

UKRAINE UPDATES, OCTOBER 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2024

Nov 30, 2024 - ISW Press

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 30, 2024](#)

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Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

November 30, 2024, 3:45 pm ET

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

Kremlin officials responded to Syrian opposition forces' offensive into Syrian regime-held territory on November 29 and 30 and expressed interest in using the Astana Process to respond to the situation. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on November 29 that the Syrian opposition forces' offensive is an "encroachment on Syria's sovereignty" and that Russia advocates for Syrian authorities to restore "constitutional order." [1] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke on the phone with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on November 30 to discuss the situation in Syria. [2] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed that both parties expressed serious concerns about the "dangerous developments" in Aleppo and Idlib provinces. Lavrov and Fidan reportedly discussed the need to coordinate joint Russian-Turkish actions to stabilize the situation, primarily through the Astana Process that Russia, Turkey, and Iran launched in December 2016. (The Astana Process is a rival political process to the United Nations [UN]-led Geneva Process under UN Security Council Resolution 2254.) Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also reportedly initiated a telephone conversation with Lavrov on November 30, during which Lavrov and Araghchi expressed "extreme concern" about the "dangerous escalation" in Syria. [3] Lavrov reportedly reaffirmed Russia's strong support for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and both agreed to intensify joint efforts to stabilize and review the situation through the Astana Process. It remains unclear whether the Kremlin will be able to deploy additional assets to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime given the high tempo and operational requirements for Russia to continue conducting operations in Ukraine – the Kremlin's priority theater. Russia withdrew S-300 systems from Syria back to Russia in 2022, likely to support Russian operations in Ukraine. [4] ISW collected unconfirmed reports in March 2022 that Russia withdrew Russian soldiers and Wagner militants from Syria, likely to support Russian operations in Ukraine. [5]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un during his unannounced trip to Pyongyang on November 30. [6] Belousov and Kim discussed the Russia-North Korea strategic partnership and relations between the Russian and North Korean militaries. [7] Kim reiterated support for Russia's war in Ukraine and boilerplate rhetoric that the Kremlin uses to forward its reflexive control campaign aimed at forcing the West into self-deterrence. [8]

Key Takeaways:

- **Kremlin officials responded to Syrian opposition forces' offensive into Syrian regime-held territory on November 29 and 30 and expressed interest in using the Astana Process to respond to the situation.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un during his unannounced trip to Pyongyang on November 30.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions north of Kharkiv City, and Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar.**

- Russian milbloggers continued to criticize poor Russian military command decisions and poor training and discipline among Russian personnel.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 29, 2024

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Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, William Runkel, and George Barros

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to laud the technical specifications of the recently launched Oreshnik ballistic missile and threaten additional Oreshnik strikes against Ukraine as part of an intensified Russian reflexive control campaign aimed at forcing the West and Ukraine into self-deterrence. Putin addressed members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) Security Council in Astana, Kazakhstan, on November 28 and reiterated several claims about the Oreshnik ballistic missile, with which Russian forces struck Dnipro City on November 21.[1] Putin's November 28 statements closely resembled the speeches he gave on November 21 and 22 immediately following the Oreshnik strike, again presenting the Oreshnik strike as the commensurate Russian response to recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory using Western-provided long-range missile systems such as ATACMS and Storm Shadow/SCALPs.[2] Putin detailed the purported technical specifications of the Oreshnik during his CSTO speech and subsequent press conference with journalists on November 28, highlighting the size and maximum internal temperature of its warhead, its launch speed, and its blast radius, and compared the Oreshnik to both a "nuclear weapon" and a "meteorite" in terms of the damage it can cause.[3] Putin threateningly claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian General Staff are "selecting targets for destruction" in Ukraine, including "decision-making centers in Kyiv," and later responded to a question about whether these are military or political targets by stating that "everything is possible." [4]

There is nothing particularly novel about the capabilities of the Oreshnik missile, and US and Ukrainian officials indicated that the Oreshnik missile does not portend a Russian escalation in the war. [5] Putin's efforts to stress the missile's technical specifications are part of the larger reflexive control campaign that the Kremlin is currently pursuing, and highlighting its range and payload while comparing its destructive capabilities to that of a meteor is meant to threaten both Ukraine and the West and discourage further Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory using Western-provided systems. Even Putin's threat of strikes on "decision-making centers" in Kyiv rings empty—Russian forces regularly strike civilian and critical infrastructure in Kyiv City with drones and nuclear-capable missiles. [6] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky summarized this fact on November 29 in response to Putin's CSTO statements and said that "Putin wants to add thousands more to the thousands of missiles that have already hit Ukraine." [7] *Reuters*, citing five sources close to US intelligence, reported on November 27 that the November 21 Oreshnik strike has not changed the US intelligence assessment that Russia is unlikely to use a nuclear weapon in Ukraine, even in retaliation for Ukrainian strikes into Russian with Western-provided weapons. [8] **Putin's constant flaunting of the Oreshnik and Russian missile capabilities therefore remains part of the Kremlin's reflexive control information operation and is unlikely to presage the development of particularly novel Russian deep strike capabilities.**

The Russian military is considering establishing a separate service branch for unmanned systems, likely as part of the Russian MoD's in a belated effort to catch up to the establishment of the Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces (USF) in February 2024. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated at the press conference during his visit to Kazakhstan on November 28 that the Russian MoD and General Staff are considering establishing a new unmanned system service within the Russian Armed Forces and emphasized that drones are one of the most important factors of combat operations. [9] A milblogger affiliated with the Russian Airborne (VDV) Forces explained that Russian drone detachments currently informally operate as part of other Russian military units while simultaneously being responsible for their official tasks such as conducting assault operations or performing medical and sapper functions. [10] Putin also praised Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, identified him as the lead on the establishment of the unmanned systems service, and called him a "modern defense minister." Belousov recently faced significant backlash from the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community for failing to adequately respond to the amassing deaths of Russian drone operators and specialists in assault operations in Ukraine, and Putin's mention of Belousov's involvement may be an attempt to restore Belousov's image among Russian ultranationalist and troops. [11]

A Kremlin insider source claimed that the establishment of the new service may take Belousov between six months to a year as it will require several reforms and expanding educational programs,

registering new military specialties, and integrating volunteer projects into the Russian MoD bureaucracy.[12] Belousov notably established the "Rubikon" Center for Prospective Unmanned Technologies in August 2024 on the base of an unspecified unmanned aircraft unit.[13] The "Rubikon" Center appears to be the Russian MoD's initiative to establish the educational and drone development foundation necessary for the establishment of the new unmanned systems service.

The Russian military's efforts to reorganize informal drone detachments into centralized, specialized military units are already introducing significant dysfunction into the Russian military. A former Russian Storm-Z instructor and milblogger responded to Putin's November 28 discussion of the unmanned systems service, stating there is a risk that the Russian MoD will try to formalize and monopolize drone supplies to the new unmanned systems service, which will erode a competitive and flexible environment conducive to innovation.[14] The milblogger observed that it is also unclear how the Russian military command will integrate the new drone service with the other combat operations, namely how this centralized initiative will impact the Russian tactical reconnaissance strike complex. The milblogger added that the new unmanned systems service is unlikely to prevent the Russian military command from committing drone operators to assaults given that Russian tank, engineering, artillery, and signals specialists are actively fighting as infantry in the event of manpower shortages despite being different classes of forces. Russian milbloggers previously claimed that the Russian MoD had been trying to form "joint technical drone battalions" by systematically disbanding informal Russian drone detachments and connected these efforts to the establishment of the "Rubikon" Center.[15] Russian milbloggers previously observed that Russian military commanders may have been increasingly committing drone operators to deadly assault operations in anticipation that the Russian MoD would deprive them of necessary manpower by reallocating these forces into MoD-operated "technical drone battalions." Russian milbloggers also criticized the Russian MoD's efforts to establish separate, specialized "technical drone battalions," citing the lack of a joint Russian communications system that would allow dedicated drone units to closely coordinate with assault units.[16]

Russian forces conducted a large series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine's energy grid and major defense industrial facilities on the nights of November 27 to 28 and 28 to 29. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 188 drones and missiles against Ukraine on the night of November 27 to 28, including: three S-300 air defense missiles from Belgorod Oblast targeting Kharkiv Oblast; 57 Kh-101 cruise missiles from the airspace over Volgograd Oblast; 28 Kalibr cruise missiles from vessels in the Black Sea; three Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from airspace over the Black Sea; and 97 Shahed drones and unknown other strike drones (likely referring to decoy drones) from Kursk, Oryol, and Rostov oblasts and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai as of 1030 local time on November 28.[17] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 76 Kh-101 missiles, three Kh-59/69 missiles, and 35 drones, and 62 Russian drones became "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference. The Ukrainian Air Force noted that Ukrainian forces also downed 90 percent of the Russian Kalibr missiles and that at least 12 Russian drones and missiles successfully struck Ukrainian fuel and energy objects.[18]

The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 132 Shahed drones and unknown other strike drones (likely referring to decoy drones) from Oryol, Rostov, and Kursk oblasts and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of November 28 to 29 and that Ukrainian forces downed 88 drones over Kyiv, Chernihiv, Cherkassy, Sumy, Kharkiv, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Odesa oblasts at of 900 local time on November 29.[19] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that 41 Russian drones became "lost," likely due to Ukrainian EW interference, and that one Russian drone returned to Russian air space. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones and missiles damaged residential buildings and critical infrastructure in Chernihiv, Chernivitsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Kyiv, Odesa, Sumy, and Volyn oblasts on November 28 and 29.[20] The Ukrainian Air Force noted that Russian forces have used large numbers of missiles and drones during recent strikes to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses and that Russian forces are launching thermal and radar interference devices and placing EW systems directly on missiles to defend against Ukrainian countermeasures.[21] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces have also recently seized on poor weather conditions to conduct strikes under dense fog and cloud cover.

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of strikes against four Russian air defense systems and radars in occupied Ukraine and two oil depots in Russia on November 28 and 29. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on November 29 that Ukrainian drone units recently destroyed a Russian Zoopark radar system in an unspecified area of Russia or occupied Ukraine, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Buk-M3 air defense system in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[22] The GUR reported on November 28 that Ukrainian forces destroyed a "Podlyot" mobile radar system — which identifies targets for S-300/400 air defense systems — near occupied Kotovske, Crimea (north of Yevpatoria on Crimea's northwestern coast).[23] Geolocated

footage published on November 29 purportedly shows Ukrainian forces also striking an S-400 air defense system near occupied Simferopol, Crimea.[24] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 29 that Ukrainian drones struck the Atlas Oil Depot in Rostov Oblast and caused a fire at the oil depot.[25] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the Atlas Oil Depot supplies petrol products to the Russian military. Russian sources posted imagery claiming to show a fire near the Atlas Oil Depot and claimed that Ukrainian forces also conducted a drone strike likely against an oil depot near Slavyansk-on-Kuban, Krasnodar Krai on November 28.[26] Ukrainian forces previously conducted a drone strike against the Atlas Oil Depot in August 2024.[27]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov made an unannounced visit to Pyongyang, North Korea on November 29 amid intensifying Russian-North Korean cooperation. Belousov met with North Korean Defense Minister No Kwang Chol on November 29 and stated that the Russian-North Korean comprehensive strategic partnership agreement signed in June 2024 is the foundation of a "new Eurasian security system" and will play a stabilizing role in northeast Asia.[28] Belousov also highlighted expanding Russian-North Korean military cooperation. No stated that strengthening military cooperation is the "highest priority" and that the Russian and North Korean defense ministries are already engaged in high-level exchanges.[29] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) told Ukrainian outlet *Interfax-Ukraine* in an article published on November 29 that North Korea has supplied over five million rounds of large-caliber artillery ammunition and 100 KN-23/24 (Hwasong-11Ga/Hwasongpho-11Na) ballistic missiles to Russia.[30] The GUR also reported that North Korea began supplying artillery systems to Russia on October 3 and has supplied over 100 M-1989 Koksan 170mm self-propelled artillery systems and M-1991 240mm multiple rocket launcher systems (MLRS). The GUR reported that over 60 M-1939 Koksan artillery systems are in Russia and that Russia will transfer some to the Saratov Artillery Command School in Saratov City to train Russian military personnel. US Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs Robert Wood stated on November 27 that North Korea has transferred over 18,000 containers of munitions and munitions-related materiel and over 100 ballistic missiles to Russia since November 2023.[31] Wood added that North Korea is preparing to transfer "even more" ballistic missiles to Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly appointed Colonel General Rustam Muradov as First Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces.[32] Head of Tabasaransky Raion in the Republic of Dagestan, Magomed Kurabanov, reported Muradov's appointment on November 28, though the Russian MoD has yet to confirm Muradov's reported appointment as of this publication.[33] Muradov previously served as Eastern Military District (EMD) and Eastern Grouping of Forces commander until his dismissal in March or April 2023, likely due to battlefield failures and substantial personnel and equipment casualties near Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast earlier in 2023.[34] Russian milbloggers extensively criticized Muradov for a previously failed offensive on Vuhledar and reiterated these criticisms of Muradov in response to his new appointment, with one milblogger criticizing the MoD's pattern to reappoint incompetent generals perceived as loyal to the Kremlin to new positions.[35]

The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened additional investigations on November 28 into the apparent Russian execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts. The Prosecutor General reported that in the first instance, four Ukrainian soldiers surrendered to Russian troops near Petrivka (near Pokrovsk, Donetsk Oblast) on November 22, upon which Russian forces executed them with automatic weapons at close range.[36] Russian forces also captured six Ukrainian POWs near Novodarivka (eastern Zaporizhia Oblast) and executed five POWs at close range on November 24.[37] In both instances the Ukrainian soldiers had clearly surrendered or been captured and disarmed, meaning that they were officially *hors de combat* and protected under international law. The abuse of execution of POWs is a violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs and a violation of Rule 47 of Customary International Humanitarian Law.[38]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky the appointment of Major General Mykhailo Drapatyi as Ukraine's new Ground Forces Commander on November 29, replacing Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk.[39] Zelensky also appointed Colonel Oleh Apostol as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Zelensky stated that these appointments are intended to increase Ukraine's combat capabilities, ensure quality training of Ukrainian forces, and introduce innovative management practices into the Ukrainian military.

Georgians protested in Tbilisi, Georgia in response to an initiative by the ruling pro-Kremlin Georgian Dream party to delay European Union (EU) accession negotiations, prompting the Russian information space to resurrect information operations falsely framing the protests and Georgian opposition parties as potential threats to Georgian sovereignty. Georgian Prime Minister and Georgian Dream party member Irakli Kobakhidze announced on November 28 that Georgia is suspending EU accession negotiations until 2028 and is refusing any budget grants from the EU in the meantime.[40] Georgians protested this decision outside the Georgian parliament

building in Tbilisi on November 28 and 29 and clashed with riot police, prompting authorities to detain protestors and use tear gas and water cannons in attempts to disperse the protests.[41] Russian media heavily covered the protests, and Russian milbloggers – including those with connections to the Kremlin – claimed that these protests are the Georgian opposition's attempt at a "Maidan" revolution and that successful protests could result in the installation of a new government in Georgia and Georgia "losing its sovereignty" to the West.[42] Russian government officials and Georgian Dream affiliates have previously claimed that Western countries are pursuing "Maidanization" in Georgia — a specific reference to Ukraine's Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 — to justify efforts to derail long-term European integration efforts that play into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia.[43]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to laud the technical specifications of the recently launched Oreshnik ballistic missile and threaten additional Oreshnik strikes against Ukraine as part of an intensified Russian reflexive control campaign aimed at forcing the West and Ukraine into self-deterrence.
- There is nothing particularly novel about the capabilities of the Oreshnik missile, and US and Ukrainian officials indicated that the Oreshnik missile does not portend a Russian escalation in the war. Putin's constant flaunting of the Oreshnik and Russian missile capabilities therefore remains part of the Kremlin's reflexive control information operation and is unlikely to presage the development of particularly novel Russian deep strike capabilities.
- The Russian military is considering establishing a separate service branch for unmanned systems, likely as part of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) in a belated effort to catch up to the establishment of the Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces (USF) in February 2024.
- Russian forces conducted a large series of drone and missile strikes against Ukraine's energy grid and major defense industrial facilities on the nights of November 27 to 28 and 28 to 29.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of strikes against four Russian air defense systems and radars in occupied Ukraine and two oil depots in Russia on November 28 and 29.
- Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov made an unannounced visit to Pyongyang, North Korea on November 29 amid intensifying Russian-North Korean cooperation.
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- Georgians protested in Tbilisi, Georgia in response to an initiative by the ruling pro-Kremlin Georgian Dream party to delay European Union (EU) accession negotiations, prompting the Russian information space to resurrect information operations falsely framing the protests and Georgian opposition parties as potential threats to Georgian sovereignty.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced northeast of Vuhledar.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, in Toretsk, near Pokrovsk, and near Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian opposition outlets *Mediazona* and *BBC Russian Service* reported that they have confirmed that at least 80,937 Russian soldiers have died in Ukraine since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

[There was no update on November 28, 2024]

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 27, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, Angelica Evans, William Runkel, and George Barros

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on November 27.

Note: ISW will not be releasing an assessment tomorrow, November 28, in celebration of Thanksgiving.

Ukrainian forces continue to leverage Western-provided weapons to conduct strikes using more complex strike packages against military objects in Russia's deep rear.[1] Russian and local Crimean sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a complex drone and missile strike against occupied Sevastopol on November 27, reportedly using Neptune anti-ship missiles, modified S-200 air defense missiles, unspecified ballistic missiles, Western-provided Storm Shadow missiles, and 40 strike drones.[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces intercepted 25 Ukrainian drones over occupied Crimea and the Black Sea.[3] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces targeted the Nakhimov Higher Naval School in occupied Sevastopol and the nearby Belbek Airfield, and an image published on November 27 shows a smoke plume reportedly near the naval school.[4] Russian sources denied reports that the strike damaged the school, however. [5] Ukrainian official military sources have not commented on this strike at the time of this report's publication. ISW continues to assess that the provision of long-range strike weapons to Ukrainian forces will allow Ukrainian forces to augment their existing long-range strike capabilities and scale up the effects Ukraine can generate through long-range strikes against Russian rear areas.[6]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met in Astana on November 27 and signed a joint statement deepening the Russian-Kazakh strategic partnership within the framework of Russia's efforts to establish a "new world order."[7] Putin and Tokayev signed 19 other documents deepening Russian-Kazakh political, economic, energy, and transit cooperation.[8] The Kremlin likely intends to deepen economic and transit relations with Kazakhstan, in part, to continue to leverage Kazakhstan as key intermediary to facilitate sanctions evasion schemes.[9] Putin also published an article in Kazakh state-backed newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* on November 27 emphasizing the strength of the Russian-Kazakh relationship largely in the same style as Putin's previous articles published in the state-backed newspapers of other states during bilateral visits.[10] Putin and Tokayev also agreed to expand Russian educational institutions and Russian language institutions in Kazakhstan, likely as part of an ongoing effort to expand Russian soft power influence in countries previously colonized by the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.[11] Putin notably did not mention the war in Ukraine in his article, during his meeting with Tokayev, or in the package of the signed documents, likely omitting any mention of the war in order to posture Russia as an economically stable and viable partner ahead of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit in Astana on November 28.

The Russian military command may have imposed controversial restrictions on the use of personal vehicles by Russian volunteers delivering military and humanitarian aid to Russian troops on the frontlines, likely as part of an ongoing force centralization effort. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that overnight on November 26 and 27 many Russian milbloggers received audio messages in which the Russian military command threatened all servicemembers to stop using personal vehicles that are not registered for military operations in the combat zone.[12] The audio message reportedly revealed that Russian commanders will punish servicemembers caught using personal vehicles by sending the servicemembers to fight as part of an assault group alongside any frontline commanders who authorized the use of private vehicles. The milblogger claimed that there are claims that the new Southern Military District (SMD) commander, likely referring to reportedly recently appointed Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik, issued the order but did not confirm or deny these claims.[13] The milblogger noted that the order will effectively allow the Russian military command to stop and confiscate any private vehicles belonging to volunteers delivering humanitarian aid and to commit the drivers and their commanders to frontline assaults as a punishment for violating the order. The milblogger noted that the timing and the harshness of this order may suggest that the order is fake, possibly in an effort to allow the Russian military command to later reverse its order and appear responsive to public outcry. Other Russian milbloggers complained that the order will severely impact the community of Russian volunteers that evacuate troops and deliver military and humanitarian supplies to the frontline and warned that the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) efforts to centralize humanitarian aid deliveries to Russian servicemembers will result in supply and provision shortages among frontline units.[14] The Russian military command had been trying to restrict the use of personal vehicles personal and certain personal electronic devices in the combat zone and set stricter guidelines for the grooming standards of men on the frontlines since January 2023 in a likely attempt to centralize control over Russian forces.[15]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continue to leverage Western-provided weapons to conduct strikes using more complex strike packages against military objects in Russia's deep rear.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met in Astana on November 27 and signed a joint statement deepening the Russian-Kazakh strategic partnership within the framework of Russia's efforts to establish a "new world order."
- The Russian military command may have imposed controversial restrictions on the use of personal vehicles by Russian volunteers delivering military and humanitarian aid to Russian troops on the frontlines, likely as part of an ongoing force centralization effort.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced within Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions, and within the main Ukrainian salient Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin continues to promote the "Time of Heroes" program that aims to militarize the Russian government at the local, regional, and federal levels as a way to prevent the return of "Afghan syndrome" in Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 26, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, William Runkel, and George Barros

November 26, 2024, 7:55 pm ET

Russian officials continue to demonstrate that the Kremlin aims to seize more territory in Ukraine than it currently occupies and is unwilling to accept compromises or engage in good faith negotiations, no matter who mediates such talks. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin claimed on November 26 that Russia is open to negotiations but stated that Russia "categorically rejects" any "freezing" of the current frontline or the creation of a demilitarized zone.[1] Naryshkin alleged that the "elimination" of the reasons that "caused" Russia to launch its full-scale invasion of Ukraine is the only way to ensure peace — demonstrating that Russia continues to uncompromisingly demand Ukraine's full capitulation. The Kremlin has repeatedly demanded that Ukraine relinquish areas of the four Ukrainian oblasts that the Kremlin has illegally annexed and that Russian forces do not currently occupy.[2] ISW also recently forecasted that the Russian military command is likely planning how to advance into the southeasternmost part of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast — notably not one of the four illegally annexed oblasts — in support of Russia's longstanding objective to seize all of Donetsk Oblast.[3]

The Russian military's rate of advance since Fall 2024 has notably increased recently compared to its rate of advance in 2023 and the rest of 2024, but recent Western media reports comparing recent Russian gains to those at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion continue to mischaracterize the gradual and tactical nature of Russia's recent advances.[4] ISW assesses that Russian forces have gained 574 square kilometers since November 1, 2024 — an average rate of 22 square kilometers per day. This is remarkably less than the 1,265 square kilometers per day that ISW assesses Russian forces were gaining in March 2022. *Reuter's* November 26 report that Russian forces "control" over 80 percent of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts is also misleading.[5] ISW assesses that while Russian forces occupy roughly 99 percent of Luhansk Oblast, Russian forces only occupy about 66 percent of Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces have occupied almost the entirety of Luhansk Oblast since Fall 2022 but have occupied significantly less territory in Donetsk Oblast throughout the war. ISW recently assessed that Russian forces still need to seize over 8,000 square kilometers of territory to achieve the Kremlin's self-defined objective of seizing the territory of Donetsk Oblast.[6] Russian forces would seize the remainder of Donetsk Oblast in roughly one year should Russian forces continue their recent relatively quicker rate of advance — which is not a given. Russian forces notably have been bypassing Ukrainian strongpoints, and Ukraine still has several well-defended cities in Donetsk Oblast, such as Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, that Russian forces likely cannot seize as rapidly as they have with the rural fields near Pokrovsk. ISW continues to assess that Russian forces have not been able to restore operational maneuver to the battlefield to make deep penetrations into Ukrainian positions, as seen in the initial months of the full-scale invasion.[7] Russian forces have instead been exploiting identified vulnerabilities in Ukrainian defenses to make gradual advances.[8]

US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby confirmed Ukraine's usage of US-provided ATACMS against Russia amid official Russian confirmation of recent Ukrainian ATACMS strikes. Kirby stated on November 25 that the Ukrainian forces are "able to use" ATACMS to "defend themselves" and that Ukrainian forces are already using them in and around Kursk Oblast.[9]

Kirby's statement is the first official confirmation that the US authorized Ukrainian forces to use ATACMS to strike military objects in Russia.[10] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) acknowledged on November 26 that Ukrainian forces recently struck military objects in Kursk Oblast.[11] The MoD stated that Ukrainian forces launched five ATACMS on November 23, damaging an S-400 air defense radar system in Lotarevka (northwest of Kursk City), and eight ATACMS on November 25, damaging infrastructure facilities and injuring military personnel in the Khalino Airfield. The Russian MoD published photos purportedly showing parts of the ATACMS from both strikes.[12] Geolocated footage published on November 25 shows the moment of the ATACMS strike that damaged the Khalino Airfield.[13] A former Ukrainian officer stated on November 25 that while Russian air activity from the Khalino Airfield has decreased in recent days — likely due to recent Ukrainian strikes, Ukraine's ability to inflict damage during long-range missile strikes is limited by the number of such missiles available to Ukrainian forces.[14] ISW assesses that Ukrainian long-range strikes against military objects within Russia's rear are crucial for Ukraine's ability to degrade Russian military capabilities throughout the theater.[15]

Russian forces launched a record number of drones against Ukraine on the night of November 25 to 26 as Russia continued to increase their use of decoy drones in long-range strike packages targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems.[16] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched four Iskander-M ballistic missiles and 188 Shahed and other unspecified drones — likely referring to decoy drones — from Voronezh, Kursk, Oryol, Bryansk oblasts and Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of November 25 to 26.[17] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed all four Iskander-M missiles and 76 drones over Kyiv, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, Chernivtsi, Ternopil, Rivne, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Mykolaiv oblasts as of 0900 local time on November 26. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that 95 Russian drones were "lost," likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference, and that five drones flew into Belarusian air space. Kyiv Oblast officials stated that Russian forces launched more than 10 drones at Kyiv City from different directions in several waves and that Ukrainian forces shot down all of the drones.[18] Ternopil Oblast officials stated that Russian strike drones destroyed energy infrastructure in Ternopil Oblast, causing power outages.[19] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces launched two Iskander-M missiles at civilian and energy infrastructure in Odesa Oblast during the day on November 25 and that Ukrainian forces intercepted one of the Iskander-M missiles.[20] Sumy Oblast officials stated that a Russian missile of an unspecified type struck civilian infrastructure in Sumy City during the day on November 26.[21] Ukrainian reports that roughly half of the Russian drones became "lost" suggest that Russian forces likely used a large number of decoy drones to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses. ISW recently observed reports that Russia is increasing its use of decoy drones that resemble Shahed drones during combined long-range strikes and assesses that Russia will likely continue to use decoy drones and experiment with varying strike packages to increase the effectiveness of long-range strikes against Ukraine ahead of and during the winter.[22]

Russian state media reported that the Russian MoD replaced former Russian Southern Military District (SMD) and Southern Grouping of Forces commander Colonel General Gennady Anashkin with Eastern Military District (EMD) acting commander Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik. Russian state outlet *RBK* reported in an article published on November 26 that a source in the Russian MoD stated that Sanchik replaced Anashkin as part of a "planned rotation" and that Anashkin will now head the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow.[23] A source close to the Russian MoD also told *RBK* that the Russian military appointed EMD First Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Andrei Ivanayev as EMD commander and that Leningrad Military District (LMD) Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin is also serving as Northern Grouping of Forces Commander.[24] Russian milbloggers widely claimed on November 23 that the Russian military command removed Anashkin after Russian commanders in the Siversk direction in his area of responsibility submitted incorrect reports about Russian battlefield advances to their superiors, and the Russian MoD appears to be continuing its efforts to cover up these information space claims.[25]

Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) amid a surge of recent Russian war crimes. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's office reported on November 26 that Ukrainian law enforcement officials opened a pre-trial investigation into the execution of five Ukrainian POWs by Russian forces in Petrivka (south of Pokrovsk) on November 13 in violation of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs.[26] ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs and observed an increasing trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appear to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders and the larger Russian military justice system.[27]

The Russian State Duma is preparing the legal mechanisms to remove the Taliban from the Russian government's official list of banned terrorist organizations. Russian State Duma deputies submitted a bill to the Duma on November 26 proposing to amend the law "On countering terrorism" to allow the Russian government to remove banned terrorist organizations after the organization "ceases its activities aimed at promoting, justifying, and supporting terrorism or committing" terrorist acts. Russian law does not currently provide such a removal mechanism, and the amendments would allow Russia to remove the Taliban from the list — as Kremlin officials have repeatedly stated they intend to do.[28] A Russian insider source claimed that the Kremlin is unlikely to reach an official decision to remove the Taliban from Russia's list of terrorist organizations by the end of 2024.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials continue to demonstrate that the Kremlin aims to seize more territory in Ukraine than it currently occupies and is unwilling to accept compromises or engage in good faith negotiations, no matter who mediates such talks.
- The Russian military's rate of advance since Fall 2024 has notably increased recently compared to its rate of advance in 2023 and the rest of 2024, but recent Western media reports comparing recent Russian gains to those at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion continue to mischaracterize the gradual and tactical nature of Russia's recent advances.
- US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby confirmed Ukraine's usage of US-provided ATACMS against Russia amid official Russian confirmation of recent Ukrainian ATACMS strikes.
- Russian forces launched a record number of drones against Ukraine on the night of November 25 to 26 as Russia continue to increase their use of decoy drones in long-range strike packages targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure in order to overwhelm Ukrainian air defense systems.
- Russian state media reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) replaced former Russian Southern Military District (SMD) and Southern Grouping of Forces commander Colonel General Gennady Anashkin with Eastern Military District (EMD) acting commander Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik.
- Russian forces continue to execute Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) amid a surge of recent Russian war crimes.
- The Russian State Duma is preparing the legal mechanisms to remove the Taliban from the Russian government's official list of banned terrorist organizations.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kreminna, and Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.
- A Russian milblogger complained on November 25 that Russian forces often operate artillery without coordinating between different Russian elements, highlighting significant communications issues between armored vehicle and infantry units.
- Russian authorities continue to incentivize service in Ukraine through one-time payment offers, likely in order to avoid conducting another partial involuntary reserve callup.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 25, 2024

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Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

November 25, 2024, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on November 25. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continue to make significant tactical advances in western Donetsk Oblast and are coming closer to enveloping Velyka Novosilka and advancing towards important Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) supplying the rest of western Donetsk Oblast and running into eastern Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia oblasts. Geolocated footage published on November 24 shows elements of the Russian 5th Tank Brigade (36th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) advancing to the eastern outskirts of Velyka Novosilka (just east of the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area).[1] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also made additional advances northeast and southeast of Velyka Novosilka.[2] Russian EMD elements, including of the

2nd Battalion of the 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA, EMD) are reportedly advancing on the outskirts of Velyka Novosilka.[3]

Russian forces are also continuing efforts to eliminate the small pocket east of the O0510 Kurakhove-Velyka Novosilka road (southeast of Kurakhove and northeast of Vuhledar). Geolocated footage published on November 25 indicates that elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) have advanced up to Pobiedy Street in central Kurakhove.[4] Several Russian milbloggers claimed on November 25 that Russian forces seized Romanivka (northeast of Vuhledar) and made additional gains in fields surrounding the settlement.[5] While ISW has not yet observed confirmation of Russian forces operating within Romanivka, geolocated footage published on November 24 shows two separate Russian platoon-sized mechanized assaults just east of Romanivka near Illinka and Antonivka, indicating that Russian forces advanced towards Romanivka during these assaults.[6] Elements of the 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD])) reportedly conducted the mechanized assault near Antonivka.[7] Russian milbloggers noted that Russian forces in this area are focusing on forcing Ukrainian troops to withdraw westward towards Kostyantynopolske (northwest of Vuhledar).[8]

ISW previously assessed on November 24 that the Russian military command has several potential courses of action (COAs) in this sector of the front, and Russian gains on November 24 and 25 lend themselves to two of the outlined COAs — the Russian effort to push west along the H15 to the Andriivka-Kostyantynopil line from Kurakhove, and the Russian effort to bypass Velyka Novosilka and threaten Ukrainian GLOCs into eastern Zaporizhia Oblast.[9] Russian forces have already seized positions along the H15 road in eastern Kurakhove, and will likely use new positions along Pobiedy Street (which runs southward perpendicular to the H15 road) to further interdict and advance westward through Kurakhove and along the H15, towards Dachne and Andriivka (both west of Kurakhove). Recent Russian advances to Pobiedy Street in central Kurakhove place Russian forces about 15km east of Andriivka. Both Russian milbloggers and Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets identified Andriivka as the Russian operational-level objective west of Kurakhove because the seizure of Andriivka would afford Russian forces a stronger position from which to envelop a chain of settlements along the O0510 highway northwest and northeast of Vuhledar.[10] Russian forces may continue advancing west along the H15 towards Andriivka while attacking into the pocket northeast of Vuhledar along the Uspenivka-Hannivka-Romanivka line with the intent to compel Ukrainian forces to withdraw westward to avoid encirclement. Such a maneuver could enable Russian forces to seize tactical positions in the area and level the frontline from Sontsivka (northwest of Kurakhove) to Kostyantynopolske, placing Russian forces about 23km east of the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border at its closest point.

Recent Russian advances near Velyka Novosilka are consistent with ISW's November 24 forecast that Russian forces could attempt to envelop Velyka Novosilka via its eastern and northeastern flanks.[11] ISW has not yet observed confirmation that Russian forces have crossed the Kashlahach River directly east of Velyka Novosilka, which they would have to do in order to begin fighting within the urban areas of the settlement. Russian forces are more likely to advance north of Velyka Novosilka by pushing southwest from Rozdolne towards Novyi Komar and supplement these attacks with advances northward to the west of Velyka Novosilka via Rivnopil. Ukraine's loss of Velyka Novosilka would be significant and potentially detrimental to Ukraine's ability to sustain the defense of the nexus between Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts — Ukrainian Volunteer Army Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk noted on November 24 that Velyka Novosilka is an important logistics point for Ukrainian troops, the seizure of which would allow Russian forces to more actively threaten Hulyaipole and Orikhiv (both in Zaporizhia Oblast southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[12] The seizure of Velyka Novosilka would also afford Russian forces a stronger position from which to attack into southeasternmost Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[13]

Russian advances in western Donetsk Oblast may become operationally significant if the Russian command properly exploits these recent tactical successes, which is not a given. Russian advances in western Donetsk Oblast do not automatically portend the collapse of the Ukrainian frontline. Recent Russian mechanized assaults with elements of the SMD northeast of Vuhledar appear to cohere with EMD mechanized assaults near Velyka Novosilka, further supporting ISW's assessment that elements of the EMD and SMD are currently conducting mutually supportive offensive operations in this sector of western Donetsk Oblast.[14] Russian forces' ability to further advance towards the Zaporizhia and Dnipropetrovsk oblast borders will in large part be contingent on whether Russian EMD and SMD command elements continue to successfully coordinate combat operations on their respective sectors of the front. Furthermore, even if Russian forces are able to achieve all the operational COAs outlined above, Russian forces would need to seize over 8,000 square kilometers of territory to achieve Moscow's self-defined objective of seizing the entirety of Donetsk Oblast.[15] Potential Russian advances into southeastern Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, given

historical data about Russian offensive performance, are unlikely to be immediately rapid or threaten major Ukrainian military objects or large cities in the winter 2024-2025 campaign season. The Ukrainian theater is large and Russian tactical gains in western Donetsk Oblast should not cause undue panic in the short-term. Russian gains remain tactical and Russian forces have not restored operational maneuver to the battlefield yet. The current Russian advances may fall short of their operational objectives, as did initial Russian frontal assaults against Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk earlier in 2024.

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Kaluga Oblast and an airbase in Kursk Oblast on the night of November 24 to 25. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 25 that units of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and the Ukrainian Armed Forces struck several important Russian assets in Bryansk, Kursk, and Kaluga oblasts on the night of November 24 to 25, including an oil depot in Kaluga Oblast.[16] Geolocated footage published on November 24 and 25 shows an explosion at the oil depot near Kaluga City and a subsequent fire in the area.[17] Kaluga Oblast officials reported that Russian forces downed several drones in the area and that debris from a drone caused a fire near an unspecified industrial enterprise near Kaluga City.[18] Geolocated footage and imagery published on November 25 indicate that Ukrainian forces also struck the Khalino Airfield and fields near Kursk City with several ATACMS missiles and drones.[19] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that Ukrainian forces launched at least seven ATACMS missiles and 12 drones at the airfield, and Russian milbloggers acknowledged the strike but claimed that Ukrainian forces did not significantly damage the airfield.[20] A Russian insider source posted a photo claiming to show that a Ukrainian ATACMS strike recently destroyed the radar system of a Russian S-400 air defense system near Bolshoe Zhirovo (northwest of Kursk City), Kursk Oblast following Ukrainian reporting about the S-400 strike on November 24.[21]

Ukrainian military officials continue to warn of potential Russian ground operations against Zaporizhzhia City, though the timeline and scale of this offensive operation remain unclear due to the operational constraints imposed by ongoing Russian operations in Kursk and Donetsk oblasts. *The Economist*, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources, reported on November 24 that Russian forces are preparing for a future offensive operation with up to 130,000 personnel on Zaporizhzhia City, which is 30 kilometers from the current frontline, although the date of this forecasted operation is unknown.[22] A Ukrainian brigade commander stated that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast halted initial Russian plans for an assault on Zaporizhzhia City and that the Russian military command redeployed nearly half of the 20,000-30,000 Russian troops initially slated for the offensive in Zaporizhzhia Oblast to Kursk Oblast. The battalion commander noted that continued Russian effort in Kursk may delay an offensive on Zaporizhzhia City, but that Russian forces may also conduct the attack with a smaller force grouping than originally intended.

Sources within Ukraine's military command previously stated that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast prevented Russian forces from launching a major offensive operation in Zaporizhzhia Oblast in recent months- consistent with the Ukrainian battalion commander's statements.[23] ISW previously observed reports that the Russian military command redeployed forces from western Zaporizhzhia Oblast to respond to the Kursk incursion in August 2024.[24] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn warned on November 11 that Russian forces are moving trained assault groups to forward positions in occupied Zaporizhzhia Oblast but that it is unclear if the Russian military intends to conduct a unified offensive operation or separate localized assaults.[25] Voloshyn later noted on November 24 that Russian forces have not transferred large groups of forces to the Zaporizhzhia direction but rather are moving small units of assault personnel or drone operators from Donetsk Oblast in order to intensify Russian assaults in the south.[26] Voloshyn previously stated that Russian forces are concentrating near Kamyanske (northwest of Robotyne and south of Zaporizhzhia City), Hulyaipole (northeast of Robotyne), and Robotyne itself, and are preparing to conduct intensified assaults in these areas.[27] ISW also observed intensifications of Russian activity near Kamyanske in early October 2024.[28]

Ukrainian Volunteer Army Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk downplayed reports on November 24 of a possible Russian ground offensive on Zaporizhzhia City, however, noting instead the persistent threat of Russian airstrikes along the southern frontline is aimed at spreading fear among Ukrainian civilians.[29] Bratchuk addressed concerns of Russian preparations in this area by disclosing that Ukrainian forces have observed Russian units being transferred away from the Zaporizhzhia direction to the Kurakhove-Pokrovsk line in Donetsk Oblast for ongoing offensive operations. ISW is unable to independently confirm the large-scale redeployment of Russian troops at this time.

North Korea is reportedly expanding a key weapons facility likely used to supply Russia with ballistic missiles. *Reuters*, citing satellite imagery findings from a US-based think tank, reported on November 25 that North Korea is expanding its only weapons facility that assembles KN-23 short-range ballistic missiles, which Russia uses in Ukraine.[30] *CNN* reported on November 23 that about

60 of the total 194 ballistic missiles that Russia launched against Ukraine so far in 2024 were North Korean-supplied KN-23s.[31] ISW continues to observe increased North Korean support for Russia's war effort through the deployment of North Korean troops to the theater of war and the provision of ammunition and weapons.[32]

The Kremlin signaled that it would remove the Taliban from its list of prohibited organizations amid intensified Russia-Taliban rapprochement. Afghan and Russian news outlets reported on November 25 that Russian Security Council Secretary General Sergei Shoigu stated that the Kremlin will soon remove the Taliban from its list of "terrorist organizations" during a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and a Taliban delegation.[33] ISW previously observed that the Kremlin has maintained direct contact with the Taliban since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in 2021, although more explicit Russian recognition of the Taliban as the legitimate Afghan government will likely enhance Russia-Taliban cooperation.[34] Russia has recently intensified outreach to the Taliban, in large part to leverage the Taliban's control of the Afghan government to degrade the Taliban's regional adversary, the Afghanistan-based Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP).[35]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continue to make significant tactical advances in western Donetsk Oblast and are coming closer to enveloping Velyka Novosilka and advancing towards important Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) supplying the rest of western Donetsk Oblast and running into eastern Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia oblasts.
- Russian advances in western Donetsk Oblast may become operationally significant if the Russian command properly exploits these recent tactical successes, which is not a given. Russian advances in western Donetsk Oblast do not automatically portend the collapse of the Ukrainian frontline.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Kaluga Oblast and an airbase in Kursk Oblast on the night of November 24 to 25.
- Ukrainian military officials continue to warn of potential Russian ground operations against Zaporizhzhia City, though the timeline and scale of this offensive operation remain unclear due to the operational constraints imposed by ongoing Russian operations in Kursk and Donetsk oblasts.
- North Korea is reportedly expanding a key weapons facility likely used to supply Russia with ballistic missiles.
- The Kremlin signaled that it would remove the Taliban from its list of prohibited organizations amid intensified Russia-Taliban rapprochement.
- Russian forces recently advanced in southwestern Toretsk and south and southeast of Pokrovsk.
- Russian command posts are reportedly relying on Chinese-made radios for internal communications because Russia cannot domestically produce enough quality radios for the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 24, 2024

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Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

November 24, 2024, 8:45 pm ET

Russian forces' recent confirmed battlefield gains near Vuhledar and Velyka Novosilka demonstrate that the war in Ukraine is not stalemated. The frontline in Donetsk Oblast is becoming increasingly fluid as Russian forces recently have been advancing at a significantly quicker rate than they did in the entirety of 2023. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on November 24 that Russian forces have seized Katerynivka, Yelizavetivka, Illinka, and likely Romanivka (all northeast of Vuhledar along the C051104 highway), and geolocated footage published on November 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced to the eastern outskirts of Yelizavetivka.[1] Additional geolocated footage published on November 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced to central Trudove (north of Vuhledar).[2] Russian forces also made recent confirmed advances in the Velyka Novosilka area, as geolocated footage published on November 23 and 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of Rozdolne (northeast of Velyka Novosilka) and to western Novodarivka (southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[3] Russian forces have significantly increased the tempo of their advances in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions since September 1, 2024, having gained at least 1,103 square kilometers in these

areas since September 1, 2024. Russian forces, in contrast, only gained 387 square kilometers in all of 2023 due to Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive.

Russian forces' advances in southeastern Ukraine are largely the result of the discovery and tactical exploitation of vulnerabilities in Ukraine's lines. Russian forces have been making gradual, tactical advances in southeastern Ukraine since Fall 2024. Russian forces notably have not been able to restore operational maneuver seen during the initial months of Russia's full-scale invasion, and the current Russian tactical advances, although quicker now than in the months of positional warfare that characterized most of 2023 and early 2024, are still far below the Russian rate of advance in March 2022.[4] Russian forces have succeeded in taking advantage of the seizure of Vuhledar for further offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast, contrary to an incorrect previous ISW assessment that forecasted otherwise.[5] ISW presents the following courses of action (COAs) that the Russian command may be considering given Russian forces' recent advances.

Russian advances in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions present the Russian military command with several courses of action (COAs) that the Russian command may attempt in the coming weeks and months. The Russian military command appears to be simultaneously attempting to encircle Velyka Novosilka while closing pockets with Ukrainian forces north and south of Kurakhove. Russian forces are also pursuing supporting COAs to improve Russia's battlefield geometry in southern Donetsk Oblast and reduce threats to Russian flanks. ISW presents the following COAs in no particular order, as each can be mutually beneficial, and none of these COAs are mutually exclusive.

- **COA 1: Russian forces advance southwest, east, and northeast of Velyka Novosilka to envelop the settlement from its flanks, bypassing the area immediately south of Velyka Novosilka.** ISW assessed on November 4 that Russian forces seized Shakhtarske (northeast of Velyka Novosilka), and ISW has observed confirmation that Russian forces have advanced west and northwest of the settlement since.[6] ISW also recently observed confirmation that Russian forces advanced to the eastern outskirts of Rozdolne (northeast of Velyka Novosilka and northwest of Shakhtarske).[7] Russian forces have also increasingly advanced southwest of Velyka Novosilka, having recently seized Rivnopil and advanced near Novodarivka. [8] Russian forces are confirmed to be within five kilometers northeast and 2.5 kilometers southeast of Velyka Novosilka. Russian forces appear to be trying to bypass Velyka Novosilka and the string of settlements south of the settlement as Ukrainian forces likely have better-prepared defenses in these areas. The potential future Russian seizure of Rozdolne and further advances north and northeast from the Novodarivka-Rivnopil line would continue to threaten Ukrainian defenses within Velyka Novosilka. The Russian military command likely intends for continued pressure on Velyka Novosilka's southwestern and eastern flanks to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the area without having to conduct frontal assaults on the settlement itself - demonstrating how Russian forces are attempting to identify and exploit vulnerabilities in Ukrainian defensive lines in order to make gradual, increasingly threatening advances. Russian forces are also currently threatening Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) supplying the Ukrainian defense in Velyka Novosilka. ISW assesses that Russian forces are less than three kilometers from the T0518 highway that runs north from Velyka Novosilka to the H15 highway, which itself serves as a major GLOC for Ukrainian forces in and near Kurakhove. ISW also assesses that Russian forces are less than four kilometers from the O0510 highway that runs west from Velyka Novosilka to Hulyaipole. Continued Russian pressure on these Ukrainian GLOCs will likely threaten the sustainability of the Ukrainian defense in Velyka Novosilka.
- **COA 2: Russian forces advance to Andriivka (along the H15 highway and west of Kurakhove) from the south in support of Russian efforts to close the Ukrainian pockets near Kurakhove and level the frontline.** Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets and Russian milbloggers recently identified that the Russian military command is likely trying to advance towards Andriivka from the Rozdolne-Maksymivka line.[9] Russian forces are currently attempting to envelop Ukrainian forces in the pockets north of the Kurakhivske Reservoir and near the string of settlements northeast of Vuhledar along the C051104 highway. A potential Russian seizure of Andriivka would set preferable conditions for Russian forces to envelop both of these Ukrainian pockets at once. Further Russian advances southward and southwestward from Sontsivka (northeast of Andriivka) would also support this Russian effort to envelop a larger pocket of Ukrainian forces from Andriivka. The seizure of Andriivka would also allow Russian forces to increasingly level the flank from Rozdolne to the H15 highway - benefiting ongoing Russian efforts to level the frontline between Selydove and Rozdolne so as to enable renewed Russian offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk in 2025.[10]

- **COA 3: Russian forces advance west and southwest from Selydove along the Pustynka-Sontsivka line in the direction of Andriivka to collapse the Ukrainian pocket north of Kurakhove and threaten Ukrainian egress routes.** Russian forces have continued to push west and southwest since seizing Selydove as of October 30.[11] Russian advances southwest of Selydove towards Novodmytrivka, Zorya, and Sontsivka aim to envelop Ukrainian forces defending in the area north of the Kurakhivske Reservoir (north of Kurakhove). Possible Russian advances to Andriivka from the south, as described in COA 2, would greatly limit Ukrainian egress routes out of the pockets north of the reservoir and northeast of Vuhledar along the C05114 highway. Russian advances to Andriivka could force Ukrainian forces in these pockets to withdraw along a narrow egress route northwestward towards the Bohdanivka area. Russian advances west and northwest of Selydove towards Zhovte, Pushkine, and Zorya could threaten this potential Ukrainian withdrawal towards Bohdanivka. Should Ukrainian forces be able to withdraw from the pockets near Kurkhove and Vuhledar before Russian forces are able to advance to Andriivka, Russian advances southwest and west of Selydove would still help to level the flank along the Shakhtarske-Zhovte line to enable the renewal of Russian offensive operations to seize Pokrovsk.[12]

It remains unclear which of the COAs the Russian command will pursue, if any. None of the COAs in this analysis were part of the Russian command's initial objectives for its Fall 2024/Winter 2024-2025 campaign in Donetsk Oblast. The COAs have only emerged as possibilities following the Russian seizure of Vuhledar in October 2024 and tactical advances south of Pokrovsk and near Velyka Novosilka. The Russian command's self-identified priority in Donetsk Oblast in late 2024 was the seizure of Pokrovsk – an objective the Russian command temporarily abandoned following stiff Ukrainian resistance on Pokrovsk's outskirts.[13] It is unclear how much advance preparation the Russian command has undertaken to exploit opportunities in this area of operations or what kind of resistance Ukrainian forces will provide as Russian forces advance. Ukraine notably blunted Russian offensive operations near Chasiv Yar and Pokrovsk in 2024.

The Russian military command is likely planning on how to advance into the southeasternmost part of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in support of Russia's longstanding objective to seize all of Donetsk Oblast. The Kremlin's stated objective of seizing all of Donetsk Oblast very likely presupposes ground operations in southern and eastern Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communication that support Ukrainian positions in Donetsk Oblast and envelop these Ukrainian positions. Russian forces are geographically close to Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and may advance north into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to envelop Ukrainian forces in southwestern Donetsk Oblast. (The Russian Forward Line of Own Troops near Novodarivka is eight kilometers from the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative boundary as of November 24, for example.) Such a Russian advance, if successful, could eventually force Ukrainian forces from the areas southwest of Pokrovsk, west of Kurakhove, and west and northeast of Velyka Novosilka. The Russian military would likely first have to successfully envelop or bypass Velyka Novosilka in order to interdict the T0518 Bahatyr-Velyka Novosilka highway – a significant undertaking that Russian forces may not be able to achieve. Russian forces may attempt to leverage water features as natural barriers to advance north along the Vorona River (just west of Velyka Novosilka) toward Velykomykhailivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (just east of the Donetsk-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border) from the Rivnopil area (just east of the Vorona River). Russian forces may also try to advance along the Mokri Yaly River, which runs through and north of Velyka Novosilka, toward Novopavlivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast following a potential future Russian envelopment of Velyka Novosilka. Russian forces could leverage these advances into the southeasternmost parts of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to support operations to seize territory in southwestern Donetsk Oblast. Such a development would likely not be part of a direct drive against the interior of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in the short-to-medium term, though the Kremlin likely seeks to eventually seize significant territory in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast as well. Russian milbloggers have recently reignited calls for Russian forces to advance toward southeastern Dnipropetrovsk Oblast from the Velyka Novosilka area in order to pressure the Pokrovsk-Kurakhove area from the west.[14]

Potential Russian efforts to secure the Kremlin's objective of seizing the entirety of Donetsk Oblast by occupying at least part of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast are consistent with Russia's commitment to pursuing Ukraine's total capitulation and destroying Ukraine's independence and territorial sovereignty. Ukrainian outlet *Interfax Ukraine*, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources, reported on November 20 that *Interfax Ukraine* viewed a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) document outlining Russia's objectives of partitioning Ukraine into three different parts: one acknowledging the full Russian annexation of occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and occupied Crimea; another establishing a pro-Russian puppet state centered in Kyiv under Russian military occupation; and a third part designating Ukraine's western regions as "disputed territories" to be divided among Ukraine's westernmost neighboring countries.[15] Dnipropetrovsk Oblast is notably not one of the four Ukrainian oblasts that the Kremlin has illegally annexed – for now. The Russian military may leverage

limited advances into Dnipropetrovsk Oblast to set conditions for future operations to militarily occupy Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and other regions of eastern and central Ukraine in the long-term.

