ukrainian joint statement emphasized that Russia's reciprocity to this ceasefire proposal is the key to achieving peace and noted that the ceasefire can be extended if all parties agree. The joint statement noted that the United States will immediately lift its suspension on intelligence sharing and military assistance to Ukraine. The United States and Ukraine also agreed to finalize a deal on minerals as soon as possible. Ukraine reiterated in the joint statement that European partners will be involved in the peace process. The United States and Ukraine also discussed humanitarian relief to Ukraine, especially during the ceasefire, including the return of prisoners of war (POWs), detained civilians, and forcibly deported Ukrainian children to Ukraine. Ukrainian Presidential Office Deputy Head Pavlo Palisa confirmed on March 11 that the United States has already resumed the flow of military assistance to Ukraine.^[2] A source close to the Ukrainian government told CNN that the United States also fully restored intelligence sharing to Ukraine on March 11.^[3]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the ceasefire would encompass a cease in combat operations along the entire frontline, a moratorium on long-range missile and drone strikes, and the cessation of operations in the Black Sea and would begin as soon as Russia agrees to the US proposal.^[4] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio responded during a press conference on March 11 to a question about a deadline for Russia to respond, stating that the deadline is "as quickly as possible," that the United States will inform Russia about the ceasefire proposal through multiple diplomatic channels, and that the "ball is now in [Russia's] court."^[5] US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz stated that he will speak with his Russian counterpart in the coming days and clarified that the resumed US military assistance to Ukraine includes the provision of material authorized under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA).^[6] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and French President Emmanuel Macron expressed support for the 30-day ceasefire proposal and emphasized that the onus to respond is now on Russia.^[7]

Russian ultranationalist voices, including a Russian State Duma deputy, largely rejected the ceasefire proposal on March 11. Russian milbloggers, including Kremlin-coopted milbloggers, rejected the ceasefire proposal because the United States and Ukraine will allegedly "abandon" peace "at the first opportunity" and the war in Ukraine is existential for Russia.^[8] One millogger claimed that accepting the ceasefire would be "pure betrayal and sabotage," and another millogger questioned the purpose of accepting this ceasefire proposal without achieving Russia's war aims.^[9] Russian State Duma Deputy and former 58th Combined Arms Army Commander Lieutenant General Viktor Sobolev stated after the publication of the joint statement that Russia should not agree to the "unacceptable" 30-day ceasefire proposal because it would allow Ukraine to rearm and regroup.^[10]

The Kremlin has not officially responded to the ceasefire proposal as of this publication, and Russian state media is attempting to frame earlier official Russian statements about bilateral US-Russian negotiations as responses to the ceasefire proposal. Following the publication of the ceasefire proposal, Russian state media largely amplified a statement from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova from earlier in the day on March 11 saying that Russia "does not rule out" contacts with the United States in the next few days.[11] Russian State Duma Security Committee member Mikhail Sheremet stated before the joint statement was released that Russia is interested in a settlement in Ukraine but will not allow itself to be deceived, and Russian state media only amplified Sheremet's statement after the ceasefire proposal.[12] Russian state media is likely attempting to portray the immediate Russian reaction as moderate for domestic audiences until Kremlin officials make public statements and provide a framing for broader Russian media coverage of the proposal.

Ukraine's allies and partners from Europe, Asia, and Oceania continue efforts to strengthen the Ukrainian military and back Ukraine with security guarantees — the most effective deterrent against future Russian aggression against Ukraine following a potential future peace

agreement. French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu stated on March 11 that France "will refuse any form of demilitarization of Ukraine" and that the "first guarantee of security remains the Ukrainian army." [13] *Reuters* reported that 34 military officials from European NATO states, EU states, Asia, and Oceania, met on March 11 in Paris to assess their militaries' capabilities to maintain Ukraine's long-term military strength and to guarantee Ukrainian security in the event of a permanent ceasefire in the war.[14] French President Emmanuel Macron stated after the meeting that Ukraine's partners must "define credible security guarantees" for Ukraine.[15] A French military official told the *Associated Press* on March 10 that the meeting would discuss a French and British plan for the creation of a multinational force that would aim to reassure Ukraine and deter another large-scale Russian offensive.[16] The official stated that the envisaged force could include heavy weaponry and weapons stockpiles that participating militaries could deploy to help Ukraine defend itself in "hours or days" in the event of a renewed Russian attack. A strong Ukrainian military backed by Western security guarantees continues to be the strongest deterrent against another Russian invasion in the future, and Russia has been repeatedly insisting on Ukraine's "demilitarization" and disarmament in order to deny Ukraine this deterrent and allow Russia to renew attacks against Ukraine at a time of Moscow's choosing in the future.

Bloomberg reported on March 11 that Western security officials stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "no intention" of making compromises on territory, peacekeepers, or Ukrainian neutrality and that Putin is prepared to continue fighting if he doesn't achieve his objectives in his war in Ukraine.[17] The officials stated that Putin has deliberately made "maximalist" demands, knowing that Ukraine and Europe would likely find these demands unacceptable. Western security officials' reports of the Kremlin's intention to achieve its "maximalist" goals in Ukraine are consistent with Putin's and other Russian officials' public statements, even as the Kremlin has attempted to posture itself as open to negotiations and ending the war.[18]

Russian forces continue to make confirmed advances in Kursk Oblast and have likely begun attacking Sudzha. Geolocated footage published on March 11 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Bondarevka (east of Sudzha), Zamostye, and Makhnovka (both southeast of Sudzha).[19] Additional geolocated footage published on March 10 and 11 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced into central Zazulevka (north of Sudzha), in the southeastern outskirts of Kolmakov (southeast of Sudzha), and south of Kurilovka (south of Sudzha).[20] Russian milbloggers claimed on March 11 that Russian forces seized Kazachya Loknya (north of Sudzha), and recent Russian gains north of Kazachya Loknya and east of Sudzha have likely forced Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Kazachya Loknya and Knyazhiy 2 (north of Sudzha and immediately south of Kazachya Loknya).[21] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Kolmakov and Dmitryukov (both southeast of Sudzha) and advanced east of Sverdlikovo along the 38K-030 Koronevo-Sudzha highway.[22] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) seized Knyazhiy 1 (north of Sudzha).[23] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have advanced to the outskirts of Zaoloshenka (just north of Sudzha) and that elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade are advancing into Sudzha itself from Mirny (east of Sudzha).[24] Russian forces continued attacking within Sudzha itself; north of Sudzha near Kazachya Loknya, Yuzhny, Kubatkino, and Ivashkovsky; and near the international border in Sumy Oblast near Zhuravka.[25] Elements of the Russian "Veterany" Assault Detachment (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating east of Sudzha near Mirny.[26]

Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov visited a command post in Kursk Oblast on March 11. Gerasimov heard reports from Kursk Grouping of Forces commander Colonel General Valery Solodchuk and other unspecified Russian commanders about Russian operations in the area.[27]

Russian forces continue conducting raids along the Sumy-Kursk oblast international border. Geolocated footage published on March 10 indicates that Russian forces, reportedly a sabotage and reconnaissance group, recently advanced southwest of Tetkino (northwest of the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast).[28] The assistant head of a Ukrainian border guards detachment stated on March 11 that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups are conducting operations along the international border in Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts.[29] Ukrainian military officials stated that small Russian infantry groups are attempting to gain a foothold in unspecified areas in Sumy Oblast and that Russian forces recently intensified drone and artillery strikes against Sumy Oblast border areas.[30]

Ukrainian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone strikes against Russia on the night of March 10 to 11, largely targeting Moscow Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), Unmanned Systems Forces, Special Operations Forces (SSO), Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and other Ukrainian forces military struck "a number of strategic objects" in Russia on the night of March 10 to 11.[31] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Moscow Oil Refinery's production facilities, which process 11 million tons of oil per year and provide 40 to 50 percent of Moscow City's diesel and gasoline. The Ukrainian General Staff reported explosions near an energy facility in Stalnoi Kon, Oryol Oblast that controls processes within the Druzhba oil pipeline and supplies oil to the Ust-Luga seaport in Leningrad Oblast. Moscow City and Oblast officials claimed that drone debris fell in Domodedovo and Leninsky Raion and struck civilian infrastructure and industrial enterprises in Ramenskoye and Domodedovo.[32] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported that it geolocated footage reportedly filmed on the morning of March 11 showing the aftermath of drone strikes against the Oka-Tsentr oil depot in Serpukhov, Moscow Oblast.[33] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces shot down 343 drones overnight, including 91 over Moscow Oblast.[34] Head of Ukraine's Center for Combating Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that drones struck Moscow City, the Dyagilevo Airbase in Ryazan City, and Kursk Oblast.[35] Astra also stated that locals in Ryazan City reported explosions as drones reportedly struck the Dyagilevo Airbase.[36] Ryazan Oblast Governor claimed that Russian forces destroyed 22 drones over the oblast and that there was no material damage.[37]

Key Takeaways:

- The United States and Ukraine agreed on March 11 to an immediate 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine contingent on Russia's agreement, and the US reportedly restarted intelligence sharing and military aid.
- Ukraine's allies and partners from Europe, Asia, and Oceania continue efforts to strengthen the Ukrainian military and back Ukraine with security guarantees – the most effective deterrent against future Russian aggression against Ukraine following a potential future peace agreement.
- Russian forces continue to make confirmed advances in Kursk Oblast and have likely begun attacking Sudzha.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone strikes against Russia on the night of March 10 to 11, largely targeting Moscow Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk and Robotyne and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to expand social benefits for Russian soldiers who fought in Ukraine, including soldiers who have fought for the militias of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DNR and LNR) since 2014.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 10, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

March 10, 2025, 6:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on March 10. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 11 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia continues to publicly claim that it wants peace while offering no concessions of its own in sharp contrast with the concessions Ukraine has already offered. Reuters reported on March 9 that two US officials stated that the US is planning to use the March 11 US-Ukrainian talks in Saudi Arabia "in part to determine whether Ukraine is willing to make material concessions to Russia to end

the war."^[1] One US official stated that Ukraine cannot say both "I want peace" and "I refuse to compromise on anything" at the upcoming talks. The other US official stated that the US wants "to see if the Ukrainians are interested not just in peace, but in a *realistic* [emphasis added] peace." The *Financial Times* reported on March 9 that unspecified officials briefed on the upcoming US-Ukrainian negotiations stated that Ukraine will propose a partial ceasefire with Russia for long-range drone and missile strikes and combat operations in the Black Sea.^[2] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on March 10 that a source familiar with the Ukrainian delegation's position stated that Ukraine will also propose a prisoner of war (POW) exchange.^[3] The Ukrainian source noted that these proposals are "realistic to implement quickly" and to "control." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky first suggested a ceasefire in the air and sea on March 5, and Ukraine is offering the kind of ceasefires that are more straightforward and do not require extended negotiations or a complex monitoring process.^[4] A ceasefire along the thousand kilometers of complex front line characterized by multiple "gray zones" where the lines of opposing forces are blurred would be extremely difficult to negotiate and monitor. Zelensky has also indicated several times — including in his February 28 *Fox News* interview — that he is willing to make concessions on territory, Ukraine's NATO membership, and his own tenure in office in order to secure a just and sustainable peace.^[5]

Russian officials, in contrast, continue to reiterate Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2021 and 2022 demands. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed in an interview to "New Regions of Russia" magazine published on March 10 that any future peace settlement must "eradicate" the "root causes" of the war.^[6] Lavrov defined the "root causes" of the war as the alleged "threats to Russia's security from the Ukrainian and Western directions in general" that are due to NATO's eastward expansion and the Ukrainian government's alleged "extermination" of everything that is "connected with Russia and the Russian World [*Russkiy Mir*]," including Russian language, culture, Orthodoxy, and media. Lavrov similarly defined the alleged "root causes" of the war in late December 2024, and the Kremlin's rhetoric on this topic has not changed in the over two months, even after the start of US-Russian bilateral talks in February 2024.^[7] Russia's repeated rhetoric about the "root causes" of the war and constant reiteration of its specific unchanged demands contrast sharply with the flexibility Ukraine has shown.^[8]

Russian officials continue to capitalize on the Trump administration's statements and actions in an attempt to divide the United States and Europe. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed in an interview to the "New Regions of Russia" magazine published on March 10 that US and Russian diplomats voted the same way for the first time in three years against the Ukrainian- and European-backed United Nations (UN) resolution on February 24.^[9] This resolution commemorated the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, recognized Russia as the aggressor in the war, called for a just peace in Ukraine, and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.^[10] Lavrov claimed that the "ultraliberal ruling elites of the West," support Ukraine and that European Union (EU) countries and the United Kingdom (UK) maintain "predatory, colonial habits." Lavrov notably did not mention the United States, likely in an attempt to drive a perceived ideological wedge between the United States and Europe. Lavrov's use of the "ruling elites" narrative echoes Russian President Vladimir Putin's February 27 claim that "some Western elites" are trying to "maintain instability" in the world and will try to "disrupt or compromise" the US–Russian dialogue that has begun.^[11] Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed on March 10 that the UK government is prioritizing "undermining Trump's peace efforts" and has tasked non-governmental organizations with "demonizing" Trump.^[12] The SVR notably made such claims ahead of the UK's hosting of a virtual meeting on March 15 with mainly European and British commonwealth countries to support a ceasefire agreement.^[13] Russian officials are likely attempting to leverage Trump administration statements and actions to divide the United States and Europe and will likely continue such efforts to secure maximum concessions on Ukraine from the US, Europe, and Ukraine as well as to fracture the US-Europe relationship to Russia's benefit.^[14]

Russian forces are consolidating their gains in Kursk Oblast and likely preparing to attack Sudzha in the coming days. Geolocated footage published on March 10 indicates that Russian forces advanced in central Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha).^[15] Elements of the Russian 44th Army Corps (AC) (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and the 1434th "Akhmat-Chechnya" Regiment (subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Defense [MoD]) are reportedly attacking near Martynovka.^[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Agronom and Kolmakov (both east of Sudzha), Mikhailovka (northeast of Sudzha), and Bogdanovka (north of Sudzha).^[17] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced in Mirny (east of Sudzha) and Kazachya Loknya (north of Sudzha).^[18] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims however. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are also attacking the outskirts of Sudzha, north of Sudzha near Ivashkovskiy, east of Sudzha near Dmitryukov, and south of Sudzha near Melovoi and Guyevo.^[19] Elements of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla), and the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and up to two battalions of North Korean forces are reportedly attacking south of Sudzha near Kurilovka and Guyevo.^[20]

Ukrainian forces are counterattacking along the international border. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on March 10 that Ukraine is reinforcing its force grouping in Kursk and Sumy oblasts with additional drone and electronic warfare (EW) units and that Ukrainian forces are successfully countering the threat of Russian encirclement in Kursk Oblast and along the international border.[21] Ukrainian State Border Service Spokesperson Andriy Demchenko stated that Ukrainian forces are working to repel Russian attacks in the direction of Novenke and Zhuravka (both northeast of Sumy City) and noted that Russian forces are trying to cut Ukraine's main ground line of communication (GLOC) along the Sumy City-Sudzha H-07 highway.[22] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are counterattacking near Novenke, Zhuravka, and Basivka (also northeast of Sumy City).[23] Elements of the Russian 83rd Airborne (VDV) Brigade are operating in Zhuravka.[24] Demchenko stated that Russian forces do not currently have the capacity to conduct a significant cross border operation into other areas of northern Ukraine.[25]

Ukraine continues to expand its domestic production of drones and air defense systems to support its war effort. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov signed a memorandum of understanding with German defense manufacturer Diehl Defense on March 9 to triple the supply of IRIS-T air defense systems and missiles to Ukraine and establish longer-term industrial projects that will strengthen Ukraine's air defense.[26] Director of the Procurement Policy Department of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense (MoD) Hlib Kanevsky reported on March 10 that the MoD plans to purchase approximately 4.5 million first-person view (FPV) drones from domestic producers in 2025 — the projected limit of Ukrainian domestic drone production for 2025.[27] The MoD announced that it will allocate an estimated 102 billion Ukrainian hryvnia (approximately \$2.4 billion) to this initiative. Ukrainian Armor LLC CEO Vladyslav Belbas announced on March 10 that the company is on track to produce at least 50 percent more Novator armored vehicles in 2025 compared to 2024 and that the company aims to provide Ukrainian forces with several hundred armored vehicles.[28] Belbas noted that the company delivered over 100 armored vehicles to Ukrainian forces as of August 2024.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia continues to publicly claim that it wants peace while offering no concessions of its own in sharp contrast with the concessions Ukraine has already offered.
- Russian officials continue to capitalize on the Trump administration's statements and actions in an attempt to divide the United States and Europe.
- Russian forces are consolidating their gains in Kursk Oblast and likely preparing to attack Sudzha in the coming days.
- Ukraine continues to expand its domestic production of drones and air defense systems to support its war effort.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a list on March 10 of instructions for the Russian government and the Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation aimed at increasing social benefits to Russian veterans, which will likely put further strain on the Russian budget and economy.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 9, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 9, 2025, 6:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on March 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces are collapsing the northern part of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast following several days of intensified Russian activity in the area. Geolocated footage published on March 8 indicates that Russian forces seized Novaya Sorochina (northwest of Sudzha), Malaya Loknya (just south of Novaya Sorochina), and Lebedevka (south of Malaya Loknya), and the fields between the settlements.[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) seized Malaya Loknya and that elements of the Russian 51st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) seized Lebedevka.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Pravda and Ivashkovshyi (both north of Sudzha) and positions along an unspecified area of the railway line between Malaya Loknya and Sudzha.[3] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz and 30th

Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) participated in the seizure of Kubatkin (north of Sudzha) and Pravda and that additional elements of the Russian 106th VDV Division are advancing into Kazachya Loknya (north of Sudzha) from Lebedevka.^[4] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops hold limited positions in Malaya Loknya, Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha), and Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha) but that most Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from positions in the northern part of the salient towards Kazachya Loknya and Sudzha.^[5] Russian milbloggers claimed that preparatory Russian efforts to destroy the bridges north and south of Sudzha have significantly complicated Ukraine's ability to withdraw back to Sudzha.^[6] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked near Malaya Loknya.^[7]

Russian forces reportedly advanced in Sudzha itself with support from North Korean forces. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced into the industrial area in northeastern Sudzha and that Russian forces maintain positions in the town along the east bank of the Sudzha River.^[8] One Russian milblogger claimed that some areas of the industrial zone are a contested "gray zone."^[9] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are attempting to advance into central Sudzha and crossed to the west bank of the Sudzha River in at least one place in the town.^[10] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced into Knyazhiy 1 and Knyazhiy 2 (both northwest of Sudzha) and the Zamoste Micraion in southeastern Sudzha.^[11] Ukrainian sources told the Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* on March 9 that up to two battalions of North Korean forces operating near Sudzha appear to be better trained and "acting more coherently."^[12]

Russian forces recently advanced just across the international border of the Kursk Oblast salient into Sumy Oblast and reportedly advanced south of Sudzha City. Geolocated footage published on March 8 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Novenke (northeast of Sumy City and just across the international border in Sumy Oblast).^[13] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces advanced to Melovoy (south of Sudzha) and Gogolevka (southwest of Sudzha).^[14] A Ukrainian soldier operating in Kursk Oblast stated that Russian forces advanced south of Sudzha due to support from North Korean forces and Russian forces' "massive" use of first-person view (FPV) drones with fiber optic cables.^[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked near the Sudzha border checkpoint (southwest of Sudzha along the H-07 highway) and that elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) attacked near Guyevo (south of Sudzha).^[16] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces counterattacked near Melovoy and Goncharovka (immediately west of Sudzha).^[17]

The temporal correlation between the suspension of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine and the start of Russia's collapse of the Ukrainian Kursk salient is noteworthy. Russia has been attempting to push Ukrainian forces from the salient in Kursk Oblast through slow, grinding advances since the incursion began in August 2024. Russia later deployed roughly 12,000 North Korean military personnel in October 2024 to assist in repelling the incursion, but Russian forces continued to make only gradual gains.^[18] The Trump administration suspended US intelligence sharing with Ukraine on March 5, although there continue to be conflicting reports about the details about the US suspension.^[19] Russian forces intensified offensive operations to expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast on March 6 and 7.^[20] A source reportedly affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence started reporting more rapid Russian advances in Kursk Oblast on March 5.^[21] A source in the Ukrainian government stated in a March 8 *Time* article that the US intelligence sharing suspension has impacted Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast the most.^[22] The Russian military has not previously prioritized the effort to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast over making further advances in eastern Ukraine despite concentrating a sufficient force grouping to do so in late 2024.^[23] A direct link between the suspension of US intelligence sharing and the start of the collapse of Ukraine's salient in Kursk Oblast is unclear, although Kremlin officials have recently announced their intention to take advantage of the suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing to "inflict maximum damage" to Ukrainian forces "on the ground" during the limited time frame before the possible future resumption of US intelligence sharing and military aid to Ukraine.^[24]

Reports about the extent of the suspension of US military aid to Ukraine continue to indicate that the suspension will likely affect Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russia. *Forbes* stated on March 7 that the Trump administration has halted US support for Ukraine's F-16 fighter jet radar jammers.^[25] The *Wall Street Journal* reported on March 8 that a source familiar with the matter stated that Ukraine is currently able to fire one artillery shell for every three that Russian forces fire – even with Ukraine's current supplies of US shells.^[26] The suspension of US support to Ukrainian F-16 radar jammers will likely hamper Ukraine's ability to continue to use the aircraft to defend against Russian strikes into Ukraine's rear.^[27] Ukrainian officials indicated in December 2024 that Ukrainian forces had been able to gain an artillery advantage of 1.5 to one or three-to-one in some areas of the front, and Russia's current artillery advantage over Ukraine will likely

continue to grow as Ukraine's stockpiles of US ammunition decrease further following the US suspension of military aid.

Ukraine's European allies continue to provide material and financial aid to Ukraine. French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu announced on March 8 that France will use accrued interest from frozen Russian assets to provide Ukraine with military aid worth 195 million euros (roughly \$211 million).[28] Lecornu noted that the funds will facilitate France's delivery of 155mm artillery shells and AASM Hammer missiles to Ukraine, which are compatible with Ukraine's French-supplied Mirage 2000 fighter jets. Lecornu added that France is accelerating the transfer of unspecified older armored fighting vehicles to Ukraine. Norway's Parliament agreed on March 6 to increase military aid to Ukraine to a total of 85 billion Norwegian kroner (roughly \$7.8 billion) in 2025 - an increase from Norway's November 2024 pledge to allocate roughly 35 billion Norwegian kroner (roughly \$3.2 billion). [29]

Ukraine's European partners may be able to independently supply commercially available satellite imagery to Ukraine amid the suspension of Ukraine's access to US portals with such imagery.

The *Financial Times* reported on March 8 that Anders Linder, the head of the international division of commercial satellite imagery supplier Maxar Technologies, stated that any of Maxar's commercial customers – including US allies and partners – can use the data that they purchase from Maxar "however they see fit," including by "sharing it with their allies, such as Ukraine." [30] *Politico* reported on March 7 that Maxar stated that the Trump administration had "decided to temporarily suspend Ukrainian accounts in G-EGD" - the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's (NGA) Global Enhanced GEOINT Delivery System, which is the main portal for accessing commercial imagery that the US government has purchased.[31] European states have reportedly been discussing ways to compensate for the intelligence that the US has stopped providing Ukraine.[32]

Russia continues to showcase its deepening relations with American adversaries despite ongoing bilateral talks between the United States and Russia. Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iran announced on March 9 the opening of their annual trilateral "Maritime Security Belt – 2025" naval exercise in Chabahar Port, Iran.[33] Iranian state-affiliated media outlet *Mehr News Agency* stated that the exercises will begin on March 11.[34] Russia, the PRC, and Iran conducted the exercise in 2019, 2022, 2023, and 2024, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that the objective of the exercise is to "ensure maritime security, combat piracy and terrorism at sea, and protect sea communications." [35] The PRC MoD claimed that the exercises are aimed at "deepening mutual trust and pragmatic cooperation between the armed forces of the three countries." [36]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are collapsing the northern part of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast following several days of intensified Russian activity in the area.
- The temporal correlation between the suspension of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine and the start of Russia's collapse of the Ukrainian Kursk salient is noteworthy.
- Reports about the extent of the suspension of US military aid to Ukraine continue to indicate that the suspension will likely affect Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russia.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to provide material and financial aid to Ukraine.
- Russia continues to showcase its deepening relations with American adversaries despite ongoing bilateral talks between the United States and Russia.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy and Kursk oblasts and near Siversk, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Robotyne.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 8, 2025](#)

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Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

The extent of the US suspension of intelligence sharing with Ukraine remains unclear. The *Washington Post* reported on March 7 that a statement by the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) noted that the NGA "temporarily suspended [Ukraine's] access" to the system that provides Ukraine with commercial satellite imagery that the United States has purchased. [1] Ukraine can reportedly still access imagery that it has purchased with its own accounts. A Ukrainian servicemember told the *Washington Post* that satellite service near Pokrovsk "simply disappeared" but that Ukrainian forces will "use [their] own plans." CNN reported on March 7 that two US defense officials stated that the United States is still sharing intelligence with Ukraine that can help Ukrainian

forces "defend" themselves but has "scaled back" the sharing of intelligence that Ukrainian forces could use for offensive targeting of Russian forces.[2] *Politico* reported on March 8 that a European official familiar with the intelligence capabilities of allies was "still puzzling" over the extent of the US intelligence sharing suspension and stated that European states may not be able to "bridge the gap."
[3] A source familiar with talks among the NATO allies about how to handle the US suspension reportedly stated that NATO members are not prohibited from sharing some US intelligence with Ukraine but that such sharing could be very limited as the NATO allies are trying to avoid "jeopardizing" their relationships with the United States or with each other. *Politico* reported that one NATO official stated that there is no pressure from the Trump administration to reduce or curtail allies' intelligence sharing or weapons deliveries to Ukraine.

Western and Ukrainian officials indicated that the US suspension of intelligence sharing is generating battlefield effects. *Time* reported on March 8 that five senior Western and Ukrainian officials and military officers stated that the suspension of US intelligence to Ukraine has helped Russian forces advance on the battlefield.[4] An unspecified officer told *Time* that the suspension has left Ukrainian forces unable to use "some of their best weapons systems." A source in the Ukrainian government stated that the suspension has impacted Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast the most and that Ukrainian forces have lost the ability to detect Russian aircraft approaching Ukraine — compromising Ukrainian authorities' ability to warn civilians and military personnel about incoming Russian strikes. *CNN* reported on March 8 that a Ukrainian official stated that Ukrainian forces may run out of artillery shells by May or June 2025 — likely referring only to stockpiles of US-supplied ammunition.[5] A Ukrainian official also told *CNN* that Ukraine may exhaust its stockpile of Patriot air defense missiles, upon which Ukraine relies to shoot down Russian ballistic missiles, "in a matter of weeks." ISW cannot independently verify statements about the effects on the ground of the US intelligence sharing suspension. ISW continues to assess, however, that the complete suspension of US intelligence sharing would damage Ukraine's ability to use long-range strikes to generate battlefield effects and defend against Russian offensive operations and would allow Russian forces to intensify their drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian rear areas, affecting millions of Ukrainian civilians and the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).[6]

European states continue efforts to supplement intelligence sharing with Ukraine following the US suspension. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Christophe Lemonde stated on March 8 that European states discussed how to try to compensate for the intelligence that the United States "may stop providing" during that March 6 EU summit.[7] French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu stated on March 6 that France would continue to provide intelligence to Ukraine.[8] French outlet *Intelligence Online* reported on March 7 that Safran.AI, a subsidiary of French defense corporation Safran, will provide Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) with a data fusion platform to analyze French satellite imagery and that Safran.AI and the GUR signed the agreement at the end of February 2025 — before the US suspension of intelligence sharing with Ukraine.[9] Two Ukrainian officers told *Time* that some European intelligence agencies are trying to fill the gap following the US suspension of intelligence sharing to Ukraine but that it will take time for European authorities to deploy these capabilities and that Europe is unlikely to entirely make up for the US intelligence capability "any time soon."
[10]

Russian forces intensified their multi-directional campaign to eliminate the remaining Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on March 7 and 8. Geolocated footage published on March 8 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha).
[11] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and 1427th Motorized Rifle Regiment (formed during the 2022 partial reserve call up) are advancing near Cherkasskoye Porechnoye.
[12] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian airborne (VDV) units seized Lebedevka (west of Sudzha), and another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized Kubatkin (north of Sudzha) and advanced up to eight kilometers into the Ukrainian salient.
[13] A Russian source claimed that fighting is ongoing along the Lebedevka-Kubatkin-Bondarevka line (northwest and east of Sudzha), but that the situation in this area is unclear.
[14]

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces, including elements of the 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division), seized Viktorovka and Nikolayevka and that elements of the 9th Motorized Rifle Regiment (18th Motorized Rifle Division, 11th AC, LMD) and 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are advancing near Malaya Loknya (all northwest of Sudzha).
[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are attacking Nikolskiy (northwest of Sudzha).
[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian and Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz units seized Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha) and that elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) are advancing west of Kurilovka (south of Sudzha).
[17] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces recently took advantage of an unsuccessful Ukrainian rotation in order to advance near

Sudzha, and an unnamed Ukrainian commander operating in Kursk Oblast told the *New York Post* that roughly eight to 10 Russian vehicles recently broke through Ukrainian positions near Sudzha and were able to swiftly advance — likely referring to recent Russian advances south of Sudzha between Kurilovka and Guyevo.[18]

Russian forces also began attacks on Sudzha itself on March 8. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Chechen "Aida" Spetsnaz Group, 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 11th VDV Brigade, "Veterany" Assault Detachment (Russian Volunteer Corps), and 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) are attacking near Sudzha.[19] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces attempted to covertly attack behind Ukrainian positions in Sudzha via an underground gas pipeline but issued contradictory claims about the outcome of the attack.[20] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are attacking central Sudzha and Sudzha's industrial zone.[21] Russian milbloggers reiterated that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in Sudzha and claimed that some Ukrainian forces are falling back to Sudzha from positions north of the town.[22]

Russian forces appear to be destroying bridges in Kursk Oblast and along the international border, likely as part of efforts to prevent Ukrainian forces from withdrawing from Kursk Oblast into Ukraine. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces destroyed a bridge north of Sudzha along the H-07 Sumy City-Sudzha highway (known as the R-200 highway in Russia) and that Russian forces are attempting to prevent Ukrainian forces from withdrawing to Sudzha.[23] Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 177th Naval Infantry Regiment destroyed a bridge over the Psel River between Myropillya, Sumy Oblast, and Gornal, Kursk Oblast in order to complicate Ukrainian logistics.[24] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are continuing to advance slowly in northern Sumy Oblast near Basivka and Novenke (both northeast of Sumy City) and that Russian shelling has interdicted the H-07 highway.[25] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces intend to interdict the H-07 to complicate Ukrainian logistics in Kursk Oblast and support Russian efforts to envelop the Ukrainian salient from the south.[26]

The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, announced the intensified Russian effort in Kursk Oblast on March 8.[27] Alaudinov credited elements of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz, "Veterany" Assault Detachment, 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, and 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment with conducting the main assaults. A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian military command ordered Russian Spetsnaz units to identify and destroy Ukrainian communications equipment in Kursk Oblast on the night of March 7 to 8 in order to complicate Ukraine's ability to defend against intensified Russian offensive operations.[28] Russian forces have been working to slowly eliminate the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast over the last seven months but have been struggling to make significant progress in recent months after retaking the western part of the salient in Fall 2024.[29] Russian forces may be attempting to exploit any immediate impacts that the suspension of US intelligence sharing and military aid is having on Ukraine's capabilities in Kursk Oblast. ISW has not observed reports of Ukrainian HIMARS or ATACMS strikes to support Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast on March 7 or 8, and Ukrainian forces may be struggling to leverage these systems amid the pause in US intelligence sharing.[30]

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian rear and near rear areas on the night of March 7 and 8 and during the day on March 8, and Ukrainian forces notably did not shoot down any Russian ballistic missiles. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two Iskander-M/Kn-23 ballistic missiles and one Iskander-K cruise missile from Rostov Oblast and 145 Shahed and decoy drones from the directions of Kursk and Bryansk cities; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea on the night of March 7 to 8.[31] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down the Iskander-K cruise missiles and 79 drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, and Odessa oblasts and that 54 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. The Ukrainian Air Forces notably did not report that Ukrainian forces shot down the two ballistic missiles. Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strikes damaged civilian and energy infrastructure in Donetsk, Poltava, Kharkiv, Sumy, Zaporizhia, and Odesa oblasts.[32] Ukraine's largest private energy company, DTEK, noted on March 8 that Russian forces have struck DTEK energy facilities in Odesa City seven times in the past three weeks.[33] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces conducted a large-scale strike against Dobropillya, Donetsk Oblast (north of Pokrovsk) overnight with Iskander-M ballistic missiles, Tornado-S MLRS, and Shahed drones, killing 11 people and injuring at least 50.[34] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Russian forces struck Dobropillya a second time after Ukrainian rescue workers arrived on the scene following the initial strike.[35] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on the evening of March 8 that Russian forces conducted a strike, likely with Iskander-M ballistic missiles, against Bila Krynytsya, Kherson Oblast (northeast of Kherson City) and Novoselivka (possibly referring to Novoselivka, Mykolaiv Oblast

roughly 65 kilometers northwest of Bila Krynytsya).[36] ISW continues to assess that Russia will likely take advantage of the suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine to intensify its long-range strike campaign and deplete Ukrainian air defense missiles, particularly Patriot missiles that are vital to Ukraine's defense against ballistic missiles.[37]

The Kremlin continues to promote the false narrative that European Union (EU) member states and Ukraine seek to protract and escalate the war in Ukraine in order to distract from Russia's own long-term preparations for a war with the West. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova responded on March 7 to the March 6 EU summit by characterizing EU initiatives to increase military spending and financial aid to Ukraine as "deliberately fueling" escalation between the West and Russia and described the EU as a "militarized union" that is "obsessed" with inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia.[38] Zakharova claimed that the EU is playing "dangerous geopolitical games" and is "delaying" the possibility of negotiations to end the war. Zakharova's comments ignore an ongoing Kremlin effort to rally domestic support for the war in Ukraine and justify Russia's long-term efforts to militarize Russian society by claiming that Russia is fighting a proxy war with the West in Ukraine and must prepare for a future war with the West.[39]

Russia's efforts to strengthen its force grouping in Belarus, expand its military capabilities, and militarize its society in the long term reflect Russia's preparations for a potential future war with NATO. Russia deployed several S-300 air defense systems to Belarus in late August 2021 and Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) forces to Belarus in September 2021 and has continued to build out its force presence in Belarus over the last three years.[40] Russia and Belarus have continually used the Union State Treaty to deepen their bilateral military agreements.[41] Russia updated its nuclear doctrine in November 2024 to expand its nuclear umbrella to encompass Belarus and explicitly stated that Russia might employ tactical nuclear weapons located in Belarus in the event of aggression against Belarus. [42]

Russia is engaged in significant force restructuring, military industrial, and hybrid war efforts that underline Russia's efforts to prepare for and possibly initiate a future conflict with the West. Former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced in March 2023 that Russia would create 14 new military divisions, demonstrating Russia's clear intention to expand its military in the coming years.[43] Russia is attempting to build out its long-term warfighting capabilities by expanding and nationalizing its defense industrial base (DIB).[44] Various European law enforcement agencies and authorities have identified Russia's ongoing hybrid warfare efforts across Europe for the better part of a decade, including reports that Russia forced several commercial aircraft to turn back after targeting the aircraft with GPS jamming devices in April 2024.[45] The Kremlin is likely advancing this narrative as part of its efforts to exacerbate tensions between the United States and Europe and undermine the wider Western alliance supporting Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 8 that Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, and Deputy Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Colonel Pavlo Palisa will participate in the US-Ukrainian talks on March 11 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.[46] Zelensky confirmed that he will meet with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman on March 10 before the US-Ukrainian talks. Zelensky stated that Ukraine is "fully committed" to constructive dialogue and has been seeking peace since the start of the war.

Key Takeaways:

- The extent of the US suspension of intelligence sharing with Ukraine remains unclear.
- Western and Ukrainian officials indicated that the US suspension of intelligence sharing is generating battlefield effects.
- European states continue efforts to supplement intelligence sharing with Ukraine following the US suspension.
- Russian forces intensified their multi-directional campaign to eliminate the remaining Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on March 7 and 8.
- Russian forces appear to be destroying bridges in Kursk Oblast and along the international border, likely as part of efforts to prevent Ukrainian forces from withdrawing from Kursk Oblast into Ukraine.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, announced the intensified Russian effort in Kursk Oblast on March 8.
- Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian rear and near rear areas on the night of March 7 and 8 and during the day on March 8, and Ukrainian forces notably did not shoot down any Russian ballistic missiles.

- The Kremlin continues to promote the false narrative that European Union (EU) member states and Ukraine seek to protract and escalate the war in Ukraine in order to distract from Russia's own long-term preparations for a war with the West.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 8 that Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, and Deputy Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Colonel Pavlo Palisa will participate in the US-Ukrainian talks on March 11 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 7, 2025

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 7, 2025, 9:00pm ET

Russian forces conducted one of the largest ever missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 6 to 7 as Russian forces continue to adapt strike packages to overwhelm Ukraine's air defense umbrella by increasing the total number of Shahed and decoy drones in each strike. Russian forces launched the largest combined strike package against Ukraine since November 2024 on the night of March 6 to 7.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 67 missiles including 35 Kh-101/Kh-55 cruise missiles, eight Kalibr cruise missiles, three Iskander-M/Kn-23 ballistic missiles, four S-300 air defense missiles, eight Kh-59/69 cruise missiles, and 194 Shahed and decoy drones.[2] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 25 Kh-101/Kh-55 cruise missiles, all eight Kalibr cruise missiles, one Kh-59/69 cruise missile, and 100 Shahed and decoy drones and that 86 decoy drones and up to 10 missiles did not reach their targets, likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference.

The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Ukrainian forces downed Russian targets using F-16 and Mirage-2000 aircraft and that this was the first instance of Ukrainian forces using Mirage-2000s, which arrived one month ago, to defend against Russian strikes. The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Russian forces targeted Ukrainian gas production facilities during the strike.[3] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other official Ukrainian sources stated that Russian strikes damaged energy facilities in Odesa, Poltava, Chernihiv, and Ternopil oblasts.[4] Ternopil Oblast Military Administration reported that two Russian missiles struck a critical infrastructure facility, causing a fire.[5] Ukraine's largest private energy company DTEK stated that the strikes damaged an energy facility in Odesa Oblast.[6]

Russian forces began increasing the number of Shahed and decoy drones in strike packages in Fall 2024, likely to adapt to successful Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) innovations. ISW observed reports that Russian forces began launching between 80 and 100 (or more) Shahed and decoy drones as part of their larger strike packages in October and November 2024, and reports indicate that Russia has increased the production of Shahed drone airframes while continuing to rely on Iranian or Chinese imports for other drone components in December 2024.[7] Russia has likely leveraged the increased production of Shahed drones to increase the total number of drones launched in each strike package. Russian forces launched an average 83.4 drones per strike package in January 2025, an average of 139.3 drones per strike package in February 2024, and an average of 128.8 drones per strike package from March 1 through 7. Russian forces have only sporadically included missiles in the January, February, and March 2025 strike packages, and the 67 missiles launched in the March 6 to 7 strike series is a larger amount than in previous missile strikes this year. Russian forces likely increased the combined number of Iskander-M/KN-23 ballistic missiles and Kh-101/Kh-55 cruise missiles in the March 6 to 7 strike packages to inflict maximum damage on select targets in Ukraine while using the large number of Shahed drones, decoy drones, and Kalibr cruise missiles to detect and overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses and mobile fire groups.

Russia will likely take advantage of the suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine to intensify its long-range strike campaign and deplete Ukrainian air defense missiles. US intelligence has contributed to Ukraine's early warning system against Russian strikes and its suspension will likely impact Ukraine's ability to rapidly respond to adapting Russian strike packages.[8] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) recently reported that Russia is modernizing and increasing its production of Shahed-136 drones and producing a new Geran-3 drone variant.[9] Russian forces will likely attempt to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems by increasing

the number of Shahed and decoy drones per strike package in addition to increasing the number of missiles in select strike packages to destroy Ukrainian energy and defense industrial base (DIB) infrastructure. Russia also likely intends to force Ukraine into quickly depleting its supply of Patriot air defense interceptors - which Ukraine relies on to defend against Russian ballistic missiles - during the pause in US military aid and intelligence sharing to maximize the damage of subsequent strikes. **Ukrainian forces will likely have to be more selective in intercepting strikes as their stock of interceptors decreases with no resupply on the horizon, and successful Russian strikes against Ukrainian energy facilities will likely have lasting effects on Ukraine's ability to generate power for DIB and civilian use.**

Russian forces are further intensifying offensive operations in select frontline areas likely in order to capitalize on any immediate and longer-term battlefield impacts of the cessation of US aid to Ukraine. Russian forces have intensified offensive operations in the Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Velyka Novosilka direction in recent weeks and continue efforts to expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast and seize Pokrovsk in Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces previously leveraged Ukrainian materiel shortages prompted by a delay in US aid in Spring 2024 to make significant advances in Donetsk Oblast and launch an offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast, and the Kremlin likely intends to exploit expected Ukrainian materiel shortages to make additional gains if the suspension of US military assistance persists.[10]

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev stated on March 5 that US weapons supplies to Ukraine will "most likely resume" but that Russia's "main task" remains "inflicting maximum damage" on Ukraine "on the ground" during this limited window.[11] Russian forces appear to be further intensifying offensive operations against Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast and in the Chasiv Yar direction and likely intend to exploit the near-term impacts of the cutting of US aid, particularly intelligence sharing, to accomplish Russian operational objectives in these areas.

Russian forces recently advanced into northern Sumy Oblast for the first time since 2022 – when Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces from significant swathes of Ukrainian territory following the initial months of Russian advances. Russian forces likely intend to leverage limited advances into Sumy Oblast to completely expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast among other objectives. Geolocated footage published on March 7 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Basivka (northeast of Sumy City) just across the international border in Sumy Oblast.[12] Russian forces marginally advanced into northern Sumy Oblast near Zhuravka (northwest of Badivka) in mid-January 2025 as part of their efforts to bypass Nikolayev-Darino (east of Sudzha) from the south and have continued to operate in the area over the last six weeks.[13] Russian milbloggers recently claimed that Russian forces seized Basivka and Novenke (north of Basivka), and Ukrainian sources stated on March 7 that Russian forces have been gradually advancing in the area in recent weeks.[14] A Ukrainian source reportedly affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence stated on March 7 that Russian forces are concentrating forces in Novenke, attempting to advance towards Basivka, and attacking the Sumy City-Sudzha H-07 highway near Yunakivka (south of Basivka).[15] Russian forces are currently six kilometers from the H-07 highway and nine kilometers from Yunkivka at their furthest point of advance in northern Sumy Oblast and will have to identify or establish usable crossings over the Loknya River if they intend to advance directly southeast towards the highway from the Basivka area.

The Russian military command has likely ordered Russian forces to cut the H-07 highway in order to complicate Ukrainian logistics in the Kursk salient and as part of a longer-term Russian effort to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Kursk Oblast under the threat of envelopment. Russian forces reportedly made limited advances into Sumy Oblast south of Plekhovo (southeast of Sudzha) in early January 2025, and Russian forces may be attempting to advance along the southern flank of the Ukrainian salient and interdict Ukrainian egress routes from Kursk Oblast from the east and west.[16] Russian forces likely intend to cut Ukraine's main obvious egress route along the H-07 and force the Ukrainian military to withdraw from the Kursk salient to Ukraine via fields and smaller roads. Russian forces are likely also aiming to complicate Ukrainian logistics and troop redeployments to Kursk Oblast by interdicting the H-07 highway.

Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and 83rd Airborne (VDV) Brigade are reportedly conducting the attacks near Zhuravka, Novenke, and Basivka and additional elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade are reportedly operating near Plekhovo.[17] The Russian military command may have tasked these relatively more elite units to lead Russian efforts to envelop the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast from the south. Russian forces would have to close a gap of roughly 35 kilometers in order to envelop Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast, and this operation will likely be difficult should Ukrainian forces choose to defend the highway to support their remaining salient in Kursk Oblast. Russian forces are unlikely to conduct a significant offensive operation further towards Sumy City as long as Ukrainian forces hold positions in Kursk Oblast, however.

Russian forces also recently intensified offensive operations aimed at seizing Chasiv Yar and attacking Kostyantynivka – the southernmost settlement of Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on March 6 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along the railway line and Chekhova Street in southwestern Chasiv Yar during a reduced battalion-sized mechanized assault in the area.[18] The Ukrainian brigade that repelled the assault stated that Russian forces attacked in a single column of 25 armored vehicles and that Ukrainian forces damaged and destroyed 16 of the vehicles.[19] The brigade reported that Ukrainian forces damaged several of the Russian armored vehicles at the front of the column, causing a "jam" as Russian forces crossed the Siverskyi Donets Donbas canal and forcing Russian forces to retreat under Ukrainian shelling and drone strikes. The officer of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Chasiv Yar direction reported on March 6 that elements of the Russian 98th VDV Division conducted the mechanized assault.[20] Ukrainian Luhansk Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Dmytro Zaporozhets stated on March 7 that Russian forces attacked from two directions and that one Russian armored group unsuccessfully attempted to advance near the Avanhard Stadium in central Chasiv Yar.[21] Zaporozhets reported that the Russian military command ordered Russian forces in the area to seize Chasiv Yar by March 1, 2025 and assessed that Russian forces may undertake increasingly desperate attacks in the coming days and weeks.

The March 6 Russian mechanized assault is part of an ongoing Russian effort to seize and break out of Chasiv Yar, advance on the northeastern outskirts of Kostyantynivka, and pressure Ukraine's "fortress belt" – a 50-kilometer-long line of four major cities that forms the backbone of Ukraine's defenses in Donetsk Oblast.[22] ISW previously assessed that a multi-axis campaign against Ukraine's "fortress belt" would take Russian forces several years to complete, but this assessment is highly dependent on the provision of Western aid.[23] **Any long-term pauses or the cessation of US aid to Ukraine will likely significantly impact Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian advances and frontline strikes in the Kostyantynivka direction and will advantage Russian offensive operations along the entire frontline.**

Russian officials continue to explicitly reject making any concessions in future peace negotiations or accepting any US, European, or Ukrainian peace proposals. Bloomberg, citing people familiar with the matter in Moscow, reported on March 7 that Russian officials told US officials in a bilateral meeting in Riyadh on February 18 that "Russia is willing to discuss a temporary truce in Ukraine provided there is progress toward a final peace settlement."[24] Bloomberg, citing those familiar with the issue, reported that Russia will insist on establishing a clear understanding of the principles and parameters of an eventual peacekeeping mission as part of the final peace accord.

Russian officials have since repeatedly and explicitly articulated Russia's unwavering demand that Ukraine concede to Moscow's pre-war demands – showcasing Russia's long-standing two-fold effort to portray itself as open to negotiations while remaining unwilling to make concessions in future negotiations with the United States, Ukraine, and Europe.[25] Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on March 6 that Russia does not intend to "give in to anyone" or make any compromises in future peace negotiations, and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova rejected the possibility of a negotiated ceasefire and the deployment of European troops to Ukraine on March 6 and claimed that Russia considers any proposal that gives Ukraine a "respite" along the frontline is unacceptable.[26] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February that "a direct military conflict between NATO and Russia will be inevitable if Western troops are sent to Ukraine."^[27] Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Andrei Kelin stated in an interview published on March 6 that Russia's territorial advances in Ukraine "should be recognized" as part of any peace deal and that Ukraine should be "a neutral, non-nuclear state," underscoring Russia's ongoing demands for regime change and de-militarization in Ukraine.[28] Russia violated the agreement under which Ukraine returned its Soviet-era nuclear weapons stockpile to Russia and became a nuclear-free state by invading in 2014 and again in 2022. That treaty obliged Russia to respect Ukraine's pre-2014 borders and to refrain from any sort of coercion against Ukraine.[29]

Lithuania's intelligence services assessed that Russia may have the capabilities to conduct a limited campaign against one or several NATO countries within three to five years, an assessment that is consistent with ISW's assessments about Russian efforts to restructure and prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term. The Lithuanian State Security Service (VSD) and Second Department of Operational Services (AOTD) published a declassified National Threat Assessment on March 6 and assessed that Russia's further development of military capabilities may encourage Russian leadership to use military force if Russian officials calculate that the NATO alliance is sufficiently ill-equipped to react decisively such that Russia could localize an attack on a NATO member state and obtain a swift and decisive victory.^[30] The VSD and AOTD assessed that a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine is unlikely in the short term as Russia's main objective to subjugate Ukraine has not changed. The VSD and AOTD assessed that Russia has enough domestic political support to continue its war in Ukraine for "years."

Lithuania's assessment largely coheres with ISW's long-standing assessment that Russia is uninterested in a peace agreement to end the war in Ukraine in the near-term and Western estimates for the timeline of a Russian attack on a NATO member state correlate closely with ongoing Western sanctions limiting Russia's defense industrial capabilities. Any effort by Western powers to alleviate sanctions pressure on the Russian regime will accelerate Russia's capacity to optimize its military and further embolden Russian leadership, as Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) remains constrained by financial mechanisms in the medium- to long-term.

The United Kingdom (UK) issued Ukraine's first tranche of revenue generated from frozen Russian assets. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal reported on March 7 that the UK issued Ukraine the first tranche of funds with revenue generated from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets worth nearly \$1 billion.[31] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine will use the funds to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted one of the largest ever missile and drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of March 6 to 7 as Russian forces continue to adapt strike packages to overwhelm Ukraine's air defense umbrella by increasing the total number of Shahed and decoy drones in each strike.
- Russian forces began increasing the number of Shahed and decoy drones in strike packages in Fall 2024, likely to adapt to successful Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) innovations.
- Russia will likely take advantage of the suspension of US military aid to and intelligence sharing with Ukraine to intensify its long-range strike campaign and deplete Ukrainian air defense missiles.
- Russian forces are further intensifying offensive operations in select frontline areas likely in order to capitalize on any immediate and longer-term battlefield impacts of the cessation of US aid to Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced into northern Sumy Oblast for the first time since 2022 – when Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces from significant swathes of Ukrainian territory following the initial months of Russian advances. Russian forces likely intend to leverage limited advances into Sumy Oblast to completely expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast among other objectives.
- Russian forces also recently intensified offensive operations aimed at seizing Chasiv Yar and attacking Kostyantynivka – the southernmost settlement of Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian officials continue to explicitly reject making any concessions in future peace negotiations or accepting any US, European, or Ukrainian peace proposals.
- Lithuania's intelligence services assessed that Russia may have the capabilities to conduct a limited campaign against one or several NATO countries within three to five years, an assessment that is consistent with ISW's assessments about Russian efforts to restructure and prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term.
- The United Kingdom (UK) issued Ukraine's first tranche of revenue generated from frozen Russian assets. Russian forces recently advanced in Sumy Oblast and near Borova, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- The Kremlin continues to leverage its "Time of Heroes" program to fill government positions with veterans of its war in Ukraine as part of a long-term effort to militarize Russian society and form a new cadre of loyal Russian officials.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 6, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 6, 2025, 8:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on March 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Kremlin officials explicitly rejected making any concessions in future peace negotiations or accepting any US, European, or Ukrainian peace

proposals and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) rejected the possibility of a negotiated ceasefire on March 6. Putin stated during a visit to the Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation's Moscow branch on March 6 that Russia does not intend to "give in to anyone" or make any compromises in future peace negotiations.[1] Putin stated that Russia must choose a peace option that best suits Russia and will ensure peace in the long-term. Putin noted that Russian societal unity is critical for Russian victory in Ukraine.[2] Putin alluded to the Russian Revolution, noted that Russian society collapsed during the First World War, and urged Russians to maintain support and unity as the war continues. Putin stated that Russia "will not give up" its "own" territory in future peace negotiations — likely referring to illegally annexed territory in occupied Ukraine.[3] The Kremlin launched the Defenders of the Fatherland State Fund in April 2023 to oversee social support for veterans, elevate veterans within Russian society, and monopolize control over veterans activities in Russia.[4] Putin has also declared 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" — underlining Putin's efforts to prioritize militarizing Russian society and rallying support behind Russia's war effort in Ukraine in 2025.[5]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed during a press conference on March 6 that Russia will reject any proposals to station European peacekeeping forces in Ukraine to enforce a future ceasefire agreement.[6] Lavrov stated that Russia sees "no room for compromise" on this issue and will consider the presence of a European peacekeeping force in Ukraine as akin to a NATO deployment in Ukraine. Lavrov stated that Russia will consider the deployment of any European peacekeepers to Ukraine as the "direct, official, undisguised involvement of NATO countries" in the war and that Russia will reject such a deployment. Russian MFA Spokesperson Maria Zakharova rejected the possibility of a negotiated ceasefire and the deployment of European troops to Ukraine on March 6 and claimed that Russia considers any proposal that gives Ukraine a "respite" along the frontline as unacceptable. [7] Lavrov and Zakharova are explicitly rejecting US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's February 12 suggestion that European and non-European countries should station troops in Ukraine to enforce any future peace agreement.[8]

Lavrov said that any peace agreement must account for the alleged "root causes" of the war in Ukraine, including guarantees that NATO will stop expanding, trying to "swallow" Ukraine, and developing threats against Russia.[9] Lavrov claimed that US President Donald Trump "understands" the need to eliminate these "root causes" while European countries are attempting to ignore the "root causes." Lavrov previously identified the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[10] Russian officials often invoke the concept of "root causes" to allude to their demands for NATO to abandon its open-door policy and to blame the West and Ukraine for Putin's decision to invade Ukraine.

Russian officials will likely take advantage of the suspension of US military aid to and intelligence sharing with Ukraine to spread a longstanding Russian information operation meant to falsely portray Russian victory as inevitable. The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Main Military-Political Directorate Deputy Head and Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander, Major General Apti Alaudinov, stated on March 6 that Russia should consider conducting a full-scale mobilization, which would build up the Russian military to "at least a couple million [troops]."[11] Alaudinov added that "now is the time" when either "NATO will fall apart" and "[Russia] will destroy Europe" or Europe "can make peace" with Russia and claimed that "it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield."[12] Alaudinov is likely intensifying the false narrative of Russia's inevitable victory to scare the United States and Europe into making concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity at a time when the US has already severely limited its support for Ukraine. Alaudinov, who is the Deputy Head of a Russian MoD directorate responsible for disseminating propaganda within the Russian military, is also likely intensifying this false narrative to maximize Russian morale and drive Russian territorial gains while frontline dynamics are increasingly fluid due to the pause in US military aid.

The Kremlin welcomed a Trump administration official's recent comments mischaracterizing Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine as a "proxy war," and Russian media portrayed the statement as an admission that the United States is a participant in the war. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio characterized Russia's war in Ukraine as a "proxy war" between the United States and Russia in an interview with Fox News published on March 5.[13] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on March 6 that the Kremlin agrees with Rubio's characterization of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "proxy war."^[14] Russian state and pro-Kremlin media outlets portrayed Rubio as "admitting" that the United States is waging a proxy war against Russia through Ukraine, supporting the false Kremlin narrative and Putin's personal claims that the war in Ukraine is an existential war between the United States and Russia.^[15] Kremlin officials, including Putin, Lavrov, and Permanent Russian Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya, have consistently used this "proxy war" narrative to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine since the earliest months of the war in 2022.^[16] This narrative aims to falsely portray Ukraine as a puppet state that lacks sovereignty, justify

the war to Russian audiences, and discourage US and other Western support for Ukraine by stoking fears of escalation. The Kremlin and Russian state media likely aim to portray the Trump administration as conceding to the Kremlin and its false narrative ahead of future peace negotiations and bilateral talks.

US and Ukrainian delegations will conduct bilateral meetings in Saudi Arabia next week.

Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak stated on March 6 that he had a phone conversation with US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz to discuss the "next steps toward a just and lasting peace" and has scheduled a bilateral US-Ukrainian meeting in the near future.[17] Western media reported on March 6 that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, and Waltz will meet with a Ukrainian delegation led by Yermak next week. [18] Witkoff stated on March 6 that the US-Ukrainian bilateral meeting is intended to "get down a framework for a peace agreement and an initial ceasefire." [19] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 6 that he will meet with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman on March 10 after which his team will remain in Saudi Arabia to meet with US officials.[20]

US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg emphasized on March 6 that the early 2022 Istanbul protocols are not an "equitable framework" for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and stated that the US should "develop something entirely new." [21] Special Envoy Witkoff previously referred to the Istanbul protocols as "guideposts" for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on February 23.[22] Russian President Vladimir Putin and other senior Russian officials have repeatedly identified the 2022 peace negotiations in Istanbul as their framework for future peace negotiations to "end" Putin's war in Ukraine on Russia's terms, as such a framework would force the West to concede all of Russia's long-standing demands and amount to Ukraine's total capitulation.[23] Russia's demands in the Istanbul protocols included banning Ukraine from joining any military blocs, including NATO; limiting the size of the Ukrainian military to 85,000 soldiers, 342 tanks, and 519 artillery systems; limiting the range of Ukrainian missiles to 40 kilometers (25 miles); prohibiting Ukraine from having any foreign-supplied weapons; and requiring Ukraine to terminate any agreements incompatible with "permanent neutrality." [24]

Ukrainian opposition politicians rejected the possibility of holding elections in Ukraine before the end of the war. Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko stated on March 6 that Ukraine should only hold presidential elections once martial law ends, and former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko stated that she also opposes holding elections during the war.[25] Poroshenko stated that Ukraine should hold elections as soon as it is constitutionally acceptable — roughly 180 days after the end of martial law — and Tymoshenko reiterated that Ukraine is committed to peace negotiations to end the war. The Ukrainian constitution bars the government from holding elections or amending the Ukrainian constitution in times of martial law, and the Ukrainian government legally cannot abolish martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine.[26] Kremlin officials have repeatedly called for Ukraine to hold elections and replace Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who Russia claims is "illegitimate." [27]

European countries continue to announce new military assistance packages and other measures to support the Ukrainian military. French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu announced on March 6 that France will continue to provide intelligence to Ukraine following the March 5 US suspension of intelligence sharing with Ukraine.[28] Lecornu stated that French President Emmanuel Macron instructed the French government to accelerate various military assistance packages to compensate for the lack of US military assistance to Ukraine.[29] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Macron on March 6 and discussed the need for additional and more substantive steps to end the war in Ukraine and protect all of Europe.[30] Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof announced on March 6 that the Netherlands will reserve a 3.5 billion euros (\$3.8 billion) fund for Ukraine in 2026, including 700 million euros (\$755 million) to invest in Ukrainian drones, and that the Netherlands could use these funds in 2025 if necessary.[31] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced a new 30-million-pound (\$38.6 million) contract with US-UK defense technology company Anduril UK to provide Ukraine with Altius 600m and Altius 700m strike drones.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Kremlin officials explicitly rejected making any concessions in future peace negotiations or accepting any US, European, or Ukrainian peace proposals and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) rejected the possibility of a negotiated ceasefire on March 6.**
- **Russian officials will likely take advantage of the suspension of US military aid to and intelligence sharing with Ukraine to spread a longstanding Russian information operation meant to falsely portray Russian victory as inevitable.**

- The Kremlin welcomed a Trump administration official's recent comments mischaracterizing Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine as a "proxy war," and Russian media portrayed the statement as an admission that the United States is a participant in the war.
- US and Ukrainian delegations will conduct bilateral meetings in Saudi Arabia next week.
- Ukrainian opposition politicians rejected the possibility of holding elections in Ukraine before the end of the war.
- European countries continue to announce new military assistance packages and other measures to support the Ukrainian military.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk direction and Russian forces recently advanced in the Kupyansk, Borova, Siversk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to assuage Russian fears about conscripts going to war amid continued reports that Russian military units are forcing conscripts to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 5, 2025

[Click here to read full report](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Daria Novikov, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

March 5, 2025, 6:40 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on March 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Trump administration suspended intelligence sharing with Ukraine, one of many demands the Kremlin has made of the US, Ukraine, and Ukraine's other supporters. Details about the US suspension of intelligence sharing with Ukraine vary in different reports, but the Trump administration has suspended some level of intelligence sharing with Ukraine with some reporting indicating that the suspension affected all intelligence sharing.^[1] Western media reported that the Trump administration specifically suspended the sharing of intelligence that Ukraine uses for early warning systems to protect against Russian long-range missile and drone strikes, for target designation for HIMARS Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) strikes, and for target designation for long-range strikes within Russia.^[2] British outlet *Daily Mail* reported that the United States also prohibited the United Kingdom from sharing US intelligence with Ukraine.^[3] The Kremlin has repeatedly insisted on an end to the provision of all foreign assistance to Ukraine as part of any peace agreement, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov March 4 specifically stated on March 4 that the United States provides Ukraine with intelligence data such as satellite reconnaissance data.^[4]

The suspension of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine will damage Ukraine's ability to defend itself against ongoing Russian attacks against military and civilian targets. Ukrainian forces have leveraged their ability to strike within Russia and destroy significant amounts of materiel in order to increase pressure on Russia. Ukrainian forces struck a Russian missile and ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast on the night of September 17 to 18, 2024, destroying two to three months of Russia's ammunition supply.^[5] The Toropets facility also stored Iskander missiles, Tochka-U ballistic missiles, glide bombs, and artillery ammunition.^[6] Ukrainian forces struck the Tikhoretsk Arsenal just north of Kamenny, Krasnodar Krai on the night of September 20 to 21, 2024, which at the time contained at least 2,000 tons of munitions, including munitions from North Korea.^[7] Russian forces previously leveraged their quantitative artillery ammunition advantage and glide bomb strikes to facilitate battlefield gains by destroying settlements before deploying infantry to attack the area — most notably near Avdiivka in February 2024 during delays in US military aid to Ukraine.^[8] Ukrainian strikes on Russian missile and ammunition storage facilities have previously relieved pressure on Ukrainian forces across the frontline by preventing Russian forces from leveraging their artillery advantage to secure gains. Ukrainian strikes against military targets in Russia also pushed Russian aviation operations further from Ukraine into Russia's rear areas, hindering Russia's ability to conduct glide bomb and missile strikes against Ukrainian frontline positions from Russian airspace.^[9] Ukraine's inability to conduct ATACMS and HIMARS strikes against Russian air defense systems within Russia and occupied Ukraine will likely impact how close to the frontline Russian pilots are willing to operate and expand Russia's ability to effectively use glide bombs against both frontline areas and near rear Ukrainian cities.^[10]

The suspension of all US intelligence sharing with Ukraine would also allow Russian forces to intensify their drone and missile strikes against the Ukrainian rear, affecting millions of

Ukrainian civilians and the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB). US intelligence has contributed to Ukraine's early warning system against Russian strikes against Ukrainian cities, allowing Ukrainian authorities and civilians to prepare once Russian forces launch missiles and drones.[11] The suspension of US intelligence on Russian strikes against the Ukrainian rear, coupled with the US suspension of supplies of Patriot air defense missiles that Ukraine relies upon to defend against Russian ballistic missiles, would have severe impacts on the safety of Ukrainian rear areas. [12]

Russian drone and missile strikes have heavily targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure and DIB.[13] The likely intensification of these strikes following the US suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing to Ukraine will hinder Ukraine's ongoing progress towards expanding its DIB to be able to supply the Ukrainian military with all of its materiel needs.[14] A self-sufficient Ukrainian DIB would allow Ukraine to defend itself over the long-term with dramatically reduced foreign military assistance, and it is in America's core national security interests that Ukraine be able to continue its efforts towards self-sufficiency.

The Trump administration has been applying considerable pressure on Ukraine, whose leaders continue to offer concessions and publicly declare their interest in achieving a lasting end to the war. These Trump administration policies are undermining the leverage that the United States needs to get Russian President Vladimir Putin to accept any peace agreement that is in the interests of the United States, Ukraine, and Europe. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 4 that "Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer." [15] Zelensky also offered to exchange Ukrainian and Russian prisoners of war (POWs), to ban missile and long-range drone strikes against energy and civilian infrastructure, and to reach an immediate truce in the Black Sea.[16] Zelensky has indicated several times — including in his February 28 Fox News interview — that he is willing to make concessions on territory, Ukraine's NATO membership, and his own tenure in office in order to secure a just and sustainable peace.[17] **Russian President Vladimir Putin and numerous Kremlin officials have, in contrast, offered no meaningful concessions. They continuously repeat demands that amount to complete Ukrainian capitulation as well as the rolling back of NATO from Eastern Europe.**[18]

Russia's war effort in Ukraine has brought about a series of materiel, manpower, and economic challenges for Moscow that will worsen in the coming months if Ukraine is able to sustain its defensive military operations.[19] The United States should leverage these Russian challenges in order to secure concessions necessary to achieve a just and sustainable peace. **US policies suspending military aid and intelligence sharing to Ukraine reduce the leverage US President Donald Trump's needs to achieve his stated policy objective of bringing about an end to the war in Ukraine on acceptable terms, a task that requires increasing pressure on Russia, not Ukraine.** [20]

Kremlin officials announced their intention of taking advantage of the suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing to make additional battlefield gains. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev stated on March 5 that US weapons supplies to Ukraine will "most likely resume" but that Russia's "main task" remains "inflicting maximum damage" on Ukraine "on the ground." [21] Medvedev's statement is consistent with ISW assessment that Russian forces will likely attempt to take advantage of the pause in US aid in order to make further gains in eastern and southern Ukraine to justify Russia's territorial claims to the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[22] Medvedev also indicated that Russia is aware that it may have a limited time frame in which to leverage the US suspension of aid to "inflict maximum damage" on Ukrainian forces. Russian forces exploited the previous suspension of US military aid in early 2024, including by trying to seize Kharkiv City in May 2024 before US military aid resumed flowing to Ukrainian forces on the frontline.[23]

Russian officials continue inaccurately to place the blame on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky — and not Russian President Vladimir Putin — for the lack of meaningful peace negotiations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov responded to a question about Zelensky's willingness to negotiate, claiming that Lavrov cannot "get into [Zelensky's] head" and that Zelensky "is not human." [24] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Maria Zakharova continued to claim that Zelensky's 2022 ban on negotiating with Russia is a prominent roadblock to negotiation progress — the latest in Kremlin efforts to portray Zelensky — not Putin — as unwilling to negotiate.[25] Both Zelensky and the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) have explicitly and publicly declared Ukraine's willingness to engage in good-faith negotiations and presented substantive ceasefire proposals — in stark contrast to the Kremlin.[26]

Kremlin officials continue to use business incentives to make further demands of the United States and to push the United States to de facto recognize Russia's annexation of Ukrainian

territory. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 4 that Russia is open to working with US companies, including in areas of occupied Ukraine.[27] Peskov questioned, however, how Russia could cooperate with US companies while the US continues to sanction Russia.[28] Peskov is likely setting conditions for Russia to demand that the United States remove its sanctions before Russia would conclude any of the economic cooperation deals that American and Russian delegations have discussed in recent meetings.[29] Peskov's inclusion of Russia's illegally annexed areas of Ukraine in potential future US-Russian economic cooperation deals is part of Russian efforts to coerce the United States into de facto recognizing these territories as Russian. Peskov's rhetoric mirrors the Kremlin's strategy of leveraging international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to legitimize Russian control over Ukrainian territories.[30] The Kremlin has used discussions with IAEA officials about the ZNPP to assert that the facility lies on Russian territory.[31]

Key Takeaways:

- The Trump administration suspended intelligence sharing with Ukraine, one of many demands the Kremlin has made of the US, Ukraine, and Ukraine's other supporters.
- The suspension of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine will damage Ukraine's ability to defend itself against ongoing Russian attacks against military and civilian targets.
- The suspension of all US intelligence sharing with Ukraine would also allow Russian forces to intensify their drone and missile strikes against the Ukrainian rear, affecting millions of Ukrainian civilians and the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).
- The Trump administration has been applying considerable pressure on Ukraine, whose leaders continue to offer concessions and publicly declare their interest in achieving a lasting end to the war. These Trump administration policies are undermining the leverage that the United States needs to get Russian President Vladimir Putin to accept any peace agreement that is in the interests of the United States, Ukraine, and Europe.
- Kremlin officials announced their intention of taking advantage of the suspension of US military aid and intelligence sharing to make additional battlefield gains.
- Russian officials continue inaccurately to place the blame on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky — and not Russian President Vladimir Putin — for the lack of meaningful peace negotiations.
- Kremlin officials continue to use business incentives to make further demands of the United States and to push the United States to de facto recognize Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Over 50,000 Russian servicemembers are reportedly listed as having abandoned their units and are absent without leave (AWOL) between February 2022 and mid-December 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 4, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Daria Novikov, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

March 4, 2025, 9:20pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on March 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US President Donald Trump ordered a pause on US military aid to Ukraine on March 3, suspending the delivery of critical warfighting materiel. An anonymous White House official told the *Wall Street Journal* on March 3 that the United States is "pausing and reviewing" military aid to Ukraine until Trump "determines that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is making a good-faith effort towards peace negotiations with Russia."^[1] The White House official did not provide clarification about what conditions the White House is expecting Zelensky to meet in order to resume aid.

The United States had been providing Ukraine with artillery ammunition, armored vehicles, towed howitzers, Patriot air defense batteries, and long-range rocket and missile systems such as HIMARS and ATACMS — many of which are sophisticated systems that only the United States can supply.^[2] Pauses in this aid will harm Ukraine's warfighting capabilities, although it will likely take from weeks to months for the suspension of US aid to affect the frontline.^[3] Western officials estimated in late February 2025 that Ukraine will be able to sustain its current pace of

operations until about mid-2025 (roughly June 2025) as long as the United States continues to provide the aid contracted under the Biden administration on the previously anticipated timelines.^[4] A Ukrainian official told CNN on March 4 following the suspension that Ukraine may run out of US-provided artillery shells by May or June 2025 but warned that Patriot air defense missiles could run out "in a matter of weeks."^[5] Ukraine relies heavily on US Patriot systems for its air defense umbrella to protect against Russian missile strikes against Ukraine's rear areas. The shortage and eventual lack of Patriot missiles is likely to have severe impacts on the safety of Ukraine's critical, industrial, and civilian infrastructure, as Ukraine's other supporters lack an analogous system that can protect against Russian missile strikes, particularly those including ballistic missiles.^[6] As Ukraine runs short on Patriot missiles, Kyiv will have to make difficult decisions about which population centers to prioritize in terms of air defense protection. If it runs out of Patriots entirely then Ukrainian cities will lie open to Russian ballistic missiles.

The frontline in Ukraine does not risk imminent collapse, but the effects of the US aid pause will become more acute over time. Two anonymous US officials told ABC News on March 3 that about 90 percent of the weapons that the United States committed to Ukraine through past Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) packages has already arrived in Ukraine, including munitions and anti-armor systems.^[7] ABC News reported that the remaining 10 percent of PDA equipment is still slated to arrive in Ukraine by August 2025 and that private weapons contracts between Ukraine and US companies - many of which Ukraine has already paid for — will likely facilitate at least a small flow of arms deliveries to Ukraine "for at least the next several years."^[8] The United States reportedly supplies about 30 percent of Ukraine's arsenal with Ukraine's European partners supplying another 30 percent and Ukraine itself supplying domestically supplies about 40 percent from domestic production according to the editor-in-chief of Ukrainian defense-focused outlet *Defense Express*, Oleh Katkov.^[9] Ukraine will continue to fight with the materiel it currently has, with the materiel European partners have given and will continue to provide, and with the materiel Ukraine itself produces. The Trump administration's aid pause will detrimentally impact Ukraine's ability to defend itself and pursue offensive operations at its current rate, but it will not collapse the front entirely in the coming months.

Russian forces will likely exploit expected Ukrainian materiel shortages if the suspension of US military assistance persists, as Russian forces did during the previous suspension of US military assistance in early 2024. Russian forces significantly increased their tempo of operations in the Avdiivka-Pokrovsk direction in early 2024 in order to take advantage of Ukrainian supply shortages.^[10] Ukrainian officials indicated that Russian forces had a roughly 20 to one artillery shell advantage and "overwhelming air superiority" over Ukrainian forces in this direction during the peak of the Ukrainian supply shortage in May and June 2024 and that these were the main factors enabling Russian forces' creeping and costly advances northwest and west of Avdiivka at the time.^[11] Russian forces also began offensive operations in May 2024 along the Belgorod-Kharkiv Oblast international border as part of efforts to seize Kharkiv City, likely as part of attempts to take advantage of delays in US aid disbursement and to advance before US military assistance reached Ukrainian forces on the frontline once US aid resumed.^[12] Russian forces are currently conducting active offensive operations in Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk oblasts, have recently intensified efforts in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and continue attempts to cross the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast.^[13] Russian forces will likely attempt to take advantage of the pause in US aid in order to make further gains in eastern and southern Ukraine in order to justify their territorial claims to the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.

The European Commission proposed a plan on March 4 that would enable EU member states to increase defense spending to support Ukraine and strengthen European security. European rearmament is vital for Europe's short- and long-term security, and Europe should pursue these efforts regardless of the status of US aid to Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced on March 4 the five-part ReArm Europe Plan that aims to help EU member states "quickly and significantly increase expenditures in defense capabilities."^[14] Von der Leyen stated that the EU is ready to significantly increase its defense spending in order to both "respond to the short-term urgency to act and to support Ukraine" and "to address the long-term need to take on much more responsibility for...European security." The first part of the ReArm Europe Plan calls for the EU to activate the "national escape clause" of the Stability and Growth Pact in order to allow EU member states to increase their defense spending without triggering the Excessive Deficit Procedure. The Stability and Growth Pact limits the budget deficits of EU members, and the activation of the "national escape clause" would allow EU states to maintain larger budget deficits than usual in order to increase their defense spending.^[15] Von der Leyen stated that should EU member states increase their defense spending by 1.5 percent of their GDPs on average, this would make close to 650 billion euros (about \$687 billion) available over four years. The second part of the plan would provide 150 billion euros (about \$159 billion) of loans to EU member states for defense investments, including in air and missile defense, artillery systems, missiles, drones, and anti-drone systems. Von der Leyen stated that EU member states will have to "pool demand and buy together" and that EU

states can "massively step up their support to Ukraine" with this equipment. The third part of the plan calls for the use of "the power of the EU budget" to direct additional funds to defense related investments. Von der Leyen stated that the last two parts of the proposed plan aim to mobilize private capital by accelerating the Savings and Investment Union and through the European Investment Bank. Von der Leyen concluded that the ReArm Europe plan could "mobilize" close to 800 billion euros (about \$849 billion).

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on March 4 that he spoke with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, and German Christian Democratic Union party leader Friedrich Merz about support for Ukraine.^[16] Zelensky highlighted that the European Commission's defense funding will support additional air defense systems and missiles for Ukraine and create a "solid additional foundation" for Ukrainian efforts to end the war. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), citing European officials, reported on February 25 that EU countries, the UK, and Norway provided Ukraine with military assistance worth approximately \$25 billion in 2024 and that this was more than the United States sent to Ukraine in 2024.^[17]

Ukraine has significantly expanded its defense industrial production capabilities throughout the war in an effort to eventually meet its military needs independently, but Ukraine's ability to become self-sufficient in the long-term is contingent on continued support from partner states in the short- and medium-term. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on March 4 that Ukraine currently domestically produces about 33 percent of the weapons Ukraine uses on the battlefield and currently produces \$35 billion worth of weapons and ammunition annually — exceeding the production capabilities of many of Ukraine's partners.^[18] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine should be able to meet at least 50 percent of its total military needs by the end of 2025, with Ukraine meeting all of its artillery system needs and much of its 80mm and 120mm mortar shell and 105mm, 122mm, and 155mm artillery shell requirements. Shmyhal stated that Ukraine has significantly increased its defense production since 2023 - tripling its artillery production, increasing its ammunition production by a factor of 2.5, doubling its production of anti-tank weapons, and increasing its production of armored personnel carriers fivefold. Shmyhal emphasized that Ukraine currently domestically produces nearly all of the air-, sea-, and ground-based drones that Ukrainian forces use in combat operations. Shmyhal previously stated that Ukraine increased its drone production tenfold in 2024 and invested an additional 7.9 billion hryvnia (about \$189 million) to boost drone production in 2025.^[19] Shmyhal stated that Ukrainian state-owned defense enterprise manager Ukrboronprom has grown to become one of the 50 most productive defense companies in the world.^[20] Shmyhal credited European investments in the Ukrainian defense industry for much of Ukraine's defense industrial growth, especially the Danish initiative for joint defense production initiatives.^[21] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine attracted nearly \$1 billion in European defense investments in 2024, including \$351 million from Denmark, \$436 million from the EU, \$67 million from the UK, and \$45 million from Norway. Shmyhal stated that Ukraine has created a number of joint defense enterprises with European states, especially with the UK and Germany. Shmyhal stated that at least three international defense companies have provided licenses for Ukraine to start producing NATO- and EU-standard weapons within Ukraine. Ukraine has dramatically built out its defense industrial base (DIB) since 2023 but still requires investments and time to reach full self-sufficiency.^[22] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine's prospects for sustaining its military needs in the future with limited foreign assistance are excellent.^[23] Ukraine's DIB expansion continues to rely on monetary investment from partner states, and continued military assistance from partners gives Ukraine the time to continue to develop its DIB towards self-sufficiency.

The Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on March 4 Ukraine's commitment to work with the Trump Administration to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace in Ukraine. Verkhovna Rada leadership and parliamentary factions and groups issued a joint statement welcoming Trump's efforts to begin peace negotiations and reiterating the need to develop a strategic partnership with the United States through the US-Ukraine mineral deal.^[24] Zelensky stated that Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table "as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer."^[25] Zelensky added that he and his administration are ready to "work under President Trump's strong leadership" to achieve a lasting peace and proposed a partial ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia to advance a possible peace settlement. Zelensky offered for Ukraine and Russia to release prisoners of war (POWs), to ban missile and long-range drone strikes against energy and civilian infrastructure, and to reach an immediate truce in the Black Sea. Zelensky thanked the United States for its support of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, expressed regret over the meeting with Trump at the White House on February 28 that "did not go the way it was supposed to," and reiterated Ukraine's readiness to sign the mineral deal. **Russian President Vladimir Putin notably has not made any ceasefire offers since Trump assumed office on January 20. Kremlin officials instead formally rejected the possibility of a ceasefire on any terms other than Ukraine's and the West's complete capitulation in late February 2025.**^[26]

The high casualties in Russia's war in Ukraine are the direct result of Putin's determination to conquer all of Ukraine using horrific and costly tactics, and Putin can dramatically reduce this killing any time he chooses. Russian forces have been conducting highly attritional, infantry-led assaults along the frontline that result in high losses but only return disproportionately limited territorial gains.[27] Putin claimed in June 2024 that Russia is unable to secure a rapid victory in the war and so Russian forces are instead pursuing a more gradual victory.[28] Putin claimed at the time that Russian forces are trying to "squeeze" Ukrainian forces out "of those territories that should be under Russian control." Putin is committed to gradual, creeping gains at the expense of high losses and likely believes that these limited gains can set conditions over time for Russia to demand more Ukrainian territory during future peace negotiations or allow him to conquer Ukraine entirely. Putin's desire to continue this deadly approach is driving the high loss rates on the battlefield. Russia is also conducting nightly drone and missile strikes against rear Ukrainian areas that are killing civilians and destroying and damaging Ukrainian civilian and energy infrastructure – further increasing the death toll in the war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin continues to express cautious optimism about the pausing of US military aid to Ukraine and advanced several narratives as part of efforts to impose additional demands on the United States. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov welcomed the US military aid pause in a statement to Kremlin propagandist Pavel Zarubin on March 4, noting that Russia can hope "without indulging in excessive optimism" that the military aid suspension will "incline" the Ukrainian government towards "peace."^[29] Peskov deliberately misrepresented the Kremlin's desired outcome of the war — a full Ukrainian surrender brought on by the end of Western military aid to Ukraine — as a "peaceful" outcome. Peskov also remarked that the United States provides Ukraine with intelligence data, such as satellite reconnaissance data - likely in an attempt to set informational conditions for the Kremlin to demand that the United States stop providing intelligence support to Ukraine as a precondition for a future "peaceful settlement." Peskov additionally demanded that the United States remove sanctions on Russia as a precondition for improving US-Russia bilateral relations.^[30] Russian officials and propagandists also continued to falsely frame increased European support for Ukraine as an obstacle to a peaceful resolution to the war.^[31] On March 3, Peskov framed European support for Ukraine as the emergence of a European "pro-war party," and the Kremlin is likely setting informational conditions to demand that the United States cease arms sales to Europe that support Ukraine's defense.^[32] The Kremlin's rhetoric aims to confuse and mislead US policymakers into committing the United States and Ukraine to make additional preemptive concessions under the guise of setting preconditions for "peace," while the Kremlin continues to avoid making any concessions of its own.

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump ordered a pause on US military aid to Ukraine on March 3, suspending the delivery of critical warfighting materiel.
- The United States had been providing Ukraine with artillery ammunition, armored vehicles, towed howitzers, Patriot air defense batteries, and long-range rocket and missile systems such as HIMARS and ATACMS — many of which are sophisticated systems that only the United States can supply.
- The frontline in Ukraine does not risk imminent collapse, but the effects of the US aid pause will become more acute over time.
- The European Commission proposed a plan on March 4 that would enable EU member states to increase defense spending to support Ukraine and strengthen European security. European rearmament is vital for Europe's short- and long-term security, and Europe should pursue these efforts regardless of the status of US aid to Ukraine.
- Ukraine has significantly expanded its defense industrial production capabilities throughout the war in an effort to eventually meet its military needs independently, but Ukraine's ability to become self-sufficient in the long-term is contingent on continued support from partner states in the short- and medium-term.
- The Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on March 4 Ukraine's commitment to work with the Trump Administration to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace in Ukraine.
- The high casualties in Russia's war in Ukraine are the direct result of Putin's determination to conquer all of Ukraine using horrific and costly tactics, and Putin can dramatically reduce this killing any time he chooses.
- The Kremlin continues to express cautious optimism about the pausing of US military aid to Ukraine and advanced several narratives as part of efforts to impose additional demands on the United States.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, and Pokrovsk and in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly developing a plan to partially demobilize a limited number of mobilized personnel no earlier than July 2025, likely to

address growing societal backlash over the lack of rotations and demobilization of Russian mobilized troops for over two years.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 3, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mapes, Nicole Volkov, Daria Novikov, and George Barros

March 3, 2025, 6:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:10pm ET on March 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian military intelligence indicated that about 620,000 Russian soldiers are operating in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, an increase of about 40,000 personnel compared to late 2024.

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Head Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated in an interview with *RBK-Ukraine* published on March 3 that there are 620,000 Russian soldiers in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, about 200,000 of whom are actively fighting on the frontline.[1] Skibitskyi stated that there are roughly 35,000 additional Rosgvardia troops protecting rear areas and that these personnel can become a second line of defense if necessary. Skibitskyi stated in November 2024 there were about 580,000 Russian soldiers operating against Ukraine (presumably both within Ukraine and in Kursk Oblast), and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in January 2025 that the total Russian force grouping in Ukraine was about 600,000 troops.[2]

Russian authorities reportedly exceeded their recruitment quotas in 2024 and January 2025, likely in part due to increased financial incentives for recruits and prison recruitment efforts that are unsustainable in the medium- to long-term. Skibitskyi reported on March 3 that Russian authorities recruited 440,000 military personnel in 2024 — 10,000 more than their quota for the year — and fulfilled their January 2025 recruitment quota by 107 percent.[3] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev also claimed in late December 2024 that 440,000 recruits signed military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in 2024.[4] Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree in July 2024 awarding 400,000 rubles (roughly \$4,400) to anyone who signed a contract with the Russian MoD between August 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024 - more than double the previous federal award of 195,000 rubles (roughly \$2,100).[5] This increased federal reward likely contributed to Russia's successful recruitment drive in 2024. Russian federal subjects offered additional high regional bonuses to those who signed military service contracts in late 2024 and early 2025, but select federal subjects have started to reduce these regional payments following the expiration of these limited time offers, indicating that such measures are not sustainable indefinitely.[6] Skibitskyi stated that 15 percent of Russian recruits in 2024 were people under criminal investigation, in prison, or serving suspended sentences and that this figure will increase to roughly 30 percent in 2025. Russian officials reported in 2024 that Russia was shutting down some prisons after Russia's prison population significantly dropped due to the Russian prison recruitment drives.[7] Russia has recently been increasingly recruiting defendants in pretrial detention centers, likely as the pool of prison recruits has dwindled.[8] ISW continues to assess that increased military spending, including large payments and benefits to Russian servicemembers, is hurting the Russian economy at the macro level and that the Kremlin is reducing this spending on military personnel as part of efforts to mitigate the impacts of such initiatives.[9] Russian authorities are unlikely to sustain such high financial incentives as part of their recruitment drives in the medium- and long-term as the Russian economy continues to decline.

Skibitskyi noted that Russian authorities have previously adjusted their annual quotas throughout the year, having originally called for Russian authorities to recruit 375,000 to 380,000 personnel in 2024 before increasing this number to 430,000.[10] Adjustments to the 2024 recruitment quotas were likely meant to account for Russia's increased tempo of offensive operations in the last few months of 2024 that resulted in the highest casualty rates Russia experienced since early 2022.[11] Skibitskyi concluded that Russia's recruitment plans for 2025 will "mostly" allow the Russian military command to replace its battlefield losses should the current tempo of offensive operations and losses continue.[12] Russian authorities will likely have to adjust their 2025 quotas as they did in 2024 should they want the current tempo of offensive operations to continue and should Russian forces continue to suffer high losses while advancing at a slower rate.[13] Russian authorities are unlikely to generate enough forces to significantly increase the tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine in the near future.

Continued Western military aid would help Ukrainian forces inflict additional losses on the

Russian military that would likely intensify Russia's economic and military issues and force Putin into making concessions during meaningful negotiations in 2025.[14]

Russian forces continue to innovate their strike packages and leverage larger numbers of Shahed and decoy drones in an attempt to penetrate Ukraine's air defense umbrella. Skibitskyi stated that Russian forces launch missiles from several different directions and currently launch 150 to 200 drones during a single overnight strike series.[15] Skibitskyi noted that Russian forces previously launched missiles from a single direction and used an average of 20 to 30 drones in a single overnight strike series. Skibitskyi reported that Russian forces alternate launching missiles and drones in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems. Skibitskyi noted that Russian forces begin launching drones in the evening such that the drones reach Ukraine at around 2300, and that strikes continue until the morning. ISW observed reports that that Russian forces began launching between 80 and 100 (or more) Shahed and decoy drones as part of their larger strike packages in October and November 2024 and have been launching between 100 to 200 (or more) Shahed and decoy drones in February 2025.[16] Russian forces most likely use large numbers of Shahed and decoy drones to detect and overwhelm Ukrainian air defense and mobile fire groups. Increasing numbers of drones in overnight Russian strike packages indicate that Russia is likely not currently facing domestic Shahed or decoy drone production constraints or constraints in Iranian-provided components to make Shahed drones. It remains unclear whether Russia will be able to produce or source a sufficient number of components to avoid drone production constraints in the long-term, however.

Russian missile production has reportedly not significantly increased, but Russian forces appear to be prioritizing production of missile and drone variants that are more effective against Ukrainian air defenses. Skibitskyi stated that Russia has marginally increased its missile production by a factor of 1.2 to 1.5 throughout 2024 and is "redistributing" its production capabilities. [17] Skibitskyi stated that Russian forces are producing more Kh-101 cruise missiles and fewer of the less effective Kalibr cruise missiles and intend to produce more Kinzhal and Iskander-M ballistic missiles in the near future. Russian forces rarely used Kalibr cruise missiles in strike packages against Ukraine in January or February 2025 and continue to mainly use Kalibr missiles to pad larger strike packages and overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses.[18]

The GUR reported on February 18 that Russia is modernizing and increasing its production of Shahed-136 drones and producing a new Geran-3 drone variant.[19] The GUR reported that Russia has equipped some new Shahed-136 ("Geran-2") drones with a new type of warhead weighing 90 kilograms, moved the drones' navigation and power systems from the nose to the tail, and installed an additional ballast to help with the drones' stability. The GUR reported that Russia is increasingly relying on components manufactured in Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iran to produce and assemble Shahed drones. The GUR reported that the Geran-3 drone is an analogue to the Shahed-238 and can fly at a speed of up to 550 to 600 kilometers per hour and has a range of 2,500 kilometers. ISW previously assessed that Russia likely intended to further increase its production and use of Shahed drones and other Shahed-variants following the signing of the Russian-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in January 2025.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian military intelligence indicated that about 620,000 Russian soldiers are operating in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, an increase of about 40,000 personnel compared to late 2024.
- Russian authorities reportedly exceeded their recruitment quotas in 2024 and January 2025, likely in part due to increased financial incentives for recruits and prison recruitment efforts that are unsustainable in the medium- to long-term.
- Russian forces continue to innovate their strike packages and leverage larger numbers of Shahed and decoy drones in an attempt to penetrate Ukraine's air defense umbrella.
- Russian missile production has reportedly not significantly increased, but Russian forces appear to be prioritizing production of missile and drone variants that are more effective against Ukrainian air defenses.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Velyka Novosilka and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to promote its "Time of Heroes" veterans' program as part of efforts to militarize the Russian government and society.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 2, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

March 2, 2025, 7:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15 pm ET on March 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Recent Russian official statements in response to the proposed US-Ukraine mineral deal indicate that the Kremlin is trying to sabotage the deal through narratives targeting Ukrainian and American audiences. The Kremlin is claiming that this mineral deal does not benefit Ukraine while also claiming that Russia can make a better offer to the United States, indicating that Moscow sees the deal as harmful to its objectives. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded on February 23 to a question about the US-Ukraine mineral deal and whether US pressure would push Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to "finally sell out all of Ukraine," including Russia's illegally annexed territories in Ukraine.^[1] Peskov claimed that the people in occupied Ukraine decided "long ago" that they wanted to join Russia so "no one will ever sell off these territories" — implying that Zelensky may "sell out" other areas of Ukraine. Russian state television evening news program *Vesti* claimed on February 24 that the United States is "blackmailing" Ukraine with the mineral deal.^[2] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on February 22 that "there is nothing good for Kyiv" in a new version of the US-Ukraine mineral deal.^[3] The milblogger claimed that the mineral deal is "humiliating" for Ukraine and that Zelensky would be "selling the benefits of his country for nothing" should he sign the deal.

Kremlin officials are also trying to prevent the United States and Ukraine from concluding a mineral deal by making competing offers. Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed to Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on February 24 that Russia has an "order of magnitude" more rare earth materials than Ukraine and stated that Russia can cooperate with both the US government and US companies in capital investment projects for rare earth materials.^[4] Putin referred to mineral reserves both within Russia and within occupied Ukraine in his attempts to appeal to the United States to invest in "Russian" rare earth minerals (claiming minerals in occupied Ukraine as Russia's own). Putin also offered to conclude deals with the United States on the supply of Russian aluminum. CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and newly appointed Special Presidential Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries Kirill Dmitriev told CNN on February 24 that Russia is open to economic cooperation with the United States, that the first stage of cooperation would be in the energy sphere, and that such cooperation is key for a "more resilient global economy."^[5]

Russian state media is delaying coverage of select Kremlin statements in order to exploit changing dynamics in the US-Ukrainian relationship and drive wedges between Ukraine and the United States. Zarubin and Russian state media outlets *TASS* and *RIA Novosti* amplified on March 2 a previous statement from Peskov about the US decision on February 24 to vote alongside Russia against a Ukrainian- and European-backed UN resolution that recognized Russia as the aggressor in the war.^[6] Peskov claimed on February 26 that the Trump administration is "rapidly changing" all of its foreign policies in ways that "largely coincide with [Russia's] vision," but *TASS*, *RIA Novosti*, and Zarubin only reported Peskov's statements on March 2.^[7] Russian state media headlines on March 2 deliberately misrepresented Peskov's statements such that they appeared to be in response to the February 28 meeting between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.^[8]

The Kremlin has a vested interest in preventing the United States and Ukraine from signing a mineral deal, as the deal will commit the United States to a long-term investment in Ukraine and Ukraine's sovereignty. The Kremlin is investing significant time and effort into undermining and misrepresenting the US-Ukrainian mineral deal, indicating that the Kremlin views the deal as an impediment to accomplishing Russian President Vladimir Putin's objectives in Ukraine.^[9] The mineral deal, even one that does not include text about an American security guarantees for Ukraine, will represent a long-term US economic investment in Ukraine and could be a building block towards additional US assistance or military sales to Ukraine in the future, as US Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent observed in an interview to CBS on March 2.^[10] Any agreement that ties the United States to an independent and sovereign Ukraine is contrary to Russia's long-term goals of isolating and conquering Ukraine. Putin likely assesses that preventing the US-Ukrainian mineral deal is a necessary step towards pushing the United States into stopping military assistance to Ukraine and abandoning Ukraine altogether. Putin's articulated theory of victory in Ukraine — which assumes that Russia can continue slow, gradual advances in exchange for significant personnel and materiel losses — rests on the assumption that Russia can outlast and overcome US and European security assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian efforts to mobilize its economy and population to support its defense.^[11] Putin is likely attempting to undermine the US-Ukrainian mineral deal in order to prevent deepening US-Ukraine ties in the hope that Russia will be able to destroy or extract significant territorial concessions from Ukraine during future negotiations before Russia's own wartime economic

and force generation issues begin to significantly impede Russia ability to advance on the battlefield in 2025 and beyond.[12]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is attempting to exploit discussions between the United States and the EU about the possible deployment of European peacekeeping forces to Ukraine as part of a future peace settlement in order to reinvigorate the Kremlin's demands for regime change in Ukraine. Lavrov claimed on March 2 that plans to introduce European peacekeeping forces in Ukraine in the future are a continuation of European leaders' supposed efforts to "incite" Ukraine to "war against [Russia]."[13] Lavrov claimed that the West brought Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to power using "bayonets" and will use future peacekeeping forces as "bayonets" to "prop up" Zelensky. Lavrov claimed that Europe wants to continue the war in Ukraine through these peacekeeping forces whereas the United States is openly stating its desire to end the war.[14] Lavrov claimed that the introduction of peacekeepers to Ukraine would not eliminate the "root causes" of the war.[15] Lavrov has previously defined the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[16] The Kremlin has recently attempted to use this phrase to justify its calls for regime change in Ukraine. Lavrov is exploiting the ongoing discussions in the West about the deployment of peacekeepers to Ukraine in the future to make yet another argument for Russia's longstanding demand for regime change. Lavrov and other Kremlin officials have recently engaged in rhetoric similarly attempting to exacerbate US-European divisions and falsely portraying European countries as wanting to continue the war in Ukraine.[17] The Kremlin is likely attempting to drive a wedge between the United States and Europe to extract concessions in Russia's favor in future peace negotiations and other talks.[18]

European leaders demonstrated their commitment to supporting Ukraine at a defense summit in London on March 2. The United Kingdom (UK) hosted leaders of Ukraine, France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Czechia, and Romania as well as the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Hakan Fidan, NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Council Antonio Costa.[19] UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced at the summit that the UK and France, along with other unspecified countries, have expressed their commitment to develop a "coalition of the willing" that will deploy peacekeepers to defend a peace agreement in Ukraine.[20] Starmer revealed at the summit a plan aimed at assisting Ukraine: keeping military aid flowing while the war continues and increasing economic pressure on Russia; ensuring that any peace deal upholds Ukraine's sovereignty and security and that Ukraine is at the negotiating table; and committing European leaders to aim to deter any future invasion of Ukraine.[21] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the defense summit was dedicated to Ukraine and a common European future and noted that "European unity is at an extremely high level."[22] Zelensky stated that Ukraine is continuing discussions about security guarantees and conditions for a just peace with partner states and is working with Europe to create a "reliable basis of cooperation" with the United States about Ukrainian peace and guaranteed security. Zelensky met with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of the summit to discuss the development of a joint action plan to end the war in Ukraine. [23] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov also met with UK Defense Secretary John Healey on the sidelines to discuss the UK's readiness to increase military assistance to Ukraine, the prospect of purchasing weapons with profits from frozen Russian assets, and the UK's role in the Ramstein format.[24]

European countries announced additional military assistance packages for Ukraine before and during the summit. The UK announced on March 1 a loan worth 2.6 billion pounds (roughly \$3.2 billion) to bolster Ukraine's defense backed by profits from frozen Russian assets.[25] The UK stated that the first tranche of the loan will arrive later next week. Zelensky stated that the UK loan will fund Ukrainian weapons production.[26] Starmer announced on March 2 an additional 1.6 billion pound (roughly \$2 billion) deal that will allow Ukraine to purchase 5,000 lightweight-multipurpose missiles from the UK.[27] The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on March 1 that it will allocate 20 million euros (roughly \$20.7 million) to purchasing Ukrainian-produced weapons for Ukraine and to develop a joint weapons production facility in Lithuania.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Recent Russian official statements in response to the proposed US-Ukraine mineral deal indicate that the Kremlin is trying to sabotage the deal through narratives targeting Ukrainian and American audiences. The Kremlin is claiming that this mineral deal does not benefit Ukraine while also claiming that Russia can make a better offer to the United States, indicating that Moscow sees the deal as harmful to its objectives.
- The Kremlin has a vested interest in preventing the United States and Ukraine from signing a mineral deal, as the deal will commit the United States to a long-term

investment in Ukraine and Ukraine's sovereignty.

