

UKRAINE CONFLICT UPDATES JUNE 1 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

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

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Christina Harward, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 30, 2024, 4:30pm ET

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

The Russian government plans to spend 17 trillion rubles (\$183 billion) on national security and defense in 2025 — about 41 percent of its annual expenditures. The Russian government submitted a bill on the federal budget for 2025 to 2027 to the State Duma on September 30.[1] The bill projects federal revenues to be 40.3 trillion rubles (\$433 billion) in 2025 and federal expenditures to amount to 41.5 trillion rubles (\$446 billion). The budget calls for 13.5 trillion rubles (\$145 billion) to go towards "National Defense" expenditures in 2025 and projects that defense spending will decrease to 12.8 trillion rubles (\$137 billion) in 2026 but increase to 13 trillion rubles (\$139 billion) in 2027.[2] The 2025 budget also calls for 3.5 trillion rubles (\$37 billion) towards "National Security" — meaning that Russia plans to commit about 41 percent of its expenditures in 2025 to combined "defense" and "security" expenses. The budget notably allocates 14.03 billion rubles (\$151 million) annually from 2025 to 2027 to the creation of a mobilization reserve in the Russian Armed Forces.[3] The bill calls for about 40 billion rubles (\$430 million) in 2025 to fund the "Defenders of the Fatherland Fund," which supports Russian veterans and their families.[4] The Russian government is also earmarking significant funding towards developing new technologies. The 2025–2027 budget allocates 6.1 trillion rubles (\$65 billion) for measures to "achieve technological leadership," 234.4 billion rubles (\$2.5 billion) for machine-tool production, 112.1 billion rubles (\$1.2 billion) for the "Unmanned Aircraft Systems" production project, 46.9 billion rubles (\$504 million) for the development of new nuclear and energy technologies, and 175.3 billion rubles (\$1.8 billion) for the development of radio and microelectronics.[5] Increases in defense spending do not necessarily equate to increased military capabilities, however, especially when significant funding is going towards paying benefits to Russian soldiers, veterans, and their families.

The Russian budget will continue to support various social programs, including the Kremlin's pro-natalist programs, but a continued focus on defense spending is likely affecting the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs. The "Social Policy" section of the 2025 budget accounts for 6.4 trillion rubles (\$69 billion).[6] The bill allocates about 4 trillion rubles (\$43 billion) between 2025 and 2027 for payments to people with children and about 1.7 trillion rubles (\$18 billion) for Russia's maternity capital program through 2030. The budget accounts for 1.57 trillion rubles (\$16 billion) for education in 2025, and healthcare spending accounts for 1.86 trillion rubles (\$20 billion) in 2025 and 2026. The Russian government has allocated 824 billion rubles (\$8.8 million) for the payment of state pensions in 2025 and 1.36 trillion rubles (\$14 billion) for recently announced pension increases.[7] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* noted that the Russian government press release highlighted funding for pregnant women, families with children, national projects, and regional support but did not mention defense spending.[8] Kremlin officials similarly highlighted social spending while avoiding discussions of increased defense spending on September 29 when the Cabinet of Ministers initially approved the draft federal budget, likely due to the Kremlin's wariness about war fatigue among the Russian population.[9] Sustained high levels of defense spending in the coming years during a protracted war in Ukraine and continued military preparations for a possible conflict with NATO will make it more difficult for the Kremlin to sustain funding for the social programs that the Russian population cares about, such as pension increases and healthcare. Increased defense spending will also affect the long-term effectiveness of the Kremlin's efforts to use financial incentives to increase Russia's birth rate and reverse Russia's demographic crisis.[10] Popular demands for increased social and decreased defense funding in the future may also hamper the Kremlin's ability to sustain its war in Ukraine as Russian President Vladimir Putin must take his regime's stability and domestic support into account.