Elements of the Russian Central, Eastern, and Southern military districts (CMD, EMD, and SMD) are conducting simultaneous, mutually supportive offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast and have recently made relatively rapid tactical advances. The Russian military command may be learning from some battlefield mistakes after three years of war, but the extent of this learning is currently unclear. The Russian military command has dedicated significant units and formations of the CMD and 51st Combined Arms Army (CAA) (formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) to offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction and the area north of the Kurakhivske Reservoir; elements of the 8th CAA (SMD) to offensive operations east of Kurakhove and to the south of Kurakhove near Dalne; elements of the 68th AC (EMD) and 8th CAA (SMD) to offensive operations northeast of Vuhledar in the belt of settlements on the C051104 road; elements of the 36th CAA (EMD) north of Vuhledar; and elements of the 5th, 29th, and 36th CAAs (all EMD) south, east, and northeast of Velyka Novosilka.[16] This array of Russian forces to mutually supportive offensive operations represents an inflection in how Russian forces have conducted offensive efforts so far in this war, as Russian military districts have previously conducted successive and usually mutually exclusive efforts in their respective areas of responsibility in the theater.[17] More recent Russian offensive operations with operational-level objectives along mutually supportive axes have not resulted in the same relatively higher tempo of gains as those currently ongoing in southern Donetsk Oblast.[18] Russian forces have also largely struggled with interoperability and command and control (C2) when using disparate elements of multiple formations and force groupings in a single operational axis, often hindering advances during dedicated offensive efforts.[19]

The Russian military command appears to be planning more complex operations, but Russian forces have yet to be able to restore operational maneuver to the battlefield and are instead still relying on their ability to identify and exploit vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian defensive lines to make gradual, tactical advances. Russian advances in the Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions in recent weeks have prioritized efforts to exploit Ukrainian vulnerabilities to envelop or encircle Ukrainian forces from the flanks over direct frontal assaults against Ukrainian positions. Russian forces along the Pokrovsk-Kurakhove-Velyka Novosilka line have not restored operational maneuver to the battlefield, however, and are making these relatively rapid gains in highly attritional offensive operations-- resulting in personnel and equipment casualties that Russian forces cannot sustain in the medium- or long-term.[20] United Kingdom (UK) Defense Secretary John Healey stated on November 9 that Russian casualty rates in October 2024 reached about 1,345 personnel per day, and Russian forces may have suffered roughly 80,110 casualties alone in September and October 2024.[21] Data compiled by Oryx founder Jakub Janovsky indicates that Russian forces also lost 197 tanks, 661 armored personnel carriers (APCs), and 65 artillery systems larger than 100mm throughout the frontline in September and October 2024, and Russian forces are likely to run out of armored vehicles from Soviet-era stockpiles in mid-2025 or 2026.[22]

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-400 air defense system radar in an unspecified area in Kursk Oblast on the night of November 23 to 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck positions of the Russian 1490th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and a S-400 radar in Kursk Oblast.[23] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of the 1490th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment conduct ground-to-ground strikes against stationary Ukrainian targets, including civilian objects. Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that Russian forces downed 24 Ukrainian drones and two missiles over Kursk Oblast on the night of November 23 to 24.[24] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces used US-provided ATACMS missiles in the strike, but ISW cannot independently confirm these claims and has not observed official confirmation of these Russian claims.[25] Russia's S-400 air defense systems comprise part of Russia's air defense umbrella, which facilitates Russian long-range air- and ground-based strikes against Ukraine. Weakening Russia's air defense umbrella is key to Ukraine's defense and efforts to eliminate Russia's ability to use sanctuary space within Russia to launch strikes. Further degradation of Russia's air defense umbrella will enable more effective combined Ukrainian strike packages against Russian military objects and enable Ukrainian fixed-wing aircraft to more freely operate. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on November 24 that Ukrainian drones crashed near Belorechensk, Krasnodar Krai, roughly 13 kilometers from the Russian military's Khanskaya Air Base in Adygea Republic.[26] *Astra* also reported on November 24 that sources in Kaluga Oblast's emergency services stated that a Ukrainian drone struck a Rosneft oil depot in Kaluga Oblast on November 22 and damaged several empty oil tanks.[27]

Russia reportedly recruited hundreds of Yemeni nationals to fight in the Russian military amid growing cooperation between Russia, Iran, and Iran-backed Houthi movement. NOTE: A version of this text appears in the September 24 ISW-CTP Iran Update. *Financial Times* (FT) reported on November 24 that Houthi-affiliated intermediaries recruited "hundreds" of Yemeni men

beginning as early as July 2024 to travel to Russia after promising them lucrative jobs in the "security" and "engineering" fields and eventual Russian citizenship.[28] Russian authorities reportedly instead forcibly conscripted the largely inexperienced recruits into the Russian army and sent them to fight in the war upon their arrival in Russia. FT also highlighted growing ties between the Kremlin and the Houthis, citing US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking, who confirmed that Russia is actively engaging with the Houthis and discussing weapons transfers. ISW has assessed that the Kremlin has in part sought to offset heavy battlefield losses and personnel shortages by enlisting migrants and foreign nationals while avoiding another partial involuntary reserve callup in Russia.[29] ISW also observed growing engagement between Kremlin officials and Houthis amid enhanced Russia-Iran cooperation and Iranian support for the Russian war effort in Ukraine.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces' recent confirmed battlefield gains near Vuhledar and Velyka Novosilka demonstrate that the war in Ukraine is not stalemated. The frontline in Donetsk Oblast is becoming increasingly fluid as Russian forces recently have been advancing at a significantly quicker rate than they did in the entirety of 2023.
- Russian advances in the Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka directions present the Russian military command with several courses of action (COAs) that the Russian command may attempt in the coming weeks and months.
- COA 1: Russian forces advance southwest, east, and northeast of Velyka Novosilka to envelop the settlement from its flanks, bypassing the area immediately south of Velyka Novosilka.
- COA 2: Russian forces advance to Andriivka (along the H15 highway and west of Kurakhove) from the south in support of Russian efforts to close the Ukrainian pockets near Kurakhove and level the frontline.
- COA 3: Russian forces advance west and southwest from Selydove along the Pustynka-Sontsivka line in the direction of Andriivka to collapse the Ukrainian pocket north of Kurakhove and threaten Ukrainian egress routes.
- The Russian military command is likely planning on how to advance into the southeasternmost part of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in support of Russia's longstanding objective to seize all of Donetsk Oblast.
- Elements of the Russian Central, Eastern, and Southern military districts (CMD, EMD, and SMD) are conducting simultaneous, mutually supportive offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast and have recently made relatively rapid tactical advances. The Russian military command may be learning from some battlefield mistakes after three years of war, but the extent of this learning is currently unclear.
- The Russian military command appears to be planning more complex operations, but Russian forces have yet to be able to restore operational maneuver to the battlefield and are instead still relying on their ability to identify and exploit vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian defensive lines to make gradual, tactical advances.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-400 air defense system radar in an unspecified area in Kursk Oblast on the night of November 23 to 24.
- Russia reportedly recruited hundreds of Yemeni nationals to fight in the Russian military amid growing cooperation between Russia, Iran, and Iran-backed Houthi movement.
- Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced in the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Pokrovsk, Vuhledar, and Velyka Novosilka

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 23, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, William Runkel, and George Barros

November 23, 2024, 5:35pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on November 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) likely attempted to cover up the recent removal of the acting commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Colonel General Gennady Anashkin following widespread accusations within the Russian information space that Anashkin's subordinates submitted false frontline progress reports to superiors. Russian milbloggers widely

claimed on November 23 that the Russian military command removed Anashkin, the acting commander of the SMD and commander of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces, after Russian commanders in the Siversk direction in his area of responsibility submitted incorrect reports about Russian battlefield advances to their superiors.[1] Russian state outlet *RBK* reported that a source in the Russian MoD acknowledged Anashkin's dismissal but claimed that it was due to a "planned rotation" and praised Anashkin's military achievements.[2] Russian milbloggers widely applauded Anashkin's removal, claiming that this may lead to improvements in how Russian forces plan and conduct operations and may increase the value Russian commanders place on Russian soldiers' lives at the front.[3] One milblogger claimed that Anashkin's removal shows that Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov is starting to get involved in "military management" and not just administrative and economic reforms within the MoD.[4] Russian milbloggers recently claimed that Russian authorities arrested the commander of the 3rd Combined Arms Army (CAA), the 3rd CAA's chief of staff, and the commander of the 3rd CAA's 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade for submitting incorrect reports about Russian advances in the Siversk direction, and Russian milbloggers have widely complained in recent weeks about the pervasive Russian military culture of exaggerating battlefield successes near Siversk. [5] The Russian MoD falsely claimed that Russian forces in the Siversk direction seized Bilhorivka on May 20 and Serebryanka in late October 2024, for example, despite Russian milblogger criticisms of these claims since.[6]

Ukrainian military officials denied claims of North Korean personnel's presence in Kharkiv Oblast amid new unconfirmed reports that North Korean "technical advisers" are operating in occupied Mariupol. *CNN*, citing an anonymous Ukrainian security source reported on November 22 that North Korean technical advisers have arrived in Russian-occupied Mariupol, are performing support operations, and are detached from the Russian military units despite wearing Russian military uniforms. Ukrainian military officials also reportedly told *CNN* that radio intercepts suggest that North Korean troops are operating in Kharkiv Oblast and that North Korean troops are waiting for worsening weather conditions to conduct assault operations.[7] The Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces denied reports of the presence of North Korean personnel in Kharkiv Oblast and stated that the spokesperson cited in the *CNN* report is not an official Kharkiv Group of Forces spokesperson and commented on the situation outside of their responsibilities.[8] *Reuters* reported on November 23 that a large number of the 11,000 North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast are still finishing military training.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) likely attempted to cover up the recent removal of the acting commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Colonel General Gennady Anashkin following widespread accusations within the Russian information space that Anashkin's subordinates submitted false frontline progress reports to superiors.**
- **Ukrainian military officials denied claims of North Korean personnel's presence in Kharkiv Oblast amid new unconfirmed reports that North Korean "technical advisers" are operating in occupied Mariupol.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Velyka Novosilka.**
- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that Russia does not currently need to conduct another partial involuntary reserve callup as Russian authorities continue leaning into crypto-mobilization efforts.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 22, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros

November 22, 2024, 6:50pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian military leadership continue to extol the ballistic missile that Russian forces launched at Ukraine on November 21, likely in an effort to artificially inflate expectations of Russian capabilities and encourage Western and Ukrainian self-deterrence. Putin held a meeting on November 22 with Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) leadership, Russian defense industrial base representatives, and Russian missile developers, congratulating the Russian military for conducting a "successful" test of the Oreshnik ballistic missile in response to "those who are trying to blackmail" Russia.[1] Putin emphasized that the Oreshnik missile

is not a modernization of an old Soviet missile and claimed that Russian designers created it "on the basis of modern, cutting-edge developments." Putin reiterated claims that no system exists to defend against the Oreshnik and reported that Russia is already planning to serialize its production. Commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces Colonel General Sergei Karakayev told Putin that the Oreshnik can strike targets across Europe and stressed that there are no analogues to the Oreshnik anywhere in the world.[2]

US and Ukrainian reporting on the November 21 ballistic missile strike, however, emphasized that the Oreshnik missile is not inherently a novel Russian capability.[3] White House and Pentagon officials confirmed that Russia launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) at Ukraine, and Pentagon Spokesperson Sabrina Singh stated that Russia based the IRBM on the existing Russian RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) model.[4] Singh also reiterated that Ukraine has already faced Russian attacks with missiles that have "significantly larger" warheads than the Oreshnik. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on November 22 that Ukraine assesses that the IRBM that Russia launched on November 21 is actually a "Kedr" missile, which Russia has been developing since 2018-2019 in an effort to update the Yars ICBM model for shorter distances.[5] GUR Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov clarified that Ukraine believes that "Oreshnik" is the codename of the missile research and development project for the Kedr missile.[6] ISW cannot independently confirm these GUR statements, but it is noteworthy and consistent with ISW's assessment that the November 21 Russian ballistic missile strike does not represent a fundamentally novel Russian capability.[7] Russia benefits from the rhetorical fanfare surrounding the November 21 strike and likely hopes that stoking concerns over the Oreshnik missile launch will prompt the West to dial back its support for Ukraine.

Russia may additionally conduct test launches of the same or similar ballistic missiles in the coming days to accomplish the same rhetorical effect. Russian sources claimed that Russia will close part of its airspace on November 23 to 24 for a missile test, but did not specify what type of missile Russian forces are testing.[8] GUR Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi warned on November 22 that Russia likely possesses up to 10 Oreshnik missiles and that Russia will likely conduct test launches for all these missiles in the future.[9]

Russia has reportedly provided North Korea with over one million barrels of oil and an unspecified number and type of air defense systems and missiles in return for North Korea's provision of manpower for Russia's war effort in Ukraine. The Open-Source Centre, a research group based in the United Kingdom (UK), citing satellite imagery, told the *BBC* on November 22 that Russia has supplied over one million barrels (56,000 tons) of oil to North Korea since March 2024.[10] The *BBC* noted that the satellite imagery shows over a dozen different North Korean oil tankers arriving empty at an oil terminal in Russia's Far East and departing with nearly full tanks 43 times over the last eight months. UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy told the *BBC* that the oil is payment for the weapons and troops that North Korea has provided Russia for its war in Ukraine. The *BBC* noted that Russia's provision of oil to North Korea is a clear violation of United Nations (UN) sanctions against North Korea. South Korean National Security Advisor Shin Won-sik stated on November 22 that South Korea believes that Russia has provided unspecified "[air defense] equipment and anti-air missiles" to strengthen North Korea's air defense umbrella.[11] Shin noted that Russia has already declared its intention to support North Korea's satellite-related technology and supplied North Korea with various military technologies and forms of economic aid. Russia's provision of military equipment to North Korea also represents a clear violation of UN sanctions.

The quality and type of air defense system that Russia has provided to North Korea remains unclear, however. South Korean experts theorized that Russia may have provided S-400 air defense systems to North Korea, as North Korea is capable of building shorter-range systems domestically.[12] Any Russian S-400 delivery to North Korea would be a significant inflection, however, as Russia reportedly decided earlier this year to delay the delivery of two promised S-400 air defense systems to India until August 2026 and continues to delay providing Iran with S-400 systems.[13] The decision to provide North Korea with an S-400 air defense system ahead of Iran or India would suggest a major reprioritization of Russia's alliances, and ISW has not yet observed indicators that this reprioritization is underway. Furthermore, ISW has observed indications that Russia is struggling to produce advanced air defense systems and radars at a rate rapid enough to replace the losses Russia continues to sustain as a result of Ukraine's long-range drone and missile strikes.[14] Russia has more likely provided North Korea with shorter-range missiles and systems, or possibly cannon-based air defense systems.

The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened an investigation against another instance of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Donetsk Oblast. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported on November 22 that it was investigating a report that Russian forces executed five Ukrainian servicemembers near Vuhledar on October 2, in violation of the

Geneva Convention on POWs.[15] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office also reported that in total it has opened 53 criminal cases investigating Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs – 37 of which occurred during 2024.[16] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported that Ukrainian officials are investigating 13 cases of Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs between October and November 2024 alone. ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs and observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appear to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian military leadership continue to extol the ballistic missile that Russian forces launched at Ukraine on November 21, likely in an effort to artificially inflate expectations of Russian capabilities and encourage Western and Ukrainian self-deterrence.**
- **Russia may additionally conduct test launches of the same or similar ballistic missiles in the coming days to accomplish the same rhetorical effect.**
- **Russia has reportedly provided North Korea with over one million barrels of oil and an unspecified number and type of air defense systems and missiles in return for North Korea's provision of manpower for Russia's war effort in Ukraine.**
- **The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened an investigation against another instance of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced west of Svatove, south of Chasiv Yar, south of Toretsk, northeast of Vuhledar, and northeast of Velyka Novosilka.**
- **Russia continues to build its training capacity by establishing new service academies in occupied Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 21, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

November 21, 2024, 8:00pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin intensified his reflexive control campaign aimed at Ukraine and its Western partners by conducting an ostentatious ballistic missile strike against Ukraine that used multiple reentry vehicles on November 21. Russian forces conducted a complex strike against critical infrastructure and industrial enterprises in Dnipro City, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, on the morning of November 21, that reportedly included a Kh-47M2 Kinzhal ballistic missile fired from Tambov Oblast, seven Kh-101 cruise missiles fired from Volgograd Oblast, and an experimental medium-range ballistic missile with reentry vehicles – likely a modified RS-26 “Rubezh” intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) - fired from Astrakhan Oblast.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed six Kh-101 cruise missiles and that the remaining missiles did not cause significant damage.[2] Ukrainian officials reported that the strike damaged an unspecified industrial enterprise (likely Ukraine's Pivdenmash factory that manufactures missiles and space rockets), a medical facility, and residential areas in Dnipro City, and reported that a Russian missile also damaged residential areas in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[3] Western officials told Western media that the ballistic missile that targeted Dnipro City was not an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and was more likely a ballistic missile with a shorter range.[4]

Putin explicitly threatened that Russia may attack Western countries that support Ukrainian deep strikes in Russia and rhetorically connected the November 21 ballistic missile strike to Russian nuclear capabilities — a marked intensification of an existing Russian information operation that aims to use explicit threats and nuclear saber-rattling to discourage continued Western military support for Ukraine. Putin gave an address on the evening of November 21 claiming that Russian forces conducted a combined missile strike against Dnipro City, including with a new “Oreshnik” non-nuclear ballistic missile (which is reportedly an experimental variant of the RS-26 missile), framing the strike as a direct response to recent Ukrainian ATACMS and Storm Shadow strikes against military objects in Russia and alleged “aggressive actions” of NATO states against Russia.[5] Putin threatened to strike the military facilities of Western countries that allow Ukraine to conduct strikes into Russia. Putin's November 21 rhetoric is consistent with prior official Kremlin

statements defining “red lines” that the Kremlin has attempted to use to deter Western states from supporting Ukraine. [6]

Putin’s November 21 statement demonstrates that Moscow’s constant saber-rattling largely remains rhetorical. Putin’s recent threats against the West have centered against Western states allowing Ukraine to conduct long-range strikes into “Russian territory,” but Ukrainian forces have been striking what the Kremlin illegally defines as “Russian territory” for a long time. The Kremlin has illegally defined occupied Crimea as part of Russia since Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and Ukrainian forces have routinely struck Crimea with US-provided ATACMS and UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles since April 2023.[7] The Kremlin’s application of its “red lines” rhetoric has been wildly inconsistent, undermining the overall Russian escalation narrative.[8] Putin consistently escalates the war on his own without regard to Western decisions and has consistently declined to retaliate every time Western states have deepened their support of Ukraine. Putin previously threatened severe retaliation if Western states provided Ukraine with rocket artillery, tanks, warplanes, and the ability to strike into Russia, and Putin has constantly shifted the goalposts every time the West has called Putin’s bluff.

Neither the Oreshnik ballistic missile strike nor Putin’s November 21 statement represent a significant inflection in Russian strike capabilities or likelihood to use a nuclear weapon.

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. Previous Russian missile strikes have targeted industrial and critical infrastructure including within Dnipro City that caused greater damage.[9] The only fundamentally new characteristic of the Russian strikes against Dnipro City on November 21 was the Oreshnik missile itself, which ostentatiously showcased reentry vehicles to amplify the spectacle of the strike and further imply a nuclear threat.[10][11] The West maintains credible deterrence options and Putin’s nuclear saber-rattling should not constrain Western officials from choosing to further aid Ukraine. US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Bill Burns cautioned Western policymakers against fearing Putin’s nuclear rhetoric in September 2024, describing Putin as a “bully” who will “continue to saber rattle from time to time.”[12]

The Kremlin continues to demonstrate its full commitment to use the prospect of “negotiations” with Ukraine and the West to pursue nothing short of the total destruction of the Ukrainian state despite Russian President Vladimir Putin’s efforts to posture himself as amenable to peace negotiations. Ukrainian outlet *Interfax Ukraine*, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources, reported on November 20 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) drafted a document forecasting global military-political developments until 2045 and proposing Russia’s vision of the future of Ukraine — which completely erases any semblance of a free and independent Ukrainian state or Ukrainian territorial sovereignty.[13] The Russian MoD document advocates partitioning Ukraine into three different parts: one acknowledging the full Russian annexation of occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and occupied Crimea; another establishing a pro-Russian puppet state centered in Kyiv under Russian military occupation; and a third part designating Ukraine’s western regions as “disputed territories” to be divided among Ukraine’s westernmost neighboring countries. The document also outlines future global scenarios, prioritizing those where Russia defeats Ukraine and secures a Russian-led multipolar international order. ISW cannot confirm the existence of such a document and has not observed the content of the reported document itself, but the *Interfax Ukraine* report is consistent with ISW’s ongoing assessments of the Kremlin’s intent to impose full Ukrainian capitulation and disinterest in good-faith negotiations.[14] The content also reveals that the Kremlin, regardless of the US administration or Western actors, maintains the same uncompromising strategic objectives in its war of dismantling Ukrainian sovereignty and bringing about the waning of Western influence globally.

North Korean troops are reportedly training alongside Russian naval infantry and airborne (VDV) units. South Korea’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) stated on November 20 that the North Korean troops who have already deployed to Russia are training with Russian naval infantry and VDV formations and noted that some North Korean troops have already participated in combat.[15] Ukrainian intelligence sources previously reported on October 15 that Russia’s 11th VDV Brigade was forming the dedicated “Special Buryat Battalion” staffed mainly by North Korean soldiers for combat operations in Kursk Oblast.[16] Russia’s Eastern Military District (EMD) may have the mandate for training, integrating, and deploying North Korean troops—ISW previously noted that North Korean soldiers were training alongside various Russian motorized rifle formations that belong to the EMD.[17] The EMD’s chain of command includes Russia’s Pacific Fleet, which is comprised of two naval infantry brigades — the 155th and the 40th — and Russia’s 11th and 83rd VDV brigades are located inside the EMD (though they are not part of the EMD’s chain of command), so the NIS’ assessment suggests that North Korean troops are likely training with elements that are based physically close to North Korea.[18] ISW has observed reports that elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade and 11th and 83rd VDV brigades are actively deployed to combat in Kursk Oblast, which is where Ukrainian and

South Korean intelligence confirmed North Korean troops have initially deployed.[19] It is therefore likely that North Korean troops are currently training with elements of the 155th, 11th, and 83rd brigades in preparation for combat in Kursk Oblast. Russian VDV forces often act as partner units during multilateral military training exercises with partner states such as Belarus and Serbia, suggesting that the aforementioned VDV brigades could be training North Korean troops, as VDV forces have trained with other foreign troops.[20]

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. ISW has assessed at length that the distinctions in quality between various Russian formations that existed prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have become increasingly obsolete because of the way Russia is prosecuting its war.[21] Russian formations that were once considered "elite" or more specialized in terms of the tactical tasks they were associated with, such as VDV or naval infantry units, are now essentially functioning as understrength motorized rifle units, relying on infantry-led frontal assaults to make tactical gains as opposed to employing any sort of doctrinally-unique tactics. [22] Russian casualty rates on the frontline have forced the Russian military command to prioritize rushing new recruits to backfill vacancies in new units over providing them with sufficient basic, much less specialist, training.[23] These practices will likely extend to, and greatly impact, the experiences of North Korean troops fighting alongside Russian forces. North Korean troops training with VDV or naval infantry formations are likely to deploy to combat in the same way in which VDV and naval infantry soldiers deploy to combat—essentially as regular infantry forces. If the Russian command uses North Korean troops the same way that it uses Russian troops, North Korean troops are likely to face comparable rates of attrition to the rates that Russia is currently facing.[24] The losses that North Korean forces accrue in combat on behalf of Russia will dilute whatever institutional lessons the North Korean military was hoping to learn by joining Russia as a co-belligerent against Ukraine, as ISW recently assessed.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin intensified his reflexive control campaign aimed at Ukraine and its Western partners by conducting an ostentatious ballistic missile strike against Ukraine that used multiple reentry vehicles on November 21.**
- **Putin explicitly threatened that Russia may attack Western countries that support Ukrainian deep strikes in Russia and rhetorically connected the November 21 ballistic missile strike to Russian nuclear capabilities - a marked intensification of an existing Russian information operation that aims to use explicit threats and nuclear saber-rattling to discourage continued Western military support for Ukraine.**
- **Putin's November 21 statement demonstrates that Moscow's constant saber-rattling largely remains rhetorical.**
- **Neither the Oreshnik ballistic missile strike nor Putin's November 21 statement represent a significant inflection in Russian strike capabilities or likeliness to use a nuclear weapon.**
- **The Kremlin continues to demonstrate its full commitment to use the prospect of "negotiations" with Ukraine and the West to pursue nothing short of the total destruction of the Ukrainian state despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to posture himself as amenable to peace negotiations.**
- **North Korean troops are reportedly training alongside Russian naval infantry and airborne (VDV) units.**
- **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.**
- **Russian forces recently marginally advanced in the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast southeast of Sudzha.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Vuhledar. Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Kreminna, southeast of Chasiv Yar, in Toretsk, southeast of Kurakhove, northeast of Vuhledar, and likely advanced northeast of Velyka Novosilka.**
- **The Russian State Duma adopted a three-year federal budget with record defense expenditures from 2025-2027.**

November 20, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Ukraine conducted a successful combined strike against military assets in the Russian rear on the night of November 19 to 20 using drones and Western-provided long-range weapons. *The Guardian* and *Bloomberg* both reported on November 20, citing anonymous sources, that Ukrainian forces have conducted the first strikes against military targets within Russia using UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles.[1] Geolocated footage published on November 20 shows the aftermath of a likely Storm Shadow strike near Marino, Kursk Oblast.[2] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces launched up to 12 Storm Shadow missiles at Kursk Oblast, fragments of which struck Marino.[3] The geolocated footage of the strike suggests that the Ukrainian target may have been the Baryatinsky Estate in Marino, which the Ukrainian defense-focused outlet *Defense Express* suggested was housing a command post for Russian and North Korean troops operating in Kursk Oblast.[4] ISW cannot confirm this claim at this time, but Marino is about 30km from the current Kursk Oblast salient, which would be an appropriate distance for an operational headquarters for troops conducting offensives along the salient.

Ukrainian forces also conducted a large-scale drone strike against the Russian rear on the night of November 19 to 20, particularly targeting military and defense industrial assets in Voronezh, Belgorod, and Novgorod oblasts. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defense systems destroyed or intercepted a total of 44 Ukrainian drones as of the morning of November 20, including 20 over Novgorod Oblast; five over Kursk Oblast; four over Oryol Oblast; three each over Belgorod, Tula, and Tver oblasts; and two each over Bryansk, Moscow, and Smolensk oblasts.[5] Head of Ukraine's Center for Combatting Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated on November 20 that Ukrainian drones struck the 13th Main Missile and Artillery Directorate (GRAU) arsenal near Kotovo, Novgorod Oblast, at which Russian forces were reportedly storing ammunition for tube artillery; mortar mines; "Grad," "Smerch," and "Uragan" multi-launch rocket systems (MLRS) missiles; Iskander ballistic missiles; S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missiles; North Korean provided KN-23 ballistic missiles; and Tor surface-to-air system missiles.[6] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Ukrainian forces also struck a command post of the Russian "Sever" (Nothorn) Grouping of Forces in Gubkin, Belgorod Oblast.[7] Ukrainian and Russian sources additionally posted footage of the aftermath of a reported Ukrainian drone strike against the EFKO Factory in Alekseyevka, Belgorod Oblast, which Kovalenko stated produces cargo drones for the Russian military.[8] Russian sources reported that Ukrainian drones also hit an unspecified industrial enterprise in Voronezh Oblast and targeted an oil depot in Sosnovka, Samara Oblast.[9]

The November 19 to 20 strike series indicates that Ukraine has already begun leveraging Western-provided long-range weapons systems to assemble more complex and effective strike packages. Ukrainian forces notably utilized both long-range strike drones and Storm Shadow missiles in the November 19-20 strike and struck a diverse range of military targets across the Russian rear.

ISW has long assessed that the systems and capabilities that Western partners are providing Ukraine, alongside Ukraine's indigenous defense industrial production and innovation efforts, are all constituent components of wider capabilities that Ukraine requires to successfully wage a multi-domain large-scale modern war.[10] Ukraine has already proven itself effective in using often domestically-produced drones to strike a variety of military targets in the Russian rear, including air bases, command headquarters, and artillery depots.[11] Ukraine's arsenal already includes aerial and naval drones and Western-provided systems such as F-16s, HIMARS, and ATACMS, although the conditions of use on the latter systems have been restricted enough to limit the benefit Ukraine can accrue by using them. [12] The addition of more powerful and precise Western-provided systems, such as JASSMs and additional ATACMS, Storm Shadows, and SCALP systems, is crucial in enabling Ukraine to scale up the effects it can generate through long-range strikes against the Russian rear.

Russian forces, in contrast, have been experimenting and diversifying their strike packages to inflict maximum damage on Ukrainian critical infrastructure, conducting frequent strikes with a combination of Iranian-provided or Russian-produced Shahed drones and drone variants, North Korean-provided and domestically produced ballistic and cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles, and aerial bombs.[13]

Western restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided weapons to strike within Russian territory have limited Ukrainian capabilities in developing commensurate strike packages. Ukraine requires continued Western military assistance, as well as domestic innovation and production, in order to continue building and utilizing strike packages to target the Russian rear and generate tactical to operational-level impacts on the battlefield.

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces have been able to conduct optimized operational maneuver since Winter 2022-2023 due to legacy doctrinal and resource limitations, but both are learning, innovating, and adapting their respective tactics on the battlefield, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the current war. Ukrainian Missile and Artillery Forces Deputy Commander Colonel Serhiy Musienko reported in a November 18 article by Ukrainian outlet *RBK-Ukraine* that Russian forces are facing ammunition shortages on select sectors of the frontline and are increasingly committing Soviet-era 122mm and 130mm howitzers to the battlefield.[14] Musienko stated that Russian forces began dispersing their artillery and command systems along the frontline to avoid grouping equipment in one area and increasing vulnerability to Ukrainian strikes. Musienko also stated that Russian forces are changing their assault tactics, using small teams of one-to-two Russian personnel running to cover, after which small groups accumulate and coordinate before launching a subsequent assault. Musienko stated that Russian forces are also using armored vehicles, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and buggies to quickly approach Ukrainian positions and engage in small-arms battles. Musienko commented on Russia's strike adaptations, stating that Russian forces have created a reconnaissance-strike complex consisting of reconnaissance drones and an Iskander launch battery located in occupied Crimea that can identify and strike targets in the Zaporizhia direction within 20-to-30 minutes.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on November 20 that Ukrainian commanders stated that Ukrainian forces, in contrast to the situation faced by Russian forces as outlined by Musienko, continue to experience artillery shortages and are consequently relying more heavily on drone operations to constrain Russian advances along the frontline, with drone strikes resulting in upwards of 80 percent of Russian losses along the front.[15] The NYT stated that a Ukrainian drone pilot and platoon leader noted that Russian forces are targeting small drone teams with glide bombs. Musienko also noted that Ukrainian artillery and strike drones are critical for preventing Russian forces from approaching Ukrainian positions and engaging in small-arms firefights.[16]

ISW recently assessed that Ukrainian drone operations are playing a critical role in constraining Russian mechanized maneuver, slowing Russian advances to a foot pace, and preventing Russian forces from fully exploiting Ukraine's ongoing manpower constraints.[17] While neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces have discovered how to restore operational-level mechanized maneuver to the modern battlefield, the tempo of frontline fighting remains high, and the frontline remains dynamic. Frontline innovation and adaptation on both sides will continue to evolve modern warfare.

The US and Germany announced additional military assistance for Ukraine on November 20. The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced its 70th tranche of military assistance under the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) valued at \$275 million, which includes HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; 60mm and 81mm mortar rounds; drones; Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; small arms and ammunition; demolitions equipment; and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear protective equipment.[18] US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin confirmed that the United States is providing Ukraine with antipersonnel landmines with controlled detonations to help defend against Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.[19] The German government announced on November 20 that Germany has delivered additional weapons and equipment to Ukraine, including ammunition for Mardar infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), 47 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs), one TRML-4D aerial radar system, four Panzerhaubitze 2000 self-propelled howitzers, 40,000 155mm artillery rounds, seven M109 155mm howitzer barrels, over 200 various reconnaissance drones, mine-clearing and logistics vehicles, and small arms ammunition.[20]

Ukrainian officials continue to launch investigations into Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and provide statistics on Ukrainians living in Russian captivity. The Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported on November 20 that it launched an investigation into a case involving Russian forces executing two Ukrainian POWs near Novodmytrivka, Donetsk Oblast on November 10, in clear violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs.[21] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated on November 20 that Ukraine has returned a total of 3,767 Ukrainians—mostly soldiers and 168 civilians—from Russian captivity since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022, and that "tens of thousands" of Ukrainian military and civilian prisoners remain in Russian captivity.[22] ISW has previously documented systematic Russian mistreatment and executions of Ukrainian POWs, alongside a clear reluctance of Russian authorities to engage in good-faith POW exchanges with Ukraine.[23] ISW also assesses that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has likely incentivized Russian authorities to engage in more regular POW exchanges, likely driven by a rise in the capture of Russian POWs by Ukrainian forces.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine conducted a successful combined strike against military assets in the Russian rear on the night of November 19 to 20 using drones and Western-provided long-range weapons. The November 19 to 20 strike series indicates that Ukraine has already begun leveraging Western-provided long-range weapons systems to assemble more complex and effective strike packages.
- Neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces have been able to conduct optimized operational maneuver since Winter 2022-2023 due to legacy doctrinal and resource limitations, but both are learning, innovating, and adapting their respective tactics on the battlefield, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the current war.
- The US and Germany announced additional military assistance for Ukraine on November 20.
- Ukrainian officials continue to launch investigations into Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and provide statistics on Ukrainians living under Russian captivity.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian military command's lack of proper treatment of Russian soldiers and continued reliance on "meat assaults" is likely contributing to mass desertions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 19, 2024

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Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Wolkov, Olivia Gibson, Karolina Hird, Nate Trotter, William Runkle, and George Barros

November 19, 2024, 2:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 9:45am ET on November 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces have defended against Russia's full-scale invasion for 1,000 days and continue to demonstrate incredible resilience against Russian aggression. Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022 under the incorrect assumption that Ukraine would fail to defend itself and that Russian forces would be able to seize Kyiv City and install a pro-Russian proxy government in three days.[1] One thousand days later, Ukrainian forces have successfully pushed Russian forces from their most forward points of advance in Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, Poltava, and Mykolaiv oblasts and continue their daily fight to liberate occupied territory in Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, and Kherson oblasts and Crimea.[2] Russian forces are currently advancing throughout eastern Ukraine, and Ukrainian officials have recently warned about the possibility of an imminent Russian offensive operation in Zaporizhia Oblast.[3] Russian President Vladimir Putin is simultaneously waging an informational war against the West, Ukraine, and the Russian population aimed at convincing the world that Russian victory is inevitable, and that Ukraine stands no chance.[4] This informational effort is born out of Putin's fear and understanding that sustained Western military, economic, and diplomatic support for Ukraine will turn the tide of the war against Russia.

Russia has accumulated a significant amount of risk and a number of ever-increasing constraints on its warfighting capabilities over the last 1,000 days. Russia began the war with a poorly organized and understaffed military comprised of contract military personnel and limited number of conscripts due to his incorrect assumption that Ukraine would fold and fear that general mobilization could threaten the stability of his regime.[5] Russia largely relied on a combination of volunteer contract servicemembers, mobilized personnel, and irregular formations (such as the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR/LNR AC], the Wagner Group, and Russian Volunteer Corps) to wage Putin's war without general mobilization.[6] This system has provided the Kremlin the manpower necessary to support operations so far, but there are mounting indicators that this system is beginning to teeter. Recent Western estimates of Russian manpower losses suggest that Russian forces are currently losing more troops per month than Russia's ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts can sustain, and open-source evidence indicates that Russia may not be able to sustain its current rate of armored vehicle and tank losses in the medium term as Russia burns through its stockpiles of Soviet-era equipment.[7] The upcoming 2025 year will only increase the manpower and materiel constraints on the Russian military if Russia attempts to sustain its current offensive tempo, and Putin continues to appear averse to such measures given Russian society's growing disinterest in fighting in Russia's war, the Russian economy's limitations including a significant labor deficit and high inflation, and continual aversion to bearing the burden of additional wartime costs.[8] Russia cannot maintain its current tempo

indefinitely. Putin will likely need to take disruptive and drastic measures - including another involuntary call up of the mobilization reserve - to overcome these growing limitations as the war protracts.

Ukraine, meanwhile, continues to improve its warfighting capabilities and prepare itself to be self-sustainable in the long term. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presented Ukraine's "Internal Resilience Plan" to the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) on November 19.[9] The plan is comprised of 10 points that establish Ukraine's strategic objectives during and after the end of Russia's full-scale invasion.[10] The core points of the plan outline Ukraine's focus on maintaining unity and cooperation with its partners; specific measures to stabilize the frontline and increase Ukrainian military's technological efficiency; the expansion of Ukraine's domestic industrial base (DIB) production capabilities and joint DIB partnerships; the establishment of an economic policy to support Ukrainian industries and businesses; the protection of Ukraine's energy infrastructure; and the establishment of a new internal and border security system. The plan also outlines a vision to create effective local administrations, improve social and veteran policies, and strengthen Ukraine's cultural sovereignty both domestically and abroad. Zelensky emphasized in his speech to the Verkhovna Rada that Ukraine has taken many steps to improve its DIB and has already produced over 2.5 million mortar and artillery rounds in 2024.[11] Zelensky added that Ukraine plans to produce at least 3,000 cruise missiles and 30,000 long-range drones in 2025 and that Ukrainian brigades should raise their own funding to appropriately supply themselves with drones without bureaucratic limitations. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced on November 19 that the Verkhovna Rada approved the 2025 defense and security budget of 2.23 trillion hryvnias (around \$54 billion) and allocated a record-breaking 739 billion hryvnias (around \$17.9 billion) for the Ukrainian DIB and weapon procurement. [12] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine has a chance to dramatically expand its DIB and stand on its own two feet in the future if its partners empower Ukraine now.[13]

Ukrainian forces conducted the first ATACMS strike on Russian territory overnight on November 18 to 19, hitting a Russian ammunition depot in Karachev, Bryansk Oblast – days after obtaining permission to conduct such strikes. Ukrainian military officials, including the Ukrainian General Staff, reported on November 19 that Ukrainian forces struck the Russian military's 67th Main Military and Artillery Directorate (GRAU) arsenal of the 1046th Logistics Support Center near Karachev on the night of November 18 to 19 and that the strike caused an initial detonation and 12 secondary explosions.[14] A Ukrainian military source told Ukrainian outlet *RBK-Ukraine* on November 19 that Ukrainian forces used US-provided ATACMS missiles to conduct the strike.[15] Head of Ukraine's Center for Combatting Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko stated that the 67th GRAU arsenal contained artillery ammunition, including North Korean-provided shells, as well as guided glide bombs, air defense missiles, and rockets for multiple launch rocket launchers (MLRS). [16] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces launched six ballistic missiles, including ATACMS, at a military facility in Bryansk Oblast and that Russian S-400 and Pantsir air defense systems shot down five missiles and damaged one.[17] The Russian MoD claimed that missile fragments fell onto a military facility in Bryansk Oblast, causing a fire, but that the strike did not cause any damages or casualties. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* stated that Ukrainian forces also struck the "Veza" ventilation plant and buildings in Karachev, Podsosonki, and Baykova.[18] Russian sources posted footage purportedly showing the ATACMS strike and its aftermath.[19]

Western officials also provided additional clarity on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided long-range weapons systems to strike military objects in Russia. EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated on November 18 that the US authorized Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons up to 300 kilometers inside Russia.[20] US Assistant Secretary of State Brian Nichols told Brazilian outlet *O Globo* on November 19 that US President Biden issued the authorization for Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike into Russia, stating that the authorization will give Ukraine a greater ability to defend itself.[21] ISW previously assessed that restrictions on Ukraine's ability to conduct long-range strikes into Russian territory enabled Russia to maintain sanctuary space within its near and far-rear and leverage that sanctuary space for its military operations against Ukraine.[22] Ukrainian long-range strikes against military objects within Russia's rear are crucial for degrading Russian military capabilities throughout the theater.[23] These permissions, if as extensive as reported, are a new capability for Ukraine that may significantly degrade Russia's war effort.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed Russia's updated nuclear doctrine on November 19 in a clear response to the Biden Administration's decision to greenlight long-range strikes into Russia and as part of Putin's ongoing efforts to influence Western decision-makers into shying away from providing additional support to Ukraine. Putin signed the decree "On approval of the fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of nuclear deterrence" after stating in September 2024 that Russia was adjusting its nuclear doctrine to introduce "clarifications" on the necessary preconditions for Russian nuclear use.[24] Russia last updated its nuclear doctrine in June 2020.[25] The 2024 doctrine states that Russia will exercise nuclear deterrence against states

that provide "territory, air, and/or sea space and resources under their control" for the preparation and implementation of aggression against Russia; will consider aggression against Russia by any state that is part of a military coalition, bloc, or alliance as aggression by the entire coalition; and will consider aggression against Russia and/or its allies by a non-nuclear state with the participation or support of a nuclear state as a joint attack on Russia.[26] The new doctrine added additional considerations to list of the "main military dangers that may develop into military threats" to Russia and against which Russia will carry out nuclear deterrence to include: the creation of new or expansion of existing military coalitions, blocs, or alliances that results in the coalition's military infrastructure "approaching" Russia's border; actions aimed at isolating part of Russia's territory, including the blocking of access to vital transport communications; actions aimed at the destruction of ecological hazardous objects in Russia; and the planning and conducting large-scale military exercises near Russia's border. The new doctrine states that Russia maintains the "possibility" of using nuclear weapons in the event of aggression against Belarus or Russia's receipt of reliable information about a "massive" launch or take-off of air and space attack weapons, including strategic and tactical aircraft, cruise missiles, unmanned aircraft, and hypersonic aircraft, and their crossing of the Russian state border. The new doctrine retains the same language as the 2020 doctrine describing Russia's receipt of information about the launch of ballistic missiles attacking Russian territory or the territory or Russian allies as a condition "determining the possibility of Russia's use of nuclear weapons," and this language regarding ballistic missiles thus does not represent an inflection in Russia's nuclear doctrine despite some reporting suggesting otherwise. The updated doctrine no longer states that Russia regards nuclear weapons "solely" as a means of deterrence and adds that Russia will exercise nuclear deterrence against "potential" enemies.

Russia's adoption of an amended nuclear doctrine is the latest iteration of now-frequent Russian nuclear saber-rattling and does not represent a substantial change in Russia's nuclear posture, doctrine, or the threat of the employment of nuclear weapons. US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns cautioned Western policymakers on September 7 against fearing boilerplate Russian nuclear saber-rattling.[27] *Bloomberg* reported on November 19 that an unspecified US National Security Council spokesperson stated that the US sees no reason to adjust its nuclear posture and that the Russian decision to adjust its doctrine was not a surprise and is a continuation of the same "irresponsible rhetoric" that Russia has used since invading Ukraine in 2022.[28] Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated on November 18 that any Russian saber-rattling is "incredibly dangerous" and "reckless." [29] Singh stated that the US will continue to monitor Russian saber-rattling but has not seen any changes in Russia's nuclear posture. ISW continues to assess that Russia is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.[30]

The Kremlin has continuously attempted to use nuclear saber-rattling to deter Western military support for Ukraine, and the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to inject nuclear threats into the information space indicates that the Kremlin is concerned about the battlefield impacts of Ukrainian strikes into Russia with Western-provided weapons. The *Washington Post* reported in September 2024 that the Kremlin may be reconsidering the effectiveness of its nuclear saber-rattling in influencing Western decision-making against supporting Ukraine.[31] The Kremlin, however, has continued to use its same boilerplate nuclear threats in an attempt to dissuade Western decisionmakers from lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike legitimate military objects in Russia, indicating that the Kremlin fears the prospect of long-range Ukrainian strikes into Russia. The Kremlin has routinely intensified its nuclear saber-rattling during key Western discussions about military assistance to Ukraine but has never previously escalated against any perceived Western violations of Russia's "red lines." [32] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger responded to the updated Russian nuclear doctrine on November 19, complaining that Western countries no longer fear the Kremlin's nuclear threats and that the West's lack of fear is "narrowing Russia's room for maneuver." [33] The milblogger attributed this Western lack of fear to the Kremlin's unresponsiveness to prior Ukrainian strikes against military objects within Russia – one of the Kremlin's prior so-called red lines.[34] Other Russian milbloggers stated that they are waiting for the Russian government to react to the Ukrainian ATACMS strike in Bryansk Oblast on November 19. [35] The Kremlin has not clearly responded to the ATACMS strike as of this writing.

The contours of the Kremlin's nuclear blackmail remain unchanged despite the updates to Russia's nuclear doctrine, and factions within the Kremlin are reportedly arguing over a lack clarity about Russia's own nuclear "red lines." A Russian insider source claimed on November 19 that Kremlin factions disagreed on the changes to the nuclear doctrine, with one faction arguing for the new nuclear doctrine to define clear "red lines" to deter the West from taking specific actions unfavorable to the Kremlin and another faction calling for the creation of a strategically ambiguous nuclear doctrine "in the fog of war" to prevent the West from being able to predict the Kremlin's response to specifications.[36] These reports, taken in the context of the Kremlin's continued reliance on vague threats of nuclear escalation without following through, suggests that Russian officials lack a clear understanding of where the Kremlin's actual "red lines" lie. **The updated Russian nuclear**

doctrine remains vague, and actions by Russia's "potential enemies" as defined in the new doctrine will almost certainly not immediately trigger Russian nuclear weapons use. The decision to use Russian nuclear weapons lies with Putin, who has and will personally decide where Russia's "red lines" truly lie and how to respond - or not respond - to Western support of Ukraine.

Ukraine only recently has started receiving the weapons systems and military capabilities necessary to wage modern large-scale combat operations, and Ukraine may be able to conduct operationally significant counteroffensives in the future, provided the West reinforces building Ukrainian capabilities at scale. US officials are only now seriously evaluating depriving Russia of a sanctuary from which Russia wages war against Ukraine. Ukrainian forces only received F-16s and pilot training to operate F-16s in small quantities in 2024.[37] Ukrainian forces only received ATACMS for the first time in fall 2023 after Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive effectively culminated.[38] Ukrainian forces only received Western main battle tanks in small quantities for the first time in early 2023.[39] The systems and capabilities that Ukraine has been receiving are all necessary to wage successful multi-domain large-scale-combat operations, and Ukraine has not yet been provided an opportunity to demonstrate what Ukrainian forces can achieve when properly resourced. Ukraine's systems integration, capabilities, and battlefield performance likely can improve, provided Ukraine and its partners continue undertaking the difficult work necessary to build Ukrainian momentum.

Continued and enhanced Western military assistance remains necessary for Ukrainian forces to liberate occupied territory and inflict losses on the Russian military necessary to force Putin to rethink his calculus for this war. Ukraine must enter any future negotiations with Russia from a position of strength given the Kremlin's persistent refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations and its repeated calls for complete Ukrainian capitulation.[40] Ukrainian determination and innovation alone likely cannot bring about these conditions, and it remains in the West's interests to strengthen Ukraine's position at any potential future negotiating table.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces have defended against Russia's full-scale invasion for 1,000 days and continue to demonstrate incredible resilience against Russian aggression.
- Ukraine continues to improve its warfighting capabilities and prepare itself to be self-sustainable in the long term.
- Ukrainian forces conducted the first ATACMS strike on Russian territory overnight on November 18 to 19, hitting a Russian ammunition depot in Karachev, Bryansk Oblast — days after obtaining permission to conduct such strikes.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed Russia's updated nuclear doctrine on November 19 in a clear response to the Biden Administration's decision to greenlight long-range strikes into Russia and as part of Putin's ongoing efforts to influence Western decision-makers into shying away from providing additional support to Ukraine.
- Russia's adoption of an amended nuclear doctrine is the latest iteration of now-frequent Russian nuclear saber-rattling and does not represent a substantial change in Russia's nuclear posture, doctrine, or the threat of the employment of nuclear weapons.
- The Kremlin has continuously attempted to use nuclear saber-rattling to deter Western military support for Ukraine, and the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to inject nuclear threats into the information space indicates that the Kremlin is concerned about the battlefield impacts of Ukrainian strikes into Russia with Western-provided weapons.
- Ukraine only recently has started receiving the weapons systems and military capabilities necessary to wage modern large-scale combat operations, and Ukraine may be able to conduct operationally significant counteroffensives in the future, provided the West reinforces building Ukrainian capabilities at scale.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 18, 2024](#)

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November 18, 2024, 5:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30 pm ET on November 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian officials continued to use threatening rhetoric as part of efforts to deter the United States from publicly authorizing Ukraine's use of US-provided ATACMS in limited strikes against Russian and North Korean military targets in Kursk Oblast. This US authorization, if officially confirmed, would notably be a mild response to Russia's escalatory introduction of North Korean troops as active combatants in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kremlin

Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on November 18 that the United States is "adding fuel to the fire" and that the US authorization of Ukrainian ATACMS strikes against Russian military targets would be a "qualitatively new round of tension" and a "qualitative" change in US participation in the war.[1] Peskov reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's September 12 claims that Ukrainian strikes against Russia using Western-provided weapons would represent an escalation and directly involve Western countries in the war.[2] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova also reiterated Putin's September statements and further claimed that Ukrainian long-range missile strikes on Russia would be a "radical change in the essence and nature" of the war and that the Russian response would be "adequate and tangible." [3] Russian State Duma and Federation Council deputies made similar threats, claiming that Russia would be "forced" to respond to this "escalation," including with strikes against Ukraine using unspecified "new" weapons systems, and that Russia's new nuclear doctrine will outline the consequences of this US decision.[4] Russia has not previously escalated militarily against any perceived Western violations of Russia's "red lines" — as ISW has repeatedly observed.[5]

Select Russian officials and propagandists heavily emphasized that US officials have not yet formally confirmed the ATACMS strike authorization, likely in an attempt to convince the United States to back out of the decision and deny the media reports of the authorization. Zakharova stated that it is unclear if Western media outlets reporting on the US authorization are citing official sources, and Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov similarly questioned the credibility of the US media reports.[6]

Neither Ukrainian nor US officials have confirmed reports of the US authorization of Ukrainian ATACMS strikes, but US officials noted that Russia escalated the war with the deployment of North Korean forces alongside Russian forces on the battlefield. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky did not directly confirm media reports of the US authorization of limited ATACMS strikes, but stated on November 17 that "strikes are not carried out with words" and "such things are not announced," but that "the missiles will speak for themselves." [7] US Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer also did not confirm the US strike authorization but noted that Russia escalated the war with the deployment of North Korean forces to the battlefield and the massive drone and missile strike series against Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of November 16 to 17.[8] Finer directly responded to Peskov, stating that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine "lit the fire." [9] US outlet *Axios* reported on November 17 that a source with knowledge of the matter stated that the Biden administration granted Ukraine permission to use ATACMS in order to deter North Korea from sending more troops to Russia for the war.[10] *Axios* reported that US officials hope that North Korea might reconsider its decision to deploy military personnel to Russia if Ukrainian forces strike North Korean forces in Kursk Oblast.

Putin's introduction of North Korea as a new belligerent in his invasion of Ukraine was a major escalation. Allowing Ukraine to use US missiles against legitimate military targets in Russian territory in accord with all international laws and laws of armed conflict is a very limited response and cannot reasonably be characterized as an escalation in itself.

French and British sources clarified on November 18 that the reported US permissions regarding Ukraine's ability to use ATACMS for limited strikes within Russia do not inherently extend to Ukraine's ability to use French and UK-provided SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles for long-range strikes in Russia. French outlet *Le Figaro*, which ISW cited on November 17, removed phrasing from its November 17 article reporting that the ATACMS permission would extend to SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles.[11] French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot noted on November 18 that France remains open to the option of allowing Ukraine to use French-provided long-range missiles to strike within Russia but confirmed that France has not yet granted these permissions to Ukraine despite initial and erroneous reporting on November 17.[12] UK outlet *The Times* reported on November 18 that Downing Street sources stated that ATACMS have "different military specifications" from UK-provided Storm Shadows, and other UK outlets, including *The Sun* and *The Guardian*, noted on November 18 that the United States is "still blocking" Ukraine from using SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles against legitimate targets on Russian territory.[13] The UK and France jointly produce SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles, both of which utilize American-provided technologies and targeting intelligence, so all three parties would need to agree to lift restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use either SCALP or Storm Shadow missiles in long-range strikes against targets

on Russian territory.[14] Persistent restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles will continue to limit Ukraine's ability to fully target the Russian rear with a broad arsenal of suitable systems, thus allowing Russia to maintain sanctuary space within its near and far-rear to which it is not entitled by any principle of international law or norms.[15]

The Kremlin continues to state its unwillingness to accept any compromises, including those that would "freeze" the conflict along the current frontline – further demonstrating the Kremlin's insistence on complete Ukraine capitulation. *Bloomberg* reported on November 18 that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan plans to submit a peace plan for Russia's war in Ukraine at the G20 summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from November 18 to 19 that would include the freezing of the conflict along the current frontlines, a 10-year postponement of Ukraine's NATO membership alongside assurances of Western provisions of military supplies to Ukraine, the establishment of a demilitarized zone in eastern Ukraine, and the stationing of foreign troops in Ukraine.[16] Pro-Turkish government outlet *Daily Sabah* reported that sources in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) denied reports that Erdogan would propose postponing Ukraine's NATO membership, however, but stated that the Turkish government supports diplomatic initiatives aimed at ending the war.[17] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded to the initial reports of the Turkish peace proposal, stating that "freezing" the frontline is "a priori unacceptable" for the Kremlin and that Russian President Vladimir Putin's previously stated conditions for ending the war — which amounted to full Ukrainian capitulation — remain "fully relevant." [18] ISW has routinely assessed that the Kremlin's objective of total Ukrainian capitulation remains unchanged, and Peskov's comment further demonstrates that Russian authorities are unwilling to engage in good-faith negotiations that result in compromises, even those on terms unfavorable to Ukraine, such as a freezing of the conflict. ISW continues to assess that a negotiated ceasefire on the current lines will only benefit Russia and will afford the Kremlin time to further radicalize and militarize Russian society against Ukraine and the Russian military time to rest and reconstitute, likely before conducting a future attack on Ukraine.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials continued to use threatening rhetoric as part of efforts to deter the United States from publicly authorizing Ukraine's use of US-provided ATACMS in limited strikes against Russian and North Korean military targets in Kursk Oblast. This US authorization, if officially confirmed, would notably be a mild response to Russia's escalatory introduction of North Korean troops as active combatants in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Putin's introduction of North Korea as a new belligerent in his invasion of Ukraine was a major escalation. Allowing Ukraine to use US missiles against legitimate military targets in Russian territory in accord with all international laws and laws of armed conflict is a very limited response and cannot reasonably be characterized as an escalation in itself.
- French and British sources clarified on November 18 that the reported US permissions regarding Ukraine's ability to use ATACMS for limited strikes within Russia do not inherently extend to Ukraine's ability to use French and UK-provided SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles for long-range strikes in Russia.
- The Kremlin continues to state its unwillingness to accept any compromises, including those that would "freeze" the conflict along the current frontline – further demonstrating the Kremlin's insistence on complete Ukraine capitulation.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, in Kupiansk, west of Kreminna, and in the Siversk, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar directions.
- The Kremlin is continuing to militarize different levels of the Russian government by expanding the "Time of Heroes" program that aims to place veterans of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in positions in local, regional, and federal governments.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) illegally conscripted Ukrainian youth in occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts as part of Russia's Fall 2024 conscription cycle.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 17, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 17, 2024, 4:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:00 am ET on November 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The New York Times (NYT) and Washington Post reported that US President Joe Biden has authorized Ukrainian forces to use US-provided ATACMS in limited strikes against Russian and North Korean military targets within Kursk Oblast. The NYT and *Washington Post* reported on November 17 that unspecified US officials expect Ukrainian forces to initially conduct strikes against Russian and North Korean forces within Kursk Oblast and that the Biden Administration could expand this authorization to use ATACMS against targets elsewhere in Russia in the future.[1] The US officials stated that the US authorized these limited Ukrainian strikes in response to the deployment of North Korean forces to the battlefield in Kursk Oblast to deter North Korea from deploying more forces to Russia. The US officials stated that the partial lifting of restrictions aims to generate a "specific and limited" battlefield effect and will not change the course of the war. French outlet *Le Figaro* reported on November 17 that France and the United Kingdom (UK) have authorized Ukrainian forces to use French and UK-provided SCALP/Storm Shadow missiles to strike within Russia.[2] *Le Figaro* did not state if France and the UK had authorized Ukraine's SCALP/Storm Shadow usage only within Kursk Oblast. The partial lifting of restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided long-range weapons against military objects within Kursk Oblast will not completely deprive Russian forces of their sanctuary in Russian territory, as hundreds of military objects remain within ATACMS range in other Russian border regions.[3] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces will benefit from any partial sanctuary if Western states continue to impose restrictions on Ukraine's ability to defend itself and that the US should allow Ukraine to strike all legitimate military targets within Russia's operational and deep-rear within range of US-provided weapons – not just those in Kursk Oblast.[4]

Russian forces damaged Ukrainian energy infrastructure during the largest missile and drone strike since August 2024 on the night of November 16 to 17. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 90 Shahed and strike drones of an unspecified type (possibly referring to decoy drones) from Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai and Kursk and Oryol oblasts.[5] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched 120 missiles, including one Zirkon 3M22 hypersonic cruise missile, eight Kh-47M2 Kinzhal aeroballistic missiles, 101 Kh-101 and Kalibr cruise missiles, one Iskander-M ballistic missile, four Kh-22/Kh-31P cruise/anti-radiation missiles, and five Kh-59/69 cruise missiles. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 42 drones and one Zirkon, seven Kinzhal, 85 Kalibr and Kh-101, two Kh-22/31P, and five Kh-59/69 missiles. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukrainian F-16 pilots shot down roughly 10 aerial targets during the strike.[6] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that 41 drones were "lost" in Ukrainian airspace, likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) interference, and that two drones flew into Russian and Russian-occupied Ukrainian airspace. The Ukrainian Air Force noted that air defense was active in almost all Ukrainian oblasts. Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo stated that Russian strikes damaged energy facilities in several oblasts and noted that energy recovery work is ongoing in Odesa, Volyn, and Rivne oblasts.[7] Ukrainian officials reported that a Russian missile strike caused a fire at an infrastructure facility in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, damaged critical infrastructure in Rivne Oblast, and targeted energy infrastructure in Odesa Oblast.[8] Private Ukrainian energy enterprise DTEK stated that Russian strikes seriously damaged an unspecified DTEK thermal power plant (TPP) and noted that this was the eighth mass strike on a DTEK energy facility in 2024.[9] Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko stated that the strikes caused power outages in many areas of Ukraine.[10] International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi stated that Russian strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities forced Ukrainian authorities to reduce the energy production levels of several nuclear power plants (NPPs). [11] Grossi reported that Russian strikes damaged several electrical substations that are connected to the Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Pivdennoukrainsk NPPs, although the strikes did not damage the NPPs themselves. Grossi stated that six out of the nine reactors at the Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Pivdennoukrainsk NPPs are currently operating at reduced capacity. Ukrainian state railway company Ukrzaliznytsia reported that Russian forces struck a railway depot in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and that Russian strikes de-energized sections of several railway lines in southern, western, and northeastern Ukraine.[12] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian strikes also damaged civilian infrastructure in Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Rivne, and Odesa oblasts.[13]

Russian forces continue to innovate their long-range strike packages and likely included relatively ineffective sea-launched Kalibr cruise missiles in the November 16 to 17 strike package as decoys to distract and exhaust Ukrainian air defenses. Russian forces notably included Kalibr cruise missiles in the strike package against Ukraine on the night of November 16 to 17.[14] Ukrainian military officials have repeatedly noted that Ukrainian forces are able to down Kalibr cruise missiles, and Russian forces have rarely included Kalibr missiles in strike packages in recent months.[15] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated in August 2024 that Russian forces only launch sea-based Kalibr missiles during combined strikes in order to overwhelm the Ukrainian air defense umbrella.[16] ISW recently observed reports that Russia is increasing its use of decoy drones that resemble Iranian-provided Shahed drones during combined long-range strikes and assesses that Russia will likely continue to use decoy drones and experiment with varying strike packages to increase the effectiveness of long-range strikes against Ukraine ahead

of and during the winter.[17] Russian forces likely used decoy drones to additionally overload Ukrainian air defenses in the November 16-17 strike series, which contributed to Ukrainian forces' below average drone shoot down rate.