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is attempting to exploit discussions between the United States and the EU about the possible deployment of European peacekeeping forces to Ukraine as part of a future peace settlement in order to reinvigorate the Kremlin's demands for regime change in Ukraine.
- European leaders demonstrated their commitment to supporting Ukraine at a defense summit in London on March 2.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 1, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel

March 1, 2025, 5:00 pm ET

Senior US officials are suggesting that the United States may cut all aid to Ukraine, although US President Donald Trump has not indicated any such intention. Cutting the current flow of aid to Ukraine would directly undermine President Trump's stated goal of achieving a sustainable peace in Ukraine. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, citing unnamed senior Trump Administration officials, reported on February 28 that the Trump Administration is considering canceling all US military assistance to Ukraine, including any final aid shipments that former US President Joe Biden approved.[1]

Ukrainian forces, enabled by essential US assistance, are inflicting unsustainable losses on Russian forces while holding them to marginal gains. This situation, combined with the severe challenges Russia will face in 2025, offers the United States great leverage in peace negotiations. A suspension of ongoing US military assistance to Ukraine would encourage Russian President Vladimir Putin to continue to increase his demands and fuel his conviction that he can achieve total victory through war. ISW has repeatedly highlighted the importance of continued and timely Western military assistance to Ukraine and observed a correlation between the magnitude of the Russian gains in Ukraine and delays or halts in Western military support.[2] Ukrainian forces have leveraged US-supplied military systems, including Patriot air defense systems and HIMARS and ATACMS long-range strike systems, to defend against nightly Russian drone and missile strikes, enhance Ukraine's strike capabilities, complicate Russian logistics and command and control (C2), and disrupt Russia's defense industrial base (DIB). Ukrainian efforts, aided by the steady flow of Western aid, have significantly slowed Russian advances along the front, inflicted significant Russian personnel and equipment losses, and undermined Russia's efforts to project economic and domestic stability amid rising pressures from the war.[3] Russia's economic, force generation, and defense industrial constraints provide key opportunities that Ukraine, the United States, and its Western allies could leverage to extract concessions from Putin in peace negotiations.

The cessation of US military assistance and monetary assistance aimed at strengthening Ukraine's defense industry could help tip the balance of the war and give Russia greater advantages on the battlefield in Ukraine, increasing the likelihood of a Russian victory in Ukraine. Russia would leverage the cessation of US aid to Ukraine to seize more territory in Ukraine and attempt to exhaust European support – the approach Putin has outlined in his theory of victory.[4] Ending US aid to Ukraine and enabling further Russian gains would also embolden Putin and strengthen his belief that Russia can seize and control Ukraine and other former Soviet countries, including current NATO member states. The Kremlin will likely intensify its military campaign in Ukraine and attempt to exploit any delay or cessation of US military assistance to Ukraine - as the Kremlin did in Spring 2024.[5]

Curtailing aid to Ukraine would risk diminishing US influence in the world and emboldening US adversaries. Russia, Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have formed a bloc aimed at defeating the United States and its allies around the world and are currently testing the limits of US commitment to its allies in Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific region.[6] PRC President Xi Jinping stated during a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin in late February 2025 that the PRC and Russia are "true friends" who "cannot be moved away" from each other and will not be influenced by "any third party." [7] Russia established bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership agreements since the start of the war with the PRC in May 2023, North Korea in October 2024, and Iran in January 2025.[8] Putin continues to rely on Iranian drones and North Korean ballistic missiles and troops in his war against Ukraine.[9] US aid to Ukraine is a demonstration of the United States' commitment to defending democracies against ongoing and future aggression around the world, including but not limited to Ukraine, Israel, South Korea, and Taiwan. The Russia-led bloc will

likely see the United States abandoning Ukraine as an indicator that the United States will abandon its other allies and will seek to test the limits of US commitment around the world. The Russia-led bloc is searching for easily exploitable divisions between the United States and its allies to isolate and weaken the United States on the global stage, allowing adversaries to rise up and dictate where and how the United States can engage the world. Cutting US aid to Ukraine plays directly into these adversaries' goals and is a step toward curtailing US influence in the world.

Putin, not Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, remains the main obstacle to a lasting peace agreement on Ukraine. Zelensky has continuously reiterated his commitment to obtaining a just and lasting peace in Ukraine through negotiations. Zelensky has indicated several times — including in his February 28 *Fox News* interview — that he is willing to make concessions on territory, Ukraine's NATO membership, and even his own tenure in office to secure a just and sustainable peace.[10] These concessions align with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's February 26 statement that "what Ukraine really needs is deterrence...to make it costly for anyone to come after them again in the future" and that both the United States and Europe "can be involved" in such deterrence efforts. [11]

Putin and other senior Kremlin officials have by contrast continuously reiterated their commitment to Putin's initial war aims in Ukraine, which amount to Ukraine's full capitulation, replacing the current Ukrainian government with a pro-Russian puppet government, and Ukrainian commitments to neutrality and demilitarization — all of which would leave Ukraine nearly helpless against future Russian aggression and destabilization efforts.[12] Putin and other Kremlin officials are repackaging these demands in efforts to appear willing to negotiate in good faith with the United States, likely to extract concessions from the United States regarding Ukraine.[13] Achieving a meaningful peace in Ukraine will require the United States and its allies to help Ukraine continue to inflict significant losses on Russia and to undertake a diplomatic and economic pressure campaign aimed at forcing Putin to abandon his insistence on full Ukrainian surrender and efforts to weaken Europe and the United States.

The Kremlin launched another informational effort intended to discourage additional US and European military assistance to Ukraine by claiming that Russia has won the war in Ukraine. Kremlin newswire TASS asked former Austrian Foreign Minister and current head of the St. Petersburg State University Geopolitical Observatory for Russia's Key Issues (GORKI) Center Karin Kneissl on March 1 if Russia has won the war in Ukraine.[14] Kneissl stated that "Russia has won in the sense that it was not defeated," "the [Russian] population supports the government," and "no one expected Russia to be so stable" after years of war. This new narrative is likely part of an ongoing rhetorical effort aimed at depicting Russian victory over Ukraine as inevitable in order to deter further Western military assistance and other support of Ukraine. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) recently warned that the Kremlin was preparing to declare "victory" over Ukraine amid reports that the Kremlin had ordered Russian state media personalities to intensify narratives intended to fracture Ukrainian society and discredit Ukraine among Western allies.[15]

European countries remain committed to supporting the Ukrainian military and defense industry, however, amid preparations for a European defense summit about Ukraine on March 2. Norwegian company Kongsberg Defense and Aerospace President Eirik Lie announced on February 28 that the company, which produces NASAMS air defense systems, is establishing a joint venture in Ukraine.[16] Lie stated that the company's priority will be to "mass produce" NASAMS missiles using unspecified Ukrainian technology. European leaders expressed widespread support for Ukraine following Zelensky's meeting with Trump at the White House on February 28.[17] British Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed Zelensky to London on March 1 and emphasized that "[Ukraine has] full backing across the United Kingdom." [18] Zelensky will attend a European defense summit in London on March 2 to discuss peace plans in Ukraine and joint defense issues.[19] Leaders from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Turkey, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Czechia, and Romania, as well as NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and European Council President Antonio Costa will attend the summit.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Senior US officials are suggesting that the United States may cut all aid to Ukraine, although US President Donald Trump has not indicated any such intention. Cutting the current flow of aid to Ukraine would directly undermine President Trump's stated goal of achieving a sustainable peace in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces enabled by essential US assistance are inflicting unsustainable losses on Russian forces while holding them to marginal gains. This situation, combined with the severe challenges Russia will face in 2025, offers the US great leverage in peace

- negotiations. A suspension of ongoing US military assistance to Ukraine would encourage Russian President Vladimir Putin to continue to increase his demands and fuel his conviction that he can achieve total victory through war.
- Curtailing aid to Ukraine would risk diminishing US influence in the world and emboldening US adversaries.
 - Putin, not Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, remains the main obstacle to a lasting peace agreement on Ukraine.
 - The Kremlin launched another informational effort intended to discourage additional US and European military assistance to Ukraine by claiming that Russia has won the war in Ukraine.
 - European countries remain committed to supporting the Ukrainian military and defense industry, however, amid preparations for a European defense summit about Ukraine on March 2.
 - Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced near Velyka Novosilka.
 - The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to recruit medically unfit soldiers in an effort to address personnel shortages.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 28, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan with William Runkel and Nate Trotter

February 28, 2025, 7:45pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump held a contentious meeting at the White House on February 28.^[1] Zelensky observed that Russia has repeatedly violated previous ceasefire agreements, as ISW has reported.^[2] Zelensky said that Ukraine will not accept a ceasefire agreement with Russia without sufficient external security guarantees, as such an agreement will fail to preserve Ukraine's sovereignty and prevent war in Europe in the long-term. Zelensky stated that Russian strikes have not "completely destroyed" Ukraine and that Ukraine is "alive" and continuing to defend itself against Russian aggression. Zelensky reiterated that no country wants to end the war more than Ukraine and that any negotiations to end the war will be between Ukraine and Russia with US and European mediation efforts. Trump declined to comment on the possibility of future US security guarantees for Ukraine and US troop deployments to Ukraine. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reportedly told Zelensky to leave the White House following the meeting, and the White House canceled the afternoon press conference and the signing of the US-Ukraine mineral deal.^[3] ISW continues to assess that supporting Ukraine is a vital American national security interest, as is a strong bilateral relationship between the United States and Ukraine.^[4]

Russia continues to showcase its deepening relations with American adversaries despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's effort to posture Russia's receptiveness to negotiations with the United States. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu met separately with People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping and PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on February 28 to discuss bilateral security issues and international and regional matters.^[5] Shoigu and Xi also underlined the need to continue coordinating efforts at key international platforms including BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and diplomatic efforts about "solving the Ukrainian crisis."^[6] Shoigu claimed that the Russia-PRC relationship has reached "unprecedented" heights, and Russian state media highlighted statements from Xi and PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian's praise of close bilateral relations.^[7]

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson and Chairperson of the ruling United Russia party Dmitry Medvedev met with North Korea's Workers' Party (WPK) Central Committee member Ri Hiyong on February 26 in Moscow to express United Russia's desire "for closer cooperation with the WPK and for expanding contracts and exchanges in all areas."^[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Ri on February 27, but the Kremlin's readout did not provide further details about the meeting.^[9] Representatives of the Kursk Oblast Chamber of Commerce signed a cooperation agreement with the Pyongyang Chamber of Commerce on February 27 to develop bilateral economic ties and expand municipal production opportunities between Kursk Oblast and North Korean enterprises.^[10] The agreement also includes trade and economic ties; cooperation in industry, agriculture, and processing; and joint logistical projects. **Russia continues to align itself with adversaries of the United States, underscoring the importance of strengthening and supporting US allies and partners, including Ukraine.**

Ukrainian officials are increasing cooperation with South Korea amid deepening Russia-North

Korea ties and recent reports of a new wave of North Korean troop deployments to Kursk

Oblast. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Serhiy Boyev met with a South Korean delegation led by National Assembly Member Yu Yong-weon in Kyiv on February 28 to discuss Ukraine-South Korea bilateral relations and North Korea's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine.[11] The delegations discussed exchanging defense industrial experience, and Yu expressed interest in organizing a joint seminar between Ukrainian and South Korean defense manufacturers. This meeting follows a recent South Korean report that North Korean forces deployed 1,000 to 3,000 additional personnel to Kursk Oblast between January and February 2025 to support Russia's war effort against Ukraine.[12] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov highlighted on February 24 that North Korean forces are gaining valuable combat experience and enhancing their weapons systems while fighting in Kursk Oblast and cooperating with Russia.[13]

Ukrainian forces conducted strikes against near-rear Russian military assets in occupied

Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian ammunition depot containing thermobaric artillery ammunition near occupied Selydove, Donetsk Oblast overnight on February 27 to 28.[14] Geolocated footage published on February 28 shows a facility on fire and secondary explosions in eastern Selydove.[15] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a forward command post of the Russian 14th Army Corps (AC) (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) near occupied Ivanivka, Kherson Oblast and a drone control point of the Russian 503rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) near occupied Nesteryanka (southwest of Orikhiv), Zaporizhia Oblast on February 26.[16]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also struck the Ilsky Oil Refinery in Krasnodar Krai overnight on February 27 to 28.[17] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Ilsky Oil Refinery on February 9 and 17.[18]

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on February 28 that the United States approved current MFA North American Department Director Alexander Darchiev's appointment as Russia's Ambassador to the United States.[19] Darchiev headed the Russian delegation to the February 27 US-Russian bilateral talks in Istanbul, Turkey, and his recent appointment indicates that he will likely continue to be a key member of any future US-Russian bilateral engagements.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump held a contentious meeting at the White House on February 28.
- Russia continues to showcase its deepening relations with American adversaries despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's effort to posture Russia's receptiveness to negotiations with the United States.
- Russia continues to align itself with adversaries of the United States, underscoring the importance of strengthening and supporting US allies and partners, including Ukraine.
- Ukrainian officials are increasing cooperation with South Korea amid deepening Russia-North Korea ties and recent reports of a new wave of North Korean troop deployments to Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces conducted strikes against near-rear Russian military assets in occupied Ukraine.
- The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on February 28 that the United States approved current MFA North American Department Director Alexander Darchiev's appointment as Russia's Ambassador to the United States.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka and in western Zaporizhia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin tasked Crimea occupation head Sergey Aksyonov with establishing a "Kadry" ("Human Resources") national project to integrate Russian veterans into the Russian economy, likely in support of the Kremlin's efforts to prevent the emergence of subversive veteran civil societies.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 27, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan

February 27, 2025, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on February 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and senior Russian officials continue to reject US negotiating terms and demand that Ukraine surrender territory that Russia does not occupy. Putin stated in his February 27 address to the Federal Security Service (FSB) board that Russia will continue to strengthen FSB operations in Donbas and "Novorossiya."^[1] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov similarly claimed on February 27 that Donbas and "Novorossiya" are an "integral" part of Russia.^[2] Putin and other Russian officials have previously defined "Novorossiya" as all of eastern and southern Ukraine (including Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts), although its precise borders are disputed among Russian ultranationalists.^[3] Putin has previously demanded that Ukraine surrender all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts even though Russian forces do not occupy large parts of Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts.^[4] Putin and other Russian officials have routinely indicated that they aim for territorial conquest beyond the administrative boundaries of these four illegally annexed oblasts.^[5] Renewed official Russian statements that the invented region of "Novorossiya" is part of Russia indicate that Putin maintains his maximalist territorial ambitions and is unwilling to offer territorial concessions. Russian forces currently occupy a small portion of Kharkiv Oblast and the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast and are attempting to advance to the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border, and the Kremlin may use the Russian occupation of limited territory in these oblasts as a false premise to demand that Ukraine surrender even more territory.^[6] ISW continues to assess that Putin remains uninterested in good-faith negotiations that require compromises and thinks that he can achieve his war objectives militarily in the medium- to long-term.^[7] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 26 that if Russia is "making maximalist demands that [Russia] know[s] can't be met," then the United States will know that Putin is not "serious" about engaging in negotiations.^[8] US President Donald Trump reiterated on February 26 that Russia will have to make concessions in peace negotiations and reiterated on February 27 that the United States will "certainly try to get as much [land] as [it] can back [for Ukraine]."^[9]

Kremlin guidelines to Russian state media about coverage of recent US–Russian meetings indicate Russian President Vladimir Putin's determination to manipulate US President Donald Trump and divide the West. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on February 27 that sources in Russian state media who are close to the Russian presidential administration stated that the Kremlin has not given "strict" instructions to media about how to cover recent US–Russian contacts.^[10] A source who regularly participates in Kremlin meetings with major media editors reportedly stated that the Kremlin told media outlets to emphasize "in every way" that Russia is in contact "not with some abstract Americans, but with Trump's team" and to demonstrate that Trump is "a man who was oppressed in every way both at home and in Europe." Multiple sources reportedly told *Verstka* that they had received instructions to create an image of Trump as a man who "had the wisdom" to respond to the Kremlin's "outstretched" hand. Putin praised the Trump administration on February 27, claiming that Russia's first contacts with the administration "inspire certain hopes" and that the Trump team is displaying a "reciprocal determination" to restore US–Russian relations.^[11] Putin claimed that "ideological clichés" have started to "destroy the Western community ... from within," as evidenced by alleged problems in Western states' economies and domestic politics. Putin claimed that "some Western elites" are trying to "maintain instability" in the world and will try to "disrupt or compromise" the US–Russian dialogue that has begun. Putin's claim that "some Western elites" — but not the Trump administration — are against US–Russian talks is likely an attempt to drive wedges between Trump and other US actors and European leaders. The Kremlin has similarly recently framed European leaders as interested in prolonging the war in Ukraine as part of efforts to falsely portray the US and European positions on negotiations as significantly different and to discredit any possible European role in negotiations.^[12]

US and Russian delegations met in Istanbul, Turkey on February 27 to continue to discuss US–Russian bilateral diplomatic relations. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on February 27 that the Russian delegation in Istanbul is working to develop the agreements reached during the February 18 US–Russian talks in Saudi Arabia.^[13] Kremlin newswire TASS reported that the bilateral meeting would include discussions on the resumption of the work of the US and Russian embassies in each state.^[14] Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) correspondent Denis Davyдов claimed that Director of the North American Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Alexander Darchiev headed the Russian delegation in Istanbul.^[15] Darchiev served as the Russian Ambassador to Canada from 2014 to 2021.^[16] Russian business outlet *Kommersant* reported in November 2024 that three informed sources stated that Darchiev is the most likely candidate to become the new Russian Ambassador to the United States.^[17] Peskov stated in November 2024 that the Kremlin had chosen a candidate and would announce the appointment "in the foreseeable future."^[18] The Russian State Duma reportedly held closed consultations in November 2024 with Darchiev about the appointments of Russian diplomats abroad.^[19] *Reuters* reported on

February 27 that a US official stated that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Sonata Coulter led the US delegation in Istanbul.[20]

The Kremlin is reportedly continuing to push the United States to accept economic benefits that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine in return for Ukrainian and Western concessions that are related to the war. Bloomberg, citing a source familiar with the topic, reported on February 27 that CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and newly appointed Special Presidential Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries Kirill Dmitriev — who was part of the Russian delegation during the February 18 US–Russian talks in Saudi Arabia — convinced Putin to seek negotiations with the United States through business opportunities.[21] The Kremlin reportedly viewed US President Donald Trump's interest in a mineral deal with Ukraine as a chance to initiate economic cooperation discussions between the United States and Russia, giving Dmitriev an opportunity to take the lead on such initiatives.

North Korea reportedly recently deployed additional troops to Kursk Oblast as North Korea continues to expand its military capabilities through cooperation with Russia. South Korean news outlet *JoongAng* reported on February 27, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter, that North Korean forces deployed 1,000 to 3,000 additional personnel to Kursk Oblast between January and February 2025 — in line with a reported recent South Korean National Intelligence Service (NIS) assessment that North Korea deployed an unspecified amount of military personnel to Kursk Oblast. [22] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated on February 24 that North Korean forces are gaining valuable combat experience and enhancing their weapons systems while fighting in Kursk Oblast and cooperating with Russia.[23] Budanov noted that North Korean Kn-23 ballistic missiles initially missed their targets by over 1.5 kilometers but that Russian specialists worked with North Korean specialists in unspecified "factories" to modernize and improve the missiles' precision. Budanov also emphasized that North Korean forces have learned drone warfare tactics and will likely bring this knowledge back to North Korea to improve North Korean military capabilities. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with North Korean Politburo member Ri Hi Yong on February 27 to discuss Russian–North Korean relations.[24] ISW assesses that Russia continues to consolidate a bloc of America's most significant adversaries even as the Kremlin pretends to seek improved ties with the United States.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and senior Russian officials continue to reject US negotiating terms and demand that Ukraine surrender territory that Russia does not occupy.
- Kremlin guidelines to Russian state media about coverage of recent US–Russian meetings indicate Russian President Vladimir Putin's determination to manipulate US President Donald Trump and divide the West.
- US and Russian delegations met in Istanbul, Turkey on February 27 to continue to discuss US–Russian bilateral diplomatic relations.
- The Kremlin is reportedly continuing to push the United States to accept economic benefits that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine in return for Ukrainian and Western concessions that are related to the war.
- North Korea reportedly recently deployed additional troops to Kursk Oblast as North Korea continues to expand its military capabilities through cooperation with Russia.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 26, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

February 26, 2025, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on February 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are planning to meet at the White House on February 28, likely to sign a US-Ukraine mineral deal. A draft agreement of the deal published ahead of the meeting does not provide US security assistance or security guarantees to Ukraine, however.[1] The *Financial Times* (FT) published a draft bilateral US-

Ukrainian deal on February 26 that states that the United States wants to "invest alongside Ukraine in a free, sovereign and secure Ukraine" and supports "Ukraine's efforts to obtain security guarantees needed to establish lasting peace" but does not include any concrete US provisions of security assistance or guarantees to Ukraine.[2] Continued US security assistance to Ukraine is essential to help Ukraine set conditions for a lasting and just resolution of the war that is in the interests of Ukraine, the United States, and Europe.

Russian officials directly involved in negotiations with the United States continue to insist that any peace agreement to resolve the war in Ukraine must be based on Russia's 2021 demands. They also insist on the surrender to Russia of territory that Ukrainian forces currently hold that is home to major cities and well over a million people. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who recently led the Russian delegation at the February 18 US-Russian negotiations in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, claimed on February 26 that negotiations that result in freezing the current frontlines in Ukraine are impossible because the Russian Constitution stipulates that Russia's borders include all of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[3] Russia currently does not occupy large parts of Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts and a small part of western Luhansk Oblast. Lavrov also stated that Russia will reject any peace deal that involves continued Western arms provisions to Ukraine.[4] Lavrov is repackaging the maximalist demands Russia has long made of Ukraine using a pseudo-legal facade, despite the illegitimacy of Russian annexations of Ukrainian territory under international law.[5] Lavrov likely attempted to justify Russia's long-standing demands by framing the Russian Constitution as a legal and hence "necessary" element in future negotiations with the United States. Russian officials have previously invoked "denazification," the alleged Ukrainian violations of Russian-speaking minorities' rights, and the false historical narrative that Ukraine is inherently part of Russia to justify their territorial claims against Ukraine and to call for full Ukrainian capitulation.[6]

Russia is demanding that Ukraine surrender several large cities that Russian forces do not currently occupy and have no prospect of seizing, handing over one million Ukrainians over to Russia. Russia's occupation of the remainder of the four Ukrainian oblasts would include large cities such as Kherson City (pre-war population of about 275,000), Kramatorsk (147,00 people), and Zaporizhzhia City (706,000 people) — all of which remain under Ukrainian control. The Russian occupation of such large population centers would significantly escalate the humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine. Russian authorities would likely employ the same tactics of oppression, displacement, and forcible assimilation to Ukrainian civilians living in these areas as they have employed against the millions of Ukrainians who have been living under Russian occupation for over three years.[7] Russian advances have recently stalled along the frontline, and Russian forces increasingly face unsustainable vehicle and personnel losses, indicating that Russian forces will likely be unable to occupy the full extent of these oblasts through military means in any short period of time if at all.[8] Lavrov's rhetoric is likely an attempt to achieve through negotiations what the Russian military cannot achieve by force. The Kremlin's stated intent of seizing more of Ukraine's land and people directly contradicts US and European efforts to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace in Ukraine and reinforces Russia's continued efforts to illegally occupy Ukrainian territory rather than to negotiate in good faith or offer concessions.

Lavrov's and other Kremlin officials' continued rejections of a ceasefire and other terms that US President Donald Trump and European leaders have identified as necessary to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine demonstrate that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains uninterested in meaningful negotiations and assesses that he can achieve his war objectives militarily in the medium- to long-term. Putin and other Kremlin officials continuously call back to Putin's pre-war demands and insist that negotiations must address the "root causes" of the war, which amount to Ukraine's full capitulation and Russian aims to weaken NATO.[9] US Congressional and Western intelligence officials recently assessed that Putin retains these war aims and is uninterested in negotiations.[10] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has consistently reiterated Ukraine's intent to negotiate with Russia in good faith and make compromises, including offering a territorial exchange that Russian officials rejected, and negotiating directly with Putin despite Putin's continuous efforts to discredit Zelensky.[11] US officials have also offered negotiating terms to Russia to promote good-faith negotiations.[12] The Kremlin is attempting to portray the US and European positions on negotiations as significantly different by falsely portraying European countries as wanting to continue the war when the United States and European countries largely agree on key points.[13] US and European officials have continuously reiterated that both Russia and Ukraine will have to make territorial concessions, and Trump reiterated again on February 26 that Russia will have to make concessions in peace negotiations.[14]

European countries have announced several new military assistance packages for Ukraine in recent weeks and reiterated the importance of continued military assistance to Ukraine.[15] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 26 that "what Ukraine really needs is a deterrent...to make it

costly for anyone to come after them again in the future."^[16] US and European officials have also continuously reiterated the importance of preserving Ukrainian sovereignty and the importance of both Ukrainian and European involvement in peace negotiations.^[17] The Kremlin likely aims to exacerbate divisions between the United States and Europe as well as between the US, Europe, and Ukraine to extract further concessions in peace negotiations and other talks in Russia's favor, including those that support Putin's maximalist war aims.

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are planning to meet at the White House on February 28, likely to sign a US-Ukraine mineral deal. A draft agreement of the deal published ahead of the meeting does not provide US security assistance or security guarantees to Ukraine, however.
- Russian officials directly involved in negotiations with the United States continue to insist that any peace agreement to resolve the war in Ukraine must be based on Russia's 2021 demands. They also insist on the surrender to Russia of territory that Ukrainian forces currently hold that is home to major cities and well over a million people.
- Russia is demanding that Ukraine surrender several large cities that Russian forces do not currently occupy and have no prospect of seizing, handing over one million Ukrainians over to Russia.
- Lavrov's and other Kremlin officials' continued rejections of a ceasefire and other terms that US President Donald Trump and European leaders have identified as necessary to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine demonstrate that Russian President Vladimir Putin remains uninterested in meaningful negotiations and assesses that he can achieve his war objectives militarily in the medium- to long-term.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovs'k, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Kurakhove, Velyka Novosilka, and Robotyne.
- Russian officials proposed that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) assume control over all Russian pretrial detention facilities amid reports that the FSB is in charge of a pretrial detention facility linked to the abuse of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 25, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

February 25, 2025, 10:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15 pm ET on February 25. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin implicitly acknowledged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the legitimate president of Ukraine and Russia's future negotiating partner while promoting a new information operation that aims to destabilize Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian military from within. Putin gave an interview with Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on February 24 in which Putin stated that "elections in Ukraine are not held under the pretext of martial law" — Putin's first acknowledgment that Ukrainian law prohibits elections during martial law.^[1] Putin claimed that Zelensky is "toxic" for Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian military and that Zelensky would lose any future presidential election to other Ukrainian political and military leaders. Putin's statements are likely aimed at Ukrainian and Russian audiences. Putin's claims that Zelensky is unpopular and harmful to Ukraine are attempts to drive a wedge between the legitimate government of Ukraine and the Ukrainian military and population. Putin has repeatedly claimed that Zelensky is not the legitimate leader of Ukraine after Ukraine did not hold elections in 2024 — in accordance with Ukrainian law — as part of Russian efforts to claim that Russia cannot negotiate with Zelensky.^[2] US President Donald Trump has stated that Putin and Zelensky must engage in negotiations, and Putin is likely shifting his rhetoric in order to explain to Russian domestic audiences his decision to engage in any future negotiations with Zelensky.^[3] Putin and other Kremlin officials will likely attempt to exploit any Ukrainian military setbacks or differing opinions among Ukrainian officials to intensify this information operation and sow discord in Ukraine.

Putin attempted to use new language to repackage the calls for regime change in Ukraine that he has demanded since 2021. Putin stated during the interview with Zarubin that Russia "has nothing against" the preservation of Ukrainian statehood but wants Ukraine to "turn into a friendly neighboring state" and for Ukrainian territory to "not be used as a springboard for an attack against Russia" in the future.[4] Putin's calls for Ukraine to "turn" into a "friendly" state demonstrate that Putin is still calling for the removal of the democratically elected government in Ukraine and the installation of a pro-Kremlin government. The Kremlin has previously used thinly veiled calls for "denazification" to demand regime change in Ukraine, and Putin appears to be using new language to make these same demands.[5] Putin has demanded Ukrainian regime change since Summer 2021.[6]

Putin offered to make a deal with the United States on Russian rare earth minerals as part of efforts to outbid Ukraine on this matter and to push the United States to accept Russian offers of economic measures in lieu of any actual Russian concessions on Ukraine. Putin claimed to Zarubin on February 24 that Russia has an "order of magnitude" more rare earth materials than Ukraine and stated that Russia can cooperate with both the US government and US companies in capital investment projects for rare earth materials.[7] Putin included mineral reserves both within Russia and within occupied Ukraine in his attempts to appeal to the United States to invest in Russian rare earth minerals. Putin also offered to conclude deals with the United States on the supply of Russian aluminum. Putin held a meeting with senior Kremlin officials on February 24 specifically about the importance of further developing Russia's domestic rare earth minerals industry and identified this as a priority effort.[8]

The Kremlin is framing any future US-Russian cooperation on rare earth minerals as conditional on the conclusion of a Russian-friendly peace deal on the war in Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 25 that any US-Russia cooperation on rare earth minerals can only begin after normalizing bilateral relations and achieving a peace settlement in Ukraine.[9] ISW assessed that Russian officials used the recent US-Russian talks in Saudi Arabia to start an effort to push the United States to accept economic benefits that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine in return for Ukrainian and Western concessions that are related to the war.[10] ISW continues to assess that American acceptance of these Russian-offered economic measures — without demanding any Russian concessions on Ukraine in return — would give away leverage that the United States will need to achieve Trump's stated objective of achieving a lasting and enduring peace that benefits the United States and Ukraine.

Putin attempted to claim that he supports Europe's participation in negotiations on Ukraine while continuing to show his unwillingness to make concessions and seemingly proposing Russian allies as possible future negotiating parties. Putin responded to Zarubin's question about Putin's assessment of Europeans' "demands" for the "right to vote in negotiations" about Ukraine, stating that he "does not see anything bad here."[11] Putin then claimed that "probably no one can demand anything here, especially from Russia" but they can try to make demands of someone else — signaling Russia's unwillingness to make compromises in future negotiations. Putin claimed that Moscow respects the positions of Russia's "friends" from BRICS and that "other countries have the right and can participate" in discussions about issues about the war and efforts to achieve peace. Putin specifically highlighted his recent call with People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping and applauded PRC efforts to discuss peace in Ukraine. The PRC and Brazil — two members of BRICS — have put forth peace proposals for the war in Ukraine that heavily favored Russia, and Putin appears to be posturing these states as possible participants in future negotiations.[12]

Kremlin officials continue to exploit diplomatic engagements with Russia's allies to reinforce Moscow's narrative that Russia invaded Ukraine to protect Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran.[13] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated that the delegations "touched upon" the situation in Ukraine and that Lavrov expressed gratitude to Iranian authorities for their "balanced position" and their understanding of the "root causes" of the war, including Russia's need to protect Russian-speaking minorities from alleged discrimination from the Ukrainian government.[14] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* readout of the meeting noted that the delegations discussed Ukraine and Lavrov's statement about Iran's "balanced position" but notably did not mention discussions of the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine.[15] Kremlin officials have recently increasingly referred to Russia's alleged need for future peace negotiations to address the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine, which Lavrov defined in December 2024 as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to advance eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine.[16] Lavrov met with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi on February 20, and the Russian MFA claimed that Wang emphasized that the PRC's approach to resolving the war in Ukraine focuses on addressing the war's "root causes," while the PRC's MFA official readout of the Wang-Lavrov meeting attributed all talk of the "root causes" of the war to Lavrov and not Wang.[17] Russia is attempting to use meetings with its allies to publicly

reiterate its calls for regime change in Ukraine and posture Russia's allies as supportive of these efforts.

A delegation from North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) arrived in Moscow on February 25 at the invitation of Russia's ruling party, United Russia, amid reports that North Korea may be shipping more material to Russia.[18] Russian and North Korean state media reported that Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Consular Department Head Andrei Klimov and North Korean Ambassador to Russia Sin Hong Chol met with a high-ranking North Korean delegation, including North Korean Politburo member Ri Hi Yong, in Moscow.[19] The Russian Embassy in Pyongyang reported on February 24 that the delegations will discuss increased cooperation between United Russia and the WPK in accordance with the Russia-North Korea comprehensive strategic partnership agreement that entered into force in December 2024.[20] South Korean media outlet *Korea JoongAng Daily* reported on February 24 that commercial satellite imagery collected by Planet Labs PBC shows a 110-meter-long vessel entering and leaving North Korea's Rason Port near the border with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia.[21] The satellite imagery also shows a line of containers roughly 100 meters long on the pier at Rason Port next to the docked vessel. The vessel reportedly arrived at the inner side of Rason Port's pier on February 20 and moved to the outer side on February 21, indicating that the vessel unloaded containers on the pier's inner side and loaded new containers on the outer side before departing. ISW reported that North Korea likely used Rason Port to transfer munitions to Vladivostok, Russia in November 2023.[22]

Western officials continue to highlight the scale of European military aid to Ukraine. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), citing European officials, reported on February 25 that European Union (EU) countries, the United Kingdom (UK), and Norway provided Ukraine with military assistance worth approximately \$25 billion in 2024 and that this is more than the United States sent to Ukraine in 2024. [23] An unspecified Western official also told the WSJ that Europe supplies about 25 percent of Ukraine's military hardware and that the United States supplies about 20 percent.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin implicitly acknowledged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the legitimate president of Ukraine and Russia's future negotiating partner while promoting a new information operation that aims to destabilize Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian military from within.
- Putin attempted to use new language to repackage the calls for regime change in Ukraine that he has demanded since 2021.
- Putin offered to make a deal with the United States on Russian rare earth minerals as part of efforts to outbid Ukraine on this matter and to push the United States to accept Russian offers of economic measures in lieu of any actual Russian concessions on Ukraine.
- Putin attempted to claim that he supports Europe's participation in negotiations on Ukraine while continuing to show his unwillingness to make concessions and seemingly proposing Russian allies as possible future negotiating parties.
- Kremlin officials continue to exploit diplomatic engagements with Russia's allies to reinforce Moscow's narrative that Russia invaded Ukraine to protect Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine.
- A delegation from North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) arrived in Moscow on February 25 at the invitation of Russia's ruling party, United Russia, amid reports that North Korea may be shipping more material to Russia.
- Western officials continue to highlight the scale of European military aid to Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Lyman, and Velyka Novosilka, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk.
- Samara Oblast authorities reduced one-time payments to soldiers who sign military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) after temporarily increasing these payments in January 2025.
- The BBC Russian Service reported on February 25 that over 100 Russian government, military, and security officials accused and convicted of various corruption charges are fighting in Ukraine.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to use its "Time of Heroes" program, which places veterans of the war in Ukraine in government positions, to form a new Russian elite composed of loyal and ultranationalist veterans that will continue to militarize Russian society over the long term.
- Russia may be reopening a Soviet-era submarine base in occupied Crimea.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 24, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

February 24, 2025, 7:40 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on February 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago on February 24, 2022. Ukraine has not been defeated or destroyed but remains resilient and innovative in the face of this unjustified Russian aggression. Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in a failed attempt to seize Kyiv City, overthrow Ukraine's democratically elected government, and forcibly install a pro-Russian proxy government in three days. Ukrainian forces, supported by a coalition of allies including the United States and European partners, have since successfully pushed Russian forces out of northern Ukraine and liberated significant territory in southern and northeastern Ukraine. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksander Syrskyi reported on February 24 that Ukrainian forces have regained more than 50 percent of the territory that Russian forces have occupied since February 24, 2022.^[1] ISW has observed confirmation that Ukrainian forces have regained 50.03 percent of the territory that Russian forces had seized since February 24, 2022. Russian forces have spent the last year making slow and incremental but steady advances in eastern Ukraine as a result of significant Russian manpower and materiel advantages and Russia's ability to leverage delays in Western aid to Ukraine. Ukrainian forces are using their technological advantages and integrating technological innovations with ground operations in order to slow Russian gains. Ukraine continues to improve and innovate its warfighting capabilities and is working to become self-sufficient in the long-term, but Western and international military support for Ukraine in the short- and medium-term remains crucial for Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian aggression. The defense of Ukraine and the preservation of Ukraine as an independent, sovereign, and democratic country capable of defending itself against Russia is a critical part of deterring broader Russian aggression against the West. The United States, Europe, and other Western allies must demonstrate commitment to Ukraine through timely and reliable military assistance, continue to enable Ukrainian forces to impose significant pressure on Russia, and force Putin to abandon his conquest of Ukraine and his wider ambitions in Europe in order to bring about sustainable peace.

Russia has accumulated unsustainable personnel and vehicle losses in the last three years since Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksander Syrskyi reported on February 24 that Russian forces have lost over 10,100 tanks, 21,100 armored combat vehicles, and 23,300 artillery systems presumably destroyed and damaged in the three years of Russia's full-scale invasion.^[2] The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) recently estimated that Russia had lost about 14,000 tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and armored personnel carriers since February 2022.^[3] (IISS's numbers likely differ from those from Syrskyi as IISS data likely only accounts for destroyed vehicles.) Syrskyi stated on February 24 that Russian forces have lost almost 870,000 personnel, including about 250,000 dead.^[4] Russian opposition outlets *Meduza* and *Mediazona* published a joint report on February 24 wherein they used the Russian Register of Inheritance Cases (RND) to estimate that at least 160,000 to 165,000 Russian servicemembers have died in the past three years of the war.^[5] Syrskyi previously reported that Russian forces suffered more than 434,000 casualties in 2024 alone, and *Meduza* and *Mediazone* estimated in February 2024 that Russia had lost at least 66,000 to 88,000 personnel during the first two years of the war — suggesting that Russian losses significantly increased in 2024.^[6] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces have suffered vehicle and artillery system losses on the battlefield that are unsustainable in the medium- to long-term given the limitations of Russia's defense industrial capacity and Soviet-era weapons and equipment stocks, and that Russia's force generation apparatus is struggling to recruit enough soldiers to sustain Russia's current rate of offensive operations and loss rates.^[7]

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a Ukrainian- and European-backed resolution on February 24 commemorating the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that recognized Russia as the aggressor in the war, called for a just peace in Ukraine, and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.^[8] The United States, Russia, Belarus, North Korea, and 14 other countries voted against the Ukrainian- and European-backed resolution, while 93 countries supported it.^[9] The People's Republic of China and Iran abstained. The United States also abstained from a second resolution about the third anniversary of the war that it had proposed after European countries amended the resolution to add language supporting Ukraine's "sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity."^[10] The US-backed draft resolution — prior to the European amendments — reportedly did not acknowledge Russia's role as the aggressor and referred to Russia's war against Ukraine as the "Russian Federation-Ukraine conflict."^[11]

Recent polling indicates that Russians are increasingly supportive of Russia continuing the war in Ukraine until it achieves complete Ukrainian capitulation but are simultaneously starting to feel the economic toll of the three years of Russia's war — casting doubt on Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to continue to balance "butter and guns" at home in the medium- to long-term. A recent poll conducted by independent Russian opposition polling organization Chronicles between February 5 and 13 showed that 46 percent of respondents do not support the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine without Russia having achieved its war goals. [12] The number of respondents who do not support such a Russian withdrawal had consistently decreased between February 2023 (47 percent) and September 2024 (31 percent) but then jumped back to February 2023 levels in February 2025. Fifty-four percent of respondents in February 2025 stated that the war had negatively affected their daily lives. Thirty-six percent of respondents stated that their financial situation had worsened — an increase from 27 percent in September 2024. Thirty-six percent of respondents in February 2025 stated that the Russian government should prioritize military spending in the budget — a decrease from 43 percent in September 2024. The number of respondents who stated that the most important area for Russian spending is the social sphere increased from 38 percent in September 2024 to 48 percent in February 2025.

Kremlin rhetoric about the relatively faster Russian tempo of advances on the battlefield in recent months and continued official statements about the need for Ukraine to "denazify," "demilitarize," and declare neutrality — Putin's original stated war aims — are likely influencing more Russians to reject a withdrawal in the belief that Russia can achieve these objectives through continued fighting.[13] Russia's protracted war in Ukraine, however, is straining Russia's economy, including by increasing inflation, spending down Russia's sovereign wealth fund, and exacerbating existing labor shortages. [14] Russia will likely face a number of materiel, manpower, and economic issues in 12 to 18 months if Ukrainian forces continue to inflict damage on Russian forces on the battlefield at the current rate — likely increasing the economic burden that the Russian population will feel in the future.[15]

Russian President Vladimir Putin currently remains committed to continuing his war in Ukraine despite rising domestic political and economic pressure and has shown no indication that he is rethinking his determination to compel Ukraine to surrender. Russian state media largely ignored the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion during programming on February 24 and instead highlighted a meeting in which the Russian Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims Chairman Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin praised Putin for announcing and conducting the war in Ukraine.[16] Putin and other Kremlin officials have not abandoned their original war aims in Ukraine and continue to invoke their goals of "denazifying" and "demilitarizing" Ukraine and banning Ukraine's ability to join any security blocs in the future, despite Russia's failure to defeat Ukraine militarily over the last three years.[17]

Putin does not appear deterred by the idea of protracting the war further despite suffering significant and likely unsustainable personnel and materiel losses over the last three years.[18] ISW recently noted that the Russian military appears to be employing a method of advance in Ukraine based on the assumption that the war will continue indefinitely and that the Russian military does not need to make rapid or significant territorial gains in a single offensive operation.[19] ISW recently assessed that it would take Russian forces over 83 years to capture the remaining 80 percent of Ukraine, assuming that they can sustain their current rate of advance and massive personnel losses indefinitely — which is unlikely.[20] Putin has articulated a theory of victory, however, that assumes that Russia can outlast Ukraine and the West and continue to advance on the battlefield until Russia defeats Ukraine. Putin's recent statements rejecting the possibility of a peace agreement with Ukraine are indications of his willingness to protract the war.[21] Putin continues to signal to the Russian military and society that he will not end the war until Ukraine capitulates completely and that he has no interest in a negotiated peace agreement that requires Russia to compromise its long-standing war aims, despite Putin's efforts to signal interest in peace negotiations to Western leaders.

Kremlin officials formally rejected the possibility of a ceasefire on any terms other than the complete capitulation of Ukraine and the West on February 24, further underscoring Russia's unwillingness to make compromises during future peace negotiations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on February 24 during a press conference in Turkey that Russia will only stop military activity in Ukraine when peace negotiations bring about a "solid, stable result that suits Russia" and account for the "realities" of the battlefield.[22] Lavrov noted that any peace agreement must include provisions banning Ukraine from joining NATO in the future.[23] Russian state media TV channel *Channel One (Pervyi Kanal)* summarized Lavrov's statements as "[Russia] will only end combat operations" when negotiations end in a way that satisfies Russia.[24] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Russian state newswire *RIA Novosti* on February 24 that Russia will not agree to a ceasefire that does not address the "root causes" of the war.[25] Ryabkov stated that a ceasefire that does not address the war's "root causes" is a path to a "quick resumption" of the war and reiterated that Russia considers NATO's post-1991 eastward expansion a root cause of the war.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov also claimed on February 24 that it would be "impossible" to resolve the war in Ukraine without understanding and addressing its "root causes."^[26] Kremlin officials have repeatedly alluded to the need for future peace negotiations to address the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine, which Lavrov defined in December 2024 as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to advance eastward and "aggressive absorption" of areas near Russia's borders and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians within Ukraine.^[27]

Russian officials also continue to frame Russia's demand for Ukrainian forces to withdraw from territory that Ukrainian forces currently control in eastern and southern Ukraine as a "compromise." Ryabkov stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 2024 demand that Ukraine "completely withdraw" from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and abandon its goal of joining NATO contains "significant compromises" that could serve as the base of a future peace agreement.^[28] Ryabkov claimed that Putin's June 2024 demands highlight Russia's desire to find a resolution to the war that "balances" Russia's and Ukraine's interests, despite the fact that Putin called for Ukraine to concede significant areas in exchange for no Russian concessions. ISW has previously noted that Ukrainian authorities rejected the 2022 Istanbul protocol as its terms effectively amounted to a full Ukrainian surrender, and Ukrainian authorities are likely to reject any future ceasefire or peace agreement that amounts to the same.^[29]

European leaders announced a series of new aid packages during their visit to Kyiv on February 24 for the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion on February 24. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a new military aid package for Ukraine consisting of 25 infantry fighting vehicles, two armored combat vehicles, a landing system for F-16 fighter jets, four F-16 flight simulators, ammunition, drone camera components, and first aid kits.^[30] Swedish officials recently announced plans to provide Ukraine with an unspecified number of RobotSystem-70 and Tridon Mk2 air defense systems valued at approximately \$113 million.^[31] Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda announced plans to deliver an unspecified number of RBS-70 short-range air defense systems to Ukraine, and Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal announced a military aid package consisting of 10,000 rounds of artillery ammunition and 750,000 rations packages.^[32] Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin announced plans to supply Ukraine with an unspecified number of older air defense radar systems.^[33] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced an EU financial aid package for Ukraine valued at 3.5 billion euros (\$3.6 billion) that the EU will distribute in March 2025.^[34] British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with 4.5 billion pounds (\$5.6 billion) in military aid.^[35] Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez pledged that Spain will deliver a new military aid package for Ukraine worth an estimated one billion euros (\$1.05 billion) as part of a broader 10-year bilateral security and defense agreement that Ukraine and Spain signed in May 2024.^[36] Icelandic Prime Minister Kristrún Mjöll Frostadóttir pledged to increase Iceland's monetary support to Ukraine by roughly 14.4 million euros (\$15 million).^[37]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago on February 24, 2022. Ukraine has not been defeated or destroyed but remains resilient and innovative in the face of this unjustified Russian aggression.
- Russia has accumulated unsustainable personnel and vehicle losses in the last three years since Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022.
- The United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a Ukrainian- and European-backed resolution on February 24 commemorating the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that recognized Russia as the aggressor in the war, called for a just peace in Ukraine, and supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Recent polling indicates that Russians are increasingly supportive of Russia continuing the war in Ukraine until it achieves complete Ukrainian capitulation but are simultaneously starting to feel the economic toll of the three years of Russia's war – casting doubt on Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to continue to balance "butter and guns" at home in the medium- to long-term.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin currently remains committed to continuing his war in Ukraine despite rising domestic political and economic pressure and has shown no indication that he is rethinking his determination to compel Ukraine to surrender.
- Kremlin officials formally rejected the possibility of a ceasefire on any terms other than the complete capitulation of Ukraine and the West on February 24, further underscoring Russia's unwillingness to make compromises during future peace negotiations.
- European leaders announced a series of new aid packages during their visit to Kyiv on February 24 for the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion on February 24.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.

- The Kremlin continues to use Muslim religious and cultural structures in Russia for military recruitment.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 23, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros with William Runkel

February 23, 2025, 6:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on February 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff referred to the early 2022 Istanbul protocols as offering "guideposts" for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on February 23. An agreement based on those protocols would be a capitulation document.^[1] Russian President Vladimir Putin and other senior Russian officials have repeatedly identified the 2022 peace negotiations in Istanbul as their ideal framework for future peace negotiations to end Putin's war in Ukraine, as such a framework would force the West to concede to all of Russia's long-standing demands.^[2] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and the *New York Times* (NYT) reported in March and June 2024 that both publications obtained several versions of the draft treaties from the March and April 2022 Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiations in Istanbul that indicate that both sides initially agreed that Ukraine would forgo its NATO membership aspirations and be a "permanently neutral state that doesn't participate in military blocs."^[3] The draft treaties also reportedly banned Ukraine from receiving any foreign weapons or hosting any foreign military personnel. The WSJ and NYT reported that Russia pushed for the Ukrainian military to be limited to 85,000 soldiers, 342 tanks, and 519 artillery systems. Russia also reportedly demanded that Ukrainian missiles be limited to a range of 40 kilometers (25 miles), a range that would allow Russian forces to deploy critical systems and materiel close to Ukraine without fear of strikes. The draft treaties reportedly listed the United States, United Kingdom (UK), the People's Republic of China (PRC), France, and Russia as guarantors of the treaty, and Russia reportedly wanted to include Belarus as a guarantor. The guarantor states were supposed to "terminate international treaties and agreements incompatible with the permanent neutrality [of Ukraine]," including military aid agreements. The draft treaties did not specify if other non-guarantor states would have to terminate their agreements with Ukraine as well, although this is likely considering that the treaty would ban Ukraine from having any foreign-supplied weapons. Russia insisted on these terms in the first and second months of the war when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv City and throughout northeastern, eastern, and southern Ukraine and before Ukrainian forces conducted successful counteroffensives that liberated significant swaths of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts.

Ukraine is unlikely to accept any peace agreement based on the Istanbul negotiations as such terms are effectively a full Ukrainian surrender to Russia's long-term war goals. The Istanbul negotiations effectively conceded to Russia's long-standing demands to "denazify" — overthrow and replace the democratically elected Ukrainian government and install a pro-Russian puppet state — and "demilitarize" — constrain and shrink the Ukrainian military beyond the point of being able to defend itself against future Russian aggression — Ukraine.^[4] The Istanbul negotiations also conceded to Russia's demands that Ukraine abandon its aspirations to join NATO or any other security blocs in the future. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky walked away from the Istanbul negotiations with the backing of Europe and the United States in 2022 and will almost certainly reject such terms in 2025.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues to demonstrate his commitment to preserving Ukraine's democracy and a just resolution to the war. Zelensky responded to a hypothetical question during the "Ukraine. Year 2025" Forum on February 23 about stepping down as president and stated that he is ready to step down in the event of or to facilitate peace or immediate NATO membership for Ukraine.^[5] Zelensky noted that he remains committed to holding elections after the war ends and has no interest in being in power "for a decade" and reiterated that Ukraine cannot hold elections until after Russia stops attacking Ukraine and after Ukraine lifts martial law.^[6] The Ukrainian Constitution bars the government from holding elections or amending the Ukrainian constitution in times of martial law, and the Ukrainian government legally cannot abolish martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine.^[7] Zelensky has repeatedly noted Ukraine's commitment to holding fair and democratic elections in the future.^[8]

Zelensky stated during the press conference that several European officials will visit Kyiv for the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2025 and reiterated that

European countries should be involved in future peace negotiations about the war in Ukraine.[9] Zelensky noted that NATO membership is one of the best security guarantees that Ukraine could receive and that Ukraine would also consider membership in the European Union (EU), Western financing for an 800,000-person-strong Ukrainian military, and the presence of a Western peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine as acceptable security guarantees in the event of a ceasefire with Russia.[10]

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Ukraine's domestic defense industry and domestically produced strike capabilities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated during the "Ukraine. Year 2025" forum on February 23 that Ukraine produced 2.2 million first person view (FPV) drones and over 100,000 long-range drones in 2025 and intends to increase its drone production rate in 2025.[11] Zelensky stated that Ukraine produced 154 artillery systems in 2024 and intends to increase production of artillery systems in 2025 and noted that Ukraine is working to develop an analogue to the US-produced Patriot air defense system.[12] Zelensky noted that Ukraine funded 40 percent, European countries funded 30 percent, and the United States funded another 30 percent of Ukraine's domestic defense production in 2024. Zelensky stated that Ukraine intends to fund 50 percent of its domestic defense production in 2025.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rустем Умеров stated at the forum that Ukraine has become the largest producer of tactical and long-range drones in the world and that 96 percent of the Ukrainian military's drones are purchased or produced in Ukraine.[13] Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov announced that Ukraine intends to operationalize technology that will allow a single drone operator to control multiple drones in a "swarm" in 2025.[14] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksander Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces conducted 130 long-range operations and struck 377 objects in Russia in 2024.[15] Syrskyi noted that Ukraine has deployed over 1.3 million drones to the frontline and is working to increase its production of fiber-optic drones. Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian long-range drones can strike targets up to 1,700 kilometers deep in Russian territory.

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) CEO Kirill Dmitriev as Special Presidential Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries on February 23.[16] Dmitriev was part of the Russian delegation that met with US officials in Saudi Arabia on February 17, and a source close to the Kremlin told Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* in an article published on February 19 that Dmitriev's appointment to the delegation appeared largely as a response to US demands that Russia appoint someone that would "understand" the United States, likely given his experiences living and studying in the US at Standford University and Harvard University and working for US companies.[17]

Russian forces launched a record number of drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of February 22 to 23, ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24. The Ukrainian Air Force reported on February 23 that Russian forces launched three Iskander-M/North Korean-provided KN-23 ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea and 267 Shahed and other drones from the directions of Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk cities; Shatalovo, Smolensk Oblast; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea. [18] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 138 Shahed and decoy drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, Mykolajiv, Odesa and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts; that 119 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference; and that three drones flew toward Belarusian airspace. Ukrainian officials reported that drones damaged infrastructure in Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, Poltava, Kyiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts and that a missile damaged civilian infrastructure in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[19] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on February 23 that Russia launched the largest number of Shahed drones against Ukraine on the night of February 22 to 23.[20]

Russia appears to be relying more on Iran and North Korea to support its war in Ukraine. Iran has largely enabled Russia to launch near nightly series of large drone strikes as it has provided Russia with Iranian designed and produced Shahed drones and helped Russia establish its own Shahed drone production facility in Tatarstan Republic.[21] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated on February 23 during the "Ukraine. Year 2025" Forum on February 23 that half of Russia's ammunition comes from North Korea and that North Korea has started large-scale deliveries of 170mm self-propelled artillery system and 240mm multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS).[22] Budanov added that North Korea plans to provide Russia with 148 ballistic missiles, presumably in 2025.[23]

Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in clear violation of international law. Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on February 23 that footage circulating on social media shows a Russian servicemember executing a Ukrainian POW in an

unspecified area of Kursk Oblast.[24] ISW has observed and reported on numerous instances of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs along the frontline in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast and continues to assess that this is a systemic trend in the Russian military and that Russian commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling their subordinates to conduct such atrocities. [25]

Key Takeaways:

- US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff referred to the early 2022 Istanbul protocols as offering "guideposts" for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on February 23. An agreement based on those protocols would be a capitulation document.
- Ukraine is unlikely to accept any peace agreement based on the Istanbul negotiations as such terms are effectively a full Ukrainian surrender to Russia's long-term war goals.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues to demonstrate his commitment to preserving Ukraine's democracy and a just resolution to the war.
- Ukrainian officials continue to highlight Ukraine's domestic defense industry and domestically produced strike capabilities.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) CEO Kirill Dmitriev as Special Presidential Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation with Foreign Countries on February 23.
- Russian forces launched a record number of drone strikes against Ukraine on the night of February 22 to 23, ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24.
- Russia appears to be relying more on Iran and North Korea to support its war in Ukraine.
- Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in clear violation of international law.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- The Russian government continues efforts to increase its defense industrial output.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 22, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

February 22, 2025, 4:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on February 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

ISW is not reporting on the status or prospects of negotiations regarding Ukrainian minerals and US aid for Ukraine today because the discussions and situation appear to be extremely dynamic, and the information space contains too many contradictory and partially outdated rumors to permit drawing firm conclusions.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed on February 22 that US and Russian officials are planning to meet within the next two weeks in an unspecified third country about bilateral relations. Ryabkov claimed that the United States and Russia are undertaking two "parallel" but "politically interconnected" negotiation tracks that will discuss the war in Ukraine and US-Russian bilateral relations.[1] Ryabkov added that Russia is prioritizing its demand for the United States to return six Russian diplomatic properties, likely referring to properties US authorities previously seized on charges of being used for intelligence purposes.[2] Ryabkov also stated that the United States and Russian delegations may discuss other international topics such as arms control and the situation in the Middle East.[3] US and Russian officials met in Saudi Arabia for bilateral talks about the war in Ukraine on February 18.[4]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed on February 22 that US and Russian officials are planning to meet within the next two weeks in an unspecified third country about bilateral relations.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

- Russian forces continue to deploy wounded and medically unfit soldiers to the frontline in an effort to address personnel shortages.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 21, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

February 21, 2025, 6:15pm ET

Russian state media and Kremlin officials appear to be leveraging select statements from US officials alongside long-standing Russian narratives to create tension between the United States and Ukraine and undermine faith in America's commitment to Ukraine. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on February 21 that the Kremlin has ordered Russian state media personalities and other prominent voices in the Russian information space to intensify narratives aimed at creating discord in Ukrainian society and discrediting Ukraine among Western allies.^[1] The GUR stated that Russian actors intend to amplify narratives falsely alleging that the West has "betrayed" Ukraine, the United States is not concerned about Europe's and Ukraine's opinions, the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, the Ukrainian military is losing on the frontline, and "corrupt people" are stealing billions of dollars of US aid from Ukraine. The GUR reported that the Kremlin is also preparing to declare "victory" over Ukraine and possibly over NATO on the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion – February 24, 2025.

ISW has recently observed Kremlin officials and prominent voices in the Russian information space amplifying these narratives and other select statements from US officials aimed at sowing discord between Ukraine and its allies.^[2] ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory is built on the assumption that Russia can outlast Western support for Ukraine and that Putin is thus attempting to bring about the cessation of Western and particularly US support for Ukraine.^[3] Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported that Russian actors also intend to incite protests in Ukraine via social media posts on February 24, 2025, and will offer to pay protestors if they attend rallies in Ukraine.^[4] The SBU asked Ukrainian citizens to be cautious of Russian efforts to manipulate Ukraine's information space ahead of the third anniversary of the war.

US officials continue to reiterate their support for Ukraine and a lasting and just resolution of the war. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 20 that the United States used the recent bilateral meeting with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia to gauge Russia's interest in good faith peace negotiations and to open a communication channel between the two countries.^[5] Rubio emphasized on February 18 that a war can only end when "everyone involved" in the war — which Rubio explicitly defined as including Ukraine, Russia, and US partners in Europe — is "okay with" and accepts the end agreement.^[6] Rubio reiterated on February 16 that Trump wants to see the war end in a way that "protects Ukraine's sovereignty," and US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated on February 15 that Russia must make territorial concessions during negotiations.^[7]

Russian forces recently eliminated the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove amid continued reports that the Russian military is redeploying elements of the Russian Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction. Geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces – reportedly elements of the 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) – seized Ulakly (west of Kurakhove) and likely closed the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove.^[8] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced within central Kostyantynopil (west of Kurakhove) from the south.^[9] Russian forces continued attacking west of Kurakhove near Andriivka, Ulakly, and Kostyantynopil on February 20 and 21 as part of ongoing efforts to leverage the seizure of Kurakhove and Dachne (west of Kurakhove) to level the frontline west of the settlements.^[10] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces' main objective in the Kurakhove direction was to level the frontline and create more defensible positions west of Kurakhove and that Russian forces would not redeploy forces from the Kurakhove direction until Russian forces achieved their objectives in the area.^[11] Russian forces appear close to leveling the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast and are reportedly working to redeploy elements of two formations from this area.

ISW recently observed reports that the Russian military command redeployed elements of the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions (both of the 8th CAA, SMD) to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions, and Russian servicemen in the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, 1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC, SMD) operating near Toretsk claimed on February 18 that elements of

the 103rd Motorized Rifle Regiment and 163rd Tank Regiment (both of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA) recently redeployed to the area.[12]

The Russian military command likely began redeploying elements of the 8th CAA as Russian forces began closing the Kurakhove pocket and aligning the frontline between the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions in Winter 2024-2025 by pushing west from the Yasenove-Andriivka (northwest and west of Kurakhove) line and north from Zelenivka (southwest of Kurakhove). Russian forces have likely freed up some forces of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division from the Kurakhove direction to redeploy to the Toretsk direction by evening out the frontline west of Kurakhove and are likely prioritizing pressuring Kostyantynivka (northwest of Toretsk) - the southernmost point of Ukraine's "fortress belt" in Donetsk Oblast. ISW has observed elements of the 90th Tank Division (41st CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) attacking toward Andriivka from the west and northwest since at least the beginning of January 2025.[13]

The Russian military will likely continue attacking in the Kurakhove direction from the east with elements of the 41st CAA (CMD) and from the southeast with elements of the EMD thereby allowing 8th CAA (SMD) elements to redeploy to other areas of the frontline.

Russian forces are attempting to leverage the seizure of Velyka Novosilka to advance further north of the settlement toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border. Russian forces recently reintensified offensive operations northeast, north, and west of Velyka Novosilka after temporarily pausing attacks in these areas for several weeks after Russian forces seized Velyka Novosilka in late January 2025.[14] Geolocated footage published on February 20 indicates that Russian forces seized Novoocheretuvate (northwest of Velyka Novosilka) after recently crossing the Mokri Yaly River.[15] The Russian Ministry of Defense [MoD] claimed on February 21 that elements of the Russian 5th Tank Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) played a crucial role in crossing the Mokri Yaly River and seizing the settlement.[16] Russian forces may have exploited a dry patch of the Mokri Yaly River near Novoocheretuvate to advance into the settlement, as ISW previously assessed that the Mokri Yaly River could pose a significant challenge for Russian forces.[17] ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command could either redeploy most of the EMD to another sector of the frontline or opt to retain elements of the EMD in the Velyka Novosilka direction and continue advancing toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary.[18]

Russian forces have also intensified offensive operations on Velyka Novosilka's northeastern and western flanks. A Russian milblogger published footage on February 21 purportedly showing elements of the Russian 57th Mechanized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) conducting a reinforced platoon-sized mechanized assault near Novosilka (west of Velyka Novosilka), and Russian forces recently conducted a battalion-sized mechanized assault near Bahatyr (west of Kurakhove and northeast of Velyka Novosilka).[19] Another Russian milblogger claimed on February 20 that elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) recently penetrated Ukrainian defenses north of Vremivka (west of Velyka Novosilka) and seized several strongholds in the area.[20] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recently advanced west of Velyka Novosilka and east and south of Novosilka, but ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims.[21] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are using armored vehicles and electronic warfare (EW) systems to support Russian infantry attacking near Novosilka, and another milblogger claimed that Russian forces are leveraging lowlands with distanced shelters and windbreaks to advance between settlements in the area.[22] Another Russian milblogger claimed on February 20 that Russian forces are attacking Skudne (northwest of Novoocheretuvate) and in the direction of Burlatske and Pryvilne (northwest and west of Velyka Novosilka).[23] The milblogger noted that the Russian military command is attempting to penetrate areas of weakness along Ukraine's defensive line and advance near the border of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) through significant expansion in the domestic production of key military equipment. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced on February 21 that Ukrainian forces have tripled domestic artillery production, increased armored personnel carrier production fivefold, and doubled the output of anti-tank weapons.[24] Shmyhal noted that Ukraine's ammunition production has grown 2.5 times and drone manufacturing has surged tenfold between January 2024 and January 2025. Shmyhal stated that Ukraine currently produces about one-third of its weapons domestically and is actively working to increase this share and that Ukraine is allocating an additional 7.9 billion hryvnia (about \$189 million) to boost drone production in 2025.

Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov also stated on February 21 that 19 Ukrainian companies joined the Ukrainian defense innovation platform Brave1 to support the production of short and medium-range missiles as well as ballistic missiles.[25] Fedorov added that

the Brave1 platform will also create a separate grant program to support the development and production of explosives and gunpowder for Ukrainian forces.[26]

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on February 20 the launch of the new State Rear Operator (DOT)-Chain System model of efficiently delivering drones to Ukrainian forces on the frontline.[27] The DOT-Chain System expedites drone delivery through forecasting orders and better informs Ukrainian DIB companies of upcoming drone requirements. ISW assesses that such enhancement of Ukraine's DIB – in part through continued Western support – is part of a continued plan to create a sustainable basis for Ukraine to be able to defend itself over the long term with dramatically reduced foreign military assistance.[28]

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Sergei Pinchuk to the rank of Admiral and Eastern Group of Forces Commander Andrei Ivanayev to the rank of Colonel General on February 21.[29] Pinchuk's promotion may be reflective of recent Russian efforts to restructure Russia's peacetime military administrative control over military services. Putin signed a decree on February 5 revoking Russian military districts' "interservice status" and removing naval and Aerospace Forces (VKS) units from subordination to Russian military districts.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian state media and Kremlin officials appear to be leveraging select statements from US officials alongside long-standing Russian narratives to create tension between the United States and Ukraine and undermine faith in America's commitment to Ukraine.
- US officials continue to reiterate their support for Ukraine and a lasting and just resolution of the war.
- Russian forces recently eliminated the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove amid continued reports that the Russian military is redeploying elements of the Russian Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction.
- Russian forces are attempting to leverage the seizure of Velyka Novosilka to advance further north of the settlement toward the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border.
- Ukrainian officials continue to highlight the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) through significant expansion in the domestic production of key military equipment.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Sergei Pinchuk to the rank of Admiral and Eastern Group of Forces Commander Andrei Ivanayev to the rank of Colonel General on February 21.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly falsely designating former penal recruits as having abandoned their units without authorization (SOCH) to avoid paying them amid continued indicators that Russian authorities are concerned about the war's strain on the Russian economy.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 20, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and George Barros with William Runkel

February 20, 2025, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on February 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The *Financial Times* (FT) published an investigation on February 20 supporting ISW's long-held assessment that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling subordinates to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in clear violation of international law.[1] The FT investigation provided additional details and analysis following a significant increase in the number of credible reports of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs in 2024 compared to the first two years of the war.[2] FT and experts from the Center for Information Resilience analyzed footage of the executions and used the soldiers' uniforms to confirm that Russian forces were conducting the executions. FT conducted an investigation into footage of a Russian soldier shooting

six unarmed Ukrainian POWs and identified the possible perpetrator as a soldier in a "Storm" penal detachment of the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]), but noted that the situation warrants further investigation to confirm this soldier's involvement. FT reported that the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade has been fighting near Pokrovsk since Fall 2024, which is consistent with ISW's observations.[3] FT noted that Ukrainian frontline units are often the primary source of execution reports and drone footage of executions. FT noted, however, that tracking these executions is challenging because the Ukrainian units do not always relay reports of Ukrainian POW executions to their commanders.[4] FT noted that Ukrainian prosecutors sometimes find out about the executions based on footage published online. FT interviewed the cofounders of a project reportedly affiliated with Ukrainian military intelligence who stated that many Ukrainian units do not publish information about executions "because it has become routine" and that there are likely hundreds of instances of POW executions beyond the "dozens" recorded so far.

FT's investigation suggests that more senior Russian commanders may also be complicit in issuing orders to execute Ukrainian POWs.[5] Ukrainian officials opened investigations into 43 executions with 109 victims in 2024, and FT analyzed footage of 30 of these instances with 133 victims. The FT investigation found that Russian forces across the frontline — particularly in eastern Ukraine and Zaporizhia Oblast - are executing Ukrainian POWs, not just a few isolated "rogue [Russian] units." Global Rights Compliance President Wayne Jordash, who is assisting Ukrainian investigations into POW executions, told the FT that Russia is pursuing a "strategy of criminality" in Ukraine, including by torturing, sexually assaulting, and otherwise abusing residents in occupied Ukraine, and that the POW executions are also part of this criminality campaign. Jordash stated that Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs function to degrade Ukraine's military and security apparatus, leaving Ukraine more vulnerable to aggression.

Jordash noted that international law states that individuals who fail to prevent war crimes are also culpable for said war crimes and that government officials calling for POW executions are violating international law.[6] Jordash mentioned specific instances of senior Russian leaders, including Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov, explicitly calling for Russian forces to execute Ukrainian POWs. Jordash highlighted that Russian President Vladimir Putin praised the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) for its actions in combat, which is notable because the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade is has been linked to the beheading of Ukrainian POWs and execution of Ukrainian drone operators in October 2024. *Forbes* attributed beheadings of Ukrainian POWs in August 2024 and summary executions in October 2024 in Kursk Oblast to the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade.[7] Putin awarded the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade the "Guards" honorific title in July 2024.[8] FT reported that Putin held highly publicized meetings with two unspecified participants of the Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" veterans program who reportedly executed POWs near Robotyne, Zaporizhia Oblast in May 2024.[9] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) recently reported that there is a culture of torture and abuse of Ukrainian POWs detained in Russian penal colonies, and taken together these reports suggest that Russian decisionmakers in higher echelons of the chain of command may be implicitly encouraging, explicitly ordering, or failing to stop Russian executions and other abuses of Ukrainian POWs in a system that seems to incentivize such abuses.[10]

Senior Ukrainian intelligence officials reported that North Korean forces are conducting joint operations with Russian forces in Kursk Oblast and are gaining new combat capabilities.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov told South Korean outlet *Chosun Ilbo* in an article published on February 17 that roughly 4,000 North Korean forces have been killed or seriously wounded in Kursk Oblast.[11] Budanov noted that North Korean forces are embedded in Russian units and conduct joint operations in small groups with Russian forces and that North Korean forces move as part of larger Russian units to conduct joint operations. The commander of a Ukrainian platoon operating in Kursk Oblast stated on February 20 that North Korean forces have changed their tactics in the area, reducing the size of their infantry assault groups from 50 personnel to 10 to 15 personnel and moving "more cautiously."[12] The commander noted that North Korean assault groups are still larger than Russian assault groups. South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) stated in November 2024 that North Korean forces had been training alongside Russian naval infantry and airborne (VDV) units - traditionally more elite forces in the Russian military.[13] Budanov noted that there are more artillery and missile units in Kursk Oblast due to the presence of North Korean troops, but that the GUR has not observed additional North Korean deployments to Russia. GUR Deputy Head Major General Vadym Skibitskyi also told *Chosun Ilbo* that 1,000 North Korean troops are training on unspecified new military equipment in an unspecified area in Russia. Skibitskyi reported that North Korean forces have rapidly improved their combat effectiveness by adapting to new combat tactics and operating weapons such as tanks and drones. Budanov also confirmed a *Reuters* report from December 2024 that Russian missile experts have modified North Korean-provided KN-23 ballistic missiles, which previously had a 500 to 1,500 meter margin of error, to make them more precise.[14] The deputy commander of a Ukrainian battalion

operating in Kursk Oblast reported on February 16 that North Korean assault groups were attacking in more spread out formations as part of efforts to complicate Ukrainian efforts to strike the attacking forces.[15] North Korean forces reportedly recently withdrew from active combat operations in Kursk Oblast after suffering heavy casualties largely due to Ukrainian drone strikes, and reports that North Korean troops have adjusted their tactics on the battlefield to counter Ukrainian drone strikes indicates that North Korean forces may be learning lessons and internalizing valuable combat experience.

US Special Representative for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on February 20. Zelensky stated that he had a "good" conversation with Kellogg during which they discussed the battlefield situation, the return of all Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), and effective security guarantees for Ukraine.[16] Zelensky reiterated Ukraine's readiness to make a "strong, effective investment and security agreement" with the United States and stated that Ukraine has proposed the "fastest and most constructive" ways to achieve such results.

The Kremlin is likely attempting to portray the People's Republic of China (PRC) as more aligned with its stance on the war in Ukraine than the PRC is willing to publicly message. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the G20 Foreign Ministers' summit in South Africa on February 20. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)'s official readout stated that Wang emphasized that the PRC's approach to resolving the war in Ukraine focuses on addressing the war's "root causes." [17] The PRC MFA's official readout of the meeting notably differed and stated that Lavrov stated that Russia, not the PRC, is committed to solving the "root causes" of the war.[18] The Russian MFA's likely purposeful misattribution reflects Russia's attempt to align the PRC's position on the war fully with its own in an effort to bolster its international standing and to shape Russian domestic perceptions of Russia's relationship with China. Russian officials have explicitly defined the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to advance eastward in areas near Russia's border, which indicates that the Kremlin remains committed to imposing its will and security interests on the United States and Europe and is not interested in compromising on this demand.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- The *Financial Times* (FT) published an investigation on February 20 supporting ISW's long-held assessment that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or directly enabling subordinates to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in clear violation of international law.
- FT's investigation suggests that more senior Russian commanders may also be complicit in issuing orders to execute Ukrainian POWs.
- Senior Ukrainian intelligence officials reported that North Korean forces are conducting joint operations with Russian forces in Kursk Oblast and are gaining new combat capabilities.
- US Special Representative for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on February 20.
- The Kremlin is likely attempting to portray the People's Republic of China (PRC) as more aligned with its stance on the war in Ukraine than the PRC is willing to publicly message.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovska, and Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovska and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russia is reportedly increasing its production of glide bombs and modernizing its cruise missiles.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 19, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30 pm ET on February 19 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly trying to optimize the Russian negotiations delegation to be most effective with the specific individuals whom the United States chooses for its negotiation delegation, likely in an effort to extract maximum concessions from the United States. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 19 that Putin will appoint a negotiator for talks with the United States after the United States appoints its own negotiator.[1] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on February 19, citing a source close to the Kremlin, that the United States was the first to select its delegation for the February 18 bilateral talks in Saudi Arabia, after which Russia attempted to "select relevant" counterparts for each of the selected US officials.[2] The source claimed that Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) CEO Kirill Dmitriev's appointment to the delegation appeared largely as a response to US demands that Russia appoint

someone that would "understand" the United States. Another source close to the Kremlin told *Meduza* that Putin may appoint his aide Vladimir Medinsky to the Russian negotiations delegation if Ukrainian representatives join future negotiations because Medinsky took part in the Spring 2022 Russian-Ukrainian negotiations in Istanbul. The source claimed that the Kremlin does not need to include Medinsky in the Russian delegation so long as negotiations remain bilateral between the United States and Russia. The *Moscow Times* reported on February 19, citing a diplomatic source familiar with the February 18 US-Russia meeting, that the Kremlin seeks to restore access to roughly \$6 billion worth of frozen Russian Central Bank reserves in the US.^[3] The source claimed that the Russian negotiations delegation in Saudi Arabia pushed for the United States to agree that both countries fully resume the operations of their diplomatic missions in the other country and to return Russian diplomatic property in the United States, which US authorities had previously seized on charges of being used for intelligence purposes. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 18 that the United States and Russia had agreed to restore "the functionality of [their] respective missions in Washington and Moscow."^[4] The Kremlin appears to be attempting to push the United States to accept economic and diplomatic terms that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine, possibly in return for Ukrainian and Western concessions that are related to the war.^[5] US acceptance of these economic and diplomatic terms — without demanding any Russian concessions on Ukraine in return — would give away leverage that the United States will need to achieve US President Donald Trump's stated objective of achieving a lasting and enduring peace that benefits the United States and Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Adviser Michael Waltz reiterated on February 18 that US President Donald Trump's position that the war in Ukraine must end in a way that is "fair, enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all parties involved" remains unchanged.^[6] Rubio, Waltz, and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff gave an interview to CNN and the Associated Press (AP) on February 18 following bilateral talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Presidential Aide Yury Ushakov in Saudi Arabia. Waltz stated that any future end to the war needs to be "permanent," not "temporary as we have seen in the past." Waltz stated that there is going to have to be "some discussion of territory...and security guarantees" and that future talks will discuss Russia's ability to retain any Ukrainian territory that Russia has illegally annexed since February 2022. Rubio answered a question about possible concessions from Russia, stating that these "kinds of things" will happen through "difficult diplomacy in closed rooms." Rubio later noted that there will have to be concessions "made by all sides" in order to bring about an end to the war. Rubio emphasized that a war can only end when "everyone involved" in the war — which Rubio explicitly defined as including Ukraine, Russia, and US partners in Europe — is "okay with" and accepts the end agreement. Rubio answered a question about his assessment of Russia's desire to achieve peace following the talks in Saudi Arabia, stating that Russia appears willing to "begin to engage in a serious process to determine" the mechanism to end the war, but that an outcome will ultimately depend on the willingness of every side in the war to "agree to certain things."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on February 19 that Ukraine needs either NATO membership or a strong military and security guarantees for a sustainable peace. Zelensky emphasized that security guarantees do not necessarily mean deploying peacekeeping forces to Ukraine.^[7] Zelensky stated that it would be sufficient if the United States provided Ukraine with 20 Patriot air defense systems and the license to domestically produce Patriot missiles.^[8] Zelensky has repeatedly emphasized Ukraine's need for additional Patriot systems and missiles to defend against Russian missile strikes, particularly those with ballistic missiles targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure, and his February 19 statements are consistent with previous statements that Ukraine needs a strong military of its own to deter and defend against future Russian aggression.^[9]

US Special Representative for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg arrived in Kyiv on February 19 for his first official visit to Ukraine.^[10] Kellogg met with Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, and Yermak emphasized that Ukraine remains interested in a strategic, long-term, and comprehensive partnership with the United States.^[11]

Ukraine's European partners continue to support Ukraine's military and defense industrial base (DIB). The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on February 19 that a new delivery of trucks, thermal imaging sights, and other military support arrived in Ukraine as part of a package worth 80 million euros (about \$83.3 million) that Lithuania prepared during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting on February 12.^[12] The Lithuanian MoD estimated that Lithuania's military support for Ukraine in 2025 could reach one billion euros (about \$1.042 billion) and stated that Lithuania plans to focus its support on Ukraine's air defense, ammunition, drone, and anti-drone needs and financing for Ukrainian domestic weapons production.

Ukrainian forces continue to conduct drone strikes against Russian energy facilities supplying the Russian military. Head of Ukraine's Center for Combating Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Ukrainian forces struck the Rosneft Syzran Oil Refinery in Syzran, Samara

Oblast on the night of February 18 and 19.[13] Kovalenko noted that the refinery has a processing capacity of 8.9 million tons of oil per year and produces fuel, jet fuel, and bitumen. Kovalenko stated that Russian refineries play an important role in supplying Russian troops. Kovalenko stated that the oil refinery stopped operating after the strike, and *Reuters*, citing two industry sources, also reported that the refinery suspended oil processing after the drone strike caused a fire at the primary refining unit.[14] The industry sources told *Reuters* that the Syzran refinery had been operating at only 4.7 million tons of capacity in 2024 at least in part due to previous Ukrainian strikes. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* published footage on February 19 of a fire at the refinery, which was later geolocated to within Syzran.[15] Samara Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Fedorishchev claimed that Ukrainian forces struck the Syzran Oil Refinery but that there was no "major" damage.[16]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly trying to optimize the Russian negotiations delegation to be most effective with the specific individuals whom the United States chooses for its negotiation delegation, likely in an effort to extract maximum concessions from the United States.
- US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Adviser Michael Waltz reiterated on February 18 that US President Donald Trump's position that the war in Ukraine must end in a way that is "fair, enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all parties involved" remains unchanged.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on February 19 that Ukraine needs either NATO membership or a strong military and security guarantees for a sustainable peace.
- US Special Representative for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg arrived in Kyiv on February 19 for his first official visit to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces continue to conduct drone strikes against Russian energy facilities supplying the Russian military.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk and Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Borova, Siversk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian federal subjects are reportedly halting their recruitment of foreigners who do not speak Russian for service in the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 18, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Russian and American officials met in Saudi Arabia for bilateral talks about the war in Ukraine on February 18, but Russia continues to display no indications that it is prepared to make any meaningful concessions on Ukraine as assessed by Western intelligence and US officials in line with ISW's longstanding assessment. NBC reported on February 18 that four Western intelligence officials and two US congressional officials stated that intelligence from the United States and unspecified close American allies shows that Russian President Vladimir Putin still wants to control all of Ukraine and that his goals "remain maximalist." [1] One congressional official stated that there is "zero" intelligence showing that Putin is interested in a "real peace deal right now." Intelligence officials stated that Putin has no plans to withdraw troops from Ukraine or to pull any personnel or equipment from western Russia. The six officials stated that Putin may agree to a ceasefire and peace deal in order to give the Russian military time to rest and reconstitute, and there is an idea among Western officials that Putin may "go through the motions" of negotiations in order to see what concessions he can get and to reintegrate Russia back into the global community. The two congressional officials and a former senior US administration official noted that Putin's "broad ambitions" have remained unchanged from the end of the Biden administration into the new Trump administration.

Western intelligence assessments suggest that Putin has not changed his theory of victory in Ukraine and still believes that Russia's military superiority is such that Russia can outlast the West and Ukraine on the battlefield. The six official sources told NBC that Putin still thinks that he can "wait out" Ukraine and Europe to eventually control all of Ukraine.[2] A Western intelligence official noted that Putin "thinks he is winning" and does not feel pressure to stop hostilities due to Russian battlefield losses. Putin claimed in June 2024 that Russian forces aim to "squeeze" Ukrainian forces out "of those territories that should be under Russian control" and that Russia did not need to conduct another partial involuntary reserve call up similar to that in September 2022 because Russia is not trying to achieve its military objectives in Ukraine rapidly.[3] Putin's theory of victory assumes that the Russian

military can sustain slow, creeping advances on the battlefield longer than Ukrainian forces can defend and longer than the West is willing to support Ukraine.

Many recent Russian statements show that Putin remains uninterested in engaging in good faith negotiations and retains his objective of destroying the Ukrainian state while the Kremlin has offered no public indication that it would materially compromise. Kremlin officials have repeatedly denied Ukraine's sovereignty over its internationally recognized 1991 borders and the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government.[4] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov most recently claimed on February 16.[5] Kremlin officials, including Putin, have promoted false narratives that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is "illegitimate" as part of efforts to claim that Zelensky does not have the authority to negotiate with Russia or that Russia does not have to honor any agreements that Zelensky may sign in the future.[6] Putin and other Russian officials have also demanded that Ukraine cede additional territory in eastern and southern Ukraine to Russia, while denying that Russia will make any territorial concessions of its own.[7]

Russia attempted to posture itself as on equal terms with the United States during the February 18 Russian-American talks in Saudi Arabia, focusing its official public rhetoric about the meeting on US-Russian relations and not the war in Ukraine.[8] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) published a boilerplate readout of the meeting, during which Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Adviser Michael Waltz, and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff.[9] Russian officials, including Peskov, Lavrov, and Ushakov, broadly stated that the talks went well, claiming that the discussions were the start of a long process and that Russia and the United States will continue dialogue on these issues.[10] Lavrov claimed that the meeting was "useful" and that Russia and the United States began to "hear each other" and share a "determination to move forward."[11] The Russian MFA's readout emphasized the Russian-American bilateral aspects of the talks, including normalizing bilateral relations, establishing a dialogue for future economic and energy cooperation, and resuming communications on international issues. The Russian MFA's readout also emphasized that Russia and the United States have a "special responsibility" as nuclear powers and members of the UN Security Council to resume communicating on international issues. ISW continues to note that Putin is trying to present himself as equal to US President Donald Trump and to present Russia as a global power comparable to the United States and as the heir to the Soviet Union's "superpower" status.[12] The Russian MFA readout only briefly mentioned Ukraine, claiming that the delegations "exchanged views" on the situation "around Ukraine" and mutually committed to resolving the war.[13]

Russian officials at the bilateral meeting continued to signal the Kremlin's unwillingness to negotiate on the war in Ukraine and determination to achieve its maximalist objectives in Ukraine. Lavrov claimed that authorities in Romania and other unspecified EU states are discussing laying claim to Ukrainian territory.[14] Lavrov's claim is part of a wider Kremlin information operation that claims that Ukrainian territory is actually the historical territory of other states such that only a rump state in western Ukraine might be left independent after Russia and Ukraine's other neighbors had absorbed most Ukrainian territory.[15] The Russian MFA stated that the Russian delegation in Saudi Arabia reiterated the need to eliminate the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine.[16] Kremlin officials have defined these root causes as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine.[17] Kremlin officials have frequently referred back to Russia's alleged need to address these "root causes" in recent weeks, including during Putin's February 12 call with Trump. Claims about the "root causes" of the war are in direct reference to Putin's late 2021 and early 2022 demands of the US and Ukraine, include demands that would force Ukraine to become a permanently neutral state that could never join NATO, impose severe limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military, and remove the Ukrainian government.[18] Moscow's presentation of the "root causes" of the war is intended to place the blame for Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine and present the start of this war of conquest as something Russia was compelled to undertake rather than the unprovoked aggression it actually was. This presentation denies the realities that Zelensky ran and took office on a platform of ending the ongoing conflict and sought to negotiate with Putin early in his term and that Putin refused to curtail his proxies' continuous violations of the terms of the Minsk II agreement.[19]

Lavrov also denied Russia's culpability for its deliberate and years' long strike campaigns against Ukrainian energy infrastructure. Lavrov claimed that Russian forces did not intend to damage Ukrainian energy infrastructure despite ample evidence that Russian forces have consistently waged strike campaigns using high-precision weaponry to specifically target Ukraine's energy infrastructure. [20] Russian forces have also repeatedly experimented with different strike packages that aim to ensure that high-precision weapons are able to bypass Ukrainian air defense and reach their intended energy infrastructure targets.[21] Lavrov claimed that US officials at the bilateral meeting proposed a

moratorium on strikes against Russian and Ukrainian energy facilities, and Lavrov responded that Russian forces only strike facilities that "directly support" the Ukrainian military. Lavrov is deliberately downplaying the Russian strike campaigns against Ukrainian energy infrastructure that Russian forces have waged every winter of Russia's full-scale invasion.[22]

Zelensky, in contrast to Kremlin officials, continues to demonstrate Ukraine's willingness to compromise to bring about an enduring end to the war. Zelensky has repeatedly demonstrated Ukraine's commitment to engaging in good faith negotiations that require compromises with Russia. [23] Zelensky recently expressed his willingness to negotiate directly with Putin.[24] Zelensky stated on February 11 that Ukraine is willing to commit to a territorial exchange with Russia as a condition for peace — a proposal that Russian officials rejected.[25] Ukraine hosted an international Summit on Peace in Switzerland in June 2024 to establish high-level dialogue before potential future peace talks with Russia, and Ukrainian officials announced in December 2024 that Ukraine was preparing another global peace summit.[26] Ukraine previously expressed its willingness to invite Russian representatives to any future peace summits.[27]

Russian officials in Saudi Arabia began what will likely be an ongoing effort to push the United States into accepting Russian offers of economic and investment measures in lieu of any actual Russian concessions on Ukraine. CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev, who was part of the Russian delegation in Saudi Arabia, told CNN on February 17 that he had already met with several unspecified members from the US delegation in Riyadh prior to the official talks on February 18.[28] Dmitriev denied that Moscow primarily sought to lift sanctions against Russia, claiming instead that both the United States and Russia would benefit from economic cooperation. Dmitriev stated on February 18 that he would present the US delegation in Saudi Arabia with an estimate that US companies lost an alleged \$300 billion by leaving the Russian market.[29] Dmitriev stated that major US oil companies "have had very successful business in Russia" and that the companies will return to Russia "at some point," reasoning that the companies would not "forego" the opportunities Russia offers in terms of access to Russian natural resources. Dmitriev claimed that the Russian delegation put forward a number of unspecified economic proposals that the United States is considering and that he thinks there could be progress on these areas in the next two to three months.[30] Dmitriev also called on Russia and the US to establish joint projects in the Arctic, and Minister-Counselor of the Russian Embassy in Canada Vladimir Proskuryakov, who is reportedly an Arctic specialist, notably attended the February 18 bilateral meeting.[31] The Kremlin appears to be engaging in an effort to push the United States to accept economic terms that are unrelated to the war in Ukraine, possibly in return for Ukrainian and Western concessions that are related to the war. **American acceptance of these Russian-offered economic measures — without demanding any Russian concessions on Ukraine in return — would give away leverage that the United States will need to achieve Trump's stated objective of achieving a lasting and enduring peace that benefits the United States and Ukraine.**

Dmitriev attempted to frame Russian-offered economic incentives as more beneficial for the United States than for Russia, but in reality Russia needs economic relief as soon as possible to stave off looming crises in 2025 and 2026. Dmitriev claimed that previous US economic policies "undermined confidence in the dollar" and threatened the US economy.[32] Dmitriev claimed that sanctions have actually helped Russia become "more independent" while damaging the US dollar and American companies.[33] The Kremlin has been engaged in an information operation in recent months that aims to posture the Russian economy as strong and stable to international audiences, and Dmitriev's attempts to frame the United States as needing economic cooperation with Russia more than Russia needs such cooperation is a continuation of these efforts.[34] Russia, however, is facing a series of economic and military challenges and weaknesses, including rising inflation, decreases in the liquidity portion of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, and growing expenditures on the Russian military, that are forecasted to worsen in the next 12 to 18 months should current trends continue – as ISW's Christina Harward will outline in a forthcoming essay. Russia's strained economy and military would benefit from sanctions relief, the return of US companies to the Russian market, and US investment in Russian natural resources projects much more than the enormously larger US economy.

US officials continue to meet with European leaders about support for Ukraine. US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg met bilaterally with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa on February 18 to discuss support to Ukraine.[35] Von der Leyen emphasized that the United States and Europe must collaborate to achieve a just peace in Ukraine and reaffirmed the EU's commitment to strengthening military support for Ukraine. Costa similarly stated that the EU remains ready to work with the United States to ensure lasting peace and security.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian and American officials met in Saudi Arabia for bilateral talks about the war in Ukraine on February 18, but Russia continues to display no indications that it is prepared to make any meaningful concessions on Ukraine as assessed by Western intelligence and US officials in line with ISW's longstanding assessment.
- Many recent Russian statements show that the Kremlin remains uninterested in engaging in good faith negotiations and retains his objective of destroying the Ukrainian state while the Kremlin has offered no public indication that it would materially compromise.
- Russia attempted to posture itself as on equal terms with the United States during the February 18 Russian-American talks in Saudi Arabia, focusing its official public rhetoric about the meeting on US-Russian relations and not the war in Ukraine.
- Russian officials at the bilateral meeting continued to signal the Kremlin's unwillingness to negotiate on the war in Ukraine and determination to achieve its maximalist objectives in Ukraine.
- Zelensky, in contrast to Kremlin officials, continues to demonstrate Ukraine's willingness to compromise to bring about an enduring end to the war.
- Russian officials in Saudi Arabia began what will likely be an ongoing effort to push the United States into accepting Russian offers of economic and investment measures in lieu of any actual Russian concessions on Ukraine.
- Dmitriev attempted to frame Russian-offered economic incentives as more beneficial for the US than for Russia, but in reality Russia needs economic relief as soon as possible to stave off looming crises in 2025 and 2026.
- US officials continue to meet with European leaders about support for Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova, Toretsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor continued to complain that the Russian military command's lack of response to systemic issues is limiting Russian advances near Pokrovsk.
- Russian opposition outlet SOTA reported on February 18 that Republic of Mordovia Head Artyom Zdunov announced that regional authorities are raising one-time payments for recruits who sign a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) from 400,000 rubles (\$4,369) to 1.1 million rubles (\$12,015).
- Russian forces continue to deploy wounded and medically unfit soldiers to the frontline in an effort to address personnel shortages.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 17, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Kelly Campa, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

February 17, 2025, 8:15 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on February 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin reiterated its demands that Ukraine cede additional territory in eastern and southern Ukraine to Russia and disband the Ukrainian military in the future while continuing to message that the Kremlin is unwilling to make territorial concessions itself in any future peace negotiations. Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebenzya stated during a UN Security Council meeting on February 17 that Ukraine has "irrevocably lost" Crimea, the "Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics" (referring to occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), and Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts.^[1] Nebenzya insinuated that peace negotiations should "correct" the situation in these oblasts and that Ukraine should cede the remaining parts of the four oblasts that Ukraine currently controls. Nebenzya is calling for Ukraine to cede the roughly 30 percent of the total area in Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts that Russia does not currently occupy. (Russian forces currently occupy roughly 99 percent of Luhansk Oblast.) Nebenzya also demanded that Ukraine become a "demilitarized" neutral state in the future and that Ukraine not join any alliances or security blocs.^[2] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov dismissed on February 17 the possibility of Russia making territorial concessions during future negotiations.^[3] Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed in June 2024 that Ukraine should withdraw its forces from and cede any unoccupied territory in Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts to Russia, and Nebenzya appears to be resurrecting this demand ahead of bilateral US-Russia negotiations.^[4] US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated during the Munich Security Conference on February 15

that Russia must make territorial concessions during negotiations, and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio noted on February 16 that US President Donald Trump wants to see the war end in a way that "protects Ukraine's sovereignty."^[5]

Lavrov and Nebenzya also categorically rejected European involvement in future peace negotiations and accused European countries of being aggressive toward Russia. Nebenzya claimed that European Union (EU) countries and the United Kingdom (UK) are "incapable" of reaching any agreement with Russia and cannot be party to any future agreements about the war in Ukraine.^[6] Nebenzya accused European countries of being "blinded" by Russophobia and unrealistic about peace negotiations. Lavrov questioned why European countries should participate in negotiations and insinuated that European leaders only want to prolong the war in Ukraine in order to defeat Russia and prepare for a future war between Russia and Europe.^[7] Russian authorities have previously focused their information operations against NATO, accusing the alliance of conspiring and preparing for a future war with Russia. Russian accusations that European countries and the EU more broadly (implicitly as distinct from the US) are acting aggressively towards Russia is a notable informational inflection and likely indicates a new Kremlin effort to drive a wedge between the US and Europe taking advantage of tensions evident at the recent Munich Security Conference.^[8]

The Kremlin also appears to be resurrecting Putin's previous demands and information operations aimed at delegitimizing Ukraine and its government in the eyes of the West — notably ahead of the February 18 Russia-US bilateral meeting in Saudi Arabia. Nebenzya reiterated Putin's demand that Ukraine must conduct elections before the implementation of any peace agreements, continuing the Kremlin's efforts to falsely portray the current Ukrainian government as illegitimate.^[9] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Viktor Medvedchuk have also recently repeated the Kremlin's false claims that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is "illegitimate" and implicitly that Russia thus is not obligated to honor agreements concluded with the current Ukrainian government.^[10] The Kremlin's apparent unwillingness to make territorial concessions, commit to honoring any future peace agreement with Ukraine, or involve any European leaders in these negotiations calls into question Putin's supposed willingness to engage in good faith negotiations that could bring about long-term peace in Ukraine and Europe more broadly.

The Russian delegation participating in Russian-American talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on February 18 does not include one of the members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's innermost circle who had been reported as a likely negotiator.^[11] The Russian delegation includes Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov, and CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Kirill Dmitriev. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that the talks will focus on "restoring the entire complex of US-Russian relations" and preparing for possible future discussions about the war in Ukraine between US President Donald Trump and Putin.^[12] Peskov added that Lavrov and Ushakov "will be able to send urgent reports" to Putin while in Riyadh — suggesting that the Russian delegation's purpose is to convey messages and inform the Kremlin, rather than to negotiate on Putin's behalf.^[13]

Sergei Lavrov has served as the Russian foreign minister since 2004, but has reportedly been left out of previous key Kremlin decisions relating to the Russian invasions of Ukraine.^[14] Sources in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) told the BBC in August 2023 that the MFA had no previous knowledge of the Kremlin's ultimatums to the US and NATO in late 2021, and the *Financial Times* (FT) reported in February 2023 that Lavrov learned about the full-scale invasion a few hours before it started.^[15] Russian milbloggers also claimed that the Kremlin did not notify Lavrov of Putin's June 2024 press conference at the MFA during which Putin demanded that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the remaining territories of four Ukrainian oblasts.^[16]

Yuri Ushakov has served as Putin's foreign policy aide since May 2012.^[17] Ushakov was Russia's ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from 1996 to 1998, served as the Russian Ambassador to the United States from 1999-2008, and became Deputy Head of Government Staff from 2008 to 2012.^[18] Ushakov publicly dismissed US and Western intelligence about the impending Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine as "hysteria" and "absurdity" in early February 2022.^[19] Ushakov reportedly participated in early ceasefire talks with Ukraine shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.^[20]

Kirill Dmitriev has been CEO of RDIF, a Russian sovereign wealth fund meant to develop foreign direct investment in Russia, since its creation in 2011 and also holds positions on the supervisory boards of the state-owned Gazprombank, Transneft, and Russian Railways.^[21] Dmitriev studied economics at Stanford and Harvard universities in the 1990s and spent his early career working as a consultant at McKinsey & Company and Goldman Sachs and later ran the Ukrainian investment fund Icon Private Equity from 2007 to 2011.^[22] Dmitriev enjoys close ties with Putin's family, and Dmitriev's wife, Natalia

Popova, is reportedly a close friend and former classmate of Putin's daughter, Katerina Tikhonova.[23] Dmitriev has extensive experience working with Middle Eastern countries, as the RDIF's partners include the sovereign wealth funds of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. Bloomberg, citing a person familiar with the exchange, reported on February 14 that Dmitriev recently played a key role in negotiations with US Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff to free American Marc Fogel from Russia.[24] Dmitriev accompanied Putin on his visits to Abu Dhabi and Riyadh in 2023 and Beijing in May 2024.[25]

A key Putin ally will be notably absent from the meeting. Bloomberg reported on February 14 that sources familiar with the matter stated that Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head Sergei Naryshkin would participate in the Russian delegation going to Saudi Arabia – reports which ended up proving false.[26] Naryshkin is Putin's close ally who reportedly participated in Russia-Ukrainian negotiations shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 and discussions with former CIA director William Burns in Ankara in November 2022.[27] Putin has also stated that he decided to launch Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 after consulting with only the "leaders of [Russia's] special services and the defense ministry."[28] None of the members of the Russian delegation in Saudi Arabia appear to be among the closest inner circle that Putin would likely empower to engage in serious negotiations on his behalf, but Putin may intend to include more trusted individuals in future rounds of talks or may have more confidence in these individuals in these particular talks.