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted presidential aide and close personal ally Alexei Dyumin to the Russian Security Council alongside three other officials.^[11] Putin signed a decree on September 30 updating the membership of the Russian Security Council — a key Russian consultative body that informs Putin's decisions on national security issues. Putin added Dyumin, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, Head of the Russian Federal Medical-Biological Agency (FMBA) Veronika Skvortsova, and Head of the Kremlin's Main Directorate for Special Programs (GUSP) Alexander Linets to the Russian Security Council.^[12] Putin removed First Deputy Speaker of the Russian Federal Council Vladimir Yakushev from the Russian Security Council after removing Yakushev from his role as the Kremlin Representative to the Urals Federal District on September 24.^[13] Dyumin is the youngest ever member of the Russian Security Council at 52 years old and has been a loyal supporter of Putin's regime since he served as Putin's bodyguard beginning in 1999.^[14] The Russian Security Council is mostly composed of officials of Putin's generation (with most born in the 1950s), and Dyumin's appointment suggests that Putin is preparing a new generation of officials.^[15] Putin has been steadily promoting Dyumin since the Wagner Group armed rebellion in June 2023, with Dyumin becoming the presidential aide for the defense industrial base (DIB) and secretary of the advisory State Council in May 2024.^[16] Putin later tasked Dyumin with supervising the Russian response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024.^[17] Putin also recently promoted Manturov (who is 55 years old) to the position of first deputy prime minister in May 2024, despite previously using Manturov as a scapegoat for Russian DIB problems and the inadequate response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.^[18] Skvortsova (63 years old) previously served as the Russian Minister of Health between 2012 and 2020 before becoming the head of FMBA, and Putin recently reappointed Skvortsova to the position of FMBA head in late June 2024.^[19] Linets (61 years old) previously served as the deputy chief of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) of the 20th Combined Arms Army and as head of FSB Directorate for the Southern Military District (SMD) before assuming his current role in 2015.^[20] Linets has also served as a member of the Russian Military-Industrial Commission since 2015.

The Kremlin continues to use state and regional awards to co-opt previously critical milbloggers as part of wider efforts to gain control over the information space. Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded Russian milblogger and Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) correspondent Yevgeny Poddubny with the Hero of Russia award on September 30 for "demonstrating heroism" while performing official duties.^[21] Putin personally called Poddubny in August 2024 after Poddubny sustained injuries while reporting from Kursk Oblast.^[22] Poddubny served as a "trusted person" in Putin's presidential campaigns in 2018 and 2024.^[23] The Kremlin had been increasingly trying to use Poddubny to disseminate official narratives in the Russian ultranationalist information space by appointing him to Kremlin-run initiatives and highlighting his reports on Russian state media since late 2022.^[24]

Russian milblogger Roman Alekhin claimed on September 30 that Russian authorities awarded him the "Defender of Kursk Oblast" medal, thanked Kursk Oblast Governor Alexey Smirnov for trusting him, and proclaimed that he serves Russia and the Russian people.^[25] Alekhin has long been critical of Russian authorities and rhetorically attacked Smirnov on his Telegram channel in July 2024.^[26] Smirnov appointed Alekhin as a volunteer advisor following these July 2024 attacks, at which point Alekhin claimed that he is taking responsibility for and acting upon his previous criticisms of the Kursk Oblast government.^[27] Alekhin's September 30 statements suggest that Russian authorities have successfully used appointments and awards to coopt a critical voice. The Kremlin has used similar methods in the past, such as by including Alexander "Sasha" Kots in the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights in 2022 and awarding Mikhail Zvinchuk of the Rybar Telegram channel with presidential and Ministry of Defense (MoD) honors in late 2023.^[28]

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin arrived in Tehran on September 30 to meet with various Iranian officials and highlight Russo–Iranian economic cooperation.^[29] Mishustin met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and stated that he expects that Russia and Iran will sign the anticipated comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement at the upcoming BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, from October 22 to 24.^[30] Mishustin also met with Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref to talk about opportunities for Russian investment in "various fields" in Iran and notably met with Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad.^[31] Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali reported that Mishustin's visit to Iran will particularly focus on developing trade and economic ties between the two countries.^[32] Russian and Iranian officials likely view expanded economic and financial cooperation as a necessary component of generally intensified Russo–Iranian relations.

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian government plans to spend 17 trillion rubles (\$183 billion) on national security and defense in 2025 — about 41 percent of its annual expenditures. The Russian budget will continue to support various social programs, including the Kremlin's pronatalist programs, but a continued focus on defense spending is likely affecting the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted Presidential Aide and close personal ally Alexei Dyumin to the Russian Security Council alongside three other officials.
- The Kremlin continues to use state and regional awards to coopt previously critical milbloggers as part of wider efforts to gain control over the information space.

- Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin arrived in Tehran on September 30 to meet with various Iranian officials and highlight Russo-Iranian economic cooperation.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Glushkovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced within the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed on September 30 the decree on Russia's usual semi-annual fall conscription for 133,000 draftees.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 29, 2024](#)

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

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

September 29, 2024, 4:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on September 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Western countries continue to invest in the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB). The Danish Ministry of Defense (MoD), in collaboration with the Danish DIB, announced on September 29 the establishment of a defense industrial hub at the Danish embassy in Kyiv with the aim of enhancing Danish-Ukrainian defense industrial cooperation.[1] The Danish initiative aims to support Danish defense and dual-use companies that want to establish production or partnerships with Ukraine. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and Danish Defense Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Troels Lund Poulsen also signed a Letter of Intent on September 29 that pledges Danish financial support for defense production in Ukraine.[2] Denmark will allocate a total of 575 million euros (\$641 million) for investment in the Ukrainian DIB, with 175 million euros (\$195 million) coming directly from the Danish budget and an additional 400 million euros (\$446 million) from profits from frozen Russian assets.[3] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on September 14 that Ukraine will be able to domestically produce \$20 billion worth of defense equipment in 2025 if Ukraine receives additional funding from its partners.[4] ISW has assessed the importance of sustained and timely Western military support for Ukraine, particularly Western assistance to develop Ukraine's DIB, so that Ukraine can become more self-sufficient and reduce its reliance on Western military aid in the long-term.[5]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian ammunition depot and missile storage facility near Kotluban, Volgograd Oblast on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff and Ukrainian media reported on September 29 that drone operators of the Unmanned Systems Forces, Special Operations Forces (SSO), Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) struck the facility and suggested that a shipment of an unspecified number of Iranian missiles recently arrived at the facility.[6] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that the strike caused a fire and secondary ammunition denotations at the facility. Satellite imagery captured on September 29 shows that the strikes likely caused a fire just northwest of the facility, and data available from NASA FIRMS shows heat anomalies in this area.[7] Kotluban Head Igor Davydenko stated that Ukrainian drones attempted to strike the area but did not cause any damage to the facility, although a local Volgograd Oblast outlet reported that firefighters extinguished a fire caused by falling drone debris near an unspecified military facility.[8] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* noted that internet sources are falsely attributing footage from a 2021 explosion in Dubai, United Arab Emirates to the Kutluban strike.[9] *Astra* also reported that its sources in Rostov Oblast's emergency services stated that Russian forces shot down over 20 Ukrainian drones targeting the Millerovo Air Base on the night of September 28 to 29 and noted that data available from NASA FIRMS shows heat anomalies near the air base.[10] Footage published on September 29 purportedly shows a fire near the Millerovo Air Base.[11] A Russian insider source published footage purportedly showing a fire near the Yeysk Air Base in Krasnodar Krai, but ISW cannot confirm the authenticity of this footage.[12] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces shot down 125 Ukrainian drones on the night of September 28 to 29, including 67 drones over Volgograd Oblast, 17 drones over Voronezh Oblast, and 18 drones over Rostov Oblast.[13]

The Russian government is reportedly planning to further increase defense spending in 2025, although Kremlin officials appear to be highlighting planned social spending while avoiding discussions of increased defense spending. The Russian Cabinet of Ministers approved on September 29 a draft federal budget for 2025 to 2027 and will submit the budget to the State Duma by October 1.[14] The draft budget states that Russia's federal revenues are expected to grow by almost 12 percent in 2025 compared to 2024 and that the share of non-oil and gas revenues in the federal budget is expected to increase to 73 percent. *Bloomberg* reported on September 23 that it viewed draft proposals of the three-year draft budget, which showed that the Russian government plans to spend 13.2 trillion rubles (about \$140 billion) on defense in 2025 — an increase from 10.4 trillion rubles (about \$110 billion) projected for 2024.[15] *Bloomberg* stated that Russia plans to spend roughly 40 percent on national defense and domestic security in 2025 — more than spending for education, health care, social policies, and the federal economy combined. The Kremlin will reportedly increase spending on classified items from 11.1 trillion rubles (about \$117 billion) in 2024 to 12.9 trillion rubles (about \$136 billion) in 2025.

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin claimed on September 24 that the government plans to fulfill "all social obligations to citizens" and highlighted planned funding for medical care, pensions, and national projects.[16] Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov acknowledged that "significant resources" are going towards Russia's "special military operation," but emphasized that 40 trillion rubles (about \$424 billion) will go towards 19 national projects over six years — twice as much as the funding allocated for the period of 2019 to 2024.[17] Siluanov also highlighted that Russia plans to spend 180 billion rubles (about \$1.9 billion) on modernized public utilities infrastructure and preferential mortgage programs. Kremlin officials are likely wary of war fatigue among the Russian population and are attempting to maintain public support for the war by highlighting the Kremlin's attention to social projects.