Ukrainian forces struck a defense industrial factory in the Udmurt Republic for the first time on the morning of November 17. Udmurt Republic Head Alexander Brechalov claimed that a drone crashed on the morning of November 17, causing an explosion at a factory workshop in Izhevsk at the address Lenin 101.[18] Russian opposition outlets noted that the Kupol Electromechanical Plant is at this address.[19] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported that "unknown" drones struck the Kupol Electromechanical Plant that produces Tor air defense systems, radars, and components.[20] Local residents reportedly stated to Russian opposition outlet *Astra* that the Kupol factory also produces drones.[21] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) did not claim that Russian forces shot down any drones in the Udmurt Republic on November 17, and Russian state media noted that this is the first time Russian authorities have reported drone "crashes" in the republic.[22]

North Korea reportedly continues to provide military support to Russia, including the provision of rocket and artillery systems and potential additional troop deployments, which is likely to impact Russia's military operations in the short term, but its long-term benefits likely remain limited. *Financial Times* (FT), citing Ukrainian intelligence sources, reported on November 17 that North Korea has supplied Russia with weapons, including 50 170mm "Koksan" self-propelled howitzers and 20 240mm multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS).[23] FT's source observed that these systems, which Russian forces reportedly deployed to Kursk Oblast, will offer North Korean forces an opportunity to test their capabilities and weapons systems in real combat scenarios. *Bloomberg* reported on November 17 that North Korea may deploy up to 100,000 North Korean troops to Russia in future waves if bilateral relations between the two countries continue to deepen.[24] Kremlin-awarded founder and director of the prominent *Rybar* Telegram channel and social media project Mikhail Zvinchuk claimed that North Korean forces are less combat experienced than Russian forces but that a North Korean deployment to fighting alongside Russian forces would alleviate pressure on Russian forces and Russian recruitment efforts and delay a potential decision for another partial involuntary reserve callup.[25] Zvinchuk also observed that North Korean forces deployed to fight alongside Russian forces will likely learn to conduct drone warfare, which North Korean forces would use in future operations elsewhere. **The development of North Korea's ability to use drones, in addition to the already-announced decision to start serial drone production in North Korea, could pose a significant challenge to South Korea and Japan.**[26]

ISW has repeatedly observed efforts by Russian authorities to delay highly unpopular involuntary reserve callups, and the gradual deployment of 100,000 North Korean personnel could help alleviate some of these concerns in the short term while increasing pressure on Ukrainian forces.[27] A gradual deployment of 100,000 North Korean troops, however, will likely not address the eventual need for another Russian involuntary reserve callup as the reported number of North Korean personnel will not be sufficient to offset the current high Russian casualty rates. The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) previously reported that Russian forces suffered a record high average daily casualty rate of 1,271 troops per day or about 38,130 casualties total in September 2024, and the US Department of Defense (DoD) assessed that Russian forces have suffered an estimated 80,110 casualties in September and October 2024.[28] The deployment of roughly 100,000 North Korean personnel would only replace Russian losses for less than three months. Such a limited deployment would also fail to address Russia's broader shortages of millions of workers due to demographic crises and the war and the resulting mid- to long term shortcomings in Russian defense industrial base (DIB) operations.[29]

Russian forces will likely focus on seizing frontline Ukrainian towns and cities during Winter 2024-2025 through urban combat amid efforts to offset Ukrainian drone advantages and possible Russian armored vehicle constraints. Kremlin-awarded founder and director of the prominent *Rybar* Telegram channel and social media project Mikhail Zvinchuk stated during an interview with Russian-language diaspora-focused channel *RTVI* on November 16 that Russian forces will seek to concentrate fighting in "populated areas and not in open fields" during Winter 2024-25 and offered Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove as examples of towns and cities where Russia will prioritize advances this winter.[30] Zvinchuk claimed that Russian forces are preparing to begin the fight for Pokrovsk and will approach Pokrovsk from the south and southeast now that Russian forces have seized Selydove (southeast of Pokrovsk). Zvinchuk is a prominent voice within the Russian information space with ties to the Kremlin and may be privy to insider information about Russia's frontline objectives and campaign design. Russian forces have recently made advances into eastern Kupiansk and central Chasiv Yar, and such advances may be part of a concerted effort to advance into frontline cities in preparation for offensive operations in Winter 2024-2025.[31] ISW has previously assessed that the seizure of Kupiansk or Chasiv Yar would have operationally significant impacts on

the geometry of the frontline and threaten major Ukrainian defensive positions in their respective directions, and recent Russian advances into the cities would put Ukrainian defenses in both directions at higher but not immediate risk.[32]

Zvinchuk claimed that Russian forces will also look to increase their combat capabilities during Winter 2024-2025, particularly Russian drone capabilities because of the importance of the "drone war" in winter.[33] Zvinchuk noted that Russian forces have an artillery advantage over Ukrainian forces, but that Russian forces currently cannot advance due to Ukrainian drone operations. Zvinchuk suggested that better trained and equipped forces may be able to advance more effectively against Ukrainian drone operators. ISW has previously noted that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appears to be trying to centralize control over informal Russian drone units, and Zvinchuk's comments likely refer to this ongoing effort and indicate that the MoD may intend to intensify this effort during Winter 2024-2025.[34] ISW recently assessed that Ukrainian drone operations continue to play a critical role in constraining Russian mechanized maneuver and preventing Russian forces from fully exploiting Ukraine's ongoing manpower and materiel constraints.[35] The Russian military command may assess that urban combat is preferable for Russia's current infantry-led style of fighting as multi-story buildings could provide Russian infantry with better cover from Ukrainian drone operators than trees in open areas. The Russian military command may also prefer to engage in urban combat to avoid prolonging the cost that advancing in rural fields and settlements imposes on Russian armored vehicle usage and reserves.[36] The Russian military command has likely assessed that offsetting Ukraine's drone advantages and reducing Russian armored vehicle losses through urban combat is worth the large numbers of Russian casualties that will come from grinding, attritional advances in frontline towns and cities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's maximalist objectives demanding full Ukrainian capitulation remain unchanged, but a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger appears to be trying to repackage longstanding Kremlin territorial claims to southern Ukraine as less severe "peace proposals" that would actually militarily threaten Ukraine, Moldova, and NATO. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated on November 17 that his recent phone conversation with Putin showed that "little has changed" in Putin's views on the war in Ukraine and that this is "not good news." [37] Mikhail Zvinchuk in his November 16 interview with Russian-language diaspora-focused channel *RTVI* responded to a question about the conditions under which Russia could agree to peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.[38] Zvinchuk claimed that first Russia must gain full control of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts that Russia has illegally annexed, including the areas that Russian forces currently do not occupy - a demand that Putin first made explicitly in June 2024.[39] Zvinchuk added that Ukraine must unblock the road through Odesa Oblast to Transnistria, the pro-Russian breakaway republic in eastern Moldova, so that Russia can have "communication with Transnistria and the Russian people there." Zvinchuk also called for Russia to gain access to the Danube River, the mouth of which lies on the Ukrainian-Romanian border, and for the creation of a "buffer zone" in border areas in which weapons will be prohibited. Zvinchuk notably did not mention what Russia would compromise on during potential peace talks in order to achieve these proposals, but claimed later in the interview that Russia laying claim to only the four illegally annexed oblasts is in and of itself a compromise - further demonstrating how the Russian ultranationalist community, one of Putin's key constituencies, is not supportive of good faith negotiations with Ukraine. Russian access to Transnistria and the Danube River would essentially allow Russia to operate in and off the coasts of Mykolaiv and Odesa oblasts even if Russian forces did not occupy these territories.[40] Kremlin officials have long called for Russia's occupation of all of southern Ukraine, including Odesa City, and Zvinchuk appears to be proposing a new framing of this same demand.[41] Russian access to Transnistria, areas near Odesa City, and the northwestern Black Sea would allow Russian forces to conduct a future attack on southern Ukraine and Odesa City after resting and reconstituting during a potential ceasefire.

Russian access to Transnistria and the Danube River would pose military threats to Ukraine and NATO as well. Ukrainian strikes have pushed Russia's Black Sea Fleet (BSF) out of the northwestern Black Sea, but Russian access to the Danube would allow Russia to again operate in the area.[42] Russian control of Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts would deny Ukraine access to the Sea of Azov, and Russian access and possible control of the northwestern Black Sea would essentially landlock Ukraine. Russian access to the Danube River and to the road to Transnistria may also enable Russia to establish lines of communication to Transnistria - and possibly even Gagauzia in southern Moldova as Moldova has a port along the Danube River at its southernmost point at Giurgiulesti - to build up forces and means in Moldova for future military operations against Moldova, southeastern Ukraine, or Romania.[43] NATO is also currently constructing what will be its largest base near Constanta in southeastern Romania less than 100 kilometers from the mouth of the Danube River.[44]

Abkhazian oppositionists continued protests on November 17 calling for the resignation of the de facto Abkhazian President Aslan Bzhania. The opposition initially stormed the de facto

Abkhazian parliament building on November 15 demanding the dismissal of a proposed investment agreement with Russia that would grant Russian legal entities property ownership rights and privileges in Abkhazia but has ultimately expanded the scope of its demands to call for the resignation of Bzhania.[45] Bzhania stated on November 16 that he would resign and appoint a vice president as interim head of state before snap elections if the opposition left the premises of the parliament, but the protesters refused his demands and called for his unconditional resignation.[46] Bzhania called the protest an attempted coup, claimed that it is impossible to find compromise with the opposition, and refused to step down, prompting the opposition to continue the protests and propose the formation of an interim government.[47]

Key Takeaways:

- The *New York Times* (NYT) and *Washington Post* reported that US President Joe Biden has authorized Ukrainian forces to use US-provided ATACMS in limited strikes against Russian and North Korean military targets within Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces damaged Ukrainian energy infrastructure during the largest missile and drone strike since August 2024 on the night of November 16 to 17.
- Russian forces continue to innovate their long-range strike packages and likely included relatively ineffective sea-launched Kalibr cruise missiles in the November 16 to 17 strike package as decoys to distract and exhaust Ukrainian air defenses.
- Ukrainian forces struck a defense industrial factory in the Udmurt Republic for the first time on the morning of November 17.
- North Korea reportedly continues to provide military support to Russia, including the provision of rocket and artillery systems and potential additional troop deployments, which is likely to impact Russia's military operations in the short term, but its long-term benefits likely remain limited.
- Russian forces will likely focus on seizing frontline Ukrainian towns and cities during Winter 2024-2025 through urban combat amid efforts to offset Ukrainian drone advantages and possible Russian armored vehicle constraints.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's maximalist objectives demanding full Ukrainian capitulation remain unchanged, but a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger appears to be trying to repackage longstanding Kremlin territorial claims to southern Ukraine as less severe "peace proposals" that would actually militarily threaten Ukraine, Moldova, and NATO.
- Abkhazian oppositionists continued protests on November 17 calling for the resignation of the de facto Abkhazian President Aslan Bzhania.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Chasiv Yar, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar.
- Russian milbloggers continued to applaud their reported role in removing frontline 3rd Combined Arms Army (CAA, formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]) commanders after the commanders submitted false reports about Russian advances in the Siversk direction.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 16, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45 am ET on November 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian drone operations continue to play a critical role in constraining Russian mechanized maneuver and preventing Russian forces from fully exploiting Ukraine's ongoing manpower constraints. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated during an interview with Ukrainian media published on November 16 that Russian forces are currently advancing along the frontline due in part to decreased Ukrainian morale exacerbated by delays in staffing and equipping new Ukrainian brigades and granting frontline Ukrainian defenders necessary rest and rotation.[1] Zelensky stressed the importance of standing up new brigades to replace and reinforce Ukrainian forces currently serving on the frontline but noted that Russian forces also continue to take significant manpower losses in exchange for minimal gains. Zelensky estimated that Russian forces are currently losing between 1,500 and 2,000 troops per day in Ukraine and assessed that Russian forces cannot maintain their rate of advance while taking losses at this scale.

Zelensky's acknowledgement of morale issues and manpower constraints among frontline Ukrainian infantry suggests that Ukrainian drone operations are likely playing an outsized role in defending against and inflicting losses on advancing Russian forces. Zelensky noted during the interview that Russian advances have already slowed in some directions, and Ukrainian officials have previously observed that Ukrainian drone operations have played a role in slowing Russian advances to a foot pace.[2] A Ukrainian drone operator stated in August 2024 that Russian forces were able to advance more successfully in the Pokrovsk direction by conducting ground attacks in groups of two to four soldiers under the cover of trees, making them harder for Ukrainian drone operators to detect.[3] Subsequent Ukrainian reporting suggested that Russian forces began employing this tactic more widely throughout the Pokrovsk direction in September and October 2024.[4] A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor noted on November 16 that these small, infantry-led assaults are not the most efficient tactic for expedient advances in the rural settlements and fields near Selydove, where Russian forces have very little coverage from Ukrainian drone operations.[5] The milblogger suggested that Russian forces can currently only bring reinforcements and supplies forward when Ukrainian drone operators are engaged in another area of the frontline. The milblogger noted that unspecified "problems," possibly referring to Ukrainian drone operations or the Russian military command's insistence on conducting unnecessarily costly infantry assaults, continue to hinder Russian forces' ability to advance more rapidly along the frontline and fully exploit Ukraine's manpower constraints.

Ukrainian drone operations have also been crucial in constraining Russian mechanized maneuver throughout the frontline, particularly during early Summer 2024 when Ukrainian forces were facing severe artillery shortages as a result of delays in Western security assistance.[6] Successful Ukrainian drone strikes against Russian armored vehicles in the Pokrovsk direction in June 2024 may have played a role in the Russian military command's decision to limit mechanized assaults in this direction.[7] Ukrainian drone operations have also played an important role in repelling Russian mechanized assaults in Kursk and Donetsk oblasts and near Kupyansk.[8] Russian forces have attempted to innovate and deploy more effective drone protection systems for armored vehicles and tanks in recent months, but even the most "successful" Russian mechanized assaults that have resulted in several kilometers of gains have generated significant armor losses due to Ukrainian drone strikes.[9] Ukraine's demonstrated ability to strike Russian mechanized columns effectively has prevented Russian forces from conducting mechanized breakthroughs and exploitations at scale. ISW has previously assessed that the Russian military command may not be able to accept the current scale and rate of Russian vehicle losses in the coming months and years given the constraints on Russia's defense industrial production, declining Soviet-era vehicle stockpiles, and the Russian military's failure to achieve operationally significant territorial advances through mechanized maneuver.[10] Further improvements to Ukraine's drone capabilities and continually improving integration of Ukrainian drones with ground operations remain critical to Ukraine's ability to defend against advancing Russian forces and liberate occupied territory in future counteroffensive operations.

Zelensky emphasized that Ukraine must enter any future negotiations from a position of strength as Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in a negotiated settlement — no matter the negotiating platform or mediator — that results in anything less than Ukrainian capitulation. Zelensky stated that Ukraine must be "strengthened by some important elements" to negotiate with Putin, emphasizing that Ukraine cannot enter negotiations from a position of weakness.[11] Zelensky stated that Putin does not want peace but would still be willing to come to the negotiating table in order to reduce Russia's diplomatic isolation and to secure concessions and Ukraine's capitulation. Zelensky stated that it is important that any negotiation platform and potential mediators remember that Russia violated Ukrainian territorial integrity and international law by invading Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 and remarked that his conversations with US President-elect Donald Trump demonstrate that Trump is "on the side of supporting Ukraine" and has listened to Ukraine's position. Zelensky concluded that Ukraine must do everything to end the war by diplomatic means in 2025. ISW recently assessed that the Kremlin is trying to dictate the terms of any potential "peace" negotiations with Ukraine in advance of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration.[12] The Kremlin has consistently demonstrated that it is unwilling to compromise on the terms of any possible negotiations while strongly indicating that the Kremlin's longstanding goal of complete Ukrainian capitulation remains unchanged.[13] **Any future negotiations, no matter the platform or mediator, will require Ukraine to enter talks from a position of strength that forces Putin to change his calculus, engage in good faith talks, and accept compromises.**

Russian forces are innovating their long-range strike packages to include decoy Shahed drones and Shahed drones with thermobaric warheads, likely to confuse and exhaust Ukrainian air defenses and increase the damages of long-range strikes. The *Associated Press* (AP) reported on November 16 that Russia's Alabuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which assembles Iranian-provided Shahed drones, has been producing "hundreds" of decoy drones and recently began producing drones with thermobaric warheads.[14] A Ukrainian military and electronics

expert told the AP that more than half of the long-range strike drones that Russia has launched at Ukraine recently have been decoys. Acting Head of the Ukrainian Air Force Press Office Colonel Yuri Ihnat told the AP that the decoy drones are indistinguishable from armed Shahed drones on Ukrainian radar systems, forcing Ukrainian forces to expend firepower and use electronic warfare (EW) mechanisms to down them. The AP noted that Russian forces attempt to take advantage of exhausted Ukrainian air defenses to get more powerful weapons, such as cruise and ballistic missiles, through Ukraine's air defense umbrella. The AP also noted that the decoy drones also allow Russian forces to locate Ukrainian air defense locations before Ukrainian air defenses and EW down the decoys, but that Russia is using various electronic components, including Ukrainian SIM cards and Starlink systems, to make the drone variants more resistant to jamming. The Ukrainian Air Force has increasingly been reporting that Russian forces are launching strike drones of an unknown type — likely referring to the decoy drones — during regular overnight drone and missile strikes on Ukraine. [15] The Ukrainian Air Forces has also been noting that increasing numbers of drones have become "lost" in Ukrainian airspace, likely due to Ukrainian EW countermeasures — suggesting that Ukrainian forces have been successful in adapting their EW to down the new Russian decoy drones. Decoy drones are cheap, however, and the longer they remain airborne in Ukrainian airspace, the more the decoys can distract Ukrainian air defenses and provide targeting for future Russian strikes. Ihnat reported that Russian forces did not use any decoy drones overnight on November 14-15 — the first instance in weeks.[16]

The Ukrainian military and electronics expert stated that the thermobaric drones, which Russian forces began fielding in Summer 2024, account for between three and five percent of the long-range strike drones Russia has been launching at Ukraine recently.[17] Ukrainian military-focused sources recently reported that the thermobaric warheads on Shahed drones have 50 to 52 kilogram warheads and that Russian forces are equipping Shahed variants with ranges up to 140 kilometers longer with the warheads.[18] A weapons expert told the AP that thermobaric drones are particularly effective against buildings and could cause significant damage to Ukraine's power plants, which are particularly critical to maintaining Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB) and heating the country.[19] The Kremlin will likely continue to innovate its long-range strike drones in an attempt to bypass Ukrainian air defenses and may increasingly use decoy drones and drones with larger or more dangerous payloads to increase the effectiveness of its long-range strikes against Ukraine ahead of and during the winter.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un has ordered North Korean defense industrial enterprises to begin serial production of likely tactical strike drones – an example of how increasing Russian-North Korean military cooperation allows North Korea to learn from Russia's war in Ukraine. North Korean state news outlet KCNA reported on November 15 that Kim oversaw a test of "various types" of North Korean-produced strike drones and ordered the North Korean defense industrial base (DIB) to begin mass production of these drones "as early as possible." [20] Kim emphasized that strike drones have had notable impacts in both "big and small" conflicts and stated that North Korea is focusing on combining unmanned systems with operational plans and principles of war in its military policy. A Russian milblogger commented on blurred images of the drones from North Korean media and suggested that the drones look like the Russian "Lancet" tactical strike drones.[21] ISW cannot independently verify the extent to which the North Korean drones may be based on Russian Lancets. It is currently unclear if North Korea intends to export any of these new strike drones to Russia or other countries after beginning serial production. North Korea will likely continue to learn lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine as it increases its military cooperation with Russia, thereby increasing its own military capabilities and the credibility of its threat to the Asia Pacific region.[22]

The Russian military command reportedly arrested and removed several commanders within the Russian 3rd Combined Arms Army [CAA] following inaccurate reports they made about alleged Russian advances near Bilohorivka and repeated outcries from the Russian milblogger community. A Russian milblogger claimed on November 16 that Russian authorities arrested the commander of the 3rd CAA (formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC]), the 3rd CAA's chief of staff, and the commander of the 3rd CAA's 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade following widespread Russian milblogger complaints about Russian officers submitting incorrect reports to their superiors and planning "incomprehensible" assaults near Bilohorivka (northeast of Siversk).[23] The milblogger claimed that Russian authorities also removed the commanders of unspecified battalions and are inspecting the 6th and 123rd motorized rifle brigades (both of the 3rd CAA). Another Russian source additionally claimed that Russian authorities arrested the commander of the 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade for concealing losses and the "real situation" in the Siversk direction from the Russian military command.[24] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that "the system is inert" and that there was no reaction to Russian milbloggers' initial complaints about false reports of Russian advances in the Siversk direction.[25] The milblogger claimed that the Russian military command became aware of the problem when higher-ups wanted to visit Bilohorivka under the impression that Russian forces had seized the settlement and that the settlement was in the Russian rear given the alleged Russian seizures of Serebryanka and Hryhorivka (both west of Bilohorivka). The

milblogger claimed that frontline Russian commanders had previously tried to stage interviews with Russian war correspondents in order to corroborate the commanders' false reports. ISW previously observed reports from July 2024 that Major General Alexei Kolesnikov is the commander of the 3rd CAA.[26] Russian command failures and the pervasive Russian military culture of exaggerating battlefield successes near Bilohorivka has become a point of neuralgia for the Russian milblogger community recently, particularly as Russian forces have repeatedly wasted manpower and armored vehicles on unsuccessful attempts to take the settlement since at least May 2022.[27] ISW also observed geolocated footage published on November 8 indicating that Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in northern Bilohorivka — further demonstrating the significance of frontline Russian commanders' false reports to the Russian military command about Russian successes in the area. The Kremlin has previously demonstrated its sensitivity to the ultranationalist Russian milblogger community and responded to their criticisms, although it is unclear if the Russian military command arrested and removed the 3rd CAA commanders in response to the Russian milbloggers' repeated outcries about issues near Bilohorivka.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian drone operations continue to play a critical role in constraining Russian mechanized maneuver and preventing Russian forces from fully exploiting Ukraine's ongoing manpower constraints.**
- **Zelensky emphasized that Ukraine must enter any future negotiations from a position of strength as Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in a negotiated settlement – no matter the negotiating platform or mediator - that results in anything less than Ukrainian capitulation.**
- **Russian forces are innovating their long-range strike packages to include decoy Shahed drones and Shahed drones with thermobaric warheads, likely to confuse and exhaust Ukrainian air defenses and increase the damages of long-range strikes.**
- **North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un has ordered North Korean defense industrial enterprises to begin serial production of likely tactical strike drones – an example of how increasing Russian-North Korean military cooperation allows North Korea to learn from Russia's war in Ukraine.**
- **The Russian military command reportedly arrested and removed several commanders within the Russian 3rd Combined Arms Army [CAA] following inaccurate reports they made about alleged Russian advances near Bilohorivka and repeated outcries from the Russian milblogger community.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Kreminna, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.**
- **Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported that the Russian Central Bank has recently issued significantly more loan deferments (credit holidays) for Russian military personnel, indicating that Russian military recruitment rates may have increased.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 15, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Olivia Gibson, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

November 15, 2024, 7:00pm ET

The Kremlin is intensifying its reflexive control campaign aimed at influencing Western decision-making in Russia's favor ahead of or in lieu of possible future negotiations about the resolution of the war in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on November 15 and reiterated several Kremlin information operations aimed at influencing the German government and other Western states to pressure Ukraine into premature peace negotiations instead of providing Ukraine with further military support.[1] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called the Scholz-Putin call "Pandora's box" and warned that the call helps Putin achieve his key goals: reducing his isolation in the international community and bringing about negotiations on Russia's preferred terms "that will lead to nothing." [2]

Putin and other senior Russian officials have recently intensified rhetoric aimed at influencing the foreign policy of the incoming US government under President-elect Donald Trump.[3] The Kremlin has also recently reiterated its unwillingness to compromise on the terms of any possible future negotiations while strongly indicating that the Kremlin's longstanding goal of complete Ukrainian

capitulation remains unchanged.[4] The Kremlin likely aims to take advantage of uncertainty about the future US policy regarding Ukraine by intensifying its reflexive control campaign against Ukraine's European allies.[5] Senior Russian officials, including Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu and Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, have notably used phone calls with Western political and defense officials to spread Kremlin information operations and attempt to threaten the West into making premature concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity since 2022.[6]

Abkhazian oppositionists protested an agreement between the de facto government of Georgia's Abkhazia region with Russia aimed at enhancing Russian investors' rights in Abkhazia on November 15. Protesters in Abkhazia stormed the de facto parliament of the Russian-occupied and Kremlin-backed separatist region of Georgia, demanding the dismissal of a proposed investment agreement with Russia that would grant Russian legal entities property ownership rights in Abkhazia and Russian developers preferential tax exemptions.[7] Critics of the proposed legislation argued that the deal would inflate property prices, empower oligarchs, and undermine Abkhazia's desired autonomy.[8] The protesters, waving Russian flags, clarified their discontent was not directed at "fraternal" Russia but at the current Abkhaz government, citing the need to protect Abkhazia's "national interests." [9] The protesters also called for the resignation of the current de facto Abkhazian President Aslan Bzhania.[10] The protests forced the Abkhaz parliament to postpone the vote on the agreement, with opposition leaders later announcing plans to present their demands to the current de facto Abkhaz leadership.[11]

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova urged Russians to avoid travel to Abkhazia, citing safety concerns, and warned that the crisis could deter future economic investments in Abkhazia.[12] The Russian information space reacted by calling the protesters ungrateful, and some milbloggers attributed the protests to external actors including Turkey, while others warned that the Abkhaz economy largely relies on Russia.[13]

Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide Ukraine with military support via various means and platforms. French Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu reported on November 14 that the Ukrainian "Anna Kyivska" Brigade has completed its training in France.[14] The Anna Kyivska Brigade is notably the first Ukrainian brigade that completed training in France and which France equipped as part of the European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine. [15] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov noted that France has provided Ukraine with general and specialized military training and "state-of-the-art" equipment and weapons, including armored personnel carriers (APCs), self-propelled artillery systems, and situational awareness systems.[16]

Umerov also met with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Norwegian Defense Minister Bjørn Arild Gram in Oslo on November 15, during which Norway announced it would join the "Danish format" of providing support for Ukraine via financing the domestic production of Ukrainian weapons and equipment.[17] Umerov, Gram, and Støre also discussed the creation of a "Norwegian format" that would provide external investment in Ukrainian defense technology companies.[18]

US Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated during a press briefing on November 15 that the US remains committed to disbursing around \$7.1 billion in Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) assistance to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2025.[19] Singh noted that the Pentagon plans to send military assistance packages to Ukraine on an "almost weekly" basis until the inauguration.

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin is intensifying its reflexive control campaign aimed at influencing Western decision-making in Russia's favor ahead of or in lieu of possible future negotiations about the resolution of the war in Ukraine.**
- **Abkhazian oppositionists protested an agreement between the de facto government of Georgia's Abkhazia region with Russia aimed at enhancing Russian investors' rights in Abkhazia on November 15.**
- **Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide Ukraine with military support via various means and platforms.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kurakhove, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar.**
- **The Kremlin continues efforts to expand its "Time of Heroes" program to create a new social class comprised of veterans loyal to Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime and ideology.**

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

Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 14, 2024, 8:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on November 14. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 15 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin's recent economic policies indicate that the Russian economy will likely face significant challenges in 2025 and that Russian President Vladimir Putin is worried about Russia's economic stability in the long term. The Kremlin recently adopted several policies that aim to cut Russian government spending on wounded Russian servicemen, combat inflation, and address long-term demographic problems such as low birth rates and labor shortages. These policies demonstrate that the Russian economy is not as resilient to Western sanctions, monetary constraints, and the cost of the war effort as the Russian government postures. These policies also demonstrate that the Kremlin will not be able to sustain the protracted war effort for years and decades to come while shielding Russian society from economic challenges. Consistent Western and international support for Ukraine's resistance on the battlefield will further exacerbate Russia's economic problems.

Putin modified compensation promised for Russian servicemen wounded while fighting in Ukraine — a clear indicator that the Kremlin is trying to cut the mounting short- and long-term costs of the war and restore balance to the Russian economy. Putin controversially changed Russian policy guaranteeing a one-time payment of three million rubles (\$30,124) to all Russian servicemen who have been wounded in combat in Ukraine since March 2022.[1] Putin signed a decree on November 13 that restricted the one-time payments of three million rubles only to servicemen who sustained serious injuries in combat, only offering one million rubles (\$10,152) to lightly wounded servicemen, and 100,000 rubles (\$1,015) to servicemen who sustained minor injuries on the battlefield.[2] Putin's decree generated significant backlash from the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community, and Putin attempted to placate this community on November 14 by increasing the one-time payments to four million rubles (\$40,136), but still only for Russian servicemen who sustain severe battlefield injuries that result in a disability.[3] A Russian milblogger noted that Putin's authorization to increase compensation for disabled servicemen does not alter the fact that the Kremlin is renegeing on promises to thousands of Russian servicemen who joined the Russian military solely due to large financial incentives.[4] The milblogger added that Russian military medical commissions are also becoming increasingly — and often deliberately unfairly — selective in diagnosing Russian servicemen with severe injuries.

Putin originally introduced the policy offering all wounded Russian servicemen three million rubles to incentivize military recruitment after he had decided against declaring general mobilization in Spring 2022.[5] Financial incentives became the key pillar of the Russian military's recruitment campaign and personnel retention efforts over the past nearly three years, and the reversal of such incentives indicates that the system is becoming economically unsustainable for the Kremlin. ISW notably assessed in Summer 2022 that the Kremlin's reliance on high financial incentives for force generation was committing Russia to short- and long-term financial responsibilities to thousands of Russians, such as paying veterans pensions, compensations to families of deceased servicemen, and other state benefits.[6]

The Kremlin's efforts to combat inflation and high interest rates are also reportedly impacting the expansion of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) and prospects for mobilizing the economy. The Russian Central Bank recently raised the key interest rate to 21 percent on October 25, which reportedly prompted discontent among Russian politicians, DIB CEOs, and elites. Kremlin-affiliated Center for Macroeconomic Analysis and Short-Term Forecasting (TsMAKP) reported that the Russian economy is "effectively facing the threat of stagflation - simultaneous stagnation or even recession and high inflation" because of the Central Bank's tight monetary policy.[7] TsMAKP assessed that if the Russian Central Bank maintains the key interest rate at around 20 percent until mid-2025 then the composite leading indicator (CLI) for recession will exceed its critical threshold. The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service similarly reported that the number of loans with a dynamic rate — which depends on a discount from the Central Bank — increased from 44 percent in late 2023 to 53 percent in late 2024.[8] The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service added that high interest rates may create a shock and a decline in production, which can result in bankruptcies and corporate defaults. A Kremlin insider source claimed that the Central Bank's tight monetary policy is restraining the Russian DIB's pace of development in the long term and has already complicated several Russian export projects, despite the fact that it had not yet directly impacted Russian military-technological support for the Russian war effort.[9]

The Russian DIB is unlikely to match the production rate necessary to replace Russian weapons losses under these monetary policies. *Foreign Policy* (FP), citing OSINT analysts, reported that Russia has been losing around 320 tank and artillery cannon barrels per month but can only produce 20 per month.[10] FP reported that Russia will likely run out of cannon barrels in 2025 due to battlefield losses, dwindling Soviet stocks, and sanctions impacts. FP also cited OSINT estimates that Russian forces have lost at least 4,955 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) since February 2022 — about 155 IFVs per month. FP reported that Russia can only produce about 17 IFVs monthly or 200 annually. FP assessed that the Central Bank's policy of raising interest rates has made it difficult for nondefense companies to raise capital through loans, which is shrinking the civilian economy and may lead to significant post-war recession as returning Russian veterans will have a harder time finding employment.

The Kremlin is also adopting policies aimed at bolstering the domestic population in the long term, signaling mounting concerns over declining demographics and labor shortages that could threaten the sustainable operations of the Russian DIB. Russian state outlet *RBK* claimed on November 14 that the Russian government has developed a draft Strategy of Action through 2036 to address Russia's increasingly dire demographic issues.[11] The Strategy of Action aims to increase birthrates and promote the family lifestyle by improving support system for families with children and providing birth incentives; solving housing problems to increase the availability of rental, social, and new housing; creating conditions for a more successful work-family balance; improving reproductive health of the population, in particular women's prenatal and infertility care; and enhancing family-positive propaganda in media and the Russian information space. The Strategy of Action is a part of broader efforts by Russian authorities to advance policies aimed at increasing the Russian population both through concrete legislation but also through rhetoric centered on "familial and traditional" values.[12]

ISW previously assessed that Russia's demographic challenges have been worsened by the war with an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 Russians — including many highly qualified workers- fleeing the country since February 2022 likely causing Russian authorities to rely more on migrant populations.[13] Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) data shows that Russia's labor shortage amounted to 4.8 million people in 2023, a problem that has reduced Russia's economic output.[14] Rosstat also estimated in 2023 that Russia's population will decline naturally at a rate of more than 600,000 people per year until 2032. Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged Russia's ongoing labor shortage on November 7 and admitted to Russia's heavy reliance on migrants in order to mitigate the impacts of its waning population on the broader Russian workforce.[15] Putin warned, however, that reliance on migrant populations requires systematic assimilation efforts, likely in response to continued tensions between Russian ultranationalist rhetoric and the need to keep the Russian labor force capacity afloat through migration. Migrant populations are also not likely to yield the desired outcome in Russia given continued racist rhetoric and legislation and lack of skillsets among economic migrants needed to comprise a professional working class. FP reported that the Russian "civilian economy" has experienced personnel shortages and lack of qualified workers due to concerted Russian government efforts to attract Russian laborers to its DIB leading to possible future economic turmoil resulting from labor shortages and declining population. ISW has recently observed Russian authorities revoking migrants' Russian citizenship for refusing to register for military service, an increase in migrant deportations in 2024, protests, and violence against minority communities, among other rhetorical and legal realities that have created obstacles for migrants both to enter and to advance in the Russian workforce.[16] A combination of naturally declining population and aversion to creating conditions conducive to migration and enhancement of the skilled labor workforce will possibly impair the Russian economy and consequently Russian DIB in the mid- to long-term.

Russian forces recently advanced into Kupyansk during a likely roughly company-sized mechanized assault, although ISW does not assess that Russian forces control the area. Geolocated footage published on November 13 shows at least four Russian vehicles conducting an assault, indicating that Russian forces recently advanced southward along a railway line.[17] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that Russian forces attacked in two armored vehicle columns and that one column consisted of one tank and three armored vehicles and the other column consisted of an unspecified composition and number of vehicles.[18] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko reported on November 14 that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in Kupyansk and prevented Russian forces from establishing positions in Kupyansk.[19] The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) reported that Kupyansk is fully under Ukrainian control and reiterated a Ukrainian General Staff report from November 13 stating that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on the settlement.[20] ISW assessed that Russian forces likely advanced in northeastern Kupyansk but very likely do not control the area, and ISW maps currently show areas in northeastern Kupyansk where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control. Russian forces have intensified offensive operations near Kupyansk within the last two months and ISW continues to

assess that the Russian seizure of Kupyansk would generate operationally significant effects.[21] ISW is not prepared to assess whether Russian forces will be able to leverage recent tactical advances to make operationally significant gains, however. Russian forces also continued offensive operations north of Kupyansk near Holubivka; east of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Kolisnykivka, Hlushkivka, Kruhlyakivka, Lozova, Zahryzove, Kucherivka on November 13 and 14.[22]

A recent Russian state-affiliated poll suggests that most Russian residents feel largely unaffected by the war in Ukraine, supporting reports of growing concerns among Russian officials and elites that many citizens remain indifferent towards the war. Kremlin newswire TASS amplified a poll conducted by the Russian state-affiliated Institute of Sociology of the Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences on November 14 revealing that 83 percent of respondents claimed that the "Special Military Operation" did not affect their daily life or affected it only to a slight extent.[23] Patriarch Kirill, head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), claimed on October 31 that some segments of Russian society choose to "turn a blind eye" to the realities of the frontline and the hardships faced by those living in border areas near the conflict, although the war in Ukraine represents the "most urgent threat" to Russia.[24] Kirill condemned Russians who are unwilling to sacrifice their personal comforts, instead relying on "superficial distractions" to avoid confronting the hard realities of the war. ISW assessed that Kirill's remarks likely reflect underlying concerns among Russian authorities, as they suggest possible waning public support for the war effort, potential difficulties in future recruitment efforts, and a growing societal divide between portions of the Russian population most directly affected by the war and those largely insulated from its impacts.[25]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on November 14 that Russian President Vladimir Putin is personally dealing with issues concerning Ukraine and that he requires no special envoys, likely in response to reports that US President-elect Donald Trump will "soon" appoint a "Ukrainian peace envoy to lead negotiations on ending the war."[26]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin's recent economic policies indicate that the Russian economy will likely face significant challenges in 2025 and that Russian President Vladimir Putin is worried about Russia's economic stability in the long term.
- Putin modified compensation promised for Russian servicemen wounded while fighting in Ukraine — a clear indicator that the Kremlin is trying to cut the mounting short- and long-term costs of the war and restore balance to the Russian economy.
- The Kremlin's efforts to combat inflation and high interest rates are also reportedly impacting the expansion of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) and prospects for mobilizing the economy.
- The Russian DIB is unlikely to match the production rate necessary to replace Russian weapons losses under these monetary policies.
- The Kremlin is also adopting policies aimed at bolstering the domestic population in the long term, signaling mounting concerns over declining demographics and labor shortages that could threaten the sustainable operations of the Russian DIB.
- Russian forces recently advanced into Kupyansk during a likely roughly company-sized mechanized assault, although ISW does not assess that Russian forces control the area.
- A recent Russian state-affiliated poll suggests that most Russian residents feel largely unaffected by the war in Ukraine, supporting reports of growing concerns among Russian officials and elites that many citizens remain indifferent towards the war.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on November 14 that Russian President Vladimir Putin is personally dealing with issues concerning Ukraine and that he requires no special envoys, likely in response to reports that US President-elect Donald Trump will "soon" appoint a "Ukrainian peace envoy to lead negotiations on ending the war."
- Russian forces advanced in the Ukrainian main salient in Kursk Oblast, west of Ukraine's main salient in Kursk Oblast in Glushkovsky Raion, in the Chasiv Yar direction, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- Russian sources are speculating that North Korea may have provided North Korean-produced 170mm M1989 "Koksan" self-propelled artillery systems to Russia. Russian milbloggers published images showing a train transporting alleged North Korean 170mm M1989 "Koksan" self-propelled artillery systems in Krasnoyarsk, Krasnoyarsk Krai.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 13, 2024

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

November 13, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on November 13. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 14 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is attempting to dictate the terms of any potential "peace" negotiations with Ukraine in advance of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. The manner in which the Kremlin is trying to set its terms for negotiations strongly signals that Russia's objectives remain unchanged and still amount to full Ukrainian capitulation. The Kremlin does not appear any more willing to make concessions to the incoming Trump administration than it was to the current administration. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on November 13 that Western officials are lying about their interest in peace in Ukraine and that "peace" can only be achieved when the West stops providing military assistance to Ukraine.[1] Zakharova's statement indicates that Russia continues to assert that the West must end all provisions of military assistance to Ukraine as a prerequisite for peace negotiations.[2] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also claimed on November 13 that the start of Trump's presidency would not fundamentally change the US position on Ukraine and that any proposals to freeze the frontline are "even worse" than the Russia-favorable Minsk Agreements that followed Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014.[3]

Lavrov's pre-emptive rejection of the potential suggestion to freeze the current frontline further indicates that Russia is not interested in softening its approach or demands in negotiations and maintains its objective of total Ukrainian capitulation, which Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly outlined in June 2024.[4] Zakharova's and Lavrov's statements also undermine Putin's recent efforts to feign interest in a willingness to "restore" US–Russian relations with the new US presidential administration and instead indicate that Putin likely is taking for granted that the Trump administration will defer to the Kremlin's interests and preferences without the Kremlin offering any concessions or benefits in return.[5] Russian officials notably made these statements against the backdrop of reports that the Trump administration intends to appoint a "Ukrainian peace envoy to lead negotiations on ending the war" and announcements of multiple Trump national security cabinet picks, suggesting that Russia will maintain its goals in Ukraine regardless of the make-up of the incoming Trump administration.[6]

Ukrainian security services reportedly assassinated a Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) official in occupied Crimea on November 13. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on November 13 that sources in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that the SBU conducted a successful special operation in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea and planted an explosive on the car of the BSF's 41st Missile Boat Brigade Chief of Staff Captain First Rank Valery Trankovsky.[7] Trankovsky died from his injuries after the explosion.[8] SBU sources noted that Trankovsky ordered Russian cruise missile strikes from the Black Sea at civilian objects in Ukraine in 2022.[9] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev reported that a car exploded in Sevastopol on the morning of November 13, killing a Russian servicemember, but did not identify the deceased.[10] Razvozhaev claimed that Russian authorities did not rule out sabotage — suggesting that the Russian occupation administration will likely further crackdown against those it deems to be pro-Ukrainian in retaliation for the attack. Geolocated footage shows the aftermath of the car explosion in occupied Sevastopol.[11] Likely Ukrainian partisans have conducted three assassinations of Russian occupation and military officials since late September 2024.[12]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian oil executives reportedly rejected a proposal to merge Russia's three largest oil companies. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on November 13, citing unspecified "people," that Russian President Vladimir Putin shot down the proposal to merge Russian state-owned Gazprom Neft, state-affiliated Rosneft, and independently owned Rosneft.[13] FT's sources attributed the proposed merger to Russian Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilev, the husband of Putin's cousin and Russian State Secretary — Deputy Defense Minister Anna Tsivileva. Former Russian oil executives told FT that, while the merger would have given Gazprom Neft and Rosneft access to Lukoil's UAE-based trading arm, concerns over the ability to circumvent Western sanctions and temporarily reduced oil production also contributed to Putin's rejection of the proposed merger. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) first reported on the proposed merger on November 9 but noted that the Kremlin and Rosneft denied the talks while Gazprom Neft and Lukoil did not comment.[14]

Contradictory reporting on the proposed Russian oil merger highlights a possible factional struggle between close affiliates of Putin and Russian energy executives. FT reported that Tsivilev attempted to utilize his family connection to Putin to promote the deal but that Russian energy

executives also had the political leverage to oppose the proposed merger.[15] Rosneft Head Igor Sechin and Gazprom Head Alexey Miller are both longtime friends and supporters of Putin, and Putin reportedly rejected Tsivilev's proposal on their behalf despite reportedly desiring more direct Kremlin control over Russian oil production and his family connection to Tsivilev.[16] The initial reports of a merger may have been intended to weaken Sechin in particular. The WSJ reported that Sechin was a "main player" in the merger talks and was a possible, but not definite, candidate to lead the resulting company, though Rosneft rejected notions that "Evil Sechin" had "insidious intentions to take over the assets" of other oil companies."[17]

South Korean and US intelligence separately confirmed that North Korean troops have deployed into combat alongside Russian forces in Kursk Oblast. South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) confirmed on November 13 that it "assesses that the North Korean troops deployed to Russia" are already participating in combat after having completed their training and gradual battlefield deployment over the past two weeks.[18] US State Department Spokesperson Vedant Patel stated during a briefing on November 12 that over 10,000 North Korean troops deployed to eastern Russia, most of whom have now moved to western Kursk Oblast "where they have begun engaging in combat operations with Russian forces." [19] ISW assessed on November 5 that North Korean troops had entered combat in Kursk Oblast, citing reports by Ukrainian intelligence and Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin is attempting to dictate the terms of any potential "peace" negotiations with Ukraine in advance of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. The manner in which the Kremlin is trying to set its terms for negotiations strongly signals that Russia's objectives remain unchanged and still amount to full Ukrainian capitulation. The Kremlin does not appear any more willing to make concessions to the incoming Trump administration than it was to the current administration.**
- **Lavrov's pre-emptive rejection of the potential suggestion to freeze the current frontline further indicates that Russia is not interested in softening its approach or demands in negotiations and maintains its objective of total Ukrainian capitulation, which Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly outlined in June 2024.**
- **Ukrainian security services reportedly assassinated a Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) official in occupied Crimea on November 13.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian oil executives reportedly rejected a proposal to merge Russia's three largest oil companies. Contradictory reporting on the proposed Russian oil merger highlights a possible factional struggle between close affiliates of Putin and Russian energy executives.**
- **South Korean and US intelligence separately confirmed that North Korean troops have deployed into combat alongside Russian forces in Kursk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Chasiv Yar.**
- **Russian forces continue to heavily rely on refurbished tanks and armored vehicles pulled from storage to replace vehicle losses during ongoing combat operations, but likely will not be able to sustain these losses in the long term.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 12, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, Olivia Gibson, and George Barros

November 12, 2024, 6:15 pm ET

Russian forces recently advanced during two company-sized mechanized assaults within and south of Kurakhove in western Donetsk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on November 12 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along Zaporizkyi Street in northeastern Kurakhove during a company-sized mechanized assault.[1] The Ukrainian brigade that defended against the mechanized assault reported that Russian forces attacked with 12 armored vehicles and that Ukrainian artillery and drones destroyed three tanks and six infantry fighting vehicles.[2] The Ukrainian brigade reported that three groups of Russian infantry also unsuccessfully attempted to cross the Vovcha River north of Kurakhove at the same time as the mechanized assault. Additional geolocated footage published on November 11 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in northern Dalne (south of Kurakhove) during a reduced company-sized mechanized assault consisting of at least nine

armored vehicles, and Russian forces' recent advances northeast of Dalne and in the fields east and southeast of the settlement are likely a result of the same reduced company-sized mechanized assault.[3] The Ukrainian brigade that repelled the Dalne mechanized assault reported that Ukrainian artillery and tanks destroyed two Russian tanks and six armored vehicles.[4] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on November 12 that forward units of the Russian 20th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) participated in the Russian advance into Dalne.[5] The spokesperson of another Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kurakhove direction reported on November 12 that Russian forces are conducting mechanized assaults of an unspecified echelon near Katerynivka and Antonivka (both northeast of Vuhledar and south of Kurakhove along the C051104 highway) in order to level the frontline in western Donetsk Oblast.[6] Russian advances near Dalne are likely aimed at bypassing the string of settlements north of Vuhledar along the C05114 highway that could have posed a notable challenge to advancing Russian forces.[7] ISW continues to assess that further Russian advances into Dalne and west of the settlement could force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from positions in the pocket north and northeast of Vuhledar, allowing Russian forces to advance along the C051104 highway relatively uncontested and further pressure Ukrainian positions in Kurakhove from the south.[8]

Russian forces continued assaults in other areas of the Kurakhove and Vuhledar directions on November 12. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also advanced north of Kurakhove near Voznesenka, but ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.[9] Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Kurakhove itself; northwest of Kurakhove near Novodmytrivka, Sontsivka, and Zorya; north of Kurakhove near Novoselydivka, Voznesenka, and Kreminna Balka; east of Kurakhove near Maksymilianivka; south of Kurakhove near Dalne; northeast of Vuhledar near Iliinka, Antonivka, and Katerynivka; and northwest of Vuhledar near Trudove on November 11 and 12.[10] A Russian source claimed that worsening weather conditions in the Kurakhove direction are not significantly impacting the tempo of Russian advances.[11] Elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA) and drone operators of the "Aleppo" detachment of the 1472nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (68th Army Corps [AC], Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating in the Kurakhove direction.[12] Mashovets stated that elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces are attacking towards Rozlyv (northwest of Vuhledar and north of Shakhtarske) and that elements of the Russian Central Grouping of Forces and the 8th CAA (Southern Military District [SMD]) are attacking towards Andriivka (west of Kurakhove).[13]

Geolocated footage confirms reports that an explosion damaged the Ternivska Dam at the Kurakhivske Reservoir on November 11. Geolocated footage published on November 12 shows an explosion at the Ternivska Dam south of Stary Terny (northwest of Kurakhove).[14] Ukrainian Kurakhove City Military Administration Head Roman Padun and Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Vadym Filashkin reported on November 11 and 12, respectively, that the explosion and subsequent flooding did not impact any nearby homes, with Filashkin further noting that settlements along the Vovcha River west of the reservoir have not flooded.[15] Padun stated that water continues to flow from the dam but that the entire reservoir will not empty, and Filashkin reported that 15 million cubic meters of water had spilled from the reservoir. Padun reported that Russian forces have been targeting the dam with guided glide bombs for three months (since about August 2024), and ISW observed claims in September 2024 from Russian sources that Russian forces had struck the dam.[16] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported the damage to the dam on November 11 but disagreed about who was responsible for the strike.[17] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces could have struck the dam on November 11 in order to cause significant, long-lasting flooding west of the Kurakhivske Reservoir that could facilitate Russian efforts to envelop Ukrainian forces north and south of Kurakhove.[18] The potential advantages that Russian forces could gain by damaging the dam are currently unclear, however, as the extent and duration of the resulting flooding is reportedly minimal. ISW is unable to attribute who or what damaged the dam.

Recent Western and Ukrainian estimates about the size of the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast do not represent a significant inflection, as Russian forces have spent several months gathering forces for a future counteroffensive effort to expel Ukrainian forces from Russian territory. Ukrainian officials and Western media recently reported that Russia has concentrated a rough total of 50,000 personnel, including about 8,000 - 10,000 North Korean forces, in Kursk Oblast in preparation for an operation to push Ukrainian forces from Russian territory before late January 2025 and suggested that Russia has not redeployed any of these forces from eastern Ukraine.[19] Ukrainian sources estimated in September and October 2024 that Russian forces had already concentrated between 30,000 and 50,000 personnel in Kursk Oblast, including an estimated 35,000 personnel from Russia's Northern Grouping of Forces who were operating in Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod oblasts and northern Kharkiv Oblast prior to the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast in August 2024.[20] US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated on October 31 that 8,000 North Korean soldiers are also currently operating as part of the larger Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast.[21] A Ukrainian servicemember stated on November 11 that Russian forces are also redeploying additional

elements of the 104th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) and several battalions of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (Caspian Flotilla) from western Zaporizhia Oblast to Kursk Oblast, but ISW has not observed independent indications of these redeployments as of this report.[22] ISW observed reports in mid-October 2024 that elements of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment were operating near Chasiv Yar.[23] Ukraine's Pivnich (Northern) Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Vadym Mysnyk reported on November 11 that the Russian military is frequently transferring new reserves to Kursk Oblast due to high personnel and equipment losses.[24] These reserves are likely intended to replace personnel losses and not significantly bolster the existing Russian force grouping in the area.

Ukrainian military officials warned that Russian forces may intensify assaults in Zaporizhia Oblast in the near future. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn told *Reuters* in a November 11 article that Russian forces are moving trained assault groups to forward positions in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast but that it is unclear if the Russian military intends to conduct a unified offensive operation or separate assaults.[25] Voloshyn stated that Russian forces may intensify assaults with armored vehicles, buggies, and motorcycles in the near future since Russian forces have conducted preliminary reconnaissance operations in the area and have increased the number of air strikes in southern Ukraine by 30 to 40 percent in the past two to three weeks.[26] Voloshyn stated on November 9 that Russian forces are concentrating near Kamyanske (northwest of Robotyne and south of Zaporizhzhia City), Hulyaipole (northeast of Robotyne), and Robotyne and are preparing to conduct intensified assaults in these areas.[27] The spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Zaporizhia direction also reported on November 12 that the Russian military is concentrating forces to conduct assaults in the area.[28] The spokesperson also noted that Russian forces are conducting daily infantry assaults in groups of 10 to 20 personnel. ISW has not observed reports that Russian forces have redeployed forces to the Zaporizhia direction from other areas of the frontline, however. Russian forces resumed conducting small-scale attacks on the Zaporizhia frontline near Kamyanske and the Velyka Novosilka salient after a nearly year-long hiatus in early October 2024.[29]

Select Russian defense officials appear to be contradicting Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent assertion that Russia is not interested in forming a unified security bloc against the West. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu met with People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister Wang Yi on November 12 and emphasized that both Russia and the PRC "act from a united position" within international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), UN Security Council, G20, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).[30] Shoigu claimed that the Russia-PRC strategic partnership is not a "military-political alliance similar to those developed during the Cold War" but "surpasses" these relationships. Russian Military-Technical Cooperation Deputy Director Mikhail Babish also stated on November 12 that Russia is ready to discuss the joint development and production of weapons with the PRC — demonstrating growing military support within the Russia-PRC relationship.[31] Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov claimed during a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) defense ministerial meeting on November 12 that BRICS member states recently supported the Kremlin's initiative to establish a "multipolar world" and claimed that the CIS must cooperate to build "indivisible Eurasian security." [32] Belousov claimed that BRICS is focused on finding peaceful settlements in conflicts in the world and forming a multipolar order in order to oppose the "collective West," which Belousov claimed is "trying to undermine regional stability." Putin notably criticized political blocs on November 7, calling for a new world order without blocs, and Shoigu's emphasis on the unity of the Russian-PRC relationship and Belousov's statements seemingly posturing BRICS as in opposition to the "collective West" appear to contradict Putin's statement.[33] BRICS member states also notably adopted the Kazan Declaration during the BRICS summit on October 23, which demonstrated that the Kremlin had not secured the support for or created this alternative security structure, as ISW previously assessed.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces recently advanced during two company-sized mechanized assaults within and south of Kurakhove in western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Geolocated footage confirms reports that an explosion damaged the Ternivska Dam at the Kurakhivske Reservoir on November 11.**
- **Recent Western and Ukrainian estimates about the size of the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast do not represent a significant inflection, as Russian forces have spent several months gathering forces for a future counteroffensive effort to expel Ukrainian forces from Russian territory.**
- **Ukrainian military officials warned that Russian forces may intensify assaults in Zaporizhia Oblast in the near future.**
- **Select Russian defense officials appear to be contradicting Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent assertion that Russia is not interested in forming a unified security bloc**

against the West.

- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Kurakhove and in Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian military reportedly continues to coerce conscripts into signing Russian military service contracts, likely as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 11, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, Olivia Gibson, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 11, 2024, 6:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on November 11. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 12 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces are successfully leveraging their recent seizure of Vuhledar to make tactically significant gains south of Kurakhove in support of ongoing Russian offensive operations that aim to level the frontline and eliminate the Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces intensified offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast in early September 2024 and are currently attempting to envelop Kurakhove from the north and south and to level the frontline between Sontsivka (northwest of Kurakhove) and Shakhtarske (northwest of Vuhledar).[1] Russian forces seized Vuhledar as of October 1 and have advanced north and northwest of Vuhledar in a series of successful mechanized and infantry assaults over the last month.[2] Russian forces have also marginally advanced northeast of Vuhledar near Antonivka and Katerynivka, but ISW is yet to observe confirmation of Russian advances into Yelizavetivka and further west along the C051104 highway.[3] Russian forces are currently several kilometers south of the Romanivka-Uspenivka-Sukhyi Yar line — a string of settlements north of Vuhledar that could pose a notable challenge to Russian forces should Ukrainian forces be able to establish defenses in these settlements. Russian forces appear to be attempting to bypass this line of settlements, however, as geolocated footage published on November 10 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced northeast of Dalne (south of Kurakhove and northwest of Yelizavetivka) and likely hold positions in the fields east and southeast of Dalne.[4] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced into Dalne itself, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these maximalist claims.[5] Further Russian advances into Dalne and west of Dalne could force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from positions in the pocket north and northeast of Vuhledar and allow Russian forces to advance along the C051104 highway relatively uncontested. Such advances would allow Russian forces to further pressure Ukrainian positions in Kurakhove from the south. **ISW is revising its previous assessment that Russian forces would not likely be able to take advantage of the seizure of Vuhledar for further offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast. That assessment was incorrect.**

Russian forces also continued to advance in other areas of the Kurakhove and Vuhledar directions on November 10 and 11. Additional geolocated footage published on November 11 indicates that elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) recently advanced into central Novoselydivka (north of Kurakhove).[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces seized Novoselydivka and advanced near Novooleksiivka and into Sontsivka (both northwest of Kurakhove).[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have advanced into the eastern outskirts of Kurakhove and that there is fighting along Stantsiyna and Kozatska streets.[8] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced into the outskirts of Maksymivka (northwest of Vuhledar) and further north and east of Bohoyavlenka (north of Vuhledar).[9] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that there are unconfirmed reports of Russian forces entering Yelizavetivka.[10] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however. Russian forces continued assaults northeast of Kurakhove near Novodmyrivka, and Sontsivka; north of Kurakhove near Voznesenka, Illinka, Berestky, and Novoselydivka; south of Kurakhove near Dalne; northeast of Vuhledar near Maksymilyanivka, Antonivka, and Katerynivka; and northwest of Vuhledar near Trudove, Kostyantynopolske, Uspenivka, Bohoyavlenka, and Maksymivka on November 10 and 11.[11]

Russian forces reportedly continue to advance in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and Russian advances northwest of Vuhledar and south of Velyka Novosilka may begin to pressure Ukrainian positions in Velyka Novosilka. ISW assessed on November 4 that Russian forces seized Shakhtarske (northeast of Velyka Novosilka and northwest of Vuhledar), and Russian sources have claimed further Russian advances north and west of Shakhtarske since.[12] Russian forces notably resumed tactical ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area in mid-October 2024.[13] Russian milbloggers claimed on November 11 that Russian forces advanced in southern Makarivka (south of Velyka Novosilka and west of Vuhledar), with some milbloggers claiming

that elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) raised a flag over an unspecified area of the settlement.[14] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 11 that Russian forces attacked south of Velyka Novosilka near Makarivka; southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novodarivka and Rivnopil; and west of Velyka Novosilka near Zeleny Pol.[15] This November 11 report and previous Russian milblogger claims suggest that Russian forces are likely engaged in a concerted offensive effort to advance towards Velyka Novosilka from the south and southwest.[16] Russian forces would have to first advance through settlements south of Velyka Novosilka, including Blahodatne, Neskuchne, and Vremivka, in order to reach the southern and southwestern outskirts of Velyka Novosilka, and advances through these settlements could prove costly and time-consuming should Ukrainian forces choose to defend here. Russian forces will likely also leverage positions within Shakhtarske and in the fields south of the settlement to pressure Ukrainian positions in the area and attempt to force Ukrainian forces to withdraw from defensive positions south of Velyka Novosilka.

Russian forces have advanced in western Donetsk Oblast at a moderate tempo, but Russian forces remain highly unlikely to be able to conduct rapid mechanized maneuver that could successfully encircle Ukrainian forces. Russian forces have advanced just over 10 kilometers from the Vuhledar-Prechystivka line over the past five weeks, and the current rate of Russian advance in western Donetsk Oblast — should it continue - would allow Ukrainian units ample time to withdraw from frontline positions without risk of encirclement. The possible future elimination of the Ukrainian salient around Kurakhove does not portend the collapse of the frontline in Donetsk Oblast, moreover, as settlements further west could provide suitably defensible positions for Ukrainian forces in the future. Grinding Russian assaults in western Donetsk Oblast and throughout the frontline will likely continue in the coming weeks and months as the Russian military continues efforts to retain the theater-wide initiative that are degrading Russian manpower and materiel. It remains unclear if Russian forces will be able to exploit further advances in western Donetsk Oblast should Russian forces successfully close this pocket, and the future culmination of Russian offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast will provide Ukrainian forces with an opportunity to contest and possibly seize the battlefield initiative.

Ukrainian and Russian sources stated on November 11 that damage to a dam of the Kurakhivske Reservoir is causing limited flooding in nearby settlements. Ukrainian Kurakhove City Military Administration Head Roman Padun reported on the morning of November 11 that water is flowing near the Ternivska Dam but that Ukrainian authorities cannot inspect the dam to confirm the damage due to constant Russian shelling.[17] Padun stated that there was flooding in Velykonovosilkivska Hromada (west and southwest of the dam). Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Vadym Filashkin reported on the evening of November 11 that the water level in Velykonovosilkivska Hromada had risen by 1.2 meters, but no houses had flooded as of 1600 local time.[18] Filashkin stated that flooding may affect settlements along the Vovcha River in Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts. A Ukrainian Telegram channel reported that sources in Ukrainian emergency services stated that unspecified actors shelled Kurakhove in the morning of November 11, destroying the Ternivska Dam.[19] The channel reported that there was no flooding in Bahatyr, Oleksiivka, Andriivka, and Kostyantynopil (all west of the dam along the Vovcha River). Another Ukrainian Telegram channel stated that roads near the dam are usable but that the movement of armored vehicles on dirt roads is limited.[20] Russian milbloggers and opposition outlets noted that photos circulating on the internet purporting to show damage to the Ternivska Dam actually show the Kozarovytska Dam, which Ukrainian forces destroyed in February 2022 to prevent Russian advances near Kyiv at the start of the full-scale invasion.[21]

Ukrainian and Russian sources disagreed about who was responsible for damaging the dam, but Russian forces reportedly struck the dam in September 2024. Ukrainian Donetsk Oblast Military Administration Head Vadym Filashkin reported on the evening of November 11 that Russian forces struck the dam.[22] Russian milbloggers claimed Ukrainian forces struck the dam to prevent further Russian advances, but some milbloggers noted that these claims are unconfirmed.[23] A Russian milblogger claimed in September 2024 that Russian forces increased their air and ballistic missile strikes targeting dams of the Kurakhove Reservoir in order to disrupt Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) and force Ukrainian forces to use dirt roads near Bahatyr.[24] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted several strikes against the Ternivska Dam on September 18 that disabled the lock control system but did not result in flooding in nearby settlements.[25]

Russian forces may have struck the dam in order to cause significant, long-lasting flooding west of Kurakhivske Reservoir that could facilitate Russian efforts to envelop Ukrainian forces north and south of Kurakhove. Russian forces are currently conducting offensive operations north, southeast, south, and southwest of Kurakhove as part of wider efforts to eliminate the Ukrainian salient in the Kurakhove direction. Russian offensive operations northwest and north of Kurakhove along the Sontsivka-Voznesenka-Novoselydivka line aim to advance southwestward and southward to

envelop the Ukrainian pocket north of the Kurakhivske Reservoir. Russian forces are also attacking along a wide front along the Shakhtarske-Trudove-Antonivka line in order to envelop the Ukrainian salient south of Kurakhove. The Kurakhivske Reservoir is a significant water barrier separating the Ukrainian force groupings north and south of Kurakhove, and Russian forces may have struck the Ternivska Dam in order to flood settlements along the Vovcha River west of the reservoir, extending the water barrier separating these Ukrainian groupings. Russian forces may have also intended for flooding along the river to prevent Ukrainian forces from using the H-15 (Donetsk City-Zaporizhzhia City) highway, a significant Ukrainian GLOC that runs through Kurakhove and just south of the Vovcha River. The potential advantages that Russian forces could gain from the damage to the dam are currently unclear, however, as the extent and duration of the flooding remain unknown at this time.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied on November 11 reports of a recent phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President-elect Donald Trump.

[26] Peskov dismissed reports of Putin and Trump's phone call, claiming that Russian officials have no plans to organize a call between Putin and Trump. The *Washington Post* reported on November 10 that Trump spoke with Putin on November 7 and advised Putin to refrain from further escalation in Ukraine.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are successfully leveraging their recent seizure of Vuhledar to make tactically significant gains south of Kurakhove in support of ongoing Russian offensive operations that aim to level the frontline and eliminate the Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast.
- ISW is revising its previous assessment that Russian forces would not likely be able to take advantage of the seizure of Vuhledar for further offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast. That assessment was incorrect.
- Russian forces reportedly continue to advance in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area, and Russian advances northwest of Vuhledar and south of Velyka Novosilka may begin to pressure Ukrainian positions in Velyka Novosilka.
- Russian forces have advanced in western Donetsk Oblast at a moderate tempo, but Russian forces remain highly unlikely to be able to conduct rapid mechanized maneuver that could successfully encircle Ukrainian forces.
- Ukrainian and Russian sources stated on November 11 that damage to a dam of the Kurakhivske Reservoir is causing limited flooding in nearby settlements.
- Ukrainian and Russian sources disagreed about who was responsible for damaging the dam, but Russian forces reportedly struck the dam in September 2024.
- Russian forces may have struck the dam in order to cause significant, long-lasting flooding west of Kurakhivske Reservoir that could facilitate Russian efforts to envelop Ukrainian forces north and south of Kurakhove.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied on November 11 reports of a recent phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kreminna and Kurakhove.
- Russian regional governments continue to commit large portions of their social budgets towards payments to Russian veterans, likely as part of ongoing efforts to incentivize Russian military service.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 10, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 10, 2024, 3pm ET

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

Ukrainian forces struck Russian ammunition warehouses in Bryansk Oblast during a large-scale Ukrainian drone strike against Russia on the night of November 9 and 10. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that drone operators of the Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces and Ukrainian Armed Forces struck Russian ammunition warehouses at the Russian military's 1060th Logistics Center (formerly Russia's 120th Main Missile and Artillery Management Arsenal) in Bryansk Oblast, causing initial explosions and secondary detonations at the facility.[1] Geolocated imagery

published on November 9 and 10 shows two large fires burning near the facility.[2] Russian authorities claimed that Russian forces downed 32 to 34 Ukrainian drones over Moscow Oblast and that debris from downed Ukrainian drones damaged civilian infrastructure in Ramenskoye Raion.[3] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces downed 84 Ukrainian drones over Russia in total, and Russian milbloggers noted that this was one of the largest strikes against Moscow Oblast since February 2022.[4]

Ukrainian officials continue to report Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war

(POWs). The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported on November 9 that it was investigating a video showing Russian forces executing a captured and unarmed Ukrainian servicemember in violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs.[5] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated that he sent a letter to the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) concerning the reported war crime.[6] ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs and observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appeared to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders. [7]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces struck Russian ammunition warehouses in Bryansk Oblast during a large-scale Ukrainian drone strike against Russia on the night of November 9 and 10.**
- **Ukrainian officials continue to report Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs).**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in the Pokrovsk direction.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 9, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Christopher Paludi, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 9, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Russian forces reportedly lost almost 200 tanks, over 650 armored vehicles, and suffered an estimated 80,000 casualties in taking roughly 1,500 square kilometers during a period of intensified Russian offensive operations in September and October 2024. United Kingdom (UK) Defense Secretary John Healey told UK outlet *The Telegraph* on November 9 that UK defense intelligence estimates that Russian casualties "reached a new high" in October 2024 and that Russian forces suffered an average daily casualty rate of 1,345 troops per day or about 41,980 casualties in October 2024.[1] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD), citing data from the Ukrainian General Staff, previously reported that Russian forces suffered a record high average daily casualty rate of 1,271 troops per day or about 38,130 casualties in September 2024.[2] Russian forces have thus suffered an estimated 80,110 casualties over the last two months – roughly 20,000 more casualties than US forces suffered during almost 20 years of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.[3] Data compiled by Oryx founder Jakub Janovsky indicates that Russian forces also lost 197 tanks, 661 armored personnel carriers (APCs), and 65 artillery systems larger than 100mm throughout the frontline in September and October 2024.[4] Russian forces seized and recaptured a total of 1,517 square kilometers—an area less than a third the size of Delaware—throughout Ukraine and Kursk Oblast over the last two months in exchange for these losses. Russian forces have intensified offensive operations near Kupiansk in Kharkiv Oblast and Selydove, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar in Donetsk Oblast over the last two months and have managed to advance at a marginally faster rate than Russian forces have advanced over the last two years.[5] Russian forces recently seized Vuhledar and Selydove but have yet to make operationally significant advances, and Russian forces have made most of their advances during this time through open fields and small settlements.

Russian forces will eventually make operationally significant gains if Ukrainian forces do not stop ongoing Russian offensive operations, but the Russian military cannot sustain such loss rates indefinitely, especially not for such limited gains. ISW previously observed data indicating that Russian forces have lost at least five divisions' worth of armored vehicles and tanks in Pokrovsk Raion alone since October 2023.[6] Russian forces have likely accumulated a large amount of equipment in priority frontline areas, but dwindling Soviet-era tank and armored vehicle stockpiles and current armored vehicle production rates will likely make such losses prohibitive over the longer term. [7] US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated on October 31 that Russian forces are suffering roughly 1,200 casualties per day, or about 36,000 casualties per month, and ISW has recently observed indications that the Russian military has been struggling to recruit enough soldiers to replace its

frontline losses.[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin notably acknowledged Russia's ongoing labor shortages and dependence on migrants to meet these labor shortages during his November 7 Valdai Club address, and ISW noted that Russia also depends on coercing migrants to join the Russian military to meet its manpower requirements.[9] The Russian military almost certainly cannot indefinitely sustain a daily casualty rate of over 1,200 people so long as Putin remains committed to avoiding another involuntary call-up of reservists.[10] Even an involuntary reserve mobilization will not resolve the larger problem Putin apparently faces in finding enough people to work in Russia's industries while also feeding the front.

Select Russian milbloggers continue to complain about disproportionately high personnel losses, and wider discontent about losses within the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community may also influence Putin's calculus in the future. A former Russian Storm-Z instructor and milblogger complained on November 8 that it takes at least six months to train assault personnel but that the Russian military command is treating assault personnel as "meat" who do not require a high level of training and whose primary task is to "catch drones [and] shrapnel." [11] The milblogger claimed that Russian infantry losses are high due to the ongoing Russian tactic of sending small assault groups in multiple, successive waves in an attempt to overwhelm Ukrainian forces, which the milblogger labeled as "stupid" and "improperly organized." The milblogger concluded that Russian advances "do not seem proportionate to the irretrievably spent resources – human and material." The Russian milblogger community recently criticized the deaths of specialized drone operators whom their commanders sent on assaults as punishment, and the continued use of Russian servicemembers, particularly specialized troops, in unorganized, highly attritional, infantry-led "meat" assaults that result in disproportionately small gains may continue to anger the milblogger community – a group towards which the Kremlin has shown itself to be especially sensitive.[12]

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes on the Aleksin Chemical Plant in Tula Oblast on the night of November 8 to 9. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on November 9 that its sources in Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that the SBU and Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) launched at least 13 drones at the Aleksin Chemical Plant and that a successful strike caused a fire, halting the plant's operations and eventually causing a chemical explosion on the afternoon of November 9.[13] The SBU sources stated that the Aleksin Chemical Plant is a subsidiary of the Russian state defense conglomerate Rostec and that the plant produces ammunition, gunpowder, and other products for the Russian defense industrial base.[14] Footage published on November 9 purportedly shows a strike on the Aleksin Chemical Plant and the subsequent fire. [15] *Suspilne*'s sources stated that Ukrainian drone strikes also damaged a power transmission line at the nearby Aleksinskaya Thermal Power Plant.[16] Tula Oblast Governor Dmitry Milyaev claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian drone strike near Aleksin but that falling drone debris damaged several houses.[17]

Russian authorities are reportedly considering merging Russia's three largest oil companies -- Rosneft, Gazprom Neft, and Lukoil, likely to help Russia reach more advantageous energy deals with non-Western states. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on November 9, citing sources familiar with the matter, that Russian officials and executives are negotiating a possible merger between state-affiliated Rosneft, state-owned Gazprom Neft, and independently-owned Lukoil that would create the second-largest crude oil production company in the world.[18] The WSJ reported that Rosneft Head and close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin Igor Sechin is a "main player" in the ongoing talks and that the merger may be aimed at extracting higher prices for Russian oil from India or the People's Republic of China (PRC). The WSJ's sources stated that the deal is still subject to change and that it is unclear whether Sechin would head the merged company, and representatives of the Kremlin, Gazprom Neft, Lukoil, and Rosneft all denied the talks. Gazprom Neft's parent company, Gazprom, has lost significant revenues from a drop in energy sales since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.[19] Longtime Gazprom Head Alexey Miller reportedly failed to reach a deal with the PRC in early 2024 due to disagreements over the proposed Power of Siberia-2 (PS-2) gas pipeline, and Putin emphasized in his November 7 Valdai Club address that Russia is willing to sell oil, gas, and nuclear energy to the PRC to compensate for the PRC's energy supplies lost due to Western sanctions.[20] The Kremlin may be trying to consolidate its influence in the global energy market to reach more advantageous energy deals, particularly with the PRC, amid falling revenues from international energy exports and increased federal spending on national security and defense.

Russian authorities arrested a former Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) construction official for fraud on November 9. Russian authorities arrested former Russian MoD Special Construction Directorate Head Alexander Molodchenko and two other unspecified defendants on suspicion of fraud after reportedly "misleading" Russian MoD officials about the fulfillment of state construction contracts. [21] Molodchenko was reportedly dismissed from his post as MoD Special Construction Directorate head in September 2024.

The US Department of Defense (DOD) reportedly stated on November 8 that it will send a "small number" of US defense contractors to rear areas of Ukraine to repair US-provided weapons and equipment. The *Washington Post* reported that the US defense contractors will repair F-16 fighter jets, Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, and unspecified air defense systems.[22] An unspecified US defense official told *CNN* that the contractors will be located "far from" the frontline and noted that F-16s and Patriot air defense systems "require specific technical expertise to maintain." [23] The DoD told the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) in a November 9 article that keeping these weapons systems mission-capable is "critical" for Ukraine's defense. [24] A senior Biden administration official told the WSJ that the US is also providing over 500 interceptors for Patriot missile systems and NASAMS to Ukraine, which will likely arrive in the coming weeks. [25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces reportedly lost almost 200 tanks, over 650 armored vehicles, and suffered an estimated 80,000 casualties in taking roughly 1,500 square kilometers during a period of intensified Russian offensive operations in September and October 2024.
- Russian forces will eventually make operationally significant gains if Ukrainian forces do not stop ongoing Russian offensive operations, but the Russian military cannot sustain such loss rates indefinitely, especially not for such limited gains.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes on the Aleksin Chemical Plant in Tula Oblast on the night of November 8 to 9.
- Russian authorities are reportedly considering merging Russia's three largest oil companies -- Rosneft, Gazprom Neft, and Lukoil, likely to help Russia reach more advantageous energy deals with non-Western states.
- Russian authorities arrested a former Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) construction official for fraud on November 9.
- The US Department of Defense (DOD) reportedly stated on November 8 that it will send a "small number" of US defense contractors to rear areas of Ukraine to repair US-provided weapons and equipment.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Siversk and Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha stated on November 9 that Ukrainian intelligence assesses that Russia will be able to produce 30 percent more artillery shells than all European Union (EU) countries combined in 2025 should the EU fail to implement additional measures, such as sanctions, against Russia's defense industrial base (DIB).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 8, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 8, 2024, 7:15pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be assuming that US President-elect Donald Trump will defer to the Kremlin's interests and preferences without the Kremlin offering any concessions or benefits in return. Putin stated during his November 7 Valdai Club address that he is open to discussions meant to "restore" US-Russia relations but that the United States must initiate these negotiations, and implied that Russia will only consider a reset in US-Russia relations if the United States drops sanctions against Russia and ceases supporting Ukraine – terms that exclusively benefit Russia and offer no benefit to the United States. [1] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov noted on November 8 that Putin's statement about negotiating with the United States does not mean that Russia's military goals in Ukraine have changed and that instead, Russia's goals remain the same. [2] Putin may be attempting to posture himself as reaching out to Trump, but Putin is signaling to his domestic audiences that the Kremlin is unwilling to concede any aspect of its maximalist objectives in Ukraine or the wider global arena.

Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that the Kremlin issued a manual to state and pro-Kremlin media with instructions to cover Putin's Valdai statements by highlighting the special role Russia plays in bringing about a proposed "new world order" and portraying Putin as the "world's greatest leader" whose deep thinking, "breadth of political thought," and role as the "voice of the global majority and new world order" distinguish him from Western political leaders, presumably including Trump. [3] *Meduza* noted that, by contrast, the manual does not mention reporting Putin's statements about Trump or possible future negotiations with the United States about the war in Ukraine, even though

Putin largely aimed his Valdai statements at shaping Trump's foreign policy and achieving another reset in US-Russian relations on Russia's terms.[4]

Putin's proposed "new world order" emphasizes an interconnected international system without great powers or security blocs, but the Kremlin's actions contradict and undermine his proposed ideals and principles. Putin presented a six-point plan for his "new world order," which includes: an openness among states to interact with each other; the absence of universal dogmas; an accounting for all countries' perspectives when making global decisions; the rejection of security blocs that unite groups of states; "justice for all," including eradicating xenophobia and intolerance; and the "sovereign equality" of all states.[5] Putin's proposal ignores the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to increase its power and influence in neighboring countries, including destabilization efforts in Moldova and Georgia; courting a group of anti-Western states such as North Korea, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iran; and conducting its illegal and unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine.[6] The Kremlin likely aims to use this rhetoric to distract from and provide plausible deniability against the very real Russian efforts to undermine pro-Western governments and exert its influence internationally, as well as promote the expansion of BRICS and the so-called "new Eurasian security architecture" that the Kremlin has created to oppose NATO.

Putin also acknowledged that Russia is dealing with a serious labor shortage and is largely reliant on migrants to address it. Putin stated during his speech at the Valdai Club that one of the main obstacles to Russia's economic growth is Russia's ongoing labor shortages.[7] Putin stated that Russia currently has half a million people employed in the construction industry and that the industry could accommodate another 600,000 workers without "even notic[ing]." Putin stated that the construction industry currently needs at least 250,000 additional workers but noted that Russia must first create the conditions for migrants to successfully assimilate into Russian society in order to avoid "irritation" in Russian society between migrants and ethnic Russians. Putin stated that Russia should ensure that migrants who move to Russia can speak Russian and are educated and "well-trained professionals" who are knowledgeable about and compliant with Russian laws and traditions.

Russian authorities and ultranationalist voices routinely vilify migrants, particularly Central Asian migrants, as "dangerous" and unwilling to assimilate into Russian society despite Russia's reliance on these migrants to address its labor and force generation needs.[8] Putin appears to be acknowledging domestic concern about migrant assimilation while justifying Russia's continued need to import labor from abroad, although Russian authorities have consistently struggled to balance placating xenophobia in Russian society with protecting and welcoming the migrant labor that Russia desperately needs.[9] Russia is unlikely to overcome its labor shortages in the near future unless the Kremlin approves significant changes to Russia's migration and labor laws and facilitates greater acceptance of migrants in Russian society or curtails its manpower requirements for and losses in its invasion of Ukraine.

Putin doubled down on an existing information operation falsely claiming that Ukraine violated its neutral status in an attempt to justify Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Putin, answering a question about which borders of Ukraine Russia recognizes, claimed that Russia always recognized Ukraine's borders as defined in the 1991 Ukrainian Declaration of Independence as long as Ukraine agreed to remain neutral, but said that Russia did not agree when Ukraine announced its intent to join NATO.[10] Putin did not mention, however, that Ukraine's parliament did not vote to abandon Ukraine's neutral status until December 2014 – months after Russia's illegal invasion and annexation of Crimea in February and March 2014 respectively.[11] Russia also committed to respecting the independence, sovereignty, and existing borders of Ukraine, including Crimea and Donbas, in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in exchange for the return and decommissioning of Soviet-era nuclear weapons in Ukraine.[12] Putin also attempted to use Article I of the UN Charter on the right to self-determination to justify Russia's invasions of Crimea in 2014 and broader invasion in 2022, claiming that these occupied areas voted to join Russia.[13] Russia notably conducted sham annexation referendums in Crimea in 2014 and Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts in 2022 under conditions of occupation and intense militarization, using the referendums to create a veneer of legality and local support for Russia's occupation.[14]

Putin notably attempted to downplay Russia's burgeoning relationship with North Korea during his November 7 Valdai Club statements, likely in an effort to maintain some semblance of a relationship with South Korea and discourage South Korean support for Ukraine. Putin responded to a question about the recently ratified Russia-North Korea strategic comprehensive partnership agreement and claimed that it is simply a "return" to a treaty that existed between the Soviet Union and North Korea and that the 2024 agreement represents "nothing new." [15] Putin also responded to a question about the possibility of joint Russia-North Korea military exercises, asking "Why not?" and noting that the current agreement contains a mutual defense clause that would enable such exercises. Putin then once again repeated that "there is practically nothing new" in the current

agreement. Putin's constant characterization of Russia and North Korea's relations as "nothing new" contrasts sharply with the historically unprecedented deployment of up to 12,000 North Korean troops to fight in Russia and recent reports that North Korean troops have already engaged in combat against Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast.[16]

South Korea has recently signaled its possible willingness to increase support for Ukraine given North Korea's explicit alignment with Russia, and Putin likely assessed that it is undesirable for South Korea to militarily support Ukraine.[17] Putin likely hoped that using the Valdai Club as a platform to downplay Russia's relationship with, and reliance on, North Korea in front of an international audience, including representatives of the Asian-Pacific region, would somewhat assuage South Korea's concerns. While Putin is downplaying this relationship to an international audience, other Kremlin officials are more accurately characterizing the relationship as "unprecedented" and "historic" during engagements with North Korean officials--emphasizing the delicate rhetorical balance that Russia now must strike in order to retain North Korean support without drawing Seoul more directly into the fight.[18]

The Kremlin continues to build its relationship with Venezuela as a means of consolidating and expanding its influence in the Western hemisphere. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko met with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Executive Vice President Delcy Rodriguez in Caracas on November 8 and participated in the 18th meeting of the High-Level Russia-Venezuela Intergovernmental Commission.[19] Chernyshenko and Maduro signed 17 total agreements, including eight strategic-level agreements that will be in force until 2030.[20] Several of the signed agreements pertain to shared intelligence-gathering and counter-espionage, as well as the joint development and use of drones and petroleum exploration technologies.[21] Venezuelan state media notably claimed that Chernyshenko emphasized Russia's willingness to support "the needs of the Venezuelan armed forces with more sophisticated weapons and military equipment," although Russia is very unlikely to be able to supply Venezuela (or any foreign partner) with advanced military technology in the immediate to medium term due to the constraints of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.[22] Chernyshenko also visited a Russian-language education center in Caracas, which a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed shows that Venezuela is eager to promote Russian language study in order to enable long-term Russo-Venezuelan cooperation.[23]

Russia has long supported Maduro's regime both economically and militarily, in large part to contest US influence in the Western hemisphere and to paint Russia as a competitive and capable global power.[24] Russia and Venezuela most recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) against unspecified external "coercive measures" in June 2024, which ISW assessed at the time was intended to demonstrate to the United States that Russia holds power in South America.[25] Venezuela also extradited two Colombian citizens who fought with the Ukrainian Armed Forces in August 2024 on Russia's behalf, further demonstrating the alignment between the Maduro and Putin regimes.[26]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 8 that Ukrainian forces recorded 323 cases of Russian forces using ammunition equipped with chemical agents banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in October 2024 alone.[27] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continue to use banned chemical agents, including grenades and other ammunition filled with harmful but not necessarily lethal riot control agents (RCAs), against Ukrainian forces, and that a significant portion of these weapons contain unidentified chemical compounds. The use of RCAs in combat is a violation of the CWC, to which Russia is a signatory.[28] ISW has consistently reported on Russian forces using chemical substances in combat that are banned by the CWC.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be assuming that US President-elect Donald Trump will defer to the Kremlin's interests and preferences without the Kremlin offering any concessions or benefits in return.**
- **Putin's proposed "new world order" emphasizes an interconnected international system without great powers or security blocs, but the Kremlin's actions contradict and undermine his proposed ideals and principles.**
- **Putin also acknowledged that Russia is dealing with a serious labor shortage and is largely reliant on migrants to address it.**
- **Putin doubled down on an existing information operation falsely claiming that Ukraine violated its neutral status in an attempt to justify Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Putin notably attempted to downplay Russia's burgeoning relationship with North Korea during his November 7 Valdai Club statements, likely in an effort to maintain some**

semblance of a relationship with South Korea and discourage South Korean support for Ukraine.

- The Kremlin continues to build its relationship with Venezuela as a means of consolidating and expanding its influence in the Western hemisphere.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 8 that Ukrainian forces recorded 323 cases of Russian forces using ammunition equipped with chemical agents banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in October 2024 alone.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in northern Novoivanovka, Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced south of Chasiv Yar, southeast of Kurakhove, and north of Vuhledar.
- Regional Russian authorities continued to promote the expansion of newly established regional territorial defense formations by highlighting efforts to recruit women.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 7, 2024

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

Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

November 7, 2024, 7:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on November 7. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 8 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to shape US President-elect Donald Trump's foreign policy and achieve another Russia–US reset on Russia's terms. Putin addressed the 21st annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club on November 7 and advocated for a reset of US–Russia relations. Putin implied that Trump's presidential campaign expressed a "desire to restore relations with Russia, to help end the Ukrainian crisis" and later noted that Russia is open to the "possibility of restoring relations with the United States."^[1] Putin attempted to blame the United States for undermining US–Russia relations, noting that the United States imposed sanctions and restrictions on Russia, and chose to support Kyiv - without mentioning that these measures were in response to Russia's illegal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin's statement implies that Russia would only accept any reset in US–Russia relations if the US dropped sanctions and restrictions against Russia and stopped supporting Ukraine — effectively entirely on terms that benefit Russia at the expense of US interests. Putin reiterated the boilerplate narrative that NATO is a "blatant anachronism," accused the West of maintaining a bloc-oriented mentality, and deliberately misrepresented his invasion of Ukraine as NATO's efforts to remain relevant. Putin attempted to frame BRICS as a non-bloc alternative to NATO and falsely implied that Russia is not interested in becoming a hegemon, despite the fact that the Kremlin has been forming a new anti-Western bloc composed of Iran, North Korea, and China.

A recent failed Russian assault northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka prompted outrage from some Russian ultranationalist milbloggers over Russian command failures and the pervasive Russian military culture of exaggerating battlefield successes. Russian milbloggers claimed that the commander of the 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Combined Arms Army, formerly 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps) ordered the brigade's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd motorized rifle battalions and 4th Tank Battalion to conduct a simultaneous frontal assault against Ukrainian positions near Bilohorivka without adequate fire support on November 2.^[2] The milbloggers complained that the assault was unsuccessful and resulted in steep personnel, tank, and infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) losses. The milbloggers reiterated their long-standing critiques that Russian military field commanders produce "beautiful reports" and maps that deliberately inflate Russian frontline advances and send these false reports to senior Russian military leadership. Russian milbloggers claimed that field commanders send these false reports to secure promotions at the cost of Russian servicemen's lives and military equipment losses.^[3] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) had claimed in late October 2024 that Russian forces had seized Serebryanka (just west of Bilohorivka), and Russian milbloggers may have been referring to this claim in their critiques.^[4] Bilohorivka is a particular sore spot for the Russian ultranationalist community because Russian forces have impaled themselves on assaults to take the settlement since at least May 2022. The Russian military command most notably launched a catastrophic river crossing to take Bilohorivka in May 2022 that failed, resulting in significant Russian armored vehicle losses.^[5]

A Russian brigade commander and a sniper platoon commander were reported killed in combat recently in the Kurakhove and Chasiv Yar directions. Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported on November 7 that Major General Pavel Klimenko, commander of the

Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA]), was killed in combat in Ukraine.[6] Klimentyev had reportedly served in occupied Crimea before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 and was promoted to Major General in May 2024. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported in August 2024 that soldiers under Klimentyev's command had been involved in the torture of conscientious objectors and Russian personnel in an abandoned mine near Donetsk City.[7] ISW recently observed elements of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade fighting in the Kurakhove direction.[8] A Russian milblogger claimed on November 5 that Russian Deputy Commander of the Sniper Platoon of the 88th "Hispaniola" Volunteer Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) Pavel Alexandrovich Apalkov, nicknamed "Joker," was killed in combat in the Chasiv Yar direction.[9]

Ukrainian authorities continue to report systematic Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), noting a clear increase in such executions in 2024. Head of the Department for Combating Crimes Committed in Armed Conflict of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office Denys Lysenko stated on November 6 that Ukrainian authorities are investigating 49 criminal cases involving the Russian execution of 124 Ukrainian POWs.[10] Lysenko stated that the number of Russian forces' executions of Ukrainian POWs increased sharply since the end of 2023 and reached "unprecedented levels" in 2024. The highest numbers of executions occurred in Donetsk Oblast, where Russian forces executed 62 Ukrainian POWs in 17 separate incidents, followed by Zaporizhia and Kharkiv oblasts. ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs in violation of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs and has observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appeared to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders.[11]

Ukrainian strikes on Russia and Western sanctions are reportedly disrupting Russia's energy industry. The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service reported on November 6 that Russian authorities partially halted operations of Russia's Volgograd; Ilsky, Krasnodar Krai; and Yaisky, Kemerovo Oblast oil refineries in October 2024 due to failure to complete scheduled repairs of damage caused by Ukrainian strikes.[12] The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service stated that the shutdowns will reduce domestic Russian refining capacity, hinder exports, worsen fuel supply issues in Russia, and raise maintenance and modernization costs. The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service noted that Russian authorities could not complete the repairs because they lacked the necessary Western equipment and components as a result of Western sanctions and failed import substitution efforts. The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service reported that Russian manufacturers only supply 30 to 45 percent of the necessary components for Russian oil refineries and that the Russian reliance on Chinese equipment has proven problematic due to compatibility issues, which is increasing the repair costs. ISW previously reported on the effectiveness of Western sanctions and the need to strengthen them to prevent Russia from evading their impact via third parties, as well as the effectiveness of Ukrainian strikes on targets inside Russia.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to shape US President-elect Donald Trump's foreign policy and achieve another Russia-US reset on Russia's terms.
- A recent failed Russian assault northeast of Siversk near Bilohorivka prompted outrage from some Russian ultranationalist milbloggers over Russian command failures and the pervasive Russian military culture of exaggerating battlefield successes.
- A Russian brigade commander and a sniper platoon commander were reported killed in combat recently in the Kurakhove and Chasiv Yar directions.
- Ukrainian authorities continue to report systematic Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), noting a clear increase in such executions in 2024.
- Ukrainian strikes on Russia and Western sanctions are reportedly disrupting Russia's energy industry.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Russian authorities are reportedly creating "fake" non-combat volunteer battalions in occupied Ukraine and merging them with existing Cossack organizations led by occupation administrations.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 6, 2024](#)

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

Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, William Runkel, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

November 6, 2024, 4:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on November 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian naval base in Kaspiysk, Republic of Dagestan for the first time on November 6 damaging several missile ships of the Russia Caspian Sea Flotilla. Ukrainian media outlets, citing Ukraine's military intelligence, reported that the Ukrainian drones struck a naval base in damaging the *Tatarstan* and *Dagestan* Gepard-class frigates (Project 11661) and possibly damaging several nearby Buyan-class corvettes (Project 21631).[1] Republic of Dagestan Head Sergei Melikov claimed on November 6 that Russian forces downed a Ukrainian drone over Kaspiysk without specifying the consequences.[2] Satellite imagery collected on November 6 indicates the presence of three likely Russian Buyan-class vessels, two likely Buyan-M-class vessels, one likely Tarantul-class vessel, one likely Gepard-class vessel, and one likely Karakurt-class vessel present on the day of the strike in the port of Kaspiysk, although the images are insufficient for identifying damage to ships or naval piers.[3] Geolocated footage published on November 6 shows drones striking near port infrastructure in Kaspiysk.[4]

Ukrainian authorities reported that Russian forces executed at least 109 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) since the start of the full-scale invasion amid new reports of Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs. Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Head of the Department of Combating Crimes Committed in Conditions of Armed Conflict, Yuri Bilousov, reported on November 1 that Russian forces have executed at least 109 Ukrainian POWs since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and that Russian forces have intensified the number of POW executions they commit in 2024.[5] The Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported on November 5 that it has launched an investigation into new reports of Russian forces executing six captured Ukrainian POWs: three near Selydove, Donetsk Oblast on October 23 and three others also in the Pokrovsk direction on November 1.[6] ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appeared to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders.[7]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian naval base in Kaspiysk, Republic of Dagestan for the first time on November 6 damaging several missile ships of the Russia Caspian Sea Flotilla.**
- **Ukrainian authorities reported that Russian forces executed at least 109 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) since the start of the full-scale invasion amid new reports of Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in the Kupyansk, Svatove, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions.**
- **A prominent Russian brigade commander and official indicated that Russian commanders and civilian leadership explicitly view Russian military volunteers as expendable resources, consistent with high casualty rates across the frontline.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 5, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and George Barros

November 5, 2024, 5:45pm ET

The first North Korean forces have likely officially engaged in combat against Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated 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 but emphasized that it will take more time for the entire contingent of North Korean forces to deploy to Kursk Oblast and enter combat.[1] A source in Ukraine's special services also told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* that the first combat clashes between Ukrainian and North Korean forces have occurred but stated that these are not "large connections" between Ukrainian and North Korean forces.[2] Umerov noted that it would be difficult for Ukrainian forces to quickly ascertain North Korean casualty counts from the initial fighting because North Korean soldiers have been "mixed in" with the Russian army and are "disguised" as soldiers from the Republic of Buryatia, which notably suggests that the Russian military is trying to integrate North Korean

combat power into the Russian force structure, as opposed to maintaining separate North Korean units fighting under Russian command.[3] North Korean force structure under Russia's command remains unclear, however. Umerov forecasted that more North Korean personnel will finish deploying within a few weeks once they complete training in the Russian Far East.[4] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky estimated on November 4 that there are already 11,000 North Korean personnel in Kursk Oblast, although the majority of this number is likely not yet on the frontline.[5] ISW continues to assess that Russia will likely leverage North Korean manpower to first and foremost repel the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, and that in return North Korean troops hope to gain combat and military-technical experience in the conditions for a contemporary and technologically driven war.[6]

The Kremlin appointed the first-ever "Time of Heroes" program participant to a federal-level position, furthering its ongoing effort to staff government positions with pro-war veterans and set long-term conditions for the militarization of Russian government bodies from local to federal levels. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on November 4 appointing Yevgeny Pervyshov as Acting Head of Tambov Oblast.[7] Pervyshov is a veteran of the war in Ukraine and an alumnus of the Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" program and is the first veteran of the war in Ukraine to hold the position of head of a Russian federal subject.[8] ISW previously reported that Putin met with Pervyshov during a "Time of Heroes" meeting on June 14, during which Pervyshov told Putin that he believes that "Time of Heroes" participants and alumni like himself would make effective government officials and emphasized his personal political experience as a State Duma Deputy and former mayor of Krasnodar City.[9] Putin offered Pervyshov a job as a regional head in response.[10] Pervyshov previously fought in the "Grom-Kaskad" unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) Brigade, formerly part of the (now-disbanded) BARS "Kaskad" Battalion that formed in 2017 as part of the Donetsk People's Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs (DNR MVD).[11] Putin also notably appointed Maria Kostyuk, the head of the "Time of Heroes" program whose son died fighting in Ukraine in August 2022, to the position of acting governor of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast.[12] Putin's appointments of Pervyshov and Kostyuk support ISW's assessment that the Kremlin is using the "Time of Heroes" program to cultivate a cadre of loyal pro-war veterans who will assume government roles to appease the Russian servicemembers who make up one of Putin's core constituencies, to boost domestic support for the war, and militarize Russian local and federal government in the medium to long-term.[13]

Russia launched two Iranian-made satellites into orbit on November 5 via a Russian space-launch vehicle, furthering a trend of Russian-Iranian bilateral space cooperation.[14] The Russian Soyuz 2.1b launch vehicle took off from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Amur Oblast on the morning of November 5, launching 53 satellites into a 500-kilometer-high orbit. Iranian media reported that the launch included the Iranian "Kousar" and "Hodhod" satellites.[15] The "Kousar" satellite is reportedly a high-resolution sensing satellite that images the Earth's surface for agricultural, natural resource management, and environmental purposes, whereas the "Hodhod" satellite is designed to create satellite communications and Internet of Things (IoT) networks to enable communications with hard-to-reach areas.[16] A private Iranian company — Omid Faza — built and designed the satellites.[17] Russia previously launched the Iranian "Khayyam" (alternatively referred to as the Kanopus-V) remote-sensing satellite and the Pars-1 research satellite into orbit in August 2022 and February 2024, respectively.[18] ISW-CTP previously assessed that Iran may leverage these satellites to enable long-range targeting capabilities for attacks abroad.[19] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger hailed the "Kousar" and "Hodhod" launches as the latest example of "growing bilateral cooperation" between Russia and Iran in the space sector.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- **The first North Korean forces have likely officially engaged in combat against Ukrainian troops in Kursk Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin appointed the first-ever "Time of Heroes" program participant to a federal-level position, furthering its ongoing effort to staff government positions with pro-war veterans and set long-term conditions for the militarization of Russian government bodies from local to federal levels.**
- **Russia launched two Iranian-made satellites into orbit on November 5 via a Russian space-launch vehicle, furthering a trend of Russian-Iranian bilateral space cooperation.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupiansk, northwest of Kreminna, in Chasiv Yar, near Toretsk, southeast of Pokrovsk, northeast of Kurakhove, near Vuhledar, and north of Robotyne.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions south of Chasiv Yar.**
- **The Russian military is struggling to maintain a sufficient number of quality personnel within traditionally elite forces.**

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

Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

November 4, 2024, 6:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on November 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian and pro-Kremlin actors launched an information operation on November 4 to discredit incumbent Moldovan President Maia Sandu's victory in the Moldovan presidential elections. The Moldovan Central Election Commission (CEC) confirmed on November 4 that Sandu won 55.35 percent of the vote, defeating Kremlin-friendly opponent Alexandr Stoianoglo.[1] Numerous world leaders congratulated Sandu on November 3 and 4, and international election observers largely commended the conduct of the elections in spite of Russian attempts to sway the outcomes against Sandu.[2] Pro-Russian opposition parties and officials attempted to discredit Sandu's victory, with the Moldovan Socialist party calling her "an illegitimate president"; Kremlin-affiliated Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor telling Russian state TV channel *Rossiia-24* that the Moldovan opposition has 'evidence' of mass falsifications in favor of Sandu; and pro-Kremlin former Moldovan president Igor Dodon telling Kremlin newswire *TASS* that Sandu only won because of the Moldovan diaspora vote.[3] The Russian information space, including Russian milbloggers, echoed the words of the pro-Russian Moldovan opposition claiming that Moldovan elections were controlled by 'European bureaucrats' and that Moldovans had no agency in determining the outcome of the elections.[4] ISW previously reported on Russia's systematic efforts to interfere in the Moldovan election in order to derail the passage of Moldova's European Union (EU) referendum and Sandu's victory.[5]

Georgian civil society and opposition resumed peaceful demonstrations on November 4 against the highly contested October 26 Georgian parliamentary elections, calling for continued resistance and further investigations into large-scale voting irregularities. Thousands of Georgians gathered in the center of Tbilisi and reiterated their refusal to acknowledge the increasingly pro-Russian Georgian Dream party's victory in an election marred by large-scale evidence of voting irregularities and Russian influence.[6] The opposition outlined three main goals for the protest movement: 1) continuing efforts to collect evidence demonstrating the elections were not free and fair; 2) urging the international community to refrain from acknowledging the election results; and 3) practicing their right to assemble and to resist the results.[7] Georgian legal entities ranging from the Tbilisi City Court to the Georgian Prosecutor's Office have dismissed some of the demands of the Georgian opposition and civil society and cast doubt on allegations of systematic voter fraud, while showing some willingness to conduct investigations into claims of irregularity.[8] The opposition announced its intention to conduct regular protests while calling for international investigations into election falsification and internationally administered snap elections.[9]

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Sistema project released an investigation on November 4 detailing Russia's initial 2022 demands for Ukraine's total capitulation, further supporting ISW's long-standing assessment that Russia has never been willing to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine on any terms but its own.[10] *RFE/RL* reported on November 4 that it obtained a draft of the treaty that Russia offered to Ukraine on March 7, 2022, entitled "Treaty on the Settlement of the Situation in Ukraine and the Neutrality of Ukraine." The draft document includes seven provisions, all of which amount to Ukraine's complete surrender and disarmament and the abandonment of its sovereignty, lands, and people. The document calls for Ukraine to reduce its army from nearly 197,000 personnel to 50,000 personnel, which *RFE/RL* notes would have meant that the Ukrainian army would be smaller than the Belarusian army, despite the fact that the Belarusian population in 2022 was one-fifth of the Ukrainian population. The document also states that Ukraine would not be able to develop, produce, buy, or deploy missile systems with a range of more than 250 kilometers; that Ukraine would have to recognize occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) and cede parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that Ukraine still controlled in March 2022; that Ukraine would have to commit to the financial costs of rebuilding parts of the Donbas that Russia had destroyed following its initial 2014 invasion; that Ukraine and the international community would lift all sanctions and cancel all lawsuits that had been levied against Russian since 2014; that Ukraine would grant the Russian language the status of a "state language" and restore all property rights of the Kremlin-controlled Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate; and that Ukraine would re-legalize Soviet and communist symbols.[11] In essence, Moscow was asking Ukraine to willingly give up its military, its

offensive and defensive capabilities, its land, a significant portion of its population and economic capacity, and cease protecting its language, history, and culture.

The Kremlin has been incessant in its claims that it set out to negotiate in March 2022 (after illegally invading Ukraine) but that it was Ukraine and the collective West that destroyed the prospect of negotiations.[12] The *RFE/RL* investigation supports ISW's long-standing assessment that this was never the case, however, and that Russia never intended to negotiate in good faith with Ukraine.[13] Russia presented outrageous demands calling for Ukraine to surrender its security and sovereignty, knowing that Ukraine would (rightly) refuse to do so, and then blamed Ukraine for the supposed "failure" of negotiations. ISW continues to assess that Russia has constructed a narrative around the concept of negotiations that it is using in an effort to encourage the West to make concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the *RFE/RL* investigation emphasizes that Russia's "diplomatic" engagements with Ukraine and the West since the full-scale invasion have always been oriented around this destructive objective.[14]

Russian drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in Summer 2024 reportedly significantly impacted Ukrainian electrical generation capacity compared to March 2024, though it is unclear whether Russia had been able to inflict significant further damage on the Ukrainian energy grid since. Ukrainian energy experts told *Politico* in an article published on November 4 that Ukrainian power generation capacity decreased by over nine gigawatts between March 2024 and Summer 2024 after Russian forces launched more than 200 missiles and drones at Ukraine's power production facilities in late August 2024.[15] Experts estimated that Ukrainian power production facilities generated 37.6 gigawatts of electricity in early 2022, likely referring to the period prior to the start of the Russian drone and missile campaign targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure in October 2022; 18.3 gigawatts in April 2023; 21.4 gigawatts in March 2024; and 12.1 gigawatts in Summer 2024. *Politico* noted that the extent of the damage that Russian strikes inflicted on Ukrainian power production facilities in August 2024 is unknown, and the data does not represent Ukraine's most updated energy generation capacity as of November 2024. A Ukrainian energy expert told *Politico* that Ukraine needs additional air defense systems to protect its energy infrastructure. Artur Lorkowski, Director of The Energy Community (an international organization that manages Ukraine's energy procurement), also stated 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 like auto transformers.

The Kremlin-awarded founder and director of the prominent *Rybar* Telegram channel and social media project attempted to falsely portray himself as a non-Kremlin actor in the Western media and confirmed the Kremlin's efforts to establish "media schools" abroad. In an interview with the *Washington Post* published on November 4, *Rybar* founder and director Mikhail Zvinchuk commented on the US Department of State (DoS) program Rewards for Justice's reward offer for information about the whereabouts of nine *Rybar* employees reportedly involved in interfering with US elections.[16] Zvinchuk denied reports of his and *Rybar*'s election interference and used the opportunity to falsely portray *Rybar* as a "think tank" that is involved in "defending [Russia's] informational borders." Zvinchuk also claimed that *Rybar* has an organized "worldwide" network consisting of over 250 channels in 28 languages and confirmed that *Rybar* is opening "media schools" in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Kyrgyzstan. *Rybar* reportedly has 60 employees and has taught a class at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Zvinchuk also seized on a question about *Rybar*'s previous appearance on the investigation list for "discrediting" the Russian military in an attempt to portray *Rybar* employees as "patriots" who occasionally call out problems in Russia. Zvinchuk's efforts to misrepresent *Rybar* as a Western-style think tank that is occasionally critical of Russia is likely part of the Kremlin's wider effort to infiltrate Western and international media via new online-based sources such as *Rybar*. The Kremlin holds significant power over the Russian information space and civil society, and *Rybar*'s large-scale operations in Russia and abroad likely would not be possible without Kremlin's direct funding. Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) notably awarded *Rybar* with several state honors, and Rewards for Justice noted that Russian state defense conglomerate Rostec currently funds the channel.[17]

Russian authorities arrested Rosgvardia's Deputy Head of Logistics Major General Mirza Mirzaev for bribery on November 3.[18] Russian authorities have notably arrested several high-ranking Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials on bribery charges after Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced then Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and moved him to the position of Security Council Secretary in May 2024.[19] A Russian insider source speculated that arrests of senior security officials may spread outside of the Russian MoD to Rosgvardia (which operates separately of the Russian MoD) following Mirzaev's arrest.[20] The source claimed that Rosgvardia Head Viktor Zolotov has maintained a "fairly good reputation and strong position" in Russia's security

apparatus but noted that Mirzaev's arrest may lead to additional Rosgvardia arrests and reduce Zolotov's influence.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian and pro-Kremlin actors launched an information operation on November 4 to discredit incumbent Moldovan President Maia Sandu's victory in the Moldovan presidential elections.
- Georgian civil society and opposition resumed peaceful demonstrations on November 4 against the highly contested October 26 Georgian parliamentary elections, calling for continued resistance and further investigations into large-scale voting irregularities.
- *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Sistema* project released an investigation on November 4 detailing Russia's initial 2022 demands for Ukraine's total capitulation, further supporting ISW's long-standing assessment that Russia has never been willing to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine on any terms but its own.
- Russian drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in Summer 2024 reportedly significantly impacted Ukrainian electrical generation capacity compared to March 2024, though it is unclear whether Russia had been able to inflict significant further damage on the Ukrainian energy grid since.
- The Kremlin-awarded founder and director of the prominent *Rybar* Telegram channel and social media project attempted to falsely portray himself as a non-Kremlin actor in the Western media and confirmed the Kremlin's efforts to establish "media schools" abroad.
- Russian authorities arrested Rosgvardia's Deputy Head of Logistics Major General Mirza Mirzaev for bribery on November 3.
- Russian forces advanced near Novy Put, Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces advanced in Kharkiv Oblast and Russian forces advanced in the Kupiansk, Kreminna, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar directions.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues attempts to form a cadre of loyal military journalists in an effort to control the pro-war Russian information space and centralize control over Russia's war coverage.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 3, 2024

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

Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

November 3, 2024, 8pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on November 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Incumbent Moldova President Maia Sandu has claimed victory in the Moldovan presidential runoff election held on November 3, 2024.^[1] Preliminary results reported by the Moldovan Central Election Commission (CEC) show that Maia Sandu has won around 55 percent of the vote, defeating Kremlin-friendly presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo.^[2] The Moldovan CEC reported on November 3 that over 54 percent of the Moldovan electorate voted in the presidential runoff elections compared to the approximately 51 percent voter turnout during the first election round held on October 20, 2024. The reported voter turnout for the runoff election is also over the minimum legal turnout requirement of 20 percent.^[3] ISW will cover the final result of the runoff Moldovan presidential elections on November 4 after the Moldovan CEC finishes counting all votes, including votes from the Moldovan diaspora voters whose votes take longer to count due to time zone differences.

Moldovan authorities reported extensive Russian interference and sabotage efforts during the runoff presidential elections held on November 3, 2024, in a likely effort to favor pro-Kremlin Stoianoglo. Sandu's National Security Advisor Stanislav Secieru warned on November 3 of significant Russian interference in the runoff election, noting the organization of voter transport in Transnistria (which is illegal under Moldovan law); the organization of buses and charter flights from Russia to polling stations in Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Belarus; the distribution of vouchers to Moldovan voters in Moscow; and cyberattacks against the Moldova CEC's voter education site.^[4] Moldovan Independent Press Agency *IPN* reported on November 2 that Russian authorities preemptively transported 150 Moldovan citizens from Russia to Moldova via Turkey for free in a concerted effort to maximize the voter base of Kremlin-friendly Stoianoglo.^[5] Moldovan authorities also notified numerous Western countries about Russian efforts to disrupt Moldovan diaspora voting abroad by creating false bomb threats at polling stations.^[6] The Moldovan diaspora notably largely favored Sandu in the first round of the presidential elections. Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean stated

that Moldovans throughout the country had received anonymous “death threats” through phone calls, likely as part of a scare tactic to sway election results.[7] ISW previously reported on large-scale Russian intervention efforts in the first round of the 2024 Moldovan presidential elections in order to enhance the outcome in favor of Stoianoglo and against Moldova’s European Union (EU) referendum vote, which ultimately passed by a small margin.[8] Sandu stated on October 21 that “criminal groups” and “foreign forces” — likely referring to Russia and Kremlin-linked Moldovan opposition politician Ilan Shor — used tens of millions of euros to spread propaganda to destabilize Moldova.[9] Sandu also stated that Moldovan authorities had evidence that the criminal groups wanted to buy 300,000 Moldovan votes during the first round of presidential elections and that the scale of fraud was “unprecedented.”[10]

The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) efforts to centralize control over informal Russian drone operation units may degrade the effectiveness of Russian drone capabilities. Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* (*iStories*) gathered several accounts from Russian milbloggers complaining that the Russian military command is systematically disbanding informal Russian drone operation units and committing experienced drone operators to infantry assaults, resulting in high casualties among drone operators.[11] Some milbloggers explained that the Russian military command prioritizes attritional, infantry-led “meat” assaults and lacks the manpower necessary to continue these assaults, and noted that some companies have 90 people of whom only 20 are regular assault personnel — with the rest being informal drone operators, communications specialists, and troops supporting evacuations of dead and wounded personnel. Some Russian milbloggers, however, connected the trend to the Russian MoD’s recent efforts to form “joint technical drone battalions” and the MoD’s “Rubikon” Center for Prospective Unmanned Technologies. A milblogger and advisor to the Kursk Oblast Governor claimed that the Russian military commanders seem to be afraid that the Russian MoD will deprive them of available manpower for assaults by reallocating drone operators from their current units to Russian MoD-operated “technical drone battalions,” and are instead committing these drone operators to assaults to sabotage this effort. Russian milbloggers also criticized the Russian MoD’s efforts to create separate, specialized “technical drone battalions,” citing the lack of a joint Russian communications system that would allow dedicated drone units to closely coordinate with assault units. Russian milbloggers also complained that it would take the Russian MoD a long time to establish communications between newly centralized drone units and assault units, which will result in Russian assault elements temporarily losing drone coverage. ISW recently reported on the milblogger backlash regarding the deaths of two Russian drone operators of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment of the 1st “Slavic” Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA), Dmitry Lysakovsky (alias Goodwin) and Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Gritsai (alias Ernest), after both were committed to infantry assaults in Donetsk Oblast.[12] The reduction in Russian drone specialists may also at least temporarily inhibit Russian drone operations if the Russian MoD continues its centralization efforts.

Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets refuted a Russian information operation about prisoner of war (POW) exchanges aimed at destabilizing Ukrainian society and undermining Ukrainians' trust in their government.[13] Lubinets responded on November 2 to claims from Russian Human Rights Ombudsman Tatyana Moskalkova and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova falsely accusing Ukrainian authorities of attempting to sabotage the POW exchange processes and deliberately refusing to return all Ukrainian POWs from Russian captivity.[14] Lubinets directly called on Moskalkova to provide Ukraine with a list of all Ukrainian POWs whom Russia is willing to return and reiterated that Ukraine is ready to accept all lists of POWs from Russian authorities, accusing the Russian government of holding up the POW exchange processes.[15] Russia and Ukraine have engaged in more frequent POW exchanges since the start of Ukraine’s incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024 following a months-long period of minimal POW exchanges, during which Ukraine had to reportedly construct a third POW camp for Russian POWs in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials also reported at the time that Russian authorities were the cause of the significant delays in POW exchanges.[16] Kremlin information operations centered around POWs also likely intend 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, against Ukrainian POWs.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Incumbent Moldova President Maia Sandu has claimed victory in the Moldovan presidential runoff election held on November 3, 2024.
- Moldovan authorities reported extensive Russian interference and sabotage efforts during the runoff presidential elections held on November 3, 2024, in a likely effort to favor pro-Kremlin Stoianoglo.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) efforts to centralize control over informal Russian drone operation units may degrade the effectiveness of Russian drone capabilities.

- Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets refuted a Russian information operation about prisoner of war (POW) exchanges aimed at destabilizing Ukrainian society and undermining Ukrainians' trust in their government.
- Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets refuted a Russian information operation about prisoner of war (POW) exchanges aimed at destabilizing Ukrainian society and undermining Ukrainians' trust in their government.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar in Donetsk Oblast.
- A Ukrainian official reported that Russian naval infantry units cannot be considered “elite” due to a lack of specialized training for new recruits and because Ukrainian forces have destroyed the main core of the Russian professional army since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 2, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, and Fredrick W. Kagan

November 2, 2024, 4:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on November 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces have reportedly struck seven Russian radars and air defense systems since the night of October 20 to 21. A Russian Telegram user, who claims to be an employee of an unspecified branch of the Russian special services, claimed on November 2 that Ukrainian forces conducted an ATACMS strike against a Russian S-300/400 air defense system near occupied Mospyne (just southeast of Donetsk City) and that their sources are still clarifying the damage to the system.[1] The Telegram user claimed that Ukrainian forces targeted the air defense systems with six ATACMS missiles and that Russian forces downed three of the missiles. The Telegram user claimed on October 31 that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian "Podlet" radar station near occupied Cape Tarkhankut, Crimea with a drone on October 23 and that Russian forces have not evacuated the damaged station for repairs yet.[2] A Ukrainian division posted footage on October 31 purportedly showing a successful Ukrainian strike against a Russian Buk air defense system in an unspecified frontline area, and the footage showed secondary detonations consistent with a successful strike against such a system.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 25 that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Buk-M3 air defense system and destroyed the radar system of another Buk-M2 air defense system in occupied Luhansk Oblast on the night of October 24 to 25.[4] Official Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces also struck a Buk-M2 system in southern Ukraine on October 23 and a Buk-M3 air defense system on the night of October 20 to 21 in an unspecified frontline area. [5] ISW has previously observed indications that Russia has struggled to source the microelectronic components necessary to produce complex weapons and air defense systems due to Western sanctions, and Russia may not be able to produce or repair a sufficient number of air defense systems to maintain the current density of Russia's air defense coverage over occupied Ukraine if Ukraine destroys a significant number of Russian systems.[6] Further degradation of Russia's air defense umbrella, particularly over occupied Ukraine, may impact how close to the frontline Russian pilots are willing to operate and could limit Russia's ability to effectively use glide bombs against both frontline areas and rear Ukrainian cities.

South Korea signaled possible readiness to increase support for Ukraine amid continued Ukrainian intelligence on the deployment of North Korean forces near the Russian border with Ukraine. South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul stated on November 1 that "all possible scenarios are under consideration" in response to a question about possibly sending weapons to Ukraine following the deployment of North Korean troops in Russia.[7] Cho emphasized that South Korea will monitor North Korean troop involvement in Russia and the "benefits" that North Korea receives from Russia to determine a course of action. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on November 2 that Russian forces transferred 7,000 additional North Korean personnel to unspecified areas near the border with Ukraine in the last week (since about October 26). [8] The GUR reported that Russian forces have armed North Korean soldiers with 60mm mortars, AK-12 assault rifles, RPK/PKM machine guns, SVD/SVCh sniper rifles, Phoenix anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), and RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launchers and have equipped North Korean forces with some night vision devices, thermal imagers, and other optical equipment.

Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor implemented its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts on November 2. The Russian Ministry of Digital Development announced on November 2 a new registration mechanism for social media channels with over 10,000 subscribers on the state services portal.[9] Channels must register with the Russian government by January 1, 2025, and 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. Outcry about the deanonymization effort from Russian milbloggers previously prompted Roskomnadzor to slightly alter the program and may have caused a slight delay in its implementation, marking a significant example of how the Russian ultranationalist information space maintains some sway over Kremlin decision making.[10]

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces have reportedly struck seven Russian radars and air defense systems since the night of October 20 to 21.**
- **South Korea signaled possible readiness to increase support for Ukraine amid continued Ukrainian intelligence on the deployment of North Korean forces near the Russian border with Ukraine.**
- **Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor implemented its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts on November 2.**
- **Ukrainian and Russian forces marginally advanced north of Sudzha, Kursk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces marginally advanced north of Kurakhove in Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed to have rescinded an order for his Akhmat Spetsnaz soldiers to not take Ukrainian servicemembers as prisoners in the war in Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 1, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, and Fredrick W. Kagan

November 1, 2024, 7:20pm ET

Patriarch Kirill, head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), highlighted ongoing social and ideological divides within Russian society while reiterating boilerplate justifications for the war in Ukraine during a speech on October 31. Kirill offered his assessment of the main external and internal threats to the Russian state during a meeting of the Bureau of the Presidium of the World Russian People's Council, which include ethno-religious conflict, migration, and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.[1] Kirill noted that while the war in Ukraine is the “most pressing threat” to the Russian state, some people within Russian society “prefer to ignore” what is happening on the frontline in Ukraine and the struggles of people who live in Russian border areas closer to the combat zone. Kirill criticized Russians who are unwilling to “give up their personal comforts” and who are relying on “frivolous entertainment” to distract them from the reality of the war.

Kirill's rebuke of Russians who are apathetic and disinterested in the war suggests that the Kremlin may be increasingly concerned about the sustainability of Russian society's support for the war. Recent Russian opinion polls have suggested that support for local Russian government entities and some Kremlin policies, including the invasion of Ukraine, may be wavering, although Russian citizens continue to widely support Russian President Vladimir Putin.[2] Additional polling has suggested that most Russians, particularly Russians who have not personally lost family members in Ukraine, are largely apathetic to the invasion and are able to avoid thinking about the invasion entirely as long as it does not personally affect them.[3] The Kremlin may be concerned about the growing cleavage between Russian citizens who have been immediately impacted by the invasion and Russians who have successfully insulated themselves and their families from the invasion. The Kremlin may also be concerned about apathy towards the invasion in the context of the possible societal reaction to conducting a second wave of mobilization, to which most Russians remain averse.[4] Kirill has previously acted as a key figure in injecting Kremlin narratives into the Russian information space, and the Kremlin may be in the early stages of justifying and preparing Russian society to support a future wave of mobilization.[5]

Kirill also highlighted the growing trend of brutality and cruelty in the Russian military and attempted to excuse this trend as the emergence of a “neo-pagan” cult.[6] Kirill stated on October 31 that neo-pagan preachers are trying to revive paganism and instill a “cult of brute force and

cruelty" in Russia. Kirill added that neo-pagans are introducing a false belief that Christianity discourages personal heroism and valor and that "holy" Russian servicemen disprove this belief with their conduct, but he then noted that "neo-paganism" is present in the Russian army. Kirill concluded the segment by criticizing Halloween celebrations in Russia, and Kirill likely used the occasion to introduce a discussion about Russian servicemen committing brutal and cruel acts on the frontlines or upon their return to Russia from the frontlines.

ISW has observed numerous instances of Russian military personnel, especially former Wagner Group fighters, committing gruesome acts against fellow Russian servicemen on the frontlines, Ukrainian forces and civilians, and Russian citizens upon their return from the frontlines.[7] Russia is likely to see a significant rise of brutality and cruelty in its communities upon the arrival of more traumatized Russian servicemen home as long as it continues to brutalize its soldiers; refuses to provide the necessary psychological assistance to returning veterans; and militarizes its society, educational institutions, and government.

Russian authorities also continue to identify conflict between ethnic Russians and minority groups as a critical issue. Kirill identified "issues with migrants" and ethno-religious tensions as key internal threats to the Russian state during his October 31 speech, and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev noted on October 31 that Russia needs to address its migration issues.[8] Medvedev suggested that Russia should introduce "digital migrant profile[s]," which would reportedly allow Russian authorities to stop foreigners at any time and identify foreigners via electronic immigration or travel documents. ISW has reported at length on the balance that Putin is trying to strike between catering to his pro-war ultranationalist constituency, which espouses extreme anti-migrant sentiments, and his practical need to leverage migrant labor both economically and militarily.[9]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with his North Korean counterpart Choe Son-hui in Moscow on November 1, securing strong affirmations of North Korea's support for Russia amid updated Western reports on the number of North Korean troops deployed to Russia.

[10] Lavrov emphasized that Russia and North Korea share "respect and reverence" for their common history and claimed that Russian-North Korean relations are developing "at an accelerated pace in terms of the qualitative level of interaction in all areas." [11] Choe claimed that North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un instructed North Korea to support Russia's "holy war" against Ukraine until Russia's victory.[12] Choe's invocation of the concept of a "holy war" against Ukraine is notable, as the Russian Orthodox Church has used parallel language to rhetorically justify Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine as an existential and civilizational struggle—a struggle into which North Korea has now willingly entered.[13]

Choe's visit to Moscow comes against the backdrop of reports that North Korean troops have already deployed to Kursk Oblast and will soon enter combat alongside Russian forces. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a joint press conference with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and South Korean Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun on October 31, during which Austin assessed that 8,000 North Korean soldiers are in Kursk Oblast and will enter into combat against Ukrainian forces in "the coming days." [14] Austin stated that Russian forces have trained North Korean troops on how to use artillery systems, operate drones, and conduct basic tactical infantry maneuvers.

North Korean troops are unlikely to present Russia with a long-term solution to its manpower concerns, despite Choe's comments about Pyongyang's indefinite commitment to Russia's war effort. Austin reported that Russian forces are suffering over 1,200 casualties a day (or about 36,000 casualties a month), and recent US estimates placed Russian recruitment at between 25,000-30,000 new soldiers per month—meaning Russia is just shy of being able to replace its current rate of frontline losses at a 1:1 ratio.[15] The 8,000 North Korean soldiers reportedly preparing to enter combat in Kursk Oblast thus represent about one week's worth of casualties across the entire frontline. North Korea has committed an estimated total of 12,000 troops to Russia.[16] It remains unclear exactly how Russia intends to leverage North Korean manpower, but the commitment of North Korean troops into the type of highly attritional offensive operations that Russia has been pursuing is very likely to lead to high North Korean casualty rates.

ISW recently assessed that North Korea likely decided to engage in the war on Russia's behalf in order to gain valuable combat experience in a modern war but noted that the way that the Russian command uses North Korean troops in combat will impact the ability of North Korean forces to meaningfully internalize and disseminate combat experience.[17] If North Korean troops face the same casualty rates as Russian forces, then the battlefield lessons Pyongyang hopes to learn will be undermined, and Kim is unlikely to commit his forces to face such losses on the battlefield indefinitely.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a new tranche of military assistance valued at \$425 million to Ukraine on November 1. The new tranche, which is drawn from DoD stockpiles, includes Stryker armored personnel carriers (APCs); munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS); Stinger man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS) missiles; air-to-ground munitions; HIMARS ammunition; 105mm and 155mm artillery ammunition; Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (c-UAS) equipment and munitions; and Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems.[18] The package also includes small arms and ammunition, medical equipment, and other equipment. US-provided equipment, in particular Stryker APCs, could assist Ukrainian forces in kitting or resupplying new or existing Ukrainian brigades, possibly alleviating some burdens that Ukrainian officials have previously identified in equipping new Ukrainian brigades.[19]

Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor failed to enforce its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts by its stated November 1 deadline. Roskomnadzor and the Russian Ministry of Digital Development published a draft resolution on October 4 requiring social media pages with an audience of over 10,000 subscribers to register their identity and contact information with the Russian government.[20] Russian officials specified that public discussion of the resolution would continue until October 31, meaning that the resolution should have come into force on November 1. A Russian milblogger claimed that he contacted Roskomnadzor on October 31 to verify if the resolution would go into effect on November 1 and that Roskomnadzor officials responded that the "law is still in development." [21] Roskomnadzor reportedly told the milblogger that it will publish additional information about the law on Roskomnadzor's website soon. Russian milbloggers commented on Roskomnadzor's response, with one stating that Russia is passing "draconian laws" to leak milbloggers' data but had failed to instruct the milbloggers on how to abide by the law before it was supposed to come into force.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- **Patriarch Kirill, head of the Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), highlighted ongoing social and ideological divides within Russian society while reiterating boilerplate justifications for the war in Ukraine during a speech on October 31.**
- **Kirill also highlighted the growing trend of brutality and cruelty in the Russian military and attempted to excuse this trend as the emergence of a "neo-pagan" cult.**
- **Russian authorities also continue to identify conflict between ethnic Russians and minority groups as a critical issue.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with his North Korean counterpart Choe Son-hui in Moscow on November 1, securing strong affirmations of North Korea's support for Russia amid updated Western reports on the number of North Korean troops deployed to Russia.**
- **North Korean troops are unlikely to present Russia with a long-term solution to its manpower concerns, despite Choe's comments about Pyongyang's indefinite commitment to Russia's war effort.**
- **The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a new tranche of military assistance valued at \$425 million to Ukraine on November 1.**
- **Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor failed to enforce its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts by its stated November 1 deadline.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Sudzha.**
- **Both Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced within central Vovchansk. Russian forces recently advanced northeast of Kupyansk and northwest of Kreminna.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) introduced a new system on November 1 allowing Russian veterans and their families to confirm their veteran statuses digitally.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 31, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and
Fredrick W. Kagan

October 31, 2024, 6:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:00pm ET on October 31. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the November 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

North Korea and Russia signed an agreement on October 30 to cooperate in the sphere of digital communications — the latest development in Russian-North Korean cooperation likely aimed at enhancing the Kremlin's digital authoritarianism tools to increase domestic repressions. The North Korean Ministry of Information Technology and the Russian Ministry of Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Media signed a cooperation agreement on October 30 that includes cooperation in the fields of communications, information technology, and digital development. [1] Russia and North Korea signed an agreement on joint work between the Russian and North Korean prosecutor generals' offices in July 2024, after which Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov stated that Russia wanted to learn about North Korean judicial practice, particularly in the spheres of communication and information technology.[2] ISW previously assessed that the North Korean-Russian judicial agreement was likely part of Kremlin efforts to increase Russia's arsenal of domestic control methods and consolidate control over the Russian information space, including via messaging platforms and virtual private network (VPN) services.[3] The details of the October 30 digital communications agreement are unclear, but it is likely similarly aimed at increasing Russia's tools for domestic information space repression.

The South Korean government reportedly intends to send an unspecified number of South Korean personnel to Ukraine to monitor North Korean troops. South Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* reported on October 31 that a senior South Korean presidential office official stated on October 30 that South Korea has a "legitimate need" to analyze North Korean military activities in the war in Ukraine and "feels the need" to establish a team to monitor North Korean troops and the battlefield situation.[4] South Korean Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun reportedly stated on October 31 that the South Korean defense minister can make the decision about the monitoring team's deployment without parliamentary approval. South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported on October 22 that a South Korean government source stated that South Korea was considering sending South Korean military personnel, likely from intelligence units, to Ukraine to monitor North Korean forces' tactics and combat capabilities and to question captured North Koreans.[5] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on October 29 that he discussed enhanced intelligence cooperation with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.[6]

Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Andriy Kovalenko reported on October 31 that 3,000 North Korean military personnel are in Kursk Oblast and that "separate" North Korean engineers are also present in occupied Donetsk Oblast.[7] Western intelligence officials reportedly told CNN on October 30 that a small number of North Korean personnel are in occupied Ukraine but did not specify their locations, and Ukrainian and South Korean officials reported in early October 2024 that a limited number of North Korean personnel, mainly engineering personnel, were in occupied Donetsk City.[8] Kovalenko's October 31 statement clarifies that North Korean personnel are reportedly in more than one location in the combat zone.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to communicate that he is uninterested in a negotiated ceasefire and is committed to achieving his goal of destroying Ukrainian statehood. *Bloomberg* reported on October 30 that Serbian President Alexander Vucic spoke with Putin in early October 2024 for the first time in two and a half years.[9] Vucic told *Bloomberg* that he brought up the subject of a ceasefire in Ukraine, to which Putin responded that Russia will fulfill all the goals of its "special military operation" in Ukraine, which ISW continues to assess are tantamount to the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and government.[10] Putin outright rejected any negotiated ceasefire during a press conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on July 5, claiming that a ceasefire would allow Ukraine to regroup and rearm.[11] A negotiated ceasefire on current lines and under current circumstances will only benefit Russia and will afford the Kremlin time to further radicalize and militarize Russian society against Ukraine and the Russian military time to rest and reconstitute, likely before conducting a future attack on Ukraine.

Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and ensure future aid provisions over the long-term. United Kingdom (UK) Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves stated on October 30 that the UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) budget for 2025 will ensure that the UK can provide three billion pounds (\$3.87 billion) of "guaranteed" military support to Ukraine per year "for as long as it takes." [12] Norway announced on October 29 a new military aid package worth 500 million euros (\$544 million) for Ukraine, including weapons and spare parts for F-16 fighter jets and NASAMS air defense systems.[13] Lithuania announced on October 30 that it will deliver unspecified ammunition, mortar rounds, and electricity generators to Ukraine this week (the week of October 27 through November 2).[14]

The Russian military command continues to commit seriously wounded personnel to highly attritional infantry-led "meat" assaults in the Kurakhove direction as Russian President Vladimir Putin attempts to posture himself as deeply concerned with the medical treatment of Russian veterans. A former Russian Storm-Z instructor and milblogger amplified reports accusing the

Russian military command of committing wounded personnel of a medical company belonging to the 57th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) to the frontlines in the Kurakhove direction.[15] The milblogger summarized that the Russian military command failed to provide adequate medical treatment to the wounded personnel and instead held them hostage in a "medical basement." The Russian military command reportedly demanded bribes of 1.5 million rubles (\$15,459) to release the wounded personnel from the basement and claimed that there are not enough people to support assault operations in the Kurakhove direction.[16] The milblogger noted that the Russian military command transferred wounded personnel to the frontlines to fight as part of assault companies. The milblogger stated that although Russian officials immediately responded to these complaints, closed the "medical basement," and transferred the remaining wounded personnel to hospitals, the practice of detaining wounded personnel in "medical basements" persists among other Russian military units that are fighting on different sectors of the front, such as the Russian 109th Rifle Regiment (132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade, 51st CAA, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) operating in the Toretsk direction. The milblogger emphasized that the Russian military command is committing wounded personnel and specialists to assaults because it relies on "meat" assaults to sustain the tempo of Russian advances, resulting in heavy Russian manpower losses. Putin highlighted during a meeting with the Russian government on October 31 that he recently met with disabled Russian veterans who told Putin they were satisfied with government care and benefits, but tasked the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Presidential Administration to increase government support for disabled veterans, stating that government efforts in this sphere are "not enough." [17]

The Moldovan Constitutional Court confirmed on October 31 the passing of the October 20 European Union (EU) referendum with a 50.72 percent turnout rate.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- North Korea and Russia signed an agreement on October 30 to cooperate in the sphere of digital communications — the latest development in Russian-North Korean cooperation likely aimed at enhancing the Kremlin's digital authoritarianism tools to increase domestic repressions.
- The South Korean government reportedly intends to send an unspecified number of South Korean personnel to Ukraine to monitor North Korean troops.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to communicate that he is uninterested in a negotiated ceasefire and is committed to achieving his goal of destroying Ukrainian statehood.
- Ukraine's Western partners continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and ensure future aid provisions over the long-term.
- The Russian military command continues to commit seriously wounded personnel to highly attritional infantry-led "meat" assaults in the Kurakhove direction as Russian President Vladimir Putin attempts to posture himself as deeply concerned with the medical treatment of Russian veterans.
- The Moldovan Constitutional Court confirmed on October 31 the passing of the October 20 European Union (EU) referendum with a 50.72 percent turnout rate.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Svatove, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and Vuhledar, and Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 30, 2024

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

Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

October 30, 2024, 6:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on October 30. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 31 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Western intelligence officials reportedly stated that North Korean troops are in an unspecified area in occupied Ukraine. CNN, citing two unspecified Western intelligence officials, reported on October 30 that a small number of North Korean personnel are in occupied Ukraine but did not specify their location — the first such confirmation from Western sources.[1] The intelligence officials stated that they expect the number of North Korean personnel in Ukraine to grow as they complete training in

Russia. Ukrainian and South Korean officials reported in early October 2024 the presence of a limited number of North Korean personnel in occupied Donetsk City, mainly engineering personnel, who were likely repairing or somehow improving the quality of a large amount of low-quality ammunition that North Korea provided to the Russian military.[2] The reports from Western intelligence officials could refer to the same group of North Korean personnel or similar specialists conducting engineering work in occupied Ukraine. *Financial Times* reported on October 30 that senior unspecified Ukrainian intelligence officials have stated that Russian authorities transferred about 3,000 North Korean personnel to western Kursk Oblast from other areas in Russia in civilian vehicles and that the group consisted of a few hundred special forces servicemembers and regular troops.[3] North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui visited Russia on October 29 but did not specify the purpose of the visit.[4] *AP*, citing South Korean intelligence, reported on October 29 that Choe might have visited Russia to discuss the deployment of additional North Korean troops to Russia. Russian Foreign ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the arrival of the North Korean foreign minister was pre-planned, in line with Russia–North Korea cooperation.[5]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky highlighted enhanced Ukraine–South Korea cooperation amid since-retracted reports that South Korea would consider providing direct military assistance to Ukraine. Zelensky reported on October 29 that he had discussed enhanced intelligence cooperation with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in order to develop an action plan and propose a set of countermeasures in response to Russian and North Korean escalation of the war.[6] Zelensky announced that the two countries will soon exchange delegations to coordinate their actions and that they will involve common partners in their proposed intelligence cooperation. South Korean news outlet *The Dong-A Ilbo* reported on October 30 that the South Korean government was considering providing 155mm artillery shells directly to Ukraine, but the South Korean presidential office denied these reports, stating that Ukrainian officials have not requested such assistance.[7]

The Kremlin is reportedly struggling to prepare for the September 2026 Russian State Duma elections campaign due to uncertainty about the course of the war in the Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin is not confident that Russia will be able to win the war over the next two years. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on October 30 that Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko has not started to plan the "contours" of the 2026 Duma elections even though the Kremlin usually does so two years in advance of the elections.[8] A source close to the Presidential Administration told *Meduza* that the Duma elections' policy framing depends on whether the war in Ukraine will continue in 2026. *Meduza* reported that a source within United Russia's leadership stated that it is unclear if United Russia's 2026 campaign should feature military personnel or a person who "symbolizes a return to peaceful life," such as Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. A political strategist who works with the Kremlin and several regional governments reportedly stated that if the war continues during the 2026 election campaign season, then the Kremlin will need "a force that leans on ultra-patriotism," such as an entirely new political party or a "slightly updated" A Just Russia party. The source stated that if the war ends, then the Kremlin will need "moderate forces." A Just Russia notably held a congress on October 26 and announced that its new political course will be "patriotic socialism," which the party described as necessary during Russia's war in Ukraine and "firmly based on the great achievements of Russian civilization and the most important condition for [Russia's] further development." [9]

The Kremlin simultaneously continues to militarize various levels of Russian government, likely in preparation for long-term war efforts in Ukraine and confrontation against NATO despite the reported lack of preparation for the Duma elections. The "Time of Heroes" program, which Kiriyenko oversees, aims to place Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine in local, regional, and federal government positions; and ISW assesses that this program is part of Kremlin efforts to militarize Russian society and government.[10] The Kremlin has also pursued multiple efforts aimed at preparing Russian society and military for a potential large-scale conflict with NATO.[11] Although *Meduza's* reporting suggests the Kremlin may be willing to focus the 2026 Duma campaign on a return to peacetime should the war end by that time, the Kremlin likely views this as a short-term effort within an electoral body that wields little independent influence in the overall Russian political sphere. The "Time of Heroes" program is likely a better indicator of Russia's long-term trajectory under the current regime.

The US Treasury and State departments sanctioned nearly 400 entities and individuals from over a dozen countries on October 30 in one of the largest concerted efforts to address Russian sanctions evasions via third parties to date.[12] The sanctions targeted dozens of People's Republic of China (PRC)–, Hong Kong–, and India-based companies while also impacting targets in Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, Switzerland, among other countries. Russia has extensively used bilateral relations and devised mechanisms with countries, entities, and individuals to evade Western and international sanctions to support its war effort in Ukraine.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- Western intelligence officials reportedly stated that North Korean troops are in an unspecified area in occupied Ukraine.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky highlighted enhanced Ukraine-South Korea cooperation amid since-retracted reports that South Korea would consider providing direct military assistance to Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is reportedly struggling to prepare for the September 2026 Russian State Duma elections campaign due to uncertainty about the course of the war in the Ukraine, suggesting that the Kremlin is not confident that Russia will be able to win the war over the next two years.
- The Kremlin simultaneously continues to militarize various levels of Russian government, likely in preparation for long-term war efforts in Ukraine and confrontation against NATO despite the reported lack of preparation for the Duma elections.
- The US Treasury and State departments sanctioned nearly 400 entities and individuals from over a dozen countries on October 30 in one of the largest concerted efforts to address Russian sanctions evasions via third parties to date.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kreminna, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to advertise Russian military service to civilians in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 29, 2024

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

Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, Christina Harward, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

October 29, 2024, 6:10 pm ET

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

The rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has increased in recent weeks but remains slow and consistent with positional warfare rather than with rapid mechanized maneuver—emphasizing how generally stagnant Russian advances have been after over two and half years of war. Recent Western reporting linking the Russian rate of advance in September 2024 with Russian advances at the start of the war is highly misleading.[1] ISW assesses that Russian forces advanced at an average rate of 1,265 square kilometers per day in March 2022—roughly 90 times the roughly 14 square kilometers that ISW calculates that Russian forces have taken per day in September 2024. Rapid Russian advances deep into Ukrainian territory, including the temporary seizure of large portions of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv oblasts characterized the first month of the Russian full-scale invasion, whereas more recent Russian advances have been characterized by small-scale, localized, tactical advances.[2] Russian forces have been making gains in eastern Ukraine recently, but comparing those gains to the initial deep Russian penetration into Ukraine at the start of the war misleadingly frames these most recent advances. For example, Russian forces seized the settlement of Vuhledar as of October 1, 2024, have continued to advance north and northwest of Vuhledar, and have made significant tactical gains in and near Selydove (southeast of Pokrovsk) over the course of the past week.[3] These respective advances are tactically significant but do not represent a general increase in the pace of Russian advances across the frontline, much of which remains relatively stagnant, nor are they within two orders of magnitude of the rate of Russian advance in the first stage of the war.[4] The current rate of Russian advances is consistent, rather, with ISW's recent assessment that the Russian command has likely ordered Russian forces to significantly increase their tempo of mechanized attacks throughout the theater before the full onset of muddy ground conditions in the fall months.[5]

Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to use an annual Russian nuclear deterrence exercise to further boilerplate nuclear saber-rattling information operations that aim to influence Western decision making. Putin participated via video conference in a Russian military training exercise on October 29 in which the strategic deterrence forces launched ground-launched Yars intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched Sineva and Bulava ballistic missiles, and air-launched cruise missiles.[6] Putin claimed that Russia's nuclear triad continues to guarantee Russian sovereignty and security and helps maintain the global balance of power. Putin also highlighted Russia's need to possess modern strategic deterrent forces given "growing geopolitical

tensions" and the "emergence of new threats." [7] Putin also claimed that the Strategic Missile Forces are receiving new, unspecified fixed and mobile missile systems that allegedly have improved accuracy, reduced launch time, and increased capabilities. Russia previously conducted similar nuclear deterrence exercises using the same missile systems in October 2022 and 2023. [8] ISW continues to assess that Putin and other senior Russian officials attempt to leverage nuclear rhetoric and regular military exercises as a form of reflexive control in an effort to force Western decision-makers to self-deter and temper their support for Ukraine. [9]

Recent Russian polling suggests that Russian domestic support for local government entities has somewhat declined over the past year, most likely in response to increased crypto-mobilization force generation efforts at the regional level.

Independent Russian polling organization Levada Center published on October 24 the results of a month-long poll conducted in September 2024 that found that 43 percent of respondents trust local government entities; that 69 percent of respondents trust the Russian military; and that 80 percent of respondents trust Russian President Vladimir Putin. [10] Similar Levada polling in September 2023 found that 45 percent trusted local government entities, that 72 percent trusted the Russian military, and that 76 percent trusted Putin. The Levada Center's polling data indicate that Putin continues to rely on local government-level crypto-mobilization efforts to deflect discontent regarding Russian mobilization practices away from him and the federal government and onto local officials, while also avoiding having to call a general mobilization. The slight decrease in trust towards local officials and increase in trust in Putin are indicators that Putin's efforts to silo discontent away from himself and scapegoat lower-level officials for problems related to the war in Ukraine may be working. [11] ISW continues to assess that Putin will continue to instruct local government authorities to maintain crypto-mobilization efforts until federal-level mobilization efforts are necessary to achieve operational requirements in Ukraine. [12]

Russian officials and milbloggers are conducting information operations that falsely portray the Georgian opposition's peaceful and legal challenges to the conduct of the October 26 parliamentary election results as a Western- and Ukrainian-sponsored illegal coup d'état.

Russian state media claimed on October 29 that the West is supporting the transfer of Ukraine-trained snipers to Georgia in order to organize false flag provocations and trigger a pro-Western coup akin to the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity that started in 2013, which Russian actors have often labeled a Western-instigated illegal coup. [13] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev called on October 28 for the arrest of Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, falsely claiming that she "called for a coup." [14] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova baselessly suggested that the West ordered the opposition protests, which they claim are trying to destabilize Georgia. [15] Russian milbloggers also widely claimed that the West and Ukraine are sponsoring a revolution via the Georgian opposition and Zourabichvili and that Georgian opposition reports of Russian interference in the Georgian elections are false, Western-backed talking points. [16]

The Russian information space continues to closely echo the rhetoric of the ruling Georgian Dream party. Georgian Prime Minister Kobakhidze rejected the claims of election irregularities on October 28, and Georgian Dream member of parliament and Vice-Speaker of Parliament Nino Tsilosani claimed on October 29 that the opposition is attempting to organize a coup. [17] ISW previously assessed that Georgian Dream's rhetoric has increasingly echoed that of the Kremlin, particularly the Kremlin's narratives that aim to justify Russia's violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of post-Soviet countries that seek greater Western integration, including Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. [18]

The Georgian protests have been peaceful and legal - far from the Russian claims of an illegal coup.

The pro-Western Georgian opposition and tens of thousands of Georgian civil society members gathered in central Tbilisi for a peaceful demonstration against the highly contested election results on October 28, in accordance with their constitutional right to peaceful assembly. [19] Neither Zourabichvili nor representatives of the Georgian opposition called for violence, and there have been no reports of notable clashes or confirmed reports of so-called Ukrainian snipers. The opposition has instead called for an organized contestation of the election results, asking Georgian civil society to continue their efforts to gather concrete evidence of voting irregularities while encouraging the international community to address the reportedly fraudulent election results. [20] The opposition also suggested holding internationally administered snap elections without the participation of the Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC), and the CEC responded on October 29, claiming that the opposition's statements were baseless and stating that the CEC was willing to cooperate with the Georgian Prosecutor's Office to investigate the reports of electoral fraud. [21] The Georgian Constitution provides specific mechanisms through which Georgian officials can contest the election results — tools that Zourabichvili and members of the opposition can leverage amid mounting evidence of voting irregularities. [22] International and Georgian election observation bodies continue to document evidence suggesting systematic voting irregularities before and during the parliamentary elections with some calling the election neither free nor fair. [23]

These concerted Russian efforts to baselessly discredit the Georgian pro-Western opposition and civil society are part of a common Kremlin tactic aimed at framing the valid and legal concerns of pro-Western political entities in the post-Soviet space as illegitimate and violent. Russia has repeatedly accused pro-Western politicians and parties — or even ones simply not fully supportive of Russia — of acting beyond the confines of their domestic legal frameworks while also setting conditions for Russian aggression against these states or encouraging pro-Russian domestic actors to themselves engage in violence or repressions. Such efforts are a part of Russia's strategic efforts to weaken the Western ambitions of post-Soviet countries and forcefully re-establish Russian imperial boundaries.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- The rate of Russian advances in Ukraine has increased in recent weeks but remains slow and consistent with positional warfare rather than with rapid mechanized maneuver —emphasizing how generally stagnant Russian advances have been after over two and half years of war.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to use an annual Russian nuclear deterrence exercise to further boilerplate nuclear saber-rattling information operations that aim to influence Western decision making.
- Recent Russian polling suggests that Russian domestic support for local government entities has somewhat declined over the past year, most likely in response to increased crypto-mobilization force generation efforts at the regional level.
- Russian officials and milbloggers are conducting information operations that falsely portray the Georgian opposition's peaceful and legal challenges to the conduct of the October 26 parliamentary election results as a Western- and Ukrainian-sponsored illegal coup d'état.
- The Georgian protests have been peaceful and legal - far from the Russian claims of an illegal coup.
- These concerted Russian efforts to baselessly discredit the Georgian pro-Western opposition and civil society are part of a common Kremlin tactic aimed at framing the valid and legal concerns of pro-Western political entities in the post-Soviet space as illegitimate and violent.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Toretsk, and Russian forces made advanced near Kupiansk, Pokrovsk, Kurakhove, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) continues to rely on Russia's prison population to replace depleted Russian units on the frontline.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 28, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Karolina Hird, William Runkel, and Fredrick W. Kagan

October 28, 2024, 4:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on October 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte announced that South Korean intelligence officials shared evidence with NATO officials on October 28 that North Korean units are operating in Kursk Oblast.[1] Rutte stated that senior representatives from South Korea's National Intelligence Service and Ministry of National Defense and other Western allies shared intelligence assessments during a meeting on the morning of October 28 about North Korea's growing involvement in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Rutte stated that the deployment of North Korean forces represented a significant escalation in North Korea's involvement in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a breach of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, and a "dangerous expansion" of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Rutte, on behalf of NATO, called for Russia and North Korea to immediately cease these actions and stated that he will meet with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov later on October 28. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on October 27 that Russian forces are transferring North Korean military personnel along the E38 Kursk-Voronezh highway in vehicles with civilian license plates.[2] Ukraine's Pivnich (Northern) Operational Command Spokesperson Vadym Mysnyk stated on October 28 that Ukrainian forces have not engaged North Korean forces in combat or taken North Korean forces as prisoners of war (POWs), although Ukrainian intelligence has information indicating that North Korean forces have been

transferred to Kursk Oblast.[3] ISW previously noted that the involvement of North Korean troops in combat operations in Kursk Oblast or frontline areas in Ukraine would make North Korea an active combatant and belligerent in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[4]

Ukrainian forces conducted another series of drone strikes against Russian distilleries on the night of October 27 to 28, reportedly to reduce Russian aviation capabilities. Voronezh Oblast Governor Aleksander Gusev claimed that falling drone debris damaged two unspecified industrial enterprises in Anninsky and Novokhopersky raions.[5] Geolocated footage shows a fire in Krasnoye, Novokhopersky Raion.[6] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that Ukrainian drones struck the Ethanol Spirit distillery in Krasnoye.[7] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Andriy Kovalenko posted footage of a drone strike against a distillery in Krasnoye and noted that Russian distilleries produce rocket fuel and fuel for aviation brake systems, technical needs, and anti-icing agents.[8] Kovalenko stated that Ukrainian strikes against Russian distilleries are meant to reduce Russian aviation capabilities.[9] Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes on the night of October 21 to 22 targeting distilleries in Tula Oblast.[10]

Russian President Vladimir Putin briefly acknowledged Russia's labor shortages on October 28, but highlighted Russia's low unemployment rates in an attempt to reframe this challenge in a beneficial light and claim that the Russian economy is able to sustain a long war in Ukraine. Putin held a meeting with the Russian government about the economy on October 28 and highlighted Russian industrial growth and low unemployment rates.[11] Putin claimed that Russian industry has grown 4.5 percent in the first eight months of 2024 and that Russia's manufacturing and mechanical engineering sectors grew by 8.15 percent and almost 20 percent, respectively. Putin claimed that Russian unemployment is at a record low for the third month in a row at 2.4 percent and particularly highlighted low unemployment rates among Russians under the age of 25. Putin noted, however, the Russia's economy "slowed somewhat" in the third quarter of 2024 and that the Russian economy is facing "difficulties and imbalances," such as international sanctions against Russia and Russian personnel, technology, and logistics shortages. Putin claimed that the 2025–2027 federal budget will focus on developing a supply-side economy, increasing the production of goods and services, launching new investment projects, and creating modern jobs in all sectors. The September 2024 draft bill of the 2025–2027 federal budget expected Russia to spend about 41 percent of its annual expenditures on national security and defense in 2025 — somewhat at odds with Putin's claimed desire to focus on goods and services and new investments.[12] A Russian insider source claimed on October 28 that several major Russian political figures, including Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin, CEO of Russian financial development institution DOM.RF Vitaly Mutko, CEO of Russian state defense conglomerate Rostec Sergei Chemezov, and Russian elites Oleg Deripaska and Alexei Mordashov, are expressing their discontent with the Russian Central Bank's announcement to raise the key interest rate to 21 percent.[13] ISW recently assessed that Russia's economy and war effort is coming under increasing strain, which will pose increasingly acute challenges to Putin's ability to sustain the war over the long term.[14]

The Moldovan Constitutional Court stated that it will review the results of the October 20 European Union (EU) referendum on October 31, and the third runner up in the first round of the presidential election announced that he would not endorse a candidate in the runoff.[15] The Moldovan Central Election Commission submitted its reports on the referendum to the court on October 25, and the court has until November 4 to either confirm or reject the results, according to the Moldovan Electoral Code.[16] ISW recently assessed that although there have been widespread Moldovan official reports about electoral violations in the October 20 vote, it is unclear if these reports will meet the required threshold for the Constitutional Court to nullify the referendum results.[17] Renato Usatii, who came in third in the first round of the Moldovan presidential election with 213,169 votes, stated on October 28 that he would not endorse Maia Sandu or Alexandr Stoianoglo in the November 3 presidential run off.[18] Vasile Tarlev, who gained 49,316 votes in the first round; Ion Chicu, who gained 31,797 votes; and Natalia Morari, who gained 9,444 votes all endorsed Stoianoglo. ISW recently assessed that Usatii's possible endorsement of Stoianoglo would likely have allowed Stoianoglo to seriously challenge Sandu in the second round, and it is unclear how Usatii's refusal to endorse either candidate will affect the outcome of the November 3 runoff.[19]

Georgian civil society, opposition, and international election observers continue to reject the results of the 2024 Georgian parliament elections amid a large-scale demonstration in Tbilisi on October 28. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili urged Georgian citizens to take to the streets of Tbilisi on October 28 to protest the election results that local Georgian and international election observation bodies have largely condemned for large-scale voting irregularities.[20] Zourabichvili, alongside various representatives from pro-Western opposition parties, addressed thousands of peaceful protesters and stated that they will continue to reject the reportedly fraudulent and Russian-influenced election results and urged Georgians to continue to collect evidence of voting irregularities.[21] Member of the opposition Unity-National Movement Party Giorgi Vashadze called for

an international administration to hold snap elections without the participation of the Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC).[22] Zourabichvili and the opposition stated that they will continue to challenge the election results and noted that they will clarify their next steps in the coming days. The Russian information space continued to express jubilation over the Georgian Dream victory while Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev called for the arrest of Zourabichvili for "calling for a coup." [23] US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller stated on October 28 that the US will not rule out possible consequences to Georgian officials if the Georgian Dream party continued its anti-democratic trajectory, urging the party to conduct full investigations into allegations related to the results.[24] Twenty-eight European Union (EU) ministers issued a joint statement on October 28 expressing concern over voting irregularities and stated that the violations of electoral integrity are "incompatible" with EU candidate country standards, highlighting a potential further deterioration in Georgia's EU membership prospects.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte announced that South Korean intelligence officials shared evidence with NATO officials on October 28 that North Korean units are operating in Kursk Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted another series of drone strikes against Russian distilleries on the night of October 27 to 28, reportedly to reduce Russian aviation capabilities.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin briefly acknowledged Russia's labor shortages on October 28, but highlighted Russia's low unemployment rates in an attempt to reframe this challenge in a beneficial light and claim that the Russian economy is able to sustain a long war in Ukraine.**
- **The Moldovan Constitutional Court stated that it will review the results of the October 20 European Union (EU) referendum on October 31, and the third runner up in the first round of the presidential election announced that he would not endorse a candidate in the runoff.**
- **Georgian civil society, opposition, and international election observers continue to reject the results of the 2024 Georgian parliament elections amid a large-scale demonstration in Tbilisi on October 28.**
- **Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kupyansk, southeast of Pokrovsk, and southwest of Donetsk City.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 27, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

October 27, 2024, 5pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on October 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia's economy and war effort is coming under increasing strain, which will pose increasingly acute challenges to Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to sustain the war over the long term. The *Washington Post* reported on October 27 that the Russian economy is "in danger of overheating," noting that Russia's excessively high military spending has fueled economic growth in a way that has forced Russian companies to artificially raise their salaries in order to fulfill labor demands by remaining competitive with Russia's high military salaries.[1] The *Washington Post* quoted Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina, who warned in July 2024 that Russia's labor force and production capacity are "almost exhausted." The *Washington Post* noted that private Russian companies are struggling to keep up with Russian military salaries and are increasingly having to offer wages several times higher than the typical industry averages. ISW has recently reported that Russian regional authorities are significantly increasing the one-time signing bonuses for Russian contract servicemembers in order to sustain Russia's rate of force generation (roughly 30,000 troops per month), which underscores the fact that Russia does not have an indefinite pool of manpower and must financially and socially reckon with the ever-growing costs of replenishing its frontline losses via various force-generation avenues.[2] The *Washington Post* also noted that Russia's stringent migration policies, particularly after the March 2024 Crocus City Hall attack, have further depleted Russia's labor pool and amplified economic frictions. This has particularly become the case as migrant workers are increasingly identifying Russia as a hostile and unattractive place to

relocate for work.[3] ISW has reported at length on the balance that Putin is trying to strike between catering to his pro-war ultranationalist constituency, which espouses extreme anti-migrant sentiments, and his practical need to leverage migrant labor both economically and militarily.[4]

Putin very likely assesses that calling another partial mobilization wave, or introducing general mobilization, will be too costly to his regime, and has therefore resorted to crypto-mobilization efforts that appear to be placing greater and greater strains on the Russian wartime economy. The recent appearance of North Korean troops in Russia, and their reported deployment to the combat zone in Kursk Oblast, further suggests that Putin's entire force-generation system is very tenuous.[5] The costs of fueling the war will increase as Russia continues to burn through manpower and materiel on the frontline. Russian resources are finite, and Putin cannot reckon with these costs indefinitely. Russia's economy will reach a burnout point. That burnout point will inflict great costs on Russian society, which may force Putin to make major decisions about how to resource Russia's war or change Russia's mode of warfighting to preserve his regime's stability.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia's economy and war effort is coming under increasing strain, which will pose increasingly acute challenges to Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to sustain the war over the long term.**
- **Ukrainian and Russian forces both advanced within the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces advanced in and near Selydove and northwest of Vuhledar.**
- **Russian authorities are using Cossack organizations to militarize Russian children and build out Russia's force generation reserve in the long term.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 26, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 26, 2024, 5:45 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on October 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The October 26, 2024 Georgian parliamentary election will be covered in a separate [special edition](#).

Bloomberg reported on October 25, citing South Korean intelligence documents, that a second group of North Korean soldiers will soon deploy to Russia. *Bloomberg* reported that it viewed South Korean intelligence documents from an unspecified date that assessed that the first group of 1,500 North Korean "elite special forces" had arrived in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai between October 8 and 13 and that this first group was part of a planned deployment of roughly 10,000 North Korean soldiers in total.[1] *Bloomberg* also reported that the documents assessed that North Korea has sent roughly 8 million rounds of 122mm and 152mm shells to Russia since August 2023, roughly 100 KN-23 Hwasong-11 ballistic missiles, and an unspecified number of Bulsae-4 anti-tank weapons. *Bloomberg*, citing two people familiar with the matter, stated that South Korean officials will share South Korea's assessments about North Korean-Russian cooperation with NATO officials at an October 28 NATO meeting. The *New York Times* (NYT), citing one unnamed Ukrainian official and two unnamed US officials, reported on October 25 that "several thousand" North Korean soldiers arrived at Kursk Oblast to participate in an upcoming Russian counteroffensive operation to push Ukrainian forces from their salient in Kursk Oblast.[2] The officials stated that North Korean forces have not engaged in combat operations yet and that the North Korean forces' task in Kursk oblast is unclear. The officials noted that a significant contingent of North Korean forces would help the Russian military to avoid pulling additional forces from eastern Ukraine to participate in counteroffensive operations in Kursk Oblast. A senior Ukrainian official told the NYT that a maximum number of 5,000 elite North Korean troops had likely arrived in Russia by October 21.[3] The participation of North Korean troops in combat operations in Kursk Oblast or frontline areas in Ukraine would make North Korea an active combatant and belligerent in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced preparations to open additional defense industrial plants in Ukraine. Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger announced on October 26 that Rheinmetall already opened one plant in Ukraine that serves as a maintenance and production facility

for infantry fighting vehicles and main battle tanks and is on track to build a powder factory and a munitions manufacturing plant in Ukraine.[4] Papperger added that Rheinmetall expects to begin the production of the Lynx infantry fighting vehicles at the recently operational plant in Ukraine by the end of 2024. Rheinmetall also reportedly plans to open a joint production facility for air defense systems in Ukraine. Rheinmetall announced in March 2024 that it plans to open at least four weapons manufacturing plants in Ukraine.[5]

Key Takeaways:

- **Bloomberg reported on October 25, citing South Korean intelligence documents, that a second group of North Korean soldiers will soon deploy to Russia.**
- **German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced preparations to open additional defense industrial plants in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in Glushkovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast and near Pokrovsk and Vuhledar.**
- **Russian military command is reportedly continuing to commit military specialists to assault operations and incurring unnecessary losses, likely in an effort to centralize control over Russian forces and maintain the tempo of Russian offensive operations throughout the theater.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 25, 2024

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

Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 25, 2024, 7:05 pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia will imminently deploy North Korean forces to unspecified combat zones on October 27 and 28, as Russian and North Korean officials continued to issue vague yet suggestive statements regarding the possible presence of North Korean troops in Russia.[1] Zelensky stressed that Russia's involvement of North Korean forces in combat is an escalatory step and urged the international community to apply pressure on Moscow and Pyongyang. Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Brekelmans confirmed on October 25 that Dutch intelligence assesses that Russia is deploying at least 1,500 North Korean forces likely to Kursk Oblast.[2] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published an intercepted audio recording on October 25 in which elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet, Southern Military District [SMD]) operating in Kursk Oblast reportedly expressed concerns about the ability of North Korean troops to adjust to Russian command culture and language upon their deployment to the region.[3] A spokesperson of a Ukrainian air assault brigade operating in the Kursk direction stated that Ukrainian forces have not yet observed North Korean troops in Kursk Oblast and emphasized that North Korean forces do not have experience fighting in large-scale, technologically-driven wars.[4] Head of Ukraine's Center for Military Legal Research Oleksandr Mysenko stated on October 25 that Russia's efforts to directly involve North Korean forces in the war are ultimately indicative of Russia's inability to recruit sufficient personnel amid systematic yet likely unsuccessful attempts to recruit volunteers domestically.[5] North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Jong Gyu failed to deny reports of North Korean troop deployments to Russia but claimed that such deployments would be in line with principles of international law.[6] Russian President Vladimir Putin once again failed to deny the presence of the North Korean troops in Russia during an interview with Russian state TV channel *Rossiya 1* on October 25 following the conclusion of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan and stated that it is Russia's sovereign decision to activate the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and North Korea signed on June 18, 2024.[7] Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov similarly claimed that the provision of military assistance under the treaty is a signal of deterrence and that military assistance will be activated only in the event of "aggression" against any of the parties to the treaty.[8] The participation of North Korean troops in combat operations in Kursk Oblast or frontline areas in Ukraine would make North Korea an active combatant and belligerent in Russia's war in Ukraine. The Kremlin may be setting information operations to accuse Ukraine of being the aggressor in Russia's invasion of Ukraine to justify its use of North Korean forces as combatants in its war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled that Western "Ukraine fatigue" is encouraging Russia to continue its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and pursue its theory of victory predicated on Russia outlasting Western support for Ukraine. Putin responded to a question during an

interview with Russian state TV channel *Rossiya 1* on October 25 following the conclusion of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on whether exhausted Ukrainian troops, Western war fatigue, or Russian military's power is contributing to the success of Russian theater-wide offensive operations.[9] Putin responded by stating that Russia should continue to double down on its war effort in Ukraine and not pay attention to discussions of the enemy's fatigue. Putin added that the West is "beginning to realistically assess the situation around Ukraine" and "change its rhetoric" about the need for Russia's "strategic defeat," and that Russia can "only praise" the West for this rhetorical shift away from complete Russian defeat in Ukraine. Putin later stated in the interview that any outcome of Russia's war in Ukraine must be in Russia's favor and be based on the "realities on the battlefield," indicating that Russia remains committed to its original goal of forcing the Ukrainian government to capitulate and destroying Ukraine's statehood and military and that Western hesitance in support for Ukraine only encourages Russia's commitment to this goal. ISW continues to assess that Putin's theory of victory rests on a critical assumption that the West will abandon Ukraine to Russian victory, either of its own accord or in response to Russian efforts to persuade the West to do so, and that it is far from clear that the West will do so.[10]

Putin also continued to exaggerate Russian progress in Kursk Oblast, likely in an attempt to reassure domestic audiences of the Russian military's ability to suppress Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. Putin responded to a question during his interview with Russian state TV channel *Rossiya 1* on October 25 about his earlier claims on October 24 that Russian forces "blocked" roughly 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers in Kursk Oblast.[11] Putin doubled down on this claim, stating that Ukrainian forces that are "encircled" in Kursk Oblast "do not even really understand that they are encircled." [12] Putin also claimed that Ukrainian forces have lost control over encircled units and emphasized that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) had not publicly reported on claimed successful Russian infiltration of some Ukrainian positions in Kursk Oblast. Putin once again failed to acknowledge that the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast extends from the Ukrainian-Russian international border and that Ukrainian forces can freely transit the sections of the border under Ukrainian control. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi notably refuted Putin's October 24 claims of Ukrainian forces being encircled and suffering significant losses, and in turn, reported that Russian manpower casualties total 17,819 personnel (including 711 prisoners of war [POWs]) since August 8.[13] ISW cannot independently verify Ukrainian estimates of Russian losses, however, Russian and Ukrainian reporting indicates that Ukrainian forces are continuing to operate in Kursk Oblast.[14] Putin's exaggerated statistics on Ukrainian losses are likely part of his attempt to explain away Russia's inability to decisively repel the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast after nearly three months in the context of the likely imminent deployment of North Korean troops to combat in this area.

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted former Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Sparta" Battalion Commander and Plenipotentiary Representative in the Urals Lieutenant Colonel Artyom Zhoga to the Russian Security Council, likely in an ongoing effort to establish younger, pro-war figures within the Kremlin. Putin signed a decree on October 25 adding Zhoga to the Russian Security Council — a key Russian consultative body that informs Putin's decisions on national security issues.[15] Zhoga previously served as a member of Putin's re-election campaign initiatives group, and the Kremlin previously highlighted Zhoga and an interaction between Zhoga and Putin to announce Putin's presidential bid in December 2023.[16] Zhoga is also the highest-profile Kremlin appointee from the "Time of Heroes" professional training program that aims to prepare Russian veterans to take municipal, regional, and federal government positions.[17] Zhoga is now the youngest member of the Russian Security Council at 49 years old. A Russian Telegram channel that routinely shares insider information commented on Zhoga's appointment, stating that Putin typically includes newly appointed plenipotentiaries in the Russian Security Council, and Putin appointed Zhoga as the Presidential Representative to the Ural Federal Okrug on October 2.[18] The Telegram channel added that Zhoga's appointment significantly increased the influence of Russian Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko's group within the Kremlin.[19] Kiriyenko has been a leading figure in the Kremlin's efforts to establish a new elite via the "Time of Heroes" program.[20] Zhoga's appointment follows the promotion of presidential aide and close personal ally Alexei Dyumin to the Russian Security Council on September 30.[21] Dyumin had been the youngest-ever member of the council before Zhoga.[22] ISW continues to assess that Putin appears to be using the "Time of Heroes" program to militarize the Russian government, further solidify a pro-war ideology in the Russian state and society, and form a new, highly militarized elite class.[23]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russia does not seek to "influence" elections of other countries "unlike the West" amid continued evidence to the contrary. [24] Peskov stated on October 25 that the January 2025 presidential elections in Belarus are an "internal matter" but that everyone in Russia will support Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's candidacy nevertheless. Peskov claimed that while the West interfered in the 2020 Belarusian presidential elections, the West will likely fail to do so again given that Belarus has learned from

previous experience. Peskov also accused the West of unprecedented attempts to interfere in the Georgian and Moldovan elections and claimed that Moscow is not trying to influence the elections of these countries. Peskov's accusations come amid statements from Moldovan officials, including Moldovan President Maia Sandu, about unprecedented levels of election interference from Kremlin-linked officials in the first round of Moldovan presidential elections that were held on October 20.[25] Sandu stated on October 21 that Moldovan authorities have evidence that criminal groups wanted to buy 300,000 Moldovan votes against Moldova's European Union (EU) membership referendum and Sandu herself in favor of pro-Russian presidential candidates. The Georgian parliamentary elections will be held on October 26 and Russian officials and milbloggers have launched information operations portraying Georgian Dream as the stable choice for Georgia's future and discrediting openly pro-Western opposition parties while suggesting that a Georgian Dream victory could lead to territorial reconciliation, including potential compromises on the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[26] Russia has a rich history of attempting to influence elections in post-Soviet countries in its favor through war, economic pressures, political threats, information operations, and other modes of meddling.[27]

Russian authorities swiftly responded to xenophobic riots in Korkino, Chelyabinsk Oblast on October 25, a marked change from Russian authorities' slow and disorganized response to the October 2023 antisemitic riots in the Republic of Dagestan.[28] Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin ordered a federal-level investigation into the murder of a female taxi driver purportedly by a member of the local Roma community in Korkino and the ensuing riots during which roughly 150 people attacked the home of several Roma people.[29] Russian authorities reportedly quickly quelled the riot, detained 30 people, and blocked a Telegram channel accused of encouraging locals to participate in the riot.[30] Russian authorities have consistently struggled to balance placating xenophobic sentiments among Russian ultranationalists and Russian communities with maintaining Russia's economic and internal security, particularly given Russia's dependence on migrants and non-ethnic Russian communities for economic growth and force generation.[31] ISW has previously noted that the Kremlin is working to develop the capacity to use information operations on social media platforms to trigger kinetic activity, and the role of social media accounts in provoking such riots highlights the influence that such Russian operations could have abroad.[32]

German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced on October 24 that it recently delivered 20 additional Marder infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine and noted that Germany financed the delivery of the vehicles.[33]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia will imminently deploy North Korean forces to unspecified combat zones on October 27 and 28, as Russian and North Korean officials continued to issue vague yet suggestive statements regarding the possible presence of North Korean troops in Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signaled that Western "Ukraine fatigue" is encouraging Russia to continue its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and pursue its theory of victory predicated on Russia outlasting Western support for Ukraine.
- Putin also continued to exaggerate Russian progress in Kursk Oblast, likely in an attempt to reassure domestic audiences of the Russian military's ability to suppress Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted former Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Sparta" Battalion Commander and Plenipotentiary Representative in the Urals Lieutenant Colonel Artyom Zhoga to the Russian Security Council, likely in an ongoing effort to establish younger, pro-war figures within the Kremlin.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russia does not seek to "influence" elections of other countries "unlike the West" amid continued evidence to the contrary.
- Russian authorities swiftly responded to xenophobic riots in Korkino, Chelyabinsk Oblast on October 25, a marked change from Russian authorities' slow and disorganized response to the October 2023 antisemitic riots in the Republic of Dagestan.
- German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall announced on October 24 that it recently delivered 20 additional Marder infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine and noted that Germany financed the delivery of the vehicles.
- Ukrainian forces advanced near Borki and regained lost territory near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk.
- Russian forces advanced near Siversk, Pokrovsk, and regained territory near Obukhovka.
- The Kremlin is continuing to forge new state-affiliated veteran societies and organizations likely in an ongoing effort to replace veteran organizations that have been critical of Russia's conduct of war in Ukraine.