Ukrainian forces continue to conduct drone strikes against Russian energy facilities supplying the Russian military. Head of Ukraine's Center for Combating Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Ilsky Oil Refinery in Ilsky, Krasnodar Krai on February 17, and that the refinery has an annual refining capacity of about 6.6 million tons and specializes in producing fuel, mazut, bitumen, and gas oil.[29] Kovalenko noted that the oil refinery supplies Russian forces, particularly in southern Russia and occupied Ukraine. Kovalenko also reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Kropotkinskaya oil pumping station in Kavkazsky Raion, Krasnodar Krai on February 17, and that the station is the largest pumping station in the Caspian Pipeline Consortium.[30] The consortium confirmed that seven drones struck the Kropotkinskaya station, leading authorities to take the station out of operation.[31] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that sources in the Ukrainian special services stated that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and Special Operations Forces (SSO) conducted the drone strikes against the Ilsky Oil Refinery and Kropotkinskaya oil pumping station.[32] Krasnodar Krai Governor Veniamin Kondratyev claimed that falling drone debris damaged houses in Ilsky and Slavyansk-on-Kuban.[33] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces downed 70 drones overnight, including 24 drones over Krasnodar Krai.[34]

Russian commanders continue to give orders for Russian forces to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the frontline. Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on February 17 that footage shows Russian forces executing three surrendering Ukrainian POWs in an unspecified location after a Russian commander orders the soldiers to kill two of the POWs.[35] ISW has long assessed that Russian battlefield commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to execute Ukrainian POWs.[36]

Unspecified sources told Bloomberg that Russia appears to be nearing a deal with the Syrian interim government to maintain a "reduced" military presence in Syria.[37] NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's February 17 Iran Update. The sources said that Russia is "close" to a deal that would keep at least some staff and equipment in Syria. One of the sources said that Russia hopes to keep the same air and naval bases that it used prior to the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, likely referring to Hmeimim Airbase and the naval base at Tartus. Russia also previously held several other airbases within central and northern Syria, including a helicopter base in Qamishli, though it is unclear whether the agreement will cover these sites. Russian forces have fully evacuated all their former positions in Syria except for Hmeimim Airbase and the Port of Tartus.[38] Other forces, such as the Syrian interim government or US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), have taken many of these bases following Russian forces' evacuation.[39]

The tone of engagement between Russia and the Syrian interim government has notably become more cooperative in recent weeks, which supports the sources' claims that Russia may be in agreement with Syria. Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara emphasized Syria's "strong strategic relationship" with Russia during a recent phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 12.[40] Interim Syrian Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra recently suggested that Syria could allow Russia to retain air and naval bases in Syria if there are "benefits" for Syria.[41] It is not clear what "benefits" Russia may be offering Syria in current negotiations. Russia delivered local Syrian currency to the Syrian central bank on February 12 in a gesture that likely sought to foster goodwill with the Syrian government.[42] This gesture followed Syrian officials' demands that Russia pay its debts to the Syrian state and Putin's offer to Shara to assist with Syria's economy.[43]

Unspecified sources also told *Bloomberg* that Russia could help with the Syrian government's counter-ISIS efforts.[44] It is unclear based on this comment whether the Syrian interim government has discussed Russian forces re-deploying to Syria to fight against ISIS. The Syrian interim government is likely eager to obtain manpower to assist in counter-ISIS operations as the government contends with the political and material realities of forming and training the new Syrian army. Russian participation in the Assad regime campaign against ISIS failed to effectively degrade ISIS in Syria, however. Russian aircraft proved to be far more capable in targeting Syrian opposition groups on behalf of the regime than it was targeting ISIS.[45] The scale of a future Russian deployment to Syria would impact the success of any Russian counter-ISIS operations, and it is unclear if a "reduced" military presence would be any more effective against ISIS than Russian forces were at the height of Russian deployments to Syria. US Central Command announced in July 2024 that ISIS is attempting to reconstitute in Syria following several years of decreased capability.[46] Russia would by no means provide a suitable replacement for the United States or SDF in counter-ISIS operations in the face of ISIS reconstitution efforts.

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin reiterated its demands that Ukraine cede additional territory in eastern and southern Ukraine to Russia and disband the Ukrainian military in the future while continuing to message that the Kremlin is unwilling to make territorial concessions itself in any future peace negotiations.
- Lavrov and Nebenzya also categorically rejected European involvement in future peace negotiations and accused European countries of being aggressive toward Russia.
- The Kremlin also appears to be resurrecting Putin's previous demands and information operations aimed at delegitimizing Ukraine and its government in the eyes of the West – notably ahead of the February 18 Russia-US bilateral meeting in Saudi Arabia.
- The Russian delegation participating in Russian-American talks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on February 18 does not include one of the members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's innermost circle who had been reported as a likely negotiator.
- Ukrainian forces continue to conduct drone strikes against Russian energy facilities supplying the Russian military.
- Russian commanders continue to give orders for Russian forces to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the frontline.
- Unspecified sources told Bloomberg that Russia appears to be nearing a deal with the Syrian interim government to maintain a "reduced" military presence in Syria.
- Russian forces advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovska, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to violate the Geneva Convention by conscripting civilians in occupied Ukraine to serve in the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 16, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

February 16, 2025, 8:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on February 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held a telephone call on February 16 to "open a channel of communication" for future talks about the war in Ukraine. US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated that Rubio spoke with Lavrov as a follow up to US President Donald Trump's recent call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and that Rubio reaffirmed Trump's commitment to ending the war in Ukraine.[1] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed that Rubio and Lavrov agreed to maintain a channel of communication to resolve issues in the US-Russian relationship; to remove barriers to trade, economic, and investment cooperation; to work together on ending the war in Ukraine and solving issues in the Middle East; and to organize future meetings to improve the work of foreign missions in the United States and Russia.[2] The Russian MFA claimed that Rubio and Lavrov agreed to work to restore "mutually respectful" interstate dialogue and to hold regular contacts, including a Russian-American summit in the future. Rubio stated on CBS on February 16 that his phone call with Lavrov was meant to establish communications for future efforts aimed at reaching a peace agreement in

Ukraine.[3] Rubio noted that he discussed issues surrounding the operation of American and Russian embassies because it will be difficult to communicate with Russia if the embassies are not functioning.

US, Russian, and Ukrainian delegations are reportedly gathering in Saudi Arabia ahead of bilateral US-Russia and US-Ukraine negotiations in the coming weeks. US Special Presidential Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff stated on February 16 that he, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, and other unnamed US officials will travel to Saudi Arabia for bilateral negotiations with Russia. [4] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told *CBS* that he will also travel to Saudi Arabia this week and will take advantage of "any opportunity" to further US President Donald Trump's goal of ending the war in Ukraine.[5] It remains unclear who will represent Russia during the meeting, although a Russian insider source claimed on February 16 that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will arrive in Saudi Arabia in February 18.[6] Ukrainian Economic Minister Yulia Svyrydenko stated that a Ukrainian delegation has also arrived in Saudi Arabia on a working visit.[7] It is unclear if US and Ukrainian officials will meet in Saudi Arabia, as US Special Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg will arrive in Ukraine in the coming days to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. [8]

US officials continue to outline their expectations for the peace negotiations. Witkoff noted that his initial meeting with Russian officials is about "trust building" and expressed hope that he will make progress during these initial meetings.[9] Kellogg stated during the Munich Security Conference on February 15 that Russia must make territorial concessions during the negotiations and that Russia could also promise to not use force against Ukraine in the future or commit to "downsizing" the Russian military.[10] Rubio stated during his interview with *CBS* that European officials must be involved in the peace negotiations in some capacity, but did not provide additional details.[11] The People's Republic of China (PRC) and Brazil also released a statement on February 16 calling for major world powers to work together to promote peace in Ukraine.[12]

Ukraine's European partners reiterated their support for Ukraine's war effort and domestic defense industry at the Munich Security Conference. Zelensky met with Head of the German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall Armin Papperger on February 15 to discuss the development of joint projects between the Ukrainian and German defense industries, particularly regarding 155mm ammunition production, and broader cooperation in maintenance and repair efforts.[13] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and emphasized strengthening Ukraine's front-line positions, improving air defenses, and bolstering Ukrainian production of long-range drones and missiles.[14] Zelensky met separately with Finnish President Alexander Stubb and Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof and discussed increased defense assistance to Ukraine, direct investments in Ukraine's production of long-range weapons, and strengthening sanctions on Russia's shadow tanker fleet.[15] Zelensky met with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store to discuss Ukrainian weapons production, including long-range missile and drone production.[16] Zelensky met with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to discuss increasing sanctions pressure on Russia and strengthening defense cooperation.[17] Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak met with former NATO Secretary General (from 2009-2014) Anders Fogh Rasmussen and discussed strengthening Europe's own defense and establishing a task force to develop the concept of a "security guarantee mechanism" for Ukraine, inspired by the International Task Force on Security and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine.[18] Yermak and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and reiterated their commitment to future peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.[19]

Czech President Petr Pavel announced the continuation of the Czech-led Initiative to provide Ukraine with large-caliber ammunition on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference and stated that Czechia secured funding to meet Ukraine's artillery needs until April 2025.[20] *Reuters* reported that an unnamed Czech government official reported that by the end of 2024 the Czech Initiative had already provided Ukraine with roughly 500,000 155mm artillery rounds and an estimated one million shells over 100mm caliber.

Ukrainian officials also met with US officials to discuss continued support for Ukraine. Yermak met with the US Presidential Envoy for Special Missions Richard Grenell to discuss preparations for upcoming high-level meetings.[21] Grenell emphasized that support for Ukraine is an investment in global stability and security. Zelensky met with a bipartisan delegation of US congressmen to discuss continued US defense assistance to Ukraine and the provision of reliable security guarantees.[22]

The Kremlin officially reiterated its claim that Ukraine has no sovereignty, setting conditions for Moscow to claim that Ukraine has no standing to negotiate with Russia or that any agreements reached with Ukraine in the future are invalid. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on February 16 that Russia has adjusted its approach to potential talks with Ukraine because Ukraine allegedly has a "deficit" of sovereignty.[23] Peskov claimed that Ukraine's decision to not sign the

peace agreement that Russia and Ukraine were discussing in Spring 2022 in Istanbul shows that Russia cannot trust Ukraine's word. Ukraine and Russia had not finalized a peace deal in Istanbul in 2022.[24] Kremlin officials have repeatedly claimed that the West forced Ukraine to walk away from the Istanbul deal and that Ukraine thus lacks sovereignty. Peskov also continued longstanding Kremlin efforts to place the blame for Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine, claiming that Ukraine would "be intact," that the Ukrainian government would not have "abused" Russians in eastern Ukraine, that there would have been no "civil war," and that Russians in eastern Ukraine would have had "no desire...to separate from Ukraine" had Ukraine fulfilled the terms of the Minsk agreements.[25] The Minsk agreements were notably extremely favorable to Russia, placing no obligations on Moscow, yet Russian proxies continually violated the accords with Russian support.[26] Kremlin-controlled state media used a February 15 interview with Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Viktor Medvedchuk to reiterate the Kremlin's false narrative about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's illegitimacy.[27]

Medvedchuk's interview and Peskov's February 16 statements continue to cast doubt on Moscow's willingness to negotiate in good faith about a settlement of the war and set informational conditions for Russia to violate any agreement reached on the grounds that the Ukrainian government had no legal right to conclude it.[28] US President Donald Trump recently reiterated that Ukraine will be part of any talks with Russia about ending the war.[29] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 16 that Putin expressed his desire to end the war to Trump in their recent phone call but noted that Putin must follow up his statement with action in the coming days and weeks to show if he is serious.[30]

The Kremlin extended an open invitation to US President Donald Trump to attend the May 9 Victory Day parade in Moscow as part of efforts to posture Russia's strength and global power status. Peskov stated in response to a question about whether the Kremlin is considering hosting Trump at the May 9 Victory Day parade in Moscow that Russian President Vladimir Putin would be "happy to welcome" any head of state to the parade.[31] The May 9 parade highlights the Soviet Union's role in defeating Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Putin has often used his May 9 speeches to emphasize the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany while minimizing the contributions of the other Western Allies.[32] Putin has even previously claimed that the Soviet Union acted "alone" in the Second World War.[33] The 2025 Victory Day parade will notably celebrate the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and Putin has named 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland."^[34] ISW continues to note that Putin is trying to present himself as equal to Trump and to present Russia as a global power comparable to the United States and as an heir to the Soviet Union's "superpower" status.[35]

Western reporting suggests that the United States intends to ease sanctions on Belarus. Russia uses Belarus as a staging ground for its military against Ukraine and NATO and as a critical tool in its sanctions evasion schemes. US Deputy Assistance Secretary of State Christopher Smith told CNN on February 12 that he led a US delegation to Minsk and met with "Belarusian counterparts" to secure the release of several political prisoners.[36] Smith stated that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko "didn't get anything for this" release and that the release was a "unilateral gesture" by Belarus. Belarusian journalist Igar Tur claimed on February 13 that Smith and unspecified US officials may have met with Lukashenko during the visit.^[37] The New York Times (NYT), citing sources familiar with Smith's trip, reported on February 15 that Smith met with Lukashenko and Belarusian State Security Committee (KGB) Head Ivan Tertel in Minsk on February 12.^[38] NYT, citing individuals who attended Smith's briefing after the trip, reported that Smith later announced that the US is considering a bilateral agreement in which Lukashenko would release an unspecified number of political prisoners in exchange for the US easing sanctions on Belarusian banks and exports of potash, a key ingredient for fertilizer and major Belarusian export. ISW assesses that any sort of sanctions relief directed toward Belarus would have a positive effect on the Russian economy, as Russia has spent decades integrating Belarus into the Russian economy as part of the Union State project as ISW's George Barros has recently reported in detail.^[39] Belarus is a key tool for Russia in its sanctions evasion scheme and the Russian and Belarusian economies are integrated to a degree that Russia's war effort would directly benefit from the easing of US sanctions on Belarus.^[40]

The Russian military command reportedly redeployed additional elements of the Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions, further indicating that the Russian military command intends to prioritize putting pressure on Kostyantynivka – the southernmost point of Ukraine's "fortress belt" – in 2025. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on February 16 that the Russian military command redeployed elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division's 242nd, 255th, and 33rd motorized rifle regiments and the 150th Motorized Rifle Division's 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments and 163rd Tank Regiment from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk

directions.[41] Mashovets stated that elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division recently arrived in Toretsk and will attempt to advance along the T-0516 Toretsk highway towards Pleshchiivka and Kostyantynivka (both northwest of Toretsk) with the support of the 9th and 132nd motorized rifle brigades (51st CAA, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], SMD). Mashovets stated that elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division arrived near Vozdvyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk and southwest of Toretsk) and will attempt to advance along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway with support from the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA). Mashovets stated that the Russian military command recently reconstituted the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions with new personnel and equipment and estimated that the Russian military command redeployed 7,000 to 8,000 troops from each division to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions. A Ukrainian source recently amplified footage of a Russian servicemember claiming that the Russian military command redeployed the 150th Motorized Rifle Division to the Toretsk direction, and Mashovets' report supports this claim. [42] ISW has not observed additional reports of the 20th or 150th motorized rifle divisions engaged in combat in the Toretsk or eastern Pokrovsk directions as of this report, however.

Mashovets assessed that Russian forces intend to eliminate the Ukrainian pocket around Stara Mykolaivka and along the H-20 Avdiivka-Kostyantynivka highway before advancing on Kostyantynivka from the south and southwest, which is consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian forces may want to eliminate the Ukrainian pocket southwest of Toretsk in order to firm up their southern flank ahead of a push on Kostyantynivka.[43] Russian forces likely intend to leverage advances southwest of Toretsk and northeast of Pokrovsk to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from this pocket under threat of envelopment in the coming months. Mashovets suggested that the Russian military command may redeploy elements of the 110th and 114th motorized rifle brigades (51st CAA) to the Toretsk-Vozdvyzhenka area to reinforce this effort after these elements complete the seizure of Andriivka (west of Kurakhove) and level the frontline west of Kurakhove.[44] ISW assesses that Russian forces operating east of Pokrovsk near Vozdvyzhenka are roughly 22 kilometers south of Kostyantynivka at their closest point of advance and that Russian forces operating in Toretsk are roughly 11 kilometers from Kostyantynivka at their closest point of advance as of February 16. Russian forces could possibly reach the southern outskirts of Kostyantynivka in May 2025 should Russian forces be able to replicate their recent rate of advance south of Pokrovsk, but this is unlikely given the likely more significant Ukrainian defenses that Russian forces will face on the road to Kostyantynivka and the degradation of the Russian units involved.

The Russian military appears to be committing to a multi-year-long effort to seize Ukraine's "fortress belt" in Donetsk Oblast, further underscoring Russia's Putin's apparent disinterest in a lasting and enduring peace in Ukraine. Mashovets stated that the Russian military command also redeployed the 10th Tank Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division) and 68th Tank Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division) to the 3rd CAA's area of responsibility in the Siversk and Chasiv Yar directions.[45] ISW has not recently observed reports of Russia reinforcing the Siversk or Chasiv Yar directions, but Mashovets' report suggests that the Russian military command may be reprioritizing those efforts. ISW has recently observed an intensification in Russian activity in the Lyman and Chasiv Yar directions and consistent activity in the Siversk direction.[46] Russian forces may intend to leverage advances in these areas to pressure Slovyansk and Kramatorsk from the north and east as Russian forces attempt to advance on Kostyantynivka from the south.

Ukraine's "fortress belt" is a 50-kilometer-long line of four major cities (Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Druzhkivka, and Kostyantynivka) that forms the backbone of Ukraine's defenses in Donetsk Oblast, and Russia has long aspired to seize these cities.[47] Russian forces are currently between 25 and 30 kilometers from Sloviansk's eastern outskirts, roughly 20 kilometers from Kramatorsk's eastern outskirts, and nine kilometers from Kostyantynivka's northeastern outskirts at their closest points along the frontline in Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces in the Lyman and Siversk directions will have to seize Lyman and Siversk (likely months-long efforts themselves) and advance through numerous fields and small settlements before they can begin to threaten Sloviansk. Russian forces have spent most of the last 10 months slowly grinding through the urban areas of Chasiv Yar and Toretsk but have yet to completely seize these towns. Russian forces may intend to advance southwest of Kostyantynivka and attempt to cut the settlement off from the rest of the fortress belt to the west, but such advances would not collapse the entire fortress belt. Russian advances east and south Kostyantynivka would pressure the fortress belt, but Russian forces are unlikely to completely collapse and seize the fortress belt in 2025 or even 2026.

It is unlikely that the Russian military can sustain a multi-year and multi-axis campaign against Ukraine's fortress belt alongside its other offensive operations in Ukraine. ISW has extensively reported on Russia's mounting personnel and equipment losses in Ukraine and continues to assess that such losses are unsustainable in the medium- to long-term given Russia's current force generation and defense industrial capabilities.[48] A multi-year campaign against a series of significant Ukrainian defensive positions will almost certainly require more forces and materiel than previous

Russian efforts in less operationally significant frontline areas. Russian forces have yet to face significant and sufficiently built-up Ukrainian defenses since their campaign against Bakhmut in Spring 2023 and Avdiivka in Winter 2023-2024, and Russian forces' current method of advancing using its current manpower advantage to conduct costly infantry assaults is unlikely to achieve the same results in the face of significant Ukrainian defenses.[49] ISW previously noted that the Russian military command has demonstrated its willingness to commit to operations that could take months or even years to conclude as Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to hold a theory of victory that assumes that Russia is able to continue the war until Russia militarily defeats Ukraine.[50] Putin's willingness to begin a likely years-long campaign against Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast further supports this assessment and calls into question Russia's interest and intent in sitting down for bilateral negotiations with the United States.

Key Takeaways:

- US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held a telephone call on February 16 to "open a channel of communication" for future talks about the war in Ukraine.
- US, Russian, and Ukrainian delegations are reportedly gathering in Saudi Arabia ahead of bilateral US-Russia and US-Ukraine negotiations in the coming weeks.
- Ukraine's European partners reiterated their support for Ukraine's war effort and domestic defense industry at the Munich Security Conference.
- The Kremlin officially reiterated its claim that Ukraine has no sovereignty, setting conditions for Moscow to claim that Ukraine has no standing to negotiate with Russia or that any agreements reached with Ukraine in the future are invalid.
- Medvedchuk's interview and Peskov's February 16 statements continue to cast doubt on Moscow's willingness to negotiate in good faith about a settlement of the war and set informational conditions for Russia to violate any agreement reached on the grounds that the Ukrainian government had no legal right to conclude it.
- The Kremlin extended an open invitation to US President Donald Trump to attend the May 9 Victory Day parade in Moscow as part of efforts to posture Russia's strength and global power status.
- Western reporting suggests that the United States intends to ease sanctions on Belarus. Russia uses Belarus as a staging ground for its military against Ukraine and NATO and as a critical tool in its sanctions evasion schemes.
- The Russian military command reportedly redeployed additional elements of the Southern Military District's (SMD) 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) to the Toretsk and eastern Pokrovsk directions, further indicating that the Russian military command intends to prioritize putting pressure on Kostyantynivka – the southernmost point of Ukraine's "fortress belt" – in 2025.
- The Russian military appears to be committing to a multi-year-long effort to seize Ukraine's "fortress belt" in Donetsk Oblast, further underscoring Russia's Putin's apparent disinterest in a lasting and enduring peace in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Siversk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 15, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Kelly Campa, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

February 15, 2025, 6:50 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on February 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to create conditions to frame Putin as the victor over US President Donald Trump in negotiations. Zelensky stated during his address at the Munich Security Conference on February 15 that Putin intends to cut Ukraine out of negotiations about the resolution of the war in Ukraine and conduct direct bilateral negotiations with the United States.[1] ISW has previously noted that Putin has recently attempted to present himself as equal to Trump and to present Russia as a global power comparable to the United States and as an heir to the Soviet Union's "superpower" status.[2] Zelensky stated that Putin wants to embarrass Trump and have Trump attend the Russian Victory Day Parade — which highlights Russia's role in defeating Nazi Germany during the Second World War — on May

9 as a "prop."^[3] Zelensky's warning aligns with a report from Russian opposition news outlet *Meduza* that the Kremlin instructed Russian state media to reduce reporting about Trump and instead portray Putin as a strong and decisive leader, as well as to frame the February 12 Putin-Trump phone call as a victory for Putin.^[4] Zelensky also stated that Trump has not discussed the prospect of having other European states participate in negotiations and that Ukraine and the rest of Europe need to present a united front to Putin and Europe needs to participate in decisions about its own future.^[5] The Kremlin has routinely attempted to portray the US as the only other relevant actor in Ukraine besides Russia to deny Ukraine's agency in future negotiations and set conditions to convince the US to ignore Ukraine's interests, all likely to demand significant concessions in Russia's favor.^[6] Zelensky also reiterated his warning that Russia will field 15 new divisions and use military exercises in Belarus to threaten NATO.^[7]

Ukrainian and US officials continue to provide details on upcoming peace negotiations to end the war. Zelensky told *Newsmax* on February 15 that Russian forces at "minimum" need to withdraw to the pre-full scale invasion frontline and reiterated his commitment to ending the war in 2025.^[8] US Special Representative for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg stated that the US aims to engage "all parties in a peace process" within 180 days (by roughly August 2025) and noted that other European states would not "be at the table" in peace negotiations but that the US will consider their points of view.^[9]

Ukraine's US and European partners continue to work to jointly develop Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB). Ukraine's state-owned defense enterprise Ukrboronprom signed a joint venture agreement with French defense company Thales International SAS on February 15 to create advanced technology and provide operational support in the areas of air defense, radar, electronic warfare (EW), tactical communications, and optoelectronic systems.^[10] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov met on February 15 with the heads of European defense companies KNDS France and KNDS Deutschland to discuss maintaining equipment that Ukraine's partners have transferred to Ukraine and the supply of new weapons, including self-propelled artillery systems.^[11] The delegations also discussed the possibility of jointly producing 155mm artillery ammunition, repairing and modernizing Ukrainian air defense systems, and developing drone systems and artificial intelligence (AI). Umerov also met on February 15 with a delegation from Boeing Defense, Space, and Security to discuss joint drone, ammunition, and air weapons production.^[12]

Kremlin-controlled state media used an interview with Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Viktor Medvedchuk to reiterate the Kremlin's false narrative about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's illegitimacy and Russia's longstanding goal of destroying the Ukrainian state. Medvedchuk — a close personal ally of Putin whom Putin initially wanted to install in place of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky following Russia's full-scale invasion — claimed during an interview Kremlin newswire *TASS* published on February 15 that Zelensky is the illegitimate leader of Ukraine and therefore that Zelensky cannot cancel the 2022 decree banning negotiations with Putin.^[13] Medvedchuk claimed that the only government body that can cancel the decree in the absence of a legitimate president is the Ukrainian Constitutional Court but that the court currently does not have the necessary quorum to make decisions.^[14] Medvedchuk is attempting to exploit the fact that the terms of three judges on the Ukrainian Constitutional Court ended two weeks ago (in January 2025), leaving the court with only 11 of its 18 judges and unable to hold Grand Chamber meetings, which require a quorum of 12 judges.^[15] (Ukrainian officials are in the process of interviewing and ranking candidates to make the final selections.^[16]) Zelensky, however, remains the legitimate president of Ukraine as he adhered to Ukrainian law and constitution and did not hold elections under martial law in 2024.^[17] Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly used deliberately false readings of Ukraine's law and constitution to claim that Zelensky is an illegitimate president, and Medvedchuk's claims about the Constitutional Court are just the latest variation on this theme.^[18] **The platforming of the Kremlin's false narrative about Ukraine's legal inability to negotiate by a major Kremlin-controlled outlet casts serious doubts on Moscow's willingness to negotiate in good faith about a settlement of the war and sets informational conditions for Russia to violate any agreement reached on the grounds that the Ukrainian government had no legal right to conclude it.**

Medvedchuk reiterated the need to address the "root causes" of the war during future peace negotiations and claimed that the way to eliminate the "root causes" is to remove the legitimate government in Ukraine, disarm the Ukrainian military, and remove Western-supplied weapons and equipment from Ukraine. Medvedchuk claimed that the only way to address these issues and guarantee Russia's security interests is if Russia "controls the territories under [Ukrainian control]."^[19] Russian officials have explicitly defined the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture within Ukraine.^[20] Medvedchuk claimed that Russia "has every reason" to return allegedly "historical Russian lands" that have "belonged to [Russia] for centuries" in order to allegedly "save the Ukrainian people."^[20] Medvedchuk echoed

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev's longstanding claims that Ukraine's neighbors, including Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, are hoping to annex territories in Ukraine in order to sow discord among Ukraine's European allies.[21] Medvedchuk also claimed that Russia withdrew from Kyiv during the Spring 2022 peace talks in Istanbul "as a gesture of goodwill," ignoring the fact that poor Russian logistics, heavy losses, and effective Ukrainian counterattacks stymied advances and forced Russian forces to withdraw from Kyiv.[22]

It is notable that Kremlin newswire TASS published Medvedchuk's interview, particularly after the Kremlin recently reportedly issued instructions to Russian government-linked media to portray Putin as a strong leader in contrast to Trump.[23] The Kremlin almost certainly approved the publication of Medvedchuk's interview on February 15 in order to reinject the information operation targeting Zelensky's alleged illegitimacy into the information space and to reiterate Russia's long-term objectives of "denazifying," "demilitarizing," and forcing Ukraine to abandon its aspirations to join NATO amid the reported start of limited US-Russia and US-Ukraine talks. These Kremlin informational efforts aim to shape any future negotiations and use different Kremlin-linked actors like Medvedchuk to amplify Russia's longstanding negotiating position.

Russian advances south and southwest of Pokrovsk have slowed over the last two weeks amid indications that the Russian military command may prioritize offensive operations against Kostyantynivka — the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast — in Spring and Summer 2025. Russian forces made rapid advances aimed at expanding the Russian salient south and southwest of Pokrovsk in December 2024 and January 2025, but Russian advances have slowed southwest of Pokrovsk since early February 2025.[24] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on February 14 during the Munich Security Conference that the situation in the Pokrovsk direction has improved in recent days, and the spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the area stated that Russian activity has become less intense near Pokrovsk in recent days.[25] Russian forces have struggled to advance north of Kotlyne and west of Udachne as they appear to have come up against more concerted Ukrainian defenses in these areas.[26] Ukrainian forces have also conducted several counterattacks near Kotlyne and Pishchane (southeast of Kotlyne) aimed at threatening Russian positions in the salient.[27] One Russian milblogger expressed concern on February 15 that slowing Russian advances may allow Ukrainian forces to launch significant counterattacks in the coming weeks and risk giving Ukrainian forces the opportunity to collapse the Russian salient south of Pokrovsk.[28]

Russian advances may be slowing south of Pokrovsk due to degradation among frontline Russian units and intensified Ukrainian drone operations in the area. Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov reported on February 11 that Russian forces suffered roughly 7,000 personnel killed in action (KIA) in the Pokrovsk direction in January 2025, and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on February 2 that Russian forces suffered 15,000 total casualties in this direction in January 2025.[29] Russian forces have suffered significant personnel losses throughout the frontline in the past five and a half months and have likely suffered most of these losses in the Pokrovsk direction.[30] Such losses are likely negatively impacting the combat effectiveness of Russian units in the area.

A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor claimed on February 15 that Ukrainian drone operations are significantly impeding Russian activity in the Pokrovsk direction.[31] The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones are striking any Russian forces operating more than three kilometers north and west of Selydove (currently 11 kilometers south and 35 kilometers east of the frontline) and that Ukrainian drones are monitoring and restricting access to all roads in this direction. The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian drones are making it "impossible" for Russian forces to conduct rotations or resupply frontline units and that Russian activity south and southwest of Pokrovsk is currently very challenging. The milblogger suggested that Ukrainian forces have created a strong layered defense comprised of minefields, conventional artillery systems, and strike and reconnaissance drones and are successfully integrating reconnaissance from drones with ground-based fire systems to improve Ukrainian strike capabilities in the area. The milblogger expressed concern that Russia is far from reaching parity with Ukrainian drone operations and noted that excessive Russian formalization efforts have stalled the development of Russia's drone capabilities.

The Russian military command may also intend to prioritize assaults on Kostyantynivka in 2025 and are thus reportedly not reinforcing the Russian force grouping south of Pokrovsk. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on February 15 that the Russian military command has redeployed elements of the 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Southern Military District [SMD]) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk (Kostyantynivka) direction.[32] A Ukrainian source suggested on February 5 that the Russian military command was redeploying elements of the 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments, 163rd Tank Regiment, and 381st Artillery Regiment (all of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA) and elements of the 96th regiment (reportedly also part of the

150th Motorized Rifle Division, although ISW has not previously observed reports of this unit fighting in Ukraine) from the Kurakhove direction to the Kostyantynivka direction.[33] ISW has not observed further reports of the redeployment of elements of the 8th CAA to the Toretsk direction as of this report. Mashovets and some Russian milbloggers stated that elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division are still operating in the Kurakhove direction in recent days.[34] The Russian military command may be in the process of redeploying the 8th CAA or may intend to split the 8th CAA between the Kurakhove and Kostyantynivka directions until Russian forces eliminate the small Ukrainian salient remaining west of Kurakhove. Seizing Pokrovsk has been the Russian military command's main operational objective in Donetsk Oblast since February 2024, and the Russian military command could have redeployed elements of the 8th CAA to reinforce degraded Russian units in the Pokrovsk direction if Russia intended to continue prioritizing this effort in 2025.[35] The redeployment of significant Russian forces to the Kostyantynivka direction indicates that the Russian military command may have identified attacking Kostyantynivka as its priority effort for Spring and Summer 2025.[36]

Russian cargo vessels have continued to evacuate military assets from the port of Tartus as Russia negotiates its presence in Syria with the interim government. *NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's February 15 Iran Update.* OSINT analyst MT Anderson posted satellite imagery from February 14 showing the Russian cargo vessel *Baltic Leader* and potentially the *Admiral Golovko* Admiral Gorshkov-class frigate about 250 kilometers south of the coast of southwestern Cyprus.[37] Anderson said that the *Baltic Leader* departed the port of Tartus sometime after February 4, when satellite imagery showed the vessel at the port.[38] It is unclear at this time if the *Baltic Leader* will bring evacuated Russian cargo to Russia or Libya. Russia sent some assets from Syria to Libya by air in December 2024 and January 2025.[39] Publicly available marine tracking data showed that two cargo vessels that departed Tartus in late January, the *Sparta* and *Sparta II*, were sailing off the coast of the Netherlands on February 15, presumably in transit to Russia.[40] Continued Russian-Syria engagement — including a recent phone call between Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara and Russian President Vladimir Putin — suggests that Syria seeks some relationship with Russia even as Russia withdraws its military assets from Syria.[41] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on February 14 that Russia continues to discuss its military presence in Syria with the new Syrian administration.[42]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to create conditions to frame Putin as the victor over US President Donald Trump in negotiations.
- Ukraine's US and European partners continue to work to jointly develop Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).
- Kremlin-controlled state media used an interview with Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Viktor Medvedchuk to reiterate the Kremlin's false narrative about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's illegitimacy and Russia's longstanding goal of destroying the Ukrainian state.
- Russian advances south and southwest of Pokrovsk have slowed over the last two weeks amid indications that the Russian military command may prioritize offensive operations against Kostyantynivka — the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast — in Spring and Summer 2025.
- Russian advances may be slowing south of Pokrovsk due to degradation among frontline Russian units and intensified Ukrainian drone operations in the area.
- The Russian military command may also intend to prioritize assaults on Kostyantynivka in 2025 and are thus reportedly not reinforcing the Russian force grouping south of Pokrovsk.
- Russian cargo vessels have continued to evacuate military assets from the port of Tartus as Russia negotiates its presence in Syria with the interim government.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Velyka Novosilka and in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to create regional analogues to the federal "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to place veterans of the war in Ukraine in government positions as part of Kremlin efforts to integrate occupied Ukraine into Russia and militarize society and government.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 14, 2025

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Nicole Volkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

February 14, 2025, 6:15 pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US Vice President JD Vance met on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on February 14. Vance stated during a press conference following the meeting that the United States remains committed to ending the war and achieving a "durable, lasting peace" in Ukraine and not the "kind of peace that's going to have Eastern Europe in conflict just a couple years down the road."^[1] Vance noted the importance of dialogue between the United States, Russia, and Ukraine, and declined to speculate on possible conditions of a future peace agreement in order to "preserve the optionality" for the delegations. Vance and Zelensky both noted that the conversation was productive and Zelensky thanked the United States for continued military support.^[2] Zelensky stated that the United States and Ukraine are preparing a plan to stop Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression and finish the war in a just and lasting peace that provides tangible security guarantees for Ukraine. US President Donald Trump told reporters on February 14 that Ukraine would have a seat at the table during future peace negotiations with Russia to end the war.^[3]

Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak met with US Presidential Envoy for Russia and Ukraine Keith Kellogg in Munich and discussed ongoing efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine.^[4] Zelensky also met with a bipartisan delegation of US senators to discuss ongoing US military support for Ukraine, economic cooperation, and the future joint development of critical minerals and rare earth materials in Ukraine.^[5] German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, British Deputy Defense Minister Luke Pollard, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, and other European officials reiterated Europe's support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity amid ongoing discussions about future peace negotiations with Russia.^[6]

The Kremlin reportedly ordered Russian government-linked media to reduce reporting about US President Donald Trump and portray Russian President Vladimir Putin as a strong and decisive leader after the February 12 Trump-Putin phone call. Russian opposition news outlet *Meduza* reported on February 14 that the Kremlin instructed Russian state-run and pro-government media outlets to frame Trump and Putin's February 12 call as Putin's "initiative and victory" and to use Trump's name less frequently in coverage of the call and other events.^[7] *Meduza* reported that the Kremlin is concerned that the Russian public might see Trump as a more "proactive and decisive" leader than Putin and wants Russian media to emphasize that Putin alone is responsible for the outcome of negotiations between him and Trump. An unnamed political strategist in the Russian Presidential Administration told *Meduza* that the Kremlin does not want the Russian public to perceive Trump as a "strong leader capable of changing the situation" and Putin as a passive or weak leader in comparison. The political strategist added that the Kremlin also instructed the Russian media to manage the public's expectations about negotiations to not create "false, overly optimistic expectations." The Russian information space has previously portrayed Trump as a pragmatic leader with whom Russia could work, but the Kremlin may be attempting to negatively shift the Russian public's perception of Trump in order to emphasize Putin's strength and agency amid reports of possible future peace negotiations and bilateral negotiations.

Russian officials and information space actors have notably not amplified the Russian information operation aimed at portraying Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the illegitimate leader of Ukraine since the February 12 Trump-Putin call. Russian President Vladimir Putin intensified this information operation in January 2024 and most recently questioned Zelensky's legitimacy during a televised interview on January 28, and other Russian officials had amplified this information operation as of February 10.^[8] It remains unclear how long Russian officials and information space actors will refrain from amplifying this information operation, however. It would be a significant concession if Putin and other Russian officials recognized Zelensky's legitimacy as Ukraine's president after repeatedly questioning the legitimacy of all Ukrainian leaders since 2014.

A Russian Shahed drone struck the protective structure of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) on February 14. Geolocated footage published on February 14 shows a drone striking the New Safe Confinement (NSC) structure, built in 2016 to enclose the original temporary shelter structure of Chernobyl's Reactor No. 4, which exploded in April 1986.^[9] Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko reported that emergency services put out the initial fires from the drone strike and began dismantling parts of the NSC to identify and put out remaining smoldering fires.^[10] Images published on February 14 show a surface-level hole in the initial layer of the NSC.^[11] Ukrainian and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials reported that the strike did not pierce the NSC completely and that radiation levels within and outside the NSC remain normal.^[12]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky described the damage to the NSC as "significant" and asserted that the drone was flying at an altitude of only 85 meters to avoid Ukrainian radar detection.^[13] The NSC has a height of roughly 108 meters.^[14] Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) published images of the site showing the wreckage of a black drone labeled "Geran-2" – a common Russian name for the Iranian Shahed-136 drone – and noted that the drone had a "high-explosive" warhead.

[15] Head of Ukraine's Center for Combating Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko noted that Russian forces purposefully fly drones over the Chornobyl NPP and constantly experiment with Shahed drone altitudes to fly as low as possible, likely to avoid detection and downing by Ukrainian air defenses.[16]

Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko called on the IAEA to intensify international measures to stop Russian strikes on nuclear facilities following the Chornobyl strike.[17] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha had an urgent meeting with IAEA Secretary General Rafael Mariano Grossi to discuss the impacts of the Chornobyl strike.[18] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied that Russian forces conducted the strike, and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused Ukrainian forces of conducting the strike.[19] The Kremlin has periodically conducted information operations aimed at portraying Ukraine as endangering the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia NPP (ZNPP), but continued Russian military operations threatening Ukrainian NPPs highlight that Russia is the actual danger to Ukrainian NPPs.[20]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia may be preparing to launch intensified offensive operations into northern Ukraine or attack NATO's eastern flank in 2026. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned during the Munich Security Conference on February 14 that Russia is preparing upwards of 100,000 to 150,000 thousand troops organized into 15 divisions to "aggravate the situation in the Belarus direction." [21] Zelensky suggested that Russia may intend to attack into Ukraine, Poland, or possibly the Baltic countries. It remains unclear whether Zelensky is referring to active Russian military personnel or Russian efforts to recruit additional forces, as former Russian Defense Minister and Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu announced in March 2024 that Russia aimed to form 14 new military divisions in coming years.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US Vice President JD Vance met on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on February 14.**
- The Kremlin reportedly ordered Russian government-linked media to reduce reporting about US President Donald Trump and portray Russian President Vladimir Putin as a strong and decisive leader after the February 12 Trump-Putin phone call.
- Russian officials and information space actors have notably not amplified the Russian information operation aimed at portraying Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the illegitimate leader of Ukraine since the February 12 Trump-Putin call.
- A Russian Shahed drone struck the protective structure of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) on February 14.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia may be preparing to launch intensified offensive operations into northern Ukraine or attack NATO's eastern flank in 2026.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kurakhove, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Vovchansk, Lyman, Kurakhove, and Pokrovsk.
- Russia is reportedly intensifying efforts to coerce Russian mobilized and conscripted personnel into signing contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 13, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

February 13, 2025, 5:30pm ET

Ukraine's European partners announced new military assistance to Ukraine amid the February 12 Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting. The United Kingdom (UK) pledged 150 million pounds (about \$188 million) in military support, including drones, "dozens" of battle tanks and armored vehicles, and air defense systems, and confirmed plans to provide Ukraine with an additional 4.5 billion pounds (about \$5.6 billion) worth of military assistance in 2025.[1] The UK stated that it will provide Ukraine with over 50 armored and protective vehicles, including modernized T-72 tanks, by the end of Spring 2025.[2] Germany committed to supplying 100 IRIS-T air defense system missiles to Ukraine in the near future, and German defense company Helsing announced the delivery of 6,000 AI-equipped drones to Ukraine.[3] Norway joined the Ukrainian Drone Coalition and revealed plans to establish and equip Ukraine's "Northern Brigade" as part of a broader Nordic initiative in which the Nordic countries will equip and train one Ukrainian battalion each.[4] The Netherlands announced the delivery of 25 YPR armored infantry vehicles, Latvia announced the

donation of 42 armored personnel carriers, and Estonia also pledged to allocate 0.25 percent of its GDP for military assistance to Ukraine in 2025.[5]

Russia reportedly lost just over 5,000 tanks and armored vehicles during 2024 compared with 3,000 in 2023. The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimated on February 10 that Russia lost 1,400 main battle tanks (roughly four tank divisions' worth) and over 3,700 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and armored personnel carriers (APCs) — totaling 5,100 lost tanks and armored vehicles in 2024.[6] Data from the Ukrainian General Staff indicates that Ukrainian forces damaged or destroyed over 3,000 Russian tanks and almost 9,000 armored vehicles in 2024, and IISS' estimates likely only account for destroyed tanks and armored vehicles.[7] IISS assessed in February 2024 that Russia would be able to sustain its then-rate of vehicle losses (over 3,000 tanks, APCs, and IFVs annually as of 2023) until February 2026 or 2027 by refurbishing vehicles from Soviet-era storage facilities.[8] It remains unclear if the Russian military command will remain willing or able to sustain this increased rate of armored vehicle losses in 2025, as Russian forces appear to be adapting their tactics to limit such losses.

IISS noted that Russia has adapted some of its tactics to address ongoing equipment shortages and is increasingly relying on infantry-led assaults to advance along the frontline.

[9] ISW began observing indications in November and December 2024 that Russian forces were using fewer armored vehicles in Donetsk Oblast, particularly in areas where Russian forces had previously relied heavily on mechanized assaults to make significant tactical advances.[10] Russian forces have continued to use fewer armored vehicles in Donetsk Oblast and throughout the frontline, possibly due to Ukrainian drone operations, equipment constraints, or non-conducive ground conditions brought about by rainy weather. Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov stated on February 13 that successful Ukrainian drone strikes have been the main factor — and not poor weather and ground conditions — prompting Russian forces to use fewer armored vehicles along the frontline.[11] Trehubov noted that Russian forces also have issues supplying shells to some unspecified frontline positions, possibly due to successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian ammunition depots, and have thus decreased the intensity of shelling in such areas.

It remains unclear if Russia can repair and newly-produce a sufficient number of tanks and armored vehicles to replace losses in Ukraine and equip new Russian units. IISS assessed that Russia refurbished and built over 1,500 tanks and 2,800 IFVs and APCs in 2024 — suggesting that Russia produced enough vehicles to replace all of its tank losses and three quarters of its armored vehicle losses last year.[12] IISS assessed that Russia's ongoing effort to expand the Russian military and create new units is exacerbating equipment shortages and noted that Russia may also be suffering from a shortage of spare parts to refurbish tanks and armored vehicles. IISS assessed that it is highly likely that the Soviet-era tanks and armored vehicles remaining in Russia's stores are in a deteriorated condition, which may complicate Russia's ability to offset high equipment losses in 2025 and beyond. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, citing Ukrainian intelligence, reported on February 8 that Russia is continuing to form new divisions, and former Russian Defense Minister and Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu announced in January 2023 that Russia aimed to stand up 14 new military divisions in the coming years.[13] The Russian military command appears to be balancing allocating refurbished and newly-produced vehicles between new formations and formations that have been fighting on the frontline for several years. Russia may struggle to adequately equip its units with materiel in the long-term if the Russian military continues to burn through Soviet-era vehicle stocks without significantly increasing Russia's ability to produce new tanks and armored vehicles.

Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service (EFIS) assessed that Russia is attempting to build its capabilities not only to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine but also to prepare for a potential future war with NATO, which is consistent with ISW's assessments about ongoing Russian efforts to prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term. The EFIS published its annual intelligence report on February 12 which focused on Russian threats to Estonia, other NATO members, and the West.[14] The intelligence report noted that the pace of the Russian military's rearment will depend on the duration and outcome of Russia's war in Ukraine. The EFIS also assessed that a cessation or freeze of the war in Ukraine on terms favorable to Russia would allow Russia to permanently station more forces along the borders of NATO member states neighboring Russia than before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 — consistent with ISW's longstanding assessments.[15] The intelligence report highlighted Russia's efforts to increase, improve, and centralize drone operations and production.[16] The EFIS reported that Russia will allocate on average one million euros (about \$1 million) annually until 2030 to its "Unmanned Aerial Vehicle" National Project, established in December 2023, which aims to establish 48 research and production centers across Russia, standardize drone productions and development, create an electronic database of drone industry experts, and integrate drone-related education into 75 percent of all Russian schools.[17] The EFIS assessed that Russia is attempting to use these research and development centers to reduce Russia's reliance on Western and foreign technology and

components and that Russia continues to rely on the People's Republic of China (PRC) to procure Western components for drone production. The EFIS noted that up to 80 percent of sanctioned Western components likely reach Russia through the PRC.

Ukrainian forces continue to target Russian energy and military infrastructure as part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) announced on February 13 that Ukrainian drones destroyed two Valdai radar complexes in Dolgoprudny, Moscow Oblast and noted that Russian forces used the radar complexes to detect and down drones over the airspace near Moscow City.[18] Lipetsk Oblast Governor Igor Artamonov claimed on February 13 that Ukrainian drones targeted the Lipetsk water aeration station in Lipetsk City, and a Russian source claimed that Ukrainian drones targeted the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant, which is located near the station and produces about 20 percent of Russia's steel output.[19] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne*, citing sources in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), reported on February 13 that the SBU struck the Andreapol oil pumping station in Tver Oblast, causing a fire at the boiler equipment warehouse and a closed switchgear.[20]

The Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on February 13 the termination of the Moldovan-Russian Intergovernmental Agreement on the establishment and functioning of Russian cultural centers in Moldova in response to ongoing reports of Russian drones violating Moldovan airspace.[21] The Moldovan MFA noted that it summoned Russian Ambassador to Moldova Oleg Vasnetsov following Russian drone violations of Moldovan airspace and notified Vasnetsov of the intended closure of the local branch of the Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*), a Russian cultural diplomacy agency, in response. [22] Moldovan President Maia Sandu reported on February 13 that Russian Shahed drones violated the country's airspace and that two drones exploded on Moldovan territory.[23] Vasnetsov denied reports that Russian drones violated Moldovan territory.[24] Geolocated footage published on February 13 shows the explosion and aftermath of a likely Russian Shahed strike in a field near Ceadir-Lunga, Moldova.[25] Azerbaijani outlets also reported on February 6 that Azerbaijani authorities announced the closure of the local *Rossotrudnichestvo* branch in Baku, Azerbaijan citing national security concerns and a move away from "external interference."^[26] Russia currently has over 80 *Rossotrudnichestvo* branches concentrated in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Central and Southeast Asia aimed at promoting Russian culture, strengthening the influence of the Russian language, supporting "compatriots abroad," and preserving historical sites abroad with significance to Russia.[27] Moldovan and Ukrainian officials have previously warned that Russian officials use the branches to promote Russian propaganda and conduct "subversive work" abroad.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's European partners announced new military assistance to Ukraine amid the February 12 Ukraine Defense Contact Group (the Ramstein format) meeting.
- Russia reportedly lost just over 5,000 tanks and armored vehicles during 2024 compared with 3,000 in 2023.
- IISS noted that Russia has adapted some of its tactics to address ongoing equipment shortages and is increasingly relying on infantry-led assaults to advance along the frontline.
- It remains unclear if Russia can repair and newly-produce a sufficient number of tanks and armored vehicles to replace losses in Ukraine and equip new Russian units.
- Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service (EFIS) assessed that Russia is attempting to build its capabilities not only to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine but also to prepare for a potential future war with NATO, which is consistent with ISW's assessments about ongoing Russian efforts to prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term.
- Ukrainian forces continue to target Russian energy and military infrastructure as part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises.
- The Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on February 13 the termination of the Moldovan-Russian Intergovernmental Agreement on the establishment and functioning of Russian cultural centers in Moldova in response to ongoing reports of Russian drones violating Moldovan airspace.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova and Siversk.
- Russian officials continue efforts to increase recruitment for the "BARS-Bryansk" volunteer territorial defense detachment.

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

February 12, 2025, 6pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:15am ET on February 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US President Donald Trump held bilateral phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 12. Trump stated on February 12 that he discussed the war in Ukraine with Putin and that he and Putin agreed that their administrations will "immediately" begin negotiations.^[1] Trump added that he planned to "inform [Zelensky] of the conversation" after his call with Putin. The official Kremlin readout of the call claimed that Putin emphasized the need to "eliminate the root causes" of the war and that Putin "agreed with" Trump that "a long-term settlement could be achieved through peaceful negotiations."^[2] Russian officials have explicitly defined the "root causes" of the war as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to advance eastward in areas near Russia's border, which indicates that the Kremlin remains committed to imposing its will and security interests on the United States and Europe and is not interested in compromising on this demand.^[3] Trump confirmed his phone call with Zelensky and stated that they discussed the war and the upcoming February 14 meeting between Zelensky and US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference.^[4] Zelensky stated that he and Trump discussed opportunities to achieve peace, readiness to work together, and Ukraine's technological capabilities — including drones.^[5] Zelensky stated that Trump shared the details of his conversation with Putin and that he and Trump agreed to plan future bilateral meetings.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev explicitly rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's proposal to trade occupied Ukrainian territory for territory held by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast during future peace negotiations.^[6] Medvedev stated that it would be "nonsense" to swap Russian and Ukrainian territory, and Peskov stated that Russia will "never discuss" exchanging its territory. Medvedev's and Peskov's statements further support ISW's assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin is uninterested in making any compromises during future peace negotiations and will only comply with a peace agreement that fulfills all of Putin's maximalist demands in Ukraine.^[7]

Denmark's Defense Intelligence Service (DDIS) assessed that Russia may have the capabilities to launch a full-scale war against NATO in the next five years, which is consistent with ISW's assessments about Russian efforts to restructure and prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term. The DDIS published a declassified intelligence assessment on February 11 detailing the growing Russian threat to Denmark and NATO members.^[8] The intelligence assessment notes that Russia is rebuilding its military to fight NATO on an equal footing, aided by financial and material support from the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran. The intelligence assessment states that Russia's willingness to risk war with NATO may increase if European countries do not simultaneously build up their military capabilities in response to Russian capacity building efforts. The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reported on February 12 that Europe spent \$457 billion on defense in 2024, while Russia by itself spent \$462 billion on defense in last year.^[9] The DDIS intelligence assessment notes that Russia has not yet decided to launch a full-scale war against NATO but is expanding its military capabilities to maintain that option.^[10] Russia is currently avoiding actions that could trigger NATO's Article 5 — the commitment to mutual self-defense — but may take greater risks if it perceives a shift in the balance of power in its favor. The DDIS assessment states that if Russia deems NATO weakened either militarily or politically it could be more willing to attack a European NATO member, particularly if Russia doubts US military support to Europe. **The intelligence assessment notably warns that a cessation or freeze of the war in Ukraine on terms favorable to Russia will free up significant Russian military resources for their involvement in another future conventional conflict — consistent with ISW's long-standing assessment.** The DDIS assessment outlines a timeline for Russia's growing military threat in the event of an end of hostilities in Ukraine: Russia could wage a local war against a neighboring state other than Ukraine within six months; Russia could credibly threaten NATO countries in the Baltic region in two years; and Russia could be prepared for a large-scale war in Europe, assuming NATO does not rearm at the same pace as Russia, in five years. ISW previously assessed that Russia's efforts to restructure the Russian military, revive the Moscow and Leningrad military districts, and create long-term mechanisms to militarize and radicalize Russian society against Western ideals and values indicate that Russia is preparing for a future conflict with NATO.^[11]

Russian forces conducted a missile and drone strike mainly targeting Kyiv City and Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast on the night of February 11 and 12. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched seven Iskander-M ballistic missiles/S-400 air defense missiles from Bryansk Oblast and occupied Crimea and 123 Shahed and decoy drones from Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts.[12] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that the Russian missiles targeted Kyiv City and Kryvyi Rih. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed six missiles and 71 drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kyiv, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Kirovohrad, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts and that 71 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported on February 12 that Russian missiles damaged buildings in the Obolonskyi, Svyatoshynskyi, Darnytskyi, and Holosiivskyi raions of Kyiv City and Boryspil, Kyiv Oblast, and caused five casualties.[13] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported on February 12 that Russian ballistic missiles and drones damaged civilian infrastructure and killed at least one person in Kyiv City. [14] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported on February 12 that a Russian missile struck central Kryvyi Rih and damaged civilian infrastructure.[15] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yurii Ihnat emphasized that Ukraine needs US-provided Patriot air defense missile systems to counter ballistic missile strikes.[16]

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently launched the "Contract 18-24" voluntary recruitment program aimed at recruiting 18 to 24-year-old Ukrainians into the Ukrainian Armed Forces.[17] The Ukrainian MoD officially launched the program on February 11 and noted that the program offers 18- to 24-year-olds the ability to join the military under a one-year contract and the option to either reenlist after one year or return to civilian life. The Ukrainian MoD will pay volunteers 200,000 UAH (\$4,700) upon signing a one-year contract and an additional 800,000 UAH (\$19,120) during their service in addition to a monthly salary of 120,000 UAH (\$2,870). Volunteers will receive three months of training before deploying to the frontline. The Ukrainian government will subsidize future mortgages, education, and medical care for volunteers and will permit volunteers to travel abroad after their one year of service. The program also exempts volunteers from mobilization for 12 months after their one-year contract ends. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated that the "Contract 18-24" program is part of Ukraine's ongoing efforts to create a professional military. Ukrainian MoD Spokesperson Dmytro Lazutkin stated that the MoD will pay one million UAH (about \$23,900) to any Ukrainian servicemembers who were under the age of 25 when they signed a voluntary military service contract.[18]

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his first official call with Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara on February 12 since the fall of Russian-backed former Syrian President Bashar al Assad. Putin affirmed Russia's support for Syria's unity and territorial integrity and emphasized the need for a dialogue among political and ethno-religious groups within Syria. Putin pledged continued socio-economic aid to, and economic cooperation with Syria, and Putin and al Shara discussed recent negotiations between the interim Syrian government and the Russian delegation that visited Damascus on January 28.[19] This delegation failed to reach an agreement with the Syrian government on Russian military basing rights at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus, however. [20] Russia likely continues to engage with the interim Syrian government in an effort to secure its presence at these bases.

The Armenian National Assembly approved a draft law in the first reading on February 12 to commence the process of joining the European Union (EU).[21] Several Armenian civic organizations initiated the bill via a petition that garnered enough support (at least 50,000 signatures) for parliamentary consideration.[22] The legislation calls on Armenian authorities to launch EU accession talks in accordance with the will of the Armenian people.[23] Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov acknowledged Armenia's "sovereign right" to pursue EU membership but urged Armenians to consider whether the EU shares this goal.[24] Peskov also emphasized the "benefits" Armenia gains as a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).[25] Russian officials and information space commentators previously claimed that Armenia's move toward EU membership signaled its withdrawal from the EAEU.[26] Armenia continues to strengthen its ties with the EU and the broader West amid escalating tensions with Russia and concerns that Russia is an unreliable security partner to Armenia.

Key Takeaways:

- US President Donald Trump held bilateral phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 12.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev explicitly rejected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's proposal to trade occupied Ukrainian territory for territory held by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast during future peace negotiations.

- Denmark's Defense Intelligence Service (DDIS) assessed that Russia may have the capabilities to launch a full-scale war against NATO in the next five years, which is consistent with ISW's assessments about Russian efforts to restructure and prepare its military and society for a future conflict with NATO in the medium to long-term.
- The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently launched the "Contract 18-24" voluntary recruitment program aimed at recruiting 18 to 24-year-old Ukrainians into the Ukrainian Armed Forces.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin held his first official call with Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara on February 12 since the fall of Russian-backed former Syrian President Bashar al Assad.
- The Armenian National Assembly approved a draft law in the first reading on February 12 to commence the process of joining the European Union (EU).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Borova, Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Russia's Shahed drone production rate may be declining.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 11, 2025

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

February 11, 2025, 7:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on February 11. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 12 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated Ukraine's commitment to good faith peace negotiations with Russia and the particular importance of US military assistance to Ukraine's security. Zelensky stated during an interview with UK outlet *The Guardian* on February 11 that Europe will not be able to completely meet Ukraine's military needs and provide adequate security guarantees without US involvement.^[1] Zelensky called for the West to provide Ukraine with additional Patriot air-defense systems and noted that the United States has an irreplaceable role in supplying these systems to Ukraine. Zelensky noted that Ukraine's allies can help rebuild and restore Ukraine alongside Ukrainian companies and that Ukraine is prepared to discuss such plans in detail. Zelensky stated that he will provide US President Donald Trump during their next meeting with a more detailed plan for how the United States can be involved in Ukraine's reconstruction and the joint extraction of natural resources. Zelensky noted that Ukraine has Europe's largest uranium and titanium reserves and suggested that the West should not let these resources fall under Russia's control. Zelensky told *Reuters* on February 7 that he floated the idea of giving allies the opportunity to invest in critical mineral extraction during closed meetings in Fall 2024.^[2] Zelensky stated that Ukraine is offering its partners a "mutually beneficial partnership" to jointly develop Ukrainian resources and is not proposing "giving away" Ukraine's resources. Zelensky stated that the United States will receive prioritized access to this opportunity and that the United States and Ukraine are considering storing US liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Ukraine's underground gas storage sites.

Russian officials are reportedly attempting to constrain Russian milblogger reporting about the current frontline in Kursk Oblast, likely in response to concerns that the West will pressure Russia into trading Russian territory for occupied Ukrainian territory. Several Russian milbloggers who regularly criticize the Russian military's conduct of the war in Ukraine claimed on February 10 and 11 that unspecified actors are calling for Russian authorities to charge the milbloggers with discrediting the Russian military after the milbloggers reported about recent Ukrainian advances southeast of Sudzha.^[3] The milbloggers claimed that the Russian military command is targeting them for publishing information about successful Ukrainian attacks near Cherkasskaya Konopeika and Fanaseyevka, and one milblogger claimed that the recent Ukrainian attacks forced the Russian military command to delay plans for a future offensive operation in the area. The latter claim indicates that the Russian military command may have been planning to conduct an offensive operation to seize Sudzha, a prominent gas transit hub and the main town that Ukrainian forces control in Kursk Oblast.

The Russian military appears increasingly anxious to consolidate control over reporting about the situation in Kursk Oblast as Zelensky continues to express his intent to leverage Russian territory in future peace negotiations. Zelensky stated during his interview with *The Guardian* that he intends to

use Ukrainian-held territory in Kursk Oblast to secure the return of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory or "something else" during future peace negotiations with Russia.^[4] Zelensky noted that it is important to retake all of occupied Ukraine and did not speculate on which area of occupied Ukraine he would consider trading Russian territory for. Russian President Vladimir Putin likely intends to expel Ukraine from Kursk Oblast, or at least from Sudzha, before beginning peace negotiations in order to avoid having to trade occupied Ukrainian territory for Russian territory.

Russian forces continued to test new strike tactics and packages in a series of missile and drone strikes targeting energy infrastructure in Ukraine on the night of February 10 to 11. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 19 sea-, air-, and land-based missiles against a gas production facility in Poltava Oblast and 124 Shahed and decoy drones against Ukraine from Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; and Oryol, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts.^[5] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 57 Shahed and other drones over Kharkiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kyiv, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Kirovohrad, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Odesa oblasts and that 67 decoy drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. Ukrainian officials reported that strikes damaged infrastructure in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Cherkasy oblasts and facilities at a Naftogaz gas production plant in Poltava Oblast.^[6] Russian forces notably launched all the missiles in this strike package against a single target. Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko stated that the strikes forced Ukrainian energy operators to restrict electricity.^[7] Ukrainian aviation expert Anatoliy Khrapchynskyi stated that that Russian forces first launched Shahed drones, then launched cruise and ballistic missiles - including Kalibr cruise missiles - at a single target in order to complicate Ukrainian air defenses' abilities to intercept all incoming projectiles.^[8] Khrapchynskyi stated that Russian forces recently began reducing their use of Kh-101 and Kh-555 cruise missiles, which are launched from Tu-22 (Backfire) and Tu-160 (Blackjack) strategic aircraft and are increasingly using Kh-59 and Kh-69 cruise missiles launched from tactical Sukhoi aircraft. The Russians presumably prefer not to risk their strategic bombers in such strikes. Khrapchynskyi also stated that Russian forces are adapting their strike tactics following the provision of F-16 fighter aircraft to Ukraine and are prioritizing striking frontline and border areas where Ukrainian forces are less likely to operate F-16s.

Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery and reportedly struck Engels Air Base in Saratov Oblast on the night of February 10 to 11. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces (USF), Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), Special Operations Forces (SSO), and the Ukrainian military struck the Saratov Oil Refinery near Saratov City causing a fire.^[9] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Saratov Oil Refinery produces gasoline, diesel fuel, and over 20 types of petroleum products and provides fuel to the Russian military. Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin stated that a drone strike caused a fire at an industrial plant in Saratov Oblast.^[10] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Saratov Oil Refinery in November 2024 and January 2025.^[11] Head of Ukraine's Center for Combating Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko implied that Ukrainian forces also struck Engels Air Base, and Russian sources published footage purportedly showing Russian air defense operating in the area.^[12]

The Russian State Duma voted to remove Russian State Duma deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) retired Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev from the Duma Defense Committee on February 11. Russian Duma deputies submitted the proposal to remove Gurulev from the Defense Committee and transfer him to the Regional Policy and Local Government Committee on February 7, and Gurulev expressed support for this move but did not claim responsibility for the initiative.^[13] Kremlin-affiliated business outlet *Kommersant* reported on February 7 that some of its sources stated that Gurulev's removal is due to his controversial statements that reflect badly on the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).^[14] Gurulev has made statements that include proposing to introduce a tax on childless Russians and notably leaked the audio message of former commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (SMD) Major General Ivan Popov in July 2023 in which Popov claimed that the Russian command dismissed him for expressing grievances over the lack of support for Russian forces, resulting in an ongoing criminal case against Popov.^[15]

The Kremlin may be setting informational conditions for possible false-flag attacks in the Baltic Sea and against Russian opposition politicians living abroad in order to discredit Ukraine. The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed on February 11 that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) with assistance from unspecified Western countries intend to blow up a foreign vessel in the Baltic Sea to prompt NATO to block Russia's access to the Baltic Sea and start a direct armed conflict between Russia and NATO.^[16] The SVR claimed that unspecified European intelligence services and Ukraine's GUR also plan to assassinate Russian opposition figures living abroad and blame Russia for the assassinations to undermine future peace negotiations. Russia's SVR has previously accused Ukraine and other Western states of planning false flag attacks to

discredit Ukraine and drive a wedge in Western unity behind Ukraine, particularly at critical moments in Western discussions regarding support for Ukraine and a possible peace plan.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated Ukraine's commitment to good faith peace negotiations with Russia and the particular importance of US military assistance to Ukraine's security.
- Russian officials are reportedly attempting to constrain Russian milblogger reporting about the current frontline in Kursk Oblast, likely in response to concerns that the West will pressure Russia into trading Russian territory for occupied Ukrainian territory.
- Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery and reportedly struck Engels Air Base in Saratov Oblast on the night of February 10 to 11.
- The Russian State Duma voted to remove Russian State Duma deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) retired Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev from the Duma Defense Committee on February 11.
- The Kremlin may be setting informational conditions for possible false flag attacks in the Baltic Sea and against Russian opposition politicians living abroad in order to discredit Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova, Lyman, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Velyka Novosilka, and Hulyaipole.
- Russian regional authorities are reportedly reducing payments due to regional budget deficits for Russian soldiers who received minor injuries.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 10, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced the Ukrainian "Drone Line" project on February 10 as part of ongoing Ukrainian efforts to integrate drone and ground operations. Umerov stated that the Ukrainian military will "scale up" five existing drone regiments and brigades in the Ukrainian military and border guard service and will integrate infantry and drones into a single strike system, which will enable Ukrainian forces to create kill zones 10 to 15 kilometers deep, will provide constant aerial support and infantry cover, and will detect and destroy Russian forces before they can approach Ukrainian positions.[1] Ukraine's Ground Forces reported that the expansion of five such existing drone units is only the first stage of the Drone Line project.[2] This project likely formalizes and provides additional support to ongoing Ukrainian efforts to expand drone units and increase their coordination with regiments and brigades, while keeping regular units and drone units separate in order to support drone units' more rapid combat and technological adaptations and innovations.

Ukraine's efforts to integrate drone operations with ground operations significantly differ from Russian efforts to centralize drone units. Russian efforts to centralize drone units have attempted to augment Russian drone capabilities by expanding state control over drone operators and developers and increasing their incorporation into the Russian military bureaucracy.[3] The Russian military began efforts to centralize drone operators and developers in Fall 2024, disbanding informal Russian drone detachments and removing drone specialists from regular military units, then selectively reorganizing them to form new Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)-controlled drone units and centralizing their assets. The Russian MoD also reportedly established its first separate unmanned systems regiment at the military district level in January 2024, further highlighting ongoing efforts to centralize and bureaucratize control over drone operations.[4] ISW continues to assess that the Russian MoD's efforts to centralize and reorganize drone units and monopolize drone production and procurement processes may complicate Russian forces' ability to rapidly innovate and adapt new technologies and combat techniques in the short- to medium-term.[5]

Ukrainian forces continue to target oil refineries in Russia as part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries. Head of Ukraine's Center for Combatting Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko implied on February 10 that Ukrainian drones struck Krasnodar City and the Afipsky Oil Refinery in Neftekachka, Krasnodar Krai just south of Krasnodar City.[6] Kovalenko noted that the Afipsky refinery has a production capacity of 6.25 million tons of oil per year and plays a vital role in providing fuel to the Russian military, particularly in southern Ukraine. Kovalenko highlighted that the refinery's location in Krasnodar Krai

makes it a significant logistical hub supplying diesel fuel and jet fuel to Russian forces. The Afipsky Oil Refinery notably borders the base of the Russian 90th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]), which has previously been armed with Buk-M2 and Buk-M3 air defense systems, although the base's current air defense capabilities are unknown.^[7] Geolocated footage published on February 9 shows an explosion near Krasnodar City.^[8] Krasnodar Krai Governor Veniamin Kondratyev claimed on February 10 that Russian forces downed a Ukrainian drone over Krasnodar City, damaging a residential building.^[9] Kondratyev claimed that Russian forces also downed a drone over Afipsky and that debris damaged a private residence.^[10] Krasnodar City Mayor Evgeny Naumov claimed on February 10 that drone debris fell near a market.^[11]

Russian authorities reportedly authorized the systematic torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) held in Russian prisons as early as March 2022. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on February 10 that accounts from two former Russian Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) prison guards and a prison medical professional, official documents, interviews with Ukrainian POWs, and a person who has helped the Russian prison officials defect show that Russian authorities have instructed Russian prison authorities to engage in widespread torture of Ukrainian POWs in Russian prisons since March 2022.^[12] The WSJ stated that Major General Igor Potapenko, the head of the FSIN in St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, told elite prison "special forces" in March 2022 to "be cruel" to Ukrainian POWs and that there would be no restrictions on violence against the POWs. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* assessed that these "special forces" were likely the FSIN's special forces — as opposed to the Russian Main Directorate [GRU] Spetsnaz forces.^[13]) The WSJ reported that other prison authorities across Russia received similar instructions in the first weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[14] One of the former prison guards stated that they believed they had permission from their leadership to "push their mistreatment of Ukrainians to a new level." Russian forces have increasingly executed Ukrainian POWs on the battlefield, and ISW continues to assess that Russian battlefield commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to execute Ukrainian POWs.^[15] Reports that Russian authorities authorized the torture of Ukrainian POWs in Russian prisons as early as March 2022 also demonstrate the degree to which Russian authorities are complicit in these war crimes. Russian authorities notably appointed Potapenko as Vice Governor of St. Petersburg for Security and Migration Policy in 2024.^[16] Russian authorities' complicity in these crimes and the promotion of war crime perpetrators to high-level positions within the Russian government further demonstrate the atrocities that Russian occupation inflicts on the Ukrainian people.

The Kremlin may be setting informational conditions to justify an influx of North Korean citizens arriving in Russia to join either the Russian workforce or the Russian military. Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexander Matsegora claimed that North Korea and Russia are increasing educational cooperation and that professors from North Korean universities will travel to Moscow, Kazan, Novosibirsk, and Vladivostok cities "for a long period of time" to teach Korean in Russian universities and that Russian universities are preparing three-month internships for North Korean students.^[17] Matsegora's statement follows South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) report on February 9 that North Koreans are increasingly entering Russia on student visas to take construction jobs.^[18] UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2397, which Russia voted for in 2017, prohibits North Korea from sending its citizens abroad for work and mandated that all UN member states expel all North Koreans "earning income" abroad by December 2019.^[19] Matsegora's statement that North Korean professors are coming to Russia for work would likely violate UNSC Resolution 2397. Russia vetoed in March 2024 an annual UNSC resolution extending a monitoring panel tracking adherence to UN sanctions against North Korea.^[20]

A Russian official claimed that Russia is sending experienced Russian military personnel to North Korea for medical treatment. Matsegora claimed that Russia has sent "hundreds" of wounded soldiers who fought against Ukraine to North Korea for rehabilitation and medical care and that North Korea refused Russia's offer of financial compensation for the medical care, food, and other expenses related to the Russians' stay in North Korea.^[21] The Russian military command has reportedly been sending wounded personnel back into assault groups without treatment, demonstrating a general disregard for soldiers' health in the Russian military and calling into question official Russian claims to be sending Russian soldiers abroad for treatment, particularly to North Korea.^[22] The arrival of combat experienced Russian soldiers, particularly if they include officers or non-commissioned officers, to North Korea may allow the Russian military to work with North Korean forces and disseminate lessons from the war in Ukraine while ostensibly recuperating.

The pro-Russian Moldovan breakaway republic of Transnistria refused aid from the EU to resolve its gas crisis, demonstrating Russia's continued economic influence over Transnistria and the Kremlin's prioritization of the region. Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean stated on February 10 that Transnistria rejected 60 million euros (about \$61.8 million) in EU aid to support continued gas deliveries to the breakaway republic, refusing to accept the aid's condition that Tiraspol gradually increase tariffs for consumers.^[23] Recean outlined the scheme through which Transnistria

will receive gas from the European market starting February 13. MET Gas and Energy Marketing, a Hungarian natural gas trader on the European market, signed a contract with Moldovagaz to transport gas for Transnistria to the Moldovan border; Dubai-based JNX General Trading LLC will pay for the gas; Moldovagaz and Tiraspoltransgaz reached an agreement to transit the gas through Moldova to Transnistria; and Transnistria will pay the transit costs in advance. Recean noted that Moldovan authorities have vetted both companies and did not find any violations of international or Moldovan law. Transnistria will reportedly undertake measures to demonstrate its "openness" in return, including releasing political prisoners, continuing to air Moldovan public television, and removing 11 checkpoints that Tiraspol installed in 2022. Recean stated that Tiraspol refused the EU offer of aid under pressure from Moscow, and a senior Moldovan government official told *Politico* that Russia blocked the EU-proposed solution.[24] Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky claimed on February 10 that Russian "credit and functional support" made the Hungarian supply scheme possible and thanked the Russian Ministry of Energy for its assistance.[25] Russia's allocation of funds for Transnistria's purchase of European gas demonstrates that influence over Transnistria remains a priority for the Kremlin, despite Russia's ongoing economic strains at home.[26] Russia's role in financing the gas purchases indicates that Russia will continue to be the sole economic backer of the breakaway republic, despite select Transnistrian authorities' Western-leaning political and economic interests.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian Defense Minister Rустем Умеров announced the Ukrainian "Drone Line" project on February 10 as part of ongoing Ukrainian efforts to integrate drone and ground operations.
- Ukraine's efforts to integrate drone operations with ground operations significantly differ from Russian efforts to centralize drone units.
- Ukrainian forces continue to target oil refineries in Russia as part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries.
- Russian authorities reportedly authorized the systematic torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) held in Russian prisons as early as March 2022.
- The Kremlin may be setting informational conditions to justify an influx of North Korean citizens arriving in Russia to join either the Russian workforce or the Russian military.
- A Russian official claimed that Russia is sending experienced Russian military personnel to North Korea for medical treatment.
- The pro-Russian Moldovan breakaway republic of Transnistria refused aid from the EU to resolve its gas crisis, demonstrating Russia's continued economic influence over Transnistria and the Kremlin's prioritization of the region.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk.
- Russian milbloggers continue to complain about the systemic issue of Russian forces submitting false reports to Russian military authorities and of high-level Russian officers micromanaging tactical-level units on the battlefield.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 9, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

February 9, 2025, 4:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11 am ET on February 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia continues to leverage its partnerships with US adversaries, including North Korea, to offset the resource shortages constraining Russia's economy and war effort. South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported on February 9, citing South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS), that thousands of North Korean workers arrived in Russia in 2024 to take construction jobs.[1] Russian official data shows that 13,221 North Koreans entered Russia in 2024 — up to 12 times the number that entered Russia in 2023. Many of the North Korean workers are reportedly entering Russia on student visas, with 7,887 North Koreans having entered Russia in 2024 for alleged education purposes. Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on February 4 that the number of North Koreans who came to Russia to study in 2024 was the highest number since 2019.[2] Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported in November 2024 that data from the Federal Security Service

(FSB) Border Service showed that a record number of North Koreans entered Russia for education between July and September 2024 — notably in the lead up to the reported start of North Korea's deployment of troops to Russia in early October 2024.[3]

Russia has been suffering from significant labor shortages in both its civilian and defense industrial sectors since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[4] The arrival of several thousands of North Koreans to work in civilian sectors is marginal and will not significantly alleviate Russia's labor shortages. Russia reportedly has an estimated labor shortage of 1.5 million workers as of December 2024, for example.[5] North Korea's provisions of materiel and troops to Russia have significantly increased over the course of 2024, however, and the several thousands of North Korean workers that arrived in Russia recently may be the beginning of larger influxes in the future that could more significantly help Russia's labor shortage issues. (Russian forces' initial use of small numbers of North Korean artillery and mortar shells grew rapidly, with 60 percent of Russian forces' artillery ammunition fired now being sourced from North Korea as of December 2024.[6]) Russian enterprises are also likely not paying North Korean workers the same salaries as Russian citizens, so a significant influx of North Korean workers into the Russian work force in the future could also financially benefit Russian enterprises that are having to offer high salaries to Russian citizens in order to compete against Russian military and defense industrial enterprises for employees. Significant increases in the number of North Koreans working in Russia's civilian sectors in the future could also free up Russian civilian sector employees to work in the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) or fight in Ukraine.

The arrival of North Korean workers to Russia demonstrates how Russia, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), is violating UNSC Resolution 2397. Russia voted for Resolution 2397 in 2017 in response to North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests. [7] The resolution explicitly prohibits North Korea from sending its citizens abroad for work and mandated that all UN member states expel all North Koreans "earning income" abroad by December 2019. Russia is likely using the guise of student visas to hide Russia's violation of the resolution.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un continues to reiterate his support for Russia and its war effort in Ukraine. Kim gave a speech at the North Korean Ministry of National Defense on February 9 that heavily focused on the threats the US and the West allegedly pose to North Korean security.[8] Kim criticized the US for protracting the war in Ukraine and claimed that he is "seriously concerned" about the West's alleged desire to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia. Kim notably claimed that the North Korean military and people will "invariably support and encourage" Russia's "just cause" to defend its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity "in the spirit of" the June 2024 Russian-North Korean comprehensive strategic partnership agreement.

German authorities reportedly failed to down suspected Russian reconnaissance drones flying near a German military facility in January 2025 where Ukrainian forces have undergone training. German outlet *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on February 8, citing a classified internal German report, that the German Ministry of Defense (MoD) is investigating possible espionage connected to six drone sightings near the Schleswig Airbase, where Ukrainian forces have trained to operate Patriot air defense systems, from January 9 to 29, 2025.[9] *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that German forces attempted to jam or down the drones, including with HP-47 jammers, RADIS drone detection systems, and Wingman counter-drone systems, but that German forces failed to down the drones or locate the operators in all six instances. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that German authorities described the drones as "specialized objects" with modifications and are likely not commercially available. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* noted that authorities suspect that the operators launched the drones from ships in the North or Baltic seas and that the operators could be connected to Russia. A Bundeswehr spokesperson reportedly told *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the German military has observed an increase in drones flying over German military facilities in an unspecified timeframe.

Russia appears to be leveraging the technological innovations it is developing in its war in Ukraine directly against NATO states. Russia has been developing and improving its drone capabilities, including drone resistance to electronic warfare (EW) and Russia's own EW capabilities, in its ongoing war against Ukraine. NATO and its member states have increasingly warned of Russian sabotage and hybrid operations against NATO members throughout 2024.[10] Reports that a NATO member state is struggling to combat likely Russian reconnaissance drones demonstrate the need for NATO states to further develop their defensive capabilities as Russia continues to use its experience on the battlefield in Ukraine to innovate new technologies.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia continues to leverage its partnerships with US adversaries, including North Korea, to offset the resource shortages constraining Russia's economy and war effort.**

- The arrival of North Korean workers to Russia demonstrates how Russia, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), is violating UNSC Resolution 2397.
- North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un continues to reiterate his support for Russia and its war effort in Ukraine.
- German authorities reportedly failed to down suspected Russian reconnaissance drones flying near a German military facility in January 2025 where Ukrainian forces have undergone training.
- Russia appears to be leveraging the technological innovations it is developing in its war in Ukraine directly against NATO states.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Vovchansk.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russia continues efforts to recruit Russians and citizens of other Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) countries to sign military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 8, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, and George Barros

February 8, 2025, 5:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:40am ET on February 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia may be providing drone and missile technology to North Korea in exchange for North Korean troops fighting in Kursk Oblast. Japanese outlet NHK, citing multiple sources familiar with Russia–North Korea relations, reported on February 8 that Russia has agreed to assist North Korea in developing and mass-producing various types of drones in exchange for North Korean forces supporting Russia's war effort against Ukraine.^[1] NHK noted that Russia remains reluctant to help North Korea develop nuclear weapons, fearing that North Korean nuclear tests could further strain relations with the United States and complicate relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), however. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky noted on February 8 that Russia is specifically spreading modern technology to North Korea, including drone technology, and told *Reuters* on February 7 that thousands of North Korean troops have returned to active combat in Kursk Oblast after a brief pause.^[2] A Ukrainian brigade operating in Kursk Oblast published a video on February 8 reportedly showing North Korean forces conducting assaults alongside Russian forces in Kursk Oblast.^[3] South Korean sources recently reported that Russia withdrew North Korean troops from the battlefield in Kursk Oblast in mid-January 2025, possibly for rest and reconstitution or to rethink how Russia is using these troops.^[4] ISW assesses that North Korea is using the war in Ukraine as a testing ground for its own military capabilities.^[5] *Reuters* reported on February 6 that North Korean ballistic missiles fired by Russian forces since December 2024 have demonstrated significantly improved accuracy, likely an example of North Korean capability enhancement gained through the North Korea–Russia alliance.^[6]

Russia continues to expand its military capabilities, indicating that the Kremlin has no immediate interest in negotiations or a lasting peace with Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, citing Ukrainian intelligence, reported on February 8 that Russian forces are forming new military divisions, building additional defense-industrial base (DIB) facilities, planning to increase military personnel by over 100,000 soldiers, and deepening military cooperations with North Korea.^[7] Then-Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced in January 2023 that Russia would create 14 new military divisions, but ISW is unable to assess whether Zelensky is referring to these previously announced plans or the creation of additional new divisions.^[8] ISW also cannot verify the status of the formation of the 14 divisions Shoigu previously announced. Zelensky highlighted that Russia's force-generation, restructuring, and defense-production efforts make it clear that Putin is not interested in negotiations with Ukraine and seeks to continue Russia's war.^[9] Such Russian plans suggest that Russia, not Ukraine, is the party refusing good-faith negotiations and actively pushing for protracted war rather than peace, while also setting conditions to prepare for a potential broader conflict with NATO.^[10] Russian officials and information space have frequently framed the war in Ukraine as a part of a larger confrontation with the West.^[11]

The Russian command may be redeploying forces from the Kurakhove direction towards Toretsk in order to facilitate Russian offensive operations against Kostyantynivka in Spring or Summer 2025. A Russian source claimed that the Russian military command is redeploying elements of the 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments, 163rd Tank Regiment, and 381st Artillery Regiment (all of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division) and elements of the 96th regiment (possibly also part of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, although ISW has not previously observed reports of this unit operating in Ukraine) from the Kurakhove direction to the Toretsk direction.[12] ISW has not observed confirmation or other reporting on this alleged redeployment. Another Russian source claimed that elements of the 102nd and 103rd motorized rifle regiments are operating near Dachne as of February 8, however.[13] A redeployment of elements of the 8th CAA to the Toretsk direction- in conjunction with intensified Russian efforts in the Chasiv Yar direction in recent weeks- would indicate that the Russian command may intend to prioritize advances towards Kostyantynivka and pressuring Ukraine's fortress belt in 2025, as ISW previously assessed.[14]

The Baltic States cut ties with the Soviet-era power grid that connected them to Belarus and Russia on February 8 as part of efforts to achieve full energy independence from Russia and further integrate their energy infrastructure with the European Union (EU). Western sources reported on February 7 and 8 that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania disconnected from the centralized Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (BRELL) energy network on February 8 as part of a long-planned effort to integrate more closely with the EU and strengthen regional security.[15] The three countries are temporarily operating independently from the grid and, pending final tests, will synchronize with the EU's grid on February 9. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas wrote on X (formerly Twitter) on February 7 that this move ensures Russia can no longer use energy as a "tool of blackmail"- something Russia has repeatedly leveraged against countries reliant on Russian energy, including Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine.[16] Russia's Ministry of Energy reported on February 8 that Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast, located on the Baltic Sea between Poland and Lithuania, has also transitioned to autonomous power generation as a result of the Baltic states' decision.[17] Kaliningrad Oblast possesses three gas-fueled and one coal-fired power plant and can reportedly generate a total capacity of 1.88 gigawatts, which the Russian Ministry of Energy claimed is more than twice Kaliningrad's peak energy consumption.[18] It is unclear if Kaliningrad's transition to autonomous power generation will impact daily life or Russian military activity in the region.

Key Takeaways:

- Russia may be providing drone and missile technology to North Korea in exchange for North Korean troops fighting in Kursk Oblast.
- Russia continues to expand its military capabilities, indicating that the Kremlin has no immediate interest in negotiations or a lasting peace with Ukraine.
- The Russian command may be redeploying forces from the Kurakhove direction towards Toretsk in order to facilitate Russian offensive operations against Kostyantynivka in Spring or Summer 2025.
- The Baltic States cut ties with the Soviet-era power grid that connected them to Belarus and Russia on February 8 as part of efforts to achieve full energy independence from Russia and further integrate their energy infrastructure with the European Union (EU).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Lyman, and Toretsk.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to incentivize Russian citizens to serve in the military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 7, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Johanna Moore, and George Barros

February 7, 2025, 6:15 pm ET

Ukrainian forces marginally advanced during mechanized assaults in their salient in Kursk Oblast on February 6, but Russian sources claimed on February 6 and 7 that Russian forces have at least temporarily stalled Ukrainian advances southeast of Sudzha. Geolocated footage published on February 6 indicates that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced along the 38K-028 Sudzha-Oboyan highway and in the fields east of Fanaseyevka (southeast of Sudzha) during the February 6 attacks.[1] Russian sources widely claimed that Russian forces repelled all Ukrainian attacks on February 6 and on the night of February 6 to 7 but acknowledged that Ukrainian forces maintain some positions near Cherkasskaya Konopelka (north of Fanaseyevka), Fanaseyevka, and

Ulanok (east of Fanaseyevka).[2] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that fighting is ongoing on the outskirts of Makhnovka (just southeast of Sudzha) but that Ukrainian forces did not launch new attacks near Cherkasskaya Konopelka during the day on February 7.[3] Russian milbloggers continued to issue conflicting claims about the situation in Cherkasskaya Konopelka. Some milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have seized the settlement, while others claimed that Ukrainian forces bypassed the settlement or that Russian forces have retaken the settlement.[4] ISW cannot independently verify Russian claims about the situation in Cherkasskaya Konopelka. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are effectively using fiber-optic first-person view (FPV) drones to counter Ukrainian forces attacking in the area.[5]

Russian sources provided additional information about the Russian force grouping defending southeast of Sudzha. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla), "Veteran" Assault Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps), "Arbat" Special Purpose Battalion (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC], SMD), and drone operators of the Russian Rubicon Center for Advanced Unmanned Technologies are defending in the area.[6] Russian milbloggers widely credited drone operators of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz forces with defending against the Ukrainian attacks on February 6 and 7 and complained that the Russian MoD did not acknowledge the Chechen drone operators.[7] Russian milbloggers also claimed that the Russian military command reportedly removed the 11th VDV Brigade's commander and that the MoD is blaming the commander for failing to sufficiently man and defend Russian positions near Cherkasskaya Konopelka.[8]

The Kremlin continues to conduct an information campaign likely directed toward both domestic and international audiences that aims to conceal the extent to which Russia's protracted war against Ukraine has negatively affected Russia's economy. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin met on February 7 with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the state of the Russian economy.[9] Mishustin claimed that Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) rose in 2024 by 4.1 percent largely due to "intensive" growth in Russia's manufacturing industry – likely referring to Russia's boost of its defense industrial base (DIB) since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Mishustin claimed that the main contributors to the growth in Russia's manufacturing sector were the machine-building, transport engineering, automotive, and computer and electronic equipment sectors.

Mishustin claimed that inflation in Russia reached 9.52 percent in 2024, and Putin claimed that inflation was already 9.9 percent as of February 3, 2025. Russia's true inflation is quite higher than the official statistics the Kremlin is willing to publicize, however. (Several studies indicate that Russia's inflation rate is closer to 20 percent.[10]) Mishustin highlighted Russia's low 2024 unemployment rate of 2.5 percent but only briefly acknowledged Russia's significant labor shortages, which are the reason for Russia's low unemployment.

Mishustin noted that Russian economic growth might be less significant in 2025 as it is very important to stop inflation and ensure long-term economic growth – likely a signal to prepare the Russian population to expect economic hardships in 2025. Mishustin and Putin also attempted to posture Russia's economy as stable in the face of international economic pressure. Mishustin claimed that Russia's fuel and energy complex is adapting and finding new markets.

Mishustin claimed that Russia's economy has "successfully managed" with "unprecedented sanctions pressure" in recent years and that anti-Russian sanctions are hurting the states that imposed the sanctions more than the sanctions are hurting Russia. Putin similarly attempted to posture Russia's economy as stronger and growing more rapidly than economies in the West. Mishustin and Putin notably did not mention how the Russian Central Bank raised the interest rate to 21 percent in October 2024 or how Russia has been drawing from its National Welfare Fund to finance its war effort over the last three years.[11] The liquidity portion of Russia's National Welfare fund may run out by Fall 2025. [12]

Ukrainian military officials continue to highlight the country's growing drone production capacity and its effectiveness on the battlefield but acknowledged that Ukraine must address its force generation issues to fully stop Russian advances in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk stated on February 7 that Ukraine outperforms Russia in first-person view (FPV) drone production and that drone development is expanding rapidly in Ukraine.[13] Havrylyuk stated that Ukraine has introduced over 1,300 new weapon models, most of which are drones and drone munitions, since February 2022 and that Ukrainian officials approved more than 250 new drone models for use by Ukrainian forces in 2024 alone. Havrylyuk stated that while drones have become a crucial substitute for long-range missiles,

Ukrainian forces require continued innovation to counter Russian defenses and stressed that international military assistance is critical for Ukraine, particularly for weapons where Ukrainian domestic production falls short.

A Ukrainian battalion commander operating in the Pokrovsk direction told the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) on February 7 that Ukrainian drone strikes significantly disrupt Russian operations in this direction.[14] The battalion commander noted that Ukrainian drone operators hold some areas of their defense lines in the Pokrovsk direction almost completely independent from infantry support. The commander stated that growing drone supplies have helped sustain Ukraine's defenses despite Russian forces outnumbering Ukrainians ten-to-one in the Pokrovsk direction. The commander highlighted that Ukrainian forces are reportedly inflicting a seven-to-one casualty ratio on Russian troops in the area but need more personnel to fully stop Russian advances in that direction.

ISW previously noted that Ukrainian drone operations have been key in defending against Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction and throughout the frontline, although Ukraine must address its morale, force generation, and training issues to completely stall the Russian advance in Donetsk Oblast.[15]

Interim Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra stated in an interview with the *Washington Post* that Syria is open to Russia retaining its air and naval bases in Syria if there are "benefits" for Syria.[16] **NOTE:** A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's February 7 *Iran Update*. Qasra is very likely referencing some form of economic relief to help improve Syria's dire economic situation. The interim Syrian government has lobbied for economic relief from various sources since the fall of the Assad regime.[17] Cooperation with Russia could hinder European Union (EU) plans to lift sanctions on Syria, which are contingent on the new Syrian government pursuing a peaceful political future without extremism or involvement from Russia and Iran.[18] An unspecified Russian source told *Bloomberg* on January 28 that talks on Russian basing are "stuck."^[19] Russia has continued to evacuate military assets from the Port of Tartus amid ongoing negotiations with the interim Syrian government.[20]

Azerbaijan-Russia relations continue to sour following Russia's refusal to take full responsibility for the December 25, 2024 downing of an Azerbaijani Airlines (AZAL) passenger plane, likely shot mid-air by Russian air defense before crashing in Aktau, Kazakhstan. Azerbaijani outlet APA News, citing sources familiar with the matter, reported on February 5 that Azerbaijan is preparing to take legal action against Russia in an international court, citing recent clear evidence identifying unspecified Russian actors responsible for the crash and Russia's failure to take responsibility for the crash.[21] Azerbaijan's intent to sue follows the Azerbaijani Ministry of Digital Development and Transport's February 4 briefing of the initial investigation results attributing the AZAL crash to unspecified "foreign objects."^[22]

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev previously accused Russia of attempting to cover up the incident, calling the Kremlin's response "surprising, regrettable, and infuriating."^[23] Russian President Vladimir Putin apologized to Aliyev on December 28 that the crash occurred in Russian airspace but stopped short of admitting Russia's fault in the crash and taking action against those responsible – demands Aliyev set forth following the crash.^[24] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced on February 7 that Russian President Vladimir Putin does not intend to make another statement regarding the AZAL plane crash.^[25]

Azerbaijani outlet *Report.az* noted on February 6 that Azerbaijani officials have also formally notified the Kremlin of the closure of the local branch of the Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*), a Russian cultural diplomacy agency, citing national security concerns and a move away from "external interference."^[26] Russia currently has over 80 Rossotrudnichestvo branches concentrated in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Central and Southeast Asia aimed at promoting Russian culture, strengthening the influence of the Russian language, supporting "compatriots abroad," and preserving historical sites abroad with significance to Russia.^[27] Moldovan and Ukrainian officials have previously warned that Russian officials use the branches to promote Russian propaganda and conduct "subversive work" abroad.^[28]

Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers appointed Lieutenant General Yevhen Moysiuk and Captain Valeriy Churkin as Deputy Defense Ministers on February 7.^[29] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Moysiuk earlier on February 7 from his previous role as Special Envoy for the Implementation of International Security Assurances and Development of the Defense Forces of Ukraine.^[30] The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Moysiuk will focus on developing Ukraine's Defense Forces, particularly regarding mobilization processes and military training, and

Churkin will lead the charge on defense innovations and technological development for Ukraine's military.[31]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces marginally advanced during mechanized assaults in their salient in Kursk Oblast on February 6, but Russian sources claimed on February 6 and 7 that Russian forces have at least temporarily stalled Ukrainian advances southeast of Sudzha.
- The Kremlin continues to conduct an information campaign likely directed toward both domestic and international audiences that aims to conceal the extent to which Russia's protracted war against Ukraine has negatively affected Russia's economy.
- Ukrainian military officials continue to highlight the country's growing drone production capacity and its effectiveness on the battlefield but acknowledged that Ukraine must address its force generation issues to fully stop Russian advances in eastern Ukraine.
- Interim Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra stated in an interview with the *Washington Post* that Syria is open to Russia retaining its air and naval bases in Syria if there are "benefits" for Syria.
- Azerbaijan-Russia relations continue to sour following Russia's refusal to take full responsibility for the December 25, 2024 downing of an Azerbaijani Airlines (AZAL) passenger plane, likely shot mid-air by Russian air defense before crashing in Aktau, Kazakhstan
- Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers appointed Lieutenant General Yevhen Moysiuk and Captain Valeriy Churkin as Deputy Defense Ministers on February 7.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova and Toretsk.
- The Russian government continues to use its "Time of Heroes" program to appoint veterans of the war in Ukraine to regional government positions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 6, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

February 6, 2025, 6:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on February 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces launched a new series of battalion-sized mechanized assaults in Kursk Oblast and advanced up to five kilometers behind Russian lines southeast of Sudzha, Kursk Oblast on February 6. Geolocated footage published on February 6 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced southwest of Makhnovka (southeast of Sudzha) and north and east of Cherkasskaya Konopelka (southeast of Sudzha) along the 38K-028 Sudzha-Oboyan highway and seized Kolmakov (north of Cherkasskaya Konopelka) and Fanaseyevka (just southeast of Cherkasskaya Konopelka).[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked in several waves in the direction of Cherkasskaya Konopelka and Ulanok (southeast of Cherkasskaya Konopelka along the 38K-028 highway) with up to two mechanized battalions' worth of armored vehicles and that Russian forces repelled the attack.[2] Russian milbloggers estimated that Ukrainian forces attacked with 30 to 50 armored vehicles and claimed that one group of Ukrainian forces successfully attacked from Makhnovka towards Cherkasskaya Konopelka, Fanaseyevka, and Ulanok and that Russian forces repelled another Ukrainian group that attacked from Dmitriukov (just east of Makhnovka) towards Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha).[3] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Cherkasskaya Konopelka, but two other milbloggers denied this claim.[4] Some Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces broke through to or even seized Ulanok, but other sources also denied these claims.[5] ISW has not yet observed geolocated evidence to assess that Ukrainian forces are operating in Ulanok. The Ukrainian General Staff published a map on February 6 indicating that Russian forces recently marginally advanced in a forested area southwest of Kurilovka.[6]

A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces also attacked near Kruglenkoye (northwest of Sudzha), but ISW did not observe additional claims of Ukrainian activity in this area or north of Sudzha near Berdin where Ukrainian forces attacked in early January 2025.[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces launched the attacks southeast of Sudzha during poor weather conditions that complicated Russian drone operations in the area.[8] Some Russian milbloggers expressed concern that further Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast could threaten rear areas of the Russian force grouping attacking Guyevo

(south of Sudzha) and complicate Russia's ability to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) within the Ukrainian salient.[9] Russian sources acknowledged that elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), and 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) and Chechen Akhmat drone operators are the main forces defending against the Ukrainian attacks southeast of Sudzha.[10]

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised elite Russian VDV and naval infantry formations defending in Kursk Oblast on February 5, highlighting the fact that the Ukrainian incursion has pinned about a combined arms army's worth of Russian troops in Kursk Oblast since August 6, 2024. Putin stated during a meeting with acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein that elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, 106th VDV Division, 76th VDV Division, and other Russian forces are still operating in Kursk Oblast and will be rewarded for their service in the future.[11] Putin's statement underlines the fact that the Ukrainian incursion has pinned elements of these relatively elite formations in Kursk Oblast for the last six months, depriving Russia of the opportunity to redeploy these forces to higher priority areas of the frontline in Donetsk Oblast.[12] ISW recently noted that the Russian military command has gathered around 78,000 troops, including 11,000 North Koreans and elements of most of Russia's elite VDV and naval infantry formations, to expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.[13] Putin has yet to prioritize expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast over continuing his gradual advances in Donetsk Oblast and continues to drag out the liberation of Kursk's border areas, despite domestic discontent.

Ukrainian officials provided additional details about Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast in honor of the six-month anniversary of the incursion. Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) commemorated the milestone on February 6 by acknowledging that small SSO units infiltrated Russia's rear in Kursk Oblast as early as June 2024 — two months before the main incursion began in August 2024.[14] The SSO forces advanced behind Russian lines in Kursk Oblast to prepare for the Ukrainian incursion, conducting reconnaissance and targeted strikes to dismantle key elements of Russia's border defenses. The SSO noted that Ukrainian forces systematically destroyed Russian air defense and ammunition depots, limiting Russia's ability to respond to the Ukrainian incursion. The SSO also provided a detailed account of the operation and the technological adaptations the Ukrainian forces employed during the Kursk incursion. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also awarded honors to the Ukrainian personnel involved in the Kursk incursion for the anniversary, offering the first official Ukrainian statement regarding a comprehensive composition of Ukraine's force deployment in Kursk Oblast.[15] Zelensky reiterated that the incursion aimed to prevent a new Russian offensive against Sumy and Kharkiv cities. Zelensky noted that the Kursk incursion reinforced his "peace through strength" principle, provided Ukraine with a significant replenishment of POW "exchange funds," and forced Russia to divert elite military units to Kursk Oblast — impairing Russian operations elsewhere along the front. Ukrainian officials have previously noted that the Ukrainian incursion spoiled several Russian plans to attack northern Ukraine and complicated Russian efforts to intensify offensive operations in northern Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[16]

A Russian state-run poll suggests that the Russian public maintains a high level of support for the war in Ukraine despite mounting challenges. The Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) released results on February 6 of a survey of 1,600 Russians conducted from January 28 to February 2, showing that 67 percent of the people polled support Russia's war in Ukraine and that 65 percent believe that the war is "going well" for Russia.[17] VCIOM's Political Research Director Mikhail Mamontov stated that the public demands a swift, favorable conclusion to the war and supports measures that advance these goals while resenting Russian setbacks like the Ukrainian Kursk Oblast incursion, slow territorial gains, and economic hardship. VCIOM's findings likely reflect Kremlin views and narratives and likely inflate the level of public support for the war, however. These results come amid rising casualties, Russian command controversies, and immense economic strain on the Russian economy during the war.[18] Successful renewed Ukrainian counterattacks in Kursk Oblast may also negatively impact the Russian public's view of the war in the coming weeks.