Key Takeaways:

- Western countries continue to invest in the growth of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian ammunition depot and missile storage facility near Kotluban, Volgograd Oblast on September 29.
- The Russian government is reportedly planning to further increase defense spending in 2025, although Kremlin officials appear to be highlighting planned social spending while avoiding discussions of increased defense spending.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Glushkovsky Raion, west of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Toretsk and Pokrovsk directions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 28, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 28, 2024, 3:30pm ET

Western officials continue to highlight efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to support the Russian war effort in Ukraine. *The Times* reported on September 27 that Western officials revealed that an unspecified PRC company is sending a range of military drones to Russia for testing and eventual use by Russian forces in Ukraine.[1] A Western official reportedly stated that the PRC company signed the agreement with Russia in 2023 and that there is "clear evidence that PRC companies are supplying Russia with deadly weapons for use in Ukraine." *The Times* reported that the Western official confirmed a September 25 report from *Reuters* about Russia's secret weapons program in the PRC to develop long-range attack drones for use in Ukraine.[2] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on September 27 that roughly 70 percent of Russian imports of machine tools and 90 percent of microelectronic imports come from the PRC and Hong Kong and that Russia is using these imports to produce missiles, rockets, armored vehicles, and munitions.[3] Blinken stated that the PRC's actions do not "add up" since the PRC speaks about wanting peace in Ukraine but is allowing PRC companies to take actions that are helping the Russian war effort. The PRC has repeatedly attempted to depict itself as a neutral mediator in the war in Ukraine, and continued reports of PRC aid to Russia's war effort undermine this claim.[4]

Ukrainian media reported on September 28 that unspecified Russian resistance movements, in coordination with the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), killed the Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) 924th State Center for Unmanned Aviation Colonel Aleksei Kolomeystev in Koloma, Moscow Oblast.[5] GUR stated that Kolomeystev was involved in training Russian drone operators, including operators and support staff for Shahed-type kamikaze drones.[6] GUR posted a photo of Kolomeystev's body but did not acknowledge any involvement in the killing.[7] Russian officials have not officially acknowledged the assassination.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) strongly condemned on September 28 Israel's "political assassination" of Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.[8] The Russian MFA responded to the Israeli airstrike on Beirut, Lebanon that killed Nasrallah and advocated for an immediate cessation to hostilities, stating that Israel will bear full responsibility for any subsequent escalation in the Middle East. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also issued a joint condemnation of Israel's airstrikes in Syria on September 28 during a meeting with the Turkish and Iranian foreign ministers.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- Western officials continue to highlight efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to support the Russian war effort in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian media reported on September 28 that unspecified Russian resistance movements, in coordination with the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), killed the Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) 924th State Center for Unmanned Aviation Colonel Aleksei Kolomeystev in Koloma, Moscow Oblast.

- The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) strongly condemned on September 28 Israel's "political assassination" of Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Selydove, and Vuhledar.
- Russia is reportedly implementing legislation that allows Russian authorities to release those accused of crimes from criminal liabilities if the accused signs a contract with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 27, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 27, 2024, 8:15pm ET

Ukrainian forces repelled a reinforced battalion-size Russian mechanized assault in the Kupyansk direction on September 26 — the first large Russian mechanized assault along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line since Winter 2024. A Ukrainian battalion operating near Pishchane (northwest of Svatove and southeast of Kupyansk) posted geolocated footage on September 26 showing Ukrainian forces repelling the reinforced battalion-size Russian mechanized assault in fields around Pishchane and reported that Russian forces attacked in the direction of Kolisnykivka and Kruhlyakivka (west of Pishchane and directly on the Oskil River).[1] The Ukrainian battalion reported that Russian forces used 50 armored vehicles in the assault, and the Ukrainian Airborne Assault Forces Command reported that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions in two columns, one with 37 armored vehicles and the other with 13.[2] The Ukrainian battalion reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed three tanks and 11 armored vehicles and damaged 10 tanks and 16 armored vehicles.[3] The Ukrainian Airborne Assault Forces Command posted footage showing damaged and destroyed Russian armored vehicles crowded close to one another, suggesting that Russian armored vehicles attacked in tight columns and became jammed once Ukrainian fire elements started to strike the column—a common occurrence in failed Russian mechanized assaults. [4] Ukrainian military sources reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian forces back to their starting positions near Pishchane, and none of the geolocated footage that ISW has observed of the assault indicates that Russian forces advanced during the assault.[5]