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

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 24, 2024, 7:15pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to deny the presence of North Korean military personnel in Russia on October 24, amid official Ukrainian reports that the first North Korean military units arrived in Kursk Oblast on October 23. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on October 24 that the first units of North Korean personnel arrived in Kursk Oblast on October 23.[1] The GUR reported that the North Korean personnel trained at the Baranovsky military training ground in Ussuriysk, Primorsky Krai; the Donguz military training ground in Ulan-Ude, Republic of Buryatia; the Yekaterinoslavsky military training ground in Yekaterinslavka, Amur Oblast; the 248th military training ground in Knyazye-Volkonskoye, Khabarovsk Krai; and the 249th military training ground in Primorsky Krai. The GUR reported that the Russian military spent several weeks coordinating with the North Korean military units. The GUR reported that North Korea has transferred roughly 12,000 North Korean personnel, including 500 officers and three generals, to Russia and that Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov is responsible for overseeing the training and adaptation of the North Korean military personnel. The GUR noted that the Russian military is providing ammunition and other personal kit to the North Korean personnel. Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to a question at a press conference after the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, regarding recently released South Korean intelligence satellite imagery reportedly showing North Korean troops in Russia.[2] Putin wryly responded that "photos are a serious thing" and "reflect something." [3] Putin reiterated the mutual defense article in the Russian-North Korean strategic partnership agreement with North Korea, announced in June 2024 and officially ratified by the Russian State Duma on October 24, 2024.[4]

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko strongly hinted that Belarusian forces will not fight in Ukraine and appeared to question Russian President Vladimir Putin's likely efforts to introduce North Korean forces into Russia's war against Ukraine in the process. Lukashenko answered a question from the *BBC* on October 23 about reports of North Korean troops going to fight alongside Russian forces in Ukraine, claiming that these reports are "rubbish," that Russian President Vladimir Putin would "never try to persuade" another state to involve its army in Russia's war in Ukraine, and that the deployment of armed forces from any state – including from Belarus – to the frontline in Ukraine would be a "step towards the escalation" of the war.[5] Lukashenko claimed that if "we" (Belarusians) got involved in the war, this would be the "path to escalation" and that NATO would deploy forces to Ukraine in response to another country's involvement. Lukashenko continued to deny that Belarus was involved in the Russia's launch of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in part from Belarusian territory. Lukashenko also gave an interview on October 23 to Russian state-run TV channel *Rossiya 1* in which he claimed that he did not think that the Russian leadership or military needs North Korean troops as there are enough Russian forces on the front and Russia has significant mobilization resources.[6] Lukashenko claimed that Moscow understands that the deployment of North Korean forces to the war would be "undesirable for Russia" and that the West will respond by sending NATO troops to Ukraine. Kremlin newswire *TASS* notably did not report on Lukashenko's statements about how the use of North Korean forces in Russia's war against Ukraine is not in Russia's interests and only reported on his claims that NATO would deploy troops to Ukraine in response to the participation of North Korean forces in the war.[7]

The Kremlin is reportedly attempting to portray the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan as evidence of widespread international support for Russia – especially to domestic audiences in Russia. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on October 24 that it reviewed the Russian Presidential Administration's manual to Russian state media and propagandists with guidelines about how to frame the ongoing BRICS summit in Kazan.[8] The manual reportedly highlighted three themes: Russian President Vladimir Putin is the "informal lead of the world majority," Western elites are "panicking," and "anxiety" is prevalent in the West generally. The Kremlin reportedly told media outlets to report that the BRICS summit "has the world's attention" and proves that "attempts to isolate" Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine have "failed." *Meduza* reported that media outlets are supposed to highlight how Putin establishes "strategic ties that are not limited to one direction" in contrast to the West's alleged "fleeting alliances" (NATO celebrated its 75th anniversary this year). Russian state media and propagandists recently published articles highlighting many of these themes, sometimes even word for word as reportedly written in the manual.[9] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on October 24 that pro-Russian bots on Russian social media site

Vkontakte (VK) have left over 10,000 comments in two days about the BRICS summit – reportedly one of the largest Kremlin bot efforts recently.[10] The bots were promoting the idea that Russia is not internationally isolated, that BRICS' influence is growing, that anti-Russian sanctions are decreasing in importance, and that Russian forces are achieving successes in Ukraine. A Russian insider source claimed on October 24 that unspecified Kremlin-linked sources stated that BRICS states largely do not support Russia's position on its war in Ukraine, forcing the Kremlin to push this topic into the background in order to achieve some kind of "serious international association." [11] The insider source claimed that multiple meetings during the summit discussed the People's Republic of China's (PRC) and Brazil's peace proposals – which favor Russia – but that these discussions "ultimately led to nothing." ISW assessed on October 23 that the adoption of the Kazan Declaration on the second day of the BRICS summit demonstrated that Russia has not yet secured the international support nor created the alternative security structure that the Kremlin desires.[12]

Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to project Russian confidence in the Russian military's ability to repel the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast at a press conference after the BRICS summit on October 24. Putin claimed that Russian forces have surrounded roughly 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers who are now "blocked" in Kursk Oblast.[13] Putin notably failed to acknowledge that the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast extends from the Ukrainian-Russian international border and that Ukrainian forces can freely transit the sections of the border under Ukrainian control. Putin also claimed that Ukrainian forces have lost roughly 26,000 personnel during the operation in Kursk Oblast in the past "month and a bit" - likely a gross exaggeration.

Ukrainian authorities are investigating another execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) by Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction against the backdrop of Russian forces' increasingly frequent POW executions across the theater. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office stated on October 24 that it is opening a pre-trial investigation into the murder of Ukrainian POWs by Russian forces near Selydove (southeast of Pokrovsk).[14] The Prosecutor General's Office reported that Russian forces captured four Ukrainian servicemembers near Selydove on October 6 and filmed their interrogations, and that Ukrainian forces discovered the bodies of the four killed servicemembers after regaining the lost positions on October 7. The Prosecutor General's Office did not publish photographs or footage confirming this report.[15] Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated on October 24 that he sent letters to the United Nations (UN) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about Russian forces' violation of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of POWs.[16] Ukrainian officials notably recently reported that Russian forces executed two unarmed Ukrainian POWs near Selydove on October 18.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to deny the presence of North Korean military personnel in Russia on October 24, amid official Ukrainian reports that the first North Korean military units arrived in Kursk Oblast on October 23.**
- **Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko strongly hinted that Belarusian forces will not fight in Ukraine and appeared to question Russian President Vladimir Putin's likely efforts to introduce North Korean forces into Russia's war against Ukraine in the process.**
- **The Kremlin is reportedly attempting to portray the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan as evidence of widespread international support for Russia – especially to domestic audiences in Russia.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to project Russian confidence in the Russian military's ability to repel the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast at a press conference after the BRICS summit on October 24.**
- **Ukrainian authorities are investigating another execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) by Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction against the backdrop of Russian forces' increasingly frequent POW executions across the theater.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna and Siversk.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Ministry of Defense (MoD), and Rosgvardia reportedly each have their own Akhmat units that perform different functions in different sectors of the front and rear.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 23, 2024

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

October 23, 2024, 7:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on October 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The adoption of the Kazan Declaration on the second day of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on October 23 demonstrated that Russia has not yet secured the international support nor created the alternative security structure that the Kremlin desires. The Kazan Declaration notably only mentioned Russia's war in Ukraine once.[1] The declaration states that all signatories should act in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter — including the provision on respect for territorial integrity — and that BRICS states welcome "relevant" offers of mediation aimed at ensuring a peaceful settlement of the war through dialogue and diplomacy. Ukraine has emphasized that the "principles of the UN Charter" is a main avenue through which Ukraine can achieve peace and highlighted the illegality of Russia's war under international law. [2] The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) responded to the Kazan Declaration, stating that it shows that Russia failed to "export" its views on changing the world order and global security architecture to BRICS summit participant states.[3] The Ukrainian MFA stated that the declaration also demonstrates that BRICS states are not unified around Russia's war against Ukraine, likely since many of these countries support the UN Charter's principles. Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service similarly assessed that the BRICS summit will not result in the international community's approval of an alternative system of international settlements that Russia wants and stated that India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Brazil, and South Africa opposed the transformation of BRICS into an anti-US coalition.[4]

People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping reiterated the PRC's longstanding position calling for de-escalation in Russia's war in Ukraine and discouraged the involvement of third parties in the war amid reports of Russia preparing to deploy North Korean troops to Ukraine. Xi emphasized the need to promote "a rapid de-escalation" of Russia's war in Ukraine and avoid "adding fuel to the fire" during the 16th annual BRICS summit in Kazan on October 23.[5] Xi also stated that BRICS members must prevent the spreading of the war to "third parties" and avoid the escalation of hostilities. Xi stated that the PRC, Brazil and countries of the Global South created a group of "Friends of Peace," which aims to unite voices in support of a peaceful resolution of Russia's war in Ukraine.[6] Xi had previously called for de-escalation of the war and attempted to position the PRC as an impartial third-party mediator for a negotiated peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine.[7] Russia has been increasingly leveraging partnerships with North Korea and Iran, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of directly involving North Korea in the war amid reports of North Korean combat forces training in Russia for possible participation in the war. [8]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated Iran's intentions to increase ties with Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23.[9] NOTE: This text also appears in ISW-CTP's October 23 Iran Update. Pezeshkian met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss Russo-Iranian economic and strategic relations on the sidelines of the summit.[10] Pezeshkian stated that the two officials will finalize and sign memorandums soon, suggesting that both states will sign the new comprehensive strategic partnership agreement.[11] Putin authorized the signing of the deal on September 18.[12] It is in Iran's interests to have a formalized agreement with Russia. Iran presumably will seek greater international support as Israel's ground and air offensives on the Gaza Strip and Lebanon have disrupted some elements of Iran's proxy network. This disruption is particularly notable given that Hezbollah's capabilities — which now appear degraded by Israeli action at a minimum — have long served as Iran's principal deterrence against Israeli attack.[13] Russia has discouraged Israeli attack on nuclear facilities, demonstrating the advantages of strong Iranian relations with Russia.[14] The Pezeshkian administration's policy continues former President Ebrahim Raisi's "neighborhood policy." This policy is centered on building relations with regional and extra-regional states, thus demonstrating the administration's efforts to mitigate the impact of international sanctions and bolster the Iranian economy. The Iranian regime calculates that mitigating the impact of sanctions increases domestic stability and regime credibility.[15] Russo-Iranian cooperation has accelerated since the start of Russia's offensive campaign in Ukraine due to Iran's military support in the war.

Russian forces have made significant tactical advances into and around Selydove in recent days, but the Russian military command's apparent focus on securing Selydove has come at the expense of Russian forces' ability to sustain a meaningful offensive drive directly on Pokrovsk — Russia's self-defined operational objective on this sector of the front. Geolocated

footage published on October 22 and 23 shows that Russian forces have advanced along Skhidna Street in northeastern Selydove and northward along Berehova and Zakhysnykiv streets in eastern Selydove towards the center of the town.[16] Geolocated footage published on October 23 also shows that elements of the Russian 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) seized Izmailivka (southeast of Selydove), and additional geolocated footage published on October 23 indicates that Russian forces also advanced on the northeastern outskirts of Novoselydivka (west of Izmailivka and south of Selydove) and in fields northwest of Tsukuryne (also south of Selydove but north of the Izmailivka-Novoselydivka area).[17] Russian sources widely claimed that Russian forces advanced into northern Selydove, reached the outskirts of Vyshneve (west of Selydove) via the C05091 road by pushing northwestward from Tsukuryne, and made territorial gains in Hirnyk (southeast of Selydove), although ISW has not yet observed confirmation of these claims.[18]

Russian advances into Selydove, as well as territorial gains to the south and north of the town, may soon cause Ukrainian troops to withdraw from the area to avoid being trapped within a collapsing pocket. Ukrainian forces appear to have committed to a robust defense of Selydove, however, and have largely delayed Russian advances since Russian forces first began attacking into the settlement around August 2024.[19] Selydove is not Russia's operational objective on this part of the front, notably, and Ukraine's decision to defend the settlement has likely fixed a relatively large contingent of Russian troops on the southern flank of Pokrovsk — which is Russia's primary, and operationally meaningful, objective in the area.[20] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets identified this dynamic on October 21, noting that the Russian command in the Pokrovsk direction is now facing several more localized "problems" that do not directly lend themselves to the Russian seizure of Pokrovsk.[21] Mashovets emphasized that while a large number of Russian forces have been committed to the entire Pokrovsk front, a large contingent of 2nd Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Central Military District [CMD]) and 90th Tank Division (41st CAA, CMD) units are involved in trying to seize Selydove, as opposed to developing attacks on Pokrovsk.[22] Mashovets concluded that the Russian command created a large operational reserve for Russian forces to attack Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad, but that these forces got bogged down in attacks on Selydove and the southern flank of Pokrovsk, which the Russian command had hoped to capture rapidly.[23] A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor largely agreed with Mashovets' analysis, noting that despite the widely understood value of a Russian seizure of Pokrovsk, "the process is stalling." [24] The milblogger stated that the Russian command's fixation on the southern flank of Pokrovsk has led to a "spreading of forces and resources" that has resulted in "excessive" Russian infantry losses and afforded Ukrainian troops additional time to further fortify Pokrovsk itself.

Russia may well take Selydove in the coming days, but the capture of Selydove does not inherently portend the seizure of Pokrovsk, and, in fact, the seizure of Selydove is likely to have exhausted and attrited Russian forces in a way that will likely reduce their combat effectiveness if they are ordered to pivot towards Pokrovsk. The Ukrainian defense of Pokrovsk and its approaches (namely the rail-line and the M-30 highway) has already stymied Russian advances towards the city, and attrition of Russian forces in the area will likely further slow these advances, damaging Russian offensive prospects in the area in the coming weeks.[25]

The Pentagon and White House confirmed the deployment of North Korean troops to

Russia. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin reported on October 23 that the US government has evidence that there are North Korean troops in Russia but that it is unclear what they are doing.[26] National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby also stated on October 23 that North Korea deployed at least 3,000 personnel to Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai between early to mid-October but that it is unclear if these forces will enter combat alongside Russian forces.[27] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on October 22 that potentially two "brigades" of 6,000 North Korean personnel each (larger than the doctrinal endstrength of a typical brigade) are training in Russia.[28] South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported on October 23 that South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) stated during a closed-door parliamentary intelligence committee meeting that North Korea has sent 3,000 troops to Russia so far to support Russia's war in Ukraine and will send a total of 10,000 by December 2024.[29] *Yonhap News Agency* also reported that a NIS assessment stated that North Korean munitions factories that produce weapons that North Korea has shipped to Russia are operating at "full capacity." [30] ISW will discuss the development of Russia-North Korea relations and assess the implications of recent North Korean troops deployments on the security situation both in Ukraine and on the Korean Peninsula in a forthcoming special edition.

Russia and Belarus announced plans to conduct the "Zapad-2025" command staff exercise on an unspecified date in 2025 against the backdrop of deepening Russian-Belarusian security integration within the Union State framework. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov and Belarusian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin approved the plan for the Zapad-2025 exercises on October 23 during Belousov's visit to Minsk.[31] Khrenin announced that the Russian and

Belarusian general staffs had already begun preparations for Zapad-2025 exercises and stated that these exercises will help to improve the combat readiness of the regional grouping of forces and the ability of Russian and Belarusian forces to jointly fulfill their tasks.[32] Belousov noted that Russian and Belarusian forces will practice tasks that take into account "modern threats to Russia and Belarus," including experiences from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[33] Belousov and Khrenin also approved the Union State military security Work Plan for 2025 and 2027, emphasized the continuation of Russian-Belarusian cooperation in military-technical sphere, and reiterated that Moscow and Minsk are completing preparations for a new security concept under the Union State framework.[34] The last Zapad exercises — which have historically occurred once every four years — took place in September 2021, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) notably cancelled the planned 'Zapad-2023' exercises scheduled for September 2023.[35] ISW will discuss the development and implications of the Union State security, economic, and societal integration in an upcoming report.

Key Takeaways:

- The adoption of the Kazan Declaration on the second day of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan on October 23 demonstrated that Russia has not yet secured the international support nor created the alternative security structure that the Kremlin desires.
- People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping reiterated the PRC's longstanding position calling for de-escalation in Russia's war in Ukraine and discouraged the involvement of third parties in the war amid reports of Russia preparing to deploy North Korean troops to Ukraine.
- Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated Iran's intentions to increase ties with Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23.
- Russian forces have made significant tactical advances into and around Selydove in recent days, but the Russian military command's apparent focus on securing Selydove has come at the expense of Russian forces' ability to sustain a meaningful offensive drive directly on Pokrovsk — Russia's self-defined operational objective on this sector of the front.
- The Pentagon and White House confirmed the deployment of North Korean troops to Russia.
- Russia and Belarus announced plans to conduct the "Zapad-2025" command staff exercise on an unspecified date in 2025 against the backdrop of deepening Russian-Belarusian security integration within the Union State framework.
- Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- The Russian military is reportedly coercing Russian conscripts into contract service in the Russian military by issuing enlistment bonuses to conscripts who never signed military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 22, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Karolina Hird, Nate Trotter, William Runkel, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 22, 2024, 5:40pm ET

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes on the night of October 21 to 22 targeting distilleries in Russia that reportedly manufacture products for the Russian military. Tula Oblast Governor Dmitry Milyaev claimed that a Ukrainian drone strike damaged distilleries in Yefremov and Luzhlovsky.[1] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that the Ukrainian drone strike also damaged local Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Federal Security Service (FSB) buildings near the distillery in Yefremov.[2] Russian opposition and insider sources posted footage showing a fire near the Yefremov distillery, synthetic rubber plant (just northwest of the distillery), and thermal power plant (just northeast of the distillery).[3] Tambov Oblast Governor Maksim Egorov claimed that a drone struck the Biokhim enterprise in Rasskozovo, starting a fire.[4] Biokhim produces ethyl alcohol, and its website claims that it manufactures products that are of "strategic importance to the [Russian] state." [5] Voronezh Oblast Governor Aleksander Gusev claimed that Russian forces "suppressed" a drone that then fell on an unspecified industrial enterprise in Voronezh Oblast, damaging a workshop.[6] Head of the Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Andriy Kovalenko stated that Russia uses alcohol factories to manufacture fuel for military needs and explosives.[7]

South Korea may be considering directly sending weapons and intelligence personnel to Ukraine in response to the reported deployment of North Korean troops to Russia to participate in Russia's war in Ukraine. South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported on October 22 that a South Korean government source stated that South Korea is considering sending South Korean military personnel, likely from intelligence units, to Ukraine to monitor North Korean forces' tactics and combat capabilities and to question captured North Koreans.[8] The source also reportedly stated that South Korea will prioritize giving Ukraine defensive weapons over lethal aid but, if South Korea were to provide lethal weapons, Seoul will first try to find a way to provide them indirectly to Ukraine. South Korean National Security Director Chang Ho-jin stated on June 20 following the initial creation of the Russian-North Korean strategic partnership agreement on June 19 that the agreement had encouraged South Korea to change its long-standing policy prohibiting the transfer of arms to Ukraine, and *Yonhap News Agency* reported on June 21 that South Korea was considering sending 155mm artillery shells and unspecified air defense systems to Ukraine.[9] South Korea's continued consideration of sending lethal aid to Ukraine comes against the backdrop of threats from Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 20, when Putin stated that Seoul would be making "a very big mistake" if it decided to supply arms to Ukraine.[10]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov told *The War Zone* on October 22 that the first North Korean military personnel are expected to arrive in Kursk Oblast on October 23 but that it is unclear how large the force grouping will be or how they will be equipped.[11] *Newsweek* reported that a South Korean government official stated that North Korea sent fighter pilots to Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai in September 2024, possibly to train on Russian combat aircraft that Russia has allegedly supplied to North Korea, or to supplement Russia's pilot shortages.[12]

Thirty-six world leaders, including from the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, South Africa, and Iran, arrived in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, for the 16th annual BRICS summit held from October 22 to 24 during which Russia will likely seek to establish mechanisms to enhance its war effort in Ukraine. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the Taliban's Minister of Trade and Industry Nooruddin Azizi, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and other world leaders also arrived in Kazan on October 22.[13] Russian President Vladimir Putin met with PRC President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit during which both leaders emphasized the importance of multifaceted Russia-PRC relations while Xi highlighted BRICS as a format for global strategic cooperation.[14] Putin also met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa with whom he discussed bilateral ties, the creation of a multipolar world order, and the use of national currencies in mutual trade settlements. [15] Modi reiterated the need to find "the earliest possible" peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine and reaffirmed India's role as a potential mediator.[16]

Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri reported on October 22 that India returned 85 Indian citizens who had involuntarily joined the Russian military to fight in Ukraine and that Modi would negotiate with Russian authorities the return of 20 more Indian nationals during the BRICS summit.[17] Russia will likely use the BRICS summit as an opportunity to showcase its efforts at enhancing global ties with non-Western states and possibly establish deals and trade mechanisms through which it can support its war efforts in Ukraine by mitigating the impacts of Western sanctions.

A recent Russian opinion poll suggests that Russian President Vladimir Putin enjoys widespread support among Russian citizens even though many do not agree with some of the Kremlin's policies, including the war in Ukraine. Russian opposition outlets *Meduza* and *Current Time* reported on October 22 that they viewed the results of a recent poll conducted by independent Russian opposition polling organization Chronicles between September 10 and 17.[18] The Chronicles survey found that 78 percent of respondents stated that they generally approve of Putin's activities as Russian president but wanted the government to prioritize issues that are "directly opposite of the actual actions" of Putin, such as domestic social and economic problems (83 percent), a peace treaty with Ukraine that includes mutual concessions (61 percent), and the restoration of relations with Western states (43 percent). Putin has refrained from transferring the Russian economy to a full wartime footing, but the Russian government has nevertheless heavily focused Russian federal spending on defense and national security instead of social policies.[19] Putin has demonstrated that he is uninterested in agreeing to Russian concessions to Ukraine, repeatedly indicating that he is not interested in negotiations that do not result in Ukraine's complete capitulation and even demanding that Ukrainian forces withdraw from areas of eastern and southern Ukraine that Russian forces do not currently occupy.[20] Putin has repeatedly tried to distance himself from incompetent, corrupt, and overly bureaucratic Russian officials and has attempted to posture himself as a capable and caring leader who can quickly resolve average Russians' issues, despite the fact that he is behind the decision-making that most of the population appears to take issue with.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes on the night of October 21 to 22 targeting distilleries in Russia that reportedly manufacture products for the Russian military.
- South Korea may be considering directly sending weapons and intelligence personnel to Ukraine in response to the reported deployment of North Korean troops to Russia to participate in Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Thirty-six world leaders, including from the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, South Africa, and Iran, arrived in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, for the 16th annual BRICS summit held from October 22 to 24 during which Russia will likely seek to establish mechanisms to enhance its war effort in Ukraine.
- A recent Russian opinion poll suggests that Russian President Vladimir Putin enjoys widespread support among Russian citizens even though many do not agree with some of the Kremlin's policies, including about the war.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kurakhove and Vuhledar.
- Russian forces conducted multilateral military exercises with international partners. Iran hosted Russian and Omani naval forces as part of the "IMEX 2024" naval drills, which took place between October 19-20 in the Indian Ocean.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 21, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 21, 2024, 6:35pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on October 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Moldova's October 20 European Union (EU) referendum passed by an extremely narrow margin in large part due to support from the Moldovan diaspora, and current Moldovan President Maia Sandu will face Alexandr Stoianoglo in a second round of voting on November 3. Several Moldovan and European officials reported potential Russian interference in the election, and the Kremlin and its affiliates in Moldova will likely continue their malign influence efforts in the leadup to the November 3 runoff. The Moldovan Central Election Commission (CEC) completed the vote count on October 21 and reported that 50.46 percent (751,235) voted in favor of the EU referendum and that 49.54 percent (737,639) voted against — a difference of only 13,596 votes.[1] The CEC reported that Sandu took first place in the presidential election with 42.45 percent (656,354) and Stoianoglo took second with 25.98 percent (401,726). Sandu failed to gain the majority vote required to win in the first round, and she and Stoianoglo will move to the second round. Moldovan authorities counted votes from polling stations abroad last, during which the number of votes in favor of the referendum and Sandu greatly increased. Sandu stated early on October 21 while Moldovan authorities were still counting votes that "criminal groups" and "foreign forces" — likely referring to Russia and Kremlin-linked Moldovan opposition politician Ilan Shor — used tens of millions of euros to spread propaganda to destabilize Moldova.[2] Sandu stated that Moldovan authorities have evidence that the criminal groups wanted to buy 300,000 Moldovan votes and that the scale of fraud was "unprecedented." The European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations' (ENEMO) International Election Observation Mission reported on October 21 that it found "massive malign foreign interference attempts" ahead of the October 20 election despite Moldovan authorities' efforts to counter misinformation and vote buying schemes.[3] The BBC reported that it witnessed at least one instance of vote buying at a polling station in the pro-Russian breakaway Moldovan republic of Transnistria after a voter exited the poll and asked where she would receive her promised payment.[4] Moldovan authorities previously reported that Shor used a Russian state bank to distribute at least \$15 million to Shor-affiliated regional leaders and voters in Moldova in September 2024 alone.[5]

Kremlin officials and Russian milbloggers claimed that Moldovan authorities falsified the results of the election and referendum and continued to promote long-standing Kremlin narratives targeting Moldova's path towards European integration. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that Moldovan authorities used "totalitarian" methods during the election campaign and that the number of votes supporting the referendum "inexplicably" began to increase during the later stages of counting.[6] Zakharova claimed that the West is trying to turn Moldova into a "Russophobic NATO appendage deprived of sovereignty." Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused Moldovan authorities of persecuting opposition forces and

claimed that Russian authorities are monitoring the allegedly questionable increase in the number of votes for Sandu and in support of the referendum.[7] Several Russian milbloggers, including Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers, claimed that Moldovan authorities falsified the election results and adjusted the referendum's voter turnout numbers.[8] One milblogger called for Russian authorities to create a network of "analytical and information centers" that will study how to influence processes in Moldova and promote Russia's state interests in Russia.[9]

US Secretary of Defense Llyod Austin traveled to Kyiv on October 21 and announced a new \$400 million military aid package for Ukraine.[10] The aid package includes additional HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; 60mm, 81mm, and 120mm mortar systems and rounds; tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin anti-armor systems; M113 armored personnel carriers; satellite communication equipment; and small arms and ammunition.[11]

Russia appears to be scrambling to reduce tensions with South Korea following credible reports of intensified North Korean cooperation with Russia, including South Korean and Ukrainian intelligence warnings that a contingent of North Korean troops has deployed for training to Russia. South Korea's Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's Ambassador to South Korea, Georgy Zinoviev, over reports of the deployment of North Korean military personnel to Russia.[12] The Russian Embassy in South Korea falsely framed the event as a voluntary meeting, as opposed to a diplomatic summons, and notably claimed that any cooperation between Russia and North Korea "is not directed against the security interests" of Seoul.[13] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Russia-North Korea cooperation "should not cause concern" to other states, and that information about the alleged presence of North Korean troops in Russia may be "contradictory." [14] The Kremlin's apparent desire to assure South Korea that its cooperation with North Korea is not a threat to Seoul suggests that the Kremlin remains very concerned about the prospect of Seoul's potential pivot towards providing Ukraine with necessary military support, and the implications of worsened relations with Seoul for Russian security interests in the Asia Pacific region. Russia has previously attempted to court Seoul in order to mitigate the impacts of its growing reliance on North Korea, as ISW has noted. [15]

Russian forces continue to systematically perpetrate war crimes, including the continued executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and use of chemical weapons. Ukrainian officials reported on October 21 that Russian forces executed two unarmed Ukrainian POWs near Selydove, Donetsk Oblast on October 18 by shooting them while restrained at point-blank range.[16] ISW assessed that Russian forces have recently increased systematic executions of Ukrainian POWs in violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs, which forbids the inhumane treatment and execution of POWs.[17] A Russian milblogger also posted footage and openly claimed on October 20 that Russian forces are using chloropicrin (a pesticide and lung damaging agent) against Ukrainian forces. [18] The US Department of State announced on May 1 that it had determined that Russian forces are using chloropicrin and riot control agents (RCAs) in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a signatory.[19] Ukrainian officials have previously reported that Russian forces are increasingly equipping grenades with chloropicrin.[20] The apparent systematic perpetration of war crimes throughout the entire theater suggests that Russian forces continue to operate at a low level of discipline, and that Russian field commanders are doing nothing to prevent their subordinates from engaging in such criminal behaviors, or may even be encouraging them. There is no evidence that Russia is holding Russian personnel accountable for the violations of the laws of war that have been reported.

Key Takeaways:

- **Moldova's October 20 European Union (EU) referendum passed by an extremely narrow margin in large part due to support from the Moldovan diaspora, and current Moldovan President Maia Sandu will face Alexandr Stoianoglo in a second round of voting on November 3. Several Moldovan and European officials reported potential Russian interference in the election, and the Kremlin and its affiliates in Moldova will likely continue their malign influence efforts in the buildup to the November 3 runoff.**
- **Kremlin officials and Russian milbloggers claimed that Moldovan authorities falsified the results of the election and referendum and continued to promote long-standing Kremlin narratives targeting Moldova's path towards European integration.**
- **US Secretary of Defense Llyod Austin travelled to Kyiv on October 21 and announced a new \$400 million military aid package for Ukraine.**
- **Russia appears to be scrambling to reduce tensions with South Korea following credible reports of intensified North Korean cooperation with Russia, including South Korean and Ukrainian intelligence warnings that a contingent of North Korean troops has deployed for training to Russia.**

- Russian forces continue to systematically perpetrate war crimes, including the continued executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and use of chemical weapons.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the western part of the Kursk Oblast salient.
- Russian forces advanced west of Kreminna, southeast of Pokrovsk, and southeast of Kurakhove.
- Russian forces recently conducted several mechanized attacks of various echelons in the Kurakhove direction.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to coerce occupied Ukrainian populations into signing contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 20, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 20, 2024, 3:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:30am ET on October 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against the Lipetsk-2 Air Base near Lipetsk City and Russian state-owned defense enterprise Sverdlov in Dzerzhinsk, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast on the night of October 19 to 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that forces from Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Special Operations Forces (SSO) struck the Lipetsk-2 Air Base and caused a fire and secondary explosions.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces targeted ammunition depots, fuel storage, and aircraft and noted that the Russian military bases Su-34 fighter-bomber, Su-35 fighter, and MiG-31 interceptor/fighter fixed-wing aircraft at the base. Lipetsk Oblast Governor Igor Artamonov claimed that Russian forces intercepted drones over Lipetsk City and Oblast and that a crashed drone caused a fire in an unspecified area.[2] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that forces from Ukraine's SBU, GUR, and SSO also struck the Sverdlov Plant, causing secondary explosions.[3] The Sverdlov plant produces chemicals for artillery ammunition and stores and produces glide bombs, and sources in Ukrainian intelligence told Western and Ukrainian news outlets that the plant is one of Russia's largest explosives factories.[4] Geolocated footage published on October 20 shows an explosion near the Sverdlov Plant.[5] The US imposed sanctions on the Sverdlov Plant in July 2023 for its support of Russia's war effort in Ukraine.[6] Nizhny Novgorod Oblast Governor Gleb Nikitin claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian drone strike on the Dzerzhinsk industrial zone and that several plant employees received minor injuries.[7]

Moldovan authorities have yet to announce the results of the October 20 presidential election and European Union (EU) referendum, but both the election and referendum have passed the required voter turnout threshold to be valid. Current Moldovan President Maia Sandu is up for re-election, and the referendum — if passed — would change the Moldovan Constitution to define EU membership as one of Moldova's "strategic objectives." [8] The presidential election and referendum results will both be considered valid, as they surpassed the 33.33 percent voter turnout requirement.[9] The Moldovan Central Election Commission (CEC) reported that about 51 percent of registered voters had already voted in the presidential election by the end of the voting period within Moldova, but polling stations abroad are still open as of the time of this publication.[10] Moldovan media reported that 42.44 percent of voters had already participated in the referendum as of 1800 local time in Moldova.[11] ISW recently assessed that, although Moldova stands to advance its path towards European integration with the October 20 election and referendum, the Kremlin will continue its efforts to sabotage Moldova's EU accession and destabilize Moldovan democracy into the next decade.[12]

Moldovan authorities reported several attempted electoral violations, including attempts by pro-Russian actors to influence the results of the election and destabilize Moldova through violent protests and other kinetic activities. The Moldovan General Police Inspectorate reported that authorities have observed 113 electoral violations within Moldova as of 1830 local time, including photographing the ballot, damaging the ballot, and organizing the transport of voters.[13] The Moldovan CEC stated that "observers" from unspecified pro-Russian Moldovan political parties requested access to polling stations in Russia and Romania but that authorities denied their requests as they had not officially registered as observers before the deadline.[14] The Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated on October 20 that unspecified actors "artificially" created large lines at the two polling stations in

Russia as part of attempts to illegally transport voters to the polling stations.[15] Moldovan *IPN News Agency* reported that unspecified actors gave Moldovan voters at the polling station in Moscow "invitations" to a restaurant, claiming that the Moldovan embassy in Russia organized the event — a claim that embassy representatives denied.[16] The "Cultural Educational Center of Moldova," which is reportedly affiliated with US-sanctioned, Kremlin-linked Moldovan opposition politician Ilan Shor, reportedly offered voters in Moscow "Moldovan citizen in Russia" cards that offered free services, such as internet, medical, legal, and banking services in Russia.[17] Moldovan media reported a bomb threat at a polling station in Italy but did not specify the responsible actor.[18] Director of Moldova's Intelligence and Security Service Alexandru Musteata reported on October 17 that Moldovan authorities found that foreign instructors affiliated with the Wagner Group had trained a group of about 100 young, pro-Russian Moldovans at "guerilla camps" in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.[19] Musteata stated that the Moldovans learned how to challenge law enforcement, use weapons and objects to cause non-lethal injuries, use improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and handle drones with explosive attachments. The Moldovan police also reported that over 300 Moldovans learned about protest tactics at a training ground near Moscow and that Shor's Eurasia non-profit organization funded the training. Kremlin authorities and pro-Kremlin Moldovan actors may plan to ignite protests after the election as part of efforts to destabilize Moldovan society and discredit the results.

Russian sources claimed on October 20 that former Russian Yukos Oil Company Vice President for Corporate Management Mikhail Rogachev was found dead in a possible suicide after falling from a window in Moscow.[20] Russian sources claimed that Rogachev left a suicide note and had been suffering from late-stage cancer.[21] One Russian insider source, claiming to cite unspecified people within Rogachev's "inner circle," denied that Rogachev had cancer and claimed that his death was unexpected for his family.[22] Rogachev held various positions in Yukos from 1996 to 2007, including vice president, before becoming the executive director of the Russian private investment fund ONEXIM Group and later the deputy general director of the Russian mining and metallurgical company Nor Nickel.[23] Russian opposition activist Mikhail Khodorkovsky owned Yukos until Russian authorities arrested Khodorkovsky, likely for political reasons, in 2003 and closed the company in 2007.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against the Lipetsk-2 Air Base near Lipetsk City and Russian state-owned defense enterprise Sverdlov in Dzerzhinsk, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast on the night of October 19 to 20.**
- **Moldovan authorities have yet to announce the results of the October 20 presidential election and European Union (EU) referendum, but both the election and referendum have passed the required voter turnout threshold to be valid.**
- **Russian sources claimed on October 20 that former Russian Yukos Oil Company Vice President for Corporate Management Mikhail Rogachev was found dead in a possible suicide after falling from a window in Moscow.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Sudzha and Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Toretsk and Selydove.**

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 19, 2024](#)
[Click here to read the full report with maps](#)

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 11:45am ET on October 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 19, 2024, 3pm ET

Ukrainian drones reportedly struck the "Kremniy EI" microelectronic plant in Bryansk City on the night of October 18 to 19. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on October 19 that Ukrainian drones struck the plant and noted that "Kremniy EI" is one of Russia's largest microelectronic manufacturers and that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is one of the company's main customers.[1] Head of the Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko acknowledged the report of the strike and stated that the plant manufactures microelectronics for Russian Pantsir air defense systems, Iskander missiles, radars, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and drones.[2] Ukrainian outlet *RBC Ukraine* and Ukrainian open-source intelligence group CyberBoroshno published photos showing the aftermath of the strike and damage to a building at the plant.[3] Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz claimed on October 19 that debris from a downed Ukrainian drone struck and caused a fire at a "non-residential building" in Bryansk Oblast, possibly referring to the plant.[4]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner of war (POW) exchange on October 18 - the fourth exchange since the start of Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast in August 2024. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on October 19 that Ukraine returned 95 POWs, including Ukrainian servicemembers who defended the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol in early 2022, Ukrainian National Guardsmen, servicemembers of the Ukrainian State Border Service, and other Ukrainian military personnel.[5] The Russian MoD claimed on October 18 that Russian authorities also returned 95 Russian POWs and that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) mediated the exchange.[6] The Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs noted that many of the returned Ukrainian POWs had serious illnesses and severe injuries and experienced weight loss due to torture and malnutrition in Russian captivity.[7] ISW previously observed that the frequency of POW exchanges between Ukraine and Russia has significantly increased since the start of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on August 6, with both sides exchanging a total of 267 POWs each in three separate exchanges prior to the most recent October 18 POW exchange.[8] Russia and Ukraine only conducted three POW exchanges between January 1 and August 6, 2024, in comparison. ISW continues to assess that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has likely increasingly incentivized Russia to engage in POW exchanges.

Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office reported on October 18 that Ukrainian authorities opened an investigation into the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) in Bakhmut Raion in September 2024.[9] Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office reported that the Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office opened a pre-trial investigation into violations of the laws and customs of war and intentional murder in connection with Russian forces shooting an unarmed and injured Ukrainian POW near the Phenol Plant in Niu York, Donetsk Oblast on September 6, 2024. ISW has recently observed an increase in Russian violations of different aspects of the Geneva Convention on POWs, which prohibits the inhumane treatment and execution of POWs or persons who are clearly rendered *hors de combat*. [10]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian drones reportedly struck the "Kremniy EI" microelectronic plant in Bryansk City on the night of October 18 to 19.**
- **Ukraine and Russia conducted a one-for-one prisoner of war (POW) exchange on October 18 - the fourth exchange since the start of Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast in August 2024.**
- **Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office reported on October 18 that Ukrainian authorities opened an investigation into the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) in Bakhmut Raion in September 2024.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced within the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk oblast and near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 18, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 18, 2024, 7:30 pm ET

South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) reported that North Korea transferred roughly 1,500 North Korean special forces to eastern Russia, where they are reportedly training before deploying to participate in Russia's war against Ukraine. The NIS stated on October 18 that seven Russian Pacific Fleet ships transported roughly 1,500 North Korean special forces from Chongjin, Hamhung, and Musudan in North Korea to Vladivostok, Russia between October 8 and 13 and that North Korea will send a second batch of military personnel to Russia soon.[1] The NIS stated that North Korean servicemembers are currently stationed in Vladivostok, Ussuriysk, Khabarovsk, and Blagoveshchensk in eastern Russia. The NIS stated that the Russian military has issued the North Korean personnel Russian uniforms, weapons, and fake identification cards claiming that the North Koreans are residents of the Sakha and Buryatia republics. The NIS posted satellite imagery showing a Russian transport ship near North Korea and an estimated 640 North Korean personnel gathered at Russian military facilities in Ussuriysk and Khabarovsk on October 16. South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported on October 18 that the NIS also stated that North Korea recently decided to send four brigades totaling 12,000 personnel to the war in Ukraine.[2] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov told *The War Zone* on October 17 that there are nearly 11,000 North Korean infantry troops training in eastern Russia and that they will be ready to fight in Ukraine by November 1.[3] Budanov stated that the first cadre of 2,600 North Korean

soldiers will deploy to Kursk Oblast but that it is unclear where the remaining troops will deploy. ISW cannot independently verify these statements but has no basis to question the veracity of these intelligence reports, which are consistent with previous reports from South Korean and Ukrainian officials about North Korean troops training in Russia before deploying to the war in Ukraine, including to Kursk Oblast.[4] ISW has also observed recent reports that a limited number of North Korean military personnel, mainly engineering personnel, are likely operating near occupied Donetsk City.[5]

A number of sources provided footage purporting to substantiate these intelligence reports. The footage appears consistent with reports of North Korean troop deployments to Russia but does not independently validate the intelligence reports. A Russian Telegram channel posted footage on October 18 purportedly showing North Korean soldiers marching at a Russian training ground, and the footage was later geolocated to Sergeevka, Primorsky Krai.[6] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne*, along with *Vox Ukraine's* fact-checking project *VoxCheck*, reported that they could neither confirm nor deny that the soldiers in the footage are North Korean as the speech in the video is hard to hear and there are no clear external signs to indicate that the soldiers are North Korean.[7] The Ukrainian Center for Strategic Communications (Stratcom) posted additional footage on October 18 reportedly showing Russian forces outfitting North Korean troops with Russian uniforms and equipment at the Sergeevka training ground.[8] ISW cannot independently verify the presence of North Korean troops in either of the videos and cannot verify the location of the second video.

Suspilne stated that the footage of North Korean troops marching was filmed at the base of the Russian 127th Motorized Rifle Division (5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) in Sergeevka.[9] ISW has observed reports that elements of the 127th Division's 143rd Motorized Rifle Regiment were operating in Kursk Oblast as of late August 2024, while other elements of the division, including its 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment, have been operating in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area since at least June 2024.[10] Both the 394th and 143rd motorized rifle regiments are based in Sergeevka.[11] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is likely leveraging its June 2024 Russia-North Korea comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, which Russian President Vladimir Putin submitted for ratification on October 14, to in part offset Russian force generation and border security requirements – further cementing Putin's commitment to avoiding mobilization for as long as possible.[12]

Russian forces appear to be further intensifying mechanized activity in western Donetsk Oblast amid initial reports of the start of autumnal muddy ground conditions. Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Ruslan Muzychuk stated on October 18 that Russian forces are increasingly supporting infantry-led assaults with armored vehicles ahead of the onset of muddy ground conditions in Ukraine in Fall 2024.[13] Muzychuk stated that Russian forces have recently increased their use of armored personnel carriers and tanks in assaults in the Pokrovsk and Kurakhove directions but noted that Ukrainian forces are effectively destroying Russian armored vehicles in these directions.[14] Muzychuk stated that Ukrainian forces recently repelled several platoon-sized Russian mechanized assaults on the eastern outskirts of Selydove (southeast of Pokrovsk).[15] A Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kurakhove direction reported on October 17 that Russian forces conducted a battalion-sized mechanized assault near Kostyantynivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[16] The brigade reported that Russian forces attacked near Kostyantynivka with 27 armored vehicles and six tanks and that Ukrainian forces damaged or destroyed 14 armored vehicles and four tanks. Geolocated footage published on October 18 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently repelled a battalion-sized Russian mechanized assault near Maksymilianivka (east of Kurakhove).[17] The Ukrainian brigade that repelled the recent attack near Maksymilianivka reported that Russian forces attacked in two waves with a total of 33 armored vehicles and that Ukrainian forces damaged or destroyed 19 Russian armored vehicles.[18] Russian forces also conducted a company-sized mechanized assault near Selydove, as well as a reduced battalion-sized mechanized assault and several company-sized and platoon-sized mechanized assaults in the Kurakhove direction over the past week.[19] ISW observed three battalion-sized mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast in the last week alone - a notable increase in tempo, as ISW only observed reports of Russian forces conducting four battalion-sized mechanized assaults in eastern Ukraine from late July to early October 2024.[20]

Russian and Ukrainian sources have recently reported worsening ground conditions throughout the frontline in Ukraine, and the arrival or the impending arrival of muddy ground conditions are likely prompting the Russian military command to intensify mechanized offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast.[21] ISW previously noted that the Russian military command may intend for this intensified mechanized activity to facilitate advances across open fields before the onset of seasonal rainy weather and muddy ground conditions and to allow Russian forces to consolidate positions in preparation for future offensive operations in the coming months.[22] Muddy ground conditions will likely constrain Russian infantry maneuver and Russian forces' use of motorcycles and other small, wheeled vehicles along the frontline, and the Russian military command may assess that advances during the current, less muddy weather conditions will limit the number of open fields that Russian

infantry will have to cross later after ground conditions deteriorate. Russian forces may be able to more successfully employ tracked vehicles (the Soviet versions of which are designed to operate in such conditions) in muddy ground conditions, and muddy ground conditions may incentivize Russian forces to use armored vehicles and tanks in place of the smaller wheeled vehicles on which Russian infantry have come to rely to conduct assaults in certain frontline sectors.[23]

ISW continues to assess that Russian forces will continue offensive operations following the fall muddy season, though adverse weather conditions will likely degrade the effectiveness of Russian infantry until weather and ground conditions improve.[24] Russian forces notably made a concerted effort to regain the theater-wide initiative during the period of the most difficult weather conditions for mechanized offensive operations in Fall 2023 and may seek to retain the theater-wide initiative through consistent offensive pressure in Fall 2024 under similar weather conditions.[25]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to signal his disinterest in meaningful peace negotiations with Ukraine while using the upcoming BRICS summit to legitimize Kremlin information operations falsely portraying Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate. Putin met with prominent media organization heads from BRICS member states in Moscow on October 18 and claimed that Russia is willing to negotiate with Ukraine but later countered that Russia is "ready to continue this fight" and that "victory will be ours." [26] Putin's October 18 statements are the latest in a series of contradictory statements from Putin and other senior Kremlin officials that attempt to portray Russia as willing to negotiate while simultaneously signaling that the Kremlin is unwilling to accept terms that do not amount to Ukraine's capitulation and destruction.[27] Putin also claimed on October 18 that Russia needs to create conditions for an enduring peace and falsely portrayed Ukraine as the aggressor state in the war, further indicating that these conditions amount to eliminating Ukraine's ability to defend itself against possible future Russian aggression.[28] Putin used the meeting to promote alternative peace plans by Brazil and the People's Republic of China (PRC), the key principles of which favor Russia. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is uninterested in good-faith peace negotiations with Ukraine and that the Kremlin only invokes the concept of "peace plans" or "negotiations" to prompt the West to pressure Ukraine into preemptive concessions regarding Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[29]

Putin used ongoing conversations about security guarantees in Ukraine's Victory Plan to further boilerplate nuclear saber-rattling information operations that aim to discredit Ukraine to its Western partners and prevent Western aid to Ukraine. German outlet *Bild* claimed on October 17 that a Ukrainian official who specializes in weapons procurement stated several months ago that Ukraine would only need a few weeks to develop its first nuclear bomb.[30] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) denied the *Bild* allegations on October 17.[31] Putin responded to a question on October 18 about the *Bild* article and Zelensky's recent statements about Ukraine's need for more concrete security guarantees during his meeting with BRICS member states media organizations, claiming that Russia will respond with an "appropriate reaction" should Ukraine take steps to develop a nuclear weapon, which Putin labeled as a "dangerous provocation." [32] Putin has routinely engaged in nuclear saber-rattling in order to push the West into self-deterrence, particularly during critical moments in Western policy discussions about support for Ukraine.[33] ISW continues to assess that Russia's nuclear saber-rattling is not indicative of Russia's willingness to use nuclear weapons and that Russia is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.[34] In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Russia specifically committed to "respect" and "refrain from the threat or use force" against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity – making no exceptions for Crimea or the Donbas region – in exchange for Ukraine's commitment to give the Soviet nuclear weapons on its soil to Russia.[35]

Western partners continue to announce new military assistance to Ukraine. Germany announced on October 17 a new military aid package for Ukraine, which includes eight Leopard tanks; 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles; two TRML-4D radar systems; 4,000 unspecified attack drones; 42,000 40mm artillery ammunition rounds; and one IRIS-T SLM and IRIS-T SLS air defense system each.[36] NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte announced on October 17 that NATO is working to provide Ukraine with the remainder of the promised 40 billion euros (about \$43 billion) worth of military aid - 20.9 billion euros (about \$31 billion) of which NATO has already provided - by the next NATO summit in June 2025.[37] Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced on October 18 that Canada will provide 64.8 million Canadian dollars (about \$47 million) worth of military aid to Ukraine, which will include small arms, ammunition, protective gear, and funding for the training of Ukrainian forces.[38] Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof announced on October 17 that the Netherlands will allocate 271 million euros (about \$294 million) to purchase artillery shells for Ukraine.[39] Latvian Defense Minister Andris Spruds and Lithuanian Defense Minister Laurynas Kasčiūnas announced on October 18 that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia will allocate 0.25 percent of their GDPs to support Ukraine.[40] Denmark announced on October 17 that it will allocate 2.4 billion Danish kroner (about \$348 million) to Ukraine

for the purchase of new military equipment and has signed agreements with international partners to donate materiel to support Ukraine's equipment of its new brigades.[41]

The US Department of State (DoS) program Rewards for Justice offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of foreigners involved in interfering in US elections, including members of prominent Kremlin-awarded milblogger channel Rybar.[42] Rewards for Justice announced the award on October 18 and specified that the *Rybar* channel manages several social media channels, including at least one propaganda channel on X (formerly Twitter), that are trying to promote internal division and discord in the US and promote the interests of the Russian government.[43] Rewards for Justice identified nine *Rybar* employees who are of particular interest to the DoS: *Rybar* founder and director Mikhail Zvinchuk; creative director Valeriya Zvinchuk; video department head Alexander Kan; foreign language resources head Tatyana Kosterova; regional manager Olga Kuznetsova; designer and content team lead Maksim Matveyev; content head of a propaganda channel Alexander Minin; and Vladimir Berkutov and Alexander Minin, who both work on the propaganda channel.[44] Rewards for Justice noted that deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin funded *Rybar* before his death and that Russian state defense conglomerate Rostec currently funds the channel.[45] The Kremlin has coopted the *Rybar* channel as part of efforts to strengthen the Kremlin's control over the Russian information space, and ISW has previously assessed that the *Rybar* channel is also attempting to expand its influence in the international information space, including by supporting Iranian-backed Iraqi efforts to gain greater control over the Iraqi information space.[46]

Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on October 18 that Ukraine has recorded more than 100 confirmed cases of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) amid a recent theater-wide increase in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs. [47] Lubinets stated that the number of Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs is likely much higher. ISW has recently observed an increase in Russian violations of different aspects of the Geneva Convention on POWs, which prohibits the inhumane treatment and execution of POWs or persons who are clearly rendered *hors de combat*. [48] The European Union (EU) reported on October 16 that at least 177 Ukrainian POWs have died in Russian captivity since February 2022.[49] Head of the Ukrainian Department for Combating Crimes in Conditions of Armed Conflict Yuri Bilousov stated on October 4 that Russian forces have executed 93 Ukrainian POWs on the battlefield since the start of the full-scale invasion and that 80 percent of the recorded cases occurred in 2024, suggesting a clear and systemic increase in the pace of such war crimes.[50]

Key Takeaways:

- South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) reported that North Korea transferred roughly 1,500 North Korean special forces to eastern Russia, where they are reportedly training before deploying to participate in Russia's war against Ukraine.
- A number of sources provided footage purporting to substantiate these intelligence reports. The footage appears consistent with reports of North Korean troop deployments to Russia but does not independently validate the intelligence reports.
- Russian forces appear to be further intensifying mechanized activity in western Donetsk Oblast amid initial reports of the start of autumnal muddy ground conditions.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to signal his disinterest in meaningful peace negotiations with Ukraine while using the upcoming BRICS summit to legitimize Kremlin information operations falsely portraying Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate.
- Putin used ongoing conversations about security guarantees in Ukraine's Victory Plan to further boilerplate nuclear saber-rattling information operations that aim to discredit Ukraine to its Western partners and prevent Western aid to Ukraine.
- Western partners continue to announce new military assistance to Ukraine.
- The US Department of State (DoS) program Rewards for Justice offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification or location of foreigners involved in interfering in US elections, including members of prominent Kremlin-awarded milblogger channel *Rybar*.
- Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on October 18 that Ukraine has recorded more than 100 confirmed cases of Russian forces executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) amid a recent theater-wide increase in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupiansk, Kreminna, Kurakhove, and Velyka Novosilka.

October 17, 2024, 4:35pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of Ukraine's offensive in Kursk Oblast.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:00pm ET on October 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian sources reported on October 16 that unspecified actors killed the deputy commander of Russia's Special Operations Forces (SSO) Training Center, Nikita Klenkov, near Moscow City.[1] Klenkov reportedly fought in the war in Ukraine as part of military unit 43292 and was a high-ranking officer of the Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU). Russian authorities claimed that Klenkov's murder was a planned contract killing and opened a criminal investigation into the murder but have yet to accuse Ukraine or other Western actors of being involved in the murder.[2] ISW cannot independently verify these claims.