North Korea appears to be using its alliance with Russia to leverage the war in Ukraine as a testing ground to refine its missile technology and broader military capabilities. Reuters, citing two Ukrainian military-affiliated sources, reported on February 6 that North Korean ballistic missiles fired by Russian forces since December 2024 have shown significantly improved accuracy.[19] These North Korean missiles, previously accurate within 1 to 3 kilometers, can now strike within 50 to 100 meters of their intended targets. One Ukrainian source noted that Russia has launched over 20 North Korean missiles in recent weeks, all demonstrating enhanced precision. Reuters' sources speculated that North Korea may have upgraded the navigation systems of its missiles, incorporated new steering mechanisms, or received improved targeting data and guidance components from Russia, although the exact modifications remain unclear. The North Korean missiles not only serve to bolster Russia's arsenal but also likely allow North Korea to refine its capabilities for possible future military operations

elsewhere. Other Russian allies, such as Iran, likely can improve their strike systems' performance by leveraging Russia's lessons learned from operations in Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against an air base in Krasnodar Krai on the night of February 5 to 6 as a part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces (USF) and other Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the Primorsko-Akhtarsk Air Base, causing an explosion and resulting in a fire at the facility.[20] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces use the Primorsko-Akhtarsk Air Base to store, prepare, and launch Shahed drones against Ukraine and to conduct maintenance for aircraft operating over occupied Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko amplified footage of the explosion at the Primorsko-Akhtarsk air base.[21]

Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide military assistance to Ukraine. French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu announced on February 6 that France transferred an unspecified number of French Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets to Ukraine — the first batch of Mirage jets Ukraine has received. [22] French President Emmanuel Macron announced on June 6, 2024 that France would provide Ukraine with an unspecified number of Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets and equip and train several pilots to operate the jets.[23] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on February 6 that the Netherlands recently delivered an unspecified number of US-made F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.[24]

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Deputy Minister of Transport Dmitry Bakanov to replace Yuri Borisov as head of the state-owned Russian space agency Roscosmos on February 6.[25] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on February 6 that Bakanov's appointment is part of a regular personnel rotation.[26] Several Russian milblogger characterized the reshuffling, however, as a result of Kremlin officials' dissatisfaction with Roscosmos's underperformance under Borisov's leadership, including Borisov's inability to accelerate the development of a full-fledged portable satellite communications system for the Russian military by 2026.[27] A Russian insider source noted that Borisov served as Deputy Minister of Defense under former Russian Defense Minister and Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu from 2018-2022 and was one of the last remaining nodes of Shoigu's patronal network that controlled the Russian Ministry of Defense prior to widespread arrests of Ministry of Defense officials in Summer 2024.[28] Bakanov previously served as the head of Russia's Gonets communication satellite program from 2011-2019. [29] Gonets is a possible civilian analogue to Western Starlink terminals.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces launched a new series of battalion-sized mechanized assaults in Kursk Oblast and advanced up to five kilometers behind Russian lines southeast of Sudzha, Kursk Oblast on February 6.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin praised elite Russian VDV and naval infantry formations defending Kursk Oblast on February 5, highlighting the fact that the Ukrainian incursion has pinned about a combined arms army's worth of Russian troops in Kursk Oblast since August 6, 2024.
- Ukrainian officials provided additional details about Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast in honor of the six-month anniversary of the incursion.
- A Russian state-run poll suggests that the Russian public maintains a high level of support for the war in Ukraine despite mounting challenges.
- North Korea appears to be using its alliance with Russia to leverage the war in Ukraine as a testing ground to refine its missile technology and broader military capabilities.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against an air base in Krasnodar Krai on the night of February 5 to 6 as a part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries.
- Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide military assistance to Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Deputy Minister of Transport Dmitry Bakanov to replace Yuri Borisov as head of the state-owned Russian space agency Roscosmos on February 6.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and recaptured lost positions near Kurakhove.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, and Kurakhove.
- Russian authorities continue efforts to increase social benefits for Russian military personnel likely to support ongoing recruitment efforts.

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

February 5, 2025, 6:10pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on February 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues to demonstrate his willingness to negotiate with Russia from a principled position that preserves Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the long run. Zelensky reiterated during an interview published on February 4 that Ukraine cannot and will not compromise its sovereignty in future peace negotiations, but that Ukraine's partners are not currently providing Ukraine with sufficient military assistance for Ukrainian forces to push Russian forces from all occupied Ukrainian territory.^[1] Zelensky stated that he is willing to negotiate directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin but warned that any peace agreement that significantly weakens Ukraine's ability to defend itself in the future risks another Russian invasion of Ukraine. Zelensky stated that Ukraine will never recognize Russia's illegal occupation of Ukrainian territory and emphasized that there can be no compromise on Ukraine's sovereignty. Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine will eventually retake all its territory militarily and diplomatically but noted that the liberation of all Ukrainian territory from Russian occupation will take time. Zelensky called on Ukraine's allies to pressure Putin and demand that Russian forces withdraw from all Ukrainian territory. Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine wants peace and that the United States, Europe, Ukraine, and Russia must all be represented in future peace negotiations. Zelensky's statements highlight that Putin's unwillingness to participate in good-faith negotiations is the true impediment to the end of the war, despite Putin's recent efforts to falsely blame Zelensky and Ukraine for the lack of progress towards peace in Ukraine.^[2]

Zelensky reiterated that the Ukrainian Constitution bans Ukraine from holding elections during wartime, but that Ukraine remains committed to holding elections in accordance with Ukraine's constitution and laws after the war ends.^[3] Zelensky stated that Ukraine would have to change its constitution to hold an election outside of peace time and asked how Ukrainian servicemembers, citizens living in Russian-occupied Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees and expatriates living abroad would be able to vote in the election before the Ukrainian government lifts martial law. Zelensky stated that Ukraine will "definitely" hold elections after the war ends but that Ukraine currently must focus on defending itself from Russian aggression. Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly used deliberately false readings of Ukraine's law and constitution to claim that Zelensky is an illegitimate president after Ukraine, adhering to the law and constitution, did not hold elections under martial law in 2024.^[4] The Ukrainian Constitution bars the government from holding elections or amending the Ukrainian constitution in times of martial law, and the Ukrainian government legally cannot abolish martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine.^[5]

Prominent Kremlin-linked figures continue to clearly articulate Russia's disinterest in negotiations while Putin propagates the information operation accusing Ukraine of being the unwilling party. Kremlin-affiliated former Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Viktor Medvedchuk, a close personal ally of Putin and father of Putin's goddaughter, reinforced the Kremlin's efforts to delegitimize Ukrainian statehood in a February 4 article, arguing that Russia must reclaim its so-called "historical lands."^[6] Medvedchuk published an accompanying map depicting all Ukrainian territory east of Lviv, Ternopil, and Chernivtsi oblasts as part of "historical Russia." Medvedchuk claimed that Western support for Ukraine aims solely to collapse Russia from within and labeled Ukrainians as "modern barbarians" whom Russia must save through integration into the Russian state. Medvedchuk denied Ukraine's historical legitimacy, insisting that modern Ukraine is inherently Russian - a narrative consistently promoted by Kremlin officials and the Russian information space to justify Russia's war and occupation of Ukraine. Medvedchuk's rhetoric as a member of the Russian elite with extensive ties to Putin are representative of the Kremlin's systemic refusal to act in good faith regarding negotiations with Ukraine and the West and the Kremlin's core unwillingness to negotiate with Ukraine - a state and government it considers illegitimate.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on February 4 that Russian forces have suffered roughly 300,000 to 350,000 killed in action (KIA) and roughly 600,000 to 700,000 wounded in action (WIA) since the February 2022 start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.^[7] Zelensky added that Russian military personnel suffer a 2:1 wounded to killed ratio because Russian field medicine is poor, and Russian forces struggle to evacuate wounded personnel from the battlefield. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on January 20 that Russian forces suffered more than 434,000 casualties in 2024 — 150,000 of which were KIA.^[8]

Zelensky's and Syrskyi's figures indicate that the Russian military suffered roughly 41 to 48 percent of its total casualties in Ukraine since 2022 in 2024 alone. The highest range of Zelensky's estimates are notably larger than recent Russian casualty figures from the Ukrainian General Staff and former US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.[9] Zelensky also stated that roughly 50,000 to 70,000 Russian soldiers have been classified as missing in action (MIA) since February 2022.

Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against an oil depot in Krasnodar Krai on the night of February 4 to 5 as a part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Security Services (SBU) and other Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the Albashneft LLC oil depot in Novominskaya, Krasnodar Krai, causing a fire at the facility.[10] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko amplified footage of fire at the Albashneft oil depot and noted that the depot supplies straight-run gasoline (crude oil distillate), diesel fuel, and fuel oil to the Russian military.[11] Geolocated footage published on February 5 shows a fire at the Albashneft oil depot.[12] Krasnodar Krai Governor Venyamin Kondratyev claimed on February 5 that drone debris caused a fire at an unspecified oil tank near Novominskaya.[13]

The Russian military continues efforts to restructure Russia's peacetime military administrative control over military services (вид; vid) and is apparently disaggregating administrative control for Russia's Air Force and Navy from Russia's military districts. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on February 5 revoking Russian military district's "interservice status" and removing naval and Aerospace Forces (VKS) units from subordination to Russian military districts. [14] The decree replaces the "joint strategic command" of each military district with a "directorate" that presumably will exclusively oversee ground forces and appears to disaggregate naval and VKS assets back to the control of the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy and VKS command, respectively. The decree states that military districts will also be involved in helping Russian citizens enter the "mobilization manpower reserve" of the Russian military. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed reorganizing military districts to optimize the army's command structure in June 2024.[15]

The Kremlin appears to be attempting to re-establish military districts primarily as headquarters for Russian ground forces and disaggregate the peacetime administrative headquarters for Russia's Navy and Air Force. Joint Russian operational groups will likely continue to be led by a combined-arms operational military command in wartime.[16] Disaggregating administrative control for Russian naval and air forces from the headquarters responsible for administrative control for ground forces would likely free up bureaucratic bottlenecks during peacetime and allow military district commanders to focus on training and preparing Russian ground forces for combat operations. Russia's efforts to refocus military districts on purely overseeing ground force assets could also help simplify and expedite Russia's activation of its ground forces during a future conflict. Russian forces will very likely continue to form and operate in interoperable joint force groupings under unified operational commanders during wartime, including during ongoing combat operations in Ukraine. It is unclear how or if this administrative restructuring will impact Russia's campaign in Ukraine in the long-term. Such a change is unlikely to affect the near-term battlefield situation since many Russian forces operating in Ukraine are currently organized under interservice groupings of forces. This restructuring may help Russian forces reconstitute multiple services more quickly than they otherwise could, as Russian ground, naval, and the air forces may not need to compete over the administrative resources of a single military district.

The Kremlin continues to prioritize domestic political stability over efforts to mitigate economic pressure and labor shortages. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) announced on February 4 that it will enact a new migration regime that imposes severe restrictions on migrants residing in Russia starting on February 5.[17] The law requires migrants who have committed a criminal offense or are undocumented to register with Russian authorities, regularly share geolocated photos to the MVD, and obtain MVD approval for basic activities including buying property, driving a car, accessing banking services, and traveling outside their region. The law gives the MVD the right to deport migrants who violate these restrictions without a court hearing and penalizes those who provide undocumented migrants with services. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin reported that migrant-related crimes remain a "serious concern" for Russian authorities and the public and claimed that there was an 18 percent increase in court cases against migrants in 2024.[18] Bastrykin's statements reinforce Russian ultra-nationalist narratives that migrants pose a security threat by supposedly violating laws, moving "uncontrollably" within Russia, and committing crimes. The new MVD migration regime and Bastrykin's rhetoric demonstrate that Russian authorities are increasingly prioritizing efforts to appease particularly pro-war, xenophobic Russian ultranationalists and mitigate potential domestic security risks linked to rising anti-migrant sentiment rather than offsetting Russia's labor shortages and ongoing economic struggles, in part, with migrant labor.

Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner-of-war (POW) exchange on February 5.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on February 5 that Ukraine repatriated 150 Ukrainian POWs and stated that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) mediated the exchange.[19] The Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War reported that the returned Ukrainian POWs suffer from serious injuries and illnesses.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russia also received 150 Russian POWs.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues to demonstrate his willingness to negotiate with Russia from a principled position that preserves Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the long run.
- Zelensky reiterated that the Ukrainian Constitution bans Ukraine from holding elections during wartime, but that Ukraine remains committed to holding elections in accordance with Ukraine's constitution and laws after the war ends.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on February 4 that Russian forces have suffered roughly 300,000 to 350,000 killed in action (KIA) and roughly 600,000 to 700,000 wounded in action (WIA) since the February 2022 start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against an oil depot in Krasnodar Krai on the night of February 4 to 5 as a part of an ongoing strike campaign against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries.
- The Russian military continues efforts to restructure Russia's peacetime military administrative control over military services (вид; *vid*) and is apparently disaggregating administrative control for Russia's Air Force and Navy from Russia's military districts.
- The Kremlin continues to prioritize domestic political stability over efforts to mitigate economic pressure and labor shortages.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner of war (POW) exchange on February 5.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 4, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi visited the Kyivska Electrical Substation in Kyiv Oblast on February 4 to assess damage to the substation as Russian long-range strikes targeting energy infrastructure continue to threaten Ukraine's nuclear power plants (NPPs) and Ukraine's energy production capabilities.[1] Grossi did not specify when Russian forces damaged the Kyivska Electrical Substation but emphasized that a direct strike on the substation or a power supply disruption could cause a nuclear accident.[2] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* noted that the Kyivska Electrical Substation is connected to the Rivne NPP and supplies Kyiv City and central and northern Ukraine with power.[3] Russian forces launched a large series of missile and drone strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure connected to Ukrainian NPPs on the night of November 16 to 17, 2024.[4] Grossi reported that the November 2024 Russian strikes damaged several unspecified electrical substations that are connected to the Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Pivdennoukrainsk NPPs but that the strikes did not damage the NPPs themselves.[5] Russian strikes against Ukrainian electrical substations — not just NPPs — continue to threaten Ukraine's energy generation abilities and can cause long-term damage. Artur Lorkowski, the director of the Energy Community (an international organization that manages Ukraine's energy procurement), told *Politico* in November 2024 that repairing damaged Ukrainian energy infrastructure may require a significant amount of time because it can take up to one year for Ukraine to find and reinstall specialized equipment, including auto transformers.[6] Another Ukrainian energy expert told *Politico* that Ukraine needs an expedited supply of spare parts for energy infrastructure.[7]

Russian officials continue to justify the Kremlin's decision to not conduct an involuntary reserve call up at this time despite indications that the Russian military is struggling to recruit enough new personnel to replace its high casualties. Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairperson Andrei Kartapolov claimed on February 4 that Russia does not need to conduct another partial involuntary reserve call up because Russia currently has the battlefield "advantage." [8] Duma Defense Committee member Viktor Sobolev added that 740,000 people have signed Russian military service contracts — presumably since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 —

and claimed that mobilization would "only make things worse" because it would send people without any previous military experience or specialized skills to the frontline.[9] Duma Defense Committee First Deputy Chairperson Andrei Krasov also claimed that mobilization is unnecessary because Russian military registration and enlistment officers are successfully recruiting new personnel.[10] These Russian Duma deputies are likely claiming that Russian recruitment rates are sufficient in order to assuage fears among the Russian public of a widely unpopular potential new partial involuntary reserve call up.

The Russian military may be struggling to recruit enough new military personnel, however. ISW observed reports in late 2024 and January 2025 that the Russian military's monthly recruitment rate is likely equal to or below the quantity needed to replace Russia's monthly casualty rate one-to-one.[11] ISW also observed reports that select Russian federal subjects are failing to meet their monthly recruitment quotas as citizens are less willing to volunteer to fight.[12] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed a draft amendment on February 3 to reclassify some illnesses, diseases, and disorders for conscripts and those signing military service contracts. The Russian MoD proposed reclassifying syphilis, hypertension, central nervous system atrophy disorders, skin diseases, schizophrenia, psychotic disorders, affective disorders, and other health problems as more minor ailments that do not disqualify someone from service.[13] *Radio Svoboda*, citing the Russian Movement of Conscientious Objectors, reported that the Russian MoD's proposal would make it more difficult for conscripts to obtain military service exemptions for health reasons and would complicate dismissal procedures for mobilized personnel and servicemembers who signed a military service contract.[14]

Russian occupation authorities continue to discuss Russia's possible illegal annexation of Kharkiv Oblast but claim that Ukraine's September 2022 counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast spoiled Russia's plans to hold a "referendum" in the region at that time. Kharkiv Oblast occupation governor Vitaly Ganchev claimed in an interview with Russian state news wire RIA Novosti published on February 4 that Kharkiv Oblast is "strategically" and politically significant for Russia.[15] Ganchev claimed that he was "certain" that Russian forces would seize all of Kharkiv Oblast because Russia needed a "sanitary zone" to protect Belgorod and Kursk oblasts and occupied Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts from Ukrainian shelling. Ganchev called on Russian forces to drive Ukrainian forces "as far west as possible." Ganchev claimed that occupation authorities in Kharkiv Oblast had a plan in August 2022 to hold a "referendum" on Russia's annexation of Kharkiv Oblast but that the start of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast in early September 2022 prevented the referendum. Ganchev claimed that if it were not for the Ukrainian counteroffensive, Kharkiv Oblast would have become the "fifth oblast to join Russia on September 30." Russian forces currently occupy parts of northern and eastern Kharkiv Oblast, but Russia has not attempted to illegally annex Kharkiv Oblast. Russian President Vladimir Putin notably did not include Kharkiv Oblast in his June 2024 demands that Ukraine cede Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts – even territories that Russian forces do not occupy in these regions.[16]

A significant number of Russian vessels that had been at the Port of Tartus in recent weeks may have left Syria for Russia as Russian-Syrian negotiations about Russia's continued access to its bases in Syria reportedly continue. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on February 3 that Russian and Syrian authorities will continue contacts on "all issues," including about Russia's continued access to the Port of Tartus.[17] Data from *MarineTraffic.com* showed that the Russian *Sparta* and *Sparta II* cargo ships were off the coast of Tunisia on February 4.[18] OSINT analyst MT Anderson posted satellite imagery from the morning of February 4 showing the *Sparta* and *Sparta II*, as well as potentially the *Alexander Otrakovsky* Ropucha-class landing ship, the *Admiral Golovko* Admiral Gorshkov-class frigate, and the *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate off the coast of Tunisia.[19] Satellite imagery and reports from Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) indicated that all these vessels had been at the Port of Tartus in December 2024 and January 2025.[20] The departure of a significant number of vessels from the Port of Tartus suggests that the Kremlin is not optimistic about the results of ongoing Russian-Syrian negotiations. The location of the vessels off the coast of Tunisia also suggests that these ships are not bound for Libya despite the fact that Russia sent some assets from Syria to Libya by air in December 2024 and January 2025 - as the Critical Threats Project's (CTP) Africa File previously reported.[21] The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's Resistance Center reported on February 4 that Russian ships began evacuating weapons from the Port of Tartus on January 27, and satellite imagery collected on January 18 and 27 showed that the Russian military had loaded equipment onto the *Sparta* and *Sparta II* at Tartus.[22] The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted that the *Sparta II* turned off its automatic identification system (AIS) after leaving Syria - a common practice among ships in Russia's "shadow fleet."^[23]

Ukrainian naval drone strikes have likely forced Russia to dramatically alter Russian ships' routes between Russia and Syria. The Ukrainian Resistance Center posted video evidence showing

that it had gained access to the "Mosaik" system, an internal system that Russia reportedly uses to track Russian ship routes and cargo.[24] Data from the "Mosaik" system shows that the *Sparta* IV traveled between Tartus, Syria, and Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai via the Dardanelles and Bosphorus in April 2023. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s Oboronlogistika logistics company owns the *Sparta*, *Sparta II*, and *Sparta IV* cargo ships.[25] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian vessels stopped traveling between Russia and Syria via the Black Sea in Spring 2024, likely due to the threat of Ukrainian naval drone strikes in the Black Sea.[26] Russian ships instead reportedly started traveling from Russian ports in the Baltic Sea to Syria via the Atlantic Ocean despite the fact that this route is several times longer than the Black Sea route. The appearance of Russian vessels in the Mediterranean Sea on February 4 is consistent with reports that Russian ships are now traveling between Syria and Russia via the Atlantic.

Russia has also reportedly used vessels belonging to the MoD's Oboronlogistika company to monitor NATO vessels in the Baltic Sea. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that it gained access to correspondence between an unspecified branch of the Russian Administration of Sea Ports and the *Sparta*'s captain in which Russian authorities asked the *Sparta* and *Sparta II* to monitor Latvian patrol ships in the Baltic Sea off the western coast of Latvia in April 2023.[27] NATO notably conducted its Aurora 23 exercise near Sweden in April and May 2024.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi visited the Kyivska Electrical Substation in Kyiv Oblast on February 4 to assess damage to the substation as Russian long-range strikes targeting energy infrastructure continue to threaten Ukraine's nuclear power plants (NPPS) and Ukraine's energy production capabilities
- Russian officials continue to justify the Kremlin's decision to not conduct an involuntary reserve call up at this time despite indications that the Russian military is struggling to recruit enough new personnel to replace its high casualties.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to discuss Russia's possible illegal annexation of Kharkiv Oblast but claimed that Ukraine's September 2022 counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast spoiled Russia's plans to hold a "referendum" in the region at that time.
- A significant number of Russian vessels that had been at the Port of Tartus in recent weeks may have left Syria for Russia as Russian-Syrian negotiations about Russia's continued access to its bases in Syria reportedly continue.
- Ukrainian naval drone strikes have likely forced Russia to dramatically alter Russian ships' routes between Russia and Syria.
- Russia has also reportedly used vessels belonging to the MoD's Oboronlogistika company to monitor NATO vessels in the Baltic Sea.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk.
- A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces in the Siversk direction continue to struggle with systemic issues with field commanders filing false progress reports despite recent command changes.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 3, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

February 3, 2025, 7:20pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on February 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continued to suffer high losses in January 2025 despite a slower rate of advance as compared with previous months in late 2024. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on February 3 that Russian forces suffered 48,240 casualties – over three Russian motorized rifle divisions worth of personnel – in January 2025, making January the second highest month of losses since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[1] ISW has observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces gained roughly 498 square kilometers in January in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, or roughly 16.1 square kilometers per day. The available figures suggest Russian forces suffered roughly 96 casualties per square kilometer of territory seized. The Ukrainian MoD reported that Russian forces suffered 48,670 casualties in December 2024 – their highest

monthly casualty rate since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion – and ISW assessed that Russian forces gained a total of 593 square kilometers in December 2024. The roughly 100-square-kilometer decrease in seized territory between December 2024 and January 2025, coupled with a similar monthly casualty rate, indicates that Russian forces are taking the same high level of losses despite achieving fewer territorial advances in the near term. ISW previously observed that Russian advances slowed from November 2024 to December 2024.[2] ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command likely tolerated record levels of personnel casualties from September 2024 through November 2024 to facilitate larger territorial gains, but it remains unclear if the Russian military command will be willing to sustain such casualties if Russian forces' rate of advance continues to decline as Russian forces are advancing on more heavily defended settlements such as Pokrovsk.[3]

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against Russian oil and gas infrastructure in Volgograd and Astrakhan oblasts on the night of February 2 to 3. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), Special Operations Forces (SSO), and other Ukrainian forces struck Lukoil's Volgograd Oil Refinery in Volgograd City and the Astrakhan Gas Processing Plant near Astrakhan City.[4] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the strike damaged the primary processing units at the Volgograd refinery and that a fire started at the Astrakhan plant. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko noted that the Volgograd Oil Refinery is one of the top ten refineries in Russia and that the Astrakhan Gas Processing Plant processes gas condensate and produces gas and diesel fuel.[5] A source in the SBU told *Radio Liberty* that the Volgograd Oil Refinery processes almost six percent of all Russian oil and that the Astrakhan Gas Processing Plant processes 12 billion cubic meters of gas condensate per year.[6] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that an employee at the Astrakhan plant stated that the strike damaged a gas condensate processing plant.[7] Volgograd Oblast Governor Andrey Bocharov claimed that Russian forces repelled a massive Ukrainian drone strike against the oblast overnight and intercepted and neutralized "most" of the drones.[8] Bocharov claimed that falling drone debris caused a fire at an oil refinery and short-term power outages. Astrakhan Oblast Governor Igor Babushkin claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to conduct a drone strike against fuel and energy facilities and that a fire started after a drone fell.[9] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed 25 drones over Volgograd Oblast and seven over Astrakhan Oblast.[10] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Lukoil refinery in Volgograd City on the night of January 30 to 31.[11]

Ukrainian forces continue to innovate with drone operations to maintain their technological advantage over Russia and bring about battlefield effects. Commander of the Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces Colonel Vadym Sukharevskyi stated in an interview with *Radio Liberty* published on February 3 that Ukrainian forces are working on developing new technologies but are not disclosing them for as long as possible in order to maintain the technological initiative and prevent Russian forces from making their own analogues.[12] Sukharevskyi reported that the Unmanned Systems Forces conducted over 220 strikes against Russian territory in 2024 using over 3,500 weapons. Sukharevskyi noted that Ukrainian forces have struck over 15 "Buk-M3" and "Tor" air defense systems in December 2024 and January 2025 and noted that Ukrainian forces struck a "Buk-M3" 57 kilometers from the frontline in mid-January 2025. Sukharevskyi reported that Ukrainian forces' use of first-person view (FPV) drones to hunt Russian reconnaissance drones has led to a tenfold decrease in Russian reconnaissance drone usage. Sukharevskyi highlighted Ukraine's production of first-person view (FPV) and other drones made entirely of Ukrainian-made components and stated that Ukraine is working to develop a way to counter Russian forces' fiber optic cable FPV drones and to produce its own fiber optic cable drones. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on February 3 that the Ukrainian military continues to increase the number of unmanned systems in formations and units of the Ground Forces, Airborne Assault Forces, Naval Infantry Corps, and Unmanned Systems Forces.[13] ISW continues to assess that Russian and Ukrainian forces are engaged in a technological offense-defense race to adapt and innovate their strike and anti-drone capabilities and that Ukraine's ability to field technological adaptations at scale ahead of Russian adaptations is crucial for Ukraine's ability to offset Russia's quantitative materiel advantages.[14]

The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) expressed concern about the "sharp rise" in reports of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs). The UN HRMMU reported that it has observed Russian forces execute 79 Ukrainian POWs in 24 separate incidents since late August 2024 and that Russian forces perform many of the executions as Ukrainian soldiers surrender to Russian forces.[15] UN HRRMU Head Danielle Belle reported that the Russian executions "did not arise out of nowhere" as Russian officials have "openly called for the ill treatment and even execution" of Ukrainian POWs, and the UN HRRMU recorded at least three incidents of Russian officials making such calls. The UN HRRMU reported that statements to "give no quarter" are violations of humanitarian law and a war crime, and Belle emphasized that military commanders and political leaders "must issue clear and unambiguous orders to ensure the protection and humane treatment" of all POWs and individuals no longer participating in combat. ISW

has previously assessed that Russian battlefield commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to execute Ukrainian POWs.[16] Ukrainian Commissioner for Missing Persons in Special Circumstances Artur Dobroserdov stated on February 3 that Ukrainian authorities are investigating images purportedly showing a beheaded Ukrainian serviceman.[17]

Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on February 3 that Ukraine has started implementing organizational reforms to transition the Ukrainian Armed Forces into a "corps structure."[18] Using corps structures is not entirely new for the Ukrainian Armed Forces as the Ukrainian Armed Forces have been using corps since 2023. Ukraine formed the 9th and 10th army corps and restructured its Reserve Corps to the 11th Army Corps in 2023, and Ukraine is currently forming the 4th Army Corps.[19] Further restructuring to systematically form an echelon between Ukraine's numerous separate brigades and Ukraine's various operational groups of forces, and the creation of appropriate command staff headquarters at this new intermediary echelon, would likely improve command and control for Ukrainian brigades and help facilitate more effective operations.

Unspecified actors assassinated Armen Sargsyan, the founder of the "Arbat" Special Purpose Battalion, who has been involved in Russia's hybrid activities and invasions of Ukraine since 2014. Armen Sargsyan, the founder of the "Arbat" (Armenian Battalion) Special Purpose Battalion (Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] "Pyatnashka" International Volunteer Brigade) that is currently operating in Kursk Oblast, died on February 3 after an explosive attack at his apartment building in Moscow City.[20] Sargsyan founded the Arbat Battalion, reportedly on instructions from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), in September 2022, and the battalion signed a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in July 2023.[21] Sargsyan is wanted in Ukraine for organizing violence against protestors in the 2014 pro-Western Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) reported that Sargsyan was a member of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's inner circle.[22] The SBU used explosives to assassinate Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistant, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow in December 2024.[23] Ukrainian officials have not commented on Sargsyan's death, and ISW cannot independently confirm the responsible actor.

The far-right Russian paramilitary unit "Rusich" Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group reacted to Sargsyan's assassination, claiming that "the Motherland will lose nothing from one dead bandit" and that Sargsyan and his "ethnic mafia" only caused problems for Russia.[24] "Rusich" Group leader Alexei Milchakov — who is a self-declared Nazi — and Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz commander Apty Alaudinov notably met in January 2025 following Rusich's repeated criticisms of Akhmat forces.[25] Alaudinov and Milchakov expressed their support for each other and promote a message about Russia's ethnic diversity and harmony. Rusich's response to Sargsyan's death, however, highlights the group's continued xenophobic and ultranationalist sentiments and calls into question the sincerity of Milchakov's reconciliation with Alaudinov.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continued to suffer high losses in January 2025 despite a slower rate of advance as compared with previous months in late 2024.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against Russian oil and gas infrastructure in Volgograd and Astrakhan oblasts on the night of February 2 to 3.
- Ukrainian forces continue to innovate with drone operations to maintain their technological advantage over Russia and bring about battlefield effects.
- The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) expressed concern about the "sharp rise" in reports of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs).
- Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on February 3 that Ukraine has started implementing organizational reforms to transition the Ukrainian Armed Forces into a "corps structure."
- Unspecified actors assassinated Armen Sargsyan, the founder of the "Arbat" Special Purpose Battalion, who has been involved in Russia's hybrid activities and invasions of Ukraine since 2014.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Borova, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Borova, Lyman, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and in the Dnipro direction.
- The Russian government is expanding the federal "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to install Kremlin-selected veterans into government positions, to occupied Ukraine as part of long-term efforts to integrate occupied Ukraine into Russia.

Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, and George Barros with William Runkel

February 2, 2025, 3:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:20 am ET on February 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces reportedly struck a dormitory holding Russian civilians in Sudzha, Kursk Oblast on February 1 as Russian authorities widely attempted to deny Russian responsibility for the strike and blame Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces conducted a guided glide bomb strike against a former boarding school dormitory holding 84 local Russian civilians preparing to evacuate and four Ukrainian police officers.^[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the strike wounded four people and killed four.^[2] The Ukrainian Air Force warned that Russian sources are attempting to blame Ukraine for the strike.^[3] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and senior Russian officials claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike from Sumy Oblast against a dormitory holding civilians in Sudzha.^[4] Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted the strike.^[5] Russian opposition outlet *Agentstvo* reported that Russian state-run TV stations *Channel One (Perviy Kanal)* and *NTV* claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted the strike against a dormitory holding civilians in Sudzha but also reported Russian airstrikes on Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast.^[6] ISW is unable to independently verify the details of the strike at this time.

Russia continues efforts to illegally deport Ukrainian children to occupied Crimea and Russia under the guise of evacuation and rehabilitation programs. Ukrainian Presidential Advisor on Children's Issues Daria Herasymchuk reported on February 2 that Russia has illegally deported at least 20,000 Ukrainian children since 2022 and that Ukraine has repatriated 1,189 children with support from humanitarian organizations and Qatar, South Africa, and the Vatican.^[7] Herasymchuk stated that Russian authorities have killed Ukrainian parents, kidnapped their children, and transported the children to "rehabilitation" or "evacuation" camps in occupied Crimea. Herasymchuk stated that Russian authorities have also separated children from their families in illegal filtration camps. Ukraine's Regional Human Rights Center identified 13 such "rehabilitation" or "evacuation" camps in occupied Crimea alone. Russian authorities reportedly use the camps in occupied Crimea to indoctrinate and militarize Ukrainian children before further deporting them to Russia for adoption. Herasymchuk warned that Russian authorities are increasingly attempting to mobilize Ukrainian teenage boys into the Russian military - a violation of the Geneva Convention.^[8] ISW has reported extensively on Russia's crimes in occupied Ukraine, including the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.^[9] The United Nation's Genocide Convention Article 2 defines "forcibly transferring children of a group to another group" as an act constituting genocide.^[10]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces reportedly struck a dormitory holding Russian civilians in Sudzha, Kursk Oblast on February 1 as Russian authorities widely attempted to deny Russian responsibility for the strike and blame Ukraine.
- Russia continues efforts to illegally deport Ukrainian children to occupied Crimea and Russia under the guise of evacuation and rehabilitation programs.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, Siversk, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian forces continue to forcibly mobilize civilians in occupied Ukraine into the Russian military in violation of the Geneva Convention.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 1, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on February 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 31 to February 1. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched seven Iskander-M/KN-23 ballistic missiles from Voronezh Oblast and occupied Crimea; seven Iskander-K cruise missiles from occupied Crimea and Donetsk Oblast; eight Kh-22 cruise missiles from Tu-22M3 aircraft; eight Kh-101/55 cruise missiles from Tu-95MS strategic bombers; 10

Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from tactical aircraft over Voronezh Oblast; two Kh-31P anti-radiation missiles from the Black Sea; and 123 Shahed and decoy drones from Bryansk, Kursk, and Oryol oblasts; Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai, and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea. [1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 56 Shahed and decoy drones; that 61 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference; and that Ukrainian countermeasures prevented an unspecified but significant number of Russian missiles from reaching their targets. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian ballistic missiles had a higher success rate, and ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are likely leveraging ballistic missiles in strike packages since Ukraine only has a few air defense systems suitable for intercepting such missiles.[2] Ukrainian officials, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, reported that a Russian Kh-22 missile struck a residential building in Poltava City; that Russian ballistic missiles struck the historical center of Odesa City, and damaged a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) protected building; and that drones damaged residential areas, warehouses, and private property in Kharkiv and Kyiv oblasts.[3] The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Russian forces struck an area near where Norwegian diplomats were staying in Odesa City.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russia's overnight strikes targeted Ukrainian gas and energy facilities that support the Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB).[5]

A recent Russian drone strike on a Ukrainian naval drone suggests that Russian forces have developed a new method to offset Ukrainian capabilities in the Black Sea. The Russian MoD reported on February 1 that Russia's Black Sea Fleet (BSF) used a drone to destroy a Ukrainian naval drone in the Black Sea.[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that the Russian BSF launched a Kronstadt Orion missile-capable drone from an unspecified naval asset and that this strike may be the first documented case of Russian forces leveraging a naval asset to deploy drones capable of destroying Ukrainian naval drones.[7] Another Russian milblogger called on Russian authorities to increase the production of weapons similar to the drone-launched X-UAV missiles (TKB-1030) to effectively combat Ukrainian forces' naval drone capabilities as it is now too risky for Russia to operate helicopters near the Black Sea.[8] Ukrainian forces have demonstrated their ability to down Russian Mi-8 helicopters operating over the Black Sea using missiles launched from Magura V5 naval strike drones, and the February 1 BSF strike suggests that Russian forces have developed a new method to try to offset this Ukrainian naval drone adaptation.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine on the night of January 31 to February 1.
- A recent Russian drone strike on a Ukrainian naval drone suggests that Russian forces have developed a new method to offset Ukrainian capabilities in the Black Sea.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 31, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

January 31, 2025, 8:30 pm ET

The United Kingdom (UK), Finland, and Czechia announced several immediate and longer-term military assistance packages for Ukraine on January 31. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on January 31 that the UK will provide Ukraine with a military assistance package valued at two billion GBP (about \$2.5 billion), primarily for the purchase of air defense systems and funding for the localization of defense production in Ukraine.[1] Finnish Defense Minister Antti Hukkanen announced on January 31 that Finland will provide Ukraine with a new tranche of military assistance valued at almost 200 million euros (about \$207 million).[2] Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky stated on January 31 that the Czech government is considering creating a new initiative to purchase artillery ammunition for Ukraine.[3]

Russian forces are expanding their salient north of Kupyansk as part of long-term operational efforts to push Ukrainian forces from the east (left) bank of the Oskil River. Russian offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kremmina (Kupyansk-Borova-Lyman) line gradually intensified in September 2024 after a relatively low tempo period in early and mid-2024 during which Russian forces primarily conducted infantry assaults and occasional platoon-sized mechanized assaults in the area.[4] Ukrainian forces repelled a reinforced battalion-sized Russian mechanized assault near Pishchane (southeast of Kupyansk) in late September 2024 – the first large Russian mechanized

assault in this direction since Winter 2023-2024.[5] Russian forces have recently intensified offensive operations north of Kupyansk, particularly near Dvorichna, as part of this broader intensification in the Kupyansk, Borova, and Lyman directions. Geolocated footage published on January 30 and 31 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Dvorichna (north of Kupyansk and on the west [right] bank of the Oskil River), advanced in the southern outskirts of Zapadne (southwest of Dvorichna), and advanced northward along the west bank of the Oskil River northwest of Novomlynsk (northeast of Dvorichna).[6] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on January 28 and 31 that Russian forces recently seized Dvorichna, and a Russian milblogger claimed on January 31 that Russian forces seized Novomlynsk.[7] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however.

Russian forces are also leveraging mechanized assaults to expand their salient north of Kupyansk. Russian forces have conducted five company-sized mechanized assaults and at least one reduced battalion-sized mechanized assault in the Kupyansk direction since late October 2024.[8] The commander of a Ukrainian drone battalion operating in the Kupyansk direction stated on January 28 that Ukrainian forces have repelled four mechanized assaults of unspecified echelon since January 22 alone.[9] The Russian military command has historically allocated armored vehicles to priority frontline areas and intensified mechanized activity could indicate that the Kupyansk direction is becoming a priority sector for Russian forces.[10]

Elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly leading the Russian effort to expand the salient north of Kupyansk. Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), credited elements of the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA) with seizing Dvorichna on January 28.[11] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on January 25 that elements of the Russian 69th Motorized Rifle Division (6th CAA), the Russian Volunteer Corps, and the 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate [GRU]) are attacking Dvorichna from the south, advanced to the P-79 Dvorichna-Kupyansk highway, and advanced to Kindrashivka (south of Zapadne and north of Kupyansk) as part of efforts to bypass Zapadne from the south.[12] Mashovets stated that the Russian military command has also redeployed most of the 6th CAA's artillery to the Dvorichna area, including elements of the 9th Artillery Brigade.[13]

The tempo of Russian offensive operations along this sector of the front was generally much lower than elsewhere in eastern Ukraine throughout most of 2024 and Russian units in the area are likely well-rested and prepared to begin a months-long campaign to envelop Kupyansk. The Russian military does not appear to have significant uncommitted reserves to funnel into this effort, but the Russian military command may be willing to redeploy frontline units from another sector of the frontline to exploit any significant tactical gains in the Dvorichna-Kupyansk area.[14] Mashovets suggested that the Russian military command may redeploy elements of the 6th CAA, including elements of its 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade and 69th Motorized Rifle Division, from the Vovchansk area (northeast of Kharkiv City) to Dvorichna if Russian forces begin to make substantial advances north of Kupyansk. [15] The Russian military command may want to redeploy additional elements of the 6th CAA to the Dvorichna area rather than redeploying forces from another relatively inactive area, as redeploying forces that are relatively nearby and are subordinated to the same formation as the forces already north of Kupyansk could help reduce command and control (C2) and coordination issues between frontline units operating immediately north and northwest of Kupyansk. Russian forces have historically struggled with C2 issues when redeploying units from multiple discrete formations and areas of the frontline to new efforts, a problem that was particularly notable during the Russian defense against Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[16]

Elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (GTA) (Moscow Military District [MMD]) are also participating in the envelopment of Kupyansk and are attempting to advance east of Kupyansk and to expand the Russian salient south of Kupyansk near Kruhlyakivka likely in order to prepare for advances south of Kupyansk, cross the Oskil River, and pressure

Borova. Mashovets stated recently that elements of the 1st GTA's 4th and 47th tank divisions were unsuccessfully attacking east of Kupyansk near Kotlyarivka.[17] Elements of the 1st GTA, including its 4th and 47th tank divisions, 27th Motorized Rifle Brigade, and 2nd Motorized Rifle Division, are also reportedly operating along the Kolisnykivka-Kruhlyakivka-Zahryzove salient.[18] Russian forces in this salient have advanced to the east (left) bank of the Oskil River but have thus far struggled to cross the river. Russian advances beyond the Oskil River and further Russian advances in the Dvorichna area are a necessary first step in Russian efforts to envelop Kupyansk from the northwest and southwest. The Oskil River will likely continue to constrain further Russian advances westward from the Kruhlyakivka salient, however. Elements of the 1st GTA are also operating near Lozova and Zelenyi Hai (both southeast of the Kruhlyakivka salient) and have been attacking westward to expand the southern flank of the salient, suggesting that Russian forces are also trying to push towards Borova (southwest of the Kolisnykivka-Zelenyi Hai line). It is unclear if elements of the 1st GTA will be able to

undertake two simultaneous operational efforts to advance on Borova and cross the Oskil River to support Russian efforts to envelop Kupyansk.

Russian forces appear to be developing and disseminating a doctrinal method for advances throughout the theater that aims to conduct slow envelopments of frontline towns and settlements at a scale that is reasonable for Russian forces to conclude before culminating. The Russian Central Grouping of Forces' seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024 was Russia's first relatively successful envelopment after Russian forces regained the theater-wide initiative in Fall 2023, and Russian forces spent four months closing a gap 12 to 15 kilometers wide and ultimately forced Ukrainian troops to withdraw under threat of tactical encirclement. The seizure of Avdiivka likely served as the Russian military command's blueprint for future envelopments in other frontline areas. The Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces' effort to envelop Vuhledar successfully forced Ukrainian troops to withdraw from Vuhledar, and Russian forces seized the settlement in October 2024.[19] Elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces were then able to leverage the seizure of Vuhledar, advance further west, and interdict Ukrainian egress routes to envelop and seize Velyka Novosilka in January 2025.[20] Russian forces have been successful in closing smaller envelopments around Vuhledar and Velyka Novosilka, but ongoing Russian efforts to conduct larger envelopments around Pokrovsk and Kupyansk will test the extent of Russian capabilities.

The Russian military command also appears to be experimenting with involving multiple military districts in a single envelopment. The Russian military command achieved significant tactical successes via envelopments in the Vuhledar and Velyka Novosilka directions in Fall 2024 and early Winter 2024-2025, possibly due in part to keeping these two operational efforts under a single command – the Eastern Grouping of Forces. Having a unified command over both these directions likely helped minimize coordination issues and ensured a cohesive and unified vision in operational-level planning in the area. The Russian Central Grouping of Forces is currently overseeing the envelopment of Pokrovsk from the northeast and southwest by bringing together tactical advances near Vozdvizhenka (east of Pokrovsk) and Kotlyne (southwest of Pokrovsk) in an arc around Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad and closing a gap that is currently 30 kilometers wide.[21] The Russian military command appears to be involving elements of both the 6th CAA (LMD) and 1st GTA (MMD) to envelop Kupyansk, which could complicate offensive operations in the area. The Russian military command will likely continue to experiment with envelopments of various depths and involving various force groupings as it works to further refine this method and learn from battlefield successes and failures.

The Russian military's ability to iterate on this method across multiple military districts is notable and indicates that the Russian General Staff may be improving its ability to disseminate lessons learned across multiple sectors of the frontline. Russian forces have previously failed to learn and implement lessons learned across areas of responsibility (AoRs), which has resulted in costly troop and armored vehicle losses throughout the frontline over the last three years.[22] Russian forces have historically been more adept at learning and implementing lessons among units within a single grouping of forces/military district, but Russian forces' ability to undertake an envelopment in the Kupyansk direction modeled on Russian activity in Donetsk Oblast indicates that the Russian General Staff is at least attempting to disseminate lessons learned and possibly new doctrine throughout the theater.[23]

The Russian military command has shown that it is willing to commit to operations that could take six to nine months to conclude. Russian commanders are likely operating under the assumption or direct knowledge that Russian President Vladimir Putin does not intend to end the war in Ukraine in the near future. Russian forces have been incrementally working to push Ukrainian forces from the east bank of the Oskil River since Winter 2023-2024, and the Russian military command has previously deprioritized the Kupyansk-Borova-Lyman line in favor of other operational efforts in Ukraine.[24] The envelopment of Kupyansk will almost certainly be a months-long effort that requires Russian forces to close a gap 25 to 30 kilometers wide while also fording and maintaining logistics across the Oskil River, seizing small settlements in their path, and repelling Ukrainian counterattacks. Mashovets and a Russian milblogger have suggested that the Russian military command may intend to leverage advances near Dvorichna and Vovchansk to advance on Velykyi Burluk from the northwest and southeast.[25] Russian forces are currently 30 and 35 kilometers from Velykyi Burluk from their closest point of advance in the Kupyansk and Vovchansk directions respectively, and Russian forces could spend six months to a year making slow, grinding advances toward Velykyi Burluk before they truly threaten the settlement.

Russian commanders do not seem concerned about the speed or consistency of their advances in Ukraine, likely because they believe that the war will drag on until Russia militarily defeats Ukraine. The Russian military expended four months on the seizure of Avdiivka, spent most of 2024 working to level the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast, and has devoted the last three years to seizing the remainder of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but does not appear particularly concerned with expediting

these advances.[26] Putin has previously articulated a theory of victory that assumes that the Russian military will be able to continue gradual, creeping advances in Ukraine indefinitely and has repeatedly indicated that he has no interest in a resolution of the war on any terms but those he dictates.[27] Putin's commanders are internalizing these statements and likely coming to the logical conclusion that Putin has no interest in ending the war and intends to continue fighting until he accomplishes his objectives in Ukraine, which are the toppling of the current Ukrainian government and the categorical destruction of the Ukrainian military.[28]

This Russian offensive method is bringing about slow operational maneuver on the battlefield, but these envelopments require significant planning, foresight, manpower, and equipment and do not restore rapid, mechanized maneuver to the battlefield. Russian forces' recent envelopments have demonstrated that these efforts require substantial numbers of personnel, armor, and artillery systems to sustain their tempo of advance. The personnel and vehicle losses that Russia is suffering to make these creeping, gradual advances are unsustainable given Russia's current force generation and defense industrial capacities. Reports of Russian tank and armored vehicle losses in 2024 indicate, for example, that such losses will likely be prohibitive over the longer term, particularly as Russia continues to exhaust its finite Soviet-era stocks.[29] Russia's current monthly recruitment rate is also likely either just equal to or below the quantity needed to replace Russia's monthly casualty rate one-to-one, but there are reports that select Russian regions are failing to meet their monthly recruitment quotas as citizens are less willing to volunteer to fight.[30] Russia's ability to continue slowly enveloping settlements, instead of attempting to conduct rapid mechanized maneuver that penetrates Ukraine's defensive lines and quickly achieves operationally significant advances, in the medium to long term is contingent on Russia's ability to supply the high quantities of personnel and materiel needed to sustain these operations.

Russian forces are also intensifying their efforts to close the remaining Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove. Geolocated footage published on January 30 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in fields north of Sukhi Yaly (southwest of Kurakhove) during a motorized assault and have likely collapsed the southern part of the Ukrainian pocket along the Zelenivka-Sukhi Yaly-Yantarne line.[31] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced northeast of Sukhi Yaly, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[32] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are prioritizing advances towards Kostyantynopil from the south and Andriivka from the north (both west of Kurakhove) to encircle Ukrainian forces near Dachne and Ulakly (both west of Kurakhove and east of the Kostyantynopil-Andriivka line).[33] Russian forces recently advanced across fields up to the eastern outskirts of Andriivka, and further advances in and south of Andriivka will likely complicate Ukrainian forces' ability to withdraw from the pocket.[34] Russian milbloggers claimed on January 31 that Russian forces also advanced to central Andriivka and pushed Ukrainian forces to the outskirts of Kostyantynopil but that Russian forces have not yet entered Kostyantynopil.[35]

Russian forces are also pushing against the pocket from its eastern side. ISW assessed on January 28 that Russian forces likely advanced in fields southeast of Dachne, and Russian milbloggers claimed on January 29 and 30 that Russian forces further advanced towards the settlement.[36] Russian milbloggers claimed on January 31 that there are reports that Russian forces control half of Dachne and that Russian forces may encircle Ukrainian forces near Dachne if Russian forces cut the H-15 highway near Ulakly.[37] Footage published on January 31 shows Russian forces conducting an airstrike against a Ukrainian bridge across the Sukhi Yaly River near Kostyantynopil, and a Russian millogger noted that this is the second bridge that Russian forces have destroyed in the area – likely part of the Russian effort to trap Ukrainian forces in the pocket.[38] Russian forces likely aim to close or collapse the Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove to free up Russian forces operating in the area for offensive operations elsewhere, such as advances towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border from either the Pokrovsk direction or the Velyka Novosilka direction, as ISW has previously assessed.[39]

Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities agreed to accept a European Union (EU) package that includes funding for gas purchases for Transnistria, further limiting Russia's economic influence over the pro-Russian breakaway republic. Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean stated on January 31 that Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities reached an agreement to accept an EU package totaling 64 million euros (about \$66.3 million).[40] Recean stated that 20 million euros (about \$20.7 million) will go towards purchasing gas for Transnistria and that another 10 million euros (about \$10.3 million) will go to Moldova for its electricity purchases. The EU will also give Moldova 34 million euros (about \$35.2 million) to support its federal budget. Russian business outlet *Kommersant* reported on January 30 that unspecified sources stated that Transnistria will use its EU-allocated funds to buy gas on the European market from February 1 to 10 through Moldovan state electricity company Energocom, which Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz will then supply to Transnistria.[41] *Kommersant's* sources stated that Transnistria intends to use Russian funding to buy gas from a yet-to-be-determined Hungarian company starting February 11. Transnistria's acceptance

of the EU aid heavily degrades Russia's economic influence over Transnistria, as free Russian gas supplies to Transnistria's power plant supported electricity exports that sustained Transnistria's budget. [42] Russian and pro-Kremlin Transnistrian authorities will likely attempt to play up Russia's role in providing Transnistria with limited funding for gas purchases starting in mid-February in order to promote Russia as Transnistria's benefactor and savior. EU funding for Moldova's electricity purchases will also likely degrade the efficacy of Russian anti-EU narratives, particularly those about Moldova's turn to higher-priced European electricity, ahead of the Summer 2025 Moldovan parliamentary elections.

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil refinery in Volgograd Oblast amid continued strikes against Russian energy and defense industrial infrastructure. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 31 that elements of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), Unmanned Systems Forces, and other Ukrainian forces struck the Lukoil-Volgogradneftoperobka Oil Refinery in Volgograd City on the night of January 30 to 31, causing an explosion in the area.[43] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported on January 31 that the Lukoil-Volgogradneftoperobka Oil Refinery is the sixth largest oil refinery in Russia.[44] Volgograd Oblast Governor Andrei Bocharov claimed on January 31 that drone debris caused a fire at an unspecified oil refinery in the oblast.[45] A Russian insider source posted footage purportedly showing an explosion near the Lukoil-Volgogradneftoperobka Oil Refinery.[46] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Lukoil-Volgogradneftoperobka Oil Refinery in February and May 2024.[47]

Key Takeaways:

- The United Kingdom (UK), Finland, and Czechia announced several immediate and longer-term military assistance packages for Ukraine on January 31.
- Russian forces are expanding their salient north of Kupyansk as part of long-term operational efforts to push Ukrainian forces from the east (left) bank of the Oskil River.
- Elements of the 6th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly leading the Russian effort to expand the salient north of Kupyansk.
- Elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (GTA) (Moscow Military District [MMD]) are also participating in the envelopment of Kupyansk and are attempting to advance east of Kupyansk and to expand the Russian salient south of Kupyansk near Kruhlyakivka likely in order to prepare for advances south of Kupyansk, cross the Oskil River, and pressure Borova.
- Russian forces appear to be developing and disseminating a doctrinal method for advances throughout the theater that aims to conduct slow envelopments of frontline towns and settlements at a scale that is reasonable for Russian forces to conclude before culminating.
- The Russian military command has shown that it is willing to commit to operations that could take six to nine months to conclude. Russian commanders are likely operating under the assumption or direct knowledge that Russian President Vladimir Putin does not intend to end the war in Ukraine in the near future.
- This Russian offensive method is bringing about slow operational maneuver on the battlefield, but these envelopments require significant planning, foresight, manpower, and equipment and do not restore rapid, mechanized maneuver to the battlefield.
- Russian forces are also intensifying their efforts to close the remaining Ukrainian pocket west of Kurakhove.
- Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities agreed to accept a European Union (EU) package that includes funding for gas purchases for Transnistria, further limiting Russia's economic influence over the pro-Russian breakaway republic.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil refinery in Volgograd Oblast amid continued strikes against Russian energy and defense industrial infrastructure.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Lyman, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Western and Ukrainian officials continue to report that North Korean forces have withdrawn from frontline positions in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 30, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mapes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

January 30, 2025, 6:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on January 30. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 31 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Kremlin newswire TASS published an interview with Valdai Discussion Club Research Director Fyodor Lukyanov on January 30 entitled "Don't count on big agreements," highlighting the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to shape domestic and global expectations about future negotiations between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump. The Valdai Discussion Club is an international forum where Kremlin officials, Russian scholars, and foreign officials and scholars meet to discuss international issues and has proven to be a useful tool in the Kremlin's decades-long efforts to influence Western policy in Russia's favor.^[1] Lukyanov is a senior member and scholar at the Valdai Club, has repeatedly moderated Putin's annual speech at Valdai, and is considered a well-connected and authoritative voice on the Kremlin's foreign policy goals and objectives -- though he holds no formal position in the Russian government.^[2] ISW is not prepared to assess or argue that Lukyanov has intimate and personal knowledge about Putin's state of mind or intentions in future peace negotiations, but Lukyanov's statements in this interview are generally consistent with Putin's and other Kremlin officials' statements about Russia's future negotiating positions.^[3] TASS' decision to leverage Lukyanov's interview to dampen domestic speculation about the possibility of a peace agreement in the near future also highlights the relevance of this interview and Lukyanov's statements when considering Russia's possible negotiating positions vis-a-vis Ukraine and the United States.

Lukyanov stated during the interview that the "main thing" for future peace negotiations regarding Ukraine is "not the territories" but addressing the "root causes" of the war, which Lukyanov defined as NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s.^[4] Lukyanov stated with respect to Ukrainian lands Russian forces now hold that "with the territories, everything is clear: how much you take is yours," further indicating that the Kremlin has no intention of compromising on its territorial gains in Ukraine in future peace negotiations.^[5] This position suggests that the Kremlin likely means for any future peace negotiations with Trump to start with the United States recognizing Russia's territorial claims over Ukraine, likely including areas that Russia does not currently occupy, before actual negotiations can begin that should focus on these so-called "root causes." Lukyanov stated that Russia's chief demand for future peace negotiations with Trump is "a change in the security landscape in Eastern Europe" and the "abandoning [of] a number of provisions on which NATO's existence and functioning are based."^[6] Lukyanov stated that Russia may also want to discuss the possibility of "reducing the level of [NATO's] military presence," presumably along Russia's borders, but noted that this is unlikely to happen.

Kremlin officials have repeatedly alluded to the need for future peace negotiations to address the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine, which Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov defined in December 2024 as NATO's alleged violation of commitments not to advance eastward and "aggressive absorption" of areas near Russia's borders.^[7] Putin issued a series of demands to the United States in December 2021 ahead of his full-scale invasion of Ukraine that included that: NATO commit to not accepting Ukraine or any other countries as new members; the United States commit to upholding the alleged ban on NATO enlargement; NATO not deploy any military forces to states that became NATO members after May 1997; and NATO ban any military activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, among other things.^[8] The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on January 10, citing a former senior Kremlin official and another source who discussed the topic with Putin, that Putin will maintain his pre-war demands of preventing Ukraine from joining NATO and forcing NATO to withdraw deployments in Eastern Europe in any future negotiations.^[9] **Lukyanov's statements are yet another indication that the Kremlin remains committed to imposing its will and security interests on the United States and Europe and is not interested in compromising on this goal.**

Lukyanov's statements assume that Trump and his administration are weak and more susceptible to being intimidated by the Kremlin's shows of force than the former Biden Administration. Lukyanov claimed that Trump wants to "dump all further problems" concerning Ukraine on Europe and "does not respect" European states or NATO more broadly.^[10] Lukyanov claimed that Trump may be willing to compromise NATO's foundational principles to appease Putin's demand for a NATO withdrawal from Eastern Europe and suggested more broadly that Trump will abandon Ukraine and NATO. Lukyanov claimed that "Trump only respects those who show steadfastness" and called on the Kremlin to "never give in" and "to be prepared for a fairly tough conversation, even including elements of [a] bluff" -- calling on the Putin to strongarm Trump and demonstrate his resolve in future negotiations with Trump. Lukyanov's interview supports the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to force Trump into acquiescing to Putin's demands that amount to Ukraine's full capitulation and the weakening of NATO and Putin's personal efforts to position himself as Trump's equal on the international stage.^[11]

People's Republic of China (PRC)-based companies continue to supply Russia with critical materials needed to sustain Russia's war efforts in Ukraine. *RFE/RL*, citing its own Ukrainian bureau's investigative unit Schemes, reported on January 30 that at least two dozen PRC-based firms "untouched" by Western sanctions are directly supplying Russia with gallium, germanium, and antimony — key elements used in Russian drones and missiles.[12] Schemes found that PRC-based firms send these materials to Russian defense industrial base (DIB) companies including Russian state defense conglomerate Rostec, which supplies nearly 80 percent of the Kremlin's weaponry used in Ukraine. At least a third of these suppliers are reportedly linked to the PRC government, which has repeatedly denied aiding Russia's war. Schemes also noted that the Russian subsidiary of a Japanese company imported antimony from the PRC and supplied silicon wafers to Russian military microelectronics manufacturers. ISW has previously noted that PRC companies are directly and indirectly supplying Russia with drones, machine tools, and microelectronic products that Russia uses to produce missiles, rockets, armored vehicles, and munitions used in Ukraine.[13]

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on January 28 defining its position on peace in Ukraine, closely echoing the principle of "peace through strength" that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky previously outlined.[14] The resolution called for unwavering European support to Ukraine and noted that sustainable peace negotiations can only be achieved from a position of Ukrainian strength. The resolution stated that negotiations regarding an end to the war in Ukraine can only be conducted with direct Ukrainian involvement and if Russia abandons its "imperial ambitions." The resolution also condemned Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and commended Ukraine's progress towards European Union (EU) membership. Zelensky has previously highlighted that sustainable and just peace in Ukraine should be achieved through enhanced military support to Ukraine, especially given Russia's reluctance to engage in good-faith negotiations and continued maximalist and imperialist ambitions. [15]

The US military reportedly recently transferred Patriot missiles from Israel to Poland and is expected to deliver these missiles to Ukraine. A US defense official told CNN and three sources with knowledge of the transfer told US outlet Axios on January 28 that the US military transferred roughly 90 decommissioned Patriot missiles from storage facilities in Israel to Poland.[16] The Patriot missiles are expected to be transferred to Ukraine on an unspecified date.

Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin newswire TASS published an interview with Valdai Discussion Club Research Director Fyodor Lukyanov on January 30 entitled "Don't count on big agreements," highlighting the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to shape domestic and global expectations about future negotiations between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump.
- Lukyanov stated during the interview that the "main thing" for future peace negotiations regarding Ukraine is "not the territories" but addressing the "root causes" of the war, which Lukyanov defined as NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s.
- Lukyanov's statements assume that Trump and his administration are weak and more susceptible to being intimidated by the Kremlin's shows of force than the former Biden Administration.
- People's Republic of China (PRC)-based companies continue to supply Russia with critical materials needed to sustain Russia's war efforts in Ukraine.
- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on January 28 defining its position on peace in Ukraine, closely echoing the principle of "peace through strength" that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky previously outlined.
- The US military reportedly recently transferred Patriot missiles from Israel to Poland and is expected to deliver these missiles to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kharkiv and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Kurakhove and in the Dnipro direction.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 29, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan with Nate Trotter and William Runkel

January 29, 2025, 8:45 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Western military assistance remains vital to Ukraine's ability to maintain its defense against Russian aggression. Putin gave an interview to Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin published on January 28 in which he claimed that the war in Ukraine could be over within two months if the West stops providing Ukraine with military assistance and that Ukraine's dependence on Western military aid indicates that Ukraine has "no sovereignty."^[1] Putin's claims about how quickly the war will end without further Western military assistance and his explicit rejection of Ukrainian sovereignty are a part of long-term Kremlin information operations aimed at undermining Western support for Ukraine and deterring additional Western military assistance.^[2] Putin is correct, however, that **additional Western military assistance — particularly US military assistance — remains critical to maintaining and further developing Ukraine's warfighting capabilities.** Ukrainian forces have consistently proven throughout the war that they can achieve operationally- and strategically significant battlefield victories when armed with sufficient quantities of US and other Western-provided military assistance.^[3] Ukrainian forces have also maintained stubborn defenses even when poorly provisioned and notably forced Russian forces to withdraw from Kyiv Oblast in April 2022 before significant deliveries of Western aid even arrived at the frontline and significantly slowed the pace of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine in Summer 2022.^[4] Putin and other Kremlin officials aim to portray Ukraine as weak and incapable of adequately leveraging Western-provided weapons at this critical moment in Western policy discussions about Ukraine — even though Ukraine has proven that it is anything but weak after fending off Russia for the almost three years of war.

Putin's longstanding theory of victory relies on the assumption that the West will abandon Ukraine, and only unwavering Western support and consistent deliveries of Western military assistance to Kyiv can force Putin to abandon his theory and accept the need to offer the concessions necessary for any resolution to the conflict acceptable to the United States, Europe, and Ukraine.^[5] ISW continues to assess that only the United States can provide Ukraine with some critical weapons and military equipment at the scale, speed, and regularity necessary for Ukraine's defense against Russia, and Western officials have recently proposed that European states increasingly assist in funding US military assistance to Ukraine.^[6]

Putin indicated that he will not view any peace agreement with Ukraine as binding by claiming that the Ukrainian government is either unwilling or unable to rescind the 2022 Ukrainian presidential decree banning negotiations with Putin. Putin claimed that any peace agreement that Russia and Ukraine conclude before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky rescinds his 2022 decree will be invalid.^[7] Putin further claimed that that Zelensky is no longer able to legally rescind the decree because he is no longer the "legitimate" president of Ukraine and that the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada could rescind the decree but does not seem interested in doing so. The Ukrainian constitution does not empower the Verkhovna Rada to unilaterally rescind presidential decrees, however, and a decision to do so could itself violate the Ukrainian constitution.^[8] Kremlin officials, including Putin, have repeatedly used deliberately false interpretations of Ukraine's law and constitution to claim that Zelensky is the illegitimate president of Ukraine after Ukraine, adhering to its law and constitution, did not hold elections under martial law in 2024.^[9] Putin would likely seize on any unconstitutional act by the Verkhovna Rada — even one he is now calling for — to declare the act and Verkhovna Rada "illegitimate" and stand up another strawman to hide the reality of his disinterest in serious negotiations that recognize Ukraine as an independent state. Putin has previously claimed that the Verkhovna Rada is the only "legitimate" government branch in Ukraine and thus the only Ukrainian government entity with which Russia could negotiate.^[10] Putin may intend to declare the Verkhovna Rada "illegitimate" in the future in order to justify his demands for complete regime change in Kyiv and his unwillingness to negotiate with Ukrainian authorities.

Putin's statements rejecting the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and of a possible future peace agreement set conditions for Russia to justify violating any future agreement with Ukraine. Putin has repeatedly claimed that every Ukrainian government since the 2014 pro-Western Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine has been illegitimate.^[11] Putin has nevertheless engaged in negotiations and reached agreements with Ukrainian officials, including regarding the resolution of armed conflict with the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015.^[12] Putin has also consistently violated these agreements and used similar claims about the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government to justify these violations.^[13] Even if Zelensky or other parts of the Ukrainian government agreed to lift the decree banning negotiations with Putin, Putin would likely violate any peace or other agreement that he reaches with Ukraine under the false justification that such agreements are "invalid" as long as he believes that he can achieve his maximalist war aims through military operations. Putin likely also intends to leverage false claims about the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government and the limitations that the decree places on the possibility of peace negotiations to falsely portray Ukraine — rather than Russia — as the party prolonging the war and unwilling or unable to engage in meaningful negotiations to his domestic and international audiences.

Putin continues efforts to coerce US President Donald Trump into bilateral negotiations that exclude Ukraine, impose his desired negotiation framework on Trump, and compel Trump to inadvertently endorse ongoing Russian information operations about the illegitimacy of the current Ukrainian government. Putin's January 28 statements are part of a continued effort to position himself as Trump's equal and reinforce his long-held belief that Russia is the great-power heir to the Soviet Union.[14] Putin's statements also set conditions for Russia to violate any future peace agreements with Ukraine that Trump may hope to mediate and are yet another indication that Putin is not interested in compromising on his demands of complete regime change and the crippling of Ukraine's military as conditions for peace.[15] Putin's efforts to strongarm Trump are also part of a concerted Russian effort to force the West to acknowledge and endorse Russian information operations about the illegitimacy of the current Ukrainian government and an enduring Ukrainian state. ISW previously noted that Western acquiescence to all of Russia's demands in Ukraine would require the West to acknowledge and agree that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate and that a Ukrainian identity and state independent from Russia either does not currently exist and/or does not deserve to exist in the future.[16]

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike at the Russian oil refinery in Kstovo, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, and reportedly hit a Russian arsenal in Tver Oblast on the night of January 28 to 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 29 that elements of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Unmanned Systems Forces struck the Lukoil-Nizhegorodnetaorgsintez oil refinery in Kstovo and caused a fire.[17] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko posted footage of the oil refinery fire in Kstovo and reported that the refinery produces gasoline, diesel, aviation kerosene, and bitumen; processes 15 to 17 million tons of oil per year; and supports the Russian military.[18] Geolocated footage posted on January 28 and 29 shows a fire at the Nizhny Novgorod Oil Refinery.[19] Russian petrochemicals company Sibur-Ksotvo Enterprise reported on January 29 that Ukrainian drone debris struck the enterprise on the night of January 28 to 29, and Nizhny Novgorod Oblast Governor Gleb Nikitin acknowledged that drone debris started a fire in an industrial area.[20] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported on January 29 that Ukrainian drones also struck the Russian Main Missile and Artillery Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s 23rd Arsenal near Oktyabrsky, Tver Oblast, reportedly damaging an empty weapons storage building and three other buildings.[21] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Russian 23rd Arsenal in September 2024.[22]

The Russian MoD confirmed in a post on January 29 that Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik is the commander of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces. Sanchik briefed Russian Defense Minister Belousov on Ukrainian activity along the front line in the Southern Grouping of Force's area of responsibility (AoR) and the Russian MoD posted footage showing Sanchik speaking with Belousov.[23] Sanchik previously served as commander of the Eastern Military District (EMD), and ISW first observed claims that Russian authorities appointed Sanchik commander of the Southern Grouping of Forces and Southern Military District [SMD] in November 2024.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Western military assistance remains vital to Ukraine's ability to maintain its defense against Russian aggression.
- Putin's longstanding theory of victory relies on the assumption that the West will abandon Ukraine, and only unwavering Western support and consistent deliveries of Western military assistance to Kyiv can force Putin to abandon his theory and accept the need to offer the concessions necessary for any resolution to the conflict acceptable to the US, Europe, and Ukraine.
- Putin indicated that he will not view any peace agreement with Ukraine as binding by claiming that the Ukrainian government is either unwilling or unable to rescind the 2022 Ukrainian presidential decree banning negotiations with Putin.
- Putin's statements rejecting the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and of a possible future peace agreement set conditions for Russia to justify violating any future agreements with Ukraine.
- Putin continues efforts to coerce US President Donald Trump into bilateral negotiations that exclude Ukraine, impose his desired negotiations framework on Trump, and compel Trump to inadvertently endorse ongoing Russian information operations about the illegitimacy of the current Ukrainian government.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike at the Russian oil refinery in Kstovo, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and reportedly hit a Russian arsenal in Tver Oblast on the night of January 28 to 29.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed in a post on January 29 that Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik is the commander of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces.

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk and Russian forces recently advanced near Lyman, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Velyka Novosilka, Robotnye, and in the Dnipro direction.
- Volunteer recruitment rates in Moscow have dropped sharply, as Russian citizens grow increasingly unwilling to serve in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 28, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and George Barros with Nate Trotter

The first official Russian delegation arrived in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime on January 28 to discuss Russia's continued use of its military bases in Syria.^[1] The Russian delegation includes Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Presidential Special Representative to Syria Alexander Lavrentyev. *Reuters* reported that two Syrian sources stated that the delegation will meet with the new Syrian government sometime this week.^[2] Bogdanov told Russian state media outlet *RT* that the visit aims to strengthen Russian-Syrian historical relations based on common interests.^[3] *Bloomberg* reported that a Russian source familiar with the matter stated that Russia is struggling to retain access to the Hmeimim Air Base and Port of Tartus because negotiations with the new Syrian government are "stuck."^[4] Russian milbloggers responded to the Russian delegation's arrival, claiming that Syria is "far from" Russia's first or even second priority and cautioning against believing Russian or Syrian officials' "standard phrases" about cooperation.^[5] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that there is no hope that Russian-Syrian relations can return to their previous strength and that Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) holds the upper hand in negotiations and can extract greater concessions from Russia.^[6]

The Russian military continues to evacuate military assets from the Port of Tartus amid the ongoing Russian-Syrian negotiations. Commercially available satellite imagery collected by Planet Labs PBC from January 18 and 27 shows that the Russian military loaded equipment onto the Russian *Sparta* and *Sparta II* cargo ships at Tartus and that the *Sparta II* ship left the port while the *Sparta* remained.^[7] OSINT analyst MT Anderson posted satellite imagery from January 23 showing the *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler alongside the port and possibly suggesting that the Russian military was loading vehicles onto the *Sparta*.^[8] *Bloomberg* reported on January 28 that a Russian source stated that two Russian transport ships — likely the *Sparta* and *Sparta II* — had been waiting for weeks off Tartus before Syrian authorities allowed them to dock.^[9]

The Russian military likely formed a separate unmanned systems regiment at the military district level in order to augment Russia's unmanned systems capabilities. The creation of this regiment supports the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) recent coordinated effort to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces within the Russian military and centralize control over informal drone detachments.^[10] Ukrainian volunteer drone initiative Victory Drones initially amplified in April 2024 preliminary information that the Russian military command was finalizing the establishment of the 7th Separate Unmanned Systems Reconnaissance Strike Regiment as part of the Central Military District (CMD).^[11] Victory Drones noted that the regiment had 1,342 servicemembers and that the regiment was staffed at 94 percent as of April 2024. Victory Drones noted that the regiment trained at the base of the Russian 473rd District Training Center (CMD) and consists of command elements, an unmanned systems strike battalion, three unmanned systems reconnaissance and strike battalions, and logistics support units such as signal, medical, and repair elements. Victory Drones reported that the Russian military command planned to form 102 subordinate component units within the 7th Separate Unmanned Systems Reconnaissance Strike Regiment, of which 41 are strike units and 61 are reconnaissance units. Several Russian volunteer groups began crowdfunding for the 7th Separate Unmanned Systems Reconnaissance Strike Regiment starting in July 2024 and implied that the regiment was operating in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.^[12]

Russian milbloggers observed throughout Fall 2024 that the Russian MoD began reorganizing informal drone detachments and other specialists, such as signalmen, medics, and engineers, into "joint technical battalions."^[13] The Russian MoD also announced that it formed an unspecified number of unmanned systems detachments by October 2024 via the "Rubikon" Center for Prospective Unmanned Technologies and announced the formation of five additional unmanned systems.^[14] Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov subsequently announced that the Russian MoD would complete the formation of the Unmanned Systems Forces within the Russian military in the third

quarter of 2025.[15] Defense Analyst Konrad Muzyka assessed that the recent organizational changes within the Russian military and the formation of drone units suggest that similar regiments may emerge in other Russian military districts in the future.[16] Russian forces will likely gain augmented drone support capabilities should the Russian MoD successfully form these new unmanned systems regiments and centralize its procurement efforts under the Unmanned Systems Forces, although the success of this effort will depend on the Russian military's commitment to executing the necessary reforms and the availability of resources.[17]

A senior NATO official acknowledged that Russia is escalating a sabotage and destabilization campaign against European NATO member states to deter further military assistance to Ukraine. NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General James Appathurai stated at the European Parliament on January 28 that NATO states have faced acts of sabotage in recent years, including train derailments, arson, attacks against politicians' property, and assassination plots against defense industry figures, including a Kremlin plot to assassinate Rheinmetall Head Armin Papperger.[18] Appathurai emphasized that the Kremlin aims to "create disquiet to undermine support for Ukraine" and called for NATO states to more assertively deter Russian sabotage acts.[19] The Kremlin has consistently attempted to use information operations to deter Western states from providing additional military assistance to Ukraine.[20] The Kremlin's sabotage and destabilization campaign directly targeting NATO states supports ISW's assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin sees Russia as waging a hybrid war directly against NATO.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- The first official Russian delegation arrived in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime on January 28 to discuss Russia's continued use of its military bases in Syria.
- The Russian military continues to evacuate military assets from the Port of Tartus amid the ongoing Russian-Syrian negotiations.
- The Russian military likely formed a separate unmanned systems regiment at the military district level in order to augment Russia's unmanned systems capabilities. The creation of this regiment supports the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) recent coordinated effort to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces within the Russian military and centralize control over informal drone detachments.
- A senior NATO official acknowledged that Russia is escalating a sabotage and destabilization campaign against European NATO member states in Europe to deter further military assistance to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Toretsk and near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Velyka Novosilka, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian government continues to use its "Time of Heroes" program to appoint veterans of the war in Ukraine to federal government positions as part of wider Kremlin efforts to militarize Russian society.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 27, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

January 27, 2025, 5:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45 pm ET on January 27 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces struck Russian long-range drone storage facilities in Oryol Oblast again on January 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 26 that the Ukrainian forces struck drone and thermobaric warhead storage warehouses, causing secondary detonations.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the strike destroyed over 200 Shahed drones. Oryol Oblast Governor Andrei Klychkov claimed on January 26 that Ukrainian forces repeatedly attempted to strike Oryol Oblast and that Russian electronic warfare (EW) interference downed a Ukrainian drone in Oryol Oblast.[2] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that Ukrainian forces struck the same drone storage facility at the end of December 2024.[3]

The European Union (EU) proposed an aid package on January 27 to Moldova and Transnistria to help the ongoing gas crisis in the pro-Russian breakaway republic as part of efforts to

reduce Russia's ability to exploit Transnistria in its energy blackmail schemes targeting Chisinau.[4] The package includes an immediate loan of three million cubic meters of gas to Transnistria and offers a grant of 30 million euros (about \$31.4 million) for Moldova to purchase gas – presumably from the European market – from February 1 to 10 to support Transnistria's electricity production for domestic consumption and export to the rest of Moldova. Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean noted that the EU will continue to support Chisinau after February 10 in order to ensure that Transnistria can continue to produce electricity for Transnistria and Moldova. The EU aid package offers to invest in Transnistrian electricity production and distribution over the next two years. The EU stated that it is also considering supporting coal deliveries from Ukraine to Transnistria and that it has supported the allocation of transmission capacity along the gas delivery route from Bulgaria and Romania to Moldova.[5] The Transnistrian Energy Operational Headquarters stated on January 27 that Transnistrian gas reserves are running out and will last only until early February 2025 "at most."<[6] Russian business outlet *Kommersant* reported on January 27 that its sources stated that Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz is in discussions with Hungarian oil and gas company MOL and Hungarian electricity company MVM about buying gas for Transnistria, the delivery of which would begin in early February 2025 and continue until late March or early April 2025.[7] Recean confirmed on January 27 that MOL presented Moldovagaz with a draft contract on the supply of gas for Transnistria but that Moldovan authorities must verify the legality and compliance of the contract with national and international law.[8] Transnistrian authorities have previously rejected Moldovan and Ukrainian offers of aid.[9] ISW continues to assess that Transnistria's possible acceptance of aid from Moldova, Ukraine, or the EU and Transnistria's subsequent supply of cheaper electricity to the rest of Moldova would disrupt Russian efforts to use the energy crisis to strengthen Transnistria's economic dependence on Moscow, to posture Russia as the breakaway republic's savior and benefactor, and to leverage Chisinau's turn to higher priced European electricity as part of Moscow's anti-EU narratives.
[10]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Khortytsia Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Andrii Hnatov with Ground Forces Commander Major General Mykhailo Drapatiy on January 26.[11] Zelensky stated that Drapatiy will also remain Ground Forces Commander and that Hnatov will become Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff.[12] Zelensky noted that Drapatiy's dual position will help combine the Ukrainian military's combat operations with the proper training of brigades and that Hnatov will work to improve coordination between headquarters and the front.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck Russian long-range drone storage facilities in Oryol Oblast again on January 26.
- The European Union (EU) proposed an aid package on January 27 to Moldova and Transnistria to help the ongoing gas crisis in the pro-Russian breakaway republic as part of efforts to reduce Russia's ability to exploit Transnistria in its energy blackmail schemes targeting Chisinau.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Khortytsia Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Andrii Hnatov with Ground Forces Commander Major General Mykhailo Drapatiy on January 26.
- Ukrainian forces recently recaptured lost positions near Toretsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Chasiv Yar, and Kurakhove.
- The Russian government continues to expand the federal "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to install Kremlin-selected veterans into government positions, by creating similar programs for Russian veterans across government, including at the regional level.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 26, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, William Runkel, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

Russian forces recently made further advances within Velyka Novosilka amid official Russian claims that Russian forces seized the entire settlement on January 26. Geolocated footage published on January 26 indicates that Russian forces advanced northward along Tsentralna Street in northern Velyka Novosilka.[1] Some Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), claimed on January 26 that Russian forces completely seized Velyka Novosilka, whereas other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces had seized most of the settlement.[2] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are still clearing Ukrainian forces from the settlement, including the northern part, and that Ukrainian forces are still counterattacking in the area.[3] ISW has

observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces occupy 89 percent of the settlement, however. Khortysia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov stated on January 26 that Russian forces have not occupied all of Velyka Novosilka and that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in the settlement.^[4] A Ukrainian brigade operating within Velyka Novosilka stated on January 26 that fighting continues within the settlement and that Russian forces do not pose a threat of encircling the brigade's elements.^[5] ISW has not observed independent evidence of Russian forces encircling Ukrainian forces in Velyka Novosilka. The Ukrainian brigade also reported that neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces can use heavy equipment due to parity of strikes near the contact line and that Ukrainian and Russian forces have "approximate parity" in terms of artillery and first-person view (FPV) drones but that Russian forces have a "huge" manpower advantage in the area.^[6] The brigade stated that Ukrainian forces are conducting artillery and drone strikes against Russian forces within Velyka Novosilka and that the Mokri Yaly River that flows through western Velyka Novosilka is an obstacle to Russian advances. Russian forces continued offensive operations within and near Velyka Novosilka itself, northeast of Velyka Novosilka near Rozdolne, and west of Velyka Novosilka near Novosilka on January 25 and 26.^[7]

The Russian MoD notably is paying an abnormally high amount of fanfare to the claimed Russian seizure of Velyka Novosilka, very likely as part of informational efforts to shape Western perceptions of the battlefield situation in Ukraine and degrade international support for Ukraine. The Russian MoD posted footage during the day of January 26 purportedly showing Russian forces conducting thermobaric artillery strikes against Ukrainian forces in Velyka Novosilka and claimed that Russian assault groups were clearing Ukrainian positions.^[8] The Russian MoD later claimed that elements of the Russian 5th Tank Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) and the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, EMD) seized all of Velyka Novosilka, and Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov congratulated the command and personnel of the two brigades for the seizure.^[9] The Russian MoD subsequently posted footage purportedly showing Russian flags in multiple areas of the settlement.^[10] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA) also participated in the claimed seizure of Velyka Novosilka, and it is unclear why the Russian MoD did not credit the 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade in their announcements.^[11] The Russian MoD has not recently been announcing the claimed seizures of settlements with so much fanfare and as quickly as they did on January 26. Russia is likely trying to leverage the claimed seizure of Velyka Novosilka in order to influence Western perceptions of the situation on the battlefield in Donetsk Oblast, to advance narratives that Russian battlefield gains are inevitable and that Ukrainian positions are rapidly deteriorating. Russian gains in western Donetsk Oblast continue to be gradual and far below the pace that is normal for modern mechanized warfare. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether Russian forces will be able to rapidly advance beyond Velyka Novosilka, as it is unclear how much combat power elements of the EMD still retain after several months of continuous offensive operations. Velyka Novosilka is located next to several rivers which will likely complicate and hamper further Russian tactical advances in the area.^[12] Russian forces have historically struggled with river crossings and tactical terrain features, such as rivers, will likely complicate Russian forces' ability to leverage the seizure of Velyka Novosilka to make operationally significant advances in western Donetsk Oblast.

The seizure and clearing of Velyka Novosilka will likely present opportunities and a decision point to the Russian military command on whether to redeploy elements of the Russian Eastern Military District [EMD] from the Velyka Novosilka area to other priority operational areas. Any redeployment of EMD elements from the Velyka Novosilka area over the coming weeks will indicate the Russian military command's priority operational areas for offensive operations in Spring and Summer 2025. Elements of the Russian EMD have been the primary fighting force in the Vuhledar and Velyka Novosilka directions since at least early 2023, defended against the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Summer 2023, and later intensified offensive operations in the area in Fall 2024.^[13] Elements of the EMD participated in the seizure of Vuhledar in September and October 2024 and successfully exploited the seizure of the settlement to advance north towards Kurakhove and west towards and into Velyka Novosilka over the following three months.^[14] The seizure of Velyka Novosilka will present the Russian military command with a decision point during which the Russian military command can pursue several courses of action (COAs). Velyka Novosilka is protected from Ukrainian counterattack due to the settlement's disposition near the Mokri Yaly River. The Russian military command may opt to retain elements of the EMD in the western Donetsk Oblast area and continue advancing towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary, which runs north and west of Velyka Novosilka. This decision would indicate that the Russian military is prioritizing advances to the administrative boundary as quickly as possible over other axes of advance in Donetsk Oblast or other frontline areas. It remains unclear how much combat power the EMD elements still retain after having engaged in intense operations for over six months, however. The Russian military command could also retain some EMD elements in the Velyka Novosilka area to continue limited attacks and pin Ukrainian forces in the area but redeploy the bulk of the EMD to another frontline area. Russian forces are currently intensifying offensive operations in the Kupyansk,

Borova, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk directions and are still working to eliminate the remainder of the Ukrainian salients in the Kurakhove direction and Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian officials have also recently warned that Russian forces may also renew offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast in 2025.[15] The Russian military command could redeploy EMD elements to any of these directions, and the redeployment of elements of the EMD will be an indicator of the Russian military command's priority areas for Spring and Summer 2025.

Russian forces are poised to seize Toretsk in the coming days and a redeployment of elements of the EMD to reinforce the Russian force grouping in the Toretsk direction would indicate a new Russian priority effort to resume attacks in the direction of Kostyantynivka. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces likely intend to exploit the seizure of Toretsk to push further west and along the T-05-16 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway towards the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Kostyantynivka.[16] Russian advances in the Toretsk direction have historically been slow as Russian forces fought through built up urban areas, but Russian forces may begin to advance relatively more quickly once they break out of Toretsk into the more open fields west of the settlement. Russian forces may also attempt to leverage tactical gains within and near Toretsk and east of Pokrovsk to eliminate the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk and select Russian milbloggers have recently speculated that Russian forces may be intensifying offensive operations southwest of Toretsk for this purpose.[17] Russian forces may want to eliminate the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk in order to firm up their southern flank ahead of a push on Kostyantynivka. The Russian military command may redeploy elements of the EMD to reinforce offensive operations in the Toretsk direction if it intends to prioritize pressuring the Ukrainian fortress belt in Donetsk Oblast in the Spring and Summer 2025. Seizing Pokrovsk has been the Russian military command's main operational objective in Donetsk Oblast since February 2024.[18] A Russian redeployment of EMD elements to the Toretsk or Chasiv Yar directions - as opposed to retaining the EMD elements in western Donetsk Oblast, redeploying them to the Zaporizhia direction, or redeploying them to the Pokrovsk direction - would therefore indicate an inflection in Russian operational priorities.

Ukrainian forces conducted a second strike on the Ryazan Oil Refinery in Ryazan Oblast on the night of January 25 to 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 26 that elements of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Unmanned Systems Forces struck the Ryazan Oil Refinery in Ryazan City.[19] Geolocated footage shows a fire at a tank at the refinery. [20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on January 26 that Russian forces downed eight drones over Ryazan Oblast on the night of January 25 to 26.[21] Ryazan Oblast Governor Pavel Malkov claimed that Russian air defenses and electronic warfare (EW) systems destroyed Ukrainian drones over Ryazan Oblast and that authorities were assessing material damage.[22] Ukrainian official sources noted that the Ryazan Oil Refinery is one of the four largest refineries in Russia and produces fuel for military equipment; jet fuel; diesel fuel; and other petroleum products for tanks, aircraft, and ships.[23] Ukrainian forces last struck the Ryazan Oil Refinery on the night of January 23 to 24.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces recently made further advances within Velyka Novosilka amid official Russian claims that Russian forces seized the entire settlement on January 26.
- The Russian MoD notably is paying an abnormally high amount of fanfare to the claimed Russian seizure of Velyka Novosilka, very likely as part of informational efforts to shape Western perceptions of the battlefield situation in Ukraine and degrade international support for Ukraine.
- The seizure and clearing of Velyka Novosilka will likely present opportunities and a decision point to the Russian military command on whether to redeploy elements of the Russian Eastern Military District [EMD] from the Velyka Novosilka area to other priority operational areas. Any redeployment of EMD elements from the Velyka Novosilka area over the coming weeks will indicate the Russian military command's priority operational areas for offensive operations in Spring and Summer 2025.
- Russian forces are poised to seize Toretsk in the coming days and a redeployment of elements of the EMD to reinforce the Russian force grouping in the Toretsk direction would indicate a new Russian priority effort to resume attacks in the direction of Kostyantynivka.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a second strike on the Ryazan Oil Refinery in Ryazan Oblast on the night of January 25 to 26.
- Ukrainian forces advanced in Kursk Oblast and regained positions in Toretsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian government on January 25 for not prioritizing the recruitment and training of Russia's next generation of military officers.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 25, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 25, 2025, 4:15 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on January 25 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine and Moldova continue to offer solutions to Transnistria's energy crisis as Moldovan President Maia Sandu met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on January 25. Zelensky stated at a press conference with Sandu that Ukraine can supply Transnistria with coal at low prices or even free of charge if Transnistria would supply Ukraine with electricity in return.^[1] Zelensky also stated that Ukraine is ready to send a team of specialists to help increase the Transnistrian power plant's electricity output such that it would far exceed Transnistria's domestic needs, allowing Transnistria to provide electricity to all of Moldova and Ukraine. Zelensky noted that Transnistria's cooperation with Moldova and Ukraine would help reduce electricity prices throughout all of Moldova by 30 percent. Transnistrian authorities have previously refused Moldovan and Ukrainian offers of help, instead turning to schemes that involve Moscow directly or indirectly providing enough gas to the breakaway republic to cover only its domestic electricity needs.^[2] Ukrainian and Moldovan officials have noted that Russia is trying to leverage its manufactured gas crisis to affect Moldovan public opinion before the Summer 2025 Moldovan parliamentary elections.^[3] Transnistria's possible acceptance of Ukrainian and Moldovan offers of aid and Transnistria's subsequent supply of cheaper electricity to the rest of Moldova would disrupt Russian efforts to use the energy crisis to strengthen Transnistria's economic dependence on Moscow, to posture Russia as the breakaway republic's savior and benefactor, and to leverage Chisinau's turn to higher priced European electricity as part of Moscow's anti-EU narratives.

The Kremlin is continuing to leverage the prominent Kremlin-linked *Rybar Telegram* channel to cultivate increased Russian influence in Iraq. The *Rybar* channel claimed on January 25 that members of the *Rybar* team – including its founder Mikhail Zvinchuk – visited Iraq over the last week and met with Iraqi officials, including Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia Al Sudani.^[4] The channel claimed that Iraqi officials noted their openness to increasing trade and foreign investments with Russian partners and their interest in further developing Russian–Iraqi relations. The channel welcomed Russian businesses, media companies, bloggers, and investors to begin exploring opportunities in Iraq. Member of the *Rybar* team visited Iraq in August 2024, and ISW noted at the time that this was the first observed report of a Russian milblogger meeting with a senior foreign official.^[5] ISW-CTP previously assessed that Russia may be setting conditions to supplant the US as a security partner in Iraq in anticipation of the US possibly reducing its military presence there.^[6] The recent fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria may be prompting the Kremlin to reconsider the contours of its relations with Iraq.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine and Moldova continue to offer solutions to Transnistria's energy crisis as Moldovan President Maia Sandu met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on January 25.
- The Kremlin is continuing to leverage the prominent Kremlin-linked *Rybar Telegram* channel to cultivate increased Russian influence in Iraq.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on January 25 that the Russian government will allow veterans of volunteer formations (*dobrovolcheskie formirovaniya*) to receive "combat veteran status" without submitting a formal application.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 24, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 24, 2025, 8:15pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin is once again attempting to obfuscate his unwillingness to participate in good-faith negotiations to end the war by blaming Ukraine for defending itself against Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. Putin claimed during a televised interview with Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on January 24 that he is willing to negotiate "on the Ukraine issue," but that a 2022 Ukrainian presidential decree declaring the "impossibility of negotiating" with Putin is a significant impediment to peace negotiations.^[1] Putin falsely claimed that Ukraine and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are not interested in peace negotiations and that it is impossible for Russia and Ukraine to discuss "anything serious" with the decree in place. Putin claimed that any peace agreements that result from negotiations between Russia and Ukraine before Ukraine repeals the 2022 decree will be "illegitimate" and claimed that the West must force Zelensky to repeal the 2022 decree. Putin also once again questioned Zelensky's legitimacy as the current president of Ukraine and insinuated that US President Donald Trump should negotiate exclusively with Putin about Ukraine's fate, as the two leaders can "calmly" discuss their interests. Putin has previously called for Ukraine to repeal the 2022 decree, but Putin's intense focus on the decree during his January 24 interview marks yet another attempt to distract from his unwillingness to engage in peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.^[2]

Zelensky signed the September 2022 decree banning negotiations with Putin in direct response to Putin's illegal annexation of four regions in eastern and southern Ukraine and after months of negotiations in which Russia continued to demand Ukraine's full capitulation. The Ukrainian presidential decree explicitly prohibits Ukraine from conducting negotiations with Putin.^[3] The context within which the decree was signed is important, however. Zelensky signed the decree on the day that Putin illegally annexed four Ukrainian oblasts (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts), including areas that Russian forces did not then and still do not occupy.^[4] The decree states that the ban on negotiations with Putin is a response to Russia's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory and part of Ukraine's efforts to "guarantee the security of the Euro-Atlantic space, Ukraine, and [the restoration of Ukraine's] territorial integrity."^[5] Zelensky signed the September 2022 decree after months of Russian-Ukrainian peace talks in Istanbul in Spring 2022, during which Russia demanded that Ukraine be a permanently neutral state that could not join NATO and that Ukraine submit to limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military similar to those imposed by the Treaty of Versailles on Germany after World War I. These terms would have restricted Ukraine's Armed Forces to 85,000 soldiers who would be unable to defend Ukraine against a third Russian invasion.^[6]

However, Zelensky has consistently signaled his willingness to negotiate with Russia and make certain compromises in pursuit of peace following the 2022 decree banning formal negotiations with Putin. Zelensky has outlined clear conditions for potential talks with Russia and emphasized the importance of preserving Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, developing Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB), and securing security guarantees from Ukraine's Western allies.^[7] Zelensky has repeatedly advocated for a diplomatic solution to the war, proposing that Ukraine should enter any peace negotiations from a "position of strength" – a strategy aimed at compelling Russia to engage in good-faith negotiations and consider just compromises in such negotiations. Zelensky has also invited Russian representatives to attend Ukraine's second Global Peace Summit in the future.^[8]

Kremlin officials have consistently dismissed these overtures, labeling Ukraine's proposed peace formula and platforms "unviable," and Putin even reportedly asked People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping to "snub" the first Global Peace Conference in June 2024.^[9] Zelensky has continued to express openness to direct negotiations and has acknowledged the possibility of a diplomatic compromise as part of a broader solution to the war despite Russia's repeated rejections.

Putin meanwhile continues to signal to both his domestic and global audiences that he is not interested in peace short of his full demands and remains committed to Ukraine's complete capitulation. Putin is likely using his interview with Zarubin on Russian state television to signal to Russian society that Russia is unlikely to participate in peace negotiations in the near future and that the war is unlikely to end soon. Putin is also sending this message to a subset of Russian elites who reportedly want the war to end and likely intends for this interview to silence any questions from Russian elites about Putin's timeline for the war and its resolution.^[10]

Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly claimed that they are willing to negotiate *about* Ukraine with the United States or other intermediaries but have yet to demonstrate any willingness to negotiate *with* Ukraine or to compromise on Putin's demands of replacing Zelensky and his government with a pro-Russian puppet regime, destroying the Ukrainian military and rendering Ukraine unable to defend itself from future Russian aggression, and securing a permanent ban on Ukraine's future membership in NATO.^[11]

Putin is attempting to leverage the 2022 decree as a strawman to hide the reality of his disinterest in negotiations and to sow discord between Ukraine and its Western allies. Putin is drawing attention to the decree to create friction between Ukraine, the United States, and other Western allies and to refocus the conversation about negotiations on supposed issues with Ukraine's negotiating position – as opposed to Putin's clear efforts to delay and avoid peace negotiations. Putin's theory of victory in Ukraine presupposes that Russia will successfully outlast Western support for Ukraine and will be able to inflict its demands on a weakened and abandoned Ukraine, and Putin is thus working to bring about these conditions.[12]

The West must demonstrate its enduring commitment to aiding and arming Ukraine to force Putin to reconsider his theory of victory and his demands. **Continued Western military support that enables Ukraine to resist Russian aggression now and in the future is the West's best course of action to bring Putin to the negotiating table and secure Russian concessions essential to bringing about a peace that is in America's, Europe's, and Ukraine's interests.**

Putin also attempted to position himself as Trump's equal during his interview, reinforcing his long-held belief that Russia is the great-power heir to the Soviet Union. Putin emphasized that Russia shares interests with the United States, particularly regarding the global economy, and suggested that he and Trump could engage in "calm, pragmatic" discussions, insinuating that the two leaders could bypass direct negotiations with Ukraine.[13] Putin's statements demonstrate his continued belief that Ukraine is only a proxy for the West and further his long-standing narrative that his war in Ukraine is a broader conflict between Russia and the West that can only be settled by great powers.[14]

Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak highlighted on January 24 that Putin aims to negotiate "the fate of Europe without Europe" and "Ukraine without Ukraine." [15] Putin's insistence on minimizing or eliminating Ukraine's role in negotiations about Ukraine's future blatantly disregards Ukraine's sovereignty and attempts to elevate Russia to the role of a global power while marginalizing some Western allies in an attempt to weaken the wider NATO alliance.

Putin demonstrated that he is worried about the effect that lower oil prices would have on his domestic stability and ability to wage war in Ukraine. Trump stated on January 23 that oil prices are currently "high enough" that Russia can continue its war effort in Ukraine and called for Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) states to "bring down the cost of oil" in order to decrease Russia's ability to wage war and bring about an "end the war." [16] Putin responded to Trump during his interview on January 24, claiming that Russia and the US are both large oil producers and consumers and that "too high prices are bad" for both the US and Russian economies.[17] Putin claimed that Russia and the United States rely on energy resources for domestic industries and that "too low prices" would undermine energy companies' investment opportunities. Putin attempted to portray the more modern and diversified US economy as operating similarly to that of Russia, which is a petrostate that heavily relies on revenues from energy exports.

Falling oil prices would decrease Russia's federal budget revenues and risk destabilizing the Russian regime's stability while also reducing Russia's share of the global oil market and economic influence on the global stage. Putin's emphasis on the need to maintain prices for the sake of energy companies' investments also demonstrates the extent to which Putin feels it necessary to cater to the elite in his inner circle who have personal interests in the energy sector. Putin's focus on his inner circle's interests contrasts with US leaders' larger focus on the general voting population and a broader array of business interests, which benefit from lower energy prices. Putin's attempt to portray lower oil prices as against US interests suggests that Putin is afraid of the harm such policies would cause Russia and is trying to persuade Trump to abandon these proposals without having to concede to Trump's insistence on meaningful negotiations to end the war.