The Russian Western Grouping of Forces conducted several large mechanized assaults between January and February 2024 at the start of the Russian offensive operation along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, with the last observed battalion-size Russian mechanized assault occurring west of Kreminna in late January.[6] Russian forces have since conducted infantry assaults and occasional roughly platoon-size mechanized assaults along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, and the tempo of the Russian offensive operation along this sector of the front has generally been much lower than Russian offensive operations elsewhere in Ukraine.[7]

Russian forces may be intensifying their efforts to reach the Oskil River, although Russian advances on the east (left) bank of the Oskil River will likely continue to be relatively gradual. Russian forces have created a small tactical salient around Pishchane in recent weeks and have focused on advancing toward Kolisnykivka and Kruhlyakivka.[8] Russian forces advanced along a ravine running east of Pishchane and in fields south and north of the settlement but have struggled to advance in the fields immediately east of Kolisnykivka and Kruhlyakivka. The command of the Western Grouping of Forces may have intended for the large mechanized assault to allow Russian forces to advance rapidly through these fields and consolidate positions within Kolisnykivka and Kruhlyakivka and enable Russian infantry to establish a more enduring foothold within the two settlements on the Oskil River.

Russian forces are likely focusing on establishing a foothold directly on the Oskil River because it would allow Russian forces to envelop Ukrainian positions on the east bank of the river both to the north and south - creating a narrower Ukrainian salient between Kupyansk-Vuzlovyyi and Hlushkivka and a wider Ukrainian salient south of Kruhlyakivka since the Oskil River acts as a barrier. The Western Grouping of Forces has conducted the offensive operation along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line in four mutually supporting axes of advance (northeast of Kupyansk, northwest of Svatove, southwest of Svatove, and west of Kreminna) specifically so that Russian territorial gains on any route of advance would generate opportunities to create Ukrainian salients on the east bank of the Oskil River and envelop Ukrainian positions both to the north and south of any advance.[9] The desired Russian seizure of Kolisnykivka and Kruhlyakivka does not ensure that Russian forces would be able to more quickly reduce the potential Ukrainian salient between Kupyansk-Vuzlovyyi and Hlushkivka nor increase the pace of advance south of Kruhlyakivka, however. Russian forces have not demonstrated the ability to quicken the pace of their advance along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line in recent months, and Russian forces have also failed to make even marginal gains on other axes of advance, notably spending weeks to enter small settlements like Nevske and Makiivka (both northwest of Kreminna). Russian sources claimed as of September 27 that Ukrainian forces are actively counterattacking near Nevske, and Ukrainian forces have previously conducted tactically

successful counterattacks in the Kreminna area — suggesting that Ukrainian forces have more flexibility to contest the tactical initiative in the area than elsewhere in eastern Ukraine.[10]

The Russian military command has demonstrated that it will likely accept continued gradual gains along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, however. The Western Grouping of Forces established the Russian offensive operation towards the Oskil River as a much more sustainable effort than previous offensive operations and has repeatedly slowed offensive tempo along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line to allow participating Russian units to rest, reconstitute, and rotate.[11] Russian forces began the effort to reach the Oskil River in Winter 2024 and have not abandoned the effort despite several brief operational culminations in the previous months.[12]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command are currently pursuing a theory of victory in Ukraine that posits that Russian forces can continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, and gradual Russian advances along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line cohere with this strategic calculus.[13] ISW continues to assess that Russia's objective to push Ukrainian forces off the east bank of the Oskil River is an operationally significant objective since it would allow Russian forces to establish an easily defensible front along the river and free up combat power.[14] The Russian military command continues to deprioritize other offensive operations with operationally significant objectives, however, as seen with the current Russian offensive operation around the operationally significant town of Chasiv Yar.