The European Union (EU) issued a statement on October 16 condemning Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and noted that at least 177 Ukrainian POWs have died in Russian captivity since February 2022.[3] The EU called Russia's increasingly frequent executions of Ukrainian POWs a grave breach of the Geneva Convention, highlighting that the executions demonstrate Russia's systemic disregard for international law. The Geneva Convention on POWs prohibits the inhumane treatment and execution of POWs or persons who are clearly rendered *hors de combat*. [4] ISW has recently observed an increase in Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout the theater of war.[5] Head of the Ukrainian Department for Combating Crimes in Conditions of Armed Conflict Yuri Bilousov stated on October 4 that Ukrainian sources documented evidence indicating that Russian forces have executed 93 Ukrainian POWs on the battlefield since the start of the full-scale invasion and that 80 percent of the recorded cases occurred in 2024.[6]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian sources reported on October 16 that unspecified actors killed the deputy commander of Russia's Special Operations Forces (SSO) Training Center, Nikita Klenkov, near Moscow City.
- The European Union (EU) issued a statement on October 16 condemning Russian executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and noted that at least 177 Ukrainian POWs have died in Russian captivity since February 2022.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 16, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko, Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 16, 2024, 6:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on October 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presented Ukraine's five-part Victory Plan aimed at winning the war by the end of 2025 to the Verkhovna Rada on October 16, which includes a

promise to contribute experienced Ukrainian troops to defending NATO's eastern flank following the resolution of the war in Ukraine. Zelensky stated that Ukraine's Victory Plan is intended to end the war "no later than" 2025 and is composed of five points, including: an immediate invitation to join NATO; continued Western support and aid including equipping Ukrainian brigades, supporting Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia and increasing intelligence sharing with Ukraine; Western and Ukrainian non-nuclear strategic deterrence against Russia; Western investment in Ukraine's strategic economic growth; and a promise that Ukrainian forces will "replace" certain Western military contingents currently stationed in Europe after the war's conclusion.[1] Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces will use their experience in the war to strengthen NATO's defense and ensure security in Europe and noted that Ukrainian units could replace unspecified contingents of US forces in Europe in the future. Zelensky noted that there are several secret aspects of the plan that he has shared with Ukraine's Western allies. Zelensky stated that Ukraine's fate is connected to the fate of its neighbors in the Baltics, Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia and warned that Ukraine and the West must support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity or risk future Russian aggression. Ukrainian and Western officials expressed support for Zelensky's plan on October 16, and Zelensky noted that he will present the plan to the European Council on October 17.[2]

Russian President Vladimir Putin's current theory of victory in Ukraine seeks to protract the war and posits that Russian forces can outlast Western support for Ukraine and collapse Ukrainian resistance by winning a war of attrition. Russia will likely face serious medium- and long-term constraints that will undermine this strategic effort, however. Putin and the Russian military command have committed the Russian military to a year-long offensive effort along the frontline in eastern and northeastern Ukraine that seeks to exhaust Ukrainian forces and prevent Ukraine from accumulating the necessary manpower and materiel to conduct counteroffensive operations that contest Russia's theater-wide initiative.[3] Putin and the Russian military command likely view retaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic priority and have shown themselves to be tolerant of protracted offensive operations that result in gradual, creeping advances far short of their intended operational objectives.[4] The Russian military is currently attempting to eliminate a challenge to its theater-wide initiative in Kursk Oblast following the Ukrainian incursion in early August 2024 while maintaining offensive pressure in eastern Ukraine in pursuit of longstanding operational objectives.[5] The Russian military's intensified Summer 2024 offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk and reduce the wider Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast will likely culminate in the coming months, although the Russian military command will likely continue to commit Russian forces to the overall strategic effort to retain the theater-wide initiative and exhaust Ukrainian forces well past this operational culmination point regardless of the state of Russian forces' combat effectiveness.[6] Putin's theory of victory relies on Russian forces conducting consistent offensive operations indefinitely, but these grinding assaults will likely degrade available Russian manpower and materiel significantly enough that Russian forces will have to decrease offensive tempo on at least select sectors of the front — presenting Ukrainian forces with opportunities to contest and perhaps seize the battlefield initiative in these areas.[7]

Medium- to long-term constraints on Russian force-generation capacity and Russian military-industrial production will undermine Russia's ability to support consistent offensive operations that seek to protract the war and overwhelm Ukraine through attrition. ISW has observed a steady widespread increase in financial incentives that Russian authorities are offering for concluding a military contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), suggesting that Russia is exhausting recruitment pools of willing volunteers.[8] Russian authorities have reportedly expressed concerns that ongoing recruitment efforts are producing diminishing results, and Putin remains committed to avoiding another partial mobilization call-up of reservists despite growing signs of force-generation constraints.[9] Putin retains the option to conduct another partial mobilization wave — as he did in Fall 2022 — but will likely only do so under immense pressure or once the ongoing crypto-mobilization campaign seriously fails. Russian offensive operations in Ukraine have resulted in pronounced equipment losses, particularly for armored vehicles, and Russian military industrial production capacity will likely fail to replace these losses in the medium- to long-term.[10] Russia currently relies on refurbishing a large but finite stock of Soviet-era equipment to replace its outsized losses in Ukraine and appears to be depleting stockpiles at an increased rate.[11] Russia is leveraging partnerships with North Korea and Iran to acquire ammunition and military equipment and is engaging with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to acquire critical components for defense production, but these international procurement efforts will not address all the Russian materiel requirements in Ukraine.[12] Putin appears just as reluctant to conduct a full-scale economic mobilization as he is to conduct another mobilization wave, and it remains unclear if critical bottlenecks and worsening labor shortages would even allow Russia to rapidly and fully mobilize its economy for the war effort in the event that Putin permitted it.[13]

Imprisoned ardent nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin notably questioned the Kremlin's articulated theory of victory and assessed that 2025 and possibly late 2024 will be "a serious test" for Russia because the Kremlin has yet to address medium- to long-term force-generation and defense-industrial-capacity constraints. Girkin published a series of letters from prison written between September 28 and October 12 in which he argued that the Kremlin's current strategy depends on the outcome of the US presidential elections, implying that the Kremlin anticipates that Russia will be able to outlast Western support for Ukraine based on the policies of a new US administration.[14] Girkin acknowledged that he does not have access to reliable tactical forecasts due to his imprisonment but noted that the Kremlin has yet to fix its systematic defense industrial base (DIB) and manpower problems since launching the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and that these problems may soon lead to military-economic crises in Russia. Girkin claimed that the Kremlin has exaggerated its military capabilities, resulting in the Russian DIB failing to catch up to war-time equipment needs. Girkin emphasized that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has long "consumed" or "is finishing" remaining Russian weapon reserves. Girkin also noted that Russia has expended trained personnel as if they are "endless and inexhaustible," and that the war has already "eaten up" Russian professional forces. Girkin implied that subsequent Russian force generation efforts are detrimental to the Russian economy because the Kremlin now needs to generate forces from its labor force. Girkin argued that the Kremlin's lack of long-term strategic planning and poor tactical planning created conditions in which the Russian military and DIB systems respond to emerging problems only after these problems become "critically dangerous." Girkin notably claimed that the Kremlin has wasted the time it has had to correct these "gross mistakes," noting that the Kremlin missed the opportunity that the West and Ukraine "kindly provided" to Russia "via their own incompetence and degradation" by delaying the provision of US aid to Ukraine in Winter 2023–2024 and Spring 2024. Girkin routinely pointed out Russia's long-term military and political vulnerabilities prior to his arrest in July 2023. Girkin is also notably one of the first voices within the Russian ultranationalist information space to openly question the Kremlin's theory of victory.

Girkin also assessed that Russian Summer–Fall 2024 offensive campaign did not accomplish its goals in the entire theater and is unlikely to do so ahead of the muddy season, although Russian forces are continuing intense offensive operations in several operational directions in Ukraine. Girkin stated that the Russian offensive operation north and northeast of Kharkiv City has "stalled" with very insignificant territorial advances; that Russian offensives in Donetsk Oblast merely "pushed" Ukrainian positions but did not break through the frontline; and that Russian forces are spending their reserves on repelling Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[15] Girkin argued that the Russian seizure of Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast was "unsurprising" because Russian forces once again failed to encircle Ukrainian forces, which are now able to consolidate on a shortened frontline to the northwest of the settlement. Girkin assessed that the Ukrainian Summer–Fall 2024 defensive operation was successful in achieving its goals of repelling Russian offensives with minimal territorial losses; delivering strong counterattacks; preserving unused reserves; and maintaining morale within the military and society.

US President Joe Biden announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine worth \$425 million following a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on October 16.[16] Biden stated that the package will include additional air defense capabilities, air-to-ground munitions, armored vehicles, and unspecified munitions and that the US will provide Ukraine with hundreds of air defense interceptors, dozens of tactical air defense systems, hundreds of armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles, and thousands of additional armored vehicles in the coming months. The Department of Defense (DoD) specified that the package will include additional munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), RIM-7 missiles and support for air defense, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), air-to-ground munitions, 155mm and 105mm artillery munitions, tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs), and other munitions and equipment. The DoD noted that this is the Biden administration's 67th tranche of equipment drawn from DoD inventories provided to Ukraine since August 2021. The Australian government announced that it will provide Ukraine with 49 M1A1 Abrams tanks as part a new aid package to Ukraine worth 245 million Australian dollars (about \$164 million). [17]

The South Korean Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on October 16 that it is "closely" monitoring indications that North Korean troops are directly supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine amid reports that the Russian military is training North Korean soldiers.[18] The South Korean National Intelligence Service also announced on October 16 that it is tracking the possibility that North Korean troops are participating in Russia's war effort and that it is coordinating with Ukrainian intelligence services.[19] Sources in Ukraine's military and intelligence services told Ukrainian outlets *RBC Ukraine* and *Suspilne* that the Russian military is currently training over 10,000 North Korean soldiers in Russia's Far East and are preparing to transfer some of them to border areas

near Ukraine in order to free up Russian military personnel for rotations.[20] Ukrainian outlets *Suspilne* and *Liga* reported on October 15, citing anonymous military intelligence sources, that the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade is forming a 3,000-person "battalion" staffed by North Korean citizens (the numerical strength is far beyond a battalion's), which the Russian military will likely deploy to defensive operations in Kursk Oblast.[21] ISW has not observed reports that North Korean troops are involved in combat operations, however. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stated on October 16 that NATO does not have "definitive" information that North Korean troops are fighting in Ukraine. [22] The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on October 16 that unspecified US military and intelligence officials "expressed some skepticism" that a significant number of North Korean personnel were fighting in Ukraine, but stated that they had "little doubt" that North Korean engineers and observers are operating in occupied Ukraine and Russia in part to build and operate North Korean-provided ballistic missiles for Russian forces.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presented Ukraine's five-part Victory Plan aimed at winning the war by the end of 2025 to the Verkhovna Rada on October 16, which includes a promise to contribute experienced Ukrainian troops to defending NATO's eastern flank following the resolution of the war in Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's current theory of victory in Ukraine seeks to protract the war and posits that Russian forces can outlast Western support for Ukraine and collapse Ukrainian resistance by winning a war of attrition. Russia will likely face serious medium- and long-term constraints that will undermine this strategic effort, however.
- Imprisoned ardent nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin notably questioned the Kremlin's articulated theory of victory and assessed that 2025 and possibly late 2024 will be "a serious test" for Russia because the Kremlin has yet to address medium- to long-term force-generation and defense-industrial-capacity constraints.
- Girkin also assessed that Russian Summer–Fall 2024 offensive campaign did not accomplish its goals in the entire theater and is unlikely to do so ahead of the muddy season, although Russian forces are continuing intense offensive operations in several operational directions in Ukraine.
- US President Joe Biden announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine worth \$425 million following a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on October 16.
- The South Korean Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on October 16 that it is "closely" monitoring indications that North Korean troops are directly supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine amid reports that the Russian military is training North Korean soldiers.
- Russian forces recently advanced in northern Kharkiv Oblast, near Kreminna, near Siversk, and near Toretsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 15, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 15, 2024, 7:20pm ET

The Kremlin is likely leveraging the recent June 2024 Russia-North Korea comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in part to offset Russian force generation and border security requirements—further cementing Russian President Vladimir Putin's commitment to avoiding mobilization for as long as possible. Ukrainian outlets *Suspilne* and *Liga* reported on October 15, citing anonymous military intelligence sources, that the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade is forming a 3,000-person "battalion" staffed by North Korean citizens (the numerical strength is far beyond a battalion's).[1] Ukrainian intelligence sources assessed that the "battalion" will likely be involved in ongoing Russian defensive operations in Kursk Oblast and reported that up to 18 North Korean soldiers have already deserted their positions in Bryansk and Kursk oblasts before the unit has been committed to combat operations.[2] ISW cannot independently confirm the veracity of these reports, but Russian officials notably did not deny them on October 15. Putin submitted the text of the Russia-North Korea comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, which both countries signed in June 2024, to the Russian State Duma for ratification on October 14.[3] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov emphasized in a comment to Kremlin newswire TASS that the Russia-North Korea agreement is "unambiguous" in its provision of "mutual defense and security cooperation." [4] The Kremlin is likely using the "mutual defense" provision of the agreement to provide the legal justification for the deployment of North Korean soldiers to the combat zone in Russia in response to the Ukrainian

incursion into Kursk Oblast. ISW has recently observed reports that a small contingent of North Korean personnel was operating near occupied Donetsk City.[5]

Beyond the legal justification, however, the Kremlin's willingness to enter into a mutual defense agreement with North Korea, resulting in the reported commitment of North Korean personnel into combat operations in Russia, highlights Putin's continued reliance on pursuing alternative force generation avenues instead of committing to declaring partial or general mobilization. ISW has reported at length on Putin's continued reliance on crypto-mobilization and the formation of new volunteer formations to avoid the domestic ramifications of conducting a society-wide general mobilization or another partial mobilization wave.[6] This dilemma has become particularly acute for Putin since Ukraine's August 2024 Kursk Oblast incursion, as the Russian military had to reckon with new manpower requirements introduced by the need to defend an entirely new front within Russia itself. Putin's response to the Kursk incursion has been consistent with his handling of Russian force generation throughout the war thus far, however, and he has maintained his unwillingness to counter the incursion more seriously with a wider mobilization, instead focusing on the ad hoc creation of new territorial defense units, the redeployment of existing units from Ukraine, and the use of conscripts.[7] The use of North Korean personnel under the mutual defense clause of the Russia-North Korea agreement is part of the same wider effort. Putin appears more willing to absorb North Korean personnel into the Russian military and resort to other irregular force generation efforts than to call for a wider mobilization to actually address the combat situation in the theater of operations.

The Kremlin has elected to address the recent controversy regarding its reliance on conscripts to repel Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast by offering financial incentives to any personnel involved in defending the state border. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed on October 14 expanding the criteria for Russian combat veteran status to include soldiers who have defended against an "invasion into Russia" or "armed provocations on the state border," which likely includes conscripts and local territorial defense elements involved in facing Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[8] Legal Russian combat veteran status would entitle these personnel to veterans' pensions and other social benefits, and Kremlin newswire TASS noted that the Russian federal expenditures to expand the list of military personnel classified as combat veterans will exceed 3.4 billion rubles (about \$35 million) in 2025-2027.[9] Current Russian federal law stipulates that Russian conscripts cannot participate in combat operations, and the Russian MoD has instead relied on conscripts to conduct border security functions along the border with Ukraine to free up combat power to deploy elsewhere in the theater.[10] Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast exposed the vulnerability of Russia's border security and conscription policies, as Russian conscripts actively participated in combat operations in the region in response to the incursion.[11] The Russian MoD's vague proposal to extend veteran statuses to personnel involved in border security functions is likely another loophole that will allow the Kremlin to covertly rely on conscripts to defend the border without the need to formally amend the Russian legal restrictions on the use of conscripts in combat. The proposal also likely aims to appease conscripts and their families by providing financial compensation and incentives with the likely aim of avoiding backlash similar to the controversies the Soviet Union and later Russia faced over the use of conscripts in combat operations in Afghanistan and Chechnya.[12] Putin could have chosen to amend the Russian law to formally allow conscripts to conduct combat functions but instead chose to expand the combat veteran eligibility criteria and increase spending for combat veterans.[13] The provision of veteran statuses also likely aims to incentivize recruitment into newly formed territorial defense formations such as BARS-Kursk and BARS-Belgorod. Putin has been increasingly turning to issuing a wide variety of long term financial incentives to generate manpower, appease mobilized personnel and their families, and prolong his war effort in Ukraine, and Putin's persistent reliance on these incentives suggests that he remains concerned about the possible negative consequences on the stability of his regime if he demands involuntary sacrifices from Russian society.[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law allowing Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin to stay in his position despite reaching retirement age (again) demonstrating Putin's continued preference for keeping curated loyalists from his inner circle in positions of power. Putin signed a law on October 14 allowing the Russian head of state (himself) to "extend the term of office of the head of the Investigative Committee who has reached the age of 70." [15] Bastrykin turned 71 in August 2024 and has held his position since 2011. The previous law stated that the maximum age for Investigative Committee officials was 65 but that Putin could extend this term to 70.[16] Putin has taken similar steps in recent years to raise the retirement ages of government and military officials — current Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson and then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev lowered the age limit for civil servants from 65 to 60 in 2010, but Putin raised this to 70 in 2013 when he returned to the presidency.[17] Putin also signed laws in 2021 that allowed the president to extend the term of army generals, marshals, fleet admirals, and presidential appointees.[18] Putin's continuous raising of the retirement age allows him to keep those within his inner circle who are loyal to him in positions of power. Bastrykin was notably a classmate of

Putin's at university.[19] Bastrykin has also recently positioned himself as a prominent figure in Russia's ultranationalist community, specifically appealing to ultranationalist animus towards migrants.[20] Putin has likely calculated that having a loyalist like Bastrykin rhetorically lead the ultranationalist community is beneficial for the Kremlin's recent wider efforts to appeal to and co-opt this community, and has manipulated the law accordingly.[21] Putin recently promoted younger members of his inner circle, such as 52-year-old Presidential Aide Alexei Dyumin, to positions within the Kremlin, but these younger appointees have also been loyal Putin supporters for decades.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin is likely leveraging the recent June 2024 Russia-North Korea comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in part to offset Russian force generation and border security requirements—further cementing Russian President Vladimir Putin's commitment to avoiding mobilization for as long as possible.
- The Kremlin has elected to address the recent controversy regarding its reliance on conscripts to repel Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast by offering financial incentives to any personnel involved in defending the state border.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law allowing Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin to stay in his position despite reaching retirement age (again) demonstrating Putin's continued preference for keeping curated loyalists from his inner circle in positions of power.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Kupiansk, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- A former Russian Storm-Z instructor and milblogger heavily criticized Russian forces' reliance on the partially-encrypted communications platform Discord following Russia's recent ban of the platform.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 14, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Christina Harward, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

October 14, 2024, 5:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on October 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 15 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov arrived in the People's Republic of China (PRC) for an official visit on October 14, highlighting continued Russia-PRC defense cooperation against the backdrop of bilateral naval exercises in the Pacific Ocean. Belousov met with PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun in Beijing on August 14 and discussed the role of bilateral cooperation in enhancing each state's respective defensive capabilities and maintaining global security and regional stability.[1] Dong emphasized that Russia and the PRC share a common desire to develop military cooperation and open new avenues for unspecified joint defense cooperation.[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) notably published footage on October 14 of ongoing joint Russia-PRC People's Liberation Army (PLA) anti-submarine naval exercises in the northwestern Pacific Ocean and claimed that a detachment of Russian and PLA naval vessels are conducting a joint patrol of the Asia-Pacific region.[3] Such joint naval exercises are manifestations of intensified Russia-PRC defense cooperation, as each party can learn valuable lessons from one another during combined exercises, improving interoperability and potentially shaping military doctrine in the future. Russian forces have experience repelling Ukrainian autonomous naval drone strikes against Russian naval and port infrastructure, and the PLA may hope to absorb some of these lessons in planning for the PRC's potential future actions against Taiwan. Taiwan's MoD warned that the PRC launched "massive military drills" encircling Taiwan with warships on October 14, which overlapped with Belousov's visit.[4]

Russian forces struck civilian vessels docked at Ukrainian ports for the fourth time since October 5, part of an apparent Russian strike campaign targeting port areas to undermine Ukraine's grain corridor, spoil international support for Ukraine, and push Ukraine into premature negotiations. Odesa Oblast officials reported that Russian forces struck the port of Odesa with a ballistic missile during the day on October 14, hitting the civilian vessels *NS Moon* flying the Belize flag and the *Optima* dry cargo vessel flying the Palau flag, as well as port infrastructure and a grain warehouse.[5] The officials stated that Russian strikes on October 7 already damaged

the *Optima*. Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces most recently struck civilian vessels docked at the port of Odesa overnight on October 5 to 6 and on October 7 and 9.[6] Russian ultranationalist milbloggers responded to the October 9 strike with rhetoric supporting existing Kremlin narratives aimed at undermining confidence in the grain corridor as well as attempting to justify the strike.[7] Milbloggers explicitly called for further Russian strikes against Ukrainian grain infrastructure, civilian vessels at Ukrainian ports, and other targets that would further degrade Ukraine's economic potential. ISW recently assessed that Russian strikes against civilian vessels and other grain corridor infrastructure are almost certainly intended to undermine Western confidence in Ukraine's ability to enforce and defend the corridor, influence ongoing Western discussions about long-term support for Ukraine, and impede Ukraine's ability to survive economically during the war.[8]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov arrived in the People's Republic of China (PRC) for an official visit on October 14, highlighting continued Russia-PRC defense cooperation against the backdrop of bilateral naval exercises in the Pacific Ocean.
- Russian forces struck civilian vessels docked at Ukrainian ports for the fourth time since October 5, part of an apparent Russian strike campaign targeting port areas to undermine Ukraine's grain corridor, spoil international support for Ukraine, and push Ukraine into premature negotiations.
- Russian sources claimed that Russian forces recaptured positions in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions in central Toretsk.
- Russian forces recently conducted a reduced battalion-sized mechanized assault in the Kurakhove direction and recently made confirmed advances northeast of Vuhledar.
- Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on October 11 that sources within the Russian Presidential Administration stated that the Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" program, which places veterans of the war in Ukraine into government positions after returning to Russia, is meant to increase the popularity of contract military service and boost recruitment.
- Russian occupation officials continue to pathologize Ukrainian identity in an effort to indoctrinate children in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 13, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, and George Barros

October 13, 2024, 4:05pm ET

Russian forces have recently resumed tactical offensive attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and have made tactical gains in localized assaults, but this activity so far does not appear to be a part of a larger operational offensive effort to support the wider Russian offensive operation in western Donetsk Oblast. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated on October 12 and 13 that elements of the Russian 336th Naval Infantry Brigade (Baltic Fleet, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and the 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) launched assaults near Levadne (southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and broke through Ukrainian defenses.[1] A Ukrainian military observer noted that Russian forces reached the outskirts of Levadne and advanced in the direction of Novodarivka (southwest of Novodarivka).[2] Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Russian forces seized Levadne and advanced up to the southern outskirts of Novodarivka, although ISW has not observed confirmation of these Russian claims.[3]

These tactical gains are not the result of a sudden or unexpected Russian breakthrough. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces began conducting renewed ground assaults southwest of Velyka Novosilka beginning around October 11.[4] Ukrainian Khortytzia Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn reported on October 3 that Russian forces were preparing assaults groups for offensive operations in Zaporizhia Oblast in the near future but that Ukrainian forces had not identified large Russian force concentrations in southern Ukraine.[5] Voloshyn added that the planned Russian offensive activity aimed to improve Russian tactical positions and establish tactical footholds for continued offensive actions.[6] Russian forces activated on a long dormant sector of the front in western Zaporizhia Oblast near Kamyanske (south of Stepanivka) in early October, but

this activity has so far been limited and has resulted in only marginal tactical gains.[7] Russian forces may be reactivating in less active sectors of the front in southern Ukraine to divert Ukrainian attention away from Russia's priority offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast and to fix Ukrainian forces along the front in southern Ukraine and prevent Ukraine from redeploying forces to Donetsk Oblast.

Concerted Russian offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area could theoretically support the ongoing Russian operational effort to eliminate the wider Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast and advance up to the H-15 (Donetsk City-Zaporizhzhia City) highway by pressing up the T-0518 (Velyka Novosilka-Bahatyr) highway and pressuring the western flank of the Ukrainian grouping in western Donetsk Oblast.[8] Russian forces have activated on the western bank of the Mokryi Yaly River that runs west along the T-0518 highway and the western outskirts of Velyka Novosilka, however, and are currently attempting to advance in areas that diverge from the western flank of the Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces would likely need to seize Velyka Novosilka in order to drive up the T-0518 highway and pursue significant advances into the western flank of the Ukrainian salient, which would require intensified offensive activity on the eastern bank of the Mokryi Yaly River immediately south of Velyka Novosilka. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger noted on October 13 that there has been a lull in Russian activity north of Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both south of Velyka Novosilka and immediately on the western and eastern banks of the Mokryi Yaly River, respectively).[9] Russian advances in the Levadne-Novodarivka area could theoretically aim to cut the road connecting Hulyaipole to Velyka Novosilka and degrade Ukrainian logistics to Velyka Novosilka ahead of hypothetical intensified Russian assaults to seize Velyka Novosilka. ISW has not observed reports that Russian forces are conducting notably large assaults in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, however, or accumulating manpower and materiel for an intensified offensive effort comparable to the Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces, on the contrary, have redeployed forces that were previously in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and elsewhere in southern Ukraine to respond to Ukraine's incursion in Kursk.[10]

Russian forces recently executed nine Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast amid a theater-wide increase in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs. A Ukrainian open-source intelligence (OSINT) project reported on October 13 that Russian forces executed nine Ukrainian POWs near the village of Zeleny Shlyakh, Kursk Oblast on October 10.[11] Ukrainian drone operators reportedly unexpectedly encountered Russian forces in what they likely perceived to be a rear area and came under Russian fire. The Ukrainian drone operators, facing limited ammunition, were compelled to surrender and Russian forces took them as POWs. An image of the aftermath of the execution suggests that Russian forces disarmed, lined, stripped, and shot the Ukrainian POWs — a clear indication of the premeditated nature of the executions.[12] Ukrainian Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets condemned the executions on October 13 as a serious violation of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of POWs and stated that he sent letters to the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regarding the case.[13] The Geneva Convention on POWs prohibits the execution of POWs or persons who are clearly rendered *hors de combat*. [14] The Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office also announced on October 13 that it launched an investigation into the reports of the execution of the nine Ukrainian POWs in Kursk Oblast.[15]

ISW has recently observed an increase in Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs throughout the theater, and Russian commanders are likely writ large condoning, encouraging, or directly ordering the execution of Ukrainian POWs. Head of the Ukrainian Department for Combating Crimes in Conditions of Armed Conflict Yuri Bilousov stated on October 4 that Ukrainian sources documented evidence indicating that Russian forces have executed 93 Ukrainian POWs on the battlefield since the start of the full-scale invasion and that 80 percent of the recorded cases occurred in 2024.[16] The largest single-instance of execution of Ukrainian POWs occurred on October 1 when Russian forces executed 16 Ukrainian POWs in the Pokrovsk direction.[17] ISW continues to track footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs and has observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appear to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders.[18] The Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office recently noted that Russian commanders directly ordered the execution of four Ukrainian POWs at the Vovchansk aggregate plant in Summer 2024.[19]

Russian milbloggers largely glorified the Russian execution of the Ukrainian POWs, reinforcing a cultural norm to justify and celebrate war crimes within the broader Russian ultranationalist community. Many Russian milbloggers not only justified but celebrated the Russian execution of the POWs in Kursk Oblast by claiming that the executions were deserved or that such executions are a common aspect of war.[20] Other Russian milbloggers specifically called on the Russian military to increase the execution of Ukrainian POWs throughout the theater.[21] Many of these Russian milbloggers have very large followings and are affiliated with the Kremlin, providing them with a sense of authority in establishing and reinforcing the accepted cultural norms within the Russian ultranationalist community. The *Rybar* Telegram channel, which celebrated the execution of POWs,

has received awards from the Kremlin and has a following of roughly 1.3 million subscribers as of this publication, and *Rybar* founder Mikhail Zvinchuk regularly appears on Russian state television to comment on the war in Ukraine.[22] Other prominent ultranationalist milbloggers who praised and justified the October 10 execution include: *RVvoenkor* with about 1.62 million Telegram subscribers, *Dva Mayora* with roughly 1.17 million subscribers, *Starshe Edy* with about 627,000 subscribers, and *Zapisky Veterana* with about 357,000 subscribers as of this publication.[23] Many of these subscribers are Russian military personnel and volunteers currently fighting in the war, and Russian soldiers routinely interact with these channels through correspondences and crowdfunding efforts. Russian milbloggers have often glorified Russian atrocities and brutality in Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion, and this glorification underscores a broader culture that is likely encouraging the systemic execution of Ukrainian POWs.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have recently resumed tactical offensive attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and have made tactical gains in localized assaults, but this activity so far does not appear to be a part of a larger operational offensive effort to support the wider Russian offensive operation in western Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently executed nine Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast amid a theater-wide increase in Russian executions of Ukrainian POWs.
- Russian milbloggers largely glorified the Russian execution of the Ukrainian POWs, reinforcing a cultural norm to justify and celebrate war crimes within the broader Russian ultranationalist community.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Selydove, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Donetsk City, and Velyka Novosilka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 12, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

October 12, 2024, 5:55pm ET

Russian forces are reportedly relying on illicitly obtained Starlink terminals to improve combat coordination and the effectiveness of their tactical reconnaissance strike complex (TRSC) in Ukraine as part of an overarching effort to reach technological parity with Ukrainian forces.

[1] Ukrainian military personnel operating in Donetsk Oblast told the *Washington Post* in an article published on October 12 that Starlink terminals have increasingly appeared at Russian frontline positions and that the illicitly obtained technology is helping Russian forces fix persisting issues with combat coordination and communications while improving the precision of Russian tactical fires.[2] The commander of a Ukrainian drone platoon operating near Novohrodovka (southeast of Pokrovsk) told the *Washington Post* that Ukrainian reconnaissance drones started widely recording Starlink terminals at Russian positions in the area in September 2024 and that the arrival of the terminals corresponded with a decrease in intercepted Russian radio transmissions in which Russian soldiers relayed incomplete or incorrect battlefield information to their commanders.[3] Another Ukrainian soldier reportedly stated that Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction appear to have enough Starlink terminals to give individual tactical groups their own terminal.[4] Ukrainian soldiers reportedly credited recent Russian battlefield gains, including the Russian seizure of Vuhledar in late September 2024, partially to the Russian use of Starlink terminals.[5] Russian forces have mainly relied on radio and other insecure communication technologies for organizing combat coordination and relaying targeting information to fire and strike elements, and Russian forces have yet to field modern battlefield management systems at scale to organize their TRSC as many Ukrainian units have.[6] Ukrainian access to Starlink has afforded Ukrainian forces a technological edge to conduct more effective combat coordination and field new developments in the TRSC ahead of Russian forces, and Russian forces are likely trying to degrade these Ukrainian advantages by scaling up their own use of the terminals.[7] Ukraine is currently pursuing a strategy to offset Russian manpower and materiel advantages through technological innovation and adaptation, and technological parity between Ukrainian and Russian forces will undermine this effort.[8]

A Russian milblogger claimed that a Ukrainian F-16 downed a Russian Su-34 fighter aircraft in an unspecified area of the theater on October 12. ISW cannot verify the claim that a Ukrainian F-16 was involved in the reported loss of the Russian Su-34. A Russian milblogger closely affiliated with Russian aviation published a tribute to a lost Su-34 aircraft on October 12 but did not provide additional details about the incident.[9] A prominent Russian milblogger also confirmed that the Su-34 crew died but claimed that this loss was not related to Ukrainian activity, and other milbloggers

speculated that the Su-34 could have crashed as a result of technical malfunction or human error.[10] A Russian Telegram channel, which claims to be managed by Russian airborne (VDV) officers and staff of the Russian "Dnepr" Grouping of Forces, claimed that a Ukrainian F-16 fighter jet presumably shot down the Russian Su-34 fighter aircraft while the Su-34 was dropping FAB glide bombs with unified planning and correction modules (UMPC) at a distance of about 50 kilometers from the frontline.[11] The Telegram channel later responded to the claims that the Su-34 could have crashed due to technical malfunction or human error, noting that such hypothetical scenarios still highlight a problem with the wear and tear of Russian aircraft, unprofessionalism among pilots, and pilot exhaustion.[12] The Telegram channel accused Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers of lying about the Su-34 crash and preventing Russian forces from developing plans to counter the Ukrainian F-16 threat.[13] The Telegram channel claimed in March 2024 that Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor filed a complaint against the channel for "discrediting" a Russian military commander.[14] ISW cannot independently confirm the Telegram channel's claim, but if confirmed, this incident would mark the first Ukrainian shootdown of a Russian manned aircraft with a Western-provided F-16 fighter jet.

Unknown actors opened fire on personnel of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MVD) Center for Combating Extremism in Nazran, Republic of Ingushetia on the night of October 11. [15] The shooters reportedly targeted the car of the center's deputy head, Adam Khamkhoev, who was reportedly not injured.[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Khamkhoev's whereabouts following the shooting were unknown.[17] The shooters killed three people, including one of Khamkhoev's security guards.[18] Russian law enforcement-affiliated outlet *Baza* noted that this was the fifth attempt on Khamkhoev's life and that Khamkhoev's former boss at the Center for Combating Extremism, Ibragim Eldzharkiyev, was assassinated in Moscow in 2019.[19] Russian business outlet *Kommersant* noted that Khamkhoev is listed as a victim in numerous criminal cases, including a case about a previous murder attempt against Eldzharkiyev.[20] Russian authorities previously claimed that members of the "militant group" of the Sufi followers of Batal-Khadzhi Belkhoroev (called the Batalkhadzhintsy) were involved in Eldzharkiyev's murder.[21] A member of the Batalkhadzhintsy claimed in 2023 that he killed Eldzharkiyev as part of a "blood feud." [22] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly supports fellow Sufi Batalkhadzhintsy, offering them protection in Chechnya in exchange for sending volunteer units to fight in Ukraine.[23] Kadyrov notably declared a "blood feud" against three Republic of Dagestan and Republic of Ingushetia legislators on October 10 after accusing them of plotting his assassination.[24] The Russian Emergencies Ministry stated that a gas tank exploded at a gas station in Grozny, Chechen Republic on October 12, reportedly due to safety violations.[25] ISW is not prepared to assess any connections between these events at this time.

Indian enterprises are reportedly increasing exports of dual-use technologies to Russia, in part thanks to large Russian reserves of rupees from oil sales to India. *Bloomberg* reported on October 11 that US and European officials stated that India has become the second largest supplier of restricted technologies, such as microchips, circuits, and machine tools, to Russia – after the People's Republic of China (PRC).[26] Monthly Indian exports of these technologies reportedly doubled to \$60 million in both April and May 2024 as compared to unspecified months earlier in 2024 and increased to \$95 million in July 2024. *Bloomberg* reported that the official sources stated that about one-fifth of "sensitive" technologies imported by the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) come via India. Russia's large stocks of Indian rupees following Russian oil sales to India are reportedly driving the growth of Russian imports from India. The *Financial Times* similarly reported in September 2024 that leaked documents revealed that Russia has been covertly acquiring sensitive dual-use electronics from India with "significant reserves" of Indian rupees amassed by Russian banks from increasing oil sales to India.[27] It is unclear to what extent private Indian businesses or state enterprises are exporting these technologies to Russia, but Indian firms appear to nonetheless be helping Russia sustain its war effort in Ukraine. These reports come against the backdrop of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's August 2024 visit to Ukraine, during which he rhetorically highlighted the principles of international law, including sovereignty and territorial integrity, in discussions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.[28] Reported transfers of Indian artillery shells through European intermediaries to Ukraine have also reportedly generated tensions in the Russian-Indian relationship.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are reportedly relying on illicitly obtained Starlink terminals to improve combat coordination and the effectiveness of their tactical reconnaissance strike complex (TRSC) in Ukraine as part of an overarching effort to reach technological parity with Ukrainian forces.
- A Russian milblogger claimed that a Ukrainian F-16 downed a Russian Su-34 fighter aircraft in an unspecified area of the theater on October 12, but ISW cannot verify the claim that a Ukrainian F-16 was involved in the reported loss of the Russian Su-34.
- Unknown actors opened fire on personnel of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MVD) Center for Combating Extremism in Nazran, Republic of Ingushetia on the night of

October 11.

- Indian enterprises are reportedly increasing exports of dual-use technologies to Russia, in part thanks to large Russian reserves of rupees from oil sales to India.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Donetsk City, and Robotyne.
- Russian forces are reportedly struggling to conduct effective counterbattery fires.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 11, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

October 11, 2024, 8:20pm ET

Russian forces intensified their ongoing effort to dislodge Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast around the evening of October 10 and have recently advanced further into the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast while reportedly eliminating almost the entirety of the smaller Ukrainian salient in Glushkovsky Raion. Russian forces reportedly simultaneously intensified counterattacks in Glushkovsky Raion, on the left flank of the main Ukrainian salient in Korenevsky Raion, and on the right flank of the main Ukrainian salient in Sudzhansky Raion on the evening of October 10.[1] Geolocated footage published on October 10 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced into central Kremyanoye (east of Korenevo) and to the northern outskirts of Zeleny Shlyakh (southeast of Korenevo) and enveloped Ukrainian positions near Lyubimovka (southeast of Korenevo).[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces operating in Korenevsky Raion seized Olgovka (east of Korenevo) and Nizhny Klin (southeast of Korenevo and Lyubimovka), advanced up the outskirts of Tolsty Lug and Novoivanovka (both southeast of Korenevo), and broke through Ukrainian defenses near Lyubimovka during an alleged battalion-sized mechanized assault.[3]

ISW has yet to observe confirmation that Russian forces recently conducted a battalion-sized mechanized assault in the area or recaptured any settlements. Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Russian forces enveloped Ukrainian forces in Lyubimovka and Tolsty Lug, although some milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have encircled up to two Ukrainian battalions in Korenevsky Raion.[4] ISW has not observed confirmation that Russian forces have encircled any Ukrainian units in Kursk Oblast, however. Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet, Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly conducting these intensified counterattacks in Korenevsky Raion.[5]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces operating in Sudzhansky Raion broke through Ukrainian defenses near Martynovka and Mykhailivka (both northeast of Sudzha), advanced two kilometers deep north of Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha), and are enveloping Ukrainian positions near Plekhovo (southeast of Sudzha).[6] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade advanced up to the northwestern outskirts of Sudzha, although a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger repeatedly denied these reports.[7] ISW has not observed any visual confirmation of Russian advances in Sudzhansky Raion since the start of intensified Russian counterattacks in the area on the evening of October 10. Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, EMD), 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 1220th Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized unit), and unspecified Chechen Akhmat units are reportedly conducting the intensified counterattacks in Sudzhansky Raion.[8]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of most of Glushkovsky Raion on October 10 and 11, although ISW has yet to observe visual confirmation of these alleged Russian advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces operating south of Glushkovo pushed Ukrainian forces back from Veseloye, advanced near Medvezhye, and approached the international border with Sumy Oblast.[9] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces only retain limited positions near Krasnooktyabrskoye and on the outskirts of Novy Put (both south of Glushkovo and immediately on the border with Sumy Oblast) and declared the Ukrainian offensive effort in Glushkovsky Raion a failure.[10] Ukrainian forces began ground assaults into Glushkovsky Raion on September 11, 2024, following the start of Russian counterattacks in Kursk Oblast on September 10, 2024, but have not yet established a significant foothold in the area.[11] Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, 1434th Akhmat "Chechnya" Regiment, 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), 83rd VDV Brigade, and 106th VDV Division are reportedly conducting intensified counterattacks in Glushkovsky Raion.[12]

Intensified Russian counterattacks likely aim to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast before poor weather conditions in Fall 2024 and early Winter 2024-2025 begin to constrain battlefield maneuver. Ukrainian officials have previously noted that Russian forces are intensifying offensive operations in Ukraine, particularly mechanized offensive operations, to take advantage of dry road and terrain conditions before rainy seasonal weather causes muddy ground conditions.[13] It is likely that this Russian operational calculus also extends to the Russian effort to recapture all of Kursk Oblast, where several Russian sources have reported the start of limited muddy terrain conditions as of October 11.[14] The Russian military command may be concerned that the poor weather conditions in Fall 2024 and early Winter 2024-2025 will encourage positional fighting in Kursk Oblast and afford Ukrainian forces more time to entrench themselves in their main salient and fortify existing positions. Better-entrenched Ukrainian forces with more extensive fortifications in Kursk Oblast will likely further complicate Russian efforts to push Ukrainian forces back across the border. Russian forces may perceive a closing window of opportunity to eliminate the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast with the current level of manpower and materiel that the Russian military has allocated to the effort. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated in a documentary published on October 10 that Russian forces have redeployed roughly 50,000 personnel from other operational directions to Kursk Oblast since the start of the incursion on August 6, 2024, and the Russian military likely aims to avoid committing more manpower to the area in the event that the Ukrainian presence persists into 2025.[15] Such redeployments have likely degraded the readiness of Russian operational groups in Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Kharkiv oblasts.

The Russian military command likely aims to rapidly push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast in order to free up combat power for its priority offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast and to ease the theater-wide operational pressures that the Ukrainian incursion has generated. Russian units redeployed from elsewhere in the theater to Kursk Oblast— many of which are VDV elements that the Russian military has routinely used to rapidly reinforce priority operational efforts — could have served as reinforcements for the Russian military's priority offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction and western Donetsk Oblast.[16] The Russian military has instead relied on the operational reserves it established ahead of its Summer 2024 offensive operation to sustain its offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast, and the exhaustion of these operational reserves will contribute to the likely culmination of the Russian Summer 2024 offensive operation in the coming months.[17] The Russian military command likely hopes that by rapidly eliminating the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast it can redeploy forces from Kursk Oblast to Donetsk Oblast and stave off culmination before it can achieve its operational objectives of seizing Pokrovsk and eliminating the wider Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast.[18] Russian forces have yet to make rapid gains in Kursk Oblast since starting counterattacks on September 10, however, and intensified counterattacks threaten to exhaust and degrade the very combat power that the Russian military hopes to recommit to the priority offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast.

South Korean and Ukrainian officials reportedly continue to identify North Korean military personnel already fighting in Ukraine as well as training in Russia for possible future deployments alongside the Russian military. The *Washington Post* reported on October 11 that South Korean and Ukrainian officials stated that North Korean soldiers are operating alongside Russian forces in Ukraine.[19] A Ukrainian military intelligence official reportedly stated that individual North Korean officers are observing Russian forces and studying the battlefield in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, but that Ukraine has not yet observed North Korean units operating in Ukraine. The Ukrainian official reportedly added that "several thousand" North Korean infantry personnel are training within Russia and that the Russian military command could deploy them to the frontline in Ukraine by the end of 2024 or to Russian border areas to free up Russian "reserves" to fight within Ukraine. South Korean and Ukrainian officials have recently reported that North Korean military personnel are likely operating in occupied Donetsk Oblast, and a recent Ukrainian missile strike near occupied Donetsk City reportedly killed several North Korean military officials.[20] The extent of the North Korean force grouping that Russia could deploy to the frontline or that could free up Russian forces along the border is unclear, but these scenarios may also aid Russian efforts to commit additional manpower to priority offensive operations in Ukraine and prolong the culmination of the Russian Summer 2024 offensive operation. North Korean troop deployments to Ukraine could also create opportunities for Ukrainian exploitation, depending on the quality, force structure, arrayment, and interoperability of North Korean forces.

Western partners continue to announce and provide new military assistance to Ukraine. The Norwegian government announced on October 11 that Norway will allocate 967 million Norwegian kroner (about \$90 million) for projects aimed at increasing Norway's defense capacity, including to produce defense materiel for Ukraine.[21] German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced on October 11 that Germany, along with Belgium, Denmark, and Norway, will allocate 1.4 billion euros (about \$1.5 billion) in military aid to Ukraine by the end of 2024 which will include the transfer of IRIS-T and Skyplex air defense systems as well as Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, self-propelled artillery

guns, armored vehicles, combat drones, radars, and artillery ammunition.[22] Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala announced that Ukraine will receive approximately 500 thousand 155-mm artillery ammunition as a part of the Czech Initiative by the end of 2024 while stressing that the program may expand with participation from other donor countries.[23] French outlet *Avionlegendaires* reported on October 9 that France will deliver between 12 and 20 Dassault Mirage 2000-F5 fighter jets to Ukraine in early 2025 following French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu's announcement that France would send an unspecified number of the fighter jets to Ukraine in the first quarter of 2025.[24] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on October 11 that he met with Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto and discussed the possibility of increasing Italian investment in the Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB).[25] Umerov also noted the potential creation of joint Ukrainian-Italian defense enterprises given Ukraine's strong industrial capacity.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues diplomatic efforts to establish and clarify Ukraine's strategic vision for peace. Zelensky denied on October 10 claims that he discussed with Western allies Ukraine's readiness for a ceasefire along the current frontline and territorial concessions to Russia in exchange for U.S. security guarantees and accelerated EU membership.[26] The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced on October 10 that it refutes allegations voiced in foreign media about Ukraine's alleged readiness to make concessions to Russia at the expense of its own sovereignty and territorial integrity, emphasizing the inadmissibility of such Ukrainian concessions.[27] The MFA noted that the only realistic approach to just and sustainable peace in Ukraine is Ukraine's proposed Peace Formula based on principles of the UN Charter and full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Zelensky stated during a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on October 11 that Ukraine aims to create the necessary and fair conditions for honest diplomacy regarding achieving lasting peace in Ukraine. Meloni noted that peace in Ukraine cannot mean surrender and that Italy will support Ukraine in establishing conditions conducive to principled peace negotiations.

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov declared a "blood feud" against Russian legislators, suggesting that Kadyrov is becoming increasingly emboldened in his personal political disputes. Kadyrov declared a blood feud on October 10 against Republic of Dagestan Senator Suleiman Kerminov and State Duma Deputies Bekkhan Barakhoyev and Rizvan Kurbanov, claiming that they "seized" Russia's largest online retailer Wildberries from the company's co-founder Vladislav Bakalchuk and were plotting to assassinate Kadyrov.[28] Vladislav Bakalchuk, who co-founded Wildberries with his ex-wife and current Wildberries CEO Tatyana Bakalchuk, led 20 to 30 armed accomplices on simultaneous assaults of two Wildberries offices in Moscow City in September 2024. [29] Vladislav previously appealed to Kadyrov to help prevent Tatyana from taking over the company and claimed days before the September armed assaults that Kadyrov saved his life and kept him out of prison.[30] Kadyrov notably announced the blood feud in a video in the Chechen language on his Telegram channel but did not mention the feud specifically in the accompanying Russian text, likely in an attempt to prevent its reporting in Russian media.[31] Kadyrov has previously rhetorically attacked Kremlin officials, speaking out against Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin's June 2024 statements about religious extremism in Russia.[32] It is unclear if Russian President Vladimir Putin will respond to Kadyrov's announcement of the blood feud, as Putin has supported Kadyrov's rule over Chechnya but has consistently attempted to posture Russia as a harmonious multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.[33]

Ukrainian officials confirmed that Ukrainian journalist Viktoriya Roshchyna died in Russian captivity. The Ukrainian Humanitarian and Information Policy Committee confirmed on October 10 that Roshchyna died in Russian captivity but that the circumstances surrounding her death are unknown.[34] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office stated that it upgraded the case surrounding Roshchyna's death to a war crime and intentional murder.[35] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on October 10 that Roshchyna was included on a list of prisoners that Ukraine and Russia were to exchange in the near future.[36] Roshchyna disappeared in occupied Ukraine in early August 2023, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly sent a letter to Roshchyna's family on October 10 stating that she had died on September 19.[37] The Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories stated that there were 4,337 Ukrainians in Russian captivity as of November 2023, including 763 civilians.[38] These numbers, which rely on data from the Red Cross may be even higher as the Red Cross does not always have access to places where Russian authorities hold Ukrainian civilians, including detention centers and penal colonies in occupied territories.

Ukrainian officials announced new appointments in the Ministry of Defense (MoD). Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov announced on October 11 the appointment of Serhiy Boyev to the post of Deputy Defense Minister for European Integration and Serhii Melnyk as the Deputy responsible for education, medicine, humanitarian support, and human capital policy.[39] Umerov also noted the creation of supervisory boards for the Defense Procurement Agency and the State Logistics Operator.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces intensified their ongoing effort to dislodge Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast around the evening of October 10 and have recently advanced further into the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast while reportedly eliminating almost the entirety of the smaller Ukrainian salient in Glushkovsky Raion.
- Intensified Russian counterattacks likely aim to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast before poor weather conditions in Fall 2024 and early Winter 2024-2025 begin to constrain battlefield maneuver.
- The Russian military command likely aims to rapidly push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast in order to free up combat power for its priority offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast and to ease the theater-wide operational pressures that the Ukrainian incursion has generated.
- South Korean and Ukrainian officials reportedly continue to identify North Korean military personnel already fighting in Ukraine as well as training in Russia for possible future deployments alongside the Russian military.
- Western partners continue to announce and provide new military assistance to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continues diplomatic efforts to establish and clarify Ukraine's strategic vision for peace.
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov declared a "blood feud" against Russian legislators, suggesting that Kadyrov is becoming increasingly emboldened in his personal political disputes.
- Ukrainian officials confirmed that Ukrainian journalist Viktoriya Roshchyna died in Russian captivity.
- Ukrainian officials announced new appointments in the Ministry of Defense (MoD).
- Russian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk and Kurakhove.
- The Kremlin is deceptively recruiting young African women to assemble Iranian-designed Shahed drones in the Republic of Tatarstan, likely to address labor shortages in Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 10, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, and George Barros

October 10, 2024, 11:50am ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:00am ET on October 10. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 11 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Shahed drone storage facility in Krasnodar Krai and an ammunition warehouse in the Republic of Adygea on October 9 and 10. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 9 that Ukrainian naval forces and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) struck a Russian Shahed drone storage facility near Oktyabrsky, Krasnodar Krai and that Russian forces stored around 400 Shahed drones at the facility.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that there were secondary detonations at the facility immediately following the strike, and footage published on October 10 shows a large fire and secondary detonations near the facility.[2] Krasnodar Krai officials stated on October 9 that Ukrainian drone strikes damaged several houses near Oktyabrsky and that unspecified warehouses in the area caught fire but claimed that the strike did not significantly damage the facilities.[3] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 10 that drone operators from the SBU, Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) struck an ammunition warehouse at the Khanskaya Air Base in the Republic of Adygea.[4] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces base Su-34 fighter-bombers and Su-27 fighter aircraft at the Khanskaya Air Base, and Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that sources within Ukrainian special services stated that there were 57 Russian training and combat aircraft and helicopters at the airfield at the time of the strike.[5] *Suspilne*'s sources stated that Russian forces use the Khanskaya Air Base to refuel planes during air strikes against frontline Ukrainian units and settlements.[6] Ukrainian forces are still determining the extent of the strike's damage to the airfield, and it is unclear whether Ukrainian forces struck any Russian aircraft at the Khanskaya Air Base as of the time of this report.[7] Russian sources published footage on October 10 purportedly showing Ukrainian drones striking the airfield and noted that the Russian 272nd Training Aviation Base of the Krasnodar Higher Military Aviation School of Pilots is based at the Khanskaya Air Base.[8]

Russian forces rely on Shahed drones to strike both frontline and rear Ukrainian settlements and cities and expend roughly 10,000 artillery shells per day against frontline Ukrainian positions.[9] Ukrainian forces notably struck the Oktyabrskii and Toropets ammunition depots in Tver Oblast and the Tikhoretsk ammunition depot in Krasnodar Krai in September 2024 and a Russian missile and storage ammunition storage facility in Karachev, Bryansk Oblast on October 8, which resulted in the destruction of dozens of ammunition storage buildings, rail cars, and likely a significant amount of ammunition, missiles, and drones.[10] While the impact of a single strike is unlikely to significantly impact Russia's war effort, repeated strikes against ammunition depots within Russia may force a decision point on the Russian military command to reorganize and disperse support and logistics systems within Russia's rear areas to mitigate the impact of such strikes at the expense of mass-optimized Russian logistics to support the war in Ukraine. The timely lifting of restrictions on the use of Western systems and the continued development of Ukraine's own long-range strike capabilities may allow Ukrainian forces to more effectively exploit such Russian vulnerabilities before Russia deploys countermeasures. Ukrainian strikes against facilities within Russia could impact offensive operations throughout the theater in Ukraine if Ukrainian forces have the materiel, capabilities, and permission to conduct such a strike campaign against logistics and support facilities within Russia at scale.

Russian forces have reportedly struck three civilian vessels docked in Ukrainian ports since October 5, likely as part of intensified Russian military, political, and economic pressure to undermine confidence in Ukraine's grain corridor, Western support for Ukraine, and push Ukraine into premature negotiations. Ukrainian Odesa Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Kiper stated on October 9 that Russian ballistic missiles struck port infrastructure in Odesa Raion and that Russian missiles struck a civilian container ship under the flag of Panama.[11] Kiper noted that this was the third Russian strike on a civilian vessel in the last four days and stated that these strikes are an attempt to disrupt Ukraine's grain corridor, kill civilians, and destroy Ukrainian infrastructure. Ukrainian officials reported that a Russian ballistic missile struck a civilian vessel under the flag of Palau in Odesa's port on October 7 and that Russian missiles damaged a civilian cargo ship on the night of October 5 to 6 near Odesa City.[12] Russian sources have attempted to justify the recent Russian strikes against civilian ships by claiming that the ships were carrying weapons, but ISW has not observed independent confirmation of these claims.[13] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces conducted a cruise missile strike against a civilian cargo ship under the flag of St. Kitts and Nevis transporting Ukrainian wheat to Egypt as it was leaving Ukrainian territorial waters in the Black Sea on the night of September 11.[14] Russian forces have previously heavily targeted Ukrainian ports and grain infrastructure in southern Ukraine and have engaged in threatening military posturing in the Black Sea in an effort to damage Ukrainian grain exports and undermine international confidence in Ukraine's grain corridor.[15] Russian strikes against civilian vessels in the grain corridor are almost certainly intended to undermine confidence in Ukraine's ability to enforce and defend the corridor, influence ongoing Western discussions about long-term Western support for Ukraine, and negatively impact Ukraine's efforts to economically recover amid the ongoing war.]

An unspecified senior US defense official stated on October 9 that Russian forces have suffered over 600,000 casualties since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 — a stark increase from a prior US intelligence assessment that Russian forces suffered about 315,000 casualties in Ukraine as of December 2023.[16] The senior US defense official stated on October 9 that Russian forces have suffered more battlefield casualties in Ukraine in this past month — likely referring to early September through early October 2024 — than in any other month of the war. [17] US intelligence reportedly assessed as of December 2023 that the then-estimated 315,000 Russian casualties amounted to nearly 90 percent of Russia's military personnel at the start of the invasion.[18] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) assessed in May 2024 that Russian forces have suffered over 465,000 casualties since February 2022 and that the Russian daily casualty rate starting in May 2024 was about 1,000 per day.[19]

An Iranian outlet affiliated with former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohsen Rezaei claimed on October 8 that Russia provided Iran with an S-400 air defense system and a squadron of Su-35 fighter jets but provided no evidence for this claim. NOTE: A version of this text appears in the October 9 ISW-CTP Iran Update. An Iranian outlet affiliated with former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohsen Rezaei claimed on October 8 that Russia provided Iran with an S-400 air defense system and a squadron of Su-35 fighter jets but provided no evidence for this claim.[20] ISW has not observed similar reports in prominent Western or Russian media, and ISW cannot independently verify this claim. ISW continues to assess that Russia could supply Iran with advanced military equipment in return for Iran's ongoing support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Shahed drone storage facility in Krasnodar Krai and an ammunition warehouse in the Republic of Adygea on October 9 and 10.
- Russian forces have reportedly struck three civilian vessels docked in Ukrainian ports since October 5, likely as part of intensified Russian military, political, and economic pressure to undermine confidence in Ukraine's grain corridor, Western support for Ukraine, and push Ukraine into premature negotiations.
- An unspecified senior US defense official stated on October 9 that Russian forces have suffered over 600,000 casualties since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 — a stark increase from a prior US intelligence assessment that Russian forces suffered about 315,000 casualties in Ukraine as of December 2023.
- An Iranian outlet affiliated with former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohsen Rezaei claimed on October 8 that Russia provided Iran with an S-400 air defense system and a squadron of Su-35 fighter jets but provided no evidence for this claim.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Toretsk. Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast and near Chasiv Yar, southeast of Pokrovsk, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Russian military appears to be increasingly recruiting older Russian volunteers in order to sustain ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 9, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, and George Barros

October 9, 2024, 12:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:20am ET on October 9 and covers both October 8 and 9 due to the fact that ISW did not publish a campaign assessment on October 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian military command has likely ordered Russian forces to conduct a relatively high tempo of mechanized assaults in Ukraine to pursue significant tactical advances before muddy ground conditions in fall 2024 constrain mechanized maneuver. Poor weather conditions in fall 2024 and early winter 2024-2025 will likely complicate and constrain both mechanized and infantry maneuver, but Russian forces may seek to maintain their consistent offensive pressure in eastern Ukraine despite these difficulties. Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Ruslan Muzychuk stated on October 8 that Russian forces are increasing their use of armored vehicles on the battlefield — specifically in the Kharkiv and Pokrovsk directions — in order to take advantage of dry road and terrain conditions before rainy seasonal weather causes muddy grounds conditions.[1] Russian forces have been conducting a high tempo of mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast since late July 2024 and have conducted at least four observed battalion-sized mechanized assaults in eastern Ukraine since July 25, 2024.[2] Russian forces have also resumed relatively large mechanized assaults along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line since late September 2024.[3] The Russian military command likely aims for intensified mechanized offensive activity to allow Russian forces to advance across open fields and consolidate in nearby frontline settlements that Russian forces can then use as a foothold for staging and launching offensive operations that seek to achieve operational objectives — such as the seizure of Kurakhove in western Donetsk Oblast or the seizure of Pokrovsk.[4] A Russian milblogger claimed on October 9 that muddy seasonal conditions have already started in Kursk Oblast and are constraining maneuver for wheeled vehicles. [5] ISW has not yet observed wide reporting that muddy terrain is constraining mechanized maneuver on any sector of the front in Kursk Oblast or in Ukraine, however.