The Kremlin is attempting to revive its information operation aimed at deterring the United States and other Western states from providing further military assistance to Ukraine. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu claimed in an interview with Russian state news outlet TASS on January 24 that the West failed to change the course of the war in Ukraine despite "comprehensive assistance" and a significant financial expense.[18]

Shoigu's claim is a deliberate and extreme mischaracterization of the realities on the battlefield, however. Western military assistance has consistently provided Ukraine with offensive and defensive capabilities that Ukraine would otherwise not have possessed and that allowed Ukraine to achieve significant battlefield victories. Ukrainian forces used US-provided HIMARS during an interdiction campaign in Summer-Fall 2022 that ultimately forced Russian forces to withdraw from the west (right) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast in November 2022.[19] Ukrainian forces used Western-provided armored vehicles in the Fall 2022 counteroffensive that liberated significant swaths of Kharkiv

Oblast.[20] Western initiatives to provide Ukraine with artillery shells, drones, fighter jets, air defense systems, and other weapons and equipment have allowed Ukraine to maintain its defense against Russian aggression, including denying Russian forces the ability to conduct maneuver warfare and helping Ukraine to defend against Russia's strike campaigns against Ukrainian energy infrastructure. [21] Ukraine's use of US-provided ATACMS and UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles has partially deprived Russian forces of their sanctuary within Russia to prepare for further offensive operations against northern Ukraine from Russian territory.[22] US and other Western military assistance has also bought Ukraine time to develop its own DIB capabilities in support of its defensive efforts against Russia and external aggression in the long term.[23]

Ukraine remains in critical need of US and European military assistance to maintain its defense against Russian aggression and to conduct future negotiations from a position of strength. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stated on January 23 that NATO allies need to significantly increase their military assistance to Ukraine to allow Ukraine to negotiate with Russia from a position of strength and deter future Russian aggression against NATO.[24] Rutte also acknowledged that Europe should bear a larger financial burden to support Ukraine's defense because European NATO members are geographically closer to Ukraine and that Europe will pay for the United States to continue sending military assistance to Ukraine.[25]

The Kremlin is framing the new 2025 Union State Security Concept as completely superseding the original 1999 Security Concept, indicating that this new agreement may be more expansive than the original and will further forward the Kremlin's effort to annex Belarus.[26] Shoigu told TASS on January 24 that the Union State Security Concept that Russia and Belarus signed on April 28, 1999 "has lost its relevance" and that a new Security Concept will guide Russian and Belarusian security policymaking through the framework of the Union State.[27] Shoigu described the new Union State Security Concept as a "completely new...strategic planning document" that draws from the Russian and Belarusian constitutions, the December 1999 Union State Treaty, the Russian National Security Strategy, and the Belarusian National Security Concept. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed an agreement in December 2024 to implement this new Union State Security Concept sometime in 2025.[28]

Shoigu's framing of the new Union State Security Concept suggests that the new concept may be more expansive than the original 1999 document, which would forward Russia's goal of de facto annexing Belarus through the Union State framework. Shoigu notably gave this interview two days before the January 26 Belarusian presidential election, likely to frame Belarus as an undeniable part of the Russian-dominated Union State.[29] The Kremlin will likely frame any pro-democratic protests against the upcoming Belarusian elections as part of a Western-backed hybrid war against Russia and Belarus, just as the Kremlin did in 2020.[30]

Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries on the night of January 23 to 24 as part of an ongoing strike series aimed at degrading Russian military capacity. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on January 24 that Russian forces downed 121 Ukrainian drones in total on the night of January 23 to 24, including 37 drones over Bryansk Oblast, 20 over Ryazan Oblast, 17 over Kursk Oblast, 17 over Saratov Oblast, seven over Rostov Oblast, six over Moscow Oblast, six over Belgorod Oblast, three over Voronezh Oblast, two over Tula Oblast, two over Oryol Oblast, two over Lipetsk Oblast, one over occupied Crimea, and one over Moscow City.[31]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 24 that elements of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), Special Operations Forces (SSO), and other Ukrainian forces struck the production facilities of the Ryazan Oil Refinery and the Ryazan oil pump station in Ryazan City.[32] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko posted footage of a fire at the oil refinery and noted that the Ryazan oil refinery produces fuel for military equipment, jet fuel, diesel fuel, and other petroleum products for tanks, aircraft, and ships.[33] BBC's Russian Service reported that its sources in the SBU stated that the Ukrainian strike started fires at three tanks at the refinery and a hydrotreatment workshop for diesel and jet fuel. The sources stated that Ukrainian forces also struck the Ryazan Thermal Power Plant (TPP).[34] Geolocated footage shows a fire at the oil refinery.[35] Ryazan Oblast Governor Pavel Malkov claimed that Russian forces downed 20 drones over Ryazan Oblast and that drone debris fell on an unspecified enterprise.[36]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 24 that the SBU, SSO, and other Ukrainian forces also struck the "Kremniy EI" microelectronics plant in Bryansk City, which produces microcircuits and components for Russian weapons systems such as the Topol-M and Bulava missile systems, the S-300 and S-400 air defense systems, and onboard electronics in combat aircraft.[37] Kovalenko stated that the plant also produces microelectronics for Pantsir air defense systems, Iskander missiles, radars, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and drones.[38] The press service of the Kremniy EI Group

Joint-stock Company (JSC) announced on January 24 that the plant suspended operations after the Ukrainian drone strike.[39] Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz claimed on January 24 that Russian forces downed 37 drones over Bryansk Oblast on the night of January 23 to 24.[40] Geolocated footage shows a fire near the Kremniy El plant.[41] Ukrainian forces recently struck the Kremniy El plant on the night of January 13 to 14.[42] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that Ukrainian forces also struck and damaged the Bryansk Oblast branch of the Russian Investigative Committee.[43]

Astra, citing sources in Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations, reported on January 24 that Ukrainian drones damaged the 711th Aircraft Repair Plant in Borisoglebsk, Voronezh Oblast on the night of January 23 to 24.[44] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed on January 24 that Russian forces downed "several" Ukrainian drones over Voronezh Oblast but reported no casualties or damage.[45]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin is once again attempting to obfuscate his unwillingness to participate in good-faith negotiations to end the war by blaming Ukraine for defending itself against Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory.
- Zelensky signed the decree in September 2022 banning negotiations with Putin in direct response to Putin's illegal annexation of four regions in eastern and southern Ukraine and after months of negotiations in which Russia continued to demand Ukraine's full capitulation.
- However, Zelensky has consistently signaled his willingness to negotiate with Russia and make certain compromises in pursuit of peace following the 2022 decree banning formal negotiations with Putin.
- Putin meanwhile continues to signal to both his domestic and global audiences that he is not interested in peace short of his full demands and remains committed to Ukraine's complete capitulation.
- Putin is attempting to leverage the 2022 decree as a strawman to hide the reality of his disinterest in negotiations and to sow discord between Ukraine and its Western allies.
- Putin also attempted to position himself as Trump's equal during his interview, reinforcing his long-held belief that Russia is the great-power heir to the Soviet Union.
- Putin demonstrated that he is worried about the effect that lower oil prices would have on his domestic stability and ability to wage his war in Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is attempting to revive its information operation aimed at deterring the US and other Western states from providing further military assistance to Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is framing the new 2025 Union State Security Concept as completely superseding the original 1999 Security Concept, indicating that this new agreement may be more expansive than the original and will further forward the Kremlin's effort to annex Belarus.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries on the night of January 23 to 24 as part of an ongoing strike series aimed at degrading Russian military capacity.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Ukrainian forces recently recaptured lost positions near Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 23, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 23, 2025, 4:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:50am ET on January 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia is reportedly planning to deploy additional North Korean forces, missiles, artillery systems, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) to Kursk Oblast to support Russian long-range fire operations. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov told *The War Zone* in an article published on January 22 that North Korea will deploy an unspecified number of additional missile and artillery troops to Kursk Oblast at an

unspecified future time.[1] Budanov reported that North Korea is unlikely to deploy a large number of additional ground combat troops, however. Budanov stated that North Korea has provided Russia with roughly 120 M-1989 Koksan 170mm self-propelled artillery systems and 120 M-1991 240mm MLRS since November 2024 and will likely send at least 120 more of each system in the future. The GUR previously reported in November 2024 that North Korea had provided Russia with roughly 100 of each of these systems as of October 2024.[2] Budanov stated that North Korea plans to provide Russia with 150 additional KN-23 short-range ballistic missiles in 2025 and sent Russia 148 KN-23 missiles in 2024. Budanov noted that North Korean troops typically operate North Korean-provided weapons in Kursk Oblast and are also training Russian forces on these systems. A US senior defense official recently told the *New York Times* (NYT) that additional North Korean forces will arrive in Russia "within the next two months (roughly mid-March 2025)."[3]

The Kremlin appears to be growing increasingly concerned about perceptions of Russia's economic instability. *Reuters*, citing five sources with knowledge of the situation, reported on January 23 that Russian President Vladimir Putin is growing increasingly concerned about "distortions" in the Russian economy due to the war in Ukraine.[4] Two sources familiar with "thinking in the Kremlin" told *Reuters* that there is a camp within the Russian elite that views a negotiated end to the war in Ukraine as desirable and key to addressing Russia's economic issues. One source claimed that Putin recognizes the strain that the war is placing on the Russian economy and assesses that he has achieved his "key war goals" in Ukraine, including seizing land in southern Ukraine to connect Russia within occupied Crimea and weakening the Ukrainian military. The source did not speculate on Putin's willingness to end the war, however. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on January 9 — citing sources in the Russian presidential administration, State Duma, and wider Russian federal government and regional governments — that Russian elites are growing increasingly dissatisfied with the impact of the war on the Russian economy.[5] ISW noted on January 22 that the Kremlin recently launched an information operation that seeks to create the false impression that the Russia economy is performing well despite numerous continued indicators of macroeconomic distress.[6]

Russian forces recently executed at least six unarmed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian sources circulated footage on January 23 of Russian soldiers shooting unarmed Ukrainian POWs in an unspecified area of Ukraine.[7] Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubinets and the Ukrainian Attorney General's Office reported on January 23 that Ukrainian officials are investigating social media footage of Russian forces executing six captured and unarmed Ukrainian servicemembers in an unspecified area of Donetsk Oblast.[8] Lyubinets noted that the footage shows a seventh Ukrainian POW in this group but that it is unclear what happened to the seventh POW based on the footage. ISW has frequently reported that Russian forces are conducting frontline executions of Ukrainian POWs and continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to conduct these executions.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia is reportedly planning to deploy additional North Korean forces, missiles, artillery systems, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) to Kursk Oblast to support Russian long-range fire operations.
- The Kremlin appears to be growing increasingly concerned about perceptions of Russia's economic instability.
- Russian forces recently executed at least six unarmed Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- The Kremlin is reportedly taking measures to protect industrial facilities in Russian border regions from Ukrainian strikes.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 22, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

January 22, 2025, 7:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30 pm ET on January 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin has launched an information operation that seeks to create the false impression that the Russian economy is performing well despite numerous continued indicators of macroeconomic distress. Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed during a meeting on economic

issues on January 22 that 2024 was a "strong year" for the Russian economy.[1] Putin claimed that Russia has a manageable budget deficit of 1.7 percent and achieved a 26 percent increase in non-oil-and-gas revenue to 25.6 trillion rubles (approximately \$257.9 billion) in 2024 and announced a retroactive 9.5 percent increase in insurance and military pensions to address rising Russian inflation. Bloomberg reported on January 21 that the Russian Finance Ministry released a report projecting economic strength and suggesting that Russian budget revenue in December 2024 reached a record high of over 4 trillion rubles (about \$40 billion) — a 28 percent increase compared to December 2023 and the highest level recorded since 2011.[2] The data fails to account for Russia's unsustainable levels of defense spending, rampant inflation, a growing deficit and the erosion of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, however.[3] ISW continues to observe macroeconomic data that directly contradict the Kremlin's claims that the Russian economy is performing well. The Kremlin has recently adopted policies aimed at increasing defense spending all while Russian society faces labor shortages, broader demographic issues, declining savings, and increasing reliance on bailouts as the Russian economy faces rising interest rates, inflated salaries, and deteriorating production capacity.[4] These economic realities suggest that the Kremlin's efforts to posture economic strength are largely an information operation aimed at reassuring domestic audiences and posturing Russian strength abroad while masking the true challenges Russia's economy is facing, particularly heightened due to its war against Ukraine.

Russia continues long-term efforts to build out its manpower reserve with All-Russian Cossack Society organizations and create a willing and well-trained prioritized pool designed to buffer the Kremlin from potential blowback in the event of a possible future partial call up of Russian reservists. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's northwestern Russia service Sever Realii reported on January 22 that Russian organizations have allocated a total of 11.4 million rubles (roughly \$114,880) for territorial defense training for 100 officers within the "Great Don Army" branch of the All-Russian Cossack Society, including 5.6 million rubles (approximately \$56,400) from the Russian Presidential Grant Fund and 5.7 million rubles (approximately \$57,400) from the "Great Don Army" organization.[5] The training will include drone piloting training and tactical, medical, and fire training. A separate portion of the training will be devoted to organizing defense and interacting with political authorities in "wartime conditions." The Kremlin's efforts to expand the All-Russian Cossack societies, following the March 2024 law enrolling members of the All-Russian Cossack Society into the Russian military's mobilization reserve, are likely an effort to expand the number of well-trained troops in Russia's active reserve pools that the Kremlin can call up to fight in Ukraine or elsewhere during a possible future partial call up of Russian reservists.[6]

North Korea will reportedly deploy new military personnel to Russia by mid-March 2025, likely to maintain the current pace and intensity of attritional, infantry-led assaults in Kursk Oblast. The New York Times (NYT) reported on January 22 that a US senior defense official stated that additional North Korean forces will arrive in Russia "within the next two months," (roughly mid-March 2025).[7] The NYT did not specify the number of troops or whether North Korea is rotating forces or increasing the size of its total force grouping in Russia, however. The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff reported on December 23 that North Korea may be preparing to deploy an unspecified number of additional forces to Ukraine and military equipment to Russia, either as a rotation or additional deployment of forces.[8] Western officials told the BBC on January 22 that North Korean forces have suffered roughly 1,000 killed in action and 3,000 missing or wounded in action as of mid-January 2025, roughly 33 to 40 percent of the 11,000 to 12,000 total North Korean personnel already in Russia. [9] ISW recently assessed that the entirety of the North Korean contingent in Russia may be killed or wounded in action by about mid-April 2025 at their current casualty rate, and a new North Korean deployment — whether intended to increase the current grouping or rotate out existing forces — is likely intended to sustain Russia's tempo of operations despite heavy losses of about 30,000 - 45,000 causalities (combined killed and wounded) per month.[10] North Korean forces reportedly spent at least a month training in eastern Russia before deploying to Kursk Oblast for further training in near rear areas in November 2024 and joining combat operations at least as of early December 2024.[11] This timeline roughly coheres with the possibility that a fresh contingent of North Korean forces could undergo training and replace the shrinking North Korean group in Kursk Oblast by mid-April 2025, assuming the reported next batch of North Korean troops will train for the same duration as their predecessors, and deploy to Russia imminently in late January or early February 2025.

These fresh North Korean forces are unlikely to decisively improve Russian operations and will likely face the same high casualty rates and complications operating with Russian forces as the current North Korean contingent, provided the Russian command continues to use North Korean forces the same way as it has thus far. US officials and Ukrainian soldiers told the NYT that North Korean and Russian forces continue to struggle with communications and cohesion and that Russian and North Korean forces have "clashed" at least twice due to troop identification errors.[12] A Ukrainian commander told the NYT that North Korean assault groups now include a translator who speaks Russian but that these groups are still not very effective. Ukrainian soldiers reported that North

Korean forces continue conducting mass infantry assaults and that North Korean soldiers do not retreat even if injured. Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) published footage on January 22 of North Korean forces massing for an infantry assault and reported that Ukrainian forces killed 21 and wounded 40 North Korean soldiers during the eight-hour long combat engagement.[13] Ukrainian soldiers told the NYT that Russian forces are still attempting to conceal the presence of North Koreans on the battlefield by conducting drone strikes against wounded North Korean troops as Ukrainian forces attempt to take them prisoner.[14] ISW continues to assess that North Korea's high casualty rate and interoperability difficulties with Russian forces will affect the lessons that the North Korean military command will learn from fighting in Russia's war.[15]

Russian milbloggers complained and expressed concern over recent claims that the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led interim government in Syria suspended Russian investment and financial involvement in the port of Tartus as Russia's long-term military presence in Syria remains unclear. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on January 22 that the Russian government, via a Russian military official based in Turkey, recently reached an unspecified agreement with HTS that appears to have included permission for Russian vessels to dock in the port of Tartus. [16] Marine Traffic, a shipping tracking website, shows that the Russian *Sparta* and *Sparta II* cargo ships are docked in the port of Tartus as of January 22, and these ships are likely supporting the Russian military's evacuation of military equipment from the port. The milblogger claimed that the Russian and HTS-led governments continue to negotiate about the future of Russia's presence at the Tartus and Khmeimim military bases and noted that it is unclear if any other third-party might be interested in using the port of Tartus in the future.[17] Other Russian milbloggers expressed confusion over the situation in Syria and accused unspecified actors of spreading rumors about Russia's supposed agreement with the HTS-led government.[18] Syrian Interim Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra stated on January 22 that Russian and Syrian officials have not reached a final solution in the negotiations about future Russian military bases in Syria.[19]

A Russian state media outlet reported that Russia may resume direct gas deliveries to Transnistria despite recent discussions about sourcing non-Russian gas to the region. Russian business outlet *Kommersant*, citing its own sources, reported on January 22 that Russia may resume gas supplies to Transnistria via the TurkStream pipeline, using the Cyprus-based company Obzor Enterprises as an intermediary.[20] *Kommersant*, citing data from the European Union (EU)'s Regional Booking Platform (RBP) for natural gas transmission, reported that Obzor Enterprises booked the TurkStream pipeline on January 20 to transit 3.1 million cubic meters of gas per day to the Strandzha-2 entry point from February 1 to March 1, volumes which *Kommersant* assessed align with Transnistria's estimated humanitarian needs. *Kommersant* reported that authorities are discussing extending these supplies through mid-April and that Russia would pay roughly \$160 million to purchase the gas. *Kommersant*'s sources noted that Russia is prioritizing efforts to transfer the gas to Transnistria through the Trans-Balkan pipeline, which runs through Bulgaria and Romania before reaching Transnistria. Russian and Transnistrian authorities have recently been exploring the possibility of sourcing Russian-funded European gas to Transnistria through the European spot market, but Moldovan President Maia Sandu has stated that only Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz has the authority to deliver gas to Transnistria and that Moldovagaz can only work with companies that do not violate Moldovan law or international sanctions.[21] Ukrainian and Moldovan officials have noted how Russia is trying to leverage the manufactured gas crisis to affect Moldovan public opinion before the Summer 2025 Moldovan parliamentary elections.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin has launched an information operation that seeks to create the false impression that the Russian economy is performing well despite numerous continued indicators of macroeconomic distress.
- Russia continues long-term efforts to build out its manpower reserve with All-Russian Cossack Society organizations and create a willing and well-trained prioritized pool designed to buffer the Kremlin from potential blowback in the event of a possible future partial call up of Russian reservists.
- North Korea will reportedly deploy new military personnel to Russia by mid-March 2025, likely to maintain the current pace and intensity of attritional, infantry-led assaults in Kursk Oblast.
- These fresh North Korean forces are unlikely to decisively improve Russian operations and will likely face the same high casualty rates and complications operating with Russian forces as the current North Korean contingent, provided the Russian command continues to use North Korean forces the same way as it has thus far.
- Russian milbloggers complained and expressed concern over recent claims that the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led interim government in Syria suspended Russian

investment and financial involvement in the port of Tartus as Russia's long-term military presence in Syria remains unclear.

- A Russian state media outlet reported that Russia may resume direct gas deliveries to Transnistria despite recent discussions about sourcing non-Russian gas to the region.
- Ukrainian forces recently recaptured lost positions near Toretsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russia and Uzbekistan are deepening military cooperation.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 21, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nicole Volkov, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries in Russia on the night of January 20 to 21 as part of an ongoing strike series aimed at degrading Russian military capacity. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian Special Operation Forces (SSO) elements and other Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against Rosneft's Lisinskaya Oil Refinery in Voronezh Oblast for the second time this week following successful strikes on the night of January 15 to 16.[1] The January 20 to 21 strike caused a fire at fuel and lubricant tanks, and the Ukrainian General Staff noted that the oil refinery supplies the Russian military. Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed on January 20 that Russian forces destroyed several drones in Voronezh Oblast but that a drone fell on an oil depot in Liskinsky Raion, starting a fire.[2] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger noted that the oil depot was still burning from the January 15-16 strike and the second strike started another fire at the facility.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces and SSO struck the Smolensk Aviation Plant in Smolensk Oblast.[4] Geolocated footage shows fires at the production building of the Smolensk Aviation Plant.[5] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that the plant produces and modernizes Su-25 attack aircraft and maintains aviation equipment.[6] Smolensk Oblast Governor Vasily Anokhin claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian drone strike against Smolensk Oblast but that falling drone debris caused fires.[7] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported that Ukrainian forces struck Lukoil's Saratovorgsintez Chemical Plant in Saratov City overnight that produces acrylonitrile, acetonitrile, and sodium cyanide.[8] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed 10 drones over Smolensk Oblast, six over Voronezh Oblast, and four over Saratov Oblast on the night of January 20 to 21.[9]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also continue to conduct strikes against Russian command posts in the Russian rear. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck the command post of the Russian 29th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Eastern Military District [EMD]) in occupied Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast on the night of January 20 to 21.[10] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that there are reports of explosions and smoke after the strike and that Ukrainian authorities are clarifying the results of the strike. ISW has not observed footage or other reporting of this command post strike. ISW has observed reports that elements of the 29th CAA are currently operating along the Yantarne-Zelenivka line southwest of Kurakhove.[11] The Ukrainian General Staff reported in early and mid-January 2025 that Ukrainian forces struck the command posts of the Russian 2nd CAA (Central Military District [CMD]), 8th CAA (Southern Military District), and 3rd Army Corps (AC) (CMD) in occupied Donetsk Oblast.[12] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian strikes against main command posts further in the Russian rear are likely aimed at degrading broader Russian logistics and operational planning efforts, which could impact Russia's ability to conduct its military operations in western Donetsk Oblast.[13]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping held a phone call on January 21 and emphasized deepening cooperation. Putin and Xi reiterated boilerplate narratives emphasizing increasing Russian-PRC foreign policy, energy, and economic cooperation.[14] Russian Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov claimed that Putin and Xi discussed Russia's war in Ukraine and Russia's and the PRC's relations with the United States, although the official Kremlin readout of the call did not mention these topics.[15] Ushakov also claimed that Xi gave Putin an overview of Xi's recent call with US President Donald Trump.[16]

Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein's recent appointment has thus far failed to solve or distract from Russia's failure to adequately respond to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Khinshtein to this post on December 5, 2024, following intense backlash for failing to communicate with or support Kursk Oblast residents displaced by the Ukrainian incursion - scapegoating then-Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov for Russia's

failure to respond.[17] Russian opposition media and local Kursk Oblast news outlets reported that residents of Sudzhansky, Korenevsky, Bolshesoldatsky, and Glushkovsky raions – all on the frontline in Kursk Oblast – protested in front of the Kursk Oblast Administration building on January 18 and 21, demanding to meet with Khinshtein.[18] The protestors recorded an appeal to Khinshtein on January 21 asking him to address insufficient permanent housing for residents, issues with temporary accommodation centers, and his lack of dialogue with Kursk Oblast residents – the latter of which was one of Khinshtein's stated priorities following his appointment.[19] Local Kursk Oblast media reported that Khinshtein's advisor, Viktoria Penkova, met with the protestors, and the Kursk Oblast Administration Press Service stated that authorities informed the protestors of "necessary explanations and consultations" during the meeting.[20] Putin likely appointed Khinshtein to appear dedicated to solving social issues in Kursk Oblast and to quell local protests, and Khinshtein's failure to thus far fulfill this role in his tenure as acting governor undermines this intended effect.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian defense industrial enterprises and oil refineries in Russia on the night of January 20 to 21 as part of an ongoing strike series aimed at degrading Russian military capacity.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also continue to conduct strikes against Russian command posts in the Russian rear.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping held a phone call on January 21 and emphasized deepening cooperation.
- Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein's recent appointment has thus far failed to solve or distract from Russia's failure to adequately respond to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove. Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Pokrovsk.
- Russian ultranationalist milbloggers renewed complaints against the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for failing to hold the Russian military command accountable for military failures.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 20, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 20, 2025, 8:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45 pm ET on January 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on January 20 that Russian forces suffered more than 434,000 casualties in 2024 — 150,000 of which were personnel killed in action.[1] Syrskyi stated on December 30, 2024, that Russian forces suffered 427,000 casualties in 2024, and Syrskyi's January 20 number likely reflects additional losses that Russian forces incurred in the final days of 2024.[2] ISW continues to assess that the Russian military command was likely willing to accept record levels of casualties in Fall–Winter 2024, especially from September to November 2024, in order to achieve relatively larger territorial gains from continued infantry-led, attritional assaults.[3]

Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated on January 20 that the Kremlin is willing to negotiate with the United States about the war in Ukraine but indicated that he maintains his demands for Ukraine's full capitulation. Putin convened a meeting of the Russian Security Council on January 20, at which he and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Russia's willingness to engage in peace negotiations with the new US presidential administration under President Donald Trump.[4] Putin caveated that any peace settlement should "eliminate the root causes" of the war in Ukraine. Lavrov defined these root causes on December 26 as NATO's alleged violation of obligations not to expand eastward and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture within Ukraine.[5] Senior Kremlin officials, including Putin and Lavrov, have been reiterating in recent weeks that the Kremlin refuses to consider any compromises to Putin's late 2021 and early 2022 demands, which include demands that Ukraine remain permanently "neutral" and not join NATO, impose severe limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military, and remove the current Ukrainian government.[6] Putin himself stated on December 26 that then US President Joe Biden suggested to him in 2021 that Ukraine's NATO membership be

postponed by 10 to 15 years — further demonstrating that alleged threats from NATO expansion did not actually drive Putin to launch the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[7]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an aircraft production plant in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on January 20 as a part of an ongoing series of strikes aimed at degrading Russian military capacity. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on January 20 that unspecified drones struck Russian military facilities in Kazan.[8] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* posted footage of a fire at the Gorbunov Aircraft Plant in Kazan, and an open-source intelligence (OSINT) Telegram account geolocated a picture of the aftermath of the strike to the fuel tanks of the Gorbunov plant.[9] The Gorbunov Aircraft Plant is a subsidiary of the Russia Tupolev United Aircraft Company, which produces and repairs Tu-160 strategic bombers.[10] Tatarstan authorities claimed on January 20 that Russian forces shot down all the drones and that the strike caused no damage or casualties.[11] Kaluga Oblast Governor Vladislav Shapsha claimed on January 20 that drone debris struck an unspecified enterprise on the outskirts of Kaluga City.[12] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on January 20 that sources within the Kaluga Oblast emergency services stated that Ukrainian drone strikes against Lyudinovo on January 17 damaged three diesel fuel tanks and one gas fuel tank.[13] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 18 that Ukrainian Special Operation Forces (SSO) units and other Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot of the Kaluganeftprodukt joint-stock company (JSC) near Lyudinovo, Kaluga Oblast on the night of January 17 to 18, causing a fire at the facility.[14]

Ukrainian strikes against Russian defense industrial base (DIB) targets are reportedly affecting Russian forces' combat capabilities. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on January 20 that Ukrainian strikes on Russia's military facilities, including oil refineries and those that produce ammunition, missile components, and dual-use products, have significantly disrupted Russian forces' combat capabilities and ability to maintain a high intensity of combat operations.[15] Syrskyi noted that Russian forces are using half as many artillery shells per day than they were an unspecified period of time ago. Syrskyi emphasized that Ukrainian forces target Russia's ammunition, missile component, and dual-use production enterprises as well as oil refining facilities that support Russia's war efforts. ISW has observed reports from Ukrainian personnel in the field noting decreases in Russia's artillery usage and of Russia's overall artillery advantage in some areas. [16]

Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities continue efforts to supply Transnistria with European gas. Russian and Transnistrian authorities were reportedly recently discussing the possibility of Russia buying gas for Transnistria on the European spot market through Moldovan gas company Natural Gaz DC between January and April 2025, but Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean noted on January 16 that only Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz has the authority to deliver gas to Transnistria.[17] Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky stated on January 20 that Transnistria will allow Moldovagaz to supply Transnistria with gas, presumably from Europe, despite initially refusing offers in early January 2025 from Moldovagaz to help Transnistria obtain gas from European platforms.[18] Krasnoselsky claimed that Transnistria can guarantee payment – possibly referring to Moscow's recent reported proposal to use Russian budget funds to buy European gas for Transnistria's domestic consumption.[19] Krasnoselsky claimed that Transnistrian gas company Tiraspoltransgaz sent a letter to Moldovagaz on January 18 requesting that Moldovagaz outline the procedure for supplying gas to Transnistria.[20] Moldovan President Maia Sandu responded on January 20 that Krasnoselsky's proposal does not appear to be about Transnistria's purchase of gas through Moldovagaz but that Krasnoselsky rather is proposing that "someone else" buys the gas and delivers it to Moldovan territory, after which Moldovagaz transports it through Moldova to Transnistria.[21] Sandu stated that Moldovan authorities are currently determining which companies would be involved in this process, since Moldovagaz can only work with companies that do not violate Moldovan law or international sanctions.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on January 20 that Russian forces suffered more than 434,000 casualties in 2024 — 150,000 of which were personnel killed in action.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated on January 20 that the Kremlin is willing to negotiate with the US about the war in Ukraine but indicated that he maintains his demands for Ukraine's full capitulation.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an aircraft production plant in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on January 20 as a part of an ongoing series of strikes aimed at degrading Russian military capacity.
- Ukrainian strikes against Russian defense industrial base (DIB) targets are reportedly affecting Russian forces' combat capabilities.

- Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities continue efforts to supply Transnistria with European gas.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor repeated on January 20 complaints that Russian milbloggers first issued in May 2024 about insufficient quality controls on Russian artillery shells.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 19, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 19, 2025

Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

January 19, 2025, 3:30 pm ET

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 18 that Russian forces used ammunition equipped with chemical agents banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) 434 times in Ukraine in December 2024, contributing to a total of 5,389 documented cases since February 2023.[1] Ukraine's radiation, chemical, and biological intelligence units are monitoring Russia's use of banned chemical agents, which include using regulated K-51 and RG-VO grenade launchers to launch munitions containing chemical agents and ammunition containing unspecified hazardous chemicals that are banned in warfare under the 1925 Geneva Protocol and CWC. Ukrainian officials have previously reported on increasingly common instances of Russian forces using chemical substances in combat that are banned by the CWC, to which Russia is a signatory, and the Ukrainian General Staff noted that such violations have been systematic in the Russian military since February 2023.[2]

Key Takeaways:

- The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 18 that Russian forces used ammunition equipped with chemical agents banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) 434 times in Ukraine in December 2024, contributing to a total of 5,389 documented cases since February 2023.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Lyman, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Ukrainian forces recently recaptured lost positions near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk.
- Russian volunteer military detachments continue efforts to boost manpower by recruiting women into the Russian Armed Forces.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 18, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

Ukrainian forces struck two Russian oil depots in Kaluga and Tula oblasts on the night of January 17 to 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 18 that Ukrainian Special Operation Forces (SSO) units and other Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot of the Kaluganeftprodukt joint-stock company (JSC) near Lyudinovo, Kaluga Oblast, causing a fire at the facility on the night of January 17 to 18.[1] Kaluga Oblast Governor Vladislav Shapsha claimed on January 17 and 18 that a drone strike caused a fire at an unspecified industrial enterprise in Lyudinovo, Kaluga Oblast, and later added that Russian forces downed seven drones over the region.[2] Russian sources posted footage purportedly showing the fire at the oil depot.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported on January 18 that units of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and other Ukrainian forces struck the state-owned "March 8" oil depot in Tula Oblast and noted that there were reports of a fire at the facility.[4] Tula Oblast Governor Dmitry Milyaev claimed on January 18 that drone debris struck an unspecified enterprise in Tula Oblast, causing a fuel tank to catch on fire.[5] Geolocated footage and other footage published by Russian milbloggers showed a fire at an oil depot near Didilovo, Tula Oblast.[6]

Ukrainian forces also struck a Russian air defense system and radars in occupied Ukraine on the night of January 17 to 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian "Nebo-SVU" long-range radar detection system in occupied Kherson Oblast; a Buk-M3 air defense system in occupied Donetsk Oblast; and a 9C32M radiolocation station of a S-300 air defense

system in occupied Donetsk Oblast on January 18.[7] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that they are conducting battle damage assessments (BDA) of the strikes.

The Russian Central Grouping of Forces appear to have assembled a strike group comprised of units of the 2nd and 41st combined arms armies (CAAs) south of Pokrovsk, likely as part of ongoing Russian efforts to intensify offensive operations south and southwest of the town. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on January 18 that the Russian military command have consolidated elements of four brigades - the 2nd CAA's 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 41st CAA's 35th, 55th, and 74th motorized rifle brigades — and three regiments — the 243rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (reportedly subordinated to 27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd CAA) and the 239th Tank Regiment and the 87th Rifle Regiment (both of the 90th Tank Division, 41st CAA) — south and southwest of Pokrovsk between Dachenske and Novotroitske.[8] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade recently interdicted the T-0406 Pokrovsk-Mezheva Highway and are attacking between Udachne and Kotlyne (both southwest of Pokrovsk). Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade maintain positions on the outskirts of Zvirove (east of Kotlyne) and attacking in the area while elements of the Russian 433rd Motorized Rifle Regiment with support from the 239th Tank Regiment and 87th Rifle Regiment are attacking along the banks of the Solone River toward Solone-Novoserhiivka and Novovasylivka-Uspenivka (south to southwest of Kotlyne). Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 35th Motorized Rifle Brigade are attacking towards Dachenske-Chyushchyne and Zelene-Chyushchyne (all south of Pokrovsk) and are making marginal advances. ISW has observed reports that all the brigades and regiments referenced by Mashovets are operating south and southwest of Pokrovsk except for elements of the 243rd Motorized Rifle Regiment, which ISW has not previously observed involved in combat operations in Ukraine.[9]

The commander of a Ukrainian drone unit operating in the Pokrovsk direction stated on January 17 that the Russian military command is accumulating forces to advance west of Pokrovsk as part of ongoing Russian efforts to envelop the town but noted that Russian forces are not advancing immediately south of the town.[10] The Ukrainian commander noted that Russian forces are currently focused on interdicting the railway line between Kotlyne and Udachne. Russian milbloggers similarly claimed on January 17 and 18 that Russian forces are advancing southwest of Pokrovsk near Zvirove, Kotlyne, Udachne, Novooleksandrivka, Novoserhiivka, and Sribne and attempting to interdict the E-50 Pavlohrad-Pokrovsk highway west of the town.[11] ISW previously observed indications that the Russian military command defined the 2nd CAA's area of responsibility (AoR) as south and southwest of Pokrovsk and the 41st CAA's AoR as east of Pokrovsk.[12] The Russian military command's decision to establish a strike group comprised of units of both the 2nd and 41st CAAs south of Pokrovsk indicates that Russian forces may be reprioritizing tactical objectives in the Pokrovsk direction to set conditions to exploit more opportunistic avenues of advance closer to Pokrovsk's immediate flanks. Mashovets noted that elements of the 15th and 30th motorized rifle brigades (2nd CAA) and the 348th Motorized Rifle Regiment (41st CAA) are currently resting and reconstituting in rear areas of the Pokrovsk direction and that it is unclear which sector of this direction the Russian military command will choose to redeploy these forces.[13] The Russian military command may redeploy these units to areas south of Pokrovsk if the Russian command continues to prioritize tactical advances in the direction of Pokrovsk's southern flanks in the coming weeks and months.

The Russian military command also reportedly redeployed elements of a second unit of the 51st CAA from the Kurakhove direction to offensive operations east of Pokrovsk amid ongoing efforts to intensify activity in this area. Several Russian milbloggers claimed on January 17 and 18 that elements of the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) recently advanced south of Zelene Pole (northeast of Pokrovsk).[14] ISW observed reports as recent as January 18 that elements of the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade are operating in the Kurakhove direction, indicating that the Russian military command may have recently redeployed select elements of the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade to the Pokrovsk direction if the milbloggers' claims are accurate.[15] ISW previously observed claims that the Russian military command redeployed elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA) to the Vozdvyzhenka area (east of Pokrovsk) from Kurakhove.[16] Mashovets reported on January 18 that elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 1195th and 1438th motorized rifle regiments (41st CAA) are attacking east of Pokrovsk from Vozdvyzhenka and Novotretske-Tymofiiivka (southwest of Vozdvyzhenka) towards Yelyzavetivka (west of Vozdvyzhenka).[17] Mashovets further reported that elements of the Russian 506th and 589th motorized rifle regiments (both of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd CAA), supported by elements of the 137th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA) are unsuccessfully attacking in the direction of Mykolaivka-Myrnograd and Mykolaivka-Promin (all east of Pokrovsk). Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are focusing their assaults east of Pokrovsk around Vodyane Druhe (northeast of Vozdvyzhenka), Zelene Pole, and Tarasivka (both north of Vozdvyzhenka), likely as part of ongoing Russian efforts to form a wide salient that Russian forces can leverage to envelop Pokrovsk from the northeast in the future.[18] The Russian military command

may be deprioritizing offensive operations in the Kurakhove direction and redeploying forces from Kurakhove to reinforce the Pokrovsk direction now that Russian forces have accomplished their objective of seizing Kurakhove, as elements of the 5th and 110th reportedly participated in the seizure of Kurakhove in late December 2024.^[19] It is unclear whether the Russian command reinforced or sufficiently reconstituted degraded Russian units that recently participated in battles to seize Kurakhove and its environs to the point they may effectively operate on the current frontline in Pokrovsk.

ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command would likely choose to recommit elements of the 5th and 110th brigades to a priority sector of the frontline, and the Russian military command appears to have chosen to redeploy these forces to offensive operations east of Pokrovsk.^[20] The Russian military command appears to be attempting to leverage units of the 41st and 51st CAAs to advance east of Pokrovsk and envelop the town and may intend to redeploy additional units of the 51st CAA to reinforce this effort in the future. Russian forces will likely continue to make gains as part of their intensified effort to envelop Pokrovsk from the northeast and southwest, particularly if Russian forces can identify and exploit tactical vulnerabilities in Ukrainian defenses along Pokrovsk's flanks. The rate of such advances will likely remain slow however, as Russian forces have yet to demonstrate the ability to conduct the type of rapid mechanized maneuver necessary to quickly penetrate Ukrainian defensive lines and surround Pokrovsk quickly enough to encircle a significant number of Ukrainian forces.

NATO officials are reportedly preparing for a joint NATO-Georgia exercise scheduled for March 2025.^[21] The Georgian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on January 18 that the Commander of the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC) Colonel David Gagua met with NATO Joint Forces Training Center Commander Major General Bogdan Rycerski and discussed plans for the upcoming NATO-Georgia 2025 exercise. NATO reported on March 7, 2024, that the NATO-Georgia 2025 exercise is scheduled for March 2025 and that previous NATO-Georgia exercises focused on live and simulated training exercises and certification for NATO ally and partner countries' military units.^[22] Azerbaijani and Armenian sources reported on January 17 and 18 respectively that Azerbaijan will participate in the exercise and that Armenia will be an observer of the NATO-Georgia 2025 exercise.^[23]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck two Russian oil depots in Kaluga and Tula oblasts on the night of January 17 to 18.
- Ukrainian forces also struck a Russian air defense system and radars in occupied Ukraine on the night of January 17 to 18.
- The Russian Central Grouping of Forces appears to have assembled a strike group comprised of units of the 2nd and 41st combined arms armies (CAAs) south of Pokrovsk, likely as part of ongoing Russian efforts to intensify offensive operations south and southwest of the town.
- The Russian military command also reportedly redeployed elements of a second unit of the 51st CAA from the Kurakhove direction to offensive operations east of Pokrovsk amid ongoing efforts to intensify activity in this area.
- NATO officials are reportedly preparing for a joint NATO-Georgia exercise scheduled for March 2025.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and in the Chasiv Yar and Velyka Novosilka directions.
- Ukrainian forces recently recaptured lost positions in the Kharkiv direction.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 17, 2025

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Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

January 17, 2025, 7pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed the Russia-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement on January 17.^[1] The agreement addresses issues spanning enhanced defense cooperation, intelligence sharing, nuclear energy use and cooperation, transportation support and development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), and a clause stipulating that neither party shall allow third parties to use their territory to threaten the security of the other among other economic and social areas of partnership. The agreement notably includes the unspecified development of "military-technical cooperation"

between the two countries, which could allude to Iran's extensive export of domestically-produced Shahed drones and other military equipment for Russia's use in Ukraine, Iran's assistance in Russia's domestic production of Shahed drones, and possible efforts to expand Russia's use and production of Shaheds.[2]

The bilateral agreement could also lay the groundwork for Russia to establish aircraft refueling hubs and a naval presence in Iran, particularly as the fall of Russian ally Bashar al-Assad's regime and overall waning of Russian influence in the Middle East threatens the presence of key Russian bases and assets in Syria.[3] Russia could use Iranian territory to support some of its operations in North Africa and the Middle East despite Iran's suboptimal geographic location when compared to Syria's proximity to Russia's basing in Libya and the Mediterranean Sea. Russia may also use the agreement to establish a more permanent military presence in Iran in the long term. However, Iran may be reluctant to such efforts due to the possibility of further Western sanctions and retaliation.

Russia may leverage enhanced economic and transportation ties with Iran to further Western sanctions evasion efforts and mitigate economic challenges brought about by sanctions - a broader strategy Russia has established with multiple international partners to circumvent restrictions and alleviate domestic economic pressures.[4]

The Russia-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement lacks a mutual defense clause, however, indicating that Russia likely lacks the bandwidth to support significant operations outside of Ukraine and is prioritizing its manpower needs through its mutual defense treaty with North Korea. Russia likely does not have the military and defense industrial capacity to support any significant military operations apart from its war in Ukraine, especially as Russia continues to suffer high personnel losses and is reportedly struggling to produce and refurbish enough armored vehicles to replace destroyed vehicles.[5] Putin is likely wary of intensified Russian engagements in the Middle East after Russia's strategic political defeat in Syria following the collapse of the Assad regime and is likely to focus on negotiations with the interim Syrian government to maintain the Russian military presence at the Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus.[6]

Russia appears to be valuing its ability to mitigate its manpower constraints by leveraging the mutual defense clause within its Strategic Partnership agreement with North Korea to deploy North Korean forces to Kursk Oblast over further military-technical cooperation with Iran.[7] ISW previously assessed that Russia is deploying North Korean forces to operations in Kursk Oblast in order to free up Russian military personnel for operations in Ukraine.[8] Russia is likely to prioritize addressing its manpower issues through defense agreements with North Korea, as Iran is unlikely to provide military personnel to support Russia's war in Ukraine, and Russia has been leveraging its military-technical ties with Iran since 2022 without a strategic partnership agreement.

Russian forces seized Vremivka on January 17 as part of their efforts to envelop Velyka Novosilka and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the settlement. Geolocated footage published on January 27 shows elements of the Russian 127th Motorized Rifle Division (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) planting a Russian flag in northwestern Vremivka (just west of Velyka Novosilka), indicating that Russian forces recently seized the settlement.[9] Russian milbloggers also credited elements of the 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, EMD) with the seizure of Vremivka and claimed that Russian forces seized the settlement within three days (since January 14) and advanced northeast of Velky Novosilka, further north of Vremivka, and southeast of Novosilka (west of Velyka Novosilka).[10] Russian forces continued attacking near Velyka Novosilka and Vremivka on January 16 and 17.[11] Russian forces have recently prioritized the interdiction of the Velyka Novosilka-Hulyapole O-0510 highway and advances southwest of Velyka Novosilka, including into Vremivka, as Russian advances east and north of Velyka Novosilka stalled in December 2024.[12] It remains unclear if Russian forces intend to attack directly into Velyka Novosilka itself or immediately west and northwest of Velky Novosilka to envelop the settlement, but Ukrainian defensive operations will likely complicate Russian advances in either area.

The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Velyka Novosilka direction stated on January 17 that Russian forces have a three-to-one personnel advantage in the area and are operating in teams of four to five personnel.[13] Russian forces may intend to leverage their manpower advantage in the area to close the roughly three kilometers between the forwardmost points of the assessed Russian forward line of own troops north and west of Velyka Novosilka in the coming weeks.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call on January 17 indicating the Kremlin's growing concerns over Armenia's deepening ties with the West. The Armenian Prime Minister's Office stated on January 17 that Pashinyan and Putin discussed the results of Armenia's 2024 presidency of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), upcoming EAEU activities, and unspecified bilateral issues.[14] The Kremlin claimed that

Pashinyan and Putin also addressed deepening integration within the EAEU and highlighted how the EAEU benefits the Armenian economy.[15] The Kremlin claimed that Pashinyan explained Armenia's "recent actions" regarding its relations with the European Union (EU) - likely referring to the Armenian government's January 9 approval of an EU accession bill - although the Armenian read out of the meeting did not mention this.[16]

The Pashinyan-Putin conversation also comes shortly after the January 14 launch of the Armenia-US Strategic Partnership, which sparked speculation within the Russian information space about Armenia distancing itself and possibly withdrawing from the EAEU - a claim that Armenian officials have denied. [17] Putin's emphasis on EAEU cooperation and acknowledgment of EU-Armenia relations during the phone call likely suggests that the Kremlin is increasingly concerned over Armenia's growing ties with the West, and Putin likely seeks to at least symbolically reassert Russian influence in Armenia to save face.

Recently declassified US documents highlight the integral role of US monetary and technical assistance in expanding Ukraine's domestic drone production capabilities and how US national security is directly benefiting by integrating lessons learned from Ukraine in America's defense industry. *The New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 17 that outgoing US President Joe Biden's administration recently declassified reports revealing that the United States made significant investments in Ukraine at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, enabling Kyiv to rapidly expand its domestic drone production capabilities.[18] US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan recently stated that the United States began investing in Ukraine's drone production initiative in Fall 2022 and accelerated these efforts in Summer 2023. Unspecified US officials told the NYT that US aid helped "Ukraine develop a new generation of drones and revolutionize how wars are fought." Sullivan stated on January 16 that US support for Ukraine's drone production has yielded insights for American defense industrial companies and that the Biden Administration previously held a conference with US defense industrial and military leadership to assess domestic drone production innovation efforts.[19]

Ukrainian first-person view (FPV) and long-range drone capabilities and innovations continue to play a critical role in both constraining Russian mechanized maneuver on the battlefield and undermining Russia's ability to pay for and stockpile weapons for its war in Ukraine.[20] Ukrainian forces continue efforts to innovate and expand their asymmetric strike capabilities, and such capabilities will almost certainly play a critical role in the future of modern warfare both in Ukraine and globally.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed the Russia-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement on January 17.
- The Russia-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement lacks a mutual defense clause, however, indicating that Russia likely lacks the bandwidth to support significant operations outside of Ukraine and is prioritizing its manpower needs through its mutual defense treaty with North Korea.
- Russian forces seized Vremivka on January 17 as part of their efforts to envelop Velyka Novosilka and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the settlement.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call on January 17 indicating the Kremlin's growing concerns over Armenia's deepening ties with the West.
- Recently declassified US documents highlight the integral role of US monetary and technical assistance in expanding Ukraine's domestic drone production capabilities and how US national security is directly benefiting by integrating lessons learned from Ukraine in America's defense industry.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and the Kharkiv, Kupyansk, Borova, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on January 17 authorizing calling up Russian reservists ("personnel mobilization resource" or *zapas*) for training in 2025.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 16, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

January 16, 2025, 7:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30 pm ET on January 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery in Voronezh Oblast and a gunpowder plant in Tambov Oblast on the night of January 15 to 16. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 16 that Ukrainian Special Operation Forces (SSO) and other Ukrainian forces struck the Lisinskaya Oil Refinery in Voronezh Oblast with at least three drones, causing a fire.^[1] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the oil refinery stored fuel for Russian military uses. Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed on January 16 that Ukrainian forces launched over 10 drones against three raions in Voronezh Oblast and that most of the drones hit the oil depot in Liski Raion.^[2] Geolocated footage and footage posted by Russian milbloggers show a fire at the Lisinskaya Oil Refinery.^[3] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on January 16 that Ukrainian forces also struck the Tambov Gunpowder Plant in Kuzmino-Gat, Tambov Oblast, noting that the plant produces gunpowder for various arms, artillery, and rocket systems; nitrocellulose used to produce explosives; and other specialized products.^[4] Russian news aggregator SHOT reported on January 15 that locals reported sounds of drones over Kotovsk (directly north of Kuzmino-Gat) and that Russian forces downed three drones near Kotovsk and Kuzmino-Gat.^[5]

The entire North Korean contingent of roughly 12,000 personnel currently in Kursk Oblast may be killed or wounded in action by mid-April 2025 should North Korean forces continue to suffer from their current high loss rate in the future. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in early January 2025 that 3,800 North Korean personnel had been killed or wounded in Kursk Oblast.^[6] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on November 5, 2024 that North Korean forces were engaged in "small-scale" clashes in Kursk Oblast, but Russian milbloggers began claiming on December 6 that North Korean forces were participating in more significant combat operations.^[7] North Korean have therefore likely suffered roughly 92 casualties per day since starting to participate in significant fighting in early December 2024. North Korea reportedly transferred roughly 12,000 North Korean personnel to Kursk Oblast, and the entirety of this North Korean contingent in Kursk Oblast may be killed or wounded in roughly 12 weeks (about mid-April 2025) should North Korean forces continue to suffer similarly high casualty rates in the future.^[8] South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) stated on January 13 that so far 300 North Koreans have been killed in action and 2,700 have been wounded in action in Kursk Oblast.^[9] North Korean forces will likely continue to suffer a larger ratio of wounded to killed in action - as is typical for armed conflict - and it is unclear if or when injured North Korean soldiers return to combat.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a landmark "Centennial Partnership Agreement" on January 16 outlining Ukrainian-British cooperation for the next 100 years and continued UK support to Ukraine.^[10] The agreement outlines the UK's commitment to Ukraine's possible future NATO membership as a means to guarantee Ukraine's security and calls for strengthening bilateral defense and security ties, building consensus on Ukraine's NATO membership prospects, enhancing maritime security, expanding economic and trade cooperation, and boosting collaboration in the energy, climate, and justice spheres. Starmer highlighted during a press conference on January 16 that the UK intends to provide military aid to Ukraine annually and will provide Ukraine with a loan backed by funds from frozen Russian assets.^[11] Starmer highlighted that the UK will also expand its training program for Ukrainian military personnel and provide Ukraine with 150 artillery barrels and a new Danish-funded mobile air defense system.^[12]

Russian and Transnistrian authorities are reportedly discussing Russian purchases of European gas for Transnistria through an intermediary, likely to avoid having to gain various states' permission to use the TurkStream and Trans-Balkan pipelines to supply Russian gas to the pro-Russian breakaway Moldovan republic. Russian business outlet *Kommersant* reported on January 16 that unspecified sources stated that Russia and Transnistria are discussing the possibility of Russia buying gas for Transnistria on the European spot market through Moldovan gas company Natural Gaz DC between January and April 2025.^[13] *Kommersant* stated that Moscow tentatively proposed using Russian budget funds to buy up to three million cubic meters per day of gas that would cover Transnistria's domestic consumption but would not support producing Transnistria's electricity exports to Moldova. *Kommersant* estimated that this volume of gas would likely cost Russia \$164 million from January to April 2025. Natural Gaz DC co-owner Arkady Vikol stated on January 15 that the company had signed a contract with Transnistrian gas company Tiraspoltransgaz to supply two-to-three million cubic meters of European gas per day to Transnistria.^[14] Transnistria President Vadim Krasnoselsky announced on January 15 that Russia would provide Transnistria with gas as "humanitarian aid" but did not specify the delivery method.^[15] Russia is likely seeking alternative routes to supply Transnistria with gas as the Trans-Balkan pipeline transits Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine. Ukraine stopped transiting Russian gas through its territory on January 1, and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha stated on January 15 that Ukraine was in discussions to help

Transnistria but that the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine is "generally unacceptable."^[16] Ukrainian and Moldovan officials have recently noted how Russia is trying to use its artificially created gas crisis to affect Moldovan public opinion before the Summer 2025 Moldovan parliamentary elections, and Russia may cease gas supplies to Transnistria again in April 2025.^[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery in Voronezh Oblast and a gunpowder plant in Tambov Oblast on the night of January 15 to 16.
- The entire North Korean contingent of roughly 12,000 personnel currently in Kursk Oblast may be killed or wounded in action by mid-April 2025 should North Korean forces continue to suffer from their current high loss rate in the future.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a landmark "Centennial Partnership Agreement" on January 16 outlining Ukrainian-British cooperation for the next 100 years and continued UK support to Ukraine.
- Russian and Transnistrian authorities are reportedly discussing Russian purchases of European gas for Transnistria through an intermediary, likely to avoid having to gain various states' permission to use the TurkStream and Trans-Balkan pipelines to supply Russian gas to the pro-Russian breakaway Moldovan republic.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 15, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

January 15, 2025, 6:10pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12 pm ET on January 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted a large series of missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of January 14 to 15. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 74 Shahed and other strike drones and 43 missiles at Ukraine, including one Iskander-M ballistic missile from Belgorod Oblast, seven Kh-22/32 cruise missiles from airspace over Tula Oblast, four Kalibr cruise missiles from ships in the Black Sea, 27 Kh-101/55SM cruise missiles from airspace over Volgograd Oblast, and four Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from airspace over Belgorod Oblast.^[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 23 Kh-101/55SM missiles, three Kalibr missiles, four Kh-59/69 missiles, and 47 drones, and that 27 drones became "lost" and did not hit their targets. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that the Russian strikes targeted Ukrainian gas facilities and other energy infrastructure.^[2] Ukrainian officials reported damage to energy and critical infrastructure facilities in Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, and Lviv oblasts and residential areas in Kirovohrad Oblast.^[3] Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko and Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo reported temporary emergency shutdowns in Kharkiv, Sumy, Poltava, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Dniproproetrovsk, and Kirovohrad oblasts on the morning of January 15 due to the strikes.^[4] Ukrenergo has since lifted the emergency shutdowns but noted that Ukrainians still need to limit their energy consumption following the strikes.^[5] Russia has regularly targeted Ukrainian energy infrastructure in large strike series since the Winter of 2022–2023 likely in an attempt to collapse Ukraine's energy grid, limit its defense industrial capacity, and degrade Ukrainians' will to fight.^[6]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner of war (POW) exchange on January 15, their first POW exchange in 2025. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on January 15 that Ukraine received 25 Ukrainians who suffer from serious injuries and illnesses and stated that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) mediated the exchange.^[7] The Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War reported that Ukraine received a civilian previously captured by Russian forces during the exchange.^[8] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Russia received 25 Russian POWs.^[9] Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubinets announced on January 6 that Ukraine and Russia had reached a preliminary agreement to conduct regular POW exchanges in 2025 and that Ukraine will prioritize returning seriously ill and wounded Ukrainians.^[10]

A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian drone and artillery capabilities are providing Ukrainian tanks with tactical advantages over Russian tanks in unspecified, select areas of the frontline. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 12 that Russian forces are unable to field tanks and armored vehicles in frontline areas where Ukraine has deployed at least two Ukrainian first-person view (FPV) strike drone companies and two Ukrainian reconnaissance drone companies operate because Ukrainian drone operators strike most or all Russian armored vehicles three to six kilometers from the frontline.[11] The milblogger also claimed that Russian forces are also unable to field tanks in frontline areas where Ukrainian forces have a sufficient number of shells due to the high accuracy of Ukrainian artillery strikes. The milblogger complained that Russian drones are less effective than the Ukrainian drones and that the Russian military command only supplies Russian FPV operators advanced FPV models operating on non-standard frequencies and fiber-optic drones — both of which are more resistant to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) — to priority sectors of the frontline. The milblogger further claimed that an insufficient amount of Russian artillery coupled with insufficient Russian drone capabilities in select sectors of the frontline allow Ukrainian forces to field tanks more easily for indirect and direct fire. Effective Ukrainian drone and artillery operations in select areas of the frontline may be straining Russia's ability to field tanks amid reports that Russian forces continue to accrue vehicles losses that are likely unstable in the medium term.[12] Ukraine's ability to damage and destroy Russian armored vehicles and tanks with FPV drones and artillery will likely strain Russia's ability to replace such losses as current armored vehicle and tank production rates indicate that these losses will be prohibitive over the longer term.

Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky announced on January 15 that Russia will soon provide Transnistria with gas as "humanitarian aid" but did not specify the delivery date or method.[13] Krasnoselsky visited Moscow from January 10 to 14 and negotiated possible gas deliveries to Transnistria with the Russian Energy Ministry.[14] Krasnoselsky added that Russia will provide Transnistria with enough gas for thermal power engineering, industrial enterprises, and civilian use, noting that Russia will not be supplying the rest of Moldova with gas.[15]

Armenia continues to enhance its relations with Western partners amid waning relations with Russia. The US State Department reported on January 14 that Armenia and the US launched the US-Armenia Strategic Partnership Commission, signaling a significant step in their bilateral relations.[16] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan formalized the agreement aimed at expanding bilateral cooperation in economic, security, defense, and governance sectors. Blinken emphasized US support for Armenia's sovereignty and territorial integrity while Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov criticized the partnership agreement, accusing the US of destabilizing the South Caucasus.[17] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also expressed dissatisfaction with Armenian government's January 9 approval of a European Union (EU) accession bill. Overchuk and Lavrov argued that Armenia's potential future EU membership is incompatible with Armenia's membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and framing Armenia's EU accession bill as a potential withdrawal from the EEU.[18] Overchuk and Lavrov also claimed that such decisions are Armenia's sovereign right yet highlighted potential consequences, reinforcing Kremlin's longstanding pattern of threatening and pressuring neighboring countries through indirect and direct means. The Kremlin reactions to Armenia's deepening ties with the West demonstrate a broader Russian strategy of undermining the sovereignty of neighboring and previously colonized countries through initial ultimatums and veiled coercion, often escalating to direct action and military violence when Russia's influence is challenged, as is the case in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces conducted a large series of missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of January 14 to 15.**
- **Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner of war (POW) exchange on January 15, their first POW exchange in 2025.**
- **A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian drone and artillery capabilities are providing Ukrainian tanks with tactical advantages over Russian tanks in unspecified, select areas of the frontline.**
- **Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky announced on January 15 that Russia will soon provide Transnistria with gas as "humanitarian aid" but did not specify the delivery date or method.**
- **Armenia continues to enhance its relations with Western partners amid waning relations with Russia.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in the Borova, Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk directions.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on January 15 that about 600,000 Russian soldiers are currently operating in Ukraine.**

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mapes, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 14, 2025, 7:30 pm ET

The Kremlin remains committed to achieving the original goals of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in any future peace negotiations — namely the destruction of the Ukrainian state, dissolution of the current Ukrainian government, demilitarization of Ukraine, and a permanent ban on Ukraine's future membership in NATO. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev rejected the suggestion that Russia could be willing to cede any occupied territory to Ukraine in future negotiations during an interview with Russian outlet *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published on January 14 and stated that this idea is "not even up for discussion."^[1] Patrushev falsely claimed that sham referendums in occupied Ukraine in September 2022 legitimized Russia's claim to occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and insinuated that international recognition of Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of the four oblasts and occupied Crimea is a non-negotiable condition for a future peace agreement.

Patrushev stated that Russia's goals in Ukraine remain unchanged and that Russia remains committed to achieving all of the goals that Russian President Vladimir Putin used to justify the full-scale invasion. Putin identified the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine as the key goals of the full-scale invasion during a speech on February 23, 2022 — and these goals amount to the destruction of Ukraine's ability to defend itself and replacement of the legitimate Ukrainian government with a pro-Russian puppet government.^[2] Former Roscosmos (Russian space agency) head and Zaporizhia Oblast occupation senator Dmitry Rogozin stated during an interview with Russian outlet *Gazeta.Ru* on January 14 that the Russian government continues to pursue "denazification" in Ukraine, which Rogozin defined as the "liquidation of those who instill a misanthropic Russophobic spirit" in people.^[3] Putin has consistently demanded that the Ukrainian people concede their right to determine their own government, the right to defend themselves against ongoing and future aggression, and the right to choose their own security alliances before and throughout the full-scale invasion.^[4] ISW continues to assess that Putin's goals in Ukraine are to break up NATO and seize full control over Ukraine and that Putin remains committed to these goals, and ISW has not observed any indication that Putin is willing to concede on such goals in future negotiations.^[5]

Russian officials continue to deny the existence of a Ukrainian identity and state that is independent of Russia as part of ongoing Russian efforts to justify the destruction of the Ukrainian state. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov referred in a press conference on January 14 to "the country that is now called Ukraine" — a clear effort to discredit Ukraine's existence as a sovereign and independent state.^[6] Patrushev also emphasized the "fraternal" connection between Russia and Ukraine and rejected any suggestion that Russia and Ukraine have distinct cultural and historical identities.^[7] Putin published an essay in July 2021 arguing that ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians all belong to the same "Russian nation," and Kremlin officials have reiterated these false narratives throughout the war.^[8] The Kremlin's ongoing information operation attempting to portray Russians and Ukrainians as one unified nation and culturally and historically homogeneous is one of its most significant information operations aimed at undermining Western support for Ukraine. Calls for the West to acquiesce to all of Russia's demands in Ukraine require the West to tacitly acknowledge and agree that a Ukrainian identity and state independent from Russia either does not currently exist or does not deserve to exist in the future.

Patrushev stated that he believes that only Russia and the United States should engage in negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine, and senior Kremlin officials are also questioning the role that European countries could play in such negotiations. Patrushev explicitly stated that Russia and the United States should negotiate on Ukraine "without the participation of other Western countries," specifically excluding the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom (UK) and heavily implying that Ukraine also should not participate in these negotiations.^[9] Lavrov similarly stated that he does not know what role Italy could play in resolving the war and accused Germany and France of failing in their roles as guarantors to the Minsk agreements — agreements that Russia regularly violated.^[10] These statements revive a Kremlin information operation that previously framed the West writ large — rather than just the United States — as the only meaningful negotiating party regarding the war in Ukraine other than Russia itself and rejected Ukraine's right to participate in discussions about its sovereignty and territorial integrity.^[11] The Kremlin has periodically revived this information operation in an attempt to extract concessions from the United States, particularly concessions that

would undermine Ukrainian legitimacy and further Putin's goal of destroying Ukraine.[12] Patrushev's comments also seek to place Russia on an equal footing with the United States as the Soviet Union was once regarded.

The Kremlin will likely attempt to seize on potential future Russian advances into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast for informational purposes, but these advances, if they occur, are unlikely to have significant operational impact. ISW assesses as of January 14 that Russian forces are seven kilometers away from the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border at their closest point of advance near Novovasylivka (southwest of Pokrovsk) and up to 7.5 kilometers away from the border near Novodarivka (southwest of Velyka Novosilka). Russian advances west of Pokrovsk and in the Velyka Novosilka area toward Dnipropetrovsk Oblast may be a part of Russian efforts to envelop Ukrainian forces in those areas and seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast.[13] Russian forces may also be attempting to seize any territory — including territory in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast — regardless of such territory's tactical significance in order to strengthen Russia's negotiating position before potential talks to end the war. Russian authorities may attempt to leverage limited gains in southeastern Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to claim that Russia has a right to control and annex all of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in the future. Russian President Vladimir Putin has previously called for Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts that Russia does not occupy as a prerequisite for negotiations, and Russian officials have consistently laid claim to the entirety of these four oblasts and occupied Crimea as part of their demands in Ukraine. [14] Russian forces currently occupy limited areas in northern and northeastern Kharkiv Oblast and the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast, and the Kremlin may attempt to use these positions to make additional territorial demands in the future. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged Russia's extensive territorial objectives that expand deep into central Ukraine in March 2024, and Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev claimed on January 14 that "Ukraine may cease to exist" in 2025, indicating that the Kremlin is interested in illegally occupying territory far beyond the current frontline and will leverage potential future advances in an attempt to enhance its negotiation position.[15]

Ukrainian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone and missile strikes against military and defense industrial targets in Russia on the night of January 13 to 14. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces targeted Russian military facilities between 200 and 1,110 kilometers deep in the Russian rear in Bryansk, Saratov, and Tula oblasts and the Republic of Tatarstan.[16] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces and Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) struck the Russian state-owned Kombinat Kristal oil storage facility near Engels, Saratov Oblast, which provides fuel for the strategic bombers at Russia's Engels-2 Air Base, and that the GUR and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) also struck the Saratov Oil Refinery.[17] The Ukrainian Unmanned System Forces' 14th Drone Regiment reported that Ukrainian drones struck tanks with aviation fuel for Tu-160 bomber aircraft at the Kristal oil facility at the Engels-2 Air Base.[18] Sources within the SBU told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* that Ukrainian forces struck glide bomb and cruise missile warehouses at the Engels-2 Air Base.[19] Geolocated footage published on January 14 shows a fire at the Saratov Oil Refinery.[20] Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin claimed that a Ukrainian drone strike damaged unspecified industrial enterprises in Engels and Saratov City.[21] Ukrainian forces notably struck the Kristal oil facility on the night of January 7 to 8, causing a fire that Russian authorities did not put out until January 13 — likely several hours before Ukrainian forces struck the facility again.[22]

The Ukrainian General Staff and Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces reported that Ukrainian forces, including elements of the Unmanned Systems Force, Special Operations Forces (SSO), SBU, missile troops, and GUR, struck the Bryansk Chemical Plant in Seltso, Bryansk Oblast, which produces components for Kh-59 cruise missiles and ammunition for tube artillery, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), and TOS thermobaric artillery systems and repairs Russian MLRS systems.[23] The Unmanned Systems Forces reported that Ukrainian forces used drones to overwhelm Russian air defense systems, allowing missiles to strike their targets and that Ukrainian drones hit substations and other infrastructure after the missile strike.[24] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that there were secondary explosions at the plant and that Ukrainian forces also destroyed a Tor and a Buk air defense system during the strike.[25] Ukrainian Center for Combatting Disinformation Head Andriy Kovalenko noted that the Bryansk Chemical Plant is important for Russian artillery ammunition and missile production and specializes in the production of gunpowder, solid propellant components for rocket fuel, and explosives.[26] Kovalenko also stated that Ukrainian forces struck the "Kremniy El" microelectronics plant in Bryansk City, which Ukrainian forces previously struck in October 2024 and that produces microelectronics for missile systems, Pantsir air defense systems, and Iskander missiles; radars, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and drones.[27] Geolocated footage shows drone strikes and explosions in Seltso.[28] Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz claimed on January 13 that Ukrainian forces conducted a large combined missile strike against Bryansk Oblast and that Russian air defense systems destroyed all targets.[29] Bogomaz later claimed on January 14

that a falling missile fragment damaged civilian property in Bryansk Oblast, including in Seltso.[30] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces targeted Bryansk Oblast with six ATACMS missiles, six Storm Shadow missiles, and 31 drones.[31]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the GUR and SBU struck the Kazanorgsintez Chemical Plant in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, causing a fire.[32] Kovalenko stated that the strike damaged the plant, which makes materials for military use such as polyamides, synthetic rubber, and chemical compounds for armored vehicles; tires for tanks and armored personnel carriers; plastics for weapons and equipment; and explosives for ammunition.[33] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that geolocated footage indicates that the strike did not hit the Kazanorgsintez plant but rather a Gazprom liquified gas depot two kilometers from the plant and that three fuel tanks are burning.[34] *Astra* also reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Transneft enterprise in Almetyevsk, Republic of Tatarstan.[35] Republic of Tatarstan authorities claimed that a drone strike caused a gas tank to catch fire in the suburbs of Kazan on the morning of January 14.[36]

Sources in the Ukrainian military and SBU told Ukrainian and Russian outlets that Ukrainian forces and the SBU conducted a drone strike that started a fire at the Aleksinsky Chemical Plant in Tula Oblast.[37] *Astra* stated that Ukrainian drone debris fell on the Aleksinsky Chemical Plant, which produces polymer and composite materials; the Aleksinskaya thermal power plant; and the Tulachermet metallurgical enterprise, which is one of the world's largest producers and suppliers of commercial pig iron and is crucial for Russia's steel industry.[38] Tula Oblast Governor Dmitry Milyaev claimed that Russian forces downed 16 drones over the oblast on January 13 and an additional drone on January 14.[39]

Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities continue efforts to find a solution to the gas crisis in Moldova as the pro-Russian breakaway republic Transnistria continues to refuse help from Ukraine or Moldova. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on January 12 that Ukraine is ready to provide Transnistria with coal but that Transnistrian authorities have not responded to the proposal.[40] Transnistria has also reportedly recently refused offers from Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz and Moldovan state electricity company Energocom to help Transnistria obtain gas from European platforms. In December 2024, tests showed that Moldova could receive gas through the Trans-Balkan pipeline that transits Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine.[41] Moldovan President Maia Sandu stated on January 14 that Moldova has offered medical care to Transnistrian residents but that Transnistrian authorities have refused.[42] Sandu also acknowledged on January 14 that Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselsky recently traveled to Moscow and stated that Moldovan authorities helped the Transnistrian delegation travel through the Chisinau airport (likely because Krasnoselsky does not have a Moldovan passport or residence permit).[43] Sandu stated that Moldovan authorities' involvement in Krasnoselsky's visit to Russia shows that Chisinau is not preventing any efforts to find a solution to the energy crisis. Zelensky recently stated that Russia is using the gas crisis to affect Moldovan public opinion ahead of the Summer 2024 Moldovan parliamentary elections. Moldovan Foreign Minister Mihail Popsoi stated on January 14 that Russia is using its artificially created energy crisis to try to destabilize the Moldovan economy in order to influence the upcoming elections.[44]

Kremlin officials are attempting to exploit the energy crisis in Moldova to set conditions to justify future Russian aggression against Moldova. Russian Presidential Aide and former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev claimed in an interview published on January 14 that Moldovan authorities are to blame for the current energy crisis even though the crisis began on January 1 when Gazprom cut gas supplies to Transnistria while making false allegations about Moldova's debt to Gazprom.[45] Patrushev claimed that Russia's main priority in Moldova is to protect Russia's "compatriots" from "discrimination."[46] Patrushev compared Moldova to Ukraine and alleged that Ukraine's "neo-Nazism and Russophobia" led the country to collapse "long before" Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Patrushev stated that he "does not rule out" that Moldova's "anti-Russian policy" will "lead to Moldova either becoming part of another state [likely in reference to Romania] or ceasing to exist altogether." Russia has long claimed its need to protect its "compatriots abroad" in Ukraine as a justification for its aggression against Ukraine, and Patrushev's statements suggest that the Kremlin is setting conditions to exploit the artificially created gas crisis in Moldova to justify potential future Russian aggression against Moldova as a necessary response to Moldova's policies that threaten Russian "compatriots" in Moldova.[47]

Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor reportedly caused a brief but widespread internet outage in Russia while operating restriction systems of its Sovereign Internet on January 14. Russian state media reported widespread internet outages of major Russian internet domains and online services affecting subscribers of all Russian telecommunications companies.[48] Sources in the Russian telecommunications industry attributed this outage to Roskomnadzor's technical means of

countering threats (TSPU), which Russian authorities use to restrict Russians from accessing blocked domains and services.[49]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin remains committed to achieving the original goals of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in any future peace negotiations — namely the destruction of the Ukrainian state, dissolution of the current Ukrainian government, demilitarization of Ukraine, and a permanent ban on Ukraine's future membership in NATO.
- Patrushev stated that Russia's goals in Ukraine remain unchanged and that Russia remains committed to achieving all of the goals that Russian President Vladimir Putin used to justify the full-scale invasion.
- Russian officials continue to deny the existence of a Ukrainian identity and state that is independent of Russia as part of ongoing Russian efforts to justify the destruction of the Ukrainian state.
- Patrushev stated that he believes that only Russia and the United States should engage in negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine, and senior Kremlin officials are also questioning the role that European countries could play in such negotiations.
- The Kremlin will likely attempt to seize on potential future Russian advances into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast for informational purposes, but these advances, if they occur, are unlikely to have significant operational impact.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a large-scale series of drone and missile strikes against military and defense industrial targets in Russia on the night of January 13 to 14.
- Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities continue efforts to find a solution to the gas crisis in Moldova as the pro-Russian breakaway republic Transnistria continues to refuse help from Ukraine or Moldova.
- Kremlin officials are attempting to exploit the energy crisis in Moldova to set conditions to justify future Russian aggression against Moldova.
- Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor reportedly caused a brief but widespread internet outage in Russia while operating restriction systems of its Sovereign Internet on January 14.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk and Pokrovsk directions.
- Russia continues efforts to bolster military recruitment efforts by offering financial incentives to those who sign military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 13, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 13, 2025, 5:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on January 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces recently cut the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway east of Pokrovsk and the T-0406 Pokrovsk-Mezhova highway southwest of Pokrovsk as part of their efforts to envelop Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad. Geolocated footage published on January 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced east of Myrne (east of Pokrovsk) and seized positions along the T-0504 highway.[1] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on January 13 that elements of the Russian 55th and 74th motorized rifle brigades (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) recently advanced to and cut the T-0406 highway between Kotlyne and Udachne (both southwest of Pokrovsk), and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized a section of both highways.[2] ISW assesses that Russian forces likely seized the remainder of Solone (southwest of Pokrovsk) as part of this advance. Mashovets stated that Russian forces are deploying the 55th and 74th motorized rifle brigades in a two-echelon formation and that elements of the 74th Brigade conduct the initial attacks and elements of the 55th Brigade follow behind to consolidate positions. Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 239th Tank Regiment, 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment, and 67th Rifle Regiment (all 90th Tank Division, CMD) are operating in the Novovasylivka-Uspenivka-Novoleksandriivka area (southwest of Pokrovsk).[3] Mashovets acknowledged that the Russian military command recently redeployed elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade

(51st CAA, formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) from the Kurakhove direction to offensive operations near Vozdvyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk), further substantiating previous milblogger claims that the 5th Brigade was redeployed to the Vozdvyzhenka area[4] Elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade may have participated in the interdiction of the T-0504 highway near Myrne, and the Russian military command's decision to redeploy the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade suggests that it is prioritizing efforts to advance in this area and envelop Pokrovsk from the east over further advances west of Kurakhove. ISW previously noted that Russian forces could also leverage advances east of Pokrovsk near Vozdvyzhenka and Myrne to eliminate the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk along the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway.[5]

Russian forces also advanced in other areas southwest of Pokrovsk amid ongoing efforts to envelop the town on January 12. Geolocated footage published on January 13 indicates that Russian forces seized Pishchane (southwest of Pokrovsk), and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) credited elements of the 55th, 35th, and 74th motorized rifle brigades (all 41st CAA, CMD) with the seizure of the settlement.[6] Russian forces continued attacking near Pokrovsk itself; northeast of Pokrovsk near Baranivka, Zelene Pole, Nova Poltavka, and Tarasivka; east of Pokrovsk near Novotoretske, Novooleksandrivka, Myrolyubivka, Yelyzavetivka, Promin, and Myrnohrad; southeast of Pokrovsk near Lysivka; south of Pokrovsk near Novyi Trud, Zelene, and Shevchenko; southwest of Pokrovsk near Udachne, Uspenivka, Novovasylivka, Novoandriivka, Sibne, and Yasenove; and west of Pokrovsk near Kotlyne on January 12 and 13.[7]

Russian forces likely intend to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) into Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in order to force Ukrainian units to withdraw from the towns in future months. The T-0504 and T-0406 highways are two of the three main east-west GLOCs supporting the Ukrainian force grouping in the Pokrovsk-Myrnohrad area. Russian advances east and west of Pokrovsk may complicate Ukrainian logistics and Ukraine's ability to resupply and redeploy troops to defend Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad. The Russian military command may intend to make further advances north of the T-0504 and T-0406 highways in an effort to force Ukrainian forces to eventually withdraw to the north (rather than to the east or west) to support Russia's envelopment of both settlements and further advances west towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border. The Russian military command likely also hopes to avoid conducting infantry-heavy frontal assaults through the urban areas of Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad and likely assesses that interdicting these GLOCs increases the likelihood that Ukrainian forces will withdraw from these towns and that Russian forces will be able to avoid conducting costly urban combat operations to take the towns.

Russian state-owned energy corporation Gazprom acknowledged that it is considering reducing the size of its central office staff by 40 percent, indicating that Gazprom may be concerned about the long-term effects that the war in Ukraine and the reduction in Russian gas exports to Europe will have on the Russian gas industry. Leningrad-based media outlet 47news, which is affiliated with Russian state censor Roskomnadzor, reported on January 13 that Gazprom's Deputy CEO, Elena Ilyukhina, sent a proposal to the company's CEO, Alexei Miller, on December 23 arguing that Gazprom's central office in St. Petersburg should cut its staff by 40 percent from 4,100 to 2,500.[8] Ilyukhina's proposal to shrink Gazprom's workforce is likely an effort to address economic strains due to the reduction of Russian gas exports to Europe since 2022 and Ukraine's recent refusal to renew a contract to transport Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine.[9] Gazprom official representative Sergei Kupriyanov confirmed the authenticity of the proposal on January 13 during an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS but declined to comment further.[10]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces recently cut the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway east of Pokrovsk and the T-0406 Pokrovsk-Mezhova highway southwest of Pokrovsk as part of their efforts to envelop Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad.**
- **Russian forces likely intend to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) into Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in order to force Ukrainian units to withdraw from the towns in future months.**
- **Russian state-owned energy corporation Gazprom acknowledged that it is considering reducing the size of its central office staff by 40 percent, indicating that Gazprom may be concerned about the long-term effects that the war in Ukraine and the reduction in Russian gas exports to Europe will have on the Russian gas industry.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in the Kharkiv, Borova, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka directions.**
- **South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) reportedly announced that North Korean casualties in Kursk Oblast total roughly 3,000 killed and wounded.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 12, 2025

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Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 12, 2025

Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 12, 2025, 2:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30 am ET on January 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Ukrainian General staff reported on January 12 that Ukrainian forces conducted a high-precision airstrike on the command post of Russia's 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA] (Central Military District) in Novohrodivka, Donetsk Oblast.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the operation is part of a broader series of Ukrainian strikes targeting command posts of Russian forces operating in the Donetsk direction. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on January 8 and 10 that Ukrainian forces struck the command posts of the Russian 8th CAA (Southern Military District) in occupied Khartsyzk, Donetsk Oblast, and the 3rd Army Corps [AC] (Central Military District) in occupied Svitlodarsk, Donetsk Oblast, respectively.[2] Ukrainian strikes on tactical command posts and positions located near the frontline, such as the strike against Novohrodivka, are likely intended to disrupt Russian tactical activity and directly complicate Russian command and control (C2) on the battlefield. Ukrainian strikes against main command posts further in the Russian rear, such as the January 8 strike on the Russian 8th CAA post, are likely aimed at degrading broader Russian logistics and operational planning efforts, which could have impacts on Russia's ability to conduct its military operations in western Donetsk Oblast. ISW has observed that the 2nd CAA is currently leading Russian operations south of Pokrovsk, that the 3rd AC is operating near Chasiv Yar, and that the 8th CAA is leading Russian efforts near Kurakhove.[3]

South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) confirmed that Ukrainian forces captured two North Korean soldiers during combat operations in Kursk Oblast on January 9.[4] The NIS told Agence-France-Presse (AFP) on January 12 that one of the captured North Korean soldiers initially believed that North Korean authorities had sent him to Russia for training but that he realized upon arrival that he would be engaged in combat - in line with recent statements from Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.[5] One of the captured North Korean soldiers also stated that they suffered food and water shortages for several days before their capture and that North Korean forces have suffered significant losses.[6]

Key Takeaways:

- The Ukrainian General staff reported on January 12 that Ukrainian forces conducted a high-precision airstrike on the command post of Russia's 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA] (Central Military District) in Novohrodivka, Donetsk Oblast.
- South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) confirmed that Ukrainian forces captured two North Korean soldiers during combat operations in Kursk Oblast on January 9.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 11, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

Ukrainian forces reportedly captured the first North Korean prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated on January 11 that elements of the Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (SSO) captured a North Korean soldier in Kursk Oblast on January 9 and that Ukrainian Airborne Assault Forces recently captured a second North Korean soldier in the area on an unspecified date.[1] The SBU stated that Ukrainian authorities are working with South Korean intelligence to communicate with the POWs as they do not speak English, Russian, or Ukrainian. One of the POWs was carrying a Russian military registration card from the Tuva Republic that Russian authorities reportedly issued him in Fall 2024. The POW told Ukrainian authorities that he had undergone coordination training with Russian forces for only one week before deploying to combat

and that he thought he was going to a training exercise in Russia, not to the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that usually Russian or North Korean forces kill wounded North Korean personnel in order to conceal their participation in the war.[2]

North Korean forces are reportedly deploying large assault groups to combat operations despite frequent Ukrainian drone strikes, which is likely contributing to North Korea's high casualty rates and will likely affect the lessons that the North Korean military command will learn from fighting in the war. The *Washington Post* reported on January 11 that North Koreans fighting in Kursk Oblast are attacking in large groups with support from Russian artillery and drones, unlike Russian forces who usually move in smaller groups.[3] North Korean soldiers are also reportedly ignoring Ukrainian drones and continuing to move forward despite drone strikes on personnel. The *Washington Post* reported that Russian forces are following behind North Korean advances in order to "stabilize the gains," but a Ukrainian soldier operating in Kursk Oblast reported that communications issues between Russian and North Korean forces may be slowing Russian efforts to consolidate new positions. The Ukrainian soldier stated that North Korean forces launched an assault consisting of 400 to 500 personnel in December 2024, during which North Korean forces outnumbered Ukrainian forces six-to-one. Ammunition shortages reportedly forced the Ukrainian forces to withdraw after eight hours of fighting — suggesting that North Korean forces are heavily relying on a superior number of personnel to advance despite poor tactics. The soldier stated that Ukrainian forces had inflicted significant losses on Russia's 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]), possibly pushing the Russian military command to deploy North Korean forces to Kursk Oblast sooner than planned. Western officials have recently noted that North Korean forces are suffering high casualties, including at least one instance of roughly 1,000 casualties in Kursk Oblast in only one week in late December 2024.[4] Zelensky reported on January 5 that 3,800 North Korean personnel have been killed or wounded in Kursk Oblast — roughly a third of the reported 12,000 total North Korean personnel in Kursk Oblast — and stated that North Korean forces lost up to a battalion of infantry near Makhnovka, Kursk Oblast on January 3 and 4 alone.[5] ISW continues to assess that North Korea's ability to learn and integrate lessons from fighting alongside Russian forces will likely be significantly degraded if the Russian military command uses North Korean troops in highly attritional infantry-led assaults in similar or greater sizes than it conducts with most Russian personnel.[6] North Korean forces' inability or refusal to learn to effectively counter drones will also affect the lessons they can learn from the war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin maintains his maximalist pre-war demands to isolate Ukraine and weaken NATO and reportedly aims to enforce these demands in any possible talks with Western leaders about ending the war in Ukraine. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on January 10, citing a former senior Kremlin official and another source who has discussed this topic with Putin, that Putin will maintain his pre-war demands of preventing Ukraine from joining NATO and forcing NATO to withdraw from deployments in Eastern Europe in any such talks by "chang[ing] the rules" of the international system to ensure that there are "no threats to Russia," a callback to his December 2021 ultimatum to the United States ahead of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[7] Putin demanded in 2021 that NATO commit to not accepting Ukraine or any other countries as new members; the United States commit to upholding the ban on NATO enlargement; NATO not deploy any military forces to states that became NATO members after May 1997; ban any NATO military activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia; ban deployments of intermediate-range missiles in areas that could reach Russian or NATO state territory; and ban the United States from deploying intermediate-range missiles in Europe or nuclear missiles outside of US territory.[8] Putin notably used and intensified this narrative in 2021 to shape the information space and justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine ahead of his February 2022 full-scale invasion even though the prospect of imminent NATO membership for Ukraine did not drive him to invade Ukraine as he claimed.[9] NATO did not undertake any meaningful actions to expand in Eastern Europe or advance Ukraine's future NATO membership between the 2008 Bucharest Declaration, which promised Ukraine and Georgia eventual NATO membership, and 2022.[10] Putin's December 2021 demands notably extend beyond Ukraine and aim to roll NATO back. The Kremlin likely seeks to resurrect this narrative in an attempt to manipulate Western leaders into acquiescing to Putin's maximalist demands that would weaken NATO under the guise of "compromise" in any future peace negotiations regarding the war in Ukraine. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated on January 10 that the Kremlin is ready to hold talks with Trump without any "preconditions," but ISW continues to assess that no negotiations will result in a meaningful or sustainable peace as long as Putin remains committed to his pre-war demands for full Ukrainian capitulation and the weakening of NATO.[11]

Ukrainian forces may have conducted a drone strike against an oil refinery in the Republic of Tatarstan on January 11, but details of the possible strike remain unclear at this time. Russian opposition media outlet Astra reported on January 11 that authorities at the Tanevo plant at the Tatarstan Oil Refinery Complex in Nizhnekamsk, Republic of Tatarstan evacuated the facility due to the risk of drone strikes and that locals reported smoke coming from the plant.[12] Russian sources

published footage on January 11 purportedly showing a fire near the facility, but one source later claimed that there was no fire and that authorities conducted evacuations as part of exercises.[13] Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov's press service refuted reports of a fire, claiming that footage shows a glow after the facility switched to using an intense flare as part of planned changes to the facility's equipment operations.[14] Russian authorities issued a drone threat warning in the Republic of Tatarstan and stopped operations at the Nizhnekamsk Airport, citing unspecified safety concerns.[15]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly captured the first North Korean prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast.
- North Korean forces are reportedly deploying large assault groups to combat operations despite frequent Ukrainian drone strikes, which is likely contributing to North Korea's high casualty rates and will likely affect the lessons that the North Korean military command will learn from fighting in the war.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin maintains his maximalist pre-war demands to isolate Ukraine and weaken NATO and reportedly aims to enforce these demands in any possible talks with Western leaders about ending the war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces may have conducted a drone strike against an oil refinery in the Republic of Tatarstan on January 11, but details of the possible strike remain unclear at this time.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 10, 2025

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Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 10, 2025, 7:30 pm ET

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian ammunition and drone storage warehouse in Rostov Oblast on the night of January 9 to 10. Sources within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) told Ukrainian outlets *Suspline* and *ArmyTV* that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian military warehouse near Chaltyr, Rostov Oblast with drones and Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles.[1] The sources stated that Ukrainian forces used the drones to overwhelm and exhaust Russian air defenses in the area before launching Neptune missiles at the warehouse. The sources stated that Russian forces use reconnaissance drones from this warehouse to correct Russian strikes on Ukrainian cities and frontline positions. Rostov Oblast Governor Yury Slyusar stated that Russian forces downed 16 Ukrainian drones over the oblast and that the strike caused a fire at an industrial enterprise just north of Chaltyr.[2] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* assessed that the fire occurred at a plastic coating production plant in the area. [3]

The Kremlin reiterated that it is ready to hold talks with US President-elect Donald Trump without any "preconditions" but noted that its negotiating position remains unchanged. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded on January 10 to a Trump statement about arranging a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and stated that Putin is open to contact with international leaders and that "no conditions are required for this [contact]."[4] Peskov reiterated, however, that the Kremlin maintains its "repeatedly voiced" position on Ukraine that Putin explicitly defined in June 2024 and repeated in his December 19 Direct Line presentation.[5] Putin demanded in June 2024 that Ukraine replace Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his government under the guise of "denazification," demilitarize, and cede significant swaths of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine to Russia, including areas of Ukraine that Russia does not currently occupy -- all effectively amounting to Ukraine's full capitulation.[6] No negotiations will result in a meaningful or sustainable peace as long as Putin remains committed to these demands -- regardless of the Kremlin's "willingness" to hold talks with Western leaders.[7]

The United States, United Kingdom, and Japan announced new sanctions against Russia on January 10. The US Treasury Department announced on January 10 that the United States imposed sanctions against Russian state-owned Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas, 183 Russian-connected vessels – many of which are part of Russia's shadow fleet – and dozens of oil traders, oilfield service providers, insurance companies, and Russian energy officials.[8] The United Kingdom announced that it also sanctioned Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas on January 10.[9] Japan announced additional sanctions against Russia, including asset freeze measures against 33 organizations and 12 individuals

and export bans and other measures against 53 organizations from countries including Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to strengthen Japan's response to North Korean support for Russia's war in Ukraine.[10]

The EU recently transferred three billion euros (about \$3.07 billion) to Ukraine, the first tranche of EU funding from the profits of frozen Russian assets. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced the transfer on January 10 and stated that Ukraine will use the funds for priority expenditures.[11] The G7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans initiative will provide a total of \$50 billion to Ukraine from the profits of seized Russian assets, including a total of \$20 billion from the EU.[12]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian ammunition and drone storage warehouse in Rostov Oblast on the night of January 9 to 10.
- The Kremlin reiterated that it is ready to hold talks with US President-elect Donald Trump without any "preconditions" but noted that its negotiating position remains unchanged.
- The United States, United Kingdom, and Japan announced new sanctions against Russia on January 10.
- The EU recently transferred three billion euros (about \$3.07 billion) to Ukraine, the first tranche of EU funding from the profits of frozen Russian assets.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- The BBC Russian Service reported on January 10 that a joint investigation conducted with Russian opposition outlet Medizona using open-source data has confirmed that at least 88,055 Russian soldiers have been killed in Ukraine since February 2022.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 9, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 9, 2025, 7:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on January 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine's Western partners reiterated their support for Ukraine and their commitment to the development of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on January 9. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for all participants of the group to sign bilateral security agreements with Ukraine in order to strengthen Ukrainian forces and protect Ukraine's energy sector.[1] Zelensky emphasized the importance of providing Ukraine with more air defense systems and stated that Ukraine wants to supply Ukrainian forces with a record number of domestically produced and internationally procured drones in 2025. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced that the Ukraine Defense Contact Group approved eight roadmap documents that outline the Ukrainian forces' objectives through 2027 in key areas for international cooperation, including air defense, artillery, armored vehicles, drones, air force, and maritime security.[2] Umerov stated that the roadmaps aim to ensure that the Ukrainian military is compatible with NATO and serve as the basis for medium- and long-term support for Ukraine. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told *Bloomberg* ahead of the January 8 Ramstein meeting that Russia has some advantages in the war but is also facing challenges, as evidenced by Russia's turn to North Korea and Iran for assistance in its war against Ukraine.[3]

Ukraine's Western partners announced additional military aid packages at Ramstein Air Base on January 9. Austin announced a new US military aid package for Ukraine under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) valued at approximately \$500 million.[4] The package includes AIM-7, RIM-7, and AIM-9M air defense missiles; air-to-ground munitions; F-16 support equipment; and small-arms ammunition.[5] German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius announced that Germany will provide Ukraine with an unspecified number of IRIS-T air defense missiles.[6] Polish Deputy Defense Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz announced that Poland is also preparing a new aid package for Ukraine. [7] UK Defense Secretary John Healey and Latvian Defense Minister Andris Spruds jointly announced that the drone coalition, including the UK, Latvia, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden, will provide Ukraine with 30,000 drones at an unspecified future time after the coalition signed contracts worth 45 million pounds (\$55.4 million).[8]

Russian elites and high-ranking security officials are reportedly frustrated with Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to wage a full-scale war in Ukraine with half measures and are increasingly concerned with Putin's timeline to end the war. Sources in the Russian presidential administration, State Duma, and wider Russian federal government and regional governments told Russian opposition media outlet *Meduza* that Russian elites are increasingly "disappointed" and "tired" of waiting for the war to end and are growing increasingly concerned about the long-term impact of Western sanctions on Russia's economy.[9] Two sources close to the presidential administration noted that the Russian government currently lacks a clear vision for post-war Russia and that an end to the war could be "critical" for the presidential administration if the administration cannot identify a clear narrative and political framework for Russian society after the war. A source in the Russian presidential administration told *Meduza* that Russian elites, primarily high-ranking security officials, are increasingly frustrated with not having "enough" manpower and materiel to conduct the war and assess that Putin needs to conduct "mobilization" and completely transition Russian society and the Russian economy to a wartime footing.

High-ranking Russian security officials appear to be assessing that Russia needs to intensify its war in Ukraine rather than seek an exit via negotiations. *Meduza*'s report suggests that Russian security and military officials may recognize that the Russian military is not accomplishing significant territorial gains proportionate to the manpower and materiel losses they are incurring in Ukraine. The Russian military command has, thus far, tolerated taking exorbitant personnel losses in exchange for tactically but not operationally significant advances, and Putin's theory of victory is predicated on accepting such losses so long as Russian forces continue to grind forward in Ukraine. [10] Average daily Russian advances slowed by roughly nine square kilometers in December 2024 after three straight months of increasing territorial gains and personnel losses in September, October, and November 2024, however, and the Russian military command may be less willing than Putin to incur such high casualty rates if Russian forces' rate of advance continues to slow.[11] Russian security and military officials do not appear prepared to abandon the war as a result of these losses, however, but are reportedly instead advocating for Putin to intensify Russia's war effort by calling for additional partial reserve callups and a formal decision to transition to a wartime footing, likely in hopes of flooding the battlefield with manpower and materiel. ISW continues to assess that Putin is resistant to conducting a partial involuntary reserve callup or further mobilizing the Russian economy, as such decisions would be deeply unpopular among Russians and would further strain Russia's labor shortages and economy.[12] It remains unclear if this group of Russian security and military officials calling for further manpower and economic mobilization will succeed in convincing Putin to take more dramatic measures to meet the Russian military's needs in Ukraine, although mounting personnel losses and increasing challenges in meeting voluntary recruitment targets may cause Putin to conduct an involuntary partial reserve callup in the near future.

Russian elites' reported diagnosis of the main problem with Russia's conduct of the war is inaccurate, as Russia's failure to restore maneuver to the battlefield — not a shortage of manpower — is the main factor causing Russia's relatively slow rate of advance. Russian elites' reported focus on mobilizing more Russian personnel indicates that the Russian elites likely view a lack of manpower as Russia's largest constraint to achieving rapid success on the battlefield rather than the ineffectiveness of frontline Russian forces, poor campaign-planning abilities of Russian commanders, and significant armored vehicle shortages that Russian forces are currently suffering. [13] Russian forces have recently demonstrated that they are able to make slow, grinding gains through infantry assaults in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions, but their inability to conduct rapid, mechanized maneuver has prevented Russian forces from converting these tactical gains into deep penetrations into Ukrainian rear areas.[14]

Both Russian and Ukrainian forces are struggling to restore maneuver to an increasingly transparent battlefield, but the Russian military will also have to address critical shortcomings in its ability to train frontline commanders and plan military operations if Russian forces aspire to conduct the type of rapid, mechanized maneuver that characterized the first few months of the full-scale invasion in early 2022.[15] Ukrainian military officials recently reported that Russian forces are fielding fewer armored vehicles in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions — the two operational directions with the highest intensity of fighting and where Russia has the densest concentrations of its forces — in favor of highly attritional, infantry-led assaults.[16] Russian forces have suffered high and unsustainable armored vehicle losses and have struggled to protect these vehicles from Ukrainian drones on the frontline over the last year, forcing Russian forces to increasingly limit and prioritize where and when to field armored vehicles and conduct mechanized assaults.[17] Dedicating a significant amount of additional Russian manpower to infantry assaults on critical areas of the frontline would likely allow Russian forces to at least sustain or possibly slightly increase their current pace of advance, but only as fast as Russian infantry can travel on foot — far short of the rapid gains, deep penetrations, and significant battlefield victories that the Russian elites likely desire.

Meduza's report indicates that Russia's security elite — like Putin himself — is uninterested in a negotiated and peaceful resolution to the war in the near future. Several sources told *Meduza* that Russian elites were concerned about Putin's ability to extract his territorial demands — the formal recognition of Russian control over the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts, including the parts Russia currently does not occupy — in possible future negotiations and are focused on creating an "image of victory" in post-war Russia.^[18] This focus on Russian victory in tandem with the elites' reported desire to intensify the war further indicates that Russian elites support Putin's desire to negotiate only on terms dictated by Russia and to achieve a significant victory to justify the war to Russian society. Putin and other senior Kremlin officials have repeatedly indicated that Russia is unwilling to engage in good-faith negotiations or participate in a meaningful peace negotiation except on terms that amount to Ukraine's full capitulation, and the Russian elite will most likely continue to support Putin's demands over engaging in meaningful negotiations.^[19]

A Russian opposition investigative outlet reported that Russian authorities have turned a pretrial detention center (SIZO) in Taganrog, Rostov Oblast into a torture center for Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and imprisoned Ukrainian civilians.^[20] Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported that Russian authorities have been torturing Ukrainian POWs and civilians at the SIZO-2 in Taganrog and reported several accounts from Ukrainian POWs detailing the extent and high frequency of the physical and sexual abuse that the Russian guards inflict on the Ukrainian prisoners. The Ukrainian POWs reported that the Russian guards torture Ukrainian POWs, particularly defenders of Mariupol, to coerce them into pleading guilty to extremism charges in sham trials intended to falsely portray Russia as the liberator of Ukraine and justify its occupation of Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian POWs also told *Mediazona* that Russian authorities use the SIZO-2 facility's reputation for torture to threaten Ukrainian prisoners at other facilities and that these Ukrainians are often willing to do "anything" to avoid being transferred to SIZO-2. *Mediazona* also cited various human rights experts' and lawyers' statements that Russian authorities frequently detain Ukrainian civilians and journalists in occupied Ukraine for even slight suspicion of assisting the Ukrainian military or opposing the Russian war and refuse to release them, provide access to lawyers, or provide medical care. *Mediazona* noted that it is unclear who runs the Taganrog facility, as lawyers for the detained Ukrainians assume that employees of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service run the facility. The Russian Memorial Center for Human Rights — the successor of the Memorial Human Rights Center that focused on human rights abuses in the Soviet era — reported in October 2024 that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) had assumed control over the SIZO-2 facility.^[21] The UN has consistently reported on Russian forces' "widespread and systematic torture" of Ukrainian forces as nearly all interviewed Ukrainian POWs describe consistent experiences of torture while in Russian detention.^[22]

The UN condemned the recent surge in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs. UN Deputy Human Rights Chief Nada Al-Nashif called on Russian authorities on January 8 to halt the summary executions of Ukrainian POWs and prosecute those who engage in these executions following a recent surge in credible reports of more executions.^[23] Al-Nashif noted that the UN has verified 68 cases of Russian forces conducting summary executions of Ukrainian POWs since the start of the war. ISW has frequently reported that Russian forces are conducting frontline executions of Ukrainian POWs and continues to assess that Russian military commanders are either complicit in or enabling their subordinates to conduct these executions.^[24]

The Armenian government approved a draft law on January 9, beginning Armenia's accession process into the EU.^[25] Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced on January 9 that the Armenian government does not object to the law's adoption and noted that the Armenian population must approve the decision on Armenia's possible future EU membership through a referendum.^[26]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's Western partners reiterated their support for Ukraine and their commitment to the development of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on January 9.
- Ukraine's Western partners announced additional military aid packages at Ramstein Air Base on January 9.
- Russian elites and high-ranking security officials are reportedly frustrated with Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to wage a full-scale war in Ukraine with half measures and are increasingly concerned with Putin's timeline to end the war.
- High-ranking Russian security officials appear to be assessing that Russia needs to intensify its war in Ukraine rather than seek an exit via negotiations.
- Russian elites' reported diagnosis of the main problem with Russia's conduct of the war is inaccurate, as Russia's failure to restore maneuver to the battlefield — not a shortage of manpower — is the main factor causing Russia's relatively slow rate of advance.