The Western Grouping of Forces likely has limited capacity to maintain an intensified offensive effort along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line or conduct effective combat operations that result in more rapid gains. The Western Grouping of Forces initially was comprised of both Moscow and Leningrad Military District (MMD/LMD) elements when it launched the offensive operation along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line in Winter 2024, and the Russian military redeployed the majority of the LMD elements to the Northern Grouping of Forces to conduct the Russian offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast in May 2024.[15] Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has since drawn additional elements from the Western Grouping of Forces to defend in Kursk Oblast from the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line.[16] The Western Grouping of Forces has now tasked the MMD's 1st Guards Tank Army (GTA) with a wider area of responsibility from northeast of Kupyansk to west of Svatove while continuing to task primarily the MMD's 20th Combined Arms Army [CAA] with the front southwest of Svatove to west of Kreminna.[17] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on September 25 that the 1st GTA has created an operational reserve of elements of the 1st GTA's 153rd Tank Regiment (47th Tank Division), 371st Motorized Rifle Regiment (mobilized unit), and several combined rifle battalions from the 1st GTA's 4th and 47th tank divisions to support the Russian offensive operation in the Kupyansk direction, and this reserve will likely be unable to support prolonged intensified offensive operations.[18] The command of the Western Grouping of Forces has previously overseen costly and ineffective mechanized assaults. Continued pronounced failures with mechanized assaults suggest that the Western Grouping of Forces is not learning tactical lessons that other Russian groupings of forces have learned.[19]

Russian authorities appear to be expending a significant amount of effort to influence the Western debate about allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to conduct long-range strikes against military objects in Russia. This Russian effort suggests a deep concern with the operational pressures that such strikes into Russia would generate on Russian offensive operations in Ukraine, although US officials remain hesitant to permit Ukraine to conduct such strikes. The *New York Times* (NYT), citing unnamed US officials, reported on September 26 that US intelligence assessments "play down" the effect that Ukrainian strikes into Russia with US-, UK-, and French-provided long-range missile systems could have on the course of the war in Ukraine due to Ukraine's limited number of such weapons and uncertainty around the future provision of more long-range systems.[20] NYT noted that officials within the US military and Biden administration who support the policy change stated that Western-provided weapons would allow Ukraine to strike more distant Russian bases and ammunition warehouses and force the Russian military to relocate ammunition depots, command posts, attack helicopters, and other materiel out of the range of Western missiles, which the officials noted would significantly complicate Russian supply lines in Ukraine.[21]

Even a small number of successful Ukrainian long-range strikes could have asymmetric impacts and prompt Russian forces to move significant military and storage facilities outside the range of Western-provided weapons and further away from the frontline - complicating Russian logistics in the vicinity of Ukraine. Ukrainian forces previously conducted a series of HIMARS strikes against Russian ammunition depots throughout occupied Ukraine in Summer 2022, which prompted Russian forces to disperse ammunition storage facilities and degraded the efficiency of Russian logistics.[22] Russian authorities are likely concerned about how moving ammunition depots and other critical storage facilities further away from the frontline and outside the range of Western-provided systems will impact Russian offensive capabilities in Ukraine and appear to be engaged in a significant rhetorical effort to prevent the West from allowing Ukraine to conduct another similarly significant strike campaign.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reintroduced several of the Kremlin's previously most effective narratives back into the Western and Russian information spaces in recent weeks and tailored his typical boilerplate language to specifically target the ongoing Western debate about allowing Ukraine to conduct long-range strikes into Russia with Western-provided

equipment. Putin invoked the Kremlin's ongoing narrative about its supposed "red lines" and stated on September 11 that Ukrainian strikes against Russia using Western-provided weapons would represent an escalation in the war in Ukraine and directly involve Western countries in the war. [23] Putin invoked the threat of nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West on September 25 and claimed that "aggression against Russia by a non-nuclear state with support or participation from a nuclear state" or the "receipt of reliable information about the massive launch of air and space weapons" at Russia are two possible conditions that Russia could use to justify using a nuclear weapon. [24] The Kremlin's information operations threatening nuclear war if the West crosses Russia's "red lines" were successful at prompting the West into self-deterrence and delaying Western security assistance during critical moments in 2022 and 2024. [25] Officials close to senior Russian diplomats recently claimed that Putin may be doubting the impact of his nuclear saber-rattling against Western policymakers, although Putin may continue to employ such rhetoric if he assesses that these information operations will continue to have even minimal impacts on Western decision-makers. [26]

The benefits of allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided long-range strike systems against Russia may outweigh the risk of Russian retaliation more than Western policymakers are currently considering. Western media outlets have repeatedly reported that the US and other Western governments are hesitant to greenlight Ukraine to use Western-provided systems to strike targets in Russia due to previous assessments that the risk of Russian retaliation for such strikes outweighs the possible benefits that Ukraine could generate with such strikes. [27] *NYT* reported that the assessment notes that Russia is likely to retaliate with greater force against the US and its allies, possibly with covert attacks on US and European strategic facilities and military bases in Europe, in the event that the West allows Ukraine to use Western-provided systems to strike objects in Russia. [28]