Fall weather conditions will also likely constrain Russian infantry maneuver, and the Russian military command likely hopes that mechanized advances that Russian forces can achieve now will limit the number of open fields that Russian infantry will have to cross after weather conditions deteriorate. Russian forces have relied on small infantry groups to advance under the concealment of windbreaks in open fields from settlement to settlement, particularly in the Pokrovsk direction.[6] Fall weather will cause many windbreaks comprised of deciduous trees to lose most of their foliage and will provide less concealment for Russian infantry groups during fall 2024 and winter 2024-2025 — leaving Russian infantrymen more vulnerable to pervasive Ukrainian drone reconnaissance and tactical fires.

Russian forces will likely not cease offensive operations following the fall mud season, though adverse weather conditions will likely degrade Russian infantry effectiveness. Russian forces made a concerted effort to regain the theater-wide initiative during the period of the most difficult weather conditions for mechanized offensive operations in fall 2023, however, and may seek to retain the theater-wide initiative through consistent offensive pressure in fall 2024 under similar weather conditions.[7] Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command are pursuing a strategy that aims to prevent Ukraine from accumulating manpower and materiel to contest the theater-wide initiative by maintaining consistent offensive pressure on Ukrainian forces throughout the frontline and will likely continue to pursue this strategy despite seasonal constraints on mechanized and infantry maneuver.[8] Russian forces have exhausted many of the reserves that they established for their intensified Summer 2024 offensive operation that has heavily focused on advancing in Donetsk Oblast, and ISW continues to assess that the ongoing Russian offensive operation will likely culminate within the coming months.[9] Poor weather conditions that constrain battlefield maneuver will likely contribute to culmination, but the culmination of the Russian Summer 2024 offensive operation will not necessarily result in a complete end of consistent Russian offensive operations throughout eastern Ukraine in fall 2024 and early winter 2024-2025. Russian forces have an established pattern of fighting beyond their culmination points as well as fighting through adverse weather conditions.

US European Command (EUCOM) Commander and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher Cavoli reportedly stated that the US is withholding several US weapon systems and other military communications networks from Ukraine that could support Ukraine's war effort. *CNN* reported on October 8, citing sources familiar with the situation, that Cavoli outlined a list of several US capabilities that could better support Ukraine's war effort in a September 2024 report to the US Congress.[10] Another source familiar with the matter told *CNN* that the list included the air-launched Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSMs) cruise missile and the Link 16 system – a data sharing network that the US and other NATO countries use for communication and command and control (C2). *CNN* reported that Cavoli's report does not explain why the US has not yet provided Ukraine with systems that the US assesses could aid Ukraine's war effort. An unspecified source told *CNN* that the US has likely refrained from providing Ukraine with the Link 16 system over operational security concerns.

South Korean Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun stated on October 8 that a limited number of North Korean military personnel are likely operating near occupied Donetsk City.[11] Kim stated that North Korea likely deployed several military personnel to Ukraine to support Russia's war effort in response to a report that a Ukrainian missile strike near occupied Donetsk City killed several North Korean military officials on October 3.[12] Head of the Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation, Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, stated on October 5 that a small number of North Korean military personnel, mainly engineering personnel, are operating in occupied Donetsk Oblast and are repairing or somehow improving the quality of a large amount of low-quality ammunition that North Korea provided to the Russian military.[13]

Russian illegal arms dealer and Ulyanovsk Oblast parliamentarian Viktor Bout reportedly helped broker a deal for Russia to sell arms worth \$10 million to Yemen's Houthi rebels in August 2024 amid increasing reports of potential Russian arms transfers to the Houthis and deepening Russo-Iranian cooperation. The *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* reported on October 7, citing a European security official and other sources familiar with the matter, that Bout assisted in negotiations for small arms sales worth \$10 million when a Houthi delegation visited Moscow in August 2024.[14] The *WSJ's* sources stated that the first two deliveries would consist of mostly AK-74 assault rifles and that the Houthis also discussed the potential transfer of Kornet antitank missiles and anti-air weapons. The sources stated that they were unsure whether Bout negotiated the deal on behalf of the Kremlin or just with the Kremlin's tacit approval, and the *WSJ* noted that the transfer has not yet occurred and the source of the arms is still unclear.[15] The *WSJ* reported that these deliveries could begin as soon as October 2024 to Hodeidah Port under the guise of food supplies. Both Bout and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied the *WSJ* report.[16] Russia has reportedly been involved in Iranian-brokered "secret talks" to transfer Russian Yakhont (P-800 Oniks) anti-ship cruise missiles and other military equipment to the Houthis, but it is unclear whether these transfers have or will occur. [17] ISW continues to assess that Russia likely aims to leverage Iranian proxies to indirectly confront the West and shape Western decision making, particularly to deter the West from supporting Ukraine over fears of Russian escalation against the West, including escalating in a different theater.[18]

Russia banned the partially-encrypted communications platform Discord on October 8, likely degrading some frontline Russian forces' ad-hoc communications in the near term. Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor announced on October 8 that it had banned Discord within Russia on October 8 following recent Russian fines against Discord for failing to comply with Russian censorship laws.[19] Some frontline Russian forces use Discord for coordinating operations, including combat

drone operations, and this ban will likely impede some Russian military communications on the frontline in the near term.[20] The Kremlin has recently implemented several measures that have threatened frontline ad-hoc communication systems, including limiting the use of personal electronic devices on the frontline, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has failed to establish a secure and effective official communications system for Russian forces to use instead.[21] Some Russian milbloggers responded to the Discord ban by reiterating complaints about the lack of adequate alternative communications systems for Russian forces on the frontline.[22] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger complained that the Russian MoD has failed to address this issue for the past three years but claimed that Russian forces have been able to use other communications services to coordinate combat operations successfully.[23]

Russian forces continue to use chemical weapons in Ukraine in a continued apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a party. The Ukrainian Support Forces Command reported on October 8 that Russian forces continue to use K-51 and RG-VO grenade launchers to launch munitions containing harmful but not necessarily lethal riot control agents (RCA), which are prohibited in combat by the CWC.[24] The Ukrainian Support Forces Command reported that there have been 250 cases of Russian forces using munitions containing unknown types of dangerous chemical agents in Ukraine in September 2024. The Ukrainian Support Forces Command reported that Russian chemical weapons use has been systematic since February 2023 and that as of September 24 Ukraine has recorded Russian forces using munitions equipped with chemical weapons 4,228 times. ISW has consistently reported on increasingly common instances of Russian forces using chemical substances in combat that are banned by the CWC.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Russian military command has likely ordered Russian forces to conduct a relatively high tempo of mechanized assaults in Ukraine to pursue significant tactical advances before muddy ground conditions in fall 2024 constrain mechanized maneuver. Poor weather conditions in fall 2024 and early winter 2024-2025 will likely complicate and constrain both mechanized and infantry maneuver, but Russian forces may seek to maintain their consistent offensive pressure in eastern Ukraine despite these difficulties.**
- **US European Command (EUCOM) Commander and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher Cavoli reportedly stated that the US is withholding several US weapon systems and other military communications networks from Ukraine that could support Ukraine's war effort.**
- **South Korean Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun stated on October 8 that a limited number of North Korean military personnel are likely operating near occupied Donetsk City.**
- **Russian illegal arms dealer and Ulyanovsk Oblast parliamentarian Viktor Bout reportedly helped broker a deal for Russia to sell arms worth \$10 million to Yemen's Houthi rebels in August 2024 amid increasing reports of potential Russian arms transfers to the Houthis and deepening Russo-Iranian cooperation.**
- **Russia banned partially-encrypted communications platform Discord on October 8, likely degrading some frontline Russian forces' ad-hoc communications in the near term.**
- **Russian forces continue to use chemical weapons in Ukraine in a continued apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a party.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Robotyne.**
- **Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Vitaliy Sarantsev stated on October 8 that Russian forces may have exhausted their preexisting stocks of aerial bombs for glide bomb strikes.**

ISW did not publish a Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment on October 8.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 7, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 7, 2024, 12pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10:15am ET on October 7. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Note: ISW will not be publishing a Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment tomorrow, October 8. The ISW Russia and Geospatial teams will be participating in a wreath-laying ceremony honoring heroes of an earlier generation who gave their lives defending freedom and liberating others. Updates will resume on October 9.

Ukrainian forces struck an oil terminal in occupied Feodosia, Crimea on the night of October 6 to 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 7 that Ukrainian forces struck an oil terminal in occupied Feodosia causing a fire near the facility and that Ukrainian authorities are clarifying the damage to the facility.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Feodosia houses the largest oil terminal in occupied Crimea and that Russia uses this terminal to transport petroleum products to the Russian military. Feodosia occupation mayor Igor Tkachenko acknowledged the fire at the oil depot and claimed that it did not cause an oil spill.[2] A Crimea-focused source claimed that the Russian military had deployed a Pantsir-S1 air defense system to the area in June 2024 to protect the Feodosia oil terminal.[3] Footage published on October 7 shows a fire purportedly at the Feodosia oil terminal.[4]

Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubynets reported on October 7 that Ukrainian authorities are investigating another case of Russian forces' unjust abuse and execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs). Lyubynets reported that he sent letters to the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in response to recent aerial footage of Russian forces torturing and executing three unarmed Ukrainian POWs near Niu York, Donetsk Oblast.[5] Lyubynets noted that a Ukrainian brigade operating in the area published the footage on October 6 and highlighted that the highest levels of the Russian military command appear to be tolerating Russian war crimes in Ukraine. The Geneva Convention on POWs prohibits the "mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture" of POWs, as well as the execution of POWs or persons who are clearly rendered *hors de combat*. [6] Head of the Ukrainian Department for Combating Crimes in Conditions of Armed Conflict Yuri Bilousov stated on October 4 that Ukrainian sources documented evidence indicating that Russian forces have executed 93 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) on the battlefield since the start of the full-scale invasion and that 80 percent of the recorded cases occurred in 2024.[7] Bilousov noted on October 5 that these war crimes are systemic and that Russian authorities clearly condone these crimes. ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and observed a wider trend of Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appeared to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and unpunished by Russian field commanders.[8]

Russian authorities announced an "unprecedented" cyberattack against Russian state media infrastructure on October 7. The All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) reported that unspecified actors hacked VGTRK's online services overnight in an "unprecedented" attack, and pro-Kremlin Russian news outlet *Gazeta* reported that the attack took down broadcasts of Russian state television channels *Rossiya-1*, *Rossiya-24*, *Rossiya Kultura*, *Karusel*, and roughly 80 regional television and radio companies.[9] *Gazeta* cited a source in the Russian information security field claiming that hacker group "sudo rm -RF," which is allegedly linked to Ukraine, conducted the cyberattack.[10] (The group's name refers to a Linux command to delete files.) Ukrainian news outlet *Suspilne*, citing its own sources, stated that "sudo rm -RF" has claimed responsibility and that VGTRK employees complained that the attack deleted all backup information. [11] The information security expert claimed to *Gazeta* that the hackers most likely used a type of encryption virus that deletes files rather than just encrypting them and warned that VGTRK will now have to close the vulnerability in addition to recovering backups of its systems.[12] VGTRK claimed that its systems did not suffer significant damage despite the attack and that its systems are operating normally.[13] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov expressed support for VGTRK and characterized the cyberattack as an attack on Russian critical infrastructure.[14]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces struck an oil terminal in occupied Feodosia, Crimea on the night of October 6 to 7.**
- **Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubynets reported on October 7 that Ukrainian authorities are investigating another case of Russian forces' unjust abuse and execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs).**
- **Russian authorities announced an "unprecedented" cyberattack against Russian state media infrastructure on October 7.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced in northern Kharkiv Oblast, in Donetsk Oblast, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, and George Barros

October 6, 2024, 10:45am ET

Russian forces have reportedly lost at least five divisions' worth of armored vehicles and tanks in Pokrovsk Raion since beginning their offensive operation to seize Avdiivka in October 2023 and during intensified Russian offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast in Summer 2024. An open-source X (formerly Twitter) user tracking visually confirmed Russian vehicle and equipment losses in Ukraine stated on October 4 that the user has confirmed that Russian forces have lost 1,830 pieces of heavy equipment in Pokrovsk Raion since October 9, 2023.[1] The X user stated that Russian forces have lost a total of 539 tanks (roughly a division and a half's worth of Russian tanks) and 1,020 infantry fighting vehicles (roughly four to five mechanized infantry divisions' worth of vehicles) during offensive operations in Pokrovsk Raion and specified that Ukrainian forces destroyed 381 of the 539 Russian tanks and 835 of the 1,020 armored vehicles. The X user noted that Russian forces have also lost 26 infantry mobility vehicles, 22 multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), 11 towed artillery systems, and 92 unarmored trucks. The X user noted that he confirmed that Russian forces lost 25 tanks and 59 armored vehicles (roughly two battalions' worth of mechanized equipment) in Pokrovsk Raion since September 6, 2024. Russian forces launched an intensified four-month-long offensive operation to seize Avdiivka in October 2023 and later continued assaults west of Avdiivka and west and southwest of Donetsk City in spring and summer 2024, and the user's data should reflect Russian vehicle losses accrued during these offensive efforts.[2] The X user's assessment based on visually confirmed vehicle losses is likely conservative given that not all Russian vehicle losses are visually documented. The actual number of Russian vehicle losses in the Pokrovsk area is likely higher than reported.

The Russian military command may not be willing or able to accept the current scale and rate of vehicle loss in the coming months and years given the constraints in Russia's defense industrial production, limits to Russia's Soviet-era vehicle stockpiles, and the Russian military's failure to achieve operationally significant territorial advances through mechanized maneuver. Russian forces expended a significant number of armored vehicles during the first weeks of their offensive effort to seize Avdiivka in October 2023 and later limited their armored vehicle usage while fighting within Avdiivka's administrative boundaries.[3] Russian forces appear to have limited their armored vehicle use in the area immediately west of Avdiivka in recent months, although Russian forces have simultaneously intensified their offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk city and frequently conduct largely unsuccessful platoon- and company-sized mechanized assaults in the area.[4] Russian forces have conducted several battalion-sized mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast since July 2024, the majority of which resulted in significant armored vehicle losses in exchange for marginal territorial advances.[5] The commander of a Ukrainian bridge operating in the Donetsk direction recently reported that Russian forces are losing up to 90 percent of the vehicles used in mechanized assaults in the Donetsk direction.[6] The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) think tank previously estimated that Russian forces were losing over 3,000 armored fighting vehicles annually as of February 2024, although Russia's current rate of armored vehicle losses may be higher given that the X user's data notably does not account for Russian equipment losses throughout the entire frontline.[7] Russian forces have only advanced about 40 km in the Avdiivka/Pokrovsk operational direction since October 2023 and a loss of over five divisions' worth of equipment for such tactical gains is not sustainable indefinitely without a fundamental shift in Russia's capability to resource its war.

Russian forces have likely accumulated a large amount of equipment for these assaults, although the medium- to long-term constraints of Russia's armored vehicle stocks and production rates alongside mounting equipment losses may force the Russian military to rethink the benefit of intensified mechanized activity in this sector over Russia's longer-term war effort in Ukraine.[8] The Russian military command's willingness to pursue limited tactical advances in exchange for significant armored vehicle losses will become increasingly costly as Russian forces burn through finite Soviet-era weapons and equipment stocks in the coming months and years.[9] Russia will likely struggle to adequately supply its units with materiel in the long term without transferring the Russian economy to a wartime footing and significantly increasing Russia's defense industrial production rates — a move that Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to avoid thus far.[10]

Ukrainian officials continue to document and prosecute Russian war crimes committed against Ukrainian forces. Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office Head Oleksandr Filchakov announced on October 5 that his office has initiated a pre-trial investigation into the execution of four Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) ordered by Russian commanders at the Vovchansk aggregate plant in

Summer 2024.[11] Filchakov noted that Russian POWs provided testimony about the executions during interrogations in Ukrainian detention. Filchakov suggested that Ukrainian forces might already have the perpetrator in custody, allowing for a fair trial and sentencing regarding the crime.

Russian authorities reportedly arrested the administrator of the Russian Telegram channel *Thirteenth*, who has previously criticized the Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), on October 5. Russian milbloggers and Russian opposition media stated on October 5 that Russian police detained *Thirteenth* administrator Yegor Guzenko at a concert in Novopavlovsk, Stavropol Krai.[12] Russian sources speculated that Russian authorities may have arrested Guzenko due to his refusal to undergo drug tests or after an altercation with Russian police.[13] Several Russian sources claimed that Russian authorities placed Guzenko under house arrest in 2021 but that Guzenko later violated house arrest in March 2022, causing Russian authorities to place him on the Russian and international wanted list.[14] Guzenko has frequently criticized Russian authorities, and his arrest may be part of the ongoing Kremlin effort to crack down against critical voices within the Russian ultranationalist information space while encouraging a culture of self-censorship among the pro-war information space.[15] It is not yet clear whether Guzenko's arrest is directly related to the Kremlin's effort to exert control over the pro-war ultranationalist information space, however.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have reportedly lost at least five divisions' worth of armored vehicles and tanks in Pokrovsk Raion since beginning their offensive operation to seize Avdiivka in October 2023 and during intensified Russian offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast in Summer 2024.
- The Russian military command may not be willing or able to accept the current scale and rate of vehicle loss in the coming months and years given the constraints in Russia's defense industrial production, limits to Russia's Soviet-era vehicle stockpiles, and the Russian military's failure to achieve operationally significant territorial advances through mechanized maneuver.
- Ukrainian officials continue to document and prosecute Russian war crimes committed against Ukrainian forces.
- Russian authorities reportedly arrested the administrator of the Russian Telegram channel *Thirteenth*, who has previously criticized the Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), on October 5.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 5, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, and George Barros

October 5, 2024, 11:10 am ET

The Russian Government plans to allocate 90 billion rubles (\$948 million) to one-time payments for concluding a military contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) between 2025 and 2027, indicating that the Kremlin plans to continue relying on ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts to meet the manpower requirements of its war in Ukraine for as long as the crypto-mobilization system works.[1] The Russian federal government currently offers 400,000 rubles (\$4,200) one-time payments for signing a military contract (in addition to one-time payments offered by regional governments, some of which recently exceed one million rubles), suggesting that the Kremlin intends to recruit 225,000 new personnel through contract service between 2025 and 2027, assuming current rates hold, which is unlikely given these rates have steadily increased since 2022.[2] Russian authorities have significantly increased financial incentives, particularly one-time payments, in recent months for signing military contracts, and the Kremlin may have allocated 90 billion rubles to one-time payments with the intent of further raising federal payments between 2025 and 2027.[3] Russian authorities have reportedly expressed concerns that ongoing recruitment efforts are producing diminishing results, however, and the significant increase in financial incentives in recent months suggests that existing recruitment efforts were insufficient for maintaining the consistent generation of new forces that the Russian military relies on for sustaining its offensive tempo in Ukraine.[4] ISW assesses that there are medium- to long-term constraints on how many recruits the ongoing Russian crypto-mobilization campaign can generate, and increased financial incentives are unlikely to significantly address these constraints.[5] Russian President Vladimir Putin remains committed to the ongoing crypto-mobilization campaign in order to avoid declaring another widely unpopular partial mobilization call-up of reservists, although he maintains the option to call another round of partial mobilization — as he did in Fall 2022.[6] Putin and the Russian

military command appear unwilling to accept reducing the intensity of Russian combat operations in Ukraine since they view maintaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative, and it remains unclear whether Putin will respond with another round of mobilization if faced with another crisis similar to or worse than the crisis the Kremlin faced in Fall 2022.[7]

Ukrainian officials continue to provide statistics regarding Russian war crimes, shedding light on the extent of violations committed by Russian forces and authorities. Head of the Ukrainian Department for Combating Crimes in Conditions of Armed Conflict Yuri Bilousov stated on October 4 that Ukrainian sources documented evidence indicating that Russian forces have executed 93 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) on the battlefield since the start of the full-scale invasion and that 80 percent of the recorded cases occurred in 2024.[8] Bilousov noted that Russian servicemembers' discipline and attitude towards committing such war crimes have deteriorated further. Bilousov stated on October 5 that such war crimes are systemic and Russian authorities clearly condone these crimes, as evidenced by repeated calls for violence against Ukrainian POWs by high-ranking Russian officials such as Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev.[9] The Geneva Convention on POWs prohibits the "mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture" of POWs, as well as the execution of POWs or persons who are clearly *hors de combat*. [10] *Politico* reported on October 4 that a representative of Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for POWs, Victoria Tsymbalyuk, reported that at least 177 Ukrainian personnel and civilians have died in Russian captivity since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.[11] Tsymbalyuk emphasized that the actual number of casualties could be significantly higher due to a lack of international oversight. Tsymbalyuk noted that Ukrainian authorities have returned approximately 3,600 Ukrainian POWs and civilians through exchanges with Moscow but that thousands remain imprisoned in Russia. ISW has repeatedly observed widespread and systemic war crimes committed by Russian forces and authorities against POWs and civilians with the most recent case being the execution of 16 Ukrainian POWs near Pokrovsk, the largest recorded case of such execution during the war.[12]

The Russian government appears to have amended its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts following significant backlash within the Russian ultranationalist information space. Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor and the Russian Ministry of Finance published a draft resolution on October 4 requiring social media pages with an audience of over 10,000 subscribers to register their identity and contact information with the Russian government.[13] The draft resolution requires that social media pages with 10,000 or more subscribers register and submit their contact information (including full name, phone number, and email address) through the Russian government services portal, Roskomnadzor's website, or a chat bot on social media platforms. The draft resolution states that Roskomnadzor will publish a public list of all "verified" social media pages after the owner registers their information and that Roskomnadzor will require the page to include a link to Roskomnadzor's list for subscribers. The draft resolution also states that Russian authorities will not allow "unverified" social media pages to advertise or accept donations, which could be an effective enforcement mechanism as many milbloggers depend on income from advertisements to sustain their channels documenting the war in Ukraine and often collect donations for frontline Russian units. [14] Many Russian milbloggers decried this new version of the registration law and argued that it could lead to the Russian state censoring the Russian-language internet and the milbloggers' coverage of the war.[15] Roskomnadzor published and immediately deleted a previous version of this resolution that required social media pages to also submit IP addresses to Roskomnadzor in September 2024 amid outcry among Russian milbloggers about the effort and ongoing concerns about the Kremlin's intensifying censorship efforts.[16] ISW noted at the time that Roskomnadzor's decision to delete the draft resolution indicates that the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community maintains some influence on the Kremlin's decisions, Roskomnadzor's decision to amend the draft resolution further indicates the milblogger community's influence over the Kremlin. It remains unclear how the Kremlin will react to the latest wave of milblogger criticism against the new watered-down version of the Telegram deanonymization law. Prominent Kremlin-linked and co-opted milbloggers such as Rybar, Evgeniy Poddubny, and Alexander "Sasha" Kots have not commented on the new draft regulation as of this publication. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is working to secure further control over the Russian information space via both codified regulations and reflexive control campaigns aimed at encouraging milbloggers and other critical voices in the Russian information space to self-censor.[17]

A recent Ukrainian missile strike near occupied Donetsk City reportedly killed several North Korean military officials. Unspecified sources in Ukraine's intelligence community told the *Kyiv Post* that an October 3 Ukrainian missile strike near occupied Donetsk City killed 20 Russian soldiers, including six unidentified North Korean officers "who came to confer with their Russian counterparts," and injured three other North Korean soldiers.[18] The *Kyiv Post*, citing Russian social media posts, reported that Russian forces were demonstrating infantry assault and defense training to the North Korean military personnel. ISW cannot independently confirm the presence of North Korean military officials in occupied Donetsk City. ISW has previously observed unconfirmed reports in June 2024 that North Korea planned to dispatch a large-scale engineering force to occupied Donetsk Oblast as early

as July 2024.[19] ISW also observed reports in July 2024 that a delegation from North Korea's Kim Il Sung Military University visited Russia, which against the backdrop of deepening bilateral relations, suggests that the North Korean military likely intends to learn from the Russian military's experience in the war in Ukraine.[20]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian Government plans to allocate 90 billion rubles (\$948 million) to one-time payments for concluding a military contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) between 2025 and 2027, indicating that the Kremlin plans to continue relying on ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts to meet the manpower requirements of its war in Ukraine for as long as the crypto-mobilization system works.
- Ukrainian officials continue to provide statistics regarding Russian war crimes, shedding light on the extent of violations committed by Russian forces and authorities.
- The Russian government appears to have amended its plan to deanonymize Russian social media accounts following significant backlash within the Russian ultranationalist information space.
- A recent Ukrainian missile strike near occupied Donetsk City reportedly killed several North Korean military officials.
- Russian forces recently advanced within the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, near Toretsk, near Pokrovsk, and southwest of Donetsk City.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 4, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 4, 2024, 10am ET

Ukrainian forces struck a fuel storage facility in Anna, Voronezh Oblast on the night of October 3 to 4. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) and Ukrainian military struck at least one vertical fuel reservoir at the Annaneftprodukt fuel and oil storage facility and that Ukrainian military officials are still clarifying the damage at the facility.[1] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that Russian electronic warfare (EW) interference caused a Ukrainian drone to fall onto the fuel storage facility and start a fire at an empty fuel reservoir. [2] Footage published on October 4 shows a fire at a purported fuel storage facility near Anna.[3]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck a fuel storage facility in Anna, Voronezh Oblast on the night of October 3 to 4.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Vovchansk, near Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 3, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Nate Trotter, and Frederick W. Kagan

October 3, 2024, 1:00pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 9:30am ET on October 3. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 4 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine that began in fall 2023 continues to produce gradual Russian tactical gains in specific sectors of the front, but operationally significant gains will likely continue to elude Russian forces. Ukrainian forces are conducting an effective defense in depth along the frontline, inflicting significant losses upon Russian forces while slowly giving ground but preventing the Russian military from making more rapid gains on the battlefield. Ukrainian forces do face serious operational challenges and constraints, which are providing Russian forces with opportunities to pursue tactically significant gains. Russian forces do not have the available manpower and materiel to continue intensified offensive

efforts indefinitely, however, and current Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine will likely culminate in the coming months, if not weeks, as Ukrainian officials and ISW have previously assessed.

Russian forces have recently made notable tactical gains but have not demonstrated a capacity to seize operationally significant objectives. *ISW distinguishes between tactical gains, which are relevant at the tactical level of war in the near vicinity of the fighting, and operational gains, which are significant at the operational level of war and affect large sectors of the entire frontline.* Russian forces seized Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast as of October 1, and the settlement will likely afford Russian forces an improved tactical position for pursuing their operational effort to advance towards the H-15 (Donetsk City–Zaporizhzhia City) highway and eliminate the wide Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast.[1] The Russian seizure of Vuhledar will not on its own radically change the operational situation in western Donetsk Oblast, however, and Russian forces will likely struggle to achieve their operational objectives in the area during the ongoing offensive operation in western Donetsk Oblast.[2] Russian offensive operations that are pursuing operationally significant objectives, like the Russian effort to seize Chasiv Yar or to push Ukrainian forces off the left (east) bank of the Oskil River, have either stalled or are resulting in particularly gradual gains over long stretches of time, respectively.[3] Russian forces continue to prioritize their offensive push towards Pokrovsk, and the operational significance of seizing the city will likely in part depend on the Russian military's ability to leverage the city in wider operational maneuver in Donetsk Oblast.[4] Russian forces have tried and failed to conduct wide operational maneuver across several axes throughout Donetsk Oblast on several occasions during the full-scale invasion and are currently conducting intensified offensive operations in pursuit of more limited objectives on only two mutually supporting sectors of the frontline in Donetsk Oblast (western Donetsk Oblast and the Pokrovsk direction).[5]

The Russian military command prepared the ongoing Russian summer 2024 offensive operation for months in advance and accumulated operational reserves and resources for the operation that the recent months of attritional fighting have likely heavily degraded. Russian forces reportedly aimed to establish a new operational grouping of forces with uncommitted operational reserves of up to 70,000 personnel for the offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast in May 2024 while also establishing operational reserves for the Central Grouping of Forces' push to Pokrovsk this summer.[6] Russian forces have likely expended a good portion of these reserves on the stalling offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast, the intensified offensive tempo in the Pokrovsk direction and western Donetsk Oblast, and the response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[7] Russian forces also continue to suffer heavy armored vehicle losses in large, unsuccessful mechanized assaults throughout the frontline, particularly in western Donetsk Oblast.[8] Russian forces likely accumulated a large amount of equipment for such mechanized assaults, but significant medium- to long-term constraints on Russian armored vehicle stocks will become more salient as losses grow and may force the Russian military command to rethink the benefit of continuing such intensified mechanized activity in Ukraine.[9] Continued heavy Russian attrition in Donetsk Oblast and further Russian redeployments to Kursk Oblast will weaken Russia's ability to sustain offensive operations in northeastern and eastern Ukraine, although Russian forces are more likely to continue decreasing offensive activity on lower-priority sectors of the front than to do so equally along the entire frontline.[10] The current Russian summer 2024 offensive operation will likely culminate in the coming weeks and months, but Russian forces may nevertheless continue to conduct offensive operations at a much lower tempo throughout Ukraine in hopes that consistent offensive pressure would prevent Ukrainian forces from accumulating the manpower and resources needed to contest the theater-wide initiative.[11]

Russian forces have reportedly committed a significant portion of their intended operational reserves to offensive operations in Donetsk and northern Kharkiv oblasts, indicating that the Russian military command may have prioritized forming operational reserves to support offensive operations in priority sectors of the frontline over developing theater-wide strategic reserves for the entire offensive campaign in Ukraine. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on October 3 that the Russian military command originally intended to commit most of Russia's "strategic reserves" to the Kharkiv and Pokrovsk-Toretsk directions, but that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and slowing Russian advances in northern Kharkiv Oblast complicated this plan.[12] Mashovets noted that the creation of the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces and the reinforcement of the Central Military District [CMD] in the Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Kurakhove directions throughout 2024 comprised most of Russia's efforts to develop "strategic reserves." Mashovets noted that within the Leningrad Military District [LMD] Russian forces have established the newly-formed 69th Motorized Rifle Division and another unspecified motorized rifle division (both part of the 6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], the 44th Army Corps (AC) and its 72nd Motorized Rifle Division and another unspecified motorized rifle brigade, and are continuing to staff the 68th Motorized Rifle Division (6th CAA) and the 71st Motorized Rifle Division (14th AC).[13] Mashovets stated that Russian forces also established the 51st and 3rd CAAs and the 27th Motorized Rifle Division (2nd CAA) under

the CMD in 2024. Mashovets noted that the Russian military command has already introduced some of these units and formations into combat below their doctrinal end strength and may introduce other formations as understrength "combined-reduced divisional tactical groups" in the near future.[14]

ISW has recently observed confirmation that some of these formations have been deployed to the Kharkiv and Pokrovsk directions. Ukraine's Kharkiv Group of Forces recently reported that the Russian military deployed elements of the 69th Motorized Rifle Division near Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast.[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 72nd Motorized Rifle Division are also operating in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[16] The Russian military command has reportedly deployed elements of the 68th Motorized Rifle Division to northern Kharkiv Oblast as well, and Mashovets recently stated that the Russian military command intends to deploy the remainder of the understrength division to the frontline in northern Kharkiv Oblast between the end of October and the beginning of November 2024.[17] Elements of the Russian 27th Motorized Rifle Division are reportedly operating southeast of Pokrovsk.[18] ISW has not observed reports of elements of the 71st Motorized Rifle Division participating in offensive operations in Ukraine, however. Mashovets' report likely does not encompass all of the reserve units and formations that Russia recently formed or is currently forming, although it is notable that Russia has already introduced elements of most of these formations to combat.

The Russian military command is continuing to prioritize offensive operations in priority sectors of the frontline over long-term planning for Russia's theater-wide campaign in Ukraine, but the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast appears to have significantly complicated the development of Russia's operational reserves. The Russian military command's reported intention for these reserves to participate in a specific priority of the sector instead of being committable throughout the theater indicates that these are "operational" and not "strategic" level reserves. Unspecified US officials told the *New York Times* (NYT) in August 2024 that Russia likely needs to deploy 15 to 20 brigades — at least 50,000 troops — from Ukraine or Russia's operational reserves to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast.[19] The Russian military command will likely continue to grapple with the impacts of manpower constraints on Russia's offensive capabilities until Russian President Vladimir Putin decides that the benefits of more effective force-generation policies, such as another partial mobilization call up of Russian reservists, outweigh the risk of societal backlash.

Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be using the "Time of Heroes" veteran support program to militarize regional and local government administrations and further solidify a pro-war ideology into the Russian state and society. Putin met with former Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Sparta" Battalion Commander and Speaker of the DNR Parliament Artem Zhoga on October 2 and offered him the position of Presidential Representative to the Ural Federal Okrug, which Zhoga accepted.[20] Zhoga previously served as a member of Putin's re-election campaign initiatives group, and the Kremlin previously highlighted Zhoga and used an interaction between Zhoga and Putin to announce Putin's presidential bid in December 2023.[21] Putin signed a decree on October 2 confirming the recent appointments of Zhoga and nine other "Time of Heroes" participants to various federal, regional, and local appointments: Artur Orlov as chairperson of the Russian patriotic youth organization "Movement of the First," Alexei Kondratyev as a Russian senator, Igor Yurin as Sakha Republic Minister of Youth Affairs and Social Communications, Alexander Surazov as Altai Republic Committee for Physical Culture and Sports head, Yevgeny Chintsov as head of the Nizhny Novgorod City Duma, Zaur Gurtsiev as Stavropol City first deputy head, Roman Kulakov as Sevastopol occupation legislative assembly deputy, Konstantin Yashin as head of the Samara Research and Production Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems, and Vladimir Saibel as deputy head of Russian Railways' social development department.[22] The "Movement of the First" is a Kremlin-affiliated youth organization that promotes military-patriotic education and ideology to youth within Russia and occupied Ukraine to set long term conditions for the militarization of Russian society and Russification of occupied Ukraine.[23] Putin noted that the Russian government has extended job offers to 10 additional "Time of Heroes" participants within the Russian Presidential Administration, federal and regional entities, and state-owned companies.[24] The increasing appointments of Russian military veterans of the war in Ukraine in government and state entities throughout Russia is likely part of an effort to establish pro-war, ultranationalist individuals loyal to Putin in prominent places within local government and society as Russia seeks ways to reintegrate war veterans into Russian society and subtly message Putin's vision for a future Russian class of elites and wider society comprised of such individuals.[25] Putin's publicized and likely scripted meeting with Zhoga was likely aimed at establishing Putin's public expectations of "Time of Heroes" participants. Zhoga repeatedly emphasized in his meeting with Putin that he is a "soldier first and foremost" who will serve Russia "where [he] is most needed," indicating that Putin likely expects loyalty from these handpicked individuals above all else.[26]

Russian authorities continue to arrest Russian officials on charges related to mismanagement and corruption within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). The Russian Investigative

Committee announced on October 2 that it placed former MoD Forestry Department Deputy Head Alexander Sluchak under house arrest and detained the General Director of "Translesstroy" LLC Ozman Avdolyan for embezzling 20 million rubles (about \$210,248) related to the mismanagement of MoD contracts.[27] Russian sources stated on October 2 that Russian law enforcement initiated a case into a theft of military property worth over 1 million rubles (about \$10,500) at the Tyumen Higher Military Engineering Command School, detaining two suspects including the driver of Major General D. Yevmenenko.[28] The Russian Investigative Committee also placed Deputy Head of the Russian MoD's Military Construction company, Dmitry Sergel, on the interstate wanted list for embezzling funds from the Russian MoD.[29] Sergel reportedly embezzled over 35 million rubles (about \$367,935) as part of a contract for overhauling a military hospital in Perm valued at more than 190 million rubles (about \$ 1,997,363). ISW has observed an increase in MoD-related arrests particularly under the leadership of Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov in a likely effort to not only "cleanse" widespread corruption prominent under the leadership of former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, but also satisfy the Russian public's demand for justice and demonstrate that the Kremlin is fighting corruption.[30]

Strikes reportedly targeted an ammunition depot near Russia's Hmeimim Airbase in Latakia Province, Syria overnight on October 2 to 3. Footage published on October 3 shows a fire and secondary detonations overnight reportedly near Hmeimim Airbase, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed on October 3 that unknown drone strikes destroyed an ammunition depot near Jableh City near the airbase.[31] The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that the unknown drone strikes coincided with the presence of Israeli warplanes in the area and that both Syrian and Russian air defenses attempted to shoot down incoming Israeli missiles for roughly 40 minutes.[32] A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian air defenses activated and claimed that Iranian and Syrian forces used the ammunition depot and that the Israeli strikes did not target Russia's Hmeimim Airbase directly.[33] ISW is unable to confirm the actor responsible for the October 3 Latakia strike. CTP-ISW observed a strike, reportedly conducted by Israeli forces, targeting a weapons shipment near Jableh on July 9 after an Iranian weapons shipment arrived at the nearby port of Latakia.[34] Syrian sources claimed that Syrian air defenses intercepted 17 reportedly Israeli missiles near Jableh and Tartus (south of Latakia) and reported explosions near Tartus on September 24, but the actors involved and the result of the strike remain unconfirmed.[35]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine that began in fall 2023 continues to produce gradual Russian tactical gains in specific sectors of the front, but operationally significant gains will likely continue to elude Russian forces.
- Ukrainian forces are conducting an effective defense in depth along the frontline, inflicting significant losses upon Russian forces while slowly giving ground but preventing the Russian military from making more rapid gains on the battlefield.
- Ukrainian forces do face serious operational challenges and constraints, which are providing Russian forces with opportunities to pursue tactically significant gains.
- Russian forces do not have the available manpower and materiel to continue intensified offensive efforts indefinitely, however, and current Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine will likely culminate in the coming months, if not weeks, as Ukrainian officials and ISW have previously assessed.
- Russian forces have recently made notable tactical gains but have not demonstrated a capacity to seize operationally significant objectives.
- The Russian military command prepared the ongoing Russian summer 2024 offensive operation for months in advance and accumulated operational reserves and resources for the operation that the recent months of attritional fighting have likely heavily degraded.
- Russian forces have reportedly committed a significant portion of their intended operational reserves to offensive operations in Donetsk and northern Kharkiv oblasts, indicating that the Russian military command may have prioritized forming operational reserves to support offensive operations in priority sectors of the frontline over developing theater-wide strategic reserves for the entire offensive campaign in Ukraine.
- The Russian military command is continuing to prioritize offensive operations in priority sectors of the frontline over long-term planning for Russia's theater-wide campaign in Ukraine, but the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast appears to have significantly complicated the development of Russia's operational reserves.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be using the "Time of Heroes" veteran support program to militarize regional and local government administrations and further solidify a pro-war ideology into the Russian state and society.
- Russian authorities continue to arrest Russian officials on charges related to mismanagement and corruption within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

- Strikes reportedly targeted an ammunition depot near Russia's Hmeimim Airbase in Latakia Province, Syria overnight on October 2 to 3.
- Russian forces recently advanced south of Siversk and east and southeast of Pokrovsk in Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian authorities continue to nationalize Russian enterprises for the benefit of the federal government.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 2, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Nate Trotter, and George Barros

October 2, 2024, 1:15pm ET

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

Ukraine continues efforts to expand domestic production of significant military equipment and maintain its drone advantage over Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on October 1 that Ukrainian companies can currently produce four million drones annually and that Ukraine has already contracted the domestic production of 1.5 million drones (presumably in 2024).[1] Russian President Vladimir Putin recently claimed that Russia plans to increase drone production by tenfold to 1.4 million drones in 2024, which will be lower than the two million drones that Ukraine aims to produce in 2024.[2] Zelensky also stated that Ukraine can produce 15 "Bohdan" self-propelled artillery systems every month and recently conducted a successful flight test for an unspecified domestically produced ballistic missile.[3] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on October 2 that Ukraine will continue prioritizing domestic production of drones and long-range missiles, including ballistic missiles.[4] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on October 2 that Ukraine has allocated \$7 billion for the purchase of weapons and military equipment in the Ukrainian draft 2025 state budget — a 65 percent increase from the 2024 state budget.[5] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine increased domestic weapons production by a factor of three in 2023 and by factor of two in the first eight months of 2024.[6] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian efforts to expand domestic military production will allow Ukraine to reduce its dependence on Western military assistance in the long-term, but that Ukraine still requires considerable Western assistance for the next several years in order to defend against Russian aggression and liberate strategically vital areas that Russian forces currently occupy.[7]

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov condemned the Israel Defense Force's (IDF) ground operation in southern Lebanon during a meeting with the Lebanese ambassador to Russia on October 1.[8] Bogdanov met with Lebanese Ambassador Shawki Bou Nassar and discussed the military-political situation in the Middle East. Bogdanov expressed "strong condemnation of Israel's ground invasion of Lebanon and emphasized Russia's opposition to alleged Israeli political assassinations. Bogdanov highlighted the importance of providing humanitarian assistance to Lebanon and safely evacuating Russian citizens from Lebanon. Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov called for an immediate end to the conflict in the Middle East, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with ambassadors of unspecified Arab states and called for the immediate end of military operations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict area.[9] The Kremlin likely seeks to take advantage of the conflict in the Middle East to promote Russian-dominated international structures, including some connected to the Kremlin's effort to establish an alternative "Eurasian security architecture." Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated on October 2 that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has accepted Russia's invitation to attend the BRICS summit in Kazan on October 22–24 and that participants will discuss the situation in the Middle East.[10] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) recently condemned Israel's "political assassination" of Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Israel's decision to simultaneously detonate thousands of pagers belonging to Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) members across Lebanon and Syria, and previous Israeli strikes against Iran.[11]

Latvian forces enhanced air defense near the Russian border following a recent Russian drone crash in the country. Latvian Defense Minister Andris Spruds announced on October 2 that the Latvian Air Force deployed mobile combat groups equipped with air defense missiles in Latgale near the Russian-Latvian border and set up specialized radars along the border to detect drones.[12] Spruds confirmed that both professional military personnel and members of the Latvian National Defense Service are actively participating in the air defense operation. This decision comes in response to the September 7 Russian Shahed-type drone crash in Latvia's Rezekne municipality, close to the Russian border.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine continues efforts to expand domestic production of significant military equipment and maintain its drone advantage over Russia.
- Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov condemned the Israel Defense Force's (IDF) ground operation in southern Lebanon during a meeting with the Lebanese ambassador to Russia on October 1.
- Latvian forces enhanced air defense near the Russian border following a recent Russian drone crash in the country.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces continued assaults in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Svatove, Siversk, and Vuhledar and east and southeast of Pokrovsk
- Russian defense enterprises are recruiting tens of thousands of new workers due to acute personnel shortages amid increased production of weapons due to the war in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 1, 2024

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

Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

October 1, 2024, 8:15pm ET

Russian forces likely seized Vuhledar as of October 1 following a reported Ukrainian withdrawal from the settlement, though it is unclear if Russian forces will make rapid gains beyond Vuhledar in the immediate future. Geolocated footage published on September 30 and October 1 shows Russian forces planting Russian flags and freely operating in various parts of Vuhledar, and Russian milbloggers claimed on October 1 that Russian forces seized the settlement.

[1] A Ukrainian servicemember reported on October 1 that a part of the Ukrainian force grouping conducted a planned withdrawal from Vuhledar to avoid encirclement, and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces began to withdraw from Vuhledar as of the end of September 30.

[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces did not completely interdict Ukrainian egress routes before Ukrainian forces withdrew but that Russian artillery and drones inflicted unspecified losses on withdrawing Ukrainian personnel.[3] The scale of Ukrainian casualties is unknown at this time, however, but the widespread reports of Ukrainian withdrawal suggest that the larger Ukrainian contingent likely avoided a Russian encirclement that would have generated greater casualties.

Russian sources credited elements of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]), 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th Combined Arms Army [CAA], EMD), 5th Tank Brigade and 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (both part of 36th CAA, EMD), 430th Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized unit of the 29th CAA), and 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (Special Forces of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces [GRU]) for directly seizing or assisting in the seizure of Vuhledar.[4] Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces continued to advance west of Vodyane (northeast of Vuhledar).[5]

The Russian seizure of Vuhledar follows a series of costly, failed Russian assaults near the settlement over the past two and a half years. A prominent Russian milblogger celebrated reports of Vuhledar's seizure by recalling an alleged conversation he had with a Russian high-ranking officer, who told him that the Russian decision to attack in the Vuhledar direction in March 2022 was ill-advised because Russian forces would get "stuck" on the settlement.[6] The milblogger implied that the officer was wrong given that Russian forces eventually seized Vuhledar, although the milblogger failed to acknowledge that Russian forces struggled to advance in the Vuhledar area for over two years. Russia attempted at least two major offensive efforts to seize Vuhledar in October-November 2022 and January-February 2023, both of which resulted in heavy personnel and military equipment losses.[7] Russia's previous defeats around Vuhledar notably resulted in the attrition of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, EMD).[8]

Some Russian sources expressed doubts that Russian forces will be able to rapidly advance and achieve operationally-significant breakthroughs immediately after seizing Vuhledar. Some Russian milbloggers noted that they do not expect the frontline to collapse following the seizure of Vuhledar, citing Ukrainian defensive positions northeast of Vuhledar and the need for Russian forces to completely clear Vuhledar to make it a useable position from which they can launch future assaults. [9] One Kremlin-affiliated milblogger attempted to misrepresent Vuhledar as "the last Ukrainian city in the southern Donetsk direction" which underpins the "entire Ukrainian defense" in western Donetsk

Oblast — implying that Russia can steadily advance in western Donetsk Oblast following the capture of Vuhledar.[10] Another Kremlin-affiliated milblogger criticized a similar argument that the Russian seizure of Vuhledar would lead to the destruction of Ukrainian defenses in Donetsk Oblast and allow Russian forces to advance towards Kramatorsk and Slovyansk (both approximately 170km northeast of Vuhledar) after seizing Kurakhove and Pokrovsk. The milblogger implied that the argument dismisses the fact that Russian forces will need to fight through heavily fortified settlements far north and northeast of Vuhledar, such as Kostyantynivka, Dobropillya, Pokrovsk, Selydove, Kurakhove, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk.[11] ISW previously assessed that Russia's seizure of Vuhledar is unlikely to fundamentally alter the course of offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast, largely because Vuhledar is not a particularly crucial logistics node and because Russian forces have controlled most of the main roads running into Vuhledar prior to October 1, meaning that Russian forces have already had the ability to interdict Ukrainian logistics in this part of the front to some extent.[12] Vuhledar is also about 30 kilometers south of Russia's current main effort in the Pokrovsk direction, so Russian forces would need to maneuver across 30 kilometers of open terrain to meaningfully support offensive operations southeast of Pokrovsk. Vuhledar is also located 23 kilometers south of the H-15 highway that stretches between Donetsk City and the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, but Russian forces would need to advance across an open field area during the upcoming muddy season to reach the highway. Advisor to the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Igor Kimakovsky notably assessed before the Russian seizure of Vuhledar that the dirt road that Ukrainian forces could have used to withdraw from Vuhledar would soon become unusable due to mud, and it is likely that Russian forces will face similar problems if they soon resume mechanized assaults in the area.[13]

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight how Ukraine is reducing Russia's battlefield artillery ammunition advantage, likely in part due to recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian ammunition depots. Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havryliuk stated on October 1 that the ratio of Russian to Ukrainian artillery ammunition usage decreased from 8-to-1 in favor of Russian forces in Winter 2024 to 3-to-1 as of early October 2024.[14] A Russian milblogger, who is often critical of Russian authorities, claimed on September 30 that Russian forces in various sectors of the front are suffering from artillery ammunition shortages, possibly due to recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian ammunition depots, including the September 18 strike against a Russian missile and storage ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast and the September 21 strike against the Tikhoretsk Arsenal in Krasnodar Krai.[15] The milblogger complained that Russian defense industrial factories, which are operating every day, should still be able to produce and deliver ammunition to the Russian military but appear to be failing to do so. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on September 5 that Russian forces were firing two to 2.5 more artillery shells than Ukrainian forces but that Ukrainian forces were narrowing the gap.[16] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also stated on September 13 that the ratio of Russian to Ukrainian artillery ammunition usage in the Pokrovsk direction decreased from 12-to-1 in favor of Russian forces to 2.5-to-1 after the start of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024.[17] Ukrainian officials' statements in early September 2024 about Russia's decreased artillery ammunition advantage suggest that although the recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian ammunition depots have likely decreased Russian artillery supplies, the strikes are likely not the only contributor to reportedly reduced Russian shell supplies. Western-provided military aid and increasing Ukrainian domestic ammunition production may have also allowed Ukraine to increase its ammunition usage.[18]

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) issued its June-August 2024 report detailing Ukrainian civilian casualties, systemic Russian mistreatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs), and limited Ukrainian mistreatment of Russian POWs. The UN OHCHR reported that 589 Ukrainian civilians died and 2,685 sustained injuries from conflict-related violence from June 1 to August 31 — a 45 percent increase from the previous three-month period from March 1 to May 31.[19] The UN OHCHR assessed that Russian large-scale missile strikes against Ukraine on July 8 and Russian forces' intensified efforts to advance in Donetsk Oblast were the main reasons for the high civilian casualty numbers. The UN OHCHR interviewed 169 recently-released Ukrainian POWs, five Ukrainian retained medical personnel, and 205 Russian POWs held in Ukrainian captivity. The UN OHCHR reported that 104 of the 205 interviewed Russian POWs stated that they had faced torture or ill-treatment, mostly at the initial stage of their detainment before being transferred to official facilities, but that conditions in official Ukrainian-run POW locations generally complied with international humanitarian law. The UN OHCHR found that Russian authorities, in contrast, have subjected Ukrainian POWs to torture, ill-treatment, and inhumane conditions "in a widespread and systematic manner" and that almost all Ukrainians interviewed since March 2023 discussed a wide range of methods of torture and ill-treatment during all stages of captivity and interrogation. The UN OHCHR assessed that it is highly unlikely that Russian military superiors and administrators are not aware of the treatment of Ukrainian POWs and that Russian state entities may be coordinating the use of torture. Geolocated drone footage published on October 1 shows Russian forces executing 16 surrendering Ukrainian soldiers near Mykolaivka in the Pokrovsk direction, highlighting the most recent instance of clear Russian abuse of Ukrainian POWs.[20] ISW

has extensively reported on footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian POWs and observed a wider trend of prolific Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs across various sectors of the front that appeared to be enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and upheld by Russian field commanders.[21]

The UN OHCHR report highlighted the difference between official Russian and Ukrainian reactions to the mistreatment of POWs, and Russian state media largely misrepresented the report by ignoring assessments about Russia's systemic mistreatment of Ukrainian POWs. The report noted that Russian government officials and state-owned media regularly use "dehumanizing" language about Ukrainian POWs, that some Russian public figures have explicitly called for the unlawful treatment of Ukrainian POWs, and that there are no known prosecutions or convictions against the Russian perpetrators of torture or ill-treatment of Ukrainian POWs. The report noted how the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported that it had conducted five pre-trial investigations into possible ill-treatment and murder of Russian POWs since mid-August 2024. The UN OHCHR reported that Ukrainian authorities continue to give the organization "regular and unimpeded" access to Russian POWs, whereas Russia has denied access to Ukrainian POWs since the start of the full-scale invasion. Russian state media only reported on the UN OHCHR's assessments about Ukrainian mistreatment of Russian POWs, withholding the details of the report about Russia's systemic abuse of Ukrainian POWs.[22]

The Russian federal budget for 2025-2027 has carved out funding to support online platforms belonging to a prominent Kremlin propagandist and a former opposition outlet, further highlighting the Kremlin's efforts to adapt its propaganda machine to Russians' growing reliance on social media for information. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on September 30 that the 2025-2027 draft budget allocates 4.5 billion rubles (\$47 million) and 49 million rubles (\$511,000) in state funding towards the *Solovyov Live* Telegram channel and *Readovka* online news aggregator, respectively.[23] *Astra* noted that this is the first time these online platforms are receiving federal funding. A 2023 joint investigation by Russian opposition outlets *Meduza* and *The Bell* found that *Readovka* posed itself as a semi-opposition outlet prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but then actively started voicing pro-Kremlin views and working with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) after March 2022.[24] The joint investigation noted that *Readovka* founder Alexei Kostylev "always wanted to be in the center," suggesting that the Kremlin viewed Kostylev's personal ambitions and affiliations as exploitable factors and coopted *Readovka* to further the Kremlin rhetorical line following the full-scale invasion. *Solovyov Live* is a Telegram channel run by Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov and has been a major platform through which the Kremlin has sustained its information narratives and dispelled the information space's criticism since the start of the war. Solovyov has been using the *Solovyov Live* Telegram channel to amplify his other online initiatives, such as podcasts, and most recently used the platform to defend the commander of a Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) unit who disbanded a specialized drone unit and sent specialized drone operators to their deaths while conducting an infantry assault.[25] Both *Readovka* and *Solovyov Live* have a decidedly pro-Kremlin bent, and the Kremlin's sponsorship of these online platforms and initiatives suggests that the Kremlin is increasingly adapting its state-run propaganda machine, which previously focused on traditional TV and print media, to emerging social media platforms.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces likely seized Vuhledar as of October 1 following a reported Ukrainian withdrawal from the settlement, though it is unclear if Russian forces will make rapid gains beyond Vuhledar in the immediate future.
- Some Russian sources expressed doubts that Russian forces would be able to rapidly advance and achieve operationally-significant breakthroughs immediately after seizing Vuhledar.
- Ukrainian officials continue to highlight how Ukraine is reducing Russia's battlefield artillery ammunition advantage, likely in part due to recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian ammunition depots.
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- The Russian federal budget for 2025-2027 has carved out funding to support online platforms belonging to a prominent Kremlin propagandist and a former opposition outlet, further highlighting the Kremlin's efforts to adapt its propaganda machine to Russians' growing reliance on social media for information.

- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- Russian authorities are reportedly planning to increase recruitment within Russian pre-trial detention centers.

Like 2



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