- *Meduza's report indicates that Russia's security elite — like Putin himself — is uninterested in a negotiated and peaceful resolution to the war in the near future.*
- A Russian opposition investigative outlet reported that Russian authorities have turned a pretrial detention center (SIZO) in Taganrog, Rostov Oblast into a torture center for Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and imprisoned Ukrainian civilians.
- The UN condemned the recent surge in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs.
- The Armenian government approved a draft law on January 9, beginning Armenia's accession process into the EU.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova and Pokrovsk and in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Sudzha.
- Russian officials continue to indicate that the Kremlin intends to further militarize the Russian government and Russian society in the long term.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 8, 2025

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 8, 2025, 5pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on January 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces struck Russia's state-owned Kombinat Kristal oil storage facility near Engels, Saratov Oblast on the night of January 7 to 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and the Unmanned Systems Forces struck the oil storage facility and caused a large fire.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the facility provides fuel for the Russian military's Engels-2 Air Base and noted that strike will create logistical issues for Russia's strategic aircraft based at the airfield. Geolocated footage published on January 8 shows a large fire at the storage facility, and Russian sources noted that the fire continued to burn into the morning of January 8.[2] Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin claimed that debris from a falling drone struck an unspecified industrial facility near Engels but later acknowledged that the strike caused a fire in the area.[3]

Ukrainian forces struck a command post of the Russian 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Southern Military District [SMD]) on January 8 in occupied Khartsyzk, Donetsk Oblast.[4] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the 8th CAA used this command post to coordinate operations in Kurakhove.[5] Russian sources amplified reports on January 8 that a Ukrainian purported Storm Shadow strike against Lgov, Kursk Oblast on December 30 killed at least one serviceman in the Russian 104th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) and three servicemen in the 76th VDV Division.[6]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck Russia's state-owned Kombinat Kristal oil storage facility near Engels, Saratov Oblast on the night of January 7 to 8.
- Ukrainian forces struck a command post of the Russian 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Southern Military District [SMD]) on January 8 in occupied Khartsyzk, Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian forces advanced in Kursk Oblast, in Toretsk, and near Kurakhove.
- Russian forces are increasingly using drones attached to fiber optic cables in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 7, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

Russian forces recently advanced in northwestern Toretsk following several weeks of higher tempo Russian offensive operations and gains in the area. Geolocated footage published on January 6 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along Kvitskova Street and reached the northwestern administrative boundary of Toretsk.[1] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced along Pyrohova Street in northern Toretsk, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this

claim.[2] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces occupy roughly 90 percent of Toretsk, but ISW has only observed geolocated footage to assess that Russian forces occupy approximately 71 percent of the settlement as of January 7.[3] Russian forces intensified offensive operations in the Toretsk direction in June 2024, likely to reduce the Ukrainian salient in the area and deny Ukrainian forces the ability to shell rear Russian areas in the Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk directions, both of which were Russian main efforts at the time.[4] Russian forces originally committed limited combat power, including elements of the Russian 51st Combined Arms Army (CAA) (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]), Territorial Troops, and some elements of the Central Military District [CMD], to intensified operations near Toretsk in June 2024.[5] Russian forces have made creeping and grinding gains within Toretsk and the nearby settlements since June 2024 but have intensified offensive operations in recent weeks and made tactical gains within northern and northwestern Toretsk.[6]

Russian forces appear to be shifting assault tactics in Toretsk in order to overwhelm Ukrainian forces and facilitate tactical gains within the settlement. A spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Toretsk direction reported on January 5 that Russian forces are now attacking in platoons of up to 20 soldiers after previously attacking in fireteams of roughly five personnel.[7] A Russian milblogger claimed on January 7 that Russian forces had made recent gains in Toretsk by attacking in multiple areas at once instead of focusing attacks in one location.[8] Russian forces are likely leveraging their superior manpower quantities to intensify offensive operations and advance within Toretsk.

Russian forces likely intend to exploit their advances in northwestern Toretsk to push further west of Toretsk and Shcherbynivka and along the T-05-16 Toretsk-Kostyantivka highway towards the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Kostyantynivka. Russian forces may intend to consolidate their positions in northwestern Toretsk and central Shcherbynivka (west of Toretsk) to advance along the T-05-16 highway towards Kostyantynivka through Nelipivka, Pleshchiiivka, and Ivanopillia and the fields around these settlements in an effort to threaten the southern tip of Ukraine's Kostyantynivka-Druzhkivka-Kramatorsk fortress belt, which forms the backbone of Ukraine's Donetsk Oblast defense. Russian forces may also attempt to leverage further advances northwest of Toretsk and south of Chasiv Yar towards Bila Hora and Oleksandro-Shultyne to collapse the Ukrainian pocket in this area and level the frontline west and southwest of Kostyantynivka. Such advances would complicate Ukraine's ability to counterattack into Russia's near rear southeast of Chasiv Yar, including towards Klishchiivka, and would allow Russian forces to deploy additional artillery systems within range of Kostyantynivka and operate first-person-view (FPV) drones within range of the town. Russian forces may also attempt to advance west and northwest of Niu York and Leonidivka towards the H-20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway and H-32 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway to pressure Kostyantynivka further from the south and create a more stable southern flank for a push on Kostyantynivka. Russian forces will likely be able to accomplish more rapid advances in the fields and small settlements north and west of Toretsk than they have been able to make in their grinding advances in urban Toretsk. Russian units in this area may attempt to replicate the short, tactically significant mechanized assaults that Russian forces conducted in the Kurakhove and Vuhledar directions in Fall 2024 if they have adequate armored vehicle reserves for this sector.[9]

Russian forces may attempt to leverage tactical gains within and near Toretsk and east of Pokrovsk to eliminate the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk. Russian forces may attempt to leverage gains within Toretsk and in the Toretsk-Shcherbynivka-Niu York area with recent Russian gains east of Pokrovsk to eliminate the Ukrainian pocket between Vozdyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk) and Toretsk. Russian advances east of Pokrovsk and west of Toretsk may be part of an ongoing effort to make opportunistic gains that seize any territory, regardless of that territory's relative insignificance.

Russian forces are likely attempting to break out of Toretsk's urban environment and advance into more open and rural areas that are similar to the areas where Russian forces have made significant gains in other sectors of the front in recent months. Russian forces achieved their most rapid rates of advance while operating in the fields and small settlements in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions in Fall 2024 but have struggled to make rapid advances in urban areas including Toretsk.[10] Russian forces have spent the last six months advancing roughly 12 kilometers through Toretsk and have been fighting through Chasiv Yar since April 2024.[11] Russian forces have, in contrast, advanced roughly 18 kilometers west of Selydove since Russian forces seized the settlement in late October 2024 and roughly 20 kilometers north and northwest of Vuhledar since Russian forces seized the settlement in early October 2024.[12] Russian positions in northwestern Toretsk are currently 12 kilometers from the southeastern outskirts of Kostyantynivka, and Russian forces would likely attempt to advance directly along the T-05-16 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway. Russian forces could possibly be able to threaten significant Ukrainian positions in Kostyantynivka within the coming two or three months but only if they are able to achieve a rate of advance in the open areas northwest of Toretsk similar to the rate at which they have advanced in the

Kurakhove and Pokrovsk directions. The Russian force grouping in Toretsk is likely smaller than the groupings in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions, however, likely does not have prioritized access to Russian reserves, and may not be capable of committing enough troops and materiel to the frontline to accomplish these rates of advance.

Russian forces are unlikely to pose a significant threat to Kostyantynivka unless the Russian military command reinforced the existing force grouping in the area with troops from other frontline areas. Elements of the Russian 51st Combined Arms Army (CAA) (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]), including its 132nd and 9th motorized rifle brigades and 80th "Sparta" Separate Reconnaissance Battalion, have been the main forces conducting offensive operations in Toretsk.^[13] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated in mid-December 2024 that elements of the 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, Central Military District [CMD]) are also operating in Toretsk, but ISW has not observed Russian reporting of this brigade operating in the area.^[14] The Russian military command may decide to continue offensive operations in the Toretsk direction with the 51st CAA forces that are currently deployed in the area, which would likely result in slower, gradual advances as these limited forces are likely degraded after six months of urban combat.

The Russian military command could choose to redeploy forces from other sectors of the front to the Toretsk direction. The Russian military command could redeploy forces from the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions to the Toretsk direction in the future. The Russian military command has been prioritizing offensive operations in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions recently and would likely not redeploy forces from these areas to the Toretsk direction until Russian forces had achieved their objectives in these areas. Russian forces' priority objective in the Pokrovsk direction remains unclear at this time, however, as Russian forces appear to be advancing east and southwest of Pokrovsk in order to envelop the town while also advancing westward from the area south of Pokrovsk towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border.^[15] Russian forces in the Kurakhove direction are currently focused on eliminating the Ukrainian pocket near the Sukhi Yaly River but may also prioritize continued advances westward towards the border area in the future.^[16] A Russian milblogger claimed on January 7 that the Russian military command recently withdrew elements of the 5th and 110th motorized rifle brigades (both of the 51st CAA) from combat operations near Kurakhove in order to rest and reconstitute and will redeploy these forces to an unspecified frontline area at a future date.^[17] The Russian military command will likely choose to recommit the 5th and 110th brigades to a priority sector of the front, which could be Toretsk if the command chooses to make that a priority.

The Russian military command may continue to prioritize the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove direction but deprioritize offensive operations in another sector of the front, such as the Kupyansk or Borova directions, in order to redeploy forces to the Toretsk direction. Russian forces have been conducting offensive operations at varying intensities along the entire front as part of efforts to pin down Ukrainian forces and maintain the strategic initiative.^[18] The Russian military command may prefer to maintain this continuous pressure on Ukrainian forces throughout the frontline over redeploying forces to the Toretsk direction, although the Russian offensive operations towards Kostyantynivka from the Toretsk area may offer Russian forces the opportunity to make the most operationally significant advances along the frontline. ISW is not prepared to offer a forecast of how the Russians will weigh the effort near Toretsk at this time.

The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces struck a command post of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]) in Belya, Kursk Oblast on January 7.^[19] The Ukrainian General Staff did not report if the strike killed or wounded Russian personnel. Ukrainian forces previously conducted a strike, reportedly with HIMARS, against a different 810th Naval Infantry Brigade command post near Lgov, Kursk Oblast on December 25, killing the brigade's deputy commander and other staff officers.^[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces recently advanced in northwestern Toretsk following several weeks of higher tempo Russian offensive operations and gains in the area.
- Russian forces likely intend to exploit their advances in northwestern Toretsk to push further west of Toretsk and Shcherbynivka and along the T-05-16 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway towards the southernmost point of Ukraine's fortress belt in Kostyantynivka.
- Russian forces may attempt to leverage tactical gains within and near Toretsk and east of Pokrovsk to eliminate the Ukrainian salient southwest of Toretsk.
- Russian forces are likely attempting to break out of Toretsk's urban environment and advance into more open and rural areas that are similar to the areas where Russian forces have made significant gains in other sectors of the front in recent months.
- Russian forces are unlikely to pose a significant threat to Kostyantynivka unless the Russian military command reinforced the existing force grouping in the area with troops

from other frontline areas.

- The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces struck a command post of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]) in Belya, Kursk Oblast on January 7.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to promote the "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to place veterans of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in positions in local, regional, and federal governments.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 6, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros

January 6, 2025, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on January 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces recently made tactical advances amid continued intensified offensive operations in the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on January 6. Geolocated footage published on January 5 and 6 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in southern Berdin, central Russkoye Porechnoye, and central Novosotnitsky (all northeast of Sudzha).[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian milbloggers claimed on January 6 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian roughly reduced platoon-sized mechanized assault near Berdin and that Russian forces, including elements of Rosgvardia's "Talib" Group, repelled Ukrainian attacks near Novosotnitsky.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff's Main Directorate [GRU]), 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, and Akhmat Spetsnaz units cleared areas near Berdin and Novosotnitsky.[3] One Russian milblogger characterized recent Ukrainian attacks in Kursk Oblast as enhanced reconnaissance in force operations that could be a diversionary effort for unspecified future operations.[4] Increased Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast may be the beginning stages of a concerted Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast or elsewhere in the theater, though ISW is unprepared to offer any specific forecast.

Russian forces attempted to leverage Ukrainian attacks northeast of Sudzha to attack elsewhere in the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on January 6. Geolocated footage published on January 5 indicates that Russian forces advanced west of Malaya Loknya (northwest of Sudzha).[5] Russian milbloggers claimed on January 6 that Russian forces, including elements of the 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), seized Leonidovo (northwest of Sudzha) and that Russian forces advanced in northeastern Russkoye Porechnoye (northeast of Sudzha).[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced near Makhnovka and Dmitryukov (both southeast of Sudzha).[7] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, including elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]), attacked toward Malaya Loknya and near Novoivanovka, Viktorovka, and Nikolskiy (all northwest of Sudzha).[8] The Russian MoD claimed that "Caspian naval infantry" drone units, likely referring to drone units of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla), are operating in Kursk Oblast, indicating that the Russian military command likely redeployed elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment from western Zaporizhia Oblast to Kursk Oblast.[9]

Ukrainian forces may be continuing to conduct long-range strikes against Russian rear areas in Kursk Oblast as part of efforts to use integrated strike capabilities to support ground operations. Geolocated footage published on January 5 indicates that there were audible explosions near the Russian 3754th Central Aviation Technical Base (military unit 13830) in Kursk City.[10] ISW cannot independently confirm if Ukrainian forces successfully struck the base. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 6 that Ukrainian forces targeted Russian forward and rear positions in Kursk Oblast with missiles several times.[11] The Russian Kursk Oblast Operational Headquarters claimed on January 6 that Russian forces destroyed two Ukrainian missiles over Kursk Oblast.[12] ISW previously assessed that Ukrainian forces may be attempting to integrate longer-range precision strike capabilities and electronic warfare (EW) systems activity to support ground operations.[13]

Russian forces reportedly executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on January 3. A geolocated image published on January 6 shows the aftermath of a reported Russian execution of three bound Ukrainian POWs near Neskuchne (southwest of Velyka Novosilka) on January 3, and Ukrainian officials announced an investigation into the reported executions.[14] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published a purported audio interception on January 6 reportedly of a unit commander of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) issuing an order to execute a Ukrainian POW.[15] ISW continues to assess that Russian commanders are either complacent or enabling their subordinates to execute POWs in clear violation of international law.[16]

Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubinets announced that Ukraine and Russia have reached a preliminary agreement to conduct regular POW exchanges in 2025. Lyubinets indicated on January 6 that the exchanges will include both military POWs and civilian prisoners and stated that Ukraine will prioritize returning prisoners who are seriously ill or wounded.[17] Lyubinets did not provide further details about the preliminary agreement but noted that it remains to be seen "whether the Russian side will keep its word." Ukraine and Russia conducted one of the largest POW exchanges in 2024 on December 30. Russia had consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in POW exchanges before the start of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024, during which Ukrainian forces took many Russians prisoners.[18]

The leaders of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz forces and the far-right paramilitary unit "Rusich" Russian Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group met on January 6 and promoted a message about Russia's ethnic diversity and harmony. Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz commander Apty Alaudinov published a video of his meeting with Rusich Group deputy commander (call sign "Medved") and the self-declared Nazi and the leader of the Rusich Group Alexei Milchakov on January 6.[19] Alaudinov stated that he has no issue with Russian nationalists who love their "nation" (*natsiya*) and want it to be better, as long as they do not claim that their "nation" is superior to all others. Alaudinov stated that he realized that Milchakov loves his country and that there is a lot of work ahead to make Russia "great, powerful, and united." Alaudinov stated that he and Milchakov agreed that they have a "common enemy" and "common goals" and that they need to prevent anyone from "stirring up interethnic and interfaith" tensions, presumably among Russian citizens. Milchakov stated that the meeting was "friendly" and that they discussed possible "interaction" in the war in Ukraine and the development of their "personal relationships."[20] The administration of the Rusich Telegram channel responded to criticisms of the meeting, claiming that Alaudinov invited Milchakov to the meeting, has "never fought against Russia and the Russians," and never spoke against Milchakov's views.[21] The Rusich Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group previously criticized Wagner Group commander Alexander Kuznetsov (call sign "Ratibor") for joining the Akhmat Spetsnaz in April 2024, and Russian milbloggers, including those in Russia's ultranationalist community, have previously criticized Chechen "Akhmat" forces for not contributing to Russian military operations.[22] Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly attempted to portray Russia as an ethnically and religiously harmonious and inclusive society as he balances against xenophobic demands from Russia's pro-war ultranationalist community.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces recently made tactical advances amid continued intensified offensive operations in the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on January 6.
- Russian forces attempted to leverage Ukrainian attacks northeast of Sudzha to attack elsewhere in the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on January 6.
- Ukrainian forces may be continuing to conduct long-range strikes against Russian rear areas in Kursk Oblast as part of efforts to use integrated strike capabilities to support ground operations.
- Russian forces reportedly executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on January 3.
- Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubinets announced that Ukraine and Russia have reached a preliminary agreement to conduct regular POW exchanges in 2025.
- The leaders of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz forces and the far-right paramilitary unit "Rusich" Russian Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group met on January 6 and promoted a message about Russia's ethnic diversity and harmony.
- Russian forces advanced in the Lyman, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk directions, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces seized Kurakhove.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview published on January 5 that 3,800 North Korean personnel have been killed and wounded in Kursk Oblast.

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

January 5, 2025, 7:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on January 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces resumed offensive operations in at least three areas within the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and made tactical advances on January 5. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted multiple roughly company-sized mechanized assaults in the Berdin-Novosotnitsky direction (northeast of Sudzha) in three waves of attack using roughly a battalion's worth of armored vehicles.[1] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also intensified offensive operations in the direction of Leonidovo (southeast of Korenevo) and conducted a reinforced platoon-sized mechanized assault near Pushkarnoye (east of Sudzha).[2] Geolocated footage published on January 5 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced in fields southwest and south of Berdin and entered the southern part of the settlement.[3] Russian milbloggers published updated maps of the Kursk area of operations that indicate that Ukrainian forces also occupy Cherkasskoye Porechnoye, Martynovka, and Mikhaylovka (all northeast of Sudzha and southwest of Berdin) as of January 5 and reported that Ukrainian forces recently entered Novosotnitsky (just east of Berdin); and advanced in fields west of Yamskaya Step (immediately northwest of Berdin) and west of Novaya Sorochina (north of Sudzha and northwest of Berdin).[4] Russian milbloggers reported that Ukrainian forces also conducted offensive operations near Nikolskiy and Alexandriya (east and southeast of Leonidovo, respectively) and north of Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha) towards Pushkarnoye in small infantry groups but did not provide details about the extent of any possible Ukrainian advances in these areas.[5] Russian milbloggers largely expressed concern that the renewed Ukrainian effort in Kursk Oblast may be a diversionary effort and claimed that it is too early to determine whether these operations in Kursk could be part of a future main effort.[6]

Russian forces also advanced southeast of Sudzha and counterattacked against intensified Ukrainian attacks southeast of Korenevo and north of Sudzha on January 5. Geolocated footage published on January 5 shows that Russian forces advanced in western and southern Makhnovka (just southeast of Sudzha).[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that unspecified Russian airborne (VDV) elements pushed Ukrainian forces from Makhnovka and Dmitryukov (immediately northeast of Makhnovka).[8] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces may have advanced into Makhnovka "some time ago, however.[9] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on January 4 that Russian and North Korean forces lost up to a battalion of infantry near Makhnovka on January 3 and 4.[10] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also advanced southeast of Makhnovka and along a road into southeastern Kurilovka (immediately southwest of Makhnovka).[11] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims, however. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced during counterattacks against Ukrainian assaults east of Leonidovo towards Nikolskiy and in the direction of Malaya Loknya (northeast of Sudzha) on January 5.[12] Another Russian milblogger claimed that a Russian mechanized column unsuccessfully attempted to advance towards Malaya Loknya, however.[13] The milblogger complained that Ukrainian forces destroy most Russian mechanized columns in Kursk Oblast. Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]), Chechen Akhmat "Aida" Spetsnaz group, former Wagner Group personnel, and unspecified BARS (Russian Combat Army Reserve) units reportedly defended against the Ukrainian effort in Kursk Oblast.[14]

Russian sources expressed concern about the Russian military's ability to react to Ukraine's ongoing combined arms efforts to integrate electronic warfare (EW) and long-range strike capabilities with ground operations. Several Russian milbloggers claimed on January 5 that Ukrainian EW interference during Ukrainian assaults in Kursk Oblast prevented Russian forces from operating drones in the area, degrading Russian forces' ability to defend against Ukrainian mechanized attacks.[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that drones with fiber optic cables are one of the few Russian drone variants that consistently resist Ukrainian EW countermeasures, although some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces were able to use some first-person view (FPV) and Lancet drones.[16] Russian officials claimed on January 5 that Russian forces downed three unspecified Ukrainian missiles over Kursk Oblast, suggesting that Ukrainian forces may be attempting to integrate longer-range strike capabilities with ground operations and tactical EW systems.[17] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted HIMARS strikes near Bolshoye Soldatskoye and other unspecified areas in Kursk Oblast to prevent Russian forces from deploying reinforcements, artillery systems, and drone operators.[18] Widespread Russian concern over Russia's ability to respond to improved Ukrainian EW technology and long-range strike capabilities indicates that Russian forces may be struggling to quickly adapt to Ukrainian battlefield innovations.

Reports that Ukrainian forces are using long-range fires to interdict Russian rear areas and EW to degrade Russian drones in support of Ukrainian mechanized advances indicate that Ukrainian forces operating in Kursk are employing more effective combined arms tactics.

Russian forces recently advanced east of Pokrovsk amid renewed offensive operations in the area likely aimed at supporting the envelopment of Pokrovsk from the northeast. The tempo of Russian offensive operations has remained low east of Pokrovsk near Myrnohrad, along the Hrodivka-Novohrodivka (southeast of Pokrovsk) line, and further east near Novoleksandrivka and Arkhanhelske since September 2024 when Russian military command reprioritized offensive operations aimed at seizing Selydove (southwest of Pokrovsk), Kurakhove, and Vuhledar over efforts to seize Pokrovsk.^[19] A Russian milblogger claimed on December 29 that Russian forces began intensifying offensive operations east of Pokrovsk, and geolocated footage published on January 1 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Vozdvyzhenka (east of Pokrovsk).^[20] Geolocated footage published on January 5 indicates that Russian forces have likely also seized Svyrydonivka and Tymofivka (both east of Pokrovsk) in recent days and advanced into southeastern Yelyzavetivka (south of Pokrovsk) during a platoon-sized mechanized assault.^[21] Russian milblogger claimed that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance units consolidated positions north of Tymofivka and along the T-0504 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka highway and that Russian forces advanced north of Vozdvyzhenka toward Baranivka, Vodyane Druhe, and Zelene Pole.^[22] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on January 5 that Russian forces recently resumed attacks in the Mykolaivka-Promin and Mykolaivka-Myrnohrad areas (both east of Pokrovsk) and reinforced the Russian grouping in this area with elements of the 589th Motorized Rifle Regiment (27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) and the 137 Motorized Rifle Brigade (reportedly subordinated to the 41st CAA, CMD).^[23]

The recent intensification in the Russian 41st CAA's area of responsibility (AoR) east of Pokrovsk indicates that the Russian military command is still considering the envelopment of Pokrovsk as one of their key operational objectives in this area. A Russian milblogger claimed on January 5 that Russian forces intensified offensive operations east of Pokrovsk over the last week (since December 29), and ISW started observing reports of renewed Russian activity in the area on December 27.^[24] Recent Russian advances near Vozdvyzhenka and Yelyzavetivka and claims that Russian forces are advancing further north towards Vodyane Druhe and Baranivka indicate that Russian forces may be forming a salient that they intend to leverage to envelop Pokrovsk from the northeast. Elements of the Russian 41st CAA have reportedly been regrouping and reconstituting in this area for several months, and Mashovets assessed in late December 2024 that the Russian military command was preparing to activate elements of the 41st CAA east and northeast of Pokrovsk.^[25] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces will have to make significant and rapid advances toward Novoekonomichne (northeast of Pokrovsk) or towards and into Myrnohrad (east of Pokrovsk) if Russian forces intend to envelop Pokrovsk from both the northeast and southwest in the near future.^[26] The Russian military command may assess that advancing through the fields and small settlements along the Vozdvyzhenka-Yelyzavetivka-Myrne-Razine line will be an easier path of advance than attempting to fight through the more urban and heavily defended settlements of Novoekonomichne and Myrnohrad closer to Pokrovsk.

Russian forces may also be exploiting comparatively weaker Ukrainian defensive positions further east and south of Pokrovsk as part of an ongoing effort to seize any territory, regardless of such territory's relative tactical insignificance. ISW previously assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin may have instructed the Russian military command to delay the seizure of Pokrovsk in favor of making further gains through open fields and small settlements, particularly as Russian forces advance closer to the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary.^[27] Russian advances east of Pokrovsk may be opportunistic, aimed at seizing additional territory regardless of its tactical significance, and the beginning of a concerted Russian effort to envelop Pokrovsk from the northeast. Russian advances towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary may also be part of an opportunistic exploitation of weaker Ukrainian positions south of Pokrovsk, while also contributing to Russia's long-term objective of advancing to the administrative boundaries of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.^[28] The Russian military command likely intends to exploit opportunities to advance east and south of Pokrovsk so long as such advances remain expedient and Ukrainian forces continue to repel Russian attacks immediately near and into Pokrovsk itself.

Elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps) are reportedly split between the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions — Russia's two most prioritized sectors of the frontline. Geolocated footage published on January 5 indicates that elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade recently advanced to southeastern Yelyzavetivka and seized Svyrydonivka and Tymofivka (all east of Pokrovsk).^[29] Elements of the 5th

Motorized Rifle Brigade also reportedly participated in the seizure of Vozdvyzhenka as of January 2. [30] The 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade reportedly also participated in the seizure of Kurakhove and the Kurakhivske Thermal Power Plant (TPP) and is conducting clearing operations within the settlement, indicating that elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade are currently split between at least two sectors of the frontline.[31] ISW has not observed reports of other elements of the Russian 51st CAA operating east of Pokrovsk in the 41st CAA's Aor within the past month. The Russian military's decision to split the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade along two prioritized sectors of the frontline and reports of their participation in the seizure of several settlements indicates that the Russian military may be using elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade as a tactical penetration force.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces resumed offensive operations in at least three areas within the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and made tactical advances on January 5.
- Russian forces also advanced southeast of Sudzha and counterattacked against intensified Ukrainian attacks southeast of Korenevo and north of Sudzha on January 5.
- Russian sources expressed concern about the Russian military's ability to react to Ukraine's ongoing combined arms efforts to integrate electronic warfare (EW) and long-range strike capabilities with ground operations.
- Russian forces recently advanced east of Pokrovsk amid renewed offensive operations in the area likely aimed at supporting the envelopment of Pokrovsk from the northeast.
- The recent intensification in the Russian 41st CAA's area of responsibility east of Pokrovsk indicates that the Russian military command is still considering the envelopment of Pokrovsk as one of their key operational objectives in this area.
- Russian forces may also be exploiting comparatively weaker Ukrainian defensive positions further east and south of Pokrovsk as part of an ongoing effort to seize any territory, regardless of such territory's relative tactical insignificance.
- Elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps) are reportedly split between the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions — Russia's two most prioritized sectors of the frontline.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Borova, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Kursk salient and regained lost positions near Chasiv Yar.

[**Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 4, 2025**](#)

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 4, 2025, 4:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11 am ET on January 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly destroyed or damaged over 3,000 Russian tanks and almost 9,000 armored vehicles in 2024 as Russia continues to accrue vehicle losses that are likely unsustainable in the medium-term. Data from the Ukrainian General Staff indicates that Ukrainian forces destroyed or damaged 3,689 tanks, 8,956 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), 13,050 artillery systems, and 407 air defense systems between January 1, 2024 and January 1, 2025.[1] Russian forces reportedly lost at least 197 tanks, 661 armored personnel carriers (APCs), and 65 artillery systems larger than 100mm throughout the frontline during a period of intensified offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast in September and October 2024 and likely sustained a higher rate of tank and armored vehicle losses in June and July 2024 when Russian forces were conducting mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast several times a week that often resulted in armored vehicle losses. [2]

Russia's current armored vehicle and tank production rates indicate that such losses will likely be prohibitive over the longer term, particularly as Russia continues to dip into its Soviet-era stocks.[3] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated in February 2024 that the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) can produce 250-300 "new and thoroughly modernized" tanks per year and can repair roughly 250-300 additional damaged tanks per year, far below Ukraine's estimate of 3,600 Russian tanks lost in 2024.[4] The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) think tank also reported in February 2024 that Russia is likely able to sustain its rate of vehicle losses at that time (over 3,000 armored fighting vehicles including tanks, armored personnel carriers, and infantry fighting vehicles annually as of 2023 and nearly 8,800 between February 2022 and February 2024) for at least

two to three years (until about February 2026 or 2027) by mainly refurbishing vehicles from Soviet-era storage facilities.[5] A social media source tracking Russian military depots via satellite imagery shared an updated assessment of Russian tank and armored vehicle storage facilities on December 22 and assessed that Russian forces have 47 percent of their pre-war tank reserves, 52 percent of pre-war infantry fighting vehicle reserves, and 45 percent of pre-war armored personnel carrier reserves remaining in storage as of a recent unspecified date.[6] The social media source noted that Russian forces have used most of their newer T-90 and T-80 tanks but still have a majority of their older tanks in storage, although some of these tanks have likely been heavily degraded by weather and time. It appears increasingly unlikely that the Russian military can sustain its current annual rate of almost 9,000 armored vehicle losses through 2025. This loss rate is nearly three times the annual loss rate of the first two years of the war according to IISS, suggesting that the February 2024 IISS estimate that Russia can sustain its vehicle losses through 2025 and possibly 2026 is no longer valid.

Russian forces have reportedly been using fewer armored vehicles in assaults in the most active areas of the frontline in recent weeks, possibly in order to conserve these vehicles as Soviet stocks dwindle. Ukrainian military sources have recently noted that Russian forces have been using fewer armored vehicles and conducting fewer mechanized assaults in the Kurakhove direction after suffering significant vehicle losses in October and November 2024.[7] The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kurakhove direction stated on January 3 that Russian forces have switched to mainly using infantry to conduct assaults in the area over the past few weeks and are only using armored vehicles as fire support for infantry assaults.[8] The *New York Times* reported on December 31 that a Ukrainian lieutenant colonel stated that Russian forces are increasingly using electric scooters, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) during assaults in eastern Ukraine, possibly as part of ongoing Russian efforts to offset armored vehicle losses.[9] Russian attacks near more mid-sized, urban settlements such as Kurakhove and Pokrovsk may also be less conducive to mechanized assaults than the small settlements and open fields where Russian forces advanced in most of 2024. Russian forces may be using fewer armored vehicles in the Kurakhove and Pokrovsk directions if the Russian military is struggling to reequip frontline Russian units and formations and if Russian military command does not want to withdraw Russian units for rest and reconstitution and risk further slowing Russian advances in high-priority frontline sectors.[10]

Ukrainian forces struck a gas terminal at the Ust-Luga port in Leningrad Oblast on the night of January 3 to 4. Geolocated footage published on January 4 shows damage to the Novatek gas terminal in Ust-Luga, Leningrad Oblast following a Ukrainian drone strike.[11] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported that its sources stated that Russian forces shot down most of the drones over the port terminal of Novatek subsidiary Novatrans LLC, causing minor damage to a building at the port. [12] Leningrad Oblast Governor Alexander Drozdenko claimed that Russian forces downed three drones near Luga Bay but that there was no damage.[13] Drozdenko claimed that Russian forces destroyed a total of four drones over Leningrad Oblast.[14] The Ust-Luga sea trade port is the second largest in Russia after Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai, and Ukrainian forces conducted a successful drone strike against the Novatek gas terminal at the port in January 2024.[15]

Astra reported that its sources in the Russian emergency services stated that Ukrainian forces targeted the Baltimore Air Base in Voronezh City with at least five drones on the night of January 3 to 4 and that Russian forces shot down all the drones.[16] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that Russian forces destroyed at least five drones over Voronezh City overnight and that several drones fell on residential buildings.[17] Astra also reported on January 4 that its sources in the Kursk Oblast emergency services stated that a Ukrainian HIMARS strike against Ivanovskoye, Kursk Oblast on January 2 killed seven Russian servicemembers.[18] Ukrainian and Russian sources previously stated that the strike targeted a command post of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]).[19]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces reportedly destroyed or damaged over 3,000 Russian tanks and almost 9,000 armored vehicles in 2024 as Russia continues to accrue vehicle losses that are likely unsustainable in the medium-term.**
- **Russian forces have reportedly been using fewer armored vehicles in assaults in the most active areas of the frontline in recent weeks, possibly in order to conserve these vehicles as Soviet stocks dwindle.**
- **Ukrainian forces struck a gas terminal at the Ust-Luga port in Leningrad Oblast on the night of January 3 to 4.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kreminna and likely maintain positions near Kurakhove.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.**

- The Russian government continues to increase financial incentives in order to boost the recruitment of military personnel.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 3, 2025

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 3, 2025, 6:50 pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky outlined the conditions that must be met to push Russia to agree to a "just peace." Zelensky stated on January 2 that achieving a "just peace" in future negotiations – a concept Zelensky highlighted in his December 31 New Year's address – requires a strong Ukrainian military, security guarantees from Western allies, and Ukraine's future membership in NATO and the European Union (EU) in order to deter Russia from renewed aggression against Ukraine.^[1] Zelensky stated that Ukraine cannot achieve a just peace with a small military, such as "40,000 or 50,000 soldiers" – a reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin's initial demand during the Istanbul peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in Spring 2022 that Ukraine demilitarize and only maintain a force of roughly 50,000 personnel.^[2] Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly demanded conditions for ending the war that amount to Ukraine's complete capitulation, including the removal of the legitimate Ukrainian government and Ukraine's demilitarization.^[3] These demands have not changed since 2021.

Ukrainian officials continue to signal that Ukraine is working to further increase its drone and missile capabilities in support of this goal. Zelensky stated on December 31 that Ukrainian missiles and drones are Ukraine's "arguments for a just peace."^[4] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on January 3 that Ukraine plans to produce about 3,000 cruise missiles and "drone-missiles" and at least 30,000 long-range drones in 2025.^[5] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) will also increase production capacity to about \$30 billion worth of goods and attract \$1 billion in foreign investment in 2025. The *Telegraph* reported on January 2 that Ukraine is working to mass produce the "Trembita" cruise missile, which has a 90-mile range, a 40-pound payload, and costs \$10,000 per missile to produce.^[6]

Zelensky reiterated on January 2 that the Ukrainian constitution and Ukrainian law prohibit Ukraine from holding presidential and parliamentary elections during periods of martial law.^[7] Zelensky stated that Ukrainian authorities will be able to consider lifting martial law when the "hot phase" of the war comes to an end and when Ukraine is in a "strong position" with a "strong army, a strong package of weapons, [and] security guarantees." Ukraine's law, "On the legal regime of martial law," originally passed in 2000, states that Ukrainian authorities can end martial law "provided that the threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity has been eliminated."^[8] Kremlin officials, including Putin, have repeatedly used deliberate misreadings of Ukraine's law and constitution to claim that Zelensky is an illegitimate president of Ukraine after Ukraine, adhering to the law and constitution, did not hold elections under martial law in 2024.^[9] The Ukrainian government legally cannot abolish martial law while Russia continues to attack Ukraine.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that several Russian ships will soon arrive at the Port of Tartus in Syria to evacuate Russian military assets to Libya. The GUR reported on January 3 that the *Ivan Gren* Ivan Gren-class large landing ship, the *Alexander Otrakovsky* Ropucha-class landing ship, and the *Sparta* cargo ship are scheduled to arrive at Tartus on January 5 while the *Sparta II* cargo ship and the *Ivan Skobelev* tanker are scheduled to arrive on January 8 to transfer Russian military assets to an unspecified location in Libya.^[10] The GUR previously reported in mid-December 2024 that Russia had deployed the *Ivan Gren*, *Alexander Otrakovsky*, *Sparta*, and *Sparta II* from northern Russia to Syria.^[11]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky outlined the conditions that must be met to push Russia to agree to a "just peace."
- Ukrainian officials continue to signal that Ukraine is working to further increase its drone and missile capabilities in support of this goal.
- Zelensky reiterated on January 2 that the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian law prohibit Ukraine from holding presidential and parliamentary elections during periods of martial law.

- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that several Russian ships will soon arrive at the Port of Tartus in Syria to evacuate Russian military assets to Libya.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to support its official "Glaz/Groza" reconnaissance and strike unit coordination software package despite Russian soldiers' continued reliance on other ad hoc communications systems.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 2, 2025

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

January 2, 2025, 8:10pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30 pm ET on January 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the January 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine's decision to not renew its contract to transport Russian gas through Ukrainian territory will likely significantly impact Russian gas revenues despite Kremlin posturing to the contrary. Russian and Ukrainian authorities confirmed that Russian gas ceased flowing through Ukrainian territory as of the morning of January 1, and Russian officials and media largely projected confidence that the cessation of gas supplies through Ukraine will harm Europe but not Russia.^[1] The loss of gas revenue will likely negatively affect Russian state energy operator Gazprom, which has been struggling with decreasing gas revenue from Europe since 2022.^[2] Bloomberg estimated on January 2 that Gazprom will likely lose \$6 billion in gas revenues per year due to the cessation of gas transports through Ukraine.^[3] The BBC Russian Service noted on January 1 that Gazprom's main source of income in 2021 came from Russia's 45 percent share of the European gas market at the time but that Russia now has only one remaining route to export gas to Europe — the TurkStream pipeline bypassing Ukraine through the Black Sea to Turkey — and that Russian gas currently only accounts for five percent of the European market.^[4] The BBC noted that Slovakia and Austria — the final destinations of the blocked Russian gas through Ukraine — have both fully met their energy needs through alternative sources. The Kremlin's efforts to project confidence about the cessation of gas transit through Ukraine mirrors its efforts to coerce Europe into authorizing Russian gas transit to Europe through the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in Winter 2021–2022, and the Kremlin's renewed posturing in Winter 2024–2025 likely aim to extract economic or diplomatic concessions from Europe, undermine unity within the European Union (EU), and drive a wedge between the US and EU.^[5]

Gazprom is likely attempting to exploit the cessation of gas transits through Ukraine to create an artificial energy crisis to destabilize Moldova. Gazprom shut off gas supplies to Transnistria via Ukraine on January 1, claiming that Moldova failed to pay a debt worth \$709 million.^[6] An audit by British and Norwegian audit firms, however, found in 2022 that Moldova owed Gazprom only \$8.6 million.^[7] Moldova recently held talks with Gazprom about transporting gas to Transnistria via the TurkStream pipeline that runs from Russia to Turkey, but Gazprom refused and did not make the arrangements to do so by the deadline on December 16.^[8] Free Gazprom gas has long powered Transnistria's Cuciurgan power station, which exported a significant amount of electricity to Moldova and used the profits from these sales to support Transnistria's budget.^[9] The Cuciurgan power station switched to coal reserves on January 1, which reportedly can last about 50 days.^[10] Transnistrian gas company Tiraspoltransgaz stopped gas supplies to most consumers in Transnistria and shut off most of the hot water and heat on January 1.^[11] Moldova increased its electricity imports from Romania to make up for lost supplies from Transnistria.^[12] Moldovan gas company Moldovagaz and Moldovan state electricity company Energocom offered on January 1 to provide Tiraspoltransgaz technical and commercial assistance to obtain gas from European markets after successful tests on December 31, 2024 to supply Moldova with gas through Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine.^[13]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signaled that Ukraine will increase drone and missile strikes against Russia in 2025 as part of efforts to bring Russia to accept Ukraine's demands for a "just peace" in future negotiations. Zelensky stated in his New Years Eve address on December 31, 2024, that Ukraine seeks to accomplish a "just peace" in the war and announced that Ukraine is once again building its own missiles and produced over one million drones in 2024.^[14] Zelensky noted that Ukraine is producing large quantities of "Palyanytsya," "Peklo," "Ruta," "Neptune," and "Sapsan" missiles, some of which Ukrainian forces have yet to use. Zelensky emphasized that the Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) produced 30 percent of all military equipment that Ukrainian

forces used on the frontlines in 2024. Zelensky described Ukrainian missiles and drones as Ukrainian "arguments for a just peace" and noted that Ukraine can only accomplish such a peace if it is strong.

Russia intends to issue Russian licenses for the operation of all six of Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant's (ZNPP) reactors by 2028 as part of Moscow's long-term efforts to legitimize its illegal occupation of the plant and exploit Ukraine's energy supplies. ZNPP occupation director Yuriy Chernichuk announced on January 1 that Russian occupation officials intend to obtain licenses from Moscow to operate all six of the ZNPP's nuclear reactors by 2028, obtaining a license for the operation of the first reactor by the end of 2025.[15] Ukrainian licenses for the first ZNPP reactor will expire in December 2025, and the Kremlin claimed in 2022 that all licenses would be valid until their expiration or until the ZNPP received Russian licenses.[16] Chernichuk also announced on January 2 that occupation officials plan to replace the ZNPP's foreign-sourced equipment with Russian-made equipment, that Russia will use the ZNPP reactors to supply energy to all of occupied Ukraine, and that Russia will also use the ZNPP to generate power for Russian regions west of the Ural mountains. [17] Chernichuk's stated goal of acquiring licenses for Russia to operate ZNPP's nuclear reactors signals Moscow's long-term territorial intentions and aligns with Russia's broader efforts to de facto legitimize Russia's occupation of the ZNPP and further steal Ukraine's critical energy supply.

Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike in Kursk Oblast, reportedly against a Russian military command post. Geolocated footage published on January 2 showed a damaged building and Russian military vehicles after a Ukrainian missile strike against Ivanovskoye, Kursk Oblast.[18] Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike, possibly with HIMARS, against the command post of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]) in the settlement, while Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexander Khinshtain claimed that the strike damaged the House of Culture in the area.[19] A Russian milblogger claimed that the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade was holding an award ceremony at the House of Culture.[20]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) specified new details about the December 31 Ukrainian naval drone strike against Russian Mi-8 helicopters in the Black Sea as Ukrainian strikes continue to degrade Russian operations in occupied Crimea. The GUR reported on January 2 that a Ukrainian Magura V5 naval drone used missiles to destroy two Russian Mi-8 helicopters and damage one in the Black Sea on December 31.[21] The GUR previously reported that the naval drone strike only destroyed one helicopter and damaged another.[22] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk doubted Russian reports that there were eight crewmembers aboard the helicopters but noted that the loss of highly trained helicopter crews is significant.[23] Pletenchuk also noted that Ukrainian strikes against occupied Crimea have deprived Russian forces of sustainable logistics in the area, including by damaging the railway on the Kerch Strait Bridge and ferries that transported railway cars and fuel tankers.[24] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian military vessels are trying to hide from Ukrainian naval strikes in bays and ports and that Russian forces will only be able to repel Ukrainian naval drones equipped with missiles with jet and fighter aircraft.[25] ISW assesses that increased Ukrainian offensive capabilities in the Black Sea will most likely threaten Russian control over occupied Crimea.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's decision to not renew its contract to transport Russian gas through Ukrainian territory will likely significantly impact Russian gas revenues despite Kremlin posturing to the contrary.
- Gazprom is likely attempting to exploit the cessation of gas transits through Ukraine to create an artificial energy crisis to destabilize Moldova.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signaled that Ukraine will increase drone and missile strikes against Russia in 2025 as part of efforts to bring Russia to accept Ukraine's demands for a "just peace" in future negotiations.
- Russia intends to issue Russian licenses for the operation of all six of Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant's (ZNPP) reactors by 2028 as part of Moscow's long-term efforts to legitimize its illegal occupation of the plant and exploit Ukraine's energy supplies.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike in Kursk Oblast, reportedly against a Russian military command post.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) specified new details about the December 31 Ukrainian naval drone strike against Russian Mi-8 helicopters in the Black Sea as Ukrainian strikes continue to degrade Russian operations in occupied Crimea.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar and in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to inadequately supply Russian military personnel with basic equipment and ammunition, forcing soldiers to provide

their own materiel.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 31, 2024

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

December 31, 2024, 7:15 pm ET

Russian forces gained 4,168 square kilometers, largely comprised of fields and small settlements in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, at a reported cost of over 420,000 casualties in 2024. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on December 30 that Russian forces suffered 427,000 casualties in 2024.^[1] ISW has observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces advanced 4,168 square kilometers in 2024, indicating that Russian forces have suffered approximately 102 casualties per square kilometer of Ukrainian territory seized. ISW previously observed that Russian forces gained 2,356 square kilometers in exchange for an estimated 125,800 casualties during a period of intensified Russian offensive operations in September, October, and November 2024.^[2] Russian forces made 56.5 percent of their 2024 territorial gains during the September through November 2024 period. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on December 24 that 440,000 recruits signed military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in 2024, suggesting that Russia is likely recruiting just enough military personnel to replace its recently high casualty rates one for one.^[3]

Russian advances have slowed in December 2024, however. ISW has observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces gained 593 square kilometers or 18.1 square kilometers per day in December 2024, while the number of daily Russian casualties in December 2024 remained similar to the estimated daily casualty rate in November 2024. The Ukrainian General Staff reported a daily Russian personnel casualty average of 1,585 in December 2024, marking a fourth all-time high of Russia's daily casualty rate following reports that Russia's average daily Russian personnel casualty reached a new all-time high of 1,523 casualties per day in November 2024.^[4] Russian forces were advancing at the notably higher rate of 27.96 square kilometers per day in November 2024.^[5] Syrskyi stated on December 30 that Russian forces have suffered 1,700 casualties per day over the past week (since December 23), indicating the Russian forces may have suffered an even higher casualty rate in the last few weeks of 2024 even as Russian advances slowed.^[6] The Russian military command likely tolerated record levels of personnel casualties from September through November 2024 to facilitate larger territorial gains, but it remains unclear if the Russian military command will be willing to sustain such casualties if Russian forces' rate of advance continues to decline as Russian forces continue to advance on more heavily defended settlements such as Pokrovsk.

The Russian military command largely prioritized efforts to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast and establish a buffer zone in northern Kharkiv Oblast in 2024 but failed to accomplish these goals. Intensified Russian offensive operations in early 2024 resulted in the seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February 2024 and subsequent Russian advances west of Avdiivka in the directions of Pokrovsk and Selydove throughout spring, summer, and fall 2024.^[7] Russian forces also launched a largely unsuccessful offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast aimed at creating an unspecified "buffer zone" to defend Belgorod City from Ukrainian shelling in May 2024 and renewed offensive operations near Toretsk and west and southwest of Donetsk City in June and July 2024.^[8] Western and Ukrainian sources assessed in 2023 and 2024 that Russia intended to seize the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk by the end of 2024, but Russia's slow advances in early and mid-2024 likely prompted the Russian military command to reassess and identify the seizure of Pokrovsk as Russian forces' primary offensive effort for the remainder of 2024.^[9]

Russian forces thus turned back to the Pokrovsk direction in late Summer and early Fall 2024 amid a surprise Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and successfully exploited the seizure of Selydove and Vuhledar to make further advances around Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and later Velyka Novosilka. Russian forces recently seized Kurakhove and are attempting to envelop Velyka Novosilka from the north and south.^[10] Russian forces heavily relied on platoon-, company-, and battalion-sized mechanized assaults to advance in the open fields in the Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions in recent months but consistently incurred significant armored vehicles losses during these assaults.^[11] Russian forces are currently attempting to envelop Pokrovsk from the south and northeast but have thus far failed to make significant recent progress in this effort.^[12] Russian forces may also at least temporarily be shifting their focus from the envelopment of Pokrovsk to making opportunistic advances due west towards the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border during a critical moment of Russia's ongoing efforts to undermine Western support for Ukraine.^[13]

Russian forces have seized four mid-sized settlements - Avdiivka, Selydove, Vuhledar, and Kurakhove - in all of 2024, the largest of which had a pre-war population of just over 31,000 people. Russian forces' rate of advance largely stalled around the few more urban settlements that Russian forces sought to take in 2024. Russian forces expended roughly four months in seizing Avdiivka in late 2023 and early 2024 and two months each on efforts to seize and envelop Selydove and Kurakhove in 2024. Russian forces also incurred significant personnel losses during efforts to take these settlements, and Ukrainian officials have recently estimated that Russian forces lost nearly 3,000 personnel in the Pokrovsk direction in two weeks in mid-December 2024.[14] ISW has not assessed that any of the settlements that Russian forces seized in 2024 are operationally significant, as seizing these settlements has not allowed Russian forces to threaten any notable Ukrainian defensive nodes, and Russian forces have failed to conduct the kind of rapid, mechanized maneuver necessary to convert these tactical gains into deep penetrations of Ukraine's rear. ISW currently assesses that Russian forces must capture approximately 8,559 square kilometers, which include significant Ukrainian defensive positions and large cities along Ukraine's fortress belt, to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast. **Russian forces would require just over two years to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast at their 2024 rates of advance, assuming that all their advances were confined to Donetsk, that they can seize large urban areas as easily as small villages and fields, and that the Ukrainians do not conduct any significant counterattacks in Donetsk.**

Ukrainian forces have yet to stop Russian forces from advancing in their priority sectors, however, and Western aid remains critical to Ukraine's ability to stabilize the frontline in 2025. Ukrainian defenders have largely stalled Russian advances near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, but Russian forces continue to make gradual, grinding advances in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka directions. Ongoing Ukrainian manpower constraints and morale issues are also creating vulnerabilities in Ukraine's defensive lines, and Ukrainian officials must address these issues and steel defenders against Russian infantry assaults in eastern and southern Ukraine.[15] Russian forces, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, are currently operating under a theory of victory that assumes that Russian forces can indefinitely advance in Ukraine but fails to account for the possibility that Ukrainian forces could inflict losses sufficient to stall or stop future Russian offensive operations.[16] Ukrainian forces, with support from Ukraine's Western allies, must therefore work to integrate Ukrainian drone operations, sufficiently resourced artillery and long-range strike capabilities, and committed Ukrainian infantry units to defend against Russian advances and undermine Putin's theory of victory in 2025.

Russian President Vladimir Putin officially declared 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" during his New Year's address on December 31 - signaling the Kremlin's continued efforts to militarize Russian society and maintain regime stability by appeasing the growing Russian veteran community.[17] Putin claimed that the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" will honor current Russian servicemen, the 80th Anniversary of the Second World War, and other veterans who fought for Russia. Putin approved a list of instructions for the Russian government on December 20 that aims to expand Russia's network of military-patriotic educational programs as part of his "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" policies.[18] Putin will likely also continue to expand and institutionalize additional support programs for veterans as part of the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland," many of which the Kremlin began in 2023 and 2024 likely out of a concern that an ever-growing number of dissatisfied Russian veterans could threaten the stability of Putin's regime. Putin notably created and significantly expanded the functions of Russia's Defenders of Fatherland State Fund in 2023 and 2024, which pledges to support Russian veterans who fought in Ukraine.[19] Putin also introduced the "Time of Heroes" state-wide initiative in Spring 2024, which aims to install Kremlin-selected Russian veterans into positions of power within the Russian government and business sector, and Russian authorities have already appointed two participants of this program to lead two major Russian military-patriotic institutions.[20] Putin also passed numerous decrees offering veterans subsidies and benefits throughout 2024 and will likely continue to do so in 2025 - despite the increasing costs of such policies - to ensure that the veteran community does not harbor grievances against the Kremlin and its war effort in Ukraine.[21] Putin's commitment to initiatives such as the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" and other support efforts for veterans are increasingly committing Russia to long-term financial obligations.

Ukrainian naval drones reportedly downed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter near occupied Cape Tarkhankut, Crimea, reportedly marking the first time that a naval drone has shot down an air target. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 31 that it destroyed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter using the R-73 "Sea Dragon" missiles launched from a Magura V5 naval strike drone in the Black Sea.[22] The GUR noted that Ukrainian naval drones damaged another Russian Mi-8 helicopter but that the damaged helicopter eventually landed at an airfield. The GUR stated that the naval drone strike against Russian Mi-8 helicopters marked the historic first destruction of an aerial target with a naval drone. Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhayev claimed that Russian forces repelled four Ukrainian aerial drones and two naval drones over and in the Black Sea overnight on December 31, but did not acknowledge the downing of the Mi-

8 helicopter.[23] Russian milbloggers expressed concerns that Ukraine's ability to incorporate Ukrainian naval drones as part of Ukraine's air defense capabilities will complicate Russia's efforts to destroy Ukrainian naval drones, as Russia relies on helicopters and Su-30SM fighter jets to target naval drones that are far from Crimea's shore.[24] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces also destroyed a Russian Tor air defense system in southern Ukraine, and a local Crimean source claimed that Ukrainian forces may have struck a Tor air defense system near occupied Kozacha Bay (southwest of Sevastopol).[25]

Ukrainian forces struck the Yarsevskaya oil depot in Smolensk Oblast and a building used by the Russian military in Lgov, Kursk Oblast on December 30 and 31. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 31 that Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (SSO) and Unmanned Systems Forces (USF) launched drone strikes against the Yarsevskaya oil depot, resulting in a series of intense explosions, heavy smoke, and oil tanks catching on fire near the depot.[26] The Ukrainian General Staff added that the nearby oil refinery supplied the Russian war effort. Russian authorities confirmed that Ukrainian drones struck the oil refinery in Yarosevsky Raion, resulting in an oil spill and fire at the refinery.[27] Yartsevsky Raion Head Roman Zakharov confirmed the Ukrainian drone strike on social media but later deleted the post and amplified Smolensk Oblast Governor Vasily Anokhin's claim that the debris from downed Ukrainian drones resulted in a fire at the oil refinery.[28] Russian opposition outlet Astra, citing unnamed sources, reported that Ukrainian forces launched at least six Storm Shadow missile against a building used by Russian forces in Lgov on December 30. [29] Astra reported that the strike killed eight Russian servicemembers, wounded several Russian servicemembers, and wounded one civilian. Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexander Khinshtain claimed that Ukrainian forces struck an apartment building in Lgov.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces gained 4,168 square kilometers, largely comprised of fields and small settlements in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, at a reported cost of over 420,000 casualties in 2024.
- The Russian military command largely prioritized efforts to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast and establish a buffer zone in northern Kharkiv Oblast in 2024 but failed to accomplish these goals.
- Russian forces have seized four mid-sized settlements - Avdiivka, Selydove, Vuhledar, and Kurakhove - in all of 2024, the largest of which had a pre-war population of just over 31,000 people.
- Russian forces would require just over two years to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast at their 2024 rates of advance, assuming that all their advances were confined to Donetsk, that they can seize large urban areas as easily as small villages and fields, and that the Ukrainians do not conduct any significant counterattacks in Donetsk.
- Ukrainian forces have yet to stop Russian forces from advancing in their priority sectors, however, and Western aid remains critical to Ukraine's ability to stabilize the frontline in 2025.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin officially declared 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" during his New Years' address on December 31 - signaling the Kremlin's continued efforts to militarize Russian society and maintain regime stability by appeasing the growing Russian veteran community.
- Ukrainian naval drones reportedly downed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter near occupied Cape Tarkhankut, Crimea, reportedly marking the first time that a naval drone has shot down an air target.
- Ukrainian forces struck the Yarsevskaya oil depot in Smolensk Oblast and a building used by the Russian military in Lgov, Kursk Oblast on December 30 and 31.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kreminna and in Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Siversk, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- The Russian government will deprive prisoners who volunteer to fight in Ukraine of the one-time enlistment bonus starting January 1, 2025, marking another instance of Russia trying to cut the mounting short- and long-term costs of war.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 30, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Volkov, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 30, 2024, 6:50pm ET

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Russia's demand that Ukraine renounce its right to sovereignty and territorial integrity as a precondition to start peace talks, indicating that Russia is not interested in good faith negotiations. Lavrov stated in an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS published on December 30 that Russia will not participate in any negotiations to end its war in Ukraine unless Ukraine renounces its right and objective of liberating its territory up to its internationally recognized 1991 borders.[1] Lavrov added that Russia considers Ukraine's objective of liberating its territory to its internationally recognized 1991 borders an "ultimatum." The Kremlin is likely attempting to impose unrealistic demands on Ukraine that violate international law to stymie legitimate good faith negotiations. Russia is also likely attempting to force the West into coercing Ukraine into acknowledging and accepting territorial concessions that will benefit Russia in the long term. Lavrov and other Russian officials have previously dismissed Ukraine's right to sovereignty and territorial integrity as a legitimate negotiating position.[2] ISW continues to assess that Russia is not interested in good faith negotiations with Ukraine and will continue to pursue Ukraine's total capitulation.[3]

The Kremlin appears to be prioritizing Russia's force generation requirements and domestic political stability over efforts to mitigate economic pressure and labor shortages going into 2025. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on December 30 stating that migrants who entered Russia illegally must apply for legal status or leave Russia by April 30, 2025.[4] Migrants can obtain legal status by submitting to a series of health screenings; a Russian language, history, and legal exam; and by paying off all debts, or by signing a military service contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). Russia is reportedly suffering a labor shortage of 1.5 million people, and Putin's decree will likely further exacerbate Russia's ongoing labor shortages if a significant number of migrants who work in food service, transportation, and other low-skilled industries either leave Russia or forcibly join the Russian military.[5] It remains unclear if Russian authorities will enforce this decree, although their decision whether to enforce this decree will likely indicate how Russian authorities are prioritizing responding to political, force generation, and economic labor market challenges. A decision to enforce this decree and begin deporting migrants would indicate that Russian authorities are prioritizing placating complaints among Russian pro-war ultra-nationalists and addressing possible regime security issues associated with ongoing reports of migrants committing crimes and terrorist acts in Russia than addressing Russia's economic issues. A decision not to enforce the decree would indicate that Russian authorities are more concerned with utilizing migrant labor to overcome Russia's economic issues and labor shortages than messaging to the Kremlin's ultranationalist constituency.

US President Joe Biden announced an additional military aid package for Ukraine worth \$2.5 billion on December 30.[6] The package is funded by a combined \$1.25 billion from the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) and \$1.22 billion from the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAII) and will include thousands of artillery rounds, thousands of rockets, and hundreds of armored vehicles. The US Department of Defense (DoD) reported that the package also includes: munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS); HAWK air defense munitions; Stinger missiles; counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (c-UAS) munitions; ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS); High-speed Anti-radiation missiles (HARMs); Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; Tube-launched, Optically-guided, Wire-tracked (TOW) missiles; and other materiel.[7]

Russia and Ukraine conducted one of the largest prisoners of war (POW) exchanges in 2024 on December 30, resulting in the return of 189 Ukrainian POWs — some of whom spent over two years in Russian captivity since early 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on December 30 that Ukraine returned 189 Ukrainians, some of whom defended Ukrainian positions at the Azovstal Steel Plant, Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), and Snake Island in early 2022.[8] Zelensky added that Ukraine also returned two civilians whom Russian forces captured during the siege of Mariupol. Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs reported that this POW exchange was one of the largest POWs exchanges since the January 3, 2024, and that Ukraine returned 173 privates and sergeants and 14 officers: 87 servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, 43 of Ukraine's National Guard, 33 of Ukraine's Border Guards Service, and 24 of the Ukrainian Navy. [9] The Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs added that some of the servicemen also participated in combat operations in Kursk, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. The Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs noted that in total 3,956 Ukrainian POWs returned to Ukraine, of which 1,358 returned in 2024. The Russian MoD announced on December 30 that Russia exchanged 150 Ukrainian POWs for 150 Russian POWs.[10]

Russian border guards withdrew from the Agarak border checkpoint on the Armenia-Iran border on December 30 after controlling the checkpoint for over 30 years. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that Armenian border troops began solely patrolling the Agarak checkpoint without Russian forces on December 30, indicating that Russian border guards likely withdrew from the area in accordance with the October 2024 agreement that Armenian border guards will regain control of the checkpoint starting January 1, 2025.[11] Pashinyan added that Russian border guards have been operating at the Agarak checkpoint since 1991. Russia's withdrawal from

Agarak checkpoint comes five months after Russian border guards completed withdrew from Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport and further showcases Armenia's commitment to reducing bilateral security relations with Russia.[12]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Russia's demand that Ukraine renounce its right to sovereignty and territorial integrity as a precondition to start peace talks, indicating that Russia is not interested in good faith negotiations.
- The Kremlin appears to be prioritizing Russia's force generation requirements and domestic political stability over efforts to mitigate economic pressure and labor shortages going into 2025.
- US President Joe Biden announced an additional military aid package for Ukraine worth \$2.5 billion on December 30.
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- Russian border guards withdrew from the Agarak border checkpoint on the Armenia-Iran border on December 30 after controlling the checkpoint for over 30 years.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka.
- A Russian milblogger who focuses on Russian veteran issues claimed that Russian forces have significantly strengthened the Russian international border with Ukraine since 2022 and no longer overwhelmingly rely on conscripts and alleged deserters as border security.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 29, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 29, 2024, 6:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15 pm ET on December 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explicitly rejected two suggestions reportedly considered by US President-elect Donald Trump's team in early November 2024 as conditions for ending the war in Ukraine – the delay of Ukraine's membership in NATO for 20 years and the deployment of European peacekeepers in Ukraine. Lavrov stated in an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS published on December 29 that Russia is "not satisfied" with the Trump team's reported early November 2024 proposals to delay Ukraine's membership in NATO for 20 years and to station a European peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine.[1] Lavrov is amplifying Russian President Vladimir Putin's December 26 explicit rejection of the Trump team's reported suggestion to delay Ukraine's membership in NATO for 20 years.[2] Lavrov stated that any agreements to end the war in Ukraine "must eliminate the root causes" of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and "must establish a mechanism to make it impossible to violate them." [3] Lavrov claimed in an interview on December 26 that the two main "root causes" of the war are NATO's alleged violation of obligations to not advance eastward and "aggressive absorption" of areas near Russia's borders and the Ukrainian government's alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians and Russian language, media, and culture in Ukraine. [4] Lavrov's statements are part of ongoing senior Russian officials' statements that the Kremlin refuses to consider any compromises on Putin's late 2021 and early 2022 demands.[5] These demands include forcing Ukraine to become a permanently neutral state that will never join NATO, imposing severe limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military, and removing the Ukrainian government.[6]

Russian President Vladimir Putin enshrined his alleged policy of Ukrainian "denazification" in a new state strategy document about countering extremism, demonstrating how Putin continues

to make the same demands for the removal of the Ukrainian government that he made in 2022 when launching the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin signed on December 28 a new Strategy for Countering Extremism in Russia.[7] Putin signed Russia's last iteration of such strategy in 2020. The 2024 strategy includes mentions of "Russophobia" for the first time, which the document defines as the "unfriendly, biased, and hostile" attitudes and "discriminatory actions" towards Russian citizens, language, and culture by states that are unfriendly to Russia. The 2024 document, unlike the 2020 version, also lists Ukraine as a main source of extremism and accuses Ukraine of disseminating neo-Nazi ideas. The document states that Russia needs to "eliminate" the source of extremist threats that come from Ukraine. Putin claimed in February 2022 when he launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that Russia was pursuing the "denazification" of Ukraine – an attempt to justify the removal of the legitimate, democratically elected government of Ukraine.[8] Putin has made similar statements recently reiterating his refusal to consider compromises on his late 2021 and early 2022 demands.[9] The document's mentions of "Russophobia" and "discrimination" against Russian citizens, language, and culture also align with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's recent talking point that such alleged discrimination by the current Ukrainian authorities is a "root cause" of Russia's war against Ukraine that any future negotiations must address.[10] The Kremlin will likely exploit this new strategy document to justify its calls for the removal of the Ukrainian government as "anti-extremist" measures.

The strategy document also included points that will resonate with the Russian pro-war ultranationalist community, likely as part of Kremlin efforts to placate and garner favor with this key constituency. The document claims that migrants in Russia are conducting illegal activities that are contributing to the spread of extremism in unspecified federal subjects in Russia.[11] The document calls for Russia to tighten its migration policy, including by combatting "propaganda events" that take place in migrant residences. The document also calls for Russia to adjust educational programs in the South Caucasus and Central Asia to prevent the spread of Russophobia. The Russian ultranationalist milblogger community has repeatedly called for Russia to enact more stringent migration policies and has complained about "Russophobia" in former Soviet states such as Kazakhstan.[12] ISW continues to assess that Putin must cater to his xenophobic and ultranationalist constituency – some of the staunchest supporters of Russia's war in Ukraine – while also balancing Russia's need for migrant labor for its economy and military.[13]

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev accused Russia of shooting the Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger flight over the Republic of Chechnya on December 25 and of attempting to cover up Russia's responsibility for the plane's crash in Kazakhstan — effectively rejecting Russian President Vladimir Putin's lackluster apology. Aliyev gave an interview to Azerbaijani TV published on December 29 in which he rejected Russian officials' theories that a bird strike and a gas cylinder explosion caused the crash.[14] Aliyev noted that preliminary information clearly indicated that the aircraft sustained damage from ground-based fire near Grozny, Chechnya and that Russian electronic warfare (EW) systems made the plane uncontrollable.[15] Aliyev also stated that Russia introduced an emergency airspace closure in Grozny only after striking the aircraft, and Aliyev suggested that this was part of Russian local authorities' attempts to conceal Russia's responsibility for the crash. Aliyev noted that Russia also pushed for the Interstate Aviation Committee, which he alleged is composed of mostly Russian officials and citizens, to conduct the investigation into the crash in order to further cover up Russia's involvement in the crash. Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan refused investigative assistance from this committee due to its lack of objectivity. Aliyev's interview follows Putin's vague apology to Aliyev on December 28, in which Putin did not directly admit Russia's culpability in the crash and simply stated that a "tragic accident" occurred in Russian air space.[16] Aliyev publicly reiterated the demands he reportedly made to Putin on December 27: the Kremlin must apologize to Azerbaijan, admit its culpability, punish the guilty parties, and pay compensation to Azerbaijani passengers and crew. Putin reportedly once again called Aliyev on December 29 to discuss the crash, but neither party offered a complete read out of the interaction.[17] The timing of the publication of Aliyev's interview and official statements about Putin's call to Aliyev suggests that Putin may have called Aliyev following the interview's publication and that the call likely concerned Aliyev's public accusations and demands.

Ukrainian forces are successfully innovating to combat Russian guided glide bomb strikes against Kharkiv Oblast. Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov stated on December 29 that Russian forces started experimenting with and conducting D-30 universal joint glide munition (UMPB) guided glide bomb strikes against Kharkiv Oblast in March 2024 and have since modified them to have a range of up to 80 kilometers.[18] Synehubov stated that Russian forces started launching guided glide bombs from within Russian airspace roughly 40 kilometers away from the international Russian-Ukrainian border, allowing the bombs to strike targets up to 40 kilometers inside Ukraine. Kharkiv Oblast Police Force's Explosive Department Head Volodymyr Bezruk stated that D-30 guided glide bombs can deviate from a target by up to 50 meters and that the damages from D-30 UMPB and unguided FAB-250/500 glide bombs are similar because both bombs use the same type of warhead.[19] Bezruk stated that Ukrainian forces are using machine guns and electronic

warfare (EW) interference to down and divert guided glide bombs since glide bombs' lack of a thermal energy signature prevents portable air defense systems from targeting the bombs. Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Yevheniy Romanov stated that Russian forces launched the most guided glide bombs against Kharkiv City in May and September 2024 but that Russian forces have not conducted any guided glide bomb strikes on Kharkiv City since November 2024 and have been using aviation assets less frequently in the northern Kharkiv Oblast border area. Romanov noted that Ukrainian forces recently struck several large ammunition depots within Russia that stored guided glide bombs, limiting the Russian military's guided glide bomb stockpiles. The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Lyman direction stated that Russian forces conducted roughly three to four guided glide bombs strikes per day in the Lyman direction in November 2024 but are now conducting strikes with Shahed drones instead.[20]

The US delivered its first liquified natural gas (LNG) shipment to Ukraine on December 27.

Ukraine's largest private energy company DTEK announced on December 27 that the LNG delivery consists of approximately 100 million cubic meters of gas and represents Kyiv's first direct LNG purchase from the US.[21] The US LNG shipment is part of a broader agreement between DTEK and US company Venture Global to supply Ukraine with US LNG that extends through 2026 and an additional 20-year LNG purchase agreement.[22] Ukraine stopped purchasing Russian gas in November 2015, though Ukraine continues to transport Russian gas to other European customers through Ukrainian gas pipelines - an important source of revenue for Ukraine.[23] Russia's and Ukraine's current gas transportation contract will expire at the end of December 31, 2024, and it remains unclear whether or when Russia and Ukraine may renew the contract. This US LNG delivery marks Ukraine's latest effort to offset Russia's weaponization of energy exports and solidify Ukraine's energy independence from Moscow.

Salome Zurabishvili announced her departure from the Georgian presidential palace on December 29 but stated that she considers herself to be Georgia's "legitimate" president. The Georgian government inaugurated Georgian Dream's presidential candidate Mikheil Kavelashvili as Georgian president on December 29.[24] Georgians protested against Kavelashvili's inauguration in Tbilisi, and police began arresting protestors.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explicitly rejected two suggestions reportedly considered by US President-elect Donald Trump's team in early November 2024 as conditions for ending the war in Ukraine – the delay of Ukraine's membership in NATO for 20 years and the deployment of European peacekeepers in Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin enshrined his alleged policy of Ukrainian "denazification" in a new state strategy document about countering extremism, demonstrating how Putin continues to make the same demands for the removal of the Ukrainian government that he made in 2022 when launching the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev accused Russia of shooting the Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger flight over the Republic of Chechnya on December 25 and of attempting to cover up Russia's responsibility for the plane's crash in Kazakhstan — effectively rejecting Russian President Vladimir Putin's lackluster apology.
- Ukrainian forces are successfully innovating to combat Russian guided glide bomb strikes against Kharkiv Oblast.
- The US delivered its first liquified natural gas (LNG) shipment to Ukraine on December 27.
- Salome Zurabishvili announced her departure from the Georgian presidential palace on December 29 but stated that she considers herself to be Georgia's "legitimate" president.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Vuhledar and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russia reportedly continues to face labor shortages that Russian military recruitment and persistent demographic problems are likely exacerbating.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 28, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 28, 2024, 3:45 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be trying to smooth over possible tensions in the Russian-Azerbaijani and Russian-Kazakh relationships after Russian air defense likely shot an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane on December 25, causing it to crash in Kazakhstan. Putin called Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev about the December 25 crash on December 28.^[1] The Kremlin readout of the conversation stated that Putin and Aliyev discussed "in detail" the December 25 plane crash in Aktau, Kazakhstan, and that Putin apologized that the "tragic incident" occurred in Russian airspace. The Kremlin readout noted that the plane repeatedly tried to land at the Grozny airport in the Republic of Chechnya as Russian air defense systems were repelling Ukrainian drone strikes against Grozny as well as Mozkok and Vladikavkaz in the North Ossetia-Alania Republic. The Kremlin readout stated that the Russian Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case for violating traffic safety rules, but notably did not specify that the "tragic incident" that occurred over Russian airspace was Russian air defense shooting the passenger plane. The readout from Aliyev's press service, however, stated that Putin apologized for the fact that the plane "was subjected to physical and technical impact from outside [of the plane] in Russian airspace, which resulted in the tragic incident."^[2] Azerbaijan's readout stated that Aliyev noted that there were holes in the plane's fuselage and that survivors' testimonies talked about how "foreign particles" pierced the cabin while the plane was flying. Azerbaijan's readout, although more explicit than the Russian one, also does not specify that Russian air defense struck the plane. The differences between the Russian and Azerbaijani readouts suggest that Azerbaijan is unhappy with the extent to which the Kremlin is refusing to directly acknowledge the role Russian air defense systems played in bringing down the plane.

Putin also called Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on December 28, likely to discuss how the official investigation of the crash site in Kazakhstan will present Russia's role in the crash.^[3] The Russian and Kazakh readouts of the call both stated that Putin and Tokayev exchanged condolences over the deaths of Russian and Kazakh citizens in the crash. Putin and Tokayev discussed the Kazakh government commission investigating the crash, which includes specialists from Russia, Azerbaijan, and Brazil. The Russian readout stated that the specialists will decode the flight recorders from the plane. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also spoke by phone with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov on December 28 and discussed the need to establish "all causes" of the plane crash and to take "urgent measures" to prevent a similar situation in the future.^[4] Russian authorities reportedly did not allow the plane to land at Russian airports, even though an alleged transcript of communications between the plane's crew and a dispatcher in Grozny claimed that the pilot requested emergency landing locations in Russia.^[5]

MSNBC and *NBC News* reported on December 27 that two US military officials, citing US intelligence, indicated that Russian forces targeted the plane with air defense systems after they likely misidentified the Azerbaijani airliner as a Ukrainian drone, in part due to the plane's irregular flight pattern.^[6] A Russian insider source, who reportedly has ties to Russian law enforcement and published an alleged transcript of communications between the plane's crew and a dispatcher in Grozny, claimed on December 28 that Russia transported air defense systems, including S-300 air defense systems, from Syria to Chechnya after the fall of the Bashar al Assad regime and recently installed these air defense systems around Grozny.^[7] ISW and the Critical Threats Project's (CTP) Africa File recently observed Russian flights from Syria to Makhachkala Airport (about 180 kilometers southeast of Grozny) but cannot confirm what cargo the plane was carrying.^[8]

Ukrainian forces recently struck a Russian Shahed drone storage, maintenance, and repair facility in Oryol City, Oryol Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 28 that Ukrainian forces struck the facility on December 26 and that the strike significantly reduced Russia's ability to conduct Shahed strikes against Ukraine.^[9] Russian opposition outlet *Astra*, citing unspecified sources, reported that Ukraine struck the facility with at least three Storm Shadow missiles on the afternoon of December 26 and that the strike wounded and killed nine Russian servicemembers.^[10] Satellite imagery indicates that Russian forces began constructing the facility in August 2024 and may have completed construction in November or early December 2024.^[11]

Russian authorities continue to establish a legal basis to remove the Taliban and Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) from the Russian government's official list of banned terrorist organizations. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on December 28 allowing the Russian government to remove organizations from Russia's list of terrorist organizations.^[12] Russian milbloggers noted that the decree will facilitate Russia's rapprochement with the Taliban, and one milblogger claimed that the Taliban has demonstrated their intentions to bring peace to Afghanistan, which will open new trade routes for Russia.^[13] ISW previously observed that Russian authorities are preparing legal mechanisms to remove the Taliban from the list, and Putin's decree is likely one of the final steps in this process.^[14] Putin's decree also establishes a legal basis for the Russian government to remove other organizations, including HTS, from its list of banned terrorist organizations as part of Russia's efforts to develop positive relations with the HTS-led interim

government in Syria and secure guarantees for the continued operations of Russia's military bases in Syria.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be trying to smooth over possible tensions in the Russian-Azerbaijani and Russian-Kazakh relationships after Russian air defense likely shot an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane on December 25, causing it to crash in Kazakhstan.
- Ukrainian forces recently struck a Russian Shahed drone storage, maintenance, and repair facility in Oryol City, Oryol Oblast.
- Russian authorities continue to establish a legal basis to remove the Taliban and Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) from the Russian government's official list of banned terrorist organizations.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Siversk, Toretsk, and Kurakhove.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on December 28 that the Russian military completed its Fall 2024 conscription cycle.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 27, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, Angelica Evans, and George Barros

December 27, 2024, 9:20 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on December 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia has continued to expand its domestic production capabilities of Iranian-designed Shahed drones ahead of its Winter 2024-2025 strike campaign against Ukraine. CNN, citing Ukrainian defense intelligence sources, estimated on December 27 that Russia's Shahed drone production facility in the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Republic of Tatarstan produced 5,760 drones between January and September 2024 — more than twice the number of drones that the facility produced in 2023.^[1] CNN reported that satellite imagery shows that Russian authorities have constructed two new buildings and appear to have installed anti-drone mesh cages over several buildings at the facility in the Alabuga SEZ. CNN, citing leaked documents from the facility, reported that the Alabuga facility is Russia's main Shahed production facility and has already fulfilled an agreement to produce 6,000 drones for the Russian military by September 2025. Sources in Ukraine's defense intelligence told CNN that the Alabuga facility began producing low-tech "decoy" drones that resemble Shahed drones and that Russian forces use these decoys to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems in Summer 2024. The sources told CNN that Russia intends to produce 10,000 decoy drones by the end of 2024 — almost double the number of Shahed strike drones that Russia produced in the first nine months of 2024 — since decoy drones are 10 times cheaper to produce than armed Shahed strike drones. CNN noted that Russia has also constructed a train station near the Alabuga SEZ with a direct rail connection between Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), which a Ukrainian intelligence officer stated could be used to transfer components required for drone production between the PRC and the Alabuga SEZ.

Russia has yet to address limitations in its ability to produce and field Shahed drones, however, and will likely continue to struggle with these limitations in 2025. ISW has previously observed indications that Western sanctions are complicating Russia's ability to source quality components for Shahed drones and that Russia is increasingly relying on low quality motors from the PRC to power Shahed drones.^[2] Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) innovations also appear to be enabling Ukrainian forces to disrupt Shahed-heavy strikes more effectively.^[3] Russian forces will likely continue to adjust their strike packages during Winter 2024-2025 and beyond in order to inflict significant damage on Ukraine's energy grid and critical infrastructure, and Russia likely intends to further increase its production and use of Shahed drones following the anticipated signing of the Russian-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in January 2025.^[4]

North Korean forces are continuing to experience high casualty rates amid recent confirmation of the first captured North Korean soldier in Kursk Oblast. White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby stated on December 27 that North Korean forces suffered around 1,000 casualties over the past week in Kursk Oblast (roughly December 20 to 27) and that the Russian command is using — and North Korean authorities are permitting Russia to use — lower and

higher-ranking North Korean soldiers in infantry-led assaults without armored vehicle support.[5] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 23 that over 3,000 North Korean personnel have been killed or wounded in Kursk Oblast, roughly a fourth of the 12,000 total reported North Korean personnel in Kursk Oblast.[6] South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) confirmed on December 26, following consultations with Ukrainian intelligence, that Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (SSO) captured a wounded North Korean soldier in Kursk Oblast and Ukrainian sources posted images allegedly showing the captured North Korean soldier.[7] ISW is unable to verify the images, however.

Ukrainian forces recently conducted a HIMARS strike against a Russian staff meeting in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast, reportedly killing three Russian officers, following Ukrainian warnings about the possibility of renewed Russian offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[8] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 27 that the GUR, the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces, and the Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces conducted a HIMARS and subsequent drone strikes against a leadership meeting of the Russian 4th Military Base (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast. The strike reportedly killed the commander of the Russian 1st Battalion of the 135th Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) Captain Dmitriy Nagorny, Deputy Head of Intelligence Staff of the 135th Motorized Rifle Regiment Captain Grigoriy Krokhmalyov, and commander of an anti-aircraft battery of the 4th Military Base Captain Yuryi Fomin.[9] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces lured the Russian officers under the guise of humanitarian aid deliveries in the rear of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast and then conducted a combined drone and HIMARS strike against the officers.[10] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces knew the officers' personal information including who they communicated with, their friends, and who had previously delivered humanitarian aid to them and that Ukrainian forces conducted a similar operation against another unspecified Russian unit on December 27.[11]

Russian Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsiya) attempted to blame weather conditions and the pilot's response to the Russian emergency airspace closure over the Republic of Chechnya for the Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger aircraft crash in Aktau, Kazakhstan on December 25. Rosaviatsiya Head Dmitry Yadrov stated on December 27 that the Azerbaijani aircraft - which was flying from Baku to Grozny, Chechnya – attempted to land two times at the Grozny airport amidst a declared emergency closure of Russian airspace due to a Ukrainian drone threat.[12] Yadrov also attempted to explain the plane's failure to land in Grozny several times, claiming that heavy fog over Grozny may have impacted the visibility to up to 500 meters. Yadov claimed that the pilot personally decided to land in Aktau despite the fact that Russian air traffic controllers proposed for the aircraft to land at other Russian airports. Yadrov did not comment on the Azerbaijani, Western, and Russian preliminary reports that a Russian Pantsir-S air defense system struck the aircraft after electronic warfare (EW) jamming caused the plane's communications and GPS systems to malfunction as the plane approached Grozny.[13] BBC Russian Service reported that the Russian state TV channels similarly blamed the plane crash on fog and the plane's supposed collision with a flock of birds in their coverage immediately following the incident but later began exploring other theories and largely refrained from showing the footage that suggested that Russian air defense systems may have struck the plane.[14]

A Russian insider source – who is reportedly affiliated with Russian law enforcement and released an alleged transcript of the communications between the crew and a Russian air traffic control in Grozny – accused Yadrov of attempting to conceal the misuse of Russian air defense systems.[15] ISW is unable to authenticate the transcript. The insider source claimed that the purported transcript suggests that the dispatcher did not warn the crew about foggy weather or alert them to the announcement of the emergency airspace closure. The purported transcript instead suggests that the crew informed the dispatcher of the complete failure of the GPS and communication systems as they attempted to land in Grozny three times. The insider source, citing official sources at the Grozny Airport, claimed that Russian officials only announced the emergency airspace closure after the aircraft rerouted back to Baku. The insider source also pointed out that the purported transcript suggests that the pilot originally decided to fly back to Baku after failing to land in Grozny but that the aircraft sustained damage from what the crew assessed was a flock of birds. The insider source added that the purported transcript also shows that the dispatcher did not willingly propose any alternative airports in Russia for emergency landing after the plane sustained damage and only provided a list of alternative airports in responds to the crew's questions.

Finnish authorities seized the Russian-owned *Eagle S* crude oil tanker on suspicion that the vessel was recently involved in damaging undersea electricity and telecommunication cables in the Baltic Sea but noted that it is too soon to conclude that Russia is behind the cable disruptions. Finnish authorities seized the Russian-owned *Eagle S* crude oil tanker traveling from St.

Petersburg to Egypt in the Gulf of Finland on December 26 on suspicion of the vessel's potential involvement in damaging the Estlink 2 electricity cable, which transports electricity between Estonia and Finland, and several other telecommunication cables between Finland, Estonia, and Germany on December 25.[16] Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo announced on December 25 that Finland had opened an investigation into the source of the damage, which significantly reduced the cable's capacity.[17] Orpo stated on December 26 that it is too early in the investigation to conclude that Russia is behind the cable disruptions.[18] Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal stated during a news conference on December 26 that cable repairs will take months to complete.[19] Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur announced on December 27 that Estonia deployed naval patrols to protect the Estlink 1 undersea cable and that Estonia will consult with NATO military officials.[20] NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte spoke with Finnish President Alex Stubb on December 27 about the ongoing investigation into potential sabotage of the cables and announced that NATO will consequently enhance its military presence in the Baltic Sea.[21] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on December 27 on Finland's detention of the tanker.[22] A source reportedly familiar with the tanker and who provided commercial maritime services to the tanker as recently as seven months ago told shipping news outlet *Lloyd's List* on December 27 that the tanker is equipped with transmitting and receiving devices that enabled the tanker to monitor and record the radio frequencies of NATO ships and aircraft operating in the area.[23] The source further claimed that Russian authorities offloaded the devices for analysis upon reaching Russia and that the Kremlin is deploying Russian-linked merchant ships to the Baltic Sea for spying and sabotage activities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu to head the newly established Scientific Expert Council of the Russian Security Council. Putin issued a decree on December 27 establishing the Scientific Expert Council of the Russian Security Council and specified that Shoigu will chair the council.[24] Putin's decree states that the new advisory council will enhance the scientific, methodological, and expert-analytical support for the Security Council and its working bodies. Russian media reported that the decree also reportedly abolished the previous Scientific Council directly subordinated to the Security Council.[25] ISW has not observed evidence to suggest that Shoigu will be removed from his current position as Secretary of the Russian Security Council as part of this new appointment.

Key Takeaways:

- Russia has continued to expand its domestic production capabilities of Iranian-designed Shahed drones ahead of its Winter 2024–2025 strike campaign against Ukraine.
- Russia has yet to address limitations in its ability to produce and field Shahed drones, however, and will likely continue to struggle with these limitations in 2025.
- North Korean forces are continuing to experience high casualty rates amid recent confirmation of the first captured North Korean soldier in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces recently conducted a HIMARS strike against a Russian staff meeting in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast, reportedly killing three Russian officers, following Ukrainian warnings about the possibility of renewed Russian offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast
- Russian Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsiya) attempted to blame weather conditions and the pilot's response to the Russian emergency airspace closure over the Republic of Chechnya for the Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger aircraft crash in Aktau, Kazakhstan on December 25.
- A Russian insider source — who is reportedly affiliated with Russian law enforcement and released an alleged transcript of the communications between the crew and a Russian air traffic control in Grozny — accused Rosaviatsiya of attempting to conceal the misuse of Russian air defense systems.
- Finnish authorities seized the Russian-owned *Eagle S* crude oil tanker on suspicion that the vessel was recently involved in damaging undersea electricity and telecommunication cables in the Baltic Sea but noted that it is too soon to conclude that Russia is behind the cable disruptions.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu to head the newly established Scientific Expert Council of the Russian Security Council.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Siversk and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Velyka Novosilka, and in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions.
- Russian federal subjects (regions) are continuing to increase the value of enlistment bonuses to incentivize military recruitment.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 26, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, and Fredrick W. Kagan

December 26, 2024, 9:05pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on December 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly rejected a suggestion reportedly considered by US President-elect Donald Trump's team in early November 2024 that would delay Ukraine's membership in NATO for at least a decade as a condition for ending the war in Ukraine. Putin responded on December 26 to a journalist's request to comment on the Trump team's reported early November suggestion to delay Ukraine's membership in NATO for 10 to 20 years.[1] Putin stated that it does not matter if Ukraine joins NATO "today, tomorrow, or in 10 years." Putin's December 26 statement is part of a series of comments he has made recently reiterating his refusal to consider compromises on his late 2021 and early 2022 demands.[2] These demands include forcing Ukraine to become a permanently neutral state that will never join NATO, imposing severe limitations on the size of the Ukrainian military, and removing the Ukrainian government.[3]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Putin's false claims that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate and cannot be a legitimate negotiating partner for Russia. Lavrov claimed on December 26 during an interview with Russian and foreign media that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is not legitimate according to Ukraine's constitution and that Ukraine needs to hold presidential elections.[4] Kremlin officials have been deliberately misinterpreting the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian law to delegitimize Ukraine's government and sovereignty in recent months.[5] The Kremlin's allegations that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government are not legitimate demonstrate that the Kremlin is unwilling to engage in negotiations with Ukraine or are effectively demanding regime change in Kyiv as a precondition for negotiations. Putin and other Kremlin officials have repeatedly reiterated this false narrative about Zelensky's alleged illegitimacy in order to blame Ukraine — and not Russia — for delaying negotiations.[6] This false narrative also promotes Putin's demand for the removal of the legitimate, democratically elected Ukrainian government – one of the Kremlin's ongoing maximalist demands in the war.

Russian forces have likely seized Kurakhove following two months of intensified offensive operations aimed at seizing the settlement and eliminating the Ukrainian salient north and south of the settlement. Geolocated footage published on December 24 and 25 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in western Kurakhove and up to a windbreak southwest of the settlement.[7] ISW assesses that Russian forces have likely advanced to the administrative boundaries of Kurakhove and seized the settlement and the fields south of settlement and north of Dalne. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) raised a flag over western Kurakhove and that elements of the 51st CAA's 110th and 114th motorized rifle brigades and the 20th and 150th motorized rifle divisions (both of the 8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) are attacking along Kurakhove's northern and southern flanks.[8] Russian sources issued contradictory claims about the extent of Russian advances in Kurakhove: some milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced beyond Kurakhove towards Dachne (west of Kurakhove), while others claimed that Russian forces are unsuccessfully attacking the Kurakhivska Thermal Power Plant (TPP) just west of Kurakhove — which ISW assesses to be outside of Kurakhove's administrative boundaries.[9] Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces acknowledged that Ukrainian forces recently lost unspecified positions in the Kurakhove direction.[10]

Russian forces spent just over two months seizing a settlement 7.3 square kilometers in size. Russian forces intensified offensive operations to seize Kurakhove in mid-October 2024, and ISW observed geolocated footage indicating that Russian forces advanced into the settlement for the first time in late October 2024.[11] The Russian military has reportedly concentrated roughly 35,000 to 36,000 troops in the Kurakhove direction in recent months to both seize the settlement and eliminate the Ukrainian pockets north and south of the settlement, and Russian forces have likely sustained significant casualties during this period of intensified offensive operations.[12] Russian forces have also conducted a large number of armored assaults within and near Kurakhove over the last two months and have likely sustained significant armored vehicle losses during their effort to seize the settlement.[13]

Russian forces may struggle to advance rapidly further west of Kurakhove along the H-15 highway should Ukrainian forces choose to defend in the Kurakhivska TPP and Russian forces fail to outflank Ukrainian positions in the TPP near Dachne or Ulakly. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain a presence in the Kurakhivska TPP west of the settlement along the H-15 highway.[14] Russian forces may struggle to advance farther westward along the H-15 highway from Kurakhove if Russian forces choose to conduct a frontal assault through the Kurakhivska TPP area and if Ukrainian forces decide to allocate sufficient manpower and materiel to defend in the area. Russian forces may attempt to bypass the TPP by advancing farther south of the highway in fields west and northwest of Dalne (south of Kurakhove) towards Ulakly (west of Kurakhove). Russian forces may also attempt to advance south from Stari Terny (northwest of Kurakhove and on the northwestern bank of the Kurakhivske Reservoir) towards Dachne (west of Kurakhove) in order to outflank Ukrainian positions at the TPP. Russian forces may try to advance north from Zelenivka (southwest of Kurakhove) towards Ulakly to threaten Ukraine's ability to supply positions at the TPP and complicate possible future Ukrainian withdrawals from the TPP and positions in the fields south of Dachne.

Elements of the 51st CAA have been the main forces participating in the seizure of Kurakhove amid ongoing efforts to centralize and formalize elements of the 51st CAA within the Russian military. Elements of the 51st CAA's 5th and 110th motorized rifle brigades have notably participated in most of the tactically significant advances in Kurakhove since mid-October 2024 and have been involved in offensive operations west of Donetsk City since Russia intensified activity in this area in at least Summer 2024.[15] Elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division are reportedly also operating in Kurakhove and may be overseeing the brigades' operations in the settlement and future advances west of the settlement.[16] Russian authorities have recently intensified their efforts to formalize former DNR units under the Russian military and will likely credit and praise these forces for their role in seizing Kurakhove in the coming days.[17]

Russian forces conducted a large series of missile and drone strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of December 24 to 25, seriously damaging thermal power plants (TPPs). The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles from Voronezh Oblast; 10 S-300/400 missiles from Belgorod Oblast; 12 Kalibr cruise missiles from the Black Sea; 50 Kh-101/55 cruise missiles from the airspace over Volgograd Oblast and the Caspian Sea; four Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from Belgorod Oblast; and 106 Shahed and decoy drones from Millerovo, Rostov Oblast; Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; Bryansk Oblast; and Oryol Oblast.[18] The Ukrainian Air Force stated that Ukrainian forces downed 55 Kh-101/55 and Kalibr cruise missiles, four Kh-59/69 cruise missiles, and 54 Shahed and decoy drones and that 52 drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces targeted Ukrainian fuel and energy facilities in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Zaporizhia oblasts. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 25 that Russian forces aim to cause a full blackout in Ukraine.[19] Ukrainian officials stated on December 25 that Russian forces struck and damaged energy infrastructure in Vinnytsia Oblast and Kremenchutskyi Raion, Poltava Oblast and conducted strikes against energy facilities in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[20] Ukrainian energy operator DTEK reported that Russian strikes seriously damaged TPP equipment and that Russian forces have struck DTEK's TPPs over 200 times since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.[21] DTEK added that the December 24 to 25 strike series was the 13th massive strike on Ukrainian energy infrastructure and the 10th massive strike on DTEK's energy enterprises since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian forces conducted a successful strike on December 25 against the command post of a Russian unit operating in Kursk Oblast. The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) stated on December 26 that Ukrainian forces struck the command post of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) in Lgov, Kursk Oblast on December 25, killing the brigade's deputy commander and staff officers.[22] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that Ukrainian forces used HIMARS to conduct the strike.[23] Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade have been conducting assaults in Kursk Oblast and have reportedly trained North Korean personnel in Kursk Oblast.[24] Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade also notably acknowledged in December 2023 that its personnel were deliberately using chemical weapons in Ukraine and then attempted to hide this evidence of an apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.[25]

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian ammunition depot in Rostov Oblast and Russian defense industrial base (DIB) facilities in Rostov and Tambov oblasts on December 25 and 26. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that a source in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that the SBU conducted a drone strike that destroyed an ammunition depot at the Kadamovsky military training ground near Novocherkassk, Rostov Oblast.[26] The source stated Russian forces used the

ammunition depot to supply Russian forces in the Kramatorsk (Chasiv Yar) direction. Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) stated on December 26 that the Ukrainian Air Force conducted a high-precision strike on a defense industrial facility in Kamyansk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, which produces solid rocket fuel for ballistic missiles.[27] Russian opposition media outlet *Astra* published footage and reported on December 26 that its sources stated that debris from downed Ukrainian drones caused a fire near the boiler room of a Transnefteprodukt facility in Novonikolskoye, Tambov Oblast.[28] Locals also told *Astra* that Ukrainian drones damaged the "Progres" Plant in Michurinsk, Tambov Oblast, which reportedly produces technical equipment for aircraft control systems, rocket technology, civilian electronic equipment, and equipment for oil and gas pipelines.

A Russian air defense system reportedly shot an Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger aircraft over the Republic of Chechnya on December 25, after which the plane crashed in Aktau, Kazakhstan. The aircraft was flying from Baku, Azerbaijan to Grozny, Chechnya, and there were 62 passengers and five crew members aboard the plane, of whom 32 reportedly survived the crash.[29] Four Azerbaijani sources familiar with Azerbaijan's official investigation into the crash told *Reuters* that preliminary investigation results suggest that a Russian Pantsir-S air defense system struck the plane after electronic warfare (EW) jamming caused the plane's communications to malfunction as the plane approached Grozny.[30] A US official told *Reuters* that there were early indications that a Russian anti-aircraft system may have struck the plane, and *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported that aviation experts think that videos of the wreckage suggest that a Russian air defense system hit the plane.[31] Kazakh officials neither confirmed nor denied these preliminary investigation reports, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov similarly refused to comment on the plane crash before results of the final investigation emerged.[32] Russian Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviation) Spokesperson Artyom Korenyako claimed that the plane crashed at 0930 Moscow time after the pilot chose to land at the Aktau airport after the plane "collided with birds." [33] Russian sources also originally made contradicting claims that the plane was rerouted to Mineralnye Vody Airport, Stavropol Krai (approximately 270 kilometers northwest of Grozny) and Makhachkala Airport (about 180 kilometers southeast of Grozny) due to the threat of drone strikes or foggy weather in Grozny.[34]

A Russian insider source, who is reportedly affiliated with Russian law enforcement, claimed that an air defense missile likely struck the plane at an altitude of 2,400 meters approximately 18 kilometers northwest of the Grozny airport over Naursky Raion.[35] The insider source noted that there are several Russian military bases in Naursky Raion that have air defense systems and that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently placed several Pantsir systems in Chechnya following Ukrainian drone strikes against the region.[36]

The insider source later published an alleged full transcript of the communication between the plane's crew and a dispatcher in Grozny.[37] ISW is unable to authenticate the transcript. The alleged transcript suggests that the pilot attempted to land the plane three times in Grozny between 0736 and 0811 Moscow time and that the crew informed the dispatcher several times of the complete failure of the GPS and communication systems as soon as the plane began to descend. The dispatcher also apparently lost radar contact with the plane on numerous occasions. The alleged transcript suggests that the pilot decided to turn the plane around towards Baku at around 0811 before contacting the dispatcher at 0816 with an alarming report that the plane's controls had failed and that a flock of birds had struck the plane. The insider source noted that the crew may have mistaken an explosion for a collision with a flock of birds. The alleged transcript suggests that the pilot informed the dispatcher that the crew needed help, that the plane was losing control, and that the plane's hydraulics had stopped working. The alleged transcript suggests that the pilot began to search for an alternative airport in Russia for an emergency landing, notably asking the dispatcher about the weather in the Mineralnye Vody Airport and then requesting information about the Makhachkala Airport. The alleged transcript indicated that the pilot also contacted dispatchers at the Rostov-on-Don Airport (about 744km northwest of Grozny). *Euronews* reported that sources in the Azerbaijan's government stated that Russian authorities did not allow the aircraft to land at any Russian airports and ordered the plane to fly across the Caspian Sea towards Aktau despite the pilot's requests for an emergency landing.[38] *Reuters* reported that the Makhachkala Airport was closed on the morning of December 25 and that Russian officials did not explain why the plane crossed the Caspian Sea.[39]

Japan will provide Ukraine with \$3 billion in non-lethal assistance generated solely from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets.[40] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on December 25 for the new aid package and for additional assistance for energy equipment and the construction of shelters in Ukraine. Japan's transfer of revenues from frozen Russian assets is likely part of the larger G7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans initiative to send \$50 billion worth of profits from frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine's budgetary, military, and reconstruction assistance throughout 2025.[41]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly rejected a suggestion reportedly considered by US President-elect Donald Trump's team in early November 2024 that would delay Ukraine's membership in NATO for at least a decade as a condition for ending the war in Ukraine.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Putin's false claims that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate and cannot be a legitimate negotiating partner for Russia.
- Russian forces have likely seized Kurakhove following two months of intensified offensive operations aimed at seizing the settlement and eliminating the Ukrainian salient north and south of the settlement.
- Russian forces may struggle to advance rapidly further west of Kurakhove along the H-15 Kurakhove-Pokrovske highway should Ukrainian forces choose to defend in the Kurakhivska TPP and Russian forces fail to outflank Ukrainian positions in the TPP near Dachne or Ulakly.
- Elements of the 51st CAA have been the main forces participating in the seizure of Kurakhove amid ongoing efforts to centralize and formalize elements of the 51st CAA within the Russian military.
- Russian forces conducted a large series of missile and drone strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of December 24 to 25, seriously damaging thermal power plants (TPPs).
- Ukrainian forces conducted a successful strike on December 25 against the command post of a Russian unit operating in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian ammunition depot in Rostov Oblast and Russian defense industrial base (DIB) facilities in Rostov and Tambov oblasts on December 25 and 26.
- A Russian air defense system reportedly shot an Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 passenger aircraft over the Republic of Chechnya on December 25, after which the plane crashed in Aktau, Kazakhstan.
- A Russian insider source, who is reportedly affiliated with Russian law enforcement, claimed that an air defense missile likely struck the plane at an altitude of 2,400 meters approximately 18 kilometers northwest of the Grozny airport over Naursky Raion.
- Japan will provide Ukraine with \$3 billion in non-lethal assistance generated solely from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian milbloggers acknowledged that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is attempting to monopolize crowdfunding efforts for the Russian military amid ongoing fallout from the deaths of two Russian drone operators in September 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 24, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on December 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. ISW and CTP will not publish a campaign assessment (or maps) tomorrow, December 25, in observance of the Christmas holiday. Coverage will resume on December 26.