The Kremlin has been conducting covert operations against Western powers since long before the ongoing debate about Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike Russia and the Kremlin may intend to intensify these operations regardless of the West's decision as these operations support other Kremlin objectives to destabilize European countries and undermine NATO's military readiness. [29] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are still benefiting from and exploiting territory within the range of Western-provided systems for further Russian offensive operations against Ukraine and Western policymakers maintain the decision-making power to remove this sanctuary and further complicate Russia's war effort. [30]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers on September 27, likely as part of the ongoing Kremlin effort to coopt Russian milbloggers and downplay recent backlash in the ultranationalist information space over the death of two prominent drone operators. Russian state-run news agencies *TASS* and *RIA Novosti* reported on September 27 that Belousov met with several milbloggers to discuss issues relating to unspecified frontline areas in Ukraine. [31] Several Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers (some of whom were present at previous meetings between MoD officials and milbloggers) praised Belousov for being receptive to their feedback about the situation on the frontlines and being in tune with the situation on the frontline. [32] One Kremlin-affiliated milblogger in attendance had recently published the claimed results of Belousov's investigation into the deaths of drone operators of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment (1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade, 51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) Junior Sergeant Dmitry Lysakovsky (alias Goodwin) and Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Gritsai (alias Ernest). [33] Some milbloggers accused this Kremlin-affiliated milblogger of working with the Russian MoD to gauge the public reaction to the claimed results of the investigation, which allegedly found the commander of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment not guilty of exceeding his powers by committing the drone platoon to combat operations, which ultimately resulted in Lysakovsky and Gritsai's deaths. [34] Belousov may have met with coopted Russian milbloggers to downplay the controversy generated by the deaths of Lysakovsky and Gritsai likely in an attempt to further the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) influence in the Russian information space.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) announced a new initiative to draw international support for its alternative peace plan for Ukraine amid increasing cooperation with Russia. PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced on September 26 that the PRC, Brazil, Pakistan, and "other like-minded countries in the global south" will soon establish the "Friends of Peace" platform that allegedly aims to foster "inclusive dialogue" to find a solution to end the war in Ukraine. [35] The PRC routinely promoted its alternative peace plan, allowing Russian officials to posture as willing to negotiate with Ukraine in good faith despite consistent Kremlin statements either insisting on its terms amounting to total Ukrainian capitulation or rejecting negotiations outright. [36] The Kremlin will likely promote this new Friends of Peace platform and use its support of multiple alternative peace efforts to falsely portray Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continued to meet with US officials about the war in Ukraine during his visit to the US on September 26 and 27. Zelensky met with a bipartisan delegation from the US Senate and with US President Joe Biden on September 26 and with US Vice President Kamala Harris and former US President Donald Trump on September 27. [37]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces repelled a reinforced battalion-size Russian mechanized assault in the Kupyansk direction on September 26 — the first large Russian mechanized assault along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line since Winter 2024.
- Russian forces may be intensifying their efforts to reach the Oskil River, although Russian advances on the east (left) bank of the Oskil River will likely continue to be relatively gradual.
- The Russian military command has demonstrated that it will likely accept continued gradual gains along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, however.
- The Western Grouping of Forces likely has limited capacity to maintain an intensified offensive effort along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line or conduct effective combat operations that result in more rapid gains.
- Russian authorities appear to be expending a significant amount of effort to influence the Western debate about allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to conduct long-range strikes against military objects in Russia. This Russian effort suggests a deep concern with the operational pressures that such strikes into Russia would generate on Russian offensive operations in Ukraine, although US officials remain hesitant to permit Ukraine to conduct such strikes.
- The benefits of allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided long-range strike systems against Russia may outweigh the risk of Russian retaliation more than Western policymakers are currently considering.
- Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers on September 27, likely as part of the ongoing Kremlin effort to coopt Russian milbloggers and downplay recent backlash in the ultranationalist information space over the death of two prominent drone operators.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) announced a new initiative to draw international support for its alternative peace plan for Ukraine amid increasing cooperation with Russia.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky continued to meet with US officials about the war in Ukraine during his visit to the US on September 26 and 27.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces continued assaults in Kursk Oblast, but neither side made further advances.
- Russian forces recently advanced within and around Toretsk and southeast of Pokrovsk.
- Russian authorities continue to threaten Russian frontline soldiers' ad-hoc communications networks.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 26, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 26, 2024, 5:45pm ET

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

Germany, France, and the US announced several immediate and more long-term aid packages for Ukraine on September 25 and 26. The German Ministry of Development announced on September 25 that it will provide support to Ukraine this winter for heat and energy in a package totaling around 70 million euros (\$78.2 million).[1] Germany will provide Ukrainian cities and municipalities with combined heat and power plants, boiler systems, generators, and solar-power systems to support communities that have been most affected by heat and electricity shortages resulting from heavy Russian strikes. The German Bundestag also announced on September 25 a 400 million euro (\$447 million) increase in military funding for Ukraine to enable the purchase of additional air defense systems, tanks, drones, ammunition, and spare parts.[2] French President Emmanuel Macron said during a meeting with Zelensky on September 25 that France will train and fully equip a Ukrainian brigade in the "near future." [3]

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on September 25 that the Pentagon will send an additional military assistance package to Ukraine worth roughly \$375 million and that the package will include: air-to-ground munitions; HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; M1117 armored security vehicles; Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles; light tactical vehicles; armored bridging systems; small arms, patrol boats; demolitions equipment and munitions; and other miscellaneous equipment and support materiel.[4] US President Joe Biden announced on September 26 that he directed the DoD to allocate all of the remaining security assistance funding to Ukraine (roughly \$8 billion) by the end of Biden's presidential term, including funding from the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, and that he authorized \$5.5 billion in Presidential Drawdown Authority to fund the drawdown of US equipment for Ukraine and replenish US stockpiles.[5] Biden stated that the DoD will also announce an additional assistance package worth \$2.4 billion to provide Ukraine with additional air defense systems, unmanned aerial systems, and air-to-ground munitions; strengthen Ukraine's defense industry; and support Ukraine's maintenance and sustainment requirements. Biden

also announced that the US will provide Ukraine with Joint Standoff Weapon (JOW) long-range munitions, a refurbished Patriot air defense battery, and additional Patriot missiles and will expand F-16 training capabilities to accommodate training 18 additional Ukrainian pilots in 2025. Biden noted that he will also convene a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in October 2024 to coordinate further Western support for Ukraine.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is reportedly struggling to coordinate combat tasks with the Russian military despite having control over the counterterrorism operation against the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast. Russian exiled opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported on September 25 that it identified an FSB Spetsnaz servicemember who died fighting in Kursk Oblast in August 2024 — confirming that elements of FSB Spetsnaz are fighting in Kursk Oblast.[6] *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported that an FSB officer stated that the FSB has tasked FSB Spetsnaz, including elements of the Alpha and Vypel groups, with identifying and destroying Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in Kursk Oblast.[7] The FSB officer reportedly stated that the Alpha and Vypel groups are ill-suited for combined arms battles involving heavy equipment against regular military forces, however.[8] FSB Spetsnaz has typically conducted counterterrorism operations against small terrorist groups and likely lacks the training and equipment needed to respond to Ukrainian units conducting combined arms assaults. Another source close to Russian special services reportedly told *Novaya Gazeta Europe* that the FSB's Special Operations Center does not have a "common connection" with Russian military units and that there is still no common headquarters for coordinating combat tasks between the FSB and the Russian military.[9] Putin tasked the FSB with conducting a counterterrorism operation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts on August 9 following the start of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on August 6, but then proceeded to assign overlapping tasks to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), FSB, and Rosgvardiya.[10] The Kremlin and the Russian military command have struggled to establish a cohesive and effective command and control (C2) structure during the response to the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast, and it remains unclear what responsibilities fall under the purview of the FSB's counterterrorism operation or the MoD's Coordination Council.[11] ISW has previously assessed that overlapping tasks and poor C2 structures will likely continue to generate friction between the FSB and the Russian MoD.[12]

Key Takeaways:

- **Germany, France, and the US announced several immediate and more long-term aid packages for Ukraine on September 25 and 26.**
- **The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is reportedly struggling to coordinate combat tasks with the Russian military despite having control over the counterterrorism operation against the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued assaults in Kursk Oblast but neither side made further advances in the area.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City and Chasiv Yar and east and southeast of Pokrovsk.**
- **Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian military command for holding joint military exercises with Laos, arguing that such exercises demonstrate that Russia is not learning from its battlefield experience in Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 25, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 25, 2024, 8:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on September 25. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 26 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to threaten the possibility of a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West in order to exert further control over Western decision-making and discourage the West from allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike military objects in Russia. Putin claimed during the first public meeting of the Russian Security Council's standing conference on nuclear deterrence on September 25 that Russia is adjusting its nuclear doctrine to introduce "clarifications" regarding