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Nate Trotter, Kateryna Stepanenko, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

December 24, 2024, 6:15pm ET

A senior Russian official reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's insistence that negotiations with Ukraine must be based on the same uncompromising demands he made before the full-scale invasion and at the moment of Russia's greatest territorial gains, despite the fact that Ukraine has liberated a significant amount of territory since then. Russian Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko stated on December 24 that Russia is open to compromise in negotiations with Ukraine, but that Russia will strictly adhere to the conditions that it laid out during negotiations in Istanbul in March 2022, when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv and throughout eastern and southern Ukraine.^[1] Matviyenko added that Russia would not deviate from these conditions by "one iota."^[2] The partial agreement that emerged during the Ukraine-Russia negotiations in Istanbul in March 2022 stated that Ukraine would be a permanently neutral state that could not join NATO, and imposed limitations on the Ukrainian military similar to those imposed by the

Treaty of Versailles on Germany after World War I, restricting Ukraine's Armed Forces to 85,000 soldiers.[3] Russia's demands at Istanbul were mainly more detailed versions of the demands that Putin made in the months before he launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022, including Ukraine's "demilitarization" and neutrality.[4] Matviyenko is reiterating Putin's demand from his annual Direct Line televised press conference on December 19, and more senior Russian officials are likely to make similar claims to domestic and foreign audiences in coming weeks.[5] ISW continues to assess that senior Russian officials' references to conditions Putin attempted to impose on Ukraine when he believed his full-scale invasion could succeed in a few days in 2022 reflects his projected confidence that he can completely defeat Ukraine militarily despite the tremendous setbacks Ukraine has inflicted on Russian forces since then.

The Kremlin's economic limitations will likely hinder its efforts to impose policies combatting long-term demographic decline in Russia. Nizhny Novgorod Oblast Governor Gleb Nikitin stated on December 23 that Nizhny Novgorod Oblast would provide a maternity capital payment of one million rubles (about \$10,000) for the birth of each child starting at an unspecified date in 2025.[6] Nikitin stated that Nizhny Novgorod Oblast authorities would provide one million rubles for the first and second children with federal and regional funds and will provide one million rubles for the third and fourth children solely from the regional budget. Russian regional authorities will likely continue to expand maternity capital payments as part of a Kremlin directive to address long-term demographic issues.[7] The Russian government may struggle to provide large maternity capital payments over time as the Russian economy is continually strained by its war in Ukraine, international sanctions, and rising labor shortages, however. Russian state newswire *RIA Novosti* reported on December 24 that it saw a letter that the Russian Central Bank sent in response to a request from Russian State Duma Deputy Denis Parfenov wherein the Central Bank stated that the lowering of the key interest rate in order to stimulate demand, when "demand already exceeds supply," is "dangerous."^[8] The Central Bank stated that Russia's current labor, equipment, and transport shortages mean that cheap loans will not immediately give producers additional resources and will only intensify competition for resources and increase prices. The Russian Central Bank raised the key interest rate to 21 percent in October 2024, and the bank's head, Elvira Nabiullina, has recently stated that the bank may raise it further.^[9] Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted during his Direct Line televised press conference on December 19 to portray the Russian economy as "stable and reliable," while also blaming the Russian Central Bank and Nabiullina for mishandling rising interest rates.^[10]

A Russian cargo ship sank in the Mediterranean Sea on December 23, possibly while traveling from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok via Syria and Libya. Spanish media reported on December 24 that the Russian *Ursa Major* cargo ship sank in the Mediterranean Sea between Spain and Algeria, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) confirmed that the dry cargo ship sank after an explosion in the engine room.^[11] The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Oboronlogistika logistics company, which owns the *Ursa Major*, claimed in a press release from December 20 that the vessel was traveling to Vladivostok with two cranes necessary to expand the city's port terminal and 45-ton hatch covers for new icebreakers.^[12] Oboronlogistika claimed that the vessel was going to develop port infrastructure and the Northern Sea Route. Ship tracking services showed that the vessel left St. Petersburg on December 11.^[13] Russian media reported that the captain of the *Ursa Major* stated that the ship was carrying empty containers on board.^[14] *The Maritime Executive* reported that automatic identification system (AIS) data showed that the Russian cargo ship *Sparta* came to the aid of the *Ursa Major* following the explosion.^[15] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) recently stated that the *Sparta* and the *Sparta II* cargo ships were en route from Russia to the Port of Tartus to evacuate Russian military assets from Syria.^[16] The presence of the hatch covers for new icebreakers on the *Ursa Major* is consistent with Oboronlogistika's statement that the ship was travelling to Vladivostok. Russia may have diverted the ship to the Port of Tartus to evacuate Russian military assets from Syria. Russia has reportedly started moving military assets from Syria to Libya, and the *Ursa Major* may have planned to relocate military assets from Syria to Libya before continuing on to Vladivostok.^[17] The sinking of the *Ursa Major* may complicate and slow Russian efforts to evacuate military assets from the Port of Tartus.

The United States provided Ukraine on December 24 with the first tranche of loans generated solely from profits from frozen Russian assets. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated that the United States gave Ukraine a one billion dollar loan generated solely from profits from frozen Russian assets.^[18] This is the first loan out of a total \$20 billion generated from profits from frozen Russian assets that the United States allocated to Ukraine on December 10.^[19] The United States transfer of revenues from Russian frozen assets is part of the larger G7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans initiative to send \$50 billion worth of profits from frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine's budgetary, military, and reconstruction assistance throughout 2025.

Key Takeaways:

- A senior Russian official reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's insistence that negotiations with Ukraine must be based on the same uncompromising demands he made before the full-scale invasion and at the moment of Russia's greatest territorial gains, despite the fact that Ukraine has liberated significant amount of territory since then.
- The Kremlin's economic limitations will likely hinder its efforts to impose policies combatting long-term demographic decline in Russia.
- A Russian cargo ship sank in the Mediterranean Sea on December 23, possibly while traveling from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok via Syria and Libya.
- The United States provided Ukraine on December 24 with the first tranche of loans generated solely from profits from frozen Russian assets.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Toretsk, Vuhledar, Velyka Novosilka, and in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on December 24 that 440,000 recruits signed military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 23, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, Kelly Campa, and Fredrick W. Kagan

December 23, 2024, 9:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:45pm ET on December 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces are gradually advancing south and southwest of Pokrovsk, but it remains unclear if Russian forces will be able to exploit these gains to envelop the town or if they intend to advance to the administrative boundary of Donetsk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on December 23 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of and within eastern Novovasylivka (southwest of Pokrovsk), and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced north of Novovasylivka towards Solone and Vovkove and are attacking towards Kotlyne.^[1] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are focusing their attacks on Novotroitske (east of Novovasylivka) and Dachenske (south of Pokrovsk) and forced Ukrainian forces to withdraw to the Lysivka-Pishchane line (southeast to south of Pokrovsk).^[2] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces are also advancing from Pustynka and Pushkine (both further south of Pokrovsk) towards Ukrainka (southwest of Pushkine). ISW previously assessed that the Russian military command intends to envelop Pokrovsk via a turning maneuver from the south, but Russian advances southwest of Pokrovsk could be aimed at widening the Russian salient in preparation for the envelopment of Pokrovsk from the south or alternatively for advancing westward to the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border as part of the Kremlin's political and informational objective of seizing the entirety of Donetsk Oblast.^[3]

It remains unclear which effort the Russian military command will prioritize, as Russian President Vladimir Putin may have tasked the Russian military with securing territorial gains rather than seizing significant settlements. Putin stated during his annual Direct Line televised press conference on December 19 that Russian forces are advancing not in "100, 200, 300 meters" but in square kilometers throughout the frontline, and Putin appears to be increasingly characterizing Russian advances in terms of square kilometers instead of highlighting the seizure of particular settlements as he had previously done.^[4] Putin may have instructed the Russian military command to delay the seizure of Pokrovsk in favor of making further gains through open fields and small settlements, particularly as Russian forces advance closer to the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary. ISW has observed geolocated evidence sufficient to assess that Russian forces are within 10 kilometers of the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary, and Putin may be pressuring the Russian military command to advance to the boundary rather than to envelop Pokrovsk at this time. Seizing the remainder of Donetsk Oblast is one of Putin's long-standing objectives in Ukraine, and Putin would likely highlight Russian advances up to the boundary to make outsized claims about Russian successes in Ukraine for both foreign and domestic audiences.^[5] An organized offensive operation against well-defended towns could slow the rate of Russian advance during a critical moment in the Kremlin's efforts to project the inevitability of Russian military victory on the global stage.

The Russian military command appears to have split responsibility for the Pokrovsk direction between the Central Military District's 2nd and 41st combined arms armies (CAAs), and ISW has yet to observe significant Russian activity in the 41st CAA's area of responsibility (AoR). Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that the Russian military command has mainly concentrated elements of the 2nd CAA south and southeast of Pokrovsk and elements of the 41st CAA east and northeast of Pokrovsk in the directions of Myrnohrad and Novoekonomichne with the exception of the 90th Tank Division, which is mainly attacking south of Pokrovsk near Novotroitske towards Novolenivka and Ukrainka (south of Novotroitske).^[6] Mashovets noted that the 2nd CAA has a wider AoR extending from Novotroitske to Lysivka (east to southeast of Pokrovsk) and that the Russian military command may be preparing to activate the 41st CAA east and northeast of Pokrovsk in the near future. Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian 433rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd CAA), 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment (90th Tank Division, 41st CAA, CMD), and likely the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd CAA) have recently struggled to advance further along the Novotroitske-Shevchenko-Novy Trud-Dachenske line due to successful Ukrainian counterattacks.^[7] Russian forces have remained relatively inactive in the 41st CAA's reported AoR since late October 2024 and will have to make significant advances in the direction of Novoekonomichne and Rodynske (both northeast of Pokrovsk) or towards and into Myrnohrad (east of Pokrovsk) in the near future if Russian forces intend to envelop Pokrovsk from both the northeast and southwest.^[8] The relatively lower level of activity east and northeast of Pokrovsk indicates that the Russian military command may currently be prioritizing advances to the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary over the envelopment of Pokrovsk.

Decreased combat effectiveness among Russian forces may be slowing the rate of Russian advance in the Pokrovsk direction. Mashovets suggested that elements of the Russian 90th Tank Division have suffered significant personnel losses and are struggling to make further advances south of Pokrovsk and north of Kurakhove due to decreased combat capabilities.^[9] Elements of the 90th Tank Division reportedly participated in the seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024 and have remained committed to various sectors of the Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions since then.^[10] A Ukrainian brigade officer recently estimated that Russian forces lost nearly 3,000 personnel in the Pokrovsk direction in two weeks in mid-December 2024, and the 90th Tank Division has likely suffered significant personnel losses in the Pokrovsk direction and other directions where it was previously committed.^[11] It is unlikely that the Russian military command has granted the division's various units extended periods of leave to rest and reconstitute over the last year as the Russian military command largely viewed the 90th Tank Division as its primary exploitation formation in 2024.^[12] ISW recently observed geolocated footage showing Russian forces conducting a motorized assault with civilian vehicles east of Ukrainka — within the 90th Tank Division's AoR — suggesting that the division may also be struggling to replace armored vehicle losses while engaged in frontline combat.^[13]

Increased Russian armored vehicle losses over the last year, particularly among Russian units and formations that have been engaged in frontline combat for most of 2024, may be impacting Russia's rate of advance in certain sectors of the frontline. A social media source tracking Russian military depots via satellite imagery shared an updated assessment of Russian tank and armored vehicle storage facilities on December 22 and assessed that Russian forces have 47 percent of their pre-war tank reserves, 52 percent of pre-war infantry fighting vehicle reserves, and 45 percent of pre-war armored personnel carrier reserves remaining in storage as of a recent unspecified date.^[14] The social media source's data suggests that Russian forces have used all of their pre-war T-90 tanks and most of their T-80 tanks thus far but still have most of their older T-72, T-64/62, and T-54/55 tanks in storage. The social media source noted that Russian forces will not be able to field these older tanks as the tanks have likely been degraded by weather and time. ISW is unable to independently verify the social media source's characterizations of the quality of various Russian tanks and armored vehicles based on satellite imagery as Russian forces may also be cannibalizing older tanks to repair newer tanks operating in Ukraine, which would be difficult to determine based on satellite imagery alone. Russian forces may also have additional armored vehicles and tanks in covered storage that are not visible in satellite imagery.

Armored vehicle limitations among Russian forces likely differ among sectors of the frontline, as Russian forces conducted battalion-sized mechanized assaults in the Siversk direction on November 2 and December 15 and a reinforced company-sized mechanized assault in the Kupyansk direction on October 19.^[15] Russian forces operating in the Siversk and Kupyansk directions — frontline areas with a relatively lower tempo of Russian offensive operations over the last few months — may currently have more armored vehicles because they have not been conducting armored assaults and taking armored vehicles losses at the same intensity as Russian forces in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions. The Russian military may, however, be struggling to reequip Russian frontline units and formations because the Russian military command does not want to withdraw Russian units for rest and reconstitution and risk further slowing Russian advances in high-priority frontline sectors.

North Korea is reportedly planning to deploy more troops and weapons to Russia amid reports that over 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed and wounded in Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 23 that over 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed and wounded in Kursk Oblast — roughly a fourth of the total 12,000 North Korean troops deployed to Russia.[16] The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff reported on December 23 that at least 1,100 North Korean troops have been wounded and killed in Kursk Oblast and that North Korea appears to be preparing to deploy an unspecified number of additional troops and military equipment to Russia, possibly including loitering munitions.[17] The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff added that it is unclear if North Korea is rotating troops out of Russia or increasing the deployment of troops to Russia. Russian authorities continue attempts to conceal the presence of North Korean soldiers operating in Kursk Oblast. Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) reported that the Russian military is issuing North Korean troops fake identification documents with Russian names and the Republic of Tuva as their birthplace.[18] A Ukrainian brigade posted footage on December 23 describing Russian-North Korean troop interaction in Kursk Oblast as minimal with no joint training or cooperation between Russian and North Korean units.[19] ISW previously observed reports that poor communication and coordination due to language barriers between Russian and North Korean forces are hindering Russian combat operations in Kursk Oblast.[20] The language barrier reportedly continues to create difficulties in communication and coordination, and North Korean forces are reportedly conducting the initial assaults against Ukrainian positions - after which Russian forces advance and secure positions.[21]

North Korea continues to provide Russia with weapons and troops in exchange for Russian oil, cash, and military technology that violate international sanctions. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on December 23, citing unspecified US officials, that US intelligence agencies assessed that North Korea originally proposed the idea of deploying North Korean troops to Russia — not the Kremlin.[22] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko told the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) in an article published on December 23 that 60 percent of the artillery and mortar shells that Russian forces use in Ukraine come from North Korea.[23] Unspecified Ukrainian officials also told the WSJ that Russian forces conducted almost one third of their ballistic missile strikes against Ukraine in 2024 with North Korean-provided missiles. The WSJ reported that North Korea originally provided Russia with "decades-old" ammunition, likely in Fall 2023, but is now supplying Russia with "newer" munitions such as 240mm multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) with "new guidance and control systems." The WSJ reported that unspecified South Korean officials stated that Russia is transferring fuel and equipment to support the North Korean defense industrial base (DIB) and that 200 North Korean munitions factories are currently operating at full capacity. The WSJ added, citing satellite imagery, that North Korea is expanding a missile manufacturing facility that produces KN-23 and KN-24 ballistic missiles. The WSJ reported, citing unspecified South Korean officials, that Russia is providing air defense systems and sending technicians to aid North Korea's spy satellite operations, and that North Korea likely seeks intercontinental ballistic missile technology from Russia. The WSJ reported that the London-based Open Source Centre assessed that Russia has provided North Korea with over one million barrels of oil since March 2024 — double the annual cap imposed under United Nations sanctions.[24] The WSJ also reported that Olena Guseinova, a researcher at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, assessed that Russia could have paid up to \$5.5 billion in arms deals since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and that Russia may be paying up to up to \$572 million yearly for the North Korean troop deployment to Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin used his meeting with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico to advance Russia's campaign to undermine Western unity in supporting Ukraine. Putin and Fico met in Moscow on December 22 for the first time since 2016, marking the third visit by a European Union (EU) official to Russia since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[25] Putin and Fico reportedly discussed Ukraine's decision to not transit Russian gas starting January 1, 2025, and exchanged views about Russia's war in Ukraine.[26] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov announced that Fico and Putin would not host a joint press conference or offer joint statements following the meeting.[27] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin cultivates relationships with individual Western and NATO members to leverage these relationships to exacerbate fissures within the West and undermine support for Ukraine.[28]

The Kremlin may be setting information conditions for a false flag in the pro-Russian breakaway region of Transnistria likely in a continued attempt to destabilize Moldova and hinder its integration into European Union (EU). The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed on December 23 that Moldovan President Maia Sandu is preparing a plan for a military operation in Transnistria and speculated that this military operation may lead to a war.[29] The SVR added that Sandu called on the government to develop a plan to establish control over Transnistria and eliminate the Russian presence in the region during a meeting with Moldova's energy security leadership.[30] A milblogger affiliated with the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) insinuated that Sandu is

planning to attack Transnistria in retaliation for Russia stopping its gas transit via Ukraine.[31] The milblogger identified the possible place for the false flag attack as the Cuciurgan Power Station in Transnistria. Sandu's Chief of Staff Andrian Balutel responded to the SVR claims, stating that Moldova is not preparing military operations in Transnistria and that these claims are "are serious and dangerous disinformation, designed to sow panic and distrust."^[32] Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean also stated that SVR claims are part of the Kremlin's "hybrid war," and the Moldovan Reintegration Policy Bureau reiterated that the Kremlin is trying to destabilize Moldova.^[33] The Kremlin had historically used gas and energy blackmail in attempts to destabilize internal Moldovan affairs and may be using Ukraine's refusal to extend the gas transit deal to spread panic and distrust in Moldovan society towards the pro-Western Sandu government.^[34] The Kremlin may also be setting information conditions for a false flag operation in Transnistria, however.

Russian forces have reportedly withdrawn completely from most of their positions in Syria, including their base at Qamishli in northern Syria. (NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's December 23 Iran Update.) Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 23 that Russian elements completed their withdrawal from all positions in Syria's interior and are now only present at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus.^[35] CTP-ISW cannot independently confirm the GUR report, though it is consistent with the pace of Russian military evacuations from Syria since the fall of Assad. CTP-ISW last observed Russian forces present at the Qamishli base, Hasakah Province, on December 18, suggesting that Russian elements fully evacuated the base in the days since.^[36] Russia still maintains a presence in coastal Syria at Hmeimim Air Base and the port of Tartus, but visual evidence and Syrian reporting continue to indicate that Russian forces are preparing to either significantly draw down or withdraw fully from coastal Syria.^[37] The GUR stated on December 23 that a Russian cargo ship that broke down in the Mediterranean Sea was traveling to Syria to evacuate Russian equipment and weapons from Tartus.^[38] The GUR stated on December 23 that Russia and the "new [Syrian] authorities," likely referring to the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led interim government, have continued negotiations and have discussed alleged Syrian demands that Russia withdraw from Hmeimim and Tartus no later than February 20, 2025.^[39] Russian Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov stated on December 23 that Russia is in contact with the new authorities in Syria through both diplomatic and military channels.^[40]

Germany announced additional military assistance for Ukraine on December 23. The German government announced that Germany will deliver two Patriot launcher systems; 15 Leopard 1 A5 tanks and ammunition for Leopard 1 and Leopard 2 tanks; two Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and 65,000 ammunition rounds for Gepard guns; 30 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles; one Panzerhaubitzen 2000 self-propelled howitzer; 12 armored vehicles with kinetic defense systems; seven Caracal amphibious vehicles; one IRIS-T SLM anti-aircraft missile system with missiles; one IRIS-T SLS anti-aircraft missile system; two TRML 4-D aerial radar systems; one AIM-9L/I-1 Sidewinder guided missile; 68 reconnaissance drones of Vector, RQ-Heidrun, and Hornet XR type; explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) materiel, tank and artillery munitions; logistics and special purpose vehicles; and small arms ammunition.^[41] Ukraine's Defense Procurement Agency announced on December 20 that German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall will supply Ukraine with 155mm artillery rounds, with the first deliveries scheduled for the first half of 2025.^[42]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are gradually advancing south and southwest of Pokrovska, but it remains unclear if Russian forces will be able to exploit these gains to envelop the town or if they intend to advance to the administrative boundary of Donetsk Oblast.
- It remains unclear which effort the Russian military command will prioritize, as Russian President Vladimir Putin may have tasked the Russian military with securing territorial gains rather than seizing significant settlements.
- The Russian military command appears to have split responsibility for the Pokrovska direction between the Central Military District's 2nd and 41st combined arms armies (CAAs), and ISW has yet to observe significant Russian activity in the 41st CAA's area of responsibility (AoR).
- Decreased combat effectiveness among Russian forces may be slowing the rate of Russian advance in the Pokrovska direction.
- Increased Russian armored vehicle losses over the last year, particularly among Russian units and formations that have been engaged in frontline combat for most of 2024, may be impacting Russia's rate of advance in certain sectors of the frontline.
- North Korea is reportedly planning to deploy more troops and weapons to Russia amid reports that over 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed and wounded in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin used his meeting with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico to advance Russia's campaign to undermine Western unity in supporting Ukraine.

- The Kremlin may be setting information conditions for a false flag in the pro-Russian breakaway region of Transnistria likely in a continued attempt to destabilize Moldova and hinder its integration into European Union (EU).
- Russian forces have reportedly withdrawn completely from most of their positions in Syria, including their base at Qamishli in northern Syria. *NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's December 23 Iran Update.*
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Vuhledar, Velyka Novosilka, and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to appoint Russian veterans into government positions, is already causing conflict between veterans and corrupt regional officials.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 22, 2024

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Grace Mappes, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 22, 2024, 3:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on December 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin repeated his latest assertion that he should have violated the ceasefire he had imposed on Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 by launching a full-scale invasion even earlier than February 2022. Putin reiterated during an interview with Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on December 22 that Russia should have started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine earlier than February 2022 but added that it is impossible to say exactly when that should have been.^[1] Putin blamed Ukraine and the West for "misleading" Russia and not implementing the Minsk II Accords, which Putin claimed gave the West time to prepare Ukraine for future "military actions" against Russia. Putin claimed that Russia should have "prepared for this" and "chosen the right moment" to begin its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and not "waited for the moment when it was no longer possible to do nothing." Putin failed to mention that Ukraine worked to strengthen its military as a defensive response to Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukrainian territory and the launch of a war in the country's east. Putin made similar remarks during his December 19 Direct Line televised press conference wherein he claimed that he would have made the decision to launch his full-scale invasion earlier if he could do it over again.^[2] Putin also claimed on December 19 that Ukraine did not abide by the Minsk II Accords and that Russia "spontaneously" invaded Ukraine in 2022. The Minsk II Accords were notably extremely favorable to Russia, placing no obligations on Moscow – which was party to the negotiations as an alleged neutral mediator.^[3] The Accords established a "ceasefire" that Russian proxies continually violated with Russian support.^[4]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an oil depot in Oryol Oblast with drones on the night of December 21 to 22. Oryol Oblast Governor Andrei Klychkov claimed on December 22 that Russian air defenses and electronic warfare (EW) downed 20 Ukrainian drones over Oryol Oblast and that drone strikes caused a fire at a fuel facility.^[5] Footage published on December 22 purportedly shows a drone strike at the Stalnoy Kon (Steel Horse) oil depot on the northeastern outskirts of Oryol City.^[6] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Stalnoy Kon oil depot on the night of December 13 to 14.^[7] Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service (SZR) reported on December 22 that international sanctions preventing Russia from accessing Western equipment and components, Ukrainian drone strikes, reduced Russian oil exports, and high Russian loan rates have caused Russian oil refineries to increase their downtime in 2024.^[8] The SZR reported that Russian oil refineries experienced a total downtime that prevented the facilities from refining 41.1 million tons of oil in 2024 after having only experienced a total downtime worth 35.9 million tons of oil in 2023. Ukrainian drone strikes have also targeted Russian air bases and the Russian military appears to be building shelters for aircraft at several Russian air bases. Satellite imagery collected throughout October 2024 indicates that the Russian military has been constructing shelters for aircraft at several air bases, including in Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; Kursk City; and occupied Belbek, Crimea.^[9]

Russian forces recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield. Geolocated footage published on December 22 shows Russian forces executing five Ukrainian POWs in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area in Blahodatne (south of Velyka Novosilka).^[10] ISW has routinely assessed that Russian commanders are either complacent or enabling their subordinates to engage in POW executions in clear violation of international law.^[11]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin repeated his latest assertion that he should have violated the ceasefire he had imposed on Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 by launching a full-scale invasion even earlier than February 2022.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an oil depot in Oryol Oblast with drones on the night of December 21 to 22.
- Russian forces recently executed more Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) on the battlefield.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk and in Kursk Oblast.
- North Korea may have transferred at least four additional ballistic missiles to Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 21, 2024

[**Click here to read the full report with maps**](#)

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros

December 21, 2024, 6:50pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to expand Russia's network of military-patriotic education programs for youth in Russia and occupied Ukraine ahead of the Kremlin's upcoming "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" in 2025. Putin approved a list of four instructions for the Russian government on December 20, which include orders to: establish and develop a network of "military-sports camps" to promote enlisting in the military among young people; expand the Kremlin's "Roads of Victory" program; create an online platform to organize military-patriotic education programming for Russian youth; and transfer one children's "health camp" to year-round operations.^[1] The Kremlin's "Roads of Victory" program is aimed at "foster[ing] patriotic feelings in modern children and youth" and offers free excursions to Russian cultural and historical sites of "military glory" for Russian children and youth.^[2] The Kremlin has previously leveraged "Avangard" military and sports training camps to militarize and indoctrinate Ukrainian youth into Russian cultural and historical narratives and appears to be expanding its network of these and similar camps throughout Russia as part of its long-term force generation efforts.^[3] The Kremlin is also preparing to expand and elevate other youth military-patriotic organizations, such as Yunarmiya and Movement of the First, to militarize Russian youth. In addition, it is leveraging its "Time of Heroes" program to place veterans of the war in Ukraine into government positions and militarize Russian society writ large.^[4] Putin announced on December 20 that the Kremlin will consider 2025 as the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland," indicating that he intends to orient Russia's political and ideological priorities for 2025 around Russian veterans and further militarizing Russian society.^[5] The Kremlin likely intends to leverage these military-political organizations to encourage and elevate the prestige of military service among Russian youth and society as the Kremlin continues to plan for its long-term war effort in Ukraine and possible future armed conflicts with Western countries.^[6]

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on December 21. Footage published on December 21 shows several Ukrainian drones striking large apartment buildings and other unspecified buildings in Kazan, reportedly after Russian electronic warfare (EW) disabled the drones.^[7] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces destroyed six Ukrainian drones near Kazan and downed one drone over a nearby river and that one drone struck near an unspecified industrial enterprise in Kazan.^[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin called Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov after Minnikhanov visited damaged residential areas of Kazan.^[9] Russian opposition media suggested that Ukrainian forces were likely targeting a gunpowder production facility, an airfield, a military base, or a helicopter production facility near Kazan.^[10]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to expand Russia's network of military-patriotic education programs for youth in Russia and occupied Ukraine ahead of the Kremlin's upcoming "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" in 2025.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on December 21.

- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Pokrovsk and Kurakhove.
- Ukrainian forces regained lost territory near Pokrovsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to exalt its efforts to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces following Russian President Vladimir Putin's official order to establish the new combat arms branch.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 20, 2024

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, Olivia Gibson, Nicole Volkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 20, 2024, 4:10pm

Russian ballistic missile strikes damaged several embassies in central Kyiv on the morning of December 20. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched five Iskander-M/North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles at Kyiv City on the morning of December 20 and that Ukrainian forces downed all five, but that missile debris damaged infrastructure in Kyiv City and caused civilian casualties.^[1] Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Heorhiy Tykhyi stated that the Russian missile strike damaged multiple embassies in a single building, including the embassies of Albania, Argentina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Palestine, and Portugal.^[2] Kyiv City officials reported that debris from Russian missiles damaged warehouses and infrastructure in Kyiv City.^[3] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces also launched an Iskander-M ballistic missile, a Kh-59/69 cruise missile, and 65 Shahed and other drones at Ukraine overnight on December 19 to 20, of which Ukrainian air defenses downed 40 drones and electronic warfare (EW) interference caused 20 drones to become lost.^[4] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that the overnight drone and missile strikes damaged civilian infrastructure in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Sumy oblasts.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted their first attack solely using unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) and first-person view (FPV) drones, highlighting Ukraine's ongoing efforts to leverage technological innovation into ground operations. The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kharkiv direction reported on December 20 that Ukrainian forces conducted their first ground attack exclusively using robotic systems instead of infantry on an unspecified date near Lyptsi (north of Kharkiv City) and successfully destroyed unspecified Russian positions during the attack.^[5] The spokesperson stated that Ukrainian forces conducted the attack with dozens of UGVs equipped with machine guns and also used the UGVs to lay and clear mines in unspecified positions in the area. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly highlighted Ukraine's efforts to utilize technological innovations and asymmetric strike capabilities to offset Ukraine's manpower limitations in contrast with Russia's willingness to accept unsustainable casualty rates for marginal territorial gains.^[6]

Ukraine also continues to innovate aerial drone production. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian officials completed tests of a drone attached to fiber optic cables that will be more resistant to electronic warfare (EW) interference.^[7] Russian forces have recently fielded such drones in Kursk Oblast and Ukraine.^[8] A Ukrainian drone company reported that it recently assembled a prototype of the first FPV drone made exclusively from components manufactured in Ukraine.^[9]

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his intention to orient Russia's political and ideological priorities for 2025 around Russian veterans. Putin proposed on December 20 that Russia declare 2025 the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" to honor Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine and veterans of all other Russian wars.^[10] Putin notably made this proposal while at a Russian State Council meeting discussing state support for families, which was the Kremlin's defined priority for 2024—the "Year of the Family."^[11]

The Kremlin has lately taken several steps to cater to and empower Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine. The "Time of Heroes" program, for example, seeks to place veterans of the war in Ukraine into local and federal government positions for a two-fold effect—on one hand to appease a growing portion of the Russian population that has fought in Ukraine, and on the other to install militaristic ideals at all levels of governance.^[12] Putin's focus on 2025 as the "Year of the Defender of the Fatherland" is likely meant to further appease the veteran class and to proliferate organizations and programs such as the "Time of Heroes." Putin likely understands that in order to sustain the manpower requirements of his war in Ukraine, he cannot disenfranchise the growing veteran class, and the Kremlin's defined 2025 ideological priorities are likely intended to curry favor with and even coopt this population as the war continues.

The Kremlin continues to scapegoat Kursk Oblast civil servants for its failure in responding to Ukraine's Kursk Oblast incursion. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 20, citing law enforcement sources, that Russian authorities detained the state-owned Kursk Oblast Development Corporation General Director Vladimir Lukin on December 20 under suspicion of abuse of power for embezzling 173.2 million rubles (about \$1.6 million) for the construction of fortifications in the Kursk Oblast border area.[13] Russian authorities also detained Kursk Oblast Development Corporation former Deputy Director Igor Grabin on similar charges on December 9.[14] The Kremlin recently scapegoated former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov, likely to appear dedicated to solving social issues in Kursk Oblast and quelling local protests while distracting from Russia's failure to repel the Ukrainian incursion.[15]

Roman Alekhin, a Russian milblogger and advisor to the Kursk Oblast Governor, commented on Lukin's arrest and stated that the civil servants working for the Kursk Oblast Development Corporation should not bear responsibility for Russia's failure to defend the Kursk Oblast border, but rather that blame should fall on the entities responsible for Russian border security in wartime including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Federal Security Service's (FSB) Border Guard Directorate. [16] The Kremlin continues to indicate that it has no intention of actually solving these issues in Kursk Oblast, however.

Russian President Vladimir Putin dedicated a portion of his annual Direct Line televised press conference on December 19 to discussing his plans to conduct major housing and infrastructure reconstruction projects in occupied Ukraine, attention that the Kremlin is not affording to its territory in Kursk Oblast.[17] New Kursk Oblast Governor Alexander Khinshtein, whom Putin appointed to replace Smirnov, stated on December 20 that the Russian state will not assume all costs of restoring Kursk Oblast facilities destroyed in the war due to the high degree of damage and the state's other financial obligations, including social guarantees and continuing to fund the war in Ukraine.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian ballistic missile strikes damaged several embassies in central Kyiv on the morning of December 20.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted their first attack solely using unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) and first-person view (FPV) drones, highlighting Ukraine's ongoing efforts to leverage technological innovation into ground operations.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his intention to orient Russia's political and ideological priorities for 2025 around Russian veterans.
- The Kremlin continues to scapegoat Kursk Oblast civil servants for its failure in responding to Ukraine's Kursk Oblast incursion.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast, near Kupyansk, within Toretsk, and in the Vuhledar direction.
- Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported on December 20 that it has confirmed that at least 20,364 Russian soldiers have been killed in action (KIA) in Ukraine since January 1, 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 19, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 19, 2024, 10:20 pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he should have violated the ceasefire he had imposed on Ukraine in 2014 by launching a full-scale invasion even earlier when asked to reflect on his 2022 decision to attack. Putin responded to a media question during his annual Direct Line televised press conference on December 19 on whether he would change his decision to launch the full-scale invasion of Ukraine if he had it to do over again, stating that he should have made this decision earlier.[1] Putin added that Russia should have systematically prepared ahead of the full-scale invasion and falsely claimed that Russia "spontaneously" invaded Ukraine in 2022 after Ukraine "directly" announced that it would not abide by the Minsk II Accords.

The Minsk II Accords were extremely favorable to Russia, imposing a set of commitments on Ukraine that surrendered core elements of Ukrainian sovereignty and allowing Russian proxies supported by Russian military forces to continue to occupy the areas they had seized during their initial invasions in

2014. The accords imposed no obligations on Russia — which was party to the negotiations as an alleged neutral mediator.[2] They established a "ceasefire" that Russian proxies continually violated with Russian support.[3] The Minsk II Accords also accepted the false Russian narrative that Russian proxies in Ukraine were independent of Moscow, and Putin insisted that Ukraine uphold its commitments even as the proxies, operating directly on orders from Moscow, violated their own obligations.[4] The Minsk II Accords did not require Russia to withdraw its armed forces from occupied areas of Ukraine, and Russia used positions in the occupied areas as staging areas for the 2022 full-scale invasion.

Putin insisted that negotiations with Ukraine must be based on the same demands he made before the invasion and at the moment of Russia's greatest territorial gains, despite the fact that Ukraine has secured Kyiv and liberated much of the territory his forces held at that time. Putin said during Direct Line that he is ready to hold talks with Ukraine without preconditions, that any talks must be based on what Russia and Ukraine had agreed upon during negotiations in Istanbul in March 2022, when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv and throughout eastern and southern Ukraine, and on "the realities that are developing on the ground today."^[5] Putin reiterated that the demands he made at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in June 2024 — that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts before Russia can agree to a ceasefire or peace negotiations — still stand.^[6] The draft treaty that resulted from the Ukraine-Russia negotiations in Istanbul in March 2022 stated that Ukraine would be a permanently neutral state that could not join NATO, and imposed limitations on the Ukrainian military similar to those imposed by the Treaty of Versailles on Germany after World War I, restricting Ukraine's armed forces to 85,000 soldiers.^[7] Russia's demands at Istanbul were mainly more detailed versions of the demands that Putin made in the months before he launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022, including Ukraine's "demilitarization" and neutrality.^[8]

Putin's reference to conditions he attempted to impose on Ukraine when he believed his invasion could succeed in a few days and then, later, as his forces were still driving on Kyiv, reflects his projected confidence that he can completely defeat Ukraine militarily despite the tremendous setbacks Ukraine has inflicted on Russian forces since then. Russian forces were driving on Kyiv and advancing in southern, eastern, and northern Ukraine while the Istanbul negotiations were ongoing in March 2022.^[9] Ukrainian forces have since pushed Russian forces away from Kyiv and secured the city and its environs from ground attack while conducting counteroffensives that pushed Russian forces away from Kharkiv City and liberated Kherson as well as much other territory. **Kremlin officials have repeatedly invoked the concept of the "realities on the ground" in reference to Russian gains on the battleground, but realities on the ground reflect Ukraine's demonstrated ability to stop Russian advances and reverse them.**^[10]

Putin's insistence on Ukraine's complete surrender reflects his belief that Russia is winning and will outlast Ukrainian and Western resolve. Putin will not likely accept a lesser settlement unless Ukrainian forces inflict other significant battlefield setbacks on Russia and demonstrate to him that he cannot win militarily. Putin claimed during Direct Line that Russia's combat readiness is the highest in the world and that Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) is producing everything that the Russian military needs.^[11] Putin claimed that the battlefield situation is changing significantly in Russia's favor and that Russian forces are advancing across the entire frontline. Putin bragged that Russian forces are not advancing in "100, 200, 300 meters" but in square kilometers and that Russian forces are advancing to accomplish the goals that Putin has established for the war. Russian forces' rate of advance in Kursk Oblast and Ukraine has recently slowed, however, Putin's rhetoric notwithstanding. ISW assesses that Russian forces advanced at a rate of roughly 27.96 square kilometers per day in November 2024 but have only advanced at a rate of roughly 17.1 square kilometers per day between December 1 and December 18.

Putin's articulated theory of victory assumes that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual, creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful, operationally significant counteroffensive operations against Russian forces, and will win a war of will and attrition against Ukrainian forces.^[12] This theory of victory rests on Putin's assumptions that Russia can outlast and overcome Western security assistance to Ukraine and Ukraine's ongoing efforts to man and equip its military and that the West will abandon Ukraine. Western decision-makers can invalidate these assumptions and compel Putin to negotiate on bases acceptable to the United States, Ukraine, and Europe by proving their will to continue supporting Ukraine and enabling Ukrainian forces to inflict significant battlefield setbacks on Russia.

Putin reiterated the false narrative that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency is illegitimate, in part, to blame Ukraine for delaying negotiations and garner support for full Ukrainian capitulation among a Russian population that increasingly wants the war to end. Putin falsely claimed that Zelensky is the illegitimate president of Ukraine and that any

governmental body formed under his presidency is by extension illegitimate.[13] Putin also reiterated the claim that the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada is the only legitimate governing body in Ukraine.[14] ISW has previously observed that Kremlin officials are using a false reading of the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian law to delegitimize Ukraine's government and sovereignty.[15] Putin has claimed that the Ukrainian government has been illegitimate since the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution and has used this false assertion to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[16] Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 19 that the most popular question that Russian citizens submitted to the Direct Line press conference asked when the war would end.[17] Putin is likely promoting the false narrative about Zelensky's illegitimacy to Russia's war fatigued domestic population in order to set conditions to blame Ukraine — and not Russia — for the lack of negotiations to end the war on his terms and to garner support for the removal of the legitimate Ukrainian government — one of Russia's ongoing maximalist demands. ISW observed polling published in October and November 2024 indicating that the Russian population is increasingly interested in ending the war in exchange for Russian territorial concessions, and ISW assessed that Russian authorities are increasingly concerned about waning public support for the war.[18]

Putin continues to justify his decision to prioritize Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast over expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast. Putin claimed during the Direct Line that he has no doubt that Russian forces will push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast and promised the restoration of all settlements to Russian control but refused to provide an exact timeline for the completion of the Russian operation to re-take the remainder of Kursk Oblast.[19] Putin claimed that he refuses to provide an exact timeline because Russian servicemembers will hear him and immediately begin more aggressive and costly efforts to retake the remainder of Kursk Oblast regardless of manpower losses, which Putin absurdly insinuated is against the Russian military's code of conduct. Putin's claim that Russian officials care about manpower losses is ironic considering that Russia has suffered an estimated 125,800 casualties in September, October, and November 2024 in exchange for just over 2,000 square kilometers of gains — roughly 53 casualties per square kilometer gained.[20] The Russian military command has prioritized offensive operations and advances in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions over the last five months (since about July 2024) at the expense of expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast, and Putin's claim about wanting to avoid increased manpower losses in Kursk Oblast is likely aimed at justifying Russia's delayed efforts to retake Kursk Oblast to the Russian public.

Putin is apparently embarrassed to admit his need for North Korean forces to push Ukrainian forces out of Russian territory, despite his openness about the Russia-North Korea relationship. Putin notably did not mention North Korea during the entire four and a half hours of his Direct Line press conference and instead highlighted the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) for its participation in combat operations in Kursk Oblast.[21] Russian milbloggers have recently attributed the seizure of Plekhovo, Kursk Oblast in part to elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade and North Korean forces, and one milblogger claimed that elements of two unspecified Russian brigades have claimed responsibility for the seizure even though North Korean forces had seized the settlement with no assistance from Russian forces.[22] North Korean forces reportedly trained at Russian military facilities in Primorsky Krai, including in Vladivostok where the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade is based.[23] Putin's decision not to recognize North Korean forces' contributions to combat operations is likely placing limits on the extent of the aid that Russia can get from North Korea as Putin tries to minimize evidence of their help. The Kremlin would very likely struggle to conceal larger numbers of North Korean forces fighting within Kursk Oblast or in Ukraine itself, for example.

Putin continues to fixate on the Russian "Oreshnik" ballistic missile as part of his non-nuclear deterrent aimed at simultaneously forcing the West to make decisions favorable to Russia and providing Putin with an off-ramp from his failed nuclear saber-rattling narrative. Putin claimed that the Oreshnik is a "medium and shorter" range missile with a range somewhere between 1,500 and 5,500 kilometers and that modern Western air defense systems cannot intercept the Oreshnik.[24] Putin has leaned into highlighting the Oreshnik missile's technical specifications in recent weeks, likely to create fear and uncertainty about the damage that the Oreshnik can inflict and to pressure Ukraine's partners to limit Ukrainian strikes against military targets in Russia with Western-provided weapons.[25] Putin has emphasized recently the Oreshnik's non-nuclear capabilities, likely to provide an off-ramp from his nuclear posturing as Ukrainian and Western actions have challenged the Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling every time the Kremlin has employed it. ISW has previously assessed that there is nothing particularly new about the Oreshnik's capabilities, and Russia already possesses missiles that Western air defenses likely cannot reliably shoot down.[26]

Putin's boasting about Russia's military capabilities ignores the reality of the serious and unsustainable losses that Russia has suffered to advance relatively more rapidly in Donetsk Oblast in recent months. Russian forces advanced more rapidly in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast in

September, October, and November 2024 than during the first eight months of 2024 — but Russian forces simultaneously sustained increased losses during this period as well.[27] The United Kingdom (UK) Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Russian forces reached an average of 1,523 personnel casualties per day and over 45,000 per month in November 2024 as Russia prioritized advances in eastern Ukraine - a new high for the war thus far.[28] Russia has also reportedly expended a significant percentage of its operational reserves on its 2024 offensive campaign in Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on December 19 that Russian forces expended a significant part of their operational reserves that Russia accumulated in 2024 in pursuit of gains in the Kupyansk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vremivka directions, and Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported in October 2024 that Russian forces had intended to commit most of their operational reserves formed from the Northern Grouping of Forces and Central Military District (CMD) to these directions.[29] Russian forces still need to seize over 8,000 square kilometers to achieve Russia's long-standing objective of seizing the entirety of Donetsk Oblast and will likely continue to suffer significant manpower losses if Russia continues to conduct intensified offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast in 2025.

Putin continues to falsely posture the Russian economy as strong and stable while deflecting blame for economic issues onto the Russian Central Bank. Putin characterized the Russian economy as "stable and reliable" but acknowledged that inflation rates have reached 9.2 to 9.3 percent and ordered the Central Bank to "bring these rates down to earth."^[30] Putin claimed that Russia is a strong state that is only becoming stronger and more independent in the last two or three years of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin claimed that Russia is able to "stand confidently on its own two feet" in terms of its economy and noted that Russia remains one of the world's main food exporters, neglecting to mention Russia's continued illegal export of stolen grain from occupied Ukraine. Putin insinuated that the Russian Central Bank and its head, Elvira Nabiullina, mishandled rising Russian interest rates and noted that the Russian government's economic policies had "some shortcomings," likely in an attempt to deflect blame for rising interest rates and inflation on another Russian official. In reality, Putin's personal desire to insulate the Russian people from the economic and other impacts of the war in Ukraine is likely hindering the Central Bank's ability to respond to the economic pressures of Western sanctions and rising labor shortages.

The Ukrainian government, in contrast, appears to be addressing the economic impacts of the war more effectively than Russia, despite also suffering devastating economic consequences from the same war. The *Economist* reported on December 19 that Ukraine's currency conversion rates are currently stable and that the Ukrainian Central Bank forecasts that Ukraine's GDP will grow by four percent in 2024 and 4.3 percent in 2025.^[31] The Russian Central Bank, in comparison, recently announced that it expects Russia's GDP to grow by 0.5 to 1.5 percent in 2025.^[32] Ukraine's interest rate is currently at a 30-month low at 13.5 percent compared to Russia's current high interest rate of 21 percent, which some Russian sources have speculated will rise to 23 percent following a Russian Central Bank meeting on December 20.^[33]

Putin attempted to balance among Russian ultranationalist demands for restrictions against migrants, Russia's reliance on migrants to address labor shortages and long-term demographic issues, and the need to posture Russia as an ethnically diverse and harmonious country. Putin expressed his support for requiring migrant children to pass a Russian language exam in order to attend school in Russia.^[34] Putin further claimed that Russia needs to work with Central Asian countries to prepare migrants who are interested in moving to Russia to adapt to Russian language, culture, and law and supported the creation of a separate center within the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) responsible for migration issues in the future.^[35] Putin acknowledged that Russia suffers a labor shortage in the "hundreds of thousands" but noted that Russia would rather offset these shortages with new technology that boosts labor productivity instead of unskilled migrant labor.^[36] Putin responded to a request from a German citizen living in Russia to receive Russian citizenship, claiming that Russia is interested in attracting highly qualified specialists who are "compatriots abroad" — whom Putin defined as Russian language speakers and individuals who consider themselves a part of Russian culture — to live and work in Russia.^[37] Putin has used the "compatriots abroad" framework to justify Russian involvement and influence in post-Soviet countries, including Central Asian states, but notably chose to make an example during Direct Line of a "compatriot" from a European background. Putin acknowledged Russian long-term demographic challenges and claimed that the number of women in Russia of childbearing age has decreased by 30 percent.^[38] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is trying to leverage migrants to offset labor shortages and long-term demographic decline but that the Kremlin will face challenges balancing these efforts with xenophobic Russian ultranationalist efforts to restrict migration from Central Asia.^[39]

Putin continues attempts to promote multicultural and interreligious unity among ethnic minorities living in Russia, however. Kremlin newswire TASS notably highlighted Direct Line attendees who attended the press conference wearing traditional cultural attire of Russia's ethnic minorities.^[40] One man

whom TASS filmed was wearing traditional attire and held up the banner of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade behind Putin during the press conference.[41] Putin's support for harsher restrictions against migrants and promotion of ethnic minorities living in Russia continues to indicate that Putin is attempting to placate the xenophobic pro-war Russian ultranationalist community that demands crackdowns against migrants while attempting to foster civic Russian nationalism and posture Russia as a harmonious, diverse society.

Putin attempted to frame Russia's strategic political defeat in Syria following the collapse of the Assad regime as a victory, as Moscow continues to negotiate with the interim Syrian government on the status of Russia's military bases in the country. Putin claimed during the Direct Line that Russia "achieved [its] goal" in Syria, in an attempt to frame Russia's failure to secure Bashar al Assad's regime — the reason Moscow intervened in the Syrian Civil War in 2015 — as a victory.[42] Putin claimed that Russia maintains relations with "all the groups that control the situation" in Syria and that an "overwhelming majority" — but not all — of these groups are interested in the Russian military retaining its bases in Syria. Putin claimed that Russia has proposed using its Hmeimim Air Base and Port of Tartus to bring humanitarian aid into Syria. Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) has reportedly already refused Moscow's offers of humanitarian aid, and Putin's statements suggest that talks are ongoing between Moscow and the interim Syrian government about Russia's bases but have not finalized any possible agreements.[43]

Putin framed the recent Ukrainian assassination of Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistant as a terrorist attack enabled by Russian law enforcement's failures rather than a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin responded to a journalist's question during Direct Line about Kirillov's assassination on December 17, stating that Russian security services missed Kyiv's "terrorist attacks" and called on Russian law enforcement agencies to improve their operations in order to prevent similar incidents in the future.[44] Putin also emphasized that Ukrainian "terrorist acts" could impact Russian civilians' lives but omitted the fact that the assassination targeted a high-ranking Russian military official who was responsible for Russian chemical weapons attacks and information operations against Ukraine.[45] Putin's efforts to blame the incident on the negligence of Russian internal security and law enforcement services is notable, as the Russian ultranationalist community demanded after the assassination that Russia retaliate by escalating its missile and drone strike campaign against the Ukrainian military-political leadership.[46] Putin's response to the assassination during Direct Line was also extremely brief, possibly in an attempt to downplay the embarrassment of such a high-profile assassination.

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Refinery in Rostov Oblast on the night of December 18 to 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and other Ukrainian forces struck infrastructure and production facilities at the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Refinery.[47] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Refinery is the only operational oil refinery in Rostov Oblast, and that it refines up to 7.5 million tons of fuel per year and supports the Russian military. Geolocated footage published on December 18 shows a fire at the refinery.[48] Rostov Oblast Acting Governor Yuri Slyusar acknowledged that Ukrainian strikes caused a fire at the refinery and claimed that Ukrainian forces used three unspecified missiles and more than 30 drones to facilitate the strike.[49] Ukrainian forces last targeted the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Refinery on March 13, 2024, and it reportedly temporarily stopped refining after that strike.[50]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he should have violated the ceasefire he had imposed on Ukraine in 2014 by launching a full-scale invasion even earlier when asked to reflect on his 2022 decision to attack.
- Putin insisted that negotiations with Ukraine must be based on the same demands he made before the invasion and at the moment of Russia's greatest territorial gains, despite the fact that Ukraine has secured Kyiv and liberated much of the territory his forces held at that time.
- Putin's insistence on Ukraine's complete surrender reflects his belief that Russia is winning and will outlast Ukrainian and Western resolve. Putin will not likely accept a lesser settlement unless Ukrainian forces inflict other significant battlefield setbacks on Russia and demonstrate to him that he cannot win militarily.
- Putin reiterated the false narrative that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency is illegitimate, in part, to blame Ukraine for delaying negotiations and garner support for full Ukrainian capitulation among a Russian population that increasingly wants the war to end.
- Putin continues to justify his decision to prioritize Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast over expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.

- Putin is apparently embarrassed to admit his need for North Korean forces to push Ukrainian forces out of Russian territory, despite his openness about the Russia-North Korea relationship.
- Putin continues to fixate on the Russian "Oreshnik" ballistic missile as part of his non-nuclear deterrent aimed at simultaneously forcing the West to make decisions favorable to Russia and providing Putin with an off-ramp from his failed nuclear saber-rattling narrative.
- Putin's boasting about Russia's military capabilities ignores the reality of the serious and unsustainable losses that Russia has suffered to advance relatively more rapidly in Donetsk Oblast in recent months.
- Putin continues to falsely posture the Russian economy as strong and stable while deflecting blame for economic issues onto the Russian Central Bank.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, Velyka Novosilka, and Robotyne.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continued efforts to evade blame for ongoing systemic payment issues impacting Russian servicemembers fighting in Kursk Oblast caused by his decision to downplay Ukraine's incursion into the region as a "counterterrorism operation" by scapegoating the Russian Ministry of Defense.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Mariupol occupation officials to redistribute illegally confiscated Ukrainian apartments during his annual Direct Line televised press conference on December 19, signaling Russia's continued efforts to forcibly repopulate occupied areas of Ukraine with Russians to fundamentally alter Ukraine's demographics.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 18, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 18, 2024, 7:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00 pm ET on December 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a chemical plant in Rostov Oblast on December 18. Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that unspecified actors struck the Kamensky Chemical Plant and that the plant produces rocket fuel, explosives, and ammunition components and disposes of spent rocket systems.^[1] Acting Rostov Oblast Governor Yury Slyusar claimed that Russian forces downed 10 missiles over Rostov Oblast, and Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces used Storm Shadow or ATACMS missiles in the strike.^[2] Russian sources amplified footage purportedly showing Russian air defenses downing the missiles, and a Russian insider source claimed that Ukrainian forces also targeted the Taganrog Metallurgical Plant.^[3]

Ukraine's European allies continue to provide monetary and defense industrial support to sustain Ukraine's war effort. German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced on December 17 that the company will supply Ukraine with nine million euros (\$9.34 million) worth of 155mm propellant charge modules of various types in January 2025.^[4] Rheinmetall will deliver tens of thousands of propellant charges as part of the contract and is also planning to produce unspecified artillery ammunition and produce and deliver an unspecified number of Lynx infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine in the future. Global propellant charge shortages may be limiting Ukraine's ability to produce ammunition domestically, and the delivery of additional modules will likely support Ukraine's ongoing efforts to expand its domestic ammunition production capabilities.^[5] The European Commission reported on December 18 that it disbursed nearly 4.1 billion euros (\$4.25 billion) worth of grants and loans to Ukraine as part of the second payment of the European Union's (EU) Ukraine Facility program.^[6] Reuters reported on December 17 that an unspecified source stated that NATO recently began overseeing coordination of Western military assistance to Ukraine.^[7]

Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov heavily inflated alleged statistics about Russian territorial gains in 2024. Gerasimov claimed on December 18 that Russian forces seized roughly 4,500 square kilometers in 2024.^[8] ISW has observed confirmation that Russian forces have only seized 3,306 square kilometers in 2024, however. Gerasimov's exaggerated figures contrast with Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov's more accurate statements to the Russian

Ministry of Defense (MoD) board meeting on December 16. Belousov claimed, for example, that Russian forces' average daily rate of advance is about 30 square kilometers.[9] ISW observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces advanced at a rate of roughly 27.96 square kilometers per day in November 2024.[10] Belousov also claimed that Russian forces have seized roughly 99 percent of Luhansk Oblast, 70 percent of Donetsk Oblast, roughly 74 percent of Zaporizhia Oblast, and roughly 76 percent of Kherson Oblast.[11] ISW assesses that Russian forces occupy roughly 99 percent of Luhansk Oblast, 66 percent of Donetsk Oblast, and 73 percent of Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts each.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on December 18 that Russian authorities detained the suspect who planted the improvised explosive device (IED) that killed Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his aide, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow on December 17.[12] The FSB claimed that the alleged perpetrator is a 29-year-old citizen of Uzbekistan who claimed that Ukrainian special services recruited him to place an IED planted in an electric scooter near Kirillov's residence in exchange for money and permission to live in the European Union.[13] The Uzbek Embassy in Moscow stated on December 18 that it is in contact with Russian law enforcement to clarify information about the alleged suspect.[14] ISW cannot independently confirm if the suspect was involved in Kirillov's and his assistant's death. Russian milbloggers seized on the suspect's Central Asian origins to call for harsher migration laws and restrictions against migrants.[15] Russian milbloggers' hyperfocus on the alleged perpetrator's ethnic origins highlights the polarizing debate over the role and treatment of migrants and ethnic minorities in Russian society, suggesting that the Kremlin is increasingly struggling to foster civic Russian nationalism and portray Russia as inclusive and harmonious multicultural country.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a chemical plant in Rostov Oblast on December 18.
- Ukraine's European allies continue to provide monetary and defense industrial support to sustain Ukraine's war effort.
- Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov heavily inflated alleged statistics about Russian territorial gains in 2024.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on December 18 that Russian authorities detained the suspect who planted the improvised explosive device (IED) that killed Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his aide, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow on December 17.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Kremenna, and Pokrovsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is increasingly tricking conscripts into signing military service contracts to fight in Ukraine likely in an effort to generate more assault forces and maintain the tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 17, 2024

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Volkov, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 17, 2024, 7:15 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on December 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) killed Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistant, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow on December 17. SBU sources confirmed to various Ukrainian and Western outlets that the SBU carried out a "special operation" to kill Kirillov, whom the SBU sources described as a "legitimate target" for his war crimes and use of banned chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military.[1] Russian Investigative Committee (Sledkom) Representative Svetlana Petrenko announced that Sledkom's Main Investigative Department for Moscow launched an investigation into Kirillov's and Polikarpov's deaths after an improvised explosive device (IED) planted in a scooter remotely detonated near a residential building on Ryazansky Prospect.[2] Russian sources released later geolocated footage of the IED attack and its aftermath, showing a badly damaged entrance to the building and blown out windows.[3] The SBU notably charged Kirillov in absentia on December 16 for being responsible for the mass use of banned chemical weapons in Ukraine and reported that Russian forces carried out over 4,800 attacks with chemical weapons in Ukraine under Kirillov's command.[4]

The Kremlin and Russian propagandists overwhelmingly attempted to frame Kirillov's assassination as an unprovoked terrorist act, rather than a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Kirillov's responsibility for Russian chemical weapons attacks and information operations against Ukraine. Petrenko announced that Sledkom designated Kirillov's and Polokarpov's deaths as a terrorist act, and Russian officials such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova emphasized Kirillov's prominent role in spreading numerous (false) narratives about Ukraine's and NATO's alleged use of chemical and biological weapons.[5] Kirillov spread several false narratives over the years, such as nonsensically claiming that the United States established "biolabs" in Ukraine and other countries around Russia and that the Pentagon deliberately destroyed the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) to spread contagious diseases via insects.[6] The Kremlin notably used the false claims of Ukrainian use of biolabs as a pretext for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[7] Federation Council Committee of Defense and Security Member Vladimir Chizhov among other Russian officials and propagandists claimed that Western and Ukrainian security officials hated Kirillov for "exposing" Western provocations in Russia.[8]

The Russian ultranationalist information space overwhelmingly called on the Kremlin to retaliate against Ukraine by targeting its military-political leadership and indirectly criticized the Kremlin's decision to not recognize the war in Ukraine as a full-scale war that also impacts the Russian rear.[9] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger called on the Kremlin to target Ukrainian commanders instead of "launching 100 missiles at [Ukrainian] energy infrastructure."[10] The milblogger added that the war is only eight hours from Moscow and cautioned that Russia remains vulnerable to Ukrainian agents working inside Russia.[11] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev attempted to appease the Russian ultranationalist crowd by claiming that the Russian military will avenge Kirillov's death by targeting Ukraine's military-political leadership--which the Kremlin has long been seeking to do.[12] Another Kremlin-affiliated milblogger noted that Kirillov's assassination once again showed that Ukrainian forces are able to conduct intricate operations despite Russian gains on the frontlines, and implied that more Russians should stop treating Russia's war in Ukraine as just a war in Donbas.[13] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russia cannot win this war simply by launching unguided aerial bombs and Oreshnik ballistic missiles at Ukraine and that Russia needs to destroy Ukrainian military-political leadership, effectively undermining the Kremlin's recent attempts to present Oreshnik as Russia's "latest powerful weapon."
[14]

US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby confirmed on December 16 that North Korean forces are engaged in combat operations and suffering losses in Kursk Oblast as Russian official sources continue to avoid reporting on or confirming the deployment of North Korean forces to combat in Russia.[15] Kirby stated that the US has observed North Korean soldiers moving from the "second lines" of the battlefield in Kursk Oblast to the frontline over the past several days. Pentagon Spokesperson Major General Patrick Ryder stated on December 16 that North Korean military personnel have been killed and wounded in combat operations in Kursk Oblast but did not specify how many casualties North Korean personnel have suffered.[16] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 16 that the Russian military is attempting to conceal North Korean personnel losses and is burning the faces of killed North Korean soldiers to conceal their presence in Russia.[17] Zelensky added that the Russian military forbids North Korean personnel from showing their faces while training in Russia and attempted to remove any video evidence of North Korean soldiers operating in Russia. Ukrainian military officials and intelligence sources have previously noted that the Russian military attempted to disguise North Korean soldiers as Russian forces from the Republic of Buryatia.[18] ISW has not observed Russian officials and state media acknowledging the presence of North Korean forces in Russia or their participation in combat operations in Kursk Oblast. The Kremlin will likely continue to avoid reporting on the deployment of North Korean forces in Kursk Oblast as doing so would tacitly acknowledge that Russia needs foreign troops to recapture its own territory and invalidate Russian President Vladimir Putin's claims that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast resulted in high Russian recruitment rates.[19]

Neither the Kremlin nor the interim Syrian government appear sure of the future of Russian bases in Syria, likely accounting for Russia's continued visible preparations at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus to withdraw forces despite claims and reports that the interim Syrian government might extend Russian basing rights. Various Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-affiliated sources have given Western media outlets conflicting statements about the status of Russian bases—suggesting that there is likely some dissonance even within the transitional Syrian government about its plan regarding Russian bases. The *Economist* cited an HTS source on December 17 saying that Russia and HTS have "now entered negotiations" and that HTS "has conceded that it will probably allow Russia to keep some or all of its bases."
[20] UK-based, Qatari-owned news outlet *Al Arabi al Jadeed* reported on December 16, in contrast, that sources "close to the [HTS-led] military operations department" in Syria stated that Russia will withdraw all its military forces from Syria within one month, as ISW reported.
[21] The divergent HTS-affiliated reporting suggests that HTS itself has not come to a

decision on Russian basing yet, and HTS is likely facing substantial international pressure to fully remove the Russian presence from Syria. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas stated on December 16 that the EU will raise the possibility of closing all Russian bases in Syria "with the country's new leadership."^[22] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) noted on December 16 that Russia is "closely monitoring" developments in Syria and that Moscow believes that there is a path to a "sustainable normalization of the situation in Syria...through the launch of an inclusive intra-Syrian dialogue."^[23]

Visual evidence and Syrian reporting continue to indicate that Russian forces are preparing to either significantly draw down or fully withdraw from Syria, however. A well-placed Damascus-based outlet reported on December 17 that Russian forces were evacuating their positions in Latakia (Hmeimim Air Base) and preparing a large military convoy to leave via the Port of Tartus.^[24] Maxar satellite imagery from December 15-17 shows a Russian Il-76 transport aircraft and dozens of military vehicles on the tarmac at Hmeimim Airbase and dozens of Russian military vehicles assembled at the Port of Tartus (see embedded images below). Russia is likely adopting this tentative posture and withdrawing some assets on the chance that HTS decides deny Russia a continued military presence in Syria, but it remains unclear what HTS intends to do.

Key Takeaways:

- The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) killed Russian Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Forces (NBC) Head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov and his assistant, Major Ilya Polikarpov, in Moscow on December 17.
- The Kremlin and Russian propagandists overwhelmingly attempted to frame Kirillov's assassination as an unprovoked terrorist act, rather than a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Kirillov's responsibility for Russian chemical weapons attacks and information operations against Ukraine.
- The Russian ultranationalist information space overwhelmingly called on the Kremlin to retaliate against Ukraine by targeting its military-political leadership and indirectly criticized the Kremlin's decision to not recognize the war in Ukraine as a full-scale war that also impacts the Russian rear.
- US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby confirmed on December 16 that North Korean forces are engaged in combat operations and suffering losses in Kursk Oblast as Russian official sources continue to avoid reporting on or confirming the deployment of North Korean forces to combat in Russia.
- Neither the Kremlin nor the interim Syrian government appear sure of the future of Russian bases in Syria, likely accounting for Russia's continued visible preparations at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus to withdraw forces despite claims and reports that the interim Syrian government might extend Russian basing rights.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Vuhledar, Velyka Novosilka, and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin is scaling up the intended effects of its "Time of Heroes" program, which aims to install Kremlin-selected veterans into government officials, by tasking Russian regional governments to create more localized analogues.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 16, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Grace Mapes, William Runkel, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 16, 2024 8:40PM ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:50 pm ET on December 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's continued fixation on the Russian "Oreshnik" ballistic missile and Russia's non-nuclear deterrence suggests that the Kremlin may be searching for off-ramps from its continued nuclear saber-rattling narrative. Putin addressed the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) board on December 16 and discussed Russian military developments in 2024 and Russia's military goals for 2025.^[1] Putin stated that Russia is developing military capabilities and technologies alongside its nuclear triad and emphasized that the Oreshnik ballistic missile is Russia's "latest powerful weapon," of which Russia will soon serialize production. Putin also notably

claimed that if Russia were to use the Oreshnik in a "complex manner" in tandem with other non-nuclear munitions, the resulting strike would be "comparable in power to the use of nuclear weapons." Putin noted that the Oreshnik does not have a nuclear payload and therefore does not create nuclear contamination, emphasizing that the Oreshnik's non-nuclear nature "is a very important element when deciding what means of armed struggle" Russia will employ. Putin has previously lauded the technical specifications of the Oreshnik ballistic missile, including by comparing it to a nuclear weapon or a meteorite in terms of the damage it can cause.[2]

Putin's recent emphasis on the purported power of Oreshnik is notable and suggests that the Kremlin may seek an off-ramp from the intense nuclear saber-rattling it has employed thus far in the war. Putin's December 16 MoD address, his statements at the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) Security Council in Astana, Kazakhstan, on November 28, and his speech to the MoD on November 22 all appear to be trying to establish the Oreshnik as the bastion of Russia's non-nuclear deterrent.[3] Russia has repeatedly invoked the threat of nuclear retaliation in order to force Ukraine and the West into self-deterrence, but Ukrainian and Western actions have challenged Kremlin's nuclear narrative every time the Kremlin has employed it, constantly undermining Russia's self-defined thresholds for nuclear use.[4] ISW has previously assessed that there is nothing particularly new about the Oreshnik's capabilities, so Putin is likely extolling its technical specifications in order to create fear and uncertainty about the damage the Oreshnik can inflict and to pressure Ukraine's partners to push Ukraine to limit its strikes against Russia out of fear that he will actually conduct retaliation.[5] Putin likely introduced the Oreshnik as a new element in the Kremlin's wider reflexive-control toolkit as the Kremlin increasingly comes to terms with the fact that Putin's unwillingness to follow through on hints of nuclear threats is devaluing them such that he must find a rhetorical off-ramp in order to maintain its credibility in the international information space.

Putin once again reiterated the false Russian narrative that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is illegitimate—firmly establishing that the deposition of Ukraine's legitimate, democratic government is one of the Kremlin's prerequisites for a negotiated settlement to the war. Putin falsely claimed on December 16 that the Ukrainian Constitution only provides for the extension of powers of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament) and does not extend the president's power, even under martial law.[6] Ukraine's constitution and domestic martial law legislation stipulate that presidential, parliamentary, and local elections cannot occur under martial law, and Ukraine has been under martial law since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.[7] Zelensky was legally required to suspend Ukrainian elections in 2024 under these provisions and did so.[8] Kremlin officials have previously invoked this false narrative to claim that Zelensky is illegitimate and lacks power and to suggest that the Ukrainian Rada is the only legitimate actor with which Russia can negotiate.[9] ISW has previously assessed that Kremlin officials are using a gross misrepresentation of the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian domestic law to further this claim, which is consistent with Russian decade-long efforts to rhetorically delegitimize Ukraine's government and sovereignty.[10] Putin very likely resurrected this narrative—which has been largely dormant since early Summer 2024—in order to reiterate that the Kremlin views regime change in Kyiv as a necessary precondition to "negotiate" with Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that Russia has no interest in engaging in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine and will only sit down at the negotiating table if and when it feels it has secured maximalist concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty, including by removing Ukraine's legitimate government and cutting Ukrainian actors out of the conversation entirely.[11]

Russian Defense Minister Belousov also used the December 16 Russian MoD board meeting to reiterate Putin's previously stated territorial objectives in Ukraine as another Kremlin prerequisite to a negotiated settlement to the war. Belousov reiterated that Russia can only ensure victory in its war in Ukraine by achieving the goals that Putin set out in his June 2024 speech to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), wherein Putin stated that Ukrainian forces must "completely withdraw" from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts before Russia would agree to enter into negotiations.[12] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev similarly invoked Putin's June 2024 speech on December 12, indicating that the Russian occupation of all four oblasts – including the territory that Russian forces do not currently occupy – remains the Kremlin's current territorial objective and that the Kremlin is undertaking a concerted effort to publicly promote this position throughout various branches of Russian government.[13] Kremlin officials' recent emphasis on Putin's territorial demands, coupled with Putin's continued claim that the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate, demonstrate that the Kremlin is demanding that other negotiating parties hand over sovereign Ukrainian territory, including some that Russia has been unable to seize militarily to Russia without Ukraine's consent.

Belousov also used his December 16 address to posture as an effective and innovative manager—sharply contrasting his leadership of the MoD with that of former Defense Minister and current Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu. Belousov highlighted the Russian military's recent investment in technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and quantum computing,

and noted that the MoD is following Putin's directive to make the Russian Armed Forces more flexible and receptive to innovation.[14] Belousov claimed that the Russian logistics and supply system faced "practically no disruptions" in 2024 and that the Russian MoD "regularly" meets with Russian military correspondents, after which the MoD has relayed issues raised by such correspondents to relevant military command bodies.[15] **Belousov also notably acknowledged that Ukrainian strikes on the Russian rear have forced Russian military authorities to respond by taking "priority measures" to protect arsenals and fuel depots and reviewing how Russian forces organize and disperse storage and logistics bases.**[16] Several Russian milbloggers and insider sources praised Belousov's speech and noted that it is reflective of a new era of Russian MoD leadership that aims to eliminate the bureaucratic barriers and inefficiency characteristic of Shoigu's MoD.[17] Milbloggers also noted that Belousov does not cover up issues but is willing to discuss shortcomings within the Russian military, such as obliquely acknowledging that Ukrainian strikes on the Russian rear have driven Russian command to make difficult decisions—praise that contrasts with a common critique of Shoigu and the policies he encouraged while at the head of the MoD.[18] Shoigu long faced accusations of corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and organizational incompetence, and Belousov appears to be trying to set himself apart from that legacy.[19]

Putin ordered the MoD to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces as part of continued efforts to centralize control over Russian irregular drone units. Belousov stated that Putin issued the order to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces within the Russian military and that the MoD will complete its formation in the third quarter of 2025 — consistent with ISW's recent assessment that this reorganization will take at least six to twelve months.[20] Belousov described the Unmanned Systems Forces as a combat arms branch (род войск; *rod voysk*), while Putin previously described the Unmanned Systems Forces as a separate branch (отдельный род; *otdelnyi rod*).[21] The organization of the Unmanned Systems Forces within the larger Russian military remains unclear given the differences between Putin's and Belousov's descriptions. ISW has previously reported on the Russian MoD's efforts to largely centralize control over its informal and ad-hoc drone units to free up manpower for infantry assaults, and ISW continues to assess that this reorganization may impact the Russian tactical reconnaissance strike complex (the integration of electronic warfare [EW] and unmanned systems with ground-based fires and attack drones) and reduce the cohesion between assault, drone, and artillery elements.[22]

Belousov's statements confirm that the Russian military is recruiting just enough military personnel to replace its recent casualty rates, but intensified offensive operations have and will likely continue to strain the efficacy of Russia's cryptomobilization efforts. Belousov claimed that the Russian military has recruited over 427,000 volunteer servicemembers so far in 2024, a daily average of more than 1,200 people.[23] US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated on October 31 that Russian forces are suffering roughly 1,200 casualties per day, and the UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently observed that Russian forces suffered record-high casualty rates in November 2024 with an average 1,523 casualties per day – notably higher than Belousov's claimed 1,200 recruits per day.[24] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on December 16 that data from federal budget expenditures on one-time payments to those who sign military service contracts with the Russian MoD indicate that between 215,700 and 249,000 people signed contracts in the first three quarters of 2024. [25] *Vazhnye Istorii* noted that the Russian government has not published data from the fourth quarter of 2024 yet but that at least 178,000 people would have had to have signed contracts between October 2024 and mid-December 2024 in order to reach Belousov's 427,000 figure. ISW cannot independently verify Russia's recruitment rates, and the Russian government may be delaying or even refusing to pay one-time payments to recruits such that the expenditure data does not reflect actual recruitment rates. ISW has recently observed indications that the Russian military has been struggling to recruit enough soldiers to replace its frontline losses.[26] Continued intensified offensive operations in Ukraine, particularly in western Donetsk Oblast, have put an unsustainable strain on Russia's force generation apparatus and economy. Russian authorities will likely have to balance mounting personnel losses and the growing pressure to enact a deeply unpopular partial involuntary reserve callup.

Russia continues to negotiate with the interim Syrian government to maintain its military presence at the Hmeimim Air Base and Port of Tartus in Syria, but Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov's recent appeals to Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) suggest that talks may have hit a snag. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on December 16 that there are "no final decisions" about Russia's military bases in Syria and that Moscow is in contact with "representatives of the forces that currently control the situation" in Syria — likely referring to HTS.[27] Kadyrov claimed on December 15 in a post in both English and Arabic that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "always treated the Syrian people with respect and compassion" and that Russia considers it a duty to stand by Russia's "brotherly people" in Syria.[28] Kadyrov emphasized Russia's efforts to restore mosques in Syria and provide humanitarian aid to the country. Kadyrov also applauded the interim Syrian government on December 16 for its efforts to bring stability and peace to the country.[29] Kadyrov claimed that it will be difficult to achieve stability "without the help of partners," however, and

highlighted Russia's "strength and means" that can help prevent a humanitarian crisis from developing in the country. Kadyrov called on Russia to remove HTS from Russia's list of terrorist organizations and create a Russian-HTS contact group, which should also involve Syrians who have been living in Chechnya. Kadyrov has previously used his position as a leader of the Russian Muslim community to reach out to the Arab world.[30] The relatively late timing of Kadyrov's overtures to HTS — one week after the fall of the Assad regime and days into reported Russian-HTS talks — and his overt emphasis on how the interim Syrian government can benefit from cooperation with Russia suggest that Russian-HTS talks may have hit obstacles and that the Kremlin is trying to use alternative channels to appeal to HTS.

Russia continues to withdraw elements of its force grouping in Syria to the western coast amid limited reports that Moscow plans to fully withdraw within one month. Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service (SZRU) stated on December 15 that Russian forces are withdrawing from the Russian bases near Manbij, Kobani, and Qamishli and that Russian negotiations with HTS are not covering these other bases.[31] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 16 that Russian military transport aircraft, including three Il-76MD and two An-124 transport aircraft, are flying from Syria to Chkalovsk, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and Makhachkla, Republic of Dagestan as Russian forces in Syria continue to withdraw westward to Hmeimim and Tartus.[32] CNN reported on December 16 that two US officials and one Western official familiar with intelligence on the matter stated that Russia has been withdrawing a large amount of military equipment and soldiers from Syria but that it is not clear if the withdrawal is intended to be permanent.[33] The two US officials reportedly stated that Russia has started to move naval assets from Syria to Libya, with another defense official stating that Russia is increasing pressure on Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar in order to secure Russia's use of a port in Benghazi. The *Financial Times* reported on December 15 that Kamal Lababidi, a member of the political bureau of HTS who has been involved in the HTS-led Syrian Salvation Government, stated that Russia, in coordination with HTS, recently evacuated at least 400 soldiers from Qudsaya near Damascus to Hmeimim, from where the Russian personnel flew back to Russia.[34] Lababidi reportedly stated that Russia is withdrawing forces to Hmeimim from elsewhere in Syria but is not currently evacuating Hmeimim.

UK-based, Qatari-owned news outlet *Al Araby al Jadeed* reported on December 16 that sources "close to the [HTS-led] military operations department" in Syria stated that Russia will withdraw all its military forces from Syria within one month.[35] The SZRU reported on December 15 that Russia is "urgently" transferring large landing ships from the Baltic and North seas to Syria for evacuations and that Russia is also chartering ships flagged in unspecified countries to load equipment from the Port of Tartus.[36] The GUR stated on December 12 that Russia was moving two landing ships from its Northern Fleet to Tartus and that the ships were in the Norwegian Sea at the time.[37] It will likely be weeks before the landing ships reach the Mediterranean Sea and the Port of Tartus, but Russia may be able to evacuate limited military assets with other chartered ships. OSINT analyst MT Anderson reported that satellite imagery captured on December 16 shows that the Russian vessels that recently left the Port of Tartus, including some that were in a holding pattern off the coast as of December 15, have yet to return.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin's continued fixation on the Russian "Oreshnik" ballistic missile and Russia's non-nuclear deterrence suggests that the Kremlin may be searching for off-ramps from its continued nuclear saber-rattling narrative.
- Putin once again reiterated the false Russian narrative that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is illegitimate—firmly establishing that the deposition of Ukraine's legitimate, democratic government is one of the Kremlin's prerequisites for a negotiated settlement to the war.
- Russian Defense Minister Belousov also used the December 16 Russian MoD board meeting to reiterate Putin's previously stated territorial objectives in Ukraine as another Kremlin prerequisite to a negotiated settlement to the war.
- Belousov also used his December 16 address to posture as an effective and innovative manager—sharply contrasting his leadership of the MoD with that of former Defense Minister and current Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu.
- Putin ordered the MoD to establish the Unmanned Systems Forces as part of continued efforts to centralize control over Russian irregular drone units.
- Belousov's statements confirm that the Russian military is recruiting just enough military personnel to replace its recent casualty rates, but intensified offensive operations have and will likely continue to strain the efficacy of Russia's cryptomobilization efforts.
- Russia continues to negotiate with the interim Syrian government to maintain its military presence at the Hmeimim Air Base and Port of Tartus in Syria, but Chechen Republic

Head Ramzan Kadyrov's recent appeals to Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) suggest that talks may have hit a snag.

- Russia continues to withdraw elements of its force grouping in Syria to the western coast amid limited reports that Moscow plans to fully withdraw within one month.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian government appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov as the Chairperson of the Supervisory Board of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Military Construction Company, likely as part of ongoing anti-corruption efforts within the Russian MoD.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 15, 2024

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Christina Harward, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Brian Carter, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 15, 2024 4:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on December 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted a roughly battalion-sized mechanized assault in the Siversk direction following a recent reported command change of the Russian forces operating near Siversk. Ukrainian military observer Yuriy Butusov reported on December 15 that Russian forces conducted a three-pronged mechanized assault with over 400 personnel, up to 30 armored vehicles, 13 buggies, and 60 motorcycles north, east, and south of Siversk on December 14.[1] Geolocated footage published on December 15 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced during a roughly company-sized mechanized assault north of Veselie (south of Siversk) — likely a component of the larger attack.[2] Butusov reported that Russian forces managed to wedge into four Ukrainian defensive positions and drop infantry but that Ukrainian drone and artillery fire as well as close combat ultimately repelled the assault.[3] Butusov stated that Russian forces aimed to wedge two to three kilometers into Ukrainian defenses, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced two kilometers in depth from the direction of Zolotarivka (east of Siversk).[4] ISW is currently unable to confirm the extent of Russian advances in this assault, and additional footage of the Russian assault will likely emerge in the coming days. Ukrainian Luhansk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Anastasiya Bobovnikova stated on December 14 that Russian forces fielded more than 100 pieces of equipment in a recent assault in the Siversk direction and noted that there were 55 combat engagements in this direction on December 13 — a significant increase in tempo in this area of the frontline.[5]

The recent Siversk assault indicates that Russian forces appear to be learning to conduct more effective assaults but remain far from restoring maneuver to the battlefield. This Russian assault was much larger and more coherent than most Russian assaults in the Siversk direction, and Butusov assessed that Russian forces carefully prepared this assault.[6] Butusov noted that Russian forces specifically coordinated interactions between assault units and communications, electronic warfare (EW), and drone operations – all elements of command and control (C2) with which the Russian military command has historically struggled to conduct effectively.[7] A more prepared Russian assault may be the result of the recent reported command changes in the area. Russian forces near Siversk have especially struggled to conduct effective assaults, as a failed Russian mechanized assault northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka in early November 2024 and exaggerated claims of success in the area contributed to the Russian military command's reported removal and arrest of several brigade commanders within the 3rd Combined Arms Army (CAA) (formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]).[8] A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted Russian command changes claimed on December 13 that the Russian military command recently removed 3rd CAA Commander Major General Dmitry Ovcharov.[9] A Russian milblogger rejected this claim on December 15, instead claiming that Major General Alexei Kolesnikov was the most recent commander of the 3rd CAA and that Kolesnikov recently took up a new, unspecified position.[10]

North Korean forces are reportedly facing expected struggles with high casualties and poor communication with Russian forces in Kursk Oblast, likely disrupting coordination between North Korean and Russian personnel and undermining Russian military operations. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 14 that North Korean forces operating in Kursk Oblast recently fired at Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz battalion vehicles and killed eight Chechen personnel in a friendly fire incident, likely due to the language barrier between the Russian and North Korean forces.[11] The GUR noted that the language barrier also hinders effective

combat coordination between Russian and North Korean forces.[12] The GUR reported that a contingent consisting of Russian and North Korean servicemen in Kursk Oblast lost 200 personnel as of December 14 and that Ukrainian drones swarmed a North Korean position, which is consistent with recent reports of North Korean forces engaging in attritional infantry assaults.[13] The poor integration and ongoing communication problems between Russian and North Korean forces will likely continue to cause friction in Russian military operations in Kursk Oblast in the near term.

Russia's immediate plans for its military assets in Syria remain unclear as reports continue that Russia has secured agreements to keep its main military bases in western Syria while also withdrawing from its other bases in the country. NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW-CTP's December 15 Iran Update. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 15 that rumors are circulating among Russian troops that the Kremlin and unspecified Syrian actors agreed to allow Russia to maintain its military presence at the Port of Tartus and Hmeimim Air Base in Latakia with up to a total of 3,000 Russian military personnel.[14] The GUR also reported that Russian military personnel at the Port of Tartus and Hmeimim Air Base and on nearby ships "in the region" are having problems with drinking water and food supplies and are awaiting food deliveries from Russian military transport aircraft involved in Russia's evacuation of military assets from Syria. Reports that Russian military personnel are awaiting additional food supplies suggest that the Kremlin may not plan or is unable to fully evacuate the bases in the immediate future. OSINT analyst MT Anderson reported on December 15 that satellite imagery captured on December 15 shows the *Admiral Golovko* Admiral Gorshkov-class frigate and possibly the *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate still in a holding pattern roughly 15 kilometers away from the Port of Tartus.[15] The satellite imagery does not include the other vessels in the Russian Mediterranean Sea Flotilla that have recently been offshore.[16]

The GUR also reported on December 15 that unspecified armed groups that fought against the Assad regime are accompanying Russian forces as they withdraw from "remote areas" of Syria, likely towards the western coast.[17] A Syrian anti-Assad regime media outlet claimed on December 15 that Russian forces withdrew from the Tiyas Air Base (west of Palmyra and in Homs Governorate) toward Hmeimim Air Base.[18] The GUR reported on December 14 that some Russian soldiers were waiting at the Tiyas Air Base while a Russian military commander attempted to negotiate security guarantees for the Russian soldiers from military contingents of other unspecified states.[19] Russia has also reportedly recently withdrawn from a series of bases in the Manbij and Kobani areas in northern Syria amid the ongoing Turkish-backed offensive against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).[20] Russia will probably withdraw from its last sizeable base in northern Syria, Qamishli, because Turkey and the groups on the ground in Syria—including Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA)—do not appear to be prepared to allow Russia to remain there. Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler also offered on December 15 to "support" Russia's consolidation at Hmeimim and Tartus, suggesting Turkey will not support other Russian bases.[21]

A Russian insider source claimed on December 15 that Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin may have fallen out of favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin following the Assad regime's collapse since Putin reportedly recently rescinded a decree to present Naryshkin with a state award.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted a roughly battalion-sized mechanized assault in the Siversk direction following a recent reported command change of the Russian forces operating near Siversk.
- The recent Siversk assault indicates that Russian forces appear to be learning to conduct more effective assaults but remain far from restoring maneuver to the battlefield.
- North Korean forces are reportedly facing expected struggles with high casualties and poor communication with Russian forces in Kursk Oblast, likely disrupting coordination between North Korean and Russian personnel and undermining Russian military operations.
- Russia's immediate plans for its military assets in Syria remain unclear as reports continue that Russia has secured agreements to keep its main military bases in western Syria while also withdrawing from its other bases in the country.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- Russian sources continue to complain about the Russian military's insufficient training system and inept military instructors.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 14, 2024

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December 14, 2024 5:45 pm ET

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 14 that the Russian military had deployed North Korean soldiers in infantry assaults in Kursk Oblast.[1] Zelensky stated that the Russian military is incorporating "a significant number" of North Korean soldiers into Russian units operating in Kursk Oblast and that North Korean soldiers have already sustained "noticeable" losses. Zelensky noted that Russian forces have only deployed North Korean soldiers to offensive operations in Kursk Oblast but may use them in other unspecified areas of the frontline in the future. This is the first time a Ukrainian official has reported that North Korean forces are conducting assault operations since Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced in an interview with South Korean national broadcaster KBS on November 5 that Ukrainian forces engaged in "small-scale" clashes with North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast.[2] Russian milbloggers recently acknowledged that North Korean forces are involved in assaults in Kursk Oblast and claimed on December 12 and 13 that North Korean soldiers participated in the seizure of Plekhovo (south of Sudzha) on December 6.[3] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that North Korean special forces seized Plekhovo with no assistance from Russian forces, but one milblogger characterized the assault as a joint Russian-North Korean operation.[4] Geolocated footage published on December 14 shows roughly 40 infantry personnel conducting an assault east of Kremyanoye (east of Korenevo), and some sources claimed that the footage shows North Korean troops, although ISW cannot independently verify if the footage shows North Korea or Russian personnel.[5] A Russian milblogger claimed on December 14 that elements of the Russian 1427th Motorized Rifle Regiment (a mobilized element of the Russian Territorial Troops) advanced near Russkoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha) with support from North Korean personnel.[6] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF], Southern Military District [SMD]), and "Arbat" Special Purpose Battalion (Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] "Pyatnashka" International Volunteer Brigade, 51st Combined Arms Army [CAA]) trained North Korean personnel operating in Kursk Oblast for "many weeks."<[7] Ukrainian defense outlet *Militarnyi* amplified several Ukrainian sources on December 14 claiming that North Korean soldiers conducted infantry assaults across open terrain in groups of 20 to 30 personnel in unspecified areas in Kursk Oblast.[8] ISW cannot independently verify any of these claims, however. ISW previously noted that North Korea's ability to learn and integrate lessons from fighting alongside Russia is likely to be significantly degraded if the Russian military command uses North Korean troops in the same highly attritional infantry-led assaults that it uses most Russian personnel.

The prospects for Russia's continued military presence in Syria remain unclear as reports that Russia is evacuating its military assets from Syria continue. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 14 that "hundreds" of Russian soldiers cannot reach Hmeimim Air Base from Homs Governorate out of fear that Russian forces will come under fire from unspecified actors.[9] The GUR stated that the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Africa Corps arrived in Syria to protect Russian forces moving towards Russia's bases on the western coast and that Russian Colonel Dmitry Motrenko is negotiating with military contingents in Syria from other unspecified states in order to secure guarantees of "immunity" for Russian soldiers waiting at the Tiyas Air Base west of Palmyra. The GUR also stated that roughly 1,000 Russian personnel left Damascus on December 13 in a column heading towards the Port of Tartus and Hmeimim Air Base, and ISW observed footage on December 13 of Russian military convoys moving from Damascus and other areas in southern Syria, likely towards the two main Russian bases.[10] *Reuters* reported on December 14 that a "Syrian security official" stationed near Hmeimim Air Base stated that at least one cargo plane flew out of the base on December 14 bound for Libya.[11] Syrian military and security sources reportedly stated that Russia is withdrawing some heavy equipment and senior officers from the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) to Moscow but is currently not planning to permanently pull out of the Port of Tartus or Hmeimim Air Base. A Russian milblogger posted photos and footage on December 14 purportedly showing Russian military assets still operating at the Russian helicopter base at Qamishli in northeastern Syria, and a Russian source claimed on December 14 that Russian forces have withdrawn from their base in Kobani in northern Syria.[12]

The complex nature of the interim Syrian government is likely resulting in conflicting reports about whether Russia is engaged in talks with Syrian opposition groups. Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) controls the Syrian interim government, but HTS and the interim government do not yet have complete control over the disparate groups that helped overthrow the Assad regime. Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov stated on December 12 that Russia has established contacts with HTS.^[13] *Reuters* reported on December 14 that a Russian source stated that discussions between Russia and the interim Syrian government are ongoing.^[14] A "senior rebel official close to the new interim administration" told *Reuters*, however, that the issue of Russia's military presence in Syria and Russia's previous agreements with the Assad regime are "not under discussion" and that talks at an unspecified time in the future will address this matter. The official reportedly stated that the "Syrian people will have the final say." Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 13 that Mohammed Sabra, a Syrian politician who represented the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee at the 2016 Geneva peace talks on the Syrian Civil War, similarly stated that there should be a referendum in the future to allow the Syrian people to approve any foreign military presence in Syria.^[15] It is unclear if *Reuter's* "senior rebel official close to the new interim administration" who denied talks between Russia and the interim government is a member of HTS or another Syrian opposition group.^[16] It remains unclear if Russia is in contact with all the Syrian opposition groups necessary to guarantee the short- and long-term safety of its military bases and select opposition groups may be unaware that Russia is in discussion with other groups. Russian state media has notably not differentiated between different opposition groups when reporting on the situation in Syria, possibly as part of efforts to present the interim government as more united so as to increase the legitimacy of any agreements Russia reaches with one or some of the groups.^[17]

Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot in Oryol Oblast on the night of December 13 to 14. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that units of Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) and the Ukrainian Armed Forces struck the "Steel Horse" Oil Depot near Oryol City and caused a fire at the facility.^[18] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the oil depot supplies products to the Russian military and noted that Ukrainian forces are still conducting a battle damage assessment (BDA). Footage published on December 13 and 14 shows the aftermath of the strike and the fire at the facility, and Russian officials acknowledged the strike and the resulting fire.^[19]

The new Georgian Dream-dominated parliament and other government bodies elected Georgian Dream's candidate, Mikheil Kavelashvili, as Georgian President on December 14. ^[20] Kavelashvili received the votes from the members of parliament and other government bodies required to meet the two thirds threshold to be president despite Georgian the fact that opposition parliament members boycotted the vote.^[21] Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili continues to contest the legitimacy of the Georgian Dream party's parliamentary electoral victory and stated that "nobody elected anyone" in response to Kavelashvili's election.^[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on December 14 that the Russian military has deployed North Korean soldiers in infantry assaults in Kursk Oblast.
- The prospects for Russia's continued military presence in Syria remain unclear as reports that Russia is evacuating its military assets from Syria continue.
- The complex nature of the interim Syrian government is likely to result in conflicting reports about whether Russia is engaged in talks with Syrian opposition groups.
- Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot in Oryol Oblast on the night of December 13 to 14.
- The new Georgian Dream-dominated parliament and other government bodies elected Georgian Dream's candidate, Mikheil Kavelashvili, as Georgian President on December 14.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Torestk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Robotyne.
- Ukrainian forces regained lost positions near Vovchansk within the past several weeks.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to exalt the "Time of Heroes" veteran program and use it to militarize the Russian government and society.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 13, 2024

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Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 13, 2024, 7:45 pm ET

Russian forces conducted their largest series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine since the start of the war overnight on December 12 to 13, largely targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 94 missiles and 193 Shahed and other drones at Ukraine, including four Kh-47M2 "Kinzhal" aeroballistic missiles; two Iskander-M ballistic missiles, one KN-23 ballistic missile, 55 Kh-101 and Kh-55SM cruise missiles, 24 Kalibr cruise missiles, seven Iskander-K cruise missiles, and one Kh-59/69 cruise missile.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force noted that Ukrainian forces downed 80 Kh-101, Kh-55SM, Kalibr, and Iskander-K cruise missiles; one Iskander-M; and 80 drones and that 105 other drones became "lost" due to Ukrainian countermeasures and six drones flew into Russian and Belarusian airspace as of 1130 local time.

Ukrainian energy operator DTEK reported that the strike caused severe damage to DTEK's thermal power plants (TPPs), and Ukrainian authorities reported that the Russian strikes targeted energy and critical infrastructure in Kyiv, Odesa, Chernihiv, Vinnytsia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Ternopil oblasts. [2] Ukrainian authorities reported rolling blackouts throughout much of the country following the strike. [3] The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) stated that five of the nine nuclear reactors in Ukrainian-controlled territory reduced their output due to the Russian strikes, of which two nuclear reactors were already producing power at a reduced output due to the residual effects of Russian strikes in late November 2024 and the remaining three returned to full capacity on December 13.[4]

Russia's strike series targeting Ukrainian energy facilities is part of a broader campaign aimed at freezing out Ukraine in Winter 2024-2025 and compelling Ukraine and the West to self-deterring into making policy decisions that benefit Russia. Russia has repeatedly targeted Ukrainian infrastructure during the fall and winter since launching the full-scale invasion in 2022 and conducted large-scale strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure on November 16 to 17 and 25 to 26.[5] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces conducted the December 12 to 13 strike in retribution for a Ukrainian strike against Taganrog, Rostov Oblast on December 11 using Western-provided ATACMS, although Russian forces were likely planned to conduct such a strike regardless and are conveniently using the December 11 strike to justify ongoing Russian strikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure.[6] This Russian messaging is likely aimed at assuaging the Russian ultranationalist community's calls for retribution for Ukrainian strikes into Russia and intended to support the Kremlin's reflexive control campaign aimed at compelling Western countries to make decisions about Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons and future peace negotiations that benefit Russia.[7]

Ukrainian strikes against military airfields in Russia and Russian air defense systems in near rear areas may be prompting a decrease in Russian air operations and glide bomb strikes against Ukraine. Russian forces launched a total of 431 glide bombs in the first 12 days of December 2024 according to data from the Ukrainian General Staff after reportedly launching 1,472 glide bombs in the first 12 days of November 2024 and over 3,300 glide bombs total throughout November 2024.[8] Russian forces are thus currently on track to launch only a third of the total number of glide bombs that Russian forces launched in November 2024 this month.

Russian opposition news outlet Agentstvo noted on December 12 that Russian glide bomb strikes significantly decreased after Ukraine conducted its first strikes into Russia using Western-provided long-range weapons systems in mid-November 2024.[9] Ukrainian forces conducted the first ATACMS strike on Russian territory on the night of November 18 to 19 and a Storm Shadow strike on Russian territory on the night of November 19 to 20, and data from the Ukrainian General Staff indicates that Russian forces began consistently launching fewer than 100 glide bombs per day on November 22. [10]

The threat of Ukrainian strikes against Russian airfields within ATACMS and Storm Shadow range may be forcing the Russian military to base aircraft at airfields further within Russia and complicating Russia's ability to conduct glide bomb strikes on Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have also undertaken a concerted campaign to strike Russian radars and air defense systems in occupied Ukraine and near rear areas of Russia since late October 2024.[11] This campaign could be degrading Russia's air

defense umbrella, particularly over occupied Ukraine, to the point that Russian pilots are increasingly unwilling to operate and conduct glide bomb strikes against frontline areas and rear Ukrainian cities.

Ukrainian human rights organization Truth Hounds estimated in a recent report that Ukrainian forces destroyed at least 33 Russian Su-34 fighter aircraft between February 2022 and September 2024, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) previously estimated that Russia has approximately 112 various Sukhoi fighter aircraft.[12] ISW is unable to confirm or verify the Truth Hounds' report. The destruction of nearly 30 percent of Russia's Sukhoi aircraft, could, if true, also impact Russia's ability to conduct glide bomb strikes against Ukraine, although it is unclear when these losses took place relative to the recent drop in glide bomb attacks.

Russia is evacuating elements of its force grouping in Syria while continuing negotiations with select Syrian groups about Russia's longer-term military presence in the country. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 13 that an unspecified source familiar with the matter stated that Russia is currently negotiating with unspecified new Syrian "authorities" about maintaining Russia's military presence at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus.[13] The source reportedly stated that Russia has only secured "temporary security guarantees" but that the two military bases are "functioning as usual." Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov stated on December 12 that Russia has established contacts with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), which currently controls the areas at Hmeimim and Tartus, and the TASS source is likely referring to ongoing Russian talks with HTS.[14]

Maxar satellite imagery from December 13 shows two Russian An-124 military transport aircraft preparing to load cargo while a Ka-52 helicopter and elements of an S-400 air defense system are likely undergoing preparations for transport at Hmeimim Air Base (see embedded imagery below). The Maxar imagery also shows two Russian frigates still offshore of the Port of Tartus. Drone footage reportedly of Hmeimim Air Base shows An-72, An-26, and Il-76 transport aircraft; Ka-52 and Mi-8 or Mi-17 helicopters; and at least four Su-34, seven Su-24M2, and four Su-35S fighter jets under hangars.[15] Geolocated footage published on December 13 shows a Russian military convoy moving from Hisyah (south of Homs) along the M5 highway.[16] Additional footage published on December 13 reportedly shows Russian military convoys moving from Talkalakh (west of Homs), Homs, and Damascus.[17]

It is unclear if the convoys are heading toward the Port of Tartus or Hmeimim Air Base, but the reported movement of Russian military assets indicates that Russia is pulling some of its forward assets in southern Syria to the western coast. At least four Russian landing ships and cargo ships are reportedly heading from Russian ports to the Port of Tartus but will likely not reach Syria for weeks.[18]

Russia is likely evacuating forces from its two main bases in Syria while negotiations are ongoing with new Syrian authorities as the outcome of these negotiations and Russia's longer-term presence at the bases are still unclear. Russia would be able to relatively quickly reestablish its military presence in Syria after evacuating from Hmeimim and Tartus should Moscow be able to secure more permanent agreements with the current Syrian authorities.

The status of Russia's helicopter base at Qamishli in northeastern Syria remains unclear, however. A Kurdish journalist stated on December 11 that Russian forces were withdrawing from the Qamishli base after unspecified authorities granted them safe passage out of Syria.[19] However, photos from December 12 show Russian equipment, helicopters, and personnel at the Qamishli base, and a Russian source claimed on December 12 that Russia maintains a presence at Hmeimim Air Base, the Port of Tartus, Qamishli, and other unspecified sites in Syria.[20] It is unclear if Russia is preparing to withdraw assets from Qamishli in the near future. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) currently control Qamishli, and Russian officials have only stated that Moscow has established contacts with HTS, which controls the area of the Hmeimim Air Base and Port of Tartus.[21] ISW has not observed reports that Russia is trying to separately negotiate with the SDF about Russia's continued presence at the Qamishli base, and it is unclear if Russian forces intend to or will be able to remain at the base.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on December 12 a new military aid package for Ukraine valued at \$500 million.[22] The package includes counter-drone munitions; High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; High-speed Anti-radiation missiles (HARMs); unmanned aerial systems (UAS); Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs); High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs); light tactical vehicles; Tube-launched, Optically-guided, Wire-tracked (TOW) missiles; and Javelin and AT-4 anti-tank equipment and munitions.

CNN reported on December 12 that a senior Biden administration official stated that the Biden administration is working to surge weapons deliveries to Ukraine before the administration leaves office in January 2024.[23] The official reportedly stated that the US DoD expects to deliver hundreds of thousands of artillery rounds, thousands of rockets, hundreds of armored vehicles, and other critical capabilities to Ukraine between mid-December 2024 and mid-January 2025. ISW continues to assess that sustained US assistance to Ukraine will empower Ukrainian forces to maintain the current tempo of operations across the theater of war, which is degrading Russian combat power and Russia's economy at a rate that Moscow will be unable to sustain long-term.[24]

A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted command changes within the Russian military responded to recent claims that the Russian military command removed 3rd Combined Arms Army (formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps) commander Major General Dmitry Ovcharov.[25] The insider source claimed that some sources are falsely reporting that the Russian military command removed Ovcharov for lying to his superiors about the rate of Russian advances in his area of responsibility (AoR) but that the actual reason for his removal was due to the recent Ukrainian capture of a Russian T-90M tank in the Russian rear after a Russian crew allegedly abandoned the tank. The insider source claimed that Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov ordered an inspection of the Southern Military District (SMD), whose AoR includes the Siversk direction where the 3rd CAA, after the Russian military command became aware of the incident.[26]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted footage on December 13 of Belousov meeting with Eastern Grouping of Forces commander Lieutenant General Andrei Ivanayev – officially confirming Ivanayev's new position.[27] A source close to the Russian MoD told Russian state outlet RBK on November 26 that the Russian military command appointed Ivanayev as commander of the Eastern Military District [EMD] after the previous EMD commander, Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik, became the SMD commander.[28] Ivanayev previously served as commander of the 20th Combined Arms Army (Moscow Military District [MMD]), which has been operating along the Kupyansk-Svatove line.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted their largest series of missile and drone strikes against Ukraine since the start of the war overnight on December 12 to 13, largely targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure.
- Russia's strike series targeting Ukrainian energy facilities is part of a broader campaign aimed at freezing out Ukraine in Winter 2024-2025 and compelling Ukraine and the West to self-deter into making policy decisions that benefit Russia.
- Ukrainian strikes against military airfields in Russia and Russian air defense systems in near rear areas may be prompting a decrease in Russian air operations and glide bomb strikes against Ukraine.
- Russia is evacuating elements of its force grouping in Syria while continuing negotiations with select Syrian groups about Russia's longer-term military presence in the country.
- The status of Russia's helicopter base at Qamishli in northeastern Syria remains unclear, however.
- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on December 12 a new military aid package for Ukraine valued at \$500 million.
- A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted command changes within the Russian military responded to recent claims that the Russian military command removed 3rd Combined Arms Army (formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps) commander Major General Dmitry Ovcharov.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Vuhledar.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded Rosgvardia Head Viktor Zolotov with the Hero of Russia award.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 12, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, Grace Mappes, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 12, 2024, 6:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on December 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia has reportedly reached an agreement with select elements of the Syrian opposition about control over Russian military bases in Syria, but it remains unclear if the alleged agreement ensures the security of Russia's bases in Syria in the long-term. Bloomberg reported on December 12 that unspecified sources with knowledge of the matter stated that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) thinks it has an "informal understanding" with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) that would allow Russian forces to stay at Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus but noted that the situation could change due to instability in Syria.^[1] Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov stated on December 12 that Russia has established contacts with HTS in Damascus and that Russian bases "continue to be located on Syrian territory."^[2] Bogdanov expressed hesitancy in response to a question about whether Russia expects its bases to remain in Syria, stating that the bases will "probably" remain but that there are no other decisions yet on the matter.^[3] Bogdanov implied that Russia's continued presence in Syria is important for the ongoing fight against terrorism in the country, likely as part of efforts to convince Syrian authorities to allow Russia to continue to operate its bases in the long-term. Russia has been using the cover of "fighting terrorism" as an excuse for military activities primarily aimed at supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime since it entered the Syrian Civil War in 2015.^[4] A Russian milblogger claimed on December 11 that Syrian "militants" have surrounded Hmeimim Air Base and are periodically attempting to conduct provocations and shell the facility.^[5] The milblogger claimed that Russia reached a "preliminary" agreement about the continued presence of Russian forces in Syria but that the agreement only lasts for 75 days, after which Russia will withdraw from Syria. It is unclear if the reported Russian agreement with Syrian authorities is permanent or temporary. The Syrian opposition encompasses several factions with varying ideologies and political objectives, and it is unclear if Russia is in contact with all the Syrian opposition factions necessary to guarantee the safety of Russian military bases in Syria.^[6]

Russia is reportedly moving four ships from Russian ports to Syria, possibly to facilitate evacuations —further demonstrating the Kremlin's current cautious response to the developing situation in Syria. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 12 that Russian forces from throughout Syria are withdrawing to Hmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus and that Russian forces are flying four to five military transport sorties daily between Hmeimim and unspecified airfields in Russia.^[7] The GUR stated that Russia is moving its *Ivan Gren* Ivan Gren-class large landing ship and the *Aleksandr Otrakovsky* Ropucha-class landing ship to Tartus to evacuate weapons and equipment. The GUR stated that the two ships are currently in the Norwegian Sea and are scheduled to pass the English Channel in "a few days." The GUR stated that the Russian *Sparta* and *Sparta II* cargo ships also left Baltiysk, Kaliningrad Oblast and St. Petersburg, respectively, and are heading to Tartus. It will likely be weeks until these ships reach the Mediterranean Sea and arrive at the Port of Tartus, and Russia may be moving these ships as a precaution should Moscow decide to conduct wider evacuations of the Port of Tartus and Hmeimim Air Base in the coming weeks. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is very likely hesitant to completely evacuate all military assets from Syria in the event that it can establish a relationship with Syrian opposition forces and the transitional government and continue to ensure the security of its basing and personnel in Syria.^[8]

Ukrainian officials denied Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's claim that Ukraine rejected his offer to mediate a Christmas ceasefire and a large-scale prisoner of war (POW) exchange with Russia. Orban accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on December 11 of rejecting his proposal for a ceasefire and POW swap with Russia — a statement that Russian authorities subsequently used to forward Russia's ongoing information operation portraying Ukraine as unwilling to engage in POW exchanges and broader peace talks.^[9] Ukrainian presidential aide Dmytro Lytvyn responded on December 12, stating that Hungarian officials did not discuss anything with Ukraine or inform Ukraine about Orban's December 11 call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.^[10] Lytvyn added that Ukraine has been negotiating with Russia for two weeks about a large-scale POW exchange at the end of 2024.^[11] Zelensky criticized Orban's direct engagement with Putin without consulting Ukraine and stated that Orban is undermining European unity around support to Ukraine.^[12] Russia — not Ukraine — has previously demonstrated an unwillingness to conduct POW exchanges, as Russia reportedly rebuffed Ukrainian overtures for exchanges for months before the start of Ukraine's offensive in Kursk Oblast in August 2024.^[13]

People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping continues to provide Kremlin officials with a platform from which to articulate their uncompromising demands on Ukrainian sovereignty. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev met with Xi in Beijing on December 12.^[14] Xi and Medvedev discussed the situations in Syria and Ukraine and highlighted the bilateral Russia-PRC relationship and their cooperation in multilateral institutions. Xi reiterated the PRC's standard stance on the war in Ukraine, calling for "de-escalation" and advertising the PRC's "Friends of Peace" Initiative with Brazil.^[15] Medvedev later told Russian media on December 12 that he and Xi discussed potential settlements in Ukraine and claimed that Russia is "ready to resume negotiations with Ukraine" but only if "Ukraine understands the realities that have developed ... on the

ground."^[16] Medvedev explicitly invoked Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 14, 2024 speech at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), wherein Putin stated that Ukrainian forces must "completely withdraw" from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts before Russia would agree to enter into negotiations.^[17] Kremlin officials have long used the expression "realities on the ground" to refer to Russian gains on the battlefield, albeit largely incremental and gradual, and to force Ukraine and its partners to make concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty by recognizing the territories that Russia has illegally occupied and annexed as part of Russia including those that Ukrainian forces still hold.^[18] Russia's version of "negotiations" that take into account the "realities on the ground" call for Ukraine to surrender nearly 20 percent of its territory and millions of its people living under Russian occupation. Xi and the PRC have continually provided Kremlin officials with a platform to advocate for this desired end-state to the war, as ISW has previously reported.^[19]

India continues to preserve and enhance its economic relations with Russia despite recent efforts to reduce its reliance on Russia as a security partner. Reuters reported on December 12 that Russian state oil company Rosneft and Indian refining company Reliance Industries have signed a historic 10-year deal through which Russia will supply 500,000 barrels of oil daily to India, valued at approximately \$13 billion annually.^[20] India has benefitted from cheap Russian energy supplies since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and subsequent Western sanctions, ultimately becoming the largest importer of Russian oil.^[21] ISW has recently noted India's efforts to reduce its reliance on Russian military cooperation, strengthen ties with the West, and distance itself from explicitly pro-Russian rhetoric on the war in Ukraine, but India nevertheless continues to balance these moves by maintaining strategic economic relations with Russia that are in India's interest.^[22]

Russian authorities are set to equate the violation of Russian censorship laws with extremism and terrorism, furthering the Kremlin's effort to establish a pseudo-state ideology. The Russian State Duma adopted a bill in its second and third readings on December 12 that expands the legal grounds for putting individuals on the legal list of terrorists and extremists to include disseminating "fake" information or discrediting the Russian military in violation of Russia's censorship laws.^[23] This bill is the latest Kremlin measure to legally equate opposition to its war in Ukraine and criticism of Russia's methods of waging the war with behavior that is illegal and undesirable in Russian society.^[24] These measures to create a de-facto state ideology through the Russian legal system notably bypass the Russian Constitution, as Article 13 forbids the Russian state from establishing an official state ideology and commits Russia to recognizing ideological diversity.^[25] The Russian State Duma passed a bill on December 10 that would remove the Taliban from the register of extremist and terrorist organizations.^[26]

Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded the Russian "Golden Star" Medal to a military correspondent for the first time since World War II as the Kremlin continues to use state awards to co-opt milbloggers and gain control over the Russian information space. Putin awarded the "Golden Star" Medal — a medal awarded for an "act of heroism in service to the Russian government and people" and that accompanies the Hero of Russia title — to Russian milblogger and Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) correspondent Yevgeny Poddubny on December 12 and thanked other Russian military correspondents and journalists for covering the war in Ukraine and for their "faith in Russia."^[27] Putin awarded the Hero of Russia title to Poddubny in September 2024 for injuries that Poddubny sustained while reporting from Kursk Oblast in August 2024, and ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin has been increasingly trying to use Poddubny to disseminate official narratives in the Russian ultranationalist information space since late 2022.^[28] Putin has also recently awarded prominent Russian milblogger and founder of the *Rybar* Telegram channel Mikhail Zvinchuk, who was initially critical of Russia's military performance during its full-scale invasion, with the less prestigious Russian Order of Merit of the Fatherland Second Class part of continued Kremlin efforts to incentivize Russian milbloggers to be loyal to the Kremlin.^[29]

Actors affiliated with Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) likely assassinated the Deputy General Designer and Functional Software Department Head of the Russian Rosatom-owned "Mars" design bureau Mikhail Shatsky in Russia on December 12. GUR sources told Ukrainian media outlet *Suspilne* that GUR actors may have been involved in the murder of Shatsky in Kotelniki, Moscow Oblast.^[30] GUR sources alleged that Shatsky was working to modernize Russian Kh-59 cruise missiles into Kh-69 missiles and implementing artificial intelligence (AI) technology into Russian drones and other Russian military aerospace systems. ISW cannot confirm these reports.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia has reportedly reached an agreement with select elements of the Syrian opposition about control over Russian military bases in Syria, but it remains unclear if**

- the alleged agreement ensures the security of Russia's bases in Syria in the long-term.
- Russia is reportedly moving four ships from Russian ports to Syria, possibly to facilitate evacuations — further demonstrating the Kremlin's current cautious response to the developing situation in Syria.
- Ukrainian officials denied Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's claim that Ukraine rejected his offer to mediate a Christmas ceasefire and a large-scale prisoner of war (POW) exchange with Russia.
- People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping continues to provide Kremlin officials with a platform from which to articulate their uncompromising demands on Ukrainian sovereignty.
- India continues to preserve and enhance its economic relations with Russia despite recent efforts to reduce its reliance on Russia as a security partner.
- Russian authorities are set to equate the violation of Russian censorship laws with extremism and terrorism, furthering the Kremlin's effort to establish a pseudo-state ideology.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded the Russian "Golden Star" Medal to a military correspondent for the first time since World War II as the Kremlin continues to use state awards to co-opt milbloggers and gain control over the Russian information space.
- Actors affiliated with Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) likely assassinated the Deputy General Designer and Functional Software Department Head of the Russian Rosatom-owned "Mars" design bureau Mikhail Shatsky in Russia on December 12.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and in the Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Svatove.
- The Russian military command's efforts to ensure operational security amongst Russian forces continue to draw ire from select milbloggers, who derided these efforts as disruptive overreach.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 11, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, Grace Mappes, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 11, 2024, 5:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:40am ET on December 11. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 12 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continue to make tactical gains south of Pokrovsk as they attack into Ukrainian weak points and attempt to conduct a turning maneuver to directly assault Pokrovsk from the south. Geolocated footage published on December 10 indicates that Russian forces have advanced in western Novyi Trud and along the E50 highway south of Dachenske, narrowing the small pocket west of the E50 highway and south of the Novyi Trud-Dachenske line.^[1] This advance places Russian forces about six kilometers south of Pokrovsk. Russian forces will likely continue efforts to close the pocket between Novyi Trud and Dachenske in the coming days, as doing so will provide them a stronger position from which to assault Shevchenko (just northwest of Novyi Trud and southwest of Pokrovsk). Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Nazar Voloshyn noted on December 11 that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian fortifications west of Novyi Trud, south of Novotroitske (southwest of Shevchenko), and on the southwestern outskirts of Shevchenko itself. Voloshyn reported that Ukrainian forces lost two positions during these attacks and are working to restore them.^[2] A Ukrainian battalion commander operating near Pokrovsk characterized the situation in this direction as "critical," largely because each Russian battalion-sized formation receives about 200 fresh personnel per month.^[3] The Ukrainian commander also emphasized that Russian forces are attacking Ukrainian positions up to 30 times per day and have an advantage in artillery fires—suggesting that Russian forces are currently relying on a superior number of personnel and artillery ammunition to secure tactical gains in the Pokrovsk direction. ISW recently assessed that the Russian command has resumed offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk via a turning maneuver from the south, but that this maneuver is coming at a massive cost to Russian manpower and equipment.^[4] Another Ukrainian brigade officer reported that Russian forces lost nearly 3,000 personnel in the Pokrovsk direction in two weeks.^[5] Continued Russian losses at this scale will impose a mounting cost on Russia's already-strained force generation apparatus. Russian forces may well continue making gains towards Pokrovsk, but the losses they are taking to do so will temper their ability to translate these gains into more far-reaching offensive operations.

US intelligence had warned that Russia may fire a second "Oreshnik" ballistic missile at Ukraine in the near future, likely in a continued effort to dissuade the West from providing further military assistance to Ukraine. Bloomberg, citing an unspecified US official, reported on December 11 that Russia may conduct a new Oreshnik ballistic missile strike against Ukraine in "the coming days."^[6] Russia first employed the Oreshnik missile in a strike against Dnipro City on November 21, 2024. ISW assesses that Russian Oreshnik strikes against Ukraine and the rhetoric surrounding Russia's use of the missile are part of a broader Russian reflexive control campaign aimed at forcing the West and Ukraine into self-deterrence.^[7] Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov previously undermined this sustained Kremlin information operation, however, by claiming that Russia had planned the Oreshnik missile launch well ahead of the US decision to allow Ukraine to strike military targets in Russia with US-provided ATACMS.^[8] Russian officials are likely to amplify similar narratives about the Oreshnik if Russian forces use it again.

Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot in Bryansk Oblast and an aircraft repair plant in Taganrog, Rostov Oblast on the night of December 10 to 11. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on December 11 that units of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces and Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) struck a loading point for the Druzhba oil pipeline in Bryansk Oblast, causing a massive fire.^[9] The pipeline receives, stores, and distributes fuel and supplies to Russian forces, and the strike caused a massive fire. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces downed 14 Ukrainian drones over Bryansk Oblast, and Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz claimed that a Ukrainian drone strike against an unspecified industrial facility in Bryansk Oblast caused a fire.^[10] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces also launched six ATACMS missiles at the Taganrog military airfield in Rostov Oblast, that Russian Pantsir air defenses downed two missiles, and that Russian electronic warfare (EW) "deflected" four missiles.^[11] The Russian MoD claimed that falling missile fragments damaged two buildings near the airfield, three military vehicles, and cars in the nearby parking lot.^[12] Russian opposition outlet Astra reported on December 11 that it geolocated footage of the strike to the area near the Taganrog 325th Aircraft Repair Plant.^[13] Ukrainian defense outlet Militarnyi reported that the plant repairs Russian A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft, Il-76 military transport aircraft, Il-38 maritime patrol aircraft, among other foreign aircraft.^[14] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces launched "Palyanitsa" drone missiles at Taganrog, and residents purportedly reported sounds of at least 10 explosions.^[15] ISW has not observed confirmation of which systems Ukrainian forces used in the strikes.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continue to make tactical gains south of Pokrovsk as they attack into Ukrainian weak points and attempt to conduct a turning maneuver to directly assault Pokrovsk from the south.
- US intelligence had warned that Russia may fire a second "Oreshnik" ballistic missile at Ukraine in the near future, likely in a continued effort to dissuade the West from providing further military assistance to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces struck an oil depot in Bryansk Oblast and an aircraft repair plant in Taganrog, Rostov Oblast on the night of December 10 to 11.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and in the Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions.
- The Kremlin continues to leverage its "Time of Heroes" program to integrate Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine into leadership positions within Russian regional administrations.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 10, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 10, 2024, 5:30pm ET

Russia's force posture around Syria continues to reflect the Kremlin's current cautious and indecisive response to the fall of Bashar al Assad's regime. Sentinel-2 satellite imagery from December 10 shows that Russian ships have still not returned to Syria's Port of Tartus and that the Russian Mediterranean Sea Flotilla is still in a holding pattern about eight to 15km away from Tartus. [1] Open-source analyst MT Anderson identified four Russian ships within this radius as of December 10—the Admiral Golovko Gorshkov-class frigate, the Admiral Grigorovich Grigorovich-class frigate,

the *Novorossiysk* Improved Kilo-class submarine, and the *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler.[2] Satellite imagery from December 9 indicated that the *Admiral Grigorovich*, *Novorossiysk*, and *Vyazma* were in the same holding pattern as they are as of December 10.[3] Other open-source analysts noted that the Baltic Fleet's *Alexander Shabalin* Project 775 large landing ship exited the Baltic Sea maritime zone on December 10, potentially to facilitate the removal of some Russian military assets from Tartus to the Mediterranean (potentially Tobruk, Libya).[4] A Russian milblogger claimed that as of the end of the day on December 9 "the status of Hmeimim (Air Base) and Tartus is up in the air," and Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov emphasized that it is "difficult to predict" what will happen in Syria but that Russia will continue a dialogue with all countries that share interests with Russia.[5] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 10 that Russian forces are still disassembling equipment and weapons and removing troops from Hmeimim in An-124 and Il-76 military transport aircraft and are "dismantling" equipment at Tartus under the supervision of recently-deployed Russian Spetsnaz.[6] Maxar satellite imagery from December 10 shows that Russian aircraft, helicopters, and associated military equipment remain in place at the Hmeimim Air Base (see embedded imagery below). The continued lack of a coherent Russian response, both in terms of military posture and rhetorical overtures, suggests that the Kremlin is still waiting to formulate a path forward in Syria as it observes the situation on the ground. The Kremlin is very likely hesitant to completely evacuate all military assets from Syria in the event that it can establish a relationship with Syrian opposition forces and the transitional government and continue to ensure the security of its basing and personnel in Syria.[7]

Russia intends to supply North Korea with fighter jets amid growing military partnership between the two countries. US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) commander Admiral Samuel Paparo revealed on December 10 that Russia and North Korea struck a deal in which Russia agreed to send MiG-29 and Su-27 fighter aircraft to Pyongyang in exchange for North Korea deploying troops to Russia to support Russia's war in Ukraine.[8] Paparo highlighted that North Korea's receipt of these aircraft will enhance its military capabilities and that Pyongyang likely expects additional military equipment and technologies from Russia, including ballistic missile reentry vehicles, submarine technologies, and air defense systems, as part of the agreement. Paparo noted that North Korean soldiers remain in combat zones, likely in reference to Kursk Oblast, but are not yet actively fighting. South Korean network TV *Chosun* published an exclusive report on October 21 stating that North Korea dispatched an unspecified number of fighter pilots to Vladivostok before the deployment of ground troops to Russia in early October likely in an effort to train its pilots to fly Russian fighter jets.[9] North Korean pilots are trained on Russian Su-25 attack aircraft (which are already part of the Korean People's Army [KPA] Air Force fleet) further indicating that a Russian delivery of fighter jets will benefit and expand North Korea's military capabilities, especially in the air domain.[10] ISW continues to assess that military cooperation between Russia and North Korea has particularly intensified since the two countries signed their Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in June 2024, and especially since it entered into force on December 4.[11]

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh in Moscow on December 10 as India continues efforts to balance military technical cooperation with Russia and maintain good relations with key Western allies.[12] Singh announced the commissioning of a Russian-produced "Tushil" Project 1135 Burevestnik Krivak-class frigate into the Indian Navy at the Yantar Shipbuilding Plant in Kaliningrad Oblast on December 9.[13] Indian outlet *The Sunday Guardian* reported on December 8 that India and Russia are finalizing a deal for India to purchase a Russian-made early warning radar system with a range of over 6,000 kilometers, possibly a Voronezh radar.[14] *The Sunday Guardian* noted that it is unclear exactly which radar system Russia intends to sell to India and that Indian officials may have requested an upgraded version of the Voronezh radar. *Bloomberg* reported on December 3 that India has sharply reduced its defense equipment orders from Russia and has started purchasing defense equipment from Western suppliers, however, emphasizing the tenuous balance that India is striking between Russia and its Western partners.[15]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia's force posture around Syria continues to reflect the Kremlin's current cautious and indecisive response to the fall of Bashar al Assad's regime.**
- **Russia intends to supply North Korea with fighter jets amid a growing military partnership between the two countries.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh in Moscow on December 10 as India continues efforts to balance military technical cooperation with Russia and maintain good relations with key Western allies.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Vuhledar direction, and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk and Kharkiv oblasts and in the Svatove, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions.**

- The Russian government continues efforts to formalize irregular Russian military units and veterans from the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics army corps (DNR and LNR ACs) and formally integrate them under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).
- Russia continues to utilize Western-produced high-tech components in Russian weapons systems despite Western sanctions against Russia and cobelligerent states.
- A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted command changes within the Russian MoD claimed on December 9 that Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted the Russian Deputy Defense Minister, Pavel Fradkov, to the rank of Major General.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 9, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, Kateryna Stepanenko, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 9, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on December 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin continues to cautiously signal that it can ensure the security of Russian military bases in Syria in the short-term but notably has expressed uncertainty about the long-term future of the military bases against the backdrop of the volatile and rapidly evolving political situation in Syria. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on December 9 that the Russian military is taking all necessary precautions to ensure the security of Russian military bases in Syria and that Russia is "doing everything possible" to establish contact with those who can ensure the safety of Russian military personnel in Syria.^[1] Peskov noted that the Kremlin will host "serious discussions" with the future Syrian authorities about Russia's military bases in Khmeimim and Tartus at an unspecified future date but noted that it is currently too early to discuss maintaining these bases since such a discussion involves "those who will lead Syria."^[2] Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 9, citing an unspecified source in Latakia Governorate, that Syrian opposition forces have full control over Latakia Governorate and Tartus City, but that Syrian opposition forces have not and do not intend to "invade" the Russian Khmeimim Air Base near Latakia City and the naval base at the Port of Tartus.^[3] The source added that both Russian bases are functioning normally. Russian state outlet RBK reported on December 9 that the Syrian National Coordination Committee's Foreign Relations Head Ahmed al Asrawi stated during a discussion about Russia's military bases in Syria that Syria would continue to uphold agreements that are in Syria's interest and would "never" take a hostile position toward Russia or any other friendly country.^[4] Russian milbloggers continued to debate the future of the Russian bases in Syria on December 8 and 9, expressing uncertainty about whether Russian forces will be able to maintain their presence in the country or will have to conduct a full evacuation.^[5] The Critical Threats Project (CTP) continues to assess that the potential loss of Russian bases in Syria will have major implications for Russia's ability to project power in the Mediterranean Sea, threaten NATO's southern flank, and operate in Africa.^[6]

Russia has removed some vessels from the Port of Tartus to a nearby area offshore. Satellite imagery taken on December 9 shows that all Russian ships and submarines have left the Port of Tartus.^[7] OSINT analyst MT Anderson reported that satellite imagery taken on December 9 also shows that Russian vessels — likely the *Admiral Gorshkov* Gorshkov-class frigate, *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate, *Novorossiysk* Kilo-class submarine, and *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler — are in a holding pattern in the roadstead about eight kilometers west of the port.^[8] The location of the other ships that were reportedly previously docked in the Port of Tartus, including the *Admiral Golovko* Gorshkov-class frigates and the *Yelnya* Altay-class oiler, is unclear.^[9] Syrian opposition leaders reportedly guaranteed on December 8 the security of Russian military institutions in Syria, and Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al Jalali stated on December 8 that the new Syrian authorities would make the decisions about the future of Russia's military bases in Syria.^[10] The current and future security of the Russian military bases in Syria remains unclear as Moscow continues to hold talks with the new Syrian authorities, and it is also unclear at this time if Russia is removing the vessels from the Port of Tartus as part of a wider evacuation or to better protect these military assets.

The Syrian Embassy in Moscow confirmed to Kremlin newswire TASS on December 9 that former Syrian President Bashar al Assad is in Moscow.[11] Peskov stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is the sole authority able to grant Assad asylum in Russia but did not specify if Putin actually granted Assad asylum. TASS reported on December 8 that a Kremlin source stated that Assad and his family fled to Moscow and that Russian authorities granted them asylum.[12]

Russia continues to face staggering costs required to maintain its war effort against Ukraine, with mounting economic strain, labor shortages, and systemic corruption threatening the sustainability of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB). US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reported on December 7 that Russia has spent over \$200 billion on its war in Ukraine and suffered at least 700,000 casualties since February 2022, with recent losses averaging 1,000 soldiers per day.[13] The Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation reported on December 9 that Russia's liquid assets in its National Welfare Fund dropped from \$140 billion in February 2022 to \$53.8 billion by December 1, 2024.[14] The Center noted that Russia increasingly relies on Chinese yuan reserves and gold sales to cover its budget deficit and is committing a third of its national budget for 2025-2027 to defense spending, indicating an unsustainable prioritization of the war at the expense of economic stability.[15] Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov claimed on December 9 that corruption crimes, including bribery, increased by nearly 30 percent in 2024 over 2023, with Russian authorities having disciplined over 30,000 Russian officials for corruption violations in 2024.[16] Russia's mounting economic pressures stemming from the war, paired with widespread corruption, labor shortages, and inefficiencies in Russia's DIB, will likely compound the cost of Russia's war and further undermine its ability to effectively sustain DIB operations while maintaining economic stability. ISW has previously observed reports of similar trends and statistics in the Russian economy, indicating that Russia's economic trajectory is unsustainable in the mid- to long-term and will increasingly strain its capacity to wage war against Ukraine.[17]

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov and Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov amid ongoing Kremlin efforts to shift blame for Russia's inadequate response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast onto local government officials and away from the military. Putin promoted Alaudinov to the rank of lieutenant general and Yevkurov to the rank of army general, likely in an effort to reward Alaudinov for leading Chechen Akhmat forces that have been fighting in Kursk Oblast and to reward Yevkurov for his role as the Deputy Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) "Coordinating Council" for military and security issues in Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts.[18] Putin recently replaced former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov with Russian State Duma Information Policy Committee Head Alexander Khinshtein, likely in an attempt to scapegoat Smirnov for Russia's failure to properly respond to the Ukrainian incursion.[19] Russian authorities arrested former Deputy Director of the Corporation for the Development of Kursk Oblast Igor Grabin on December 9 for mismanaging funds intended for defensive fortifications in the oblast.[20] The Kremlin appears to be punishing Kursk Oblast government officials while awarding Russian military officials responsible for Russian forces in Kursk Oblast.

The Russian government claimed to have returned the bodies of deceased Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) who were allegedly killed in the January 24 Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft crash in Belgorod Oblast.[21] Russian Human Rights Ombudsman Tatyana Moskalkova claimed on December 9 that Russian officials transferred the bodies of the alleged Ukrainian POWs on an unspecified date.[22] The Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs announced that Russian officials transferred remains during the recent POW exchange on November 29 but that these remains require additional identification.[23] The Coordination Headquarters added that experts are currently determining whether these remains actually belong to Ukrainian servicemembers. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on January 24 that the Il-76 was carrying 65 Ukrainian POWs and accused Ukraine of striking the plane with two unspecified missiles.[24] Ukrainian officials opened an investigation into the circumstances of the crash on January 25.[25] ISW continues to offer no assessment of the circumstances of the Il-76 crash at this time and cannot independently verify Russian or Ukrainian statements on the incident.

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin continues to cautiously signal that it can ensure the security of Russian military bases in Syria in the short-term but notably has expressed uncertainty about the long-term future of the military bases against the backdrop of the volatile and rapidly evolving political situation in Syria.
- Russia has removed some vessels from the Port of Tartus to a nearby area offshore.
- The Syrian Embassy in Moscow confirmed to Kremlin newswire TASS on December 9 that former Syrian President Bashar al Assad is in Moscow.
- Russia continues to face staggering costs required to maintain its war effort against Ukraine, with mounting economic strain, labor shortages, and systemic corruption threatening the sustainability of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB).
- Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov and Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov amid ongoing Kremlin efforts to shift blame for Russia's inadequate response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast onto local government officials and away from the military.
- The Russian government claimed to have returned the bodies of deceased Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) who were allegedly killed in the January 24 Russian Il-76 military transport aircraft crash in Belgorod Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to highlight Russian officials who sponsor Russian volunteer units in Ukraine and the "Time of Heroes program," which places veterans of the war in Ukraine in leadership positions within the Russian federal and regional governments.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 8, 2024

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

December 8, 2024, 4:50 pm ET

The rapid collapse of the Assad regime in Syria – a regime that the Kremlin helped prop up since 2015 – is a strategic political defeat for Moscow and has thrown the Kremlin into a crisis as it seeks to retain its strategic military basing in Syria. Russia intervened on behalf of former Syrian President Bashar al Assad in 2015 in order to secure Assad's regime after mass protests began in 2011 as part of the larger Arab Spring movement, which triggered the Syrian Civil War and threatened to oust Assad.^[1] Russian President Vladimir Putin has long viewed the "color revolutions" that ushered in new democratic governments in former Soviet states as a threat to his own regime's stability and security.^[2] Putin has also more widely opposed democratic movements to oust Kremlin-allied authoritarian rulers worldwide as he views these movements as hindering his efforts to create his envisioned multipolar world where Russia and Russia's key authoritarian allies and partners play a major role.^[3] Russia's inability or decision to not reinforce Assad's regime as the Syrian opposition offensive made rapid gains throughout the country will also hurt Russia's credibility as a reliable and effective security partner throughout the world, which will in turn negatively affect Putin's ability to garner support throughout the world for his desired multipolar world.

Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 8 that a Kremlin source stated that Assad and his family fled to Moscow and that Russian authorities granted them asylum.^[4] Putin has been able to ensure the survivability of Assad himself, but Putin intervened in the Syrian Civil War with the primary objective of bolstering Assad's regime and preventing his loss of power – an objective that the Kremlin has failed to achieve. Putin also intervened on behalf of Assad in 2015 to secure Russian military bases in Syria, support Russia's wider efforts to project power in the Mediterranean and Red Seas, increase its global footprint in the Middle East and Africa, and threaten NATO's southern flank. Russia is attempting to secure its bases in Syria as opposition forces come to power, but Russia's continued military presence in the country is not guaranteed, especially as Russia's actions in support of Assad over the past nine years have likely undermined Moscow's ability to form a lasting, positive relationship with ruling Syrian opposition groups.^[5]

The Kremlin reportedly secured an agreement on December 8 with unspecified Syrian opposition leaders to ensure the security of Russian military bases in Syria, but the contours of this arrangement and its longevity remain unclear given the volatile and rapidly evolving political situation on the ground in Syria. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on December 8 that a

Kremlin source claimed that unspecified Syrian opposition leaders guaranteed the security of Russian military and diplomatic institutions in Syria.^[6] TASS's source did not specify if the Syrian opposition leaders only guaranteed the security of Russia's two main military bases in Syria - Khmeimim Air Base near Latakia City and the naval base in the Port of Tartus - or other military bases and tactical outposts such as the Russian military base at the Qamishli Airport in northeastern Syria. Saudi-owned outlet *al Arabiy* reported on December 8 that Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al Jalali stated that the new Syrian authorities would make the decisions about the future of Russia's military bases in Syria.^[7] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated on December 8 that it was in contact with "all Syrian opposition groups" and noted that while all Russian military bases were on "high alert," there were "no serious threats" to their safety.^[8] Russian authorities have notably softened their language about Syrian opposition groups, with the Russian MFA referring to the actors opposing Assad's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) as "opposition groups" - a notable shift from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's reference to such groups, including Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), as "terrorists" a day earlier on December 7 at the Doha Forum.^[9] Russian state outlet *RIA Novosti* also notably referred to Syrian opposition groups as "armed opposition" in articles published on December 8 despite calling them "terrorists" in articles published on December 7.^[10]

The Syrian opposition is not a monolith; it encompasses several different factions with varying ideologies and political objectives, and no single opposition faction controls the territory around all of Russia's military bases and outposts in Al-Hasakah, Homs, Latakia, and Tartus governorates and beyond. It remains unclear how long cooperation amongst all the various Syrian opposition factions will last. It is also unclear if Moscow is in contact with all of the Syrian opposition factions necessary to guarantee the safety of Russian military bases in Syria. ISW previously observed reports that the Russian military redeployed some of its air defense assets protecting Khmeimim Air Base, indicating that the Russian command in Syria previously assessed that Russian military assets in Syria were not all secure.^[11]

ISW has collected strong indicators that Russia has been setting conditions to evacuate its military assets from Syria and that Russian military basing is not secure. Satellite imagery collected on December 7 shows three Il-76 and one An-124 military transport aircraft at Russia's Khmeimim Air Base, possibly in order to evacuate limited amounts of Russian military assets from the country.^[12] The Kremlin would likely need to conduct a substantial number of airlift sorties to properly evacuate Syria. Geolocated footage published on December 6 showed Russian forces transporting S-300 or S-400 and Tor-M1 air defense systems near Baniyas along the M1 Lakatia-Tartus highway, possibly as part of a tactical redeployment or for evacuation out of Syria.^[13] A Russian source claimed on December 8 that Russian forces "are leaving Syria completely" and withdrawing from Khmeimim Air Base and the Port of Tartus.^[14] Russian milbloggers, including a servicemember in the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), claimed that some Russian forces withdrew to Latakia and Tartus governorates a few days ago and are leaving from the Port of Tartus and Khmeimim Air Base but that at least one group of Russian personnel were encircled in an unspecified area of Syria and awaiting help or a negotiated exit corridor, indicating that Russian forces abandoned tactical positions beyond the main Russian bases at the port in Tartus and Khmeimim Air Base.^[15] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on December 8 that Russian operational groups withdrew from Deir ez Zor and the Kuweires Air Base east of Aleppo City and that the status of Russian forces operating near the oil fields near Palmyra remains unclear.^[16] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate [GUR] stated on December 8 that Russia's *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate and *Engineer Trubin* cargo ship left the Port of Tartus and that Russian forces are evacuating weapons from Khmeimim Air Base by air.^[17] A Russian milblogger claimed that Turkey is allowing Russia to fly through Turkish airspace to evacuate Russian military assets from Syria.^[18] It is unclear whether Russia will conduct withdrawals and evacuations from Syria following the TASS reporting on the evening of December 8 that Russia had secured guarantees for Russia's military bases from Syrian opposition leaders. **Even if Russia maintains some or all of its bases in Syria, it is a major geopolitical loss for Moscow, as Russia's continued basing in Syria will be at the mercy of Syrian opposition groups that the Kremlin previously used to call terrorists.**

The loss of Russian bases in Syria will have major implications for Russia's global military footprint and ability to operate in Africa. Russia has leveraged its Tartus naval base to project power in the Mediterranean Sea, threaten NATO's southern flank, and link its Black Sea assets to the Mediterranean Sea.^[19] The loss of Russian bases in Syria will likely disrupt Russian logistics, resupply efforts, and Africa Corps rotations, particularly weakening Russia's operations and power projection in Libya and sub-Saharan Africa. Russia could seek to leverage its presence in Libya or Sudan as alternatives, but the lack of formal agreements with these countries and insufficient infrastructure makes them inadequate substitutes. The collapse of Assad's regime and Russia's inability to preserve the regime will also damage Russia's global image as a reliable ally, threatening its influence with African autocrats whom Russia seeks to support and its broader geopolitical objective to posture as a global superpower.

The paragraph above was adapted from the Critical Threats Project's (CTP) December 4 Africa File Special Edition.

Russian ultranationalist milbloggers – many of whom fought in or covered the Syrian war – are upset about the fall of the Assad regime, criticizing it as yet another failure of Russian foreign policy to exert and maintain influence in areas of strategic importance. The Russian ultranationalist community broadly criticized the Assad regime for becoming complacent in recent years by allowing its military to degrade and rely on other countries, including Russia and Iran, to provide the Assad regime with defensive capabilities.[20] The milbloggers largely focused on the impact the regime's collapse has on Russia, however, with some describing the fall of the Assad regime as a significant Russian foreign policy failure as Russia did not consistently work to increase Russian influence in the region or push the Assad regime to conduct governmental reforms under the Kremlin's direction.[21] Some milbloggers criticized the Kremlin for not realizing that Assad's military was degraded and that the opposition groups in Syria would likely someday renew offensive operations to exploit Russia's "mistakes" in Syria, with one milblogger noting that Assad's two major allies, Russia and Iran, are currently focusing on the wars in Ukraine and Israel and Lebanon, respectively.[22] One milblogger claimed that many Russian independent analysts and military correspondents had been warning about this possible course of action for years and reiterated longstanding ultranationalist complaints about the lack of a meaningful civil society in Russia to help avoid significant foreign policy failures.[23] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger bemoaned the impact on Russia's global image, claiming that Russia's reputation is now entirely dependent on the outcome of its war in Ukraine, which is "more important [to Russia] than anything now."[24]

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on December 7 an additional military aid package for Ukraine worth \$988 million.[25] The package includes High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) ammunition; equipment and spare parts for artillery systems, tanks, and armored vehicles; and unmanned aerial systems (UAS). The US military aid package and continued Western support to Ukraine will help Ukrainian forces sustain the current tempo of operations across the theater of war which is destroying Russian combat power and degrading Russia's economy at a rate Russia cannot afford to sustain across the long term.

Russian authorities detained alleged terrorists in the Republic of Dagestan on December 7 amid growing Russian milblogger claims that the fall of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria will foster terrorism in Russia. Russian media reported on December 7 that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) detained 12 members of an alleged terrorist cell group in the Republic of Dagestan who were reportedly planning a major terrorist attack in an unspecified location in Russia.[26] Russian authorities reportedly seized two improvised explosive devices and over one ton of ammonium nitrate, weapons, and ammunition. [27] These arrests notably follow a test of the Russian sovereign internet on December 7, which prevented users in the Republic of Dagestan from accessing foreign websites and messaging services, including Telegram and WhatsApp.[28] The arrests also come amid Russian milblogger reactions to recent events in Syria claiming that the fall of the Assad regime will serve to inspire and export terrorism globally, including to Russia.[29] A Russian milblogger claimed that this particular terrorist group in Dagestan was likely inspired by the situation in Syria, cautioning that terrorism recruitment may increase in the North Caucasus, particularly among Central Asian migrants.[30] ISW assesses that Russian authorities continue to grapple with the need to foster domestic stability and growing anti-migrant ultranationalist sentiments in Russia while relying on migrants to address Russia's labor shortages.[31]

Key Takeaways:

- The rapid collapse of the Assad regime in Syria – a regime that the Kremlin helped prop up since 2015 – is a strategic political defeat for Moscow and has thrown the Kremlin into a crisis as it seeks to retain its strategic military basing in Syria.
- The Kremlin reportedly secured an agreement on December 8 with unspecified Syrian opposition leaders to ensure the security of Russian military bases in Syria, but the contours of this arrangement and its longevity remain unclear given a volatile and rapidly evolving political situation on the ground in Syria.
- ISW has collected strong indicators that Russia has been setting conditions to evacuate its military assets from Syria and that Russian military basing is not secure.
- The loss of Russian bases in Syria will have major implications for Russia's global military footprint and ability to operate in Africa.
- Russian ultranationalist milbloggers – many of whom fought in or covered the Syrian war – are upset about the fall of the Assad regime, criticizing it as yet another failure of Russian foreign policy to exert and maintain influence in areas of strategic importance.

- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on December 7 an additional military aid package for Ukraine worth \$988 million.
- Russian authorities detained alleged terrorists in the Republic of Dagestan on December 7 amid growing Russian milblogger claims that the fall of former Syrian President Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria will foster terrorism in Russia.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and the Pokrovsk and Vuhledar directions.
- One of Russia's largest microchip manufacturers has reportedly begun bankruptcy proceedings.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 7, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

December 7, 2024, 6:00 pm ET

Russian forces have resumed their offensive operations directly aimed at seizing Pokrovsk through a turning maneuver from the south after successfully widening their salient south and southeast of the town. Russian forces, including elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]), began advancing further west and northwest of Selydove (southeast of Pokrovsk) along the Petrivka-Pustynka-Zhovte line south of Pokrovsk in late November 2024 after mainly focusing their offensive efforts on widening the salient south of Selydove and eliminating the Ukrainian pockets north and south of Kurakhove.^[1] Russian forces recently seized Novopustynka (southwest of Pokrovsk and west of Zhovte) and advanced near the southern outskirts of Shevchenko (north of Zhovte), and geolocated footage published on December 6 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced north of Novotroitske (just west of Novopustynka) and along the T-05-15 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynopil highway towards Shevchenko.^[2] Russian milbloggers claimed on December 6 and 7 that fighting is ongoing towards Shevchenko and within the center of the settlement and that Russian forces have either advanced into northern Novotroitske or seized the entire settlement.^[3] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however. Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces have resumed attacks east of Myrnohrad (just east of Pokrovsk) near Hrodivka and Mykolaivka, are advancing southeast of Pokrovsk near Dachenske (east of Shevchenko), and are attacking with armored vehicle support near Sukhyi Yar and Lysivka (both northeast of Dachenske).^[4] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated in late November 2024 that elements of the Russian 90th Tank Division (41st CAA, CMD) — a formation that the Russian military command often redeploys to priority sectors and uses to exploit tactical gains — are attacking along the Novotroitske-Ukrainka line.^[5] Russian forces' turn north towards Shevchenko marks a notable inflection in the orientation of the Russian attacks in this area, as Russian forces mainly focused on advancing further west of Selydove in November 2024. The redeployment of elements of the 90th Tank Division and intensified Russian assaults near Dachenske and east of Myrnohrad further indicate a reprioritization of this sector of the frontline.

The Russian military command likely assesses that they have allocated sufficient manpower and materiel to the efforts to seize Kurakhove and seize or bypass Velyka Novosilka and level the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast in the coming weeks. Mashovets stated on December 6 that Russian forces likely seized Stari Terny (northwest of Kurakhove and on the northern shore of the Kurakhivske Reservoir), suggesting that Russian forces have likely almost completely eliminated the Ukrainian pocket north of the reservoir.^[6] Russian forces have continued to use frontal mechanized and dismounted infantry assaults to advance slowly but gradually into eastern and central Kurakhove and south of Kurakhove into Dalne, which supports larger Russian efforts to eliminate the remaining Ukrainian pocket between Dalne and Kurakhove.^[7] The Russian command may be satisfied with recent Russian advances northwest of Vuhledar into Kostyantynopolske and Uspenivka and up to Sukhi Yaly (all along the C-051104 highway) such that the Russian military command assesses that Russian forces will be able to close the Ukrainian pocket extending from Kostyantynopolske to Dalne and level the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast along the Dachne-Sukhi Yaly line in the coming weeks.^[8] Russian forces have also advanced north, east, and south of Velyka Novosilka in recent weeks as part of their ongoing efforts to envelop the settlement.^[9] The Russian military command likely assesses that Russian forces can now relaunch offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk due to Russian tactical gains in collapsing the Ukrainian pockets north and south of Kurakhove and north of Vuhledar.

Russian forces are likely attempting to flank Pokrovsk from the west and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in order to minimize Russia's need to conduct frontal assaults on the towns' eastern and southern approaches. The Russian military

command initially identified a direct assault on Pokrovsk as its primary offensive effort for its Summer-Autumn 2024 campaign but later amended their campaign design after assessing that Russian forces would be unable to seize Pokrovsk in a frontal assault.[10] The Russian military command instead appeared to identify the elimination of the Ukrainian pockets near Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and later Velyka Novosilka as prerequisites for enveloping Pokrovsk from the south via Selydove.[11] Russian forces likely intend to advance from the Novotroitske-Novopustynka area towards Udachne (west of Pokrovsk) and Hryshyne (northwest of Pokrovsk) in order to envelop Pokrovsk from the south and west. Russian forces likely intend to interdict the T-05-15, T-04-06, and M-30 highways southwest and west of Pokrovsk in order to complicate Ukrainian logistics and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad without having to conduct costly, frontal assaults on the towns.

The Russian military command may redeploy forces from the Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka directions, including additional elements of the 90th Tank Division or elements of the 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA, formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]), to reinforce the Russian units that are currently operating south of Pokrovsk. The Russian military command will likely only redeploy forces from the Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka directions after Russian forces seize or bypass tactical objectives in those areas to provide Russian forces with a preferable battlefield geography. The Russian forces currently operating in the Kurakhove and Velyka Novosilka directions are likely fatigued from months of fighting and may struggle to exploit initial tactical advances in the Pokrovsk direction. Efforts to flank Pokrovsk will require significantly more time, manpower, and armored vehicles than conducting frontal assaults on the town, as Russian forces will have to advance over extended distances and seize additional settlements. Ukrainian forces will likely attempt to mount an extensive defense in the area, with one Russian milblogger expressing concern on December 7 that well-established Ukrainian defensive positions and effective drone operations near Shevchenko and Novotroitske may complicate future Russian advances in the area.[12] Ukrainian drone units played a critical role in limiting Russia's ability to conduct mechanized operations in the Pokrovsk direction in mid-2024 and prompted the Russian military command to abandon a frontal assault on Pokrovsk in late Summer 2024.[13] Continued successful Ukrainian drone operations may again force Russian forces to conduct attritional, infantry-led assaults through Pokrovsk's urban areas in the future if Ukrainian forces can sufficiently delay and disrupt Russian efforts to envelop Pokrovsk.

The Russian military command will likely continue to trade Russian materiel and manpower for tactical territorial gains at an unsustainable rate during their offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk into 2025. The Kremlin is unlikely to abandon its costly offensive on Pokrovsk, which supports the broader Russian longstanding objective of seizing the remainder of Donetsk Oblast.[14] Russian forces will likely continue to pursue the seizure of Pokrovsk beyond Winter 2024-2025 and into Spring 2025. The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) recently observed that Russian forces suffered record-high casualty rates in November 2024, averaging 1,523 casualties daily and over 45,000 total casualties for the month.[15] Continued intensified offensive operations in Ukraine, particularly in western Donetsk Oblast, have put an unsustainable strain on Russia's force generation apparatus and economy. Russian authorities will likely have to balance mounting personnel losses and the growing pressure to enact a deeply unpopular partial involuntary reserve callup - which would further strain Russia's labor shortages and economy — against the desire to seize Pokrovsk and the rest of Donetsk Oblast.

Ukrainian forces continue to use drone strikes to contest Russia's presence in the northwestern Black Sea, including near gas extraction platforms. The Ukrainian Navy published footage that was subsequently geolocated on December 7 showing Ukrainian naval drones destroying Russian surveillance systems on gas platforms off the west coast of occupied Crimea in the Black Sea.[16] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces use the gas platforms as visual and radar observation points and that Ukrainian forces used traditional naval drones as well as those modernized to carry first-person view (FPV) drones that can independently strike targets.[17] Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a naval drone strike against occupied Crimea on the night of December 5 to 6, and a Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on December 6 that some of the Ukrainian naval drones "disappeared" during the multi-wave overnight strike.[18] The milblogger claimed that some of the Ukrainian naval drones had mounted machine guns that allowed the Ukrainian drones to return fire at Russian forces dispatched to intercept the drones.

Ukrainian forces will reportedly receive increased access to Starshield, a more secure satellite network for Starlink terminals, which may give Ukrainian forces an advantage in the technological innovation arms race in which Ukrainian and Russian forces are currently engaged. Bloomberg reported on December 6 that SpaceX recently received a Pentagon contract to increase Ukraine's access to Starshield, an encrypted version of the Starlink satellite network that can transmit classified data and is more difficult to jam or hack.[19] The US Space Systems Command's Commercial Satellite Office stated that 3,000 Ukrainian Starlink terminals will gain access to the more

secure network — an increase from the 500 Ukrainian terminals that were previously connected to Starshield. Russian and Ukrainian forces have been engaged in an offense-defense race to adapt and innovate their strike and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities. Ukrainian military personnel have recently reported that Russian forces are increasingly using Starlink terminals to fix their combat coordination and communications and to improve the precision of Russian tactical fires.[20] The Associated Press also recently reported that Russia is using Starlink systems to make Russian drone variants more resistant to jamming.[21] Ukraine's increased access to the more advanced and more secure Starshield network may afford Ukrainian forces a technological edge to conduct more effective combat coordination and field new developments in their tactical reconnaissance strike complex (TRSC) ahead of Russian forces.

Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor appears to be testing the Russian sovereign internet in Russian regions populated by ethnic minorities. Dagestani telecom operator Ellko reported that Roskomnadzor conducted a test to revoke Republic of Dagestan residents' access to foreign websites and applications from December 6 to 7, and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*'s Caucasus service reported that users in Dagestan also experienced issues accessing WhatsApp and Telegram social media and messaging services.[22] Dagestani publication *Chernovik* reported that users in the Chechen and Ingushetian republics also experienced issues accessing foreign and some domestic websites and online services, including YouTube, Google, and some services of Russian internet giant Yandex — even with virtual private networks (VPNs).[23] Roskomnadzor confirmed on December 6 the test in the Republic of Dagestan and stated that the test is to ensure that "key replacement infrastructure" can function if Roskomnadzor deliberately disconnects Russia from the global internet.[24] Roskomnadzor likely intended in part to test its ability to successfully disconnect Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia — Russian federal subjects with Muslim-majority populations and recent histories of instability — from services like Telegram in order to control the information space in the event of instability in the future. Roskomnadzor previously attempted to disconnect users in the Dagestan, Sakha, and Bashkortostan republics from Telegram during antisemitic pogroms in November 2023 and protests in January 2024.[25] The Kremlin has recently invested roughly 59 billion rubles (about \$648 million) into developing its technical capabilities to restrict internet traffic and has devoted efforts to compelling Russians to migrate from Western social media platforms to domestic platforms that the Kremlin can more easily control.[26]

Roskomnadzor indicated that it may intend to force Russians to migrate their websites from Western hosting providers to Russian hosting providers likely to better enforce Russian censorship laws. Roskomnadzor also warned on December 7 that it could block eight foreign web service hosting providers, including Amazon Web Services (AWS), GoDaddy, and HostGator, from operating in Russia due to noncompliance with Russian censorship laws.[27] Roskomnadzor has previously issued such warnings ahead of blocking Western websites and online services likely to test the reaction to these blocks before implementing them and pressure Russians to switch to domestic, Kremlin-approved and -controlled platforms and services.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces have resumed their offensive operations directly aimed at seizing Pokrovsk through a turning maneuver from the south after successfully widening their salient south and southeast of the town.**
- **The Russian military command likely assesses that they have allocated sufficient manpower and materiel to the efforts to seize Kurakhove and seize or bypass Velyka Novosilka and level the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast in the coming weeks.**
- **Russian forces are likely attempting to flank Pokrovsk from the west and force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad in order to minimize Russia's need to conduct frontal assaults on the towns' eastern and southern approaches.**
- **The Russian military command will likely continue to trade Russian materiel and manpower for tactical territorial gains at an unsustainable rate during their offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk into 2025.**
- **Ukrainian forces continue to use drone strikes to contest Russia's presence in the northwestern Black Sea, including near gas extraction platforms.**
- **Ukrainian forces will reportedly receive increased access to Starshield, a more secure satellite network for Starlink terminals, which may give Ukrainian forces an advantage in the technological innovation arms race in which Ukrainian and Russian forces are currently engaged.**
- **Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor appears to be testing the Russian sovereign internet in Russian regions populated by ethnic minorities.**
- **Roskomnadzor indicated that it may intend to force Russians to migrate their websites from Western hosting providers to Russian hosting providers likely to better enforce Russian censorship laws.**

- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and reportedly advanced near Velyka Novosilka while Russian forces advanced near Kupyansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- Russian authorities continue efforts to forcibly impress migrants into signing military service contracts with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) as part of ongoing cryptomobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 6, 2024

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 6, 2024, 9:30pm ET

Russian forces have not yet evacuated the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria as of December 6, but it remains unclear whether Russia will keep its vessels at the port as Syrian rebels continue to advance swiftly across regime-held territory. Former Norwegian Navy officer and independent OSINT analyst Thord Are Iversen assessed that the Russian *Novorossiysk* Kilo-class submarine, a Gorshkov-class frigate, the *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate, and possibly the *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler have returned to the port in Tartus based on satellite imagery collected on December 6.^[1] Satellite imagery collected on December 3 showed that Russia had removed all of its ships stationed at Tartus - the *Admiral Grigorovich* frigate, the *Novorossiysk* submarine, the *Admiral Gorshkov* and *Admiral Golovko* Gorshkov-class frigates, and likely the *Vyazma* oiler and the *Yelnya* Altay-class oiler - from the port sometime between December 1 and 3.^[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on December 3 that ten Russian naval vessels, including the *Admiral Gorshkov* and *Admiral Golovko* frigates and *Novorossiysk* submarine, participated in hypersonic and cruise missile launch exercises in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov reportedly informed the US about Russian exercises in the Mediterranean during a call on November 27.^[3] It is unclear if Russia removed the *Admiral Grigorovich* and the two oilers from Tartus as part of the exercise as well. Some of the vessels that Russian forces removed from Tartus between December 1 and 3 have not returned to port as of December 6.

Bloomberg reported on December 6 that a person close to the Kremlin stated that Russia does not have a plan to save Syrian President Bashar al Assad and that Russia is unlikely to create such a plan as long as pro-regime forces continue to abandon their positions.^[4] The Russian Embassy in Syria notably announced on December 6 that Russian citizens living in Syria should leave the country on commercial flights due to the "difficult military and political situation" in Syria.^[5] It remains unclear whether Russia plans to continue to maintain all of these vessels at Tartus or is planning to evacuate all or some of them elsewhere.

Russia appears to be redeploying at least some of its air defense assets that were defending Russia's Khmeimim Air Base in Syria, but the reason for this redeployment remains unclear at this time. Geolocated footage published on December 6 shows Russian forces transporting S-300 or S-400 and Tor-M1 air defense systems near Baniyas along the M1 Lakatia-Tartus highway.^[6] A Russian milblogger posted the same footage on December 6 and claimed that it showed Russian forces moving an S-400 system and a Tor-M2 system that Russian forces had deployed near Masyaf (about 50 kilometers southeast of Khmeimim Air Base) in 2017 to protect Khmeimim Air Base.^[7] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces are either redeploying the air defense systems to Khmeimim Air Base or Tartus due to Syrian rebel groups' recent seizure of Hama City (roughly 35 kilometers east of Masyaf). It is unclear if Russian forces are redeploying the air defense systems to new positions within western Syria in order to improve their survivability or if Russian forces are moving the air defense systems for evacuation from Syria through Tartus.

The Kremlin continues to advance its strategic effort to de facto annex Belarus and further expand the Russian military's presence in Belarus through the Union State framework. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a new Union State treaty on security guarantees at a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State in Minsk, Belarus on December 6.^[8] Lukashenko made a public appeal to Putin that Russia deploy Oreshnik ballistic missiles to Belarus under the condition that the Belarusian military-political leadership would determine the Oreshnik's targets should the missile ever launch from Belarusian territory.^[9] Putin responded to Lukashenko's request by stating that Russia could deploy Oreshnik systems to Belarus

by mid-2025 on the grounds of the new Union State agreement on security guarantees and as Russia scales up the production of Oreshnik ballistic missiles.[10] Putin noted that the new security treaty allows Russia and Belarus to use "all available forces and means" as part of Russia's and Belarus' mutual defense obligations.[11]

The treaty also requires Russia and Belarus to ensure the security of the Union State's borders, and Putin emphasized that the new document includes the potential use of Russian tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus in the event of aggression against Belarus.[12] The agreement follows the release of Russia's updated nuclear doctrine on November 19, which formally placed Belarus under Russia's nuclear umbrella and consistent with Russia's existing treaty obligations with Belarus.[13] The deployment of Oreshnik ballistic missiles to Belarus would further increase Russia's military footprint in Belarus and advance the Kremlin's longstanding strategic effort to erode Belarusian sovereignty and de facto annex Belarus through the Union State framework.

Russia and Belarus also signed 10 other Union State documents, including a Union State security concept, a decree on uniform rules in the field of consumer rights protection, a decree on joint measures to combat smuggling, an agreement on the formation of a common electric energy market, a resolution on the cancellation of mobile device roaming, and a resolution celebratory event for 80th anniversary of victory in World War II, among other Union State matters.[14]

Lukashenko is likely trying to preserve Belarusian sovereignty against Moscow by advocating that Belarus control Russian weapons deployed in Belarus – an endeavor Lukashenko has historically failed at. Lukashenko publicly requested that Minsk have the right to decide on how to use Oreshnik missiles in Belarus likely in an attempt to preserve Belarus' sovereignty within the Union State and buttress his negotiating position against further Union State integration.[15] Lukashenko has long attempted to compete against the Kremlin to determine whether Belarus can assert control over Russian military assets - such as advanced S-400 air defense systems - deployed to Belarus.[16] Belarusian Security Council State Secretary Alexander Volfovich similarly baselessly claimed that only Lukashenko can issue the order to use the Russian tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus.[17] Lukashenko noted that the Russian military personnel will continue to operate the Oreshnik system in Belarus, which indicates that Moscow will retain control over any Oreshnik ballistic missiles deployed to Belarus.

The deployment of the Oreshnik missiles to Belarus does not significantly increase the immediate risks of intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) strikes against Ukraine or NATO states despite the Kremlin's intensified nuclear saber-rattling. Putin once again tried to flaunt the Oreshnik missile and Russian missile capabilities during the Union State Supreme State Council meeting as part of the Kremlin's reflexive control information operation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov similarly attempted to frame the Oreshnik strike against Dnipro City on November 21 as Russia's readiness to use any means to prevent the West from strategically defeating Russia in an interview with an American media personality on December 5.[18] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin's constant flaunting of the Oreshnik missile is unlikely to presage the development of particularly novel Russian deep-strike capabilities.[19] Russia's deployment of Oreshnik missiles to Belarus does not significantly change the threat to Ukraine or NATO given that the Russian military has long had nuclear weapons in mainland Russia and the enclave of Kaliningrad capable of striking targets in Ukraine and NATO. Russian forces fire nuclear-capable Iskander ballistic missiles, Kinzhal hypersonic ballistic missiles, and nuclear-capable Kh-101 cruise missiles against Ukraine on a regular basis.[20]

The Kremlin is scapegoating former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov for Russia's failure to adequately respond to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on December 5 stating that Smirnov resigned "at his own request" and appointed Russian State Duma Information Policy Committee Head Alexander Khinshtein as acting Kursk Oblast governor.[21] Putin held a publicized meeting with Khinshtein on December 5 in which Putin offered Khinshtein the post of acting governor and emphasized the importance of crisis management in Kursk Oblast.[22]

Khinshtein's appointment comes after weeks of protests from Kursk Oblast residents for additional government assistance for housing and amid Russian forces' continued failure to repel the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast that began in early August 2024.[23] Putin appointed Smirnov as acting head in May 2024 before Kursk Oblast residents formally elected Smirnov as head in September 2024. Russian state news wire TASS noted that Smirnov only served as head of Kursk Oblast for 205 days, of which he only spent 80 days as elected governor.[24] The Kremlin likely refrained from replacing Smirnov during the September 2024 election to downplay the societal impacts of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[25]

Other senior Russian officials - including Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin, and Russian Transport Minister and Smirnov's predecessor Roman Starovoit - emphasized that Putin appointed Khinshtein because Smirnov was not adequately communicating with or supporting Kursk Oblast residents regarding housing issues and praised Khinshtein as capable of solving these issues.[26] Putin likely replaced Smirnov with Khinshtein now to appear dedicated to solving social issues in Kursk Oblast and quell local protests while distracting from Russia's failure to repel the Ukrainian incursion.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov used his interview with an American media personality to reiterate Kremlin talking points that are intended to shape American foreign policy and achieve a US-Russia reset detrimental to US interests and on the Kremlin's terms. Lavrov stated during the interview published on December 5 that the Kremlin wants "normal" relations with the United States and reiterated longstanding Kremlin rhetorical lines attempting to blame the United States and NATO for undermining relations with Russia. Lavrov's statements largely aligned with Russian President Vladimir Putin's November 7 talking points that also advocated for a US-Russia reset on Russia's terms.[27] Lavrov also indicated that the Kremlin still has no intentions to negotiate on any terms other than its own and falsely claimed that Russia wants to end the war in Ukraine on the basis of the United Nations (UN) Charter - despite Russia's continuing to violate the UN Charter by waging its illegal war of conquest against Ukraine in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and Russia's previous treaties with Ukraine. Lavrov rejected any notion of Russian forces withdrawing from occupied Ukraine and falsely claimed that Russia is not attempting to "exterminate" the Ukrainian people. Lavrov's statements are part of the Kremlin's continued effort to shape American foreign policy so the United States engages with Russia on terms favorable to the Kremlin without offering any concessions favorable to the United States or conceding any of the Kremlin's maximalist objectives either in Ukraine or globally.[28]

Western sanctions are reportedly degrading the overall quality of Russian drones, indicating that targeted sanctions are having some negative effects on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB). The *Washington Post* reported on December 5 that Western sanctions are forcing Russia to purchase poorer quality steering motors for drones from the People's Republic of China (PRC), which is increasing the failure rate of Russian-produced Shahed drones as they have in-flight maneuverability issues.[29] Soldiers told the *Washington Post* that Russian Shaheds have started to spin out of control after making sharp turns, causing some of the drones to crash. ISW has observed Ukrainian official reports of Russian drones increasingly becoming "locally lost" during Russia's almost daily overnight strike series against Ukraine, and the reported lower-quality steering motors may be contributing to this phenomenon.[30]

Russia is reportedly also struggling to procure sufficient quantities of basic supplies, such as high-performance lubricants needed for operating tanks in colder weather or computerized machine tools necessary for building drone airframes and missiles.[31] ISW previously reported on Russia's increasing efforts to expand bilateral relations with the PRC in order to circumvent Western sanctions, with Ukrainian officials stating that the PRC provides approximately 60 percent of all the foreign components found in the weapons that Russia uses against Ukraine.[32] ISW previously assessed that Russia is prioritizing materiel quantity over quality and that Russia's increased DIB production is likely not sustainable in the medium- and long-term as Russia is unable to completely compensate for the military and dual-use items it can no longer acquire due to sanctions.[33]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have not yet evacuated the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria as of December 6, but it remains unclear whether Russia will keep its vessels at the port as Syrian rebels continue to advance swiftly across regime-held territory.
- Russia appears to be redeploying at least some of its air defense assets that were defending Russia's Khmeimim Air Base in Syria, but the reason for this redeployment remains unclear at this time.
- The Kremlin continues to advance its strategic effort to de facto annex Belarus and further expand the Russian military's presence in Belarus through the Union State framework.
- Lukashenko is likely trying to preserve Belarusian sovereignty against Moscow by advocating that Belarus control Russian weapons deployed in Belarus - an endeavor Lukashenko has historically failed at.
- The deployment of the Oreshnik missiles to Belarus does not significantly increase the immediate risks of intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) strikes against Ukraine or NATO states despite the Kremlin's intensified nuclear saber-rattling.
- The Kremlin is scapegoating former Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov for Russia's failure to adequately respond to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov used his interview with an American media personality to reiterate Kremlin talking points that are intended to shape American foreign policy and achieve a US-Russia reset detrimental to US interests and on the Kremlin's terms.
- Western sanctions are reportedly degrading the overall quality of Russian drones, indicating that targeted sanctions are having some negative effects on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB).
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar.
- The Russian military continues to lose parts of its officer corps, a resource that is difficult to replenish, as part of Russia's ever-increasing casualties.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 5, 2024

[click here to read the full report](#)

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Nate, Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 5, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on December 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is continuing to suffer significant manpower losses to make tactical advances in western Donetsk Oblast at the expense of Russia's ongoing war effort and the medium-term viability of the Russian economy. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD), citing data from the Ukrainian General Staff, reported on December 5 that the average daily Russian personnel casualties reached a new all-time high of 1,523 casualties per day in November 2024.^[1] The UK MoD noted that Russian forces suffered just over 2,000 casualties in a single day for the first time on November 28, 2024. Russian forces suffered an estimated 45,690 total casualties throughout November 2024, and the UK MoD noted that November 2024 was the fifth consecutive month that Russian casualties increased. ISW has observed geolocated evidence to assess that Russian forces advanced at a rate of roughly 27.96 square kilometers per day and seized a total of 839 square kilometers in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast in November 2024. ISW previously reported that Russian forces suffered increased casualties in September and October 2024 as well and that Russian casualties totaled an estimated 80,110 troops in exchange for roughly 1,517 square kilometers of gains in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast in those two months.^[2] **Russian forces have thus suffered an estimated 125,800 casualties during a period of intensified offensive operations in September, October, and November 2024 in exchange for 2,356 square kilometers of gains. (Or approximately 53 Russian casualties per square kilometer of Ukrainian territory seized.)**

Russia's constrained labor pool is likely unable to sustain this increased casualty rate in the medium-term, and continued Western military support for Ukraine remains vital to Ukraine's ability to inflict losses at this rate. US officials reportedly estimated in late October 2024 that Russia's current recruitment rate was between 25,000 and 30,000 new soldiers per month.^[3] Ukrainian military observer Petro Chernykh stated on December 3 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) would have to increase its monthly recruitment rates from 40,000-42,000 recruits to 50,000 recruits in order to seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast while maintaining their current casualty rate.^[4] Chernykh's statement suggests that Russia may have increased its recruitment rate in recent weeks, although this recruitment rate appears to be thousands of troops short of Russia's ever-increasing monthly casualty totals. The Kremlin's commitment to maintaining the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine and continuing to advance in eastern Ukraine has created dueling demands on Russia's labor pool. Additional efforts to increase Russian force generation rates risk further destabilizing the Russian economy as Russia continues to grapple with domestic labor shortages and rising inflation.^[5] Russians can either serve in uniform in Ukraine, or work in Russia's domestic economy, but they cannot do both simultaneously. The Kremlin is unlikely to sufficiently meet its needs for labor in both the military and Russia's domestic economy in the near future, and additional months of intensified offensive operations in Ukraine in 2025 and beyond will only further compound Russian resourcing dilemmas. US President Joe Biden's commitment to providing the remainder of available US aid to Ukraine and the continued, regular provision of Western military assistance to Ukraine remains crucial to Ukraine's ability to continue defending against Russian offensive operations and inflicting unsustainable losses on the Russian military in 2025.^[6]

Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov undermined the Kremlin's information operation to portray Russia's November 21 Oreshnik ballistic missile strike against

Ukraine as a defensive response to the US permitting Ukraine to conduct strikes in Russia with US-provided ATACMS missiles. US officials confirmed that Gerasimov called US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Charles Q. Brown Jr. on November 27.[7] The *New York Times* (NYT) reported, citing unspecified officials, that Gerasimov told Brown that Russia had planned the Oreshnik missile launch well ahead of the US decision to allow Ukraine to strike military targets in Russia with US-provided ATACMS.[8] Western media noted that Gerasimov also warned Brown about Russian military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, but that Gerasimov did not "explicitly mention" that Russian forces would launch hypersonic missiles during the exercises. US military spokespeople confirmed to Western media that the call occurred but did not provide details on the conversation. Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Kremlin officials have notably attempted to use the Oreshnik ballistic missile and its test launch on November 21 as part of an information operation that Russia is escalating the war in Ukraine in response to the US lifting its restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons against military targets in Russia.[9] Gerasimov's statement to Brown, if accurate, directly undermined this ongoing information operation by admitting that the Oreshnik launch was not connected to Ukrainian strikes into Russia with Western-provided weapons as Putin explicitly claimed in an emergency address immediately following the strike.[10]

Russian-North Korean military cooperation will likely continue to intensify in the coming months following the formal commencement of their comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on December 4. North Korean and Russian state media reported that the strategic partnership agreement ensuring "international strategic stability" and a "fair world order" between North Korea and Russia entered into force on December 4.[11] Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un signed the strategic partnership agreement in Pyongyang on June 19 and Putin and Jong-un ratified the strategic partnership agreement on November 9 and 11, respectively.[12] ISW has extensively reported on the strengthening of Russian-North Korean bilateral relations since late 2022 that began with Russia discreetly purchasing missiles and ammunition from Pyongyang, to then facilitating performative diplomatic engagements, and most recently resulting in North Korea's deployment of over 10,000 North Korean soldiers to fight alongside Russian forces in Kursk Oblast.[13] Russia and North Korea are likely to leverage the commencement of their strategic comprehensive partnership agreement to formalize and expand their avenues of cooperation in the coming months.

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov continues to publicly position himself as a defender of migrants and Russian ethnic minorities in opposition to other senior Russian security officials, suggesting that senior Russian officials may be increasingly divided over Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to promote an inclusive Russian civic nationalism that ensures interethnic and interreligious harmony in Russia. Kadyrov accused Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Head Vladimir Kolokoltsev on December 5 of not fulfilling the objectives that Putin tasked them with in response to a case involving a Chechen minor accused of hooliganism in Moscow City.[14] Kadyrov criticized Kolokoltsev and Bastrykin for failing to protect Russian ethnic minorities and accused them of not listening to the Russian public.[15] Kadyrov further claimed that Kolokoltsev ordered Russian law enforcement services to beat foreigners and drive them out of Russia, despite Russia's need for migrants and allies.[16] Kadyrov previously clashed with Bastrykin in June 2024 over disagreements in addressing religious extremism in Russia, and Bastrykin and Kolokoltsev have been outspoken ultranationalist voices advocating for crackdowns against Russian migrants and ethnic minorities.[17] Public disagreements between senior Russian officials regarding the role and treatment of migrants and ethnic and religious minorities in Russian society suggest that there may be an increasing opposition among certain Kremlin officials to Putin's long-term efforts to portray Russia as an inclusive and harmonious multicultural Russian state and foster civic nationalism instead of ethno-religious nationalism.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin is continuing to suffer significant manpower losses to make tactical advances in western Donetsk Oblast at the expense of Russia's ongoing war effort and the medium-term viability of the Russian economy.
- Russia's constrained labor pool is likely unable to sustain this increased casualty rate in the medium-term, and continued Western military support for Ukraine remains vital to Ukraine's ability to inflict losses at this rate.
- Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov undermined the Kremlin's information operation to portray Russia's November 21 Oreshnik ballistic missile strike against Ukraine as a defensive response to the US permitting Ukraine to conduct strikes in Russia with US-provided ATACMS missiles.
- Russian-North Korean military cooperation will likely continue to intensify in the coming months following the formal commencement of their comprehensive strategic

partnership agreement on December 4.

- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov continues to publicly position himself as a defender of migrants and Russian ethnic minorities in opposition to other senior Russian security officials, suggesting that senior Russian officials may be increasingly divided over Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to promote an inclusive Russian civic nationalism that ensures interethnic and interreligious harmony in Russia.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk and northern Kharkiv oblasts, and Russian forces advanced in the Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions.
- Russian forces are reportedly increasingly recruiting women for combat and logistics functions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 4, 2024

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Angelica Evans, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Kateryna Stepanenko

December 4, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:00am ET on December 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Mounting evidence continues to personally implicate Russian President Vladimir Putin and other senior Kremlin officials in the forced deportation and "re-education" of Ukrainian children in Russia. The US Department of State and Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab published a report on December 3 detailing the role of Putin, Kremlin Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, members of Russia's ruling United Russia party, Russia's Ministry of Education, and occupation officials in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in at least 314 confirmed cases of child deportation from occupied Ukraine.^[1] The report states that Putin maintains primary control over and is the main decision-maker for Russia's deportation program and that Lvova-Belova acts as Putin's executive officer who oversees the implementation of the program. The report notes that Russian authorities have used military transport aircraft and aircraft under Putin's personal control to deport children from occupied Ukraine to intermediary holding facilities in Russia. The report states that Russian and occupation authorities have primarily deported to Russia children whom Russian authorities claim to be orphans or children without parental care and that Russian authorities have placed most of the children in Russian foster or adoptive families. The report assesses that it is highly likely that most, if not all, deported Ukrainian children have been naturalized as Russian citizens and that Russian authorities force the children to participate in a patriotic re-education program intended to Russify, militarize, and indoctrinate them into Russian cultural and historical narratives and forcibly separate them from their Ukrainian heritage. The report notes that the true number of Ukrainian children that Russia has forcibly deported to Russia remains unclear and that the number is significantly higher than the 314 children identified in the report. ISW has reported extensively on Russia's crimes in occupied Ukraine, including the forced deportation of Ukrainian youth to Russia.^[2] The Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines "forcibly transferring children of a group to another group" as an act constituting genocide.^[3]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to posture Russian economic stability and growth while high interest rates and efforts to combat inflation suggest that the Kremlin is worried about economic stability in the long-term. Putin claimed at the Russian state-owned bank VTB Bank's investment forum on December 4 that the Russian economy will grow by four percent by the end of 2024 and that Russia's GDP grew by 4.1 percent from January to October 2024.^[4] Putin is likely attempting to posture economic stability despite reports that Russia may raise key interest rates to 25 percent in December 2024, after the Russian Central Bank already raised the key interest rate to 21 percent in October 2024.^[5] Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina stated on December 4 that the Central Bank may raise the key interest rate at the upcoming Central Bank's board of directors meeting.^[6] Putin tacitly acknowledged some economic problems on December 4 by calling on the Central Bank to contain inflation.^[7] Russian state outlet RBK reported on December 4, citing Central Bank data, that Russians' cash savings have fallen to a historical low and that cash rubles account for only 15 percent of Russian citizens' savings.^[8] VTB Banks Deputy Chairperson Georgy Gorshkov assessed that cash savings may fall by "a couple" percentage points by the end of 2024.^[9] Putin also suggested that the Russian economy is growing by boasting a record low country-wide unemployment rate of 2.3 percent and claiming that unemployment rates, particularly for Russians 25-years-old and younger, have decreased significantly.^[10] Putin failed to note that unemployment rates are likely at a

record low for youth as many young Russian men are fighting in Ukraine and that Russia is suffering significant labor shortages.[11]

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced on December 4 that Armenia has effectively reached "the point of no return" in its ties with the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).[12] Pashinyan criticized CSTO allies for failing to respond to Azerbaijan's encroachment on Armenia's internationally recognized territory in 2021 and 2022 - likely referring to encroachments into Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces - despite prior assurances that any violation of Armenia's territorial integrity was a "red line" for the CSTO.[13] Pashinyan stated that the CSTO lacks credibility because it does not have a clearly defined zone of responsibility in Armenia — despite Armenia still formally being a member state - and emphasized that Armenia's issues with the CSTO are not necessarily related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Pashinyan indicated that Armenia no longer participates in CSTO activities or policymaking. ISW continues to observe souring Armenian-Russian bilateral relations and assesses that a formal Armenian withdrawal from the CSTO would serve as another blow to Russian power projection across the countries that the Soviet Union once colonized.[14]

Key Takeaways:

- Mounting evidence continues to personally implicate Russian President Vladimir Putin and other senior Kremlin officials in the forced deportation and "re-education" of Ukrainian children in Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to posture Russian economic stability and growth while high interest rates and efforts to combat inflation suggest that the Kremlin is worried about economic stability in the long-term.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced on December 4 that Armenia has effectively reached "the point of no return" in its ties with the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in Toretsk and near Velyka Novosilka. Russian forces recently advanced in Chasiv Yar, near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Vuhledar, Velyka Novosilka, and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to use its "Time of Heroes" program to place veterans of the war in Ukraine in leadership positions within the Russian government and major state companies.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 3, 2024

[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and Karolina Hird

December 3, 2024, 6:30 pm ET

Russia is evacuating naval assets from its base in Tartus, Syria, which may suggest that Russia does not intend to send significant reinforcements to support Syrian President Bashar al Assad's regime in the near term. OSINT analyst MT Anderson reported on December 2 that satellite imagery from November 30 and December 1 showed that the Russian *Admiral Gorshkov* and *Admiral Golovko* Gorskhov-class frigates, the *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate, the *Novorossiysk* Kilo-class submarine, the *Yelnya* Altay-class oiler, and the *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler were at the Russian base in Tartus.[1] Anderson then reported that satellite imagery from December 3 showed that Russia removed the three frigates, the submarine, and two unnamed auxiliary vessels (likely the *Yelnya* and *Vyazma*) from the base — amounting to all of the vessels that Russia had stationed at Tartus.[2] Russia cannot redeploy these vessels to its Black Sea ports because Turkey is enforcing the Montreux Convention, which prevents Russian warships from passing through the Turkish Straits.[3] Russia will likely therefore redeploy the vessels to its bases in northwestern Russia and Kaliningrad Oblast. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 3 that the Russian military command has likely deployed a force grouping of an unspecified size from its Africa Corps — the organization that the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) created to supplant the Wagner Group's operations in Africa following Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's death in August 2023 — to Syria.[4] ISW cannot independently confirm reports of Africa Corps elements deploying to Syria, but these reports, if true, would indicate that the Russian military command is avoiding redeploying regular Russian military forces from its priority theater in Ukraine to Syria. The Russian evacuation of Tartus and the reported deployment of Africa Corps forces to Syria suggest that Russia is worried that Syrian opposition forces may advance southward to Hama (roughly 80 kilometers northeast of Tartus) and threaten the Tartus base but that

the Russian military command will not deploy significant reinforcements to Syria in the near term to prevent such advances. The Critical Threats Project's (CTP) Africa File will cover Syria's impact on Russian activity in Africa and the Mediterranean in its upcoming update.

The United States announced additional military assistance worth \$725 million for Ukraine on December 2.[5] The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced its 71st tranche of military assistance under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), including Stinger man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS) missiles; HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS); Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (c-UAS) equipment and munitions; and AT-4 and Javelin anti-armor systems.[6] US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stated on December 2 that US President Joe Biden has asked the DoD to deliver the aid rapidly and that the United States "will deliver hundreds of thousands of additional artillery rounds, thousands of additional rockets, and other critical capabilities" to Ukraine between early December 2024 and mid-January 2025.[7]

Russian officials continue to perpetuate information operations about prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges in order to portray Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate and to undermine Ukrainians' trust in their government. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on November 27 that Russia has a list of 630 Ukrainian POWs that Russia is "immediately" ready to swap in a one-to-one exchange.[8] Russian Human Rights Ombudsman Tatyana Moskalkova published the list of the alleged 630 Ukrainian POWs on December 2 and claimed that Ukraine refused the swap after Russia suggested it.[9] Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs Secretary Brigadier General Dmytro Usov stated on December 3 that Russian authorities have not submitted requests for such POW exchanges through official channels and that the published list includes civilians and POWs whom Ukraine has already returned home.[10] Usov noted that Russian authorities are only interested in exchanging POWs that Ukrainian forces captured in Kursk Oblast. Usov stated that the Russian officials who are publicly claiming that Ukraine is undermining POW exchanges are attempting to discredit the Ukrainian government. A Russian insider source similarly noted on November 29 and December 3 that Zakharova's and Moskalkova's statements about Russia's alleged willingness to conduct a large POW exchange are an attempt to present the false narrative that Ukrainian leadership is unwilling to negotiate to Ukraine's Western partners and allies, while falsely portraying Russia as the party interested in negotiations.[11] ISW continues to assess that Kremlin information operations centered around POWs are likely intended to distract from the Kremlin's own efforts to disrupt the POW exchange process and from consistent reports of Russian human rights abuses, including executions, perpetrated against Ukrainian POWs.[12] Russia — not Ukraine — has previously demonstrated an unwillingness to conduct POW exchanges, as Russia reportedly rebuffed Ukrainian overtures for exchanges for months before the start of Ukraine's offensive in Kursk Oblast in August 2024.[13]

India is reportedly attempting to decouple its defense industry from Russia as it increases cooperation with Western defense companies and builds up its own defense industrial base (DIB). Bloomberg reported on December 3 that senior Indian officials stated that India has sharply reduced its defense equipment orders from Russia and instead started purchasing defense equipment from Western suppliers.[14] The officials reportedly stated that India canceled plans to jointly develop and manufacture helicopters and advanced fighter jets with Russia "some time ago" and that India is unlikely to move forward with plans to lease a Russian nuclear-powered submarine to train Indian crews as India is building its own submarines. One unnamed senior Indian official reportedly stated that Russian-made weapons are often cheaper than Western weapons but need frequent repairs, which increases their long-term costs. ISW has previously reported on other sources of increased tensions within the Russia-India relationship, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's August 23 visit to Ukraine and the reported transfer of Indian artillery shells through European intermediaries to Ukraine.[15]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia is evacuating naval assets from its base in Tartus, Syria, which may suggest that Russia does not intend to send significant reinforcements to support Syrian President Bashar al Assad's regime in the near term.
- The US announced additional military assistance worth \$725 million for Ukraine on December 2.
- Russian officials continue to perpetuate information operations about prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges in order to portray Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate and to undermine Ukrainians' trust in their government.
- India is reportedly attempting to decouple its defense industry from Russia as it increases cooperation with Western defense companies and builds up its own defense industrial base (DIB).
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and regained lost positions near Kupyansk. Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian forces reportedly continued to suffer significant personnel and armored vehicle losses throughout November 2024 as they attempted to maintain intensified offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 2, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Volkov, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

December 2, 2024, 5pm ET

Prominent voices within the Russian information space continue to emphasize that Russian President Vladimir Putin is uninterested in a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine that results in anything less than total Ukrainian capitulation. Kremlin-affiliated Russian oligarch and Orthodox nationalist and founder of the ultranationalist *Tsargrad* outlet Konstantin Malofeev told the *Financial Times* (FT) in an interview published on December 2 that Putin will likely reject any plan for peace negotiations that US President-elect Donald Trump puts forth unless the plan accounts for Russia's "security concerns."^[1] Malofeev claimed that the Kremlin will only consider peace negotiations with the Trump administration if Trump reverses the US policy allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided long-range weapons to strike into Russia; "removes" Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky from office; and agrees to meet with Putin to discuss the situation in Ukraine, the future European security, the conflict in the Middle East, and Russia's growing alliance with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Putin may intend to use such a meeting to extract future US policy concessions on these issues from Trump. Malofeev also claimed that the war in Ukraine has helped strengthen Russia's relationships with the PRC, Iran, and North Korea and has revitalized Russia's economy and defense industry. However, ISW continues to observe macroeconomic indications that Russia's economy is struggling to bear the weight of inflation, ongoing international sanctions, and labor shortages and will face significant challenges in 2025 assuming Russia's war in Ukraine continues at the current tempo.^[2]

Putin and other senior Russian officials have recently issued similar statements. Malofeev's interview further indicates that the Kremlin is not interested in good faith negotiations, no matter who mediates such talks.^[3] Malofeev does not currently hold an official position within the Russian government, but his rhetoric is important given his relationships with high-level Kremlin officials and the influence of *Tsargrad* among Russian ultranationalists.^[4] Malofeev has previously used *Tsargrad* to promote Kremlin narratives justifying Russia's invasion and occupation of Ukraine and continues to be an outspoken supporter of Putin.^[5] Zelensky recently acknowledged that Ukraine must find diplomatic solutions to end the war and secure the return of some parts of occupied Ukraine (including Crimea) in the future, but Malofeev's comments indicate that Putin remains averse to good faith negotiations and is committed to destroying the Ukrainian state through military means.^[6]

Russia's increased domestic production of Shahed-type drones has allowed Russia to increase the number of drones it is using in strike packages launched at Ukraine, but Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) innovations are enabling Ukrainian forces to more effectively respond to Russian strike packages. Ukrainian military expert Petro Chernyk told Ukrainian military-focused outlet *ArmyInform* on December 2 that Russia has increased the production of Shahed drone airframes while continuing to rely on Iranian or Chinese imports for other drone components.^[7] Chernyk's statements accord with ISW's October 2024 assessment that Russia is leveraging its domestication of Shahed-type drone production to increase the number of Shahed-type drones it

launches at Ukraine.[8] This dynamic is reflected in the composition of the strike packages that Russia launched at Ukraine between October and November 2024, as it has become more common for Russian forces to launch between 80 to 100 (or more) Shahed and decoy drones as part of their larger strike packages.[9] Russian forces launched 110 Shahed drones and other unspecified drones, likely decoys, at Ukraine on the night of December 1 to 2, for example.[10] Russian forces most likely use large numbers of Shahed-type drones and decoy drones to detect and overwhelm Ukrainian air defense and mobile fire groups; Russian forces most frequently launch Shaheds alongside more limited numbers of cruise and ballistic missiles.

Ukraine appears to be responding to this influx of Shahed drones in kind, however. The number of Shahed or decoy drones that are reportedly "lost" (do not reach their intended targets) due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference increased significantly over the course of October and November 2024. Russia launched 105 Shahed-type drones at Ukraine on October 2, 78 of which Ukrainian forces directly shot down and 23 of which the Ukrainian Air Force reported were "lost" due to EW interference (22 percent).[11] In contrast, Russian forces launched 110 Shaheds and decoys at Ukraine on the night of December 1 to 2, 50 of which were "lost" due to Ukrainian EW interference (45 percent), and 52 of which Ukrainian forces shot down.[12] Chernykh noted the high Ukrainian shoot-down rate and also emphasized that Ukraine has improved its EW capabilities to the extent where Ukrainian forces can either "ground" the Shaheds, cause them to get "lost," or cause them to deviate their paths and fly into Russian or Belarusian airspace.[13] Ukrainian EW interference is significantly impacting the performance of these Russian strike packages and notably adding an increased burden on the joint Russian-Belarusian air defense umbrella. Independent Belarusian monitoring group Hajun Project reported on November 25 that 38 Russian Shahed drones entered Belarusian airspace on November 24 and 25 – a record number of Russian drones violating Belarusian airspace.[14] Belarus scrambled jets to respond to the airspace violation—suggesting that Belarus was unprepared to receive errant Russian drones and that Russia had not anticipated the impacts of Ukrainian interference or communicated them to Belarus in advance.

The Kremlin continues efforts to minimize the war's social impacts on the Russian populace while tacitly resetting the goalposts for what the Kremlin initially defined as victory in Ukraine. Russian business outlet *Kommersant*, citing internal sources, reported on December 1 that Russian officials, including those from the Presidential Administration, have set the following goals for the leading United Russia party for the 2026 legislative elections: achieving 55 percent of voter turnout and obtaining 55 of the total votes; surpassing United Russia's 2021 election figures; and emphasizing the need for positive framing of a possible conclusion to the war in Ukraine.[15] *Kommersant* also noted that the Presidential Administration is trying to frame "the future results" of the war as a "victory" in a way that is palatable to both pro-war ultranationalists and less ideologically-concerned Russian "liberals," by focusing the framing of the war's outcome in a way that's acceptable to Russia's "silent majority." The Kremlin is seeking to frame any outcome of the war as a victory for the whole Russian populace. The Kremlin will likely focus on spinning rhetorical and abstract achievements that are difficult to concretize, like the "denazification" and "demilitarization" of Ukraine alongside the retention of annexed Ukrainian territories while deemphasizing negative sentiments concerning the return of traumatized and injured war veterans, regardless of how the war plays out for Russian forces on the battlefield.

Kommersant also noted that the Russian Presidential Administration is concerned with the rehabilitation and reintegration of traumatized Russian veterans into Russian society, indicating that Russian authorities are aware of the potential domestic ramifications the return of a large number of discontented veterans could have on Russian society. Russia's unemployment rate is currently very low, and many Russian war veterans may find themselves underemployed if they return to civilian life. The Kremlin's relatively broad and ill-defined domestic informational efforts suggest that the Kremlin is still unsure of how the war will end and is therefore trying to set pre-emptive societal conditions to deal with the long-term effects of the war, including finding a way to sell Russia's strategic and operational battlefield failures as victories. Russia has not achieved its self-defined objectives of "denazifying" or "demilitarizing" Ukraine or seizing all Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.

Pro-Kremlin Russian Telegram channel operators continue to resist Russian government efforts to deanonymize Russian social media accounts. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on December 2 that almost 90 percent of the largest pro-Russian government Telegram channels have not yet registered with Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor as of December 1, despite the Russian Ministry of Digital Development requiring social media channels with over 10,000 subscribers to register with the Russian government by January 1, 2025. [16] *Verstka* assessed that 82 of the top 100 most popular Telegram channels, according to the TGStat catalog of Telegram channels, are pro-Russian government channels and that only 10 of these 82 channels have registered with Roskomnadzor.[17] The Russian government is requiring such channels to provide "minimal" personal information about the identity of their operators via a special

platform or risk restrictions on advertising and their right to be reposted by other channels.

[18] *Verstka* reported that the top five most popular Telegram channels – Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov, a pro-war Russian military blogger and news aggregator, Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev, Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov, and Kremlin-awarded channel *Rybar* – have not yet registered with Roskomnadzor, possibly because they are already Kremlin-aligned and do not threaten the Kremlin's deserved control over public discourse in Russia.

[19] Russian milbloggers previously criticized the deanonymization effort and will likely continue to resist ongoing Russian government efforts to monitor and control the Russian information space.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- Prominent voices within the Russian information space continue to emphasize that Russian President Vladimir Putin is uninterested in a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine that results in anything less than total Ukrainian capitulation.
- Russia's increased domestic production of Shahed-type drones has allowed Russia to increase the number of drones it is using in strike packages launched at Ukraine, but Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) innovations are enabling Ukrainian forces to more effectively respond to Russian strike packages.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to minimize the war's social impacts on the Russian populace while tacitly resetting the goalposts for what the Kremlin initially defined as victory in Ukraine.
- Pro-Kremlin Russian Telegram channel operators continue to resist Russian government efforts to deanonymize Russian social media accounts.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- The Russian military command is focusing on training additional Russian forces and improving Russian forces' tactical assault operations.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 1, 2024

[Click here to read the full report](#)

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Nicole Volkov, and George Barros

December 1, 2024, 3:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on December 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the December 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly replaced Lieutenant General Sergei Kiselyov with Colonel General Alexander Chaiko who will reprise his previous assignment as commander of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria, though it remains unclear how Russian operations in Syria may change. Russian ultranationalist milbloggers, including the Kremlin-linked *Rybar* Telegram channel, claimed on November 30 and December 1 that the MoD removed Kiselyov as Commander of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria and replaced him with Chaiko.[1] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 1 that Chaiko replaced Kiselyov and that Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Alexander Moiseyev arrived in Tartus, Syria.[2] Chaiko served as chief of staff of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria from 2015 to 2017 and served as overall commander of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria in September 2019 to November 2020, February to June 2021, and September to December 2022.[3] It is unclear what Chaiko's assignment was between December 2022 until present. Kiselyov has reportedly commanded the Russian Force Grouping in Syria since at least May 2024.[4] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Kiselyov's removal will not significantly change the situation or Russian operations in Syria because the Russian military command has routinely rotated commanders to positions in Syria after battlefield failures in Ukraine.[5] ISW is unable to independently confirm this reported command change at this time.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree approving the 2025 federal budget and the 2026–2027 draft federal budget on December 1.[6] The 2025 budget allocates about 41 percent of Russia's annual expenditures to national security and defense.[7] ISW continues to assess that the increased Russian defense spending, while dangerous, does not necessarily equate to a one-to-one increase in Russian military capabilities, especially given that significant funding is going towards paying benefits to Russian soldiers, veterans, and their families.[8] Russia's continued focus on defense spending is likely also affecting the effectiveness and sustainability of Russian social programs, which may affect the Kremlin's ability to sustain its war in Ukraine, given mounting

pressures on the Russian economy and Putin's observed tendency to avoid risking his regime's stability.

Russian state media reported that the Russian military command appointed Colonel General Rustam Muradov as the First Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces. Russian state outlet *RBK* reported on December 1 that a source close to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed Muradov's appointment.[9] The head of Tabasaransky Raion in the Republic of Dagestan, Magomed Kurabanov, reported about Muradov's appointment on November 28.[10] The Russian MoD has yet to publicly confirm the appointment.

The Georgian opposition continues to contest the legitimacy of Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party's electoral victory following Georgian Dream's suspension of Georgia's European Union (EU) membership accession talks. Georgian Dream announced on November 28 that it will suspend the country's EU accession negotiations and will reject EU grants following a European Parliament resolution deeming the largely contested the October 26 Georgian parliamentary elections as "neither free nor fair." [11] The Georgian constitution has an enshrined aspiration to join the EU, and Georgian Dream's suspension of EU membership talks contradicts the constitution and the demonstrated will of most Georgians who have strived for EU accession for decades.[12] The Georgian opposition - comprised of opposition parties, Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, and Georgian civil society - immediately called for protests and continued to contest the legitimacy of the Georgian Dream party's electoral victory and its actions. Zourabichvili stated on November 30 that she would remain the sole legal authority of the Georgian government until new elections are held and that the new Georgian Dream-dominated parliament has no right to elect a new president in December 2024, as they intend to do.[13] Georgian presidential elections are currently scheduled for December 14.[14] The Georgian opposition has been protesting Georgian Dream's decision to suspend efforts for EU membership halt across Georgia since November 28, and Georgian riot police have violently suppressed peaceful protestors using, water cannons, beatings, and other violent tactics.[15] Various Georgian ambassadors have resigned in protest of Georgian Dream's actions, including Georgian Ambassador to the US David Zalkaliani.[16] The US State Department announced on November 30 that it is suspending the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership in response to Georgian Dream's "various anti-democratic actions", while European officials have criticized Georgian Dream's actions, voiced solidarity with the protesters, and suggested sanctioning Georgian authorities.[17] ISW previously assessed that a Georgian Dream parliamentary victory would likely derail Georgia's EU and NATO accession aspirations and degrade Georgia's relationships with its Western partners.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly replaced Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel with Colonel General Alexander Chaiko who will reprise his previous assignment as commander of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria, though it remains unclear how Russian operations in Syria may change.
 - Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree approving the 2025 federal budget and the 2026–2027 draft federal budget on December 1.
 - Russian state media reported that the Russian military command appointed Colonel General Rustam Muradov as the First Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces.
 - The Georgian opposition continues to contest the legitimacy of Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party's electoral victory following Georgian Dream's suspension of Georgia's European Union (EU) membership accession talks.
 - Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Hulyaipole.
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- Russian forces recently advanced in the Lyman, Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk directions.
Ukrainian and Russian forces both recently advanced in the Kurakhove direction.
[CORRECTED]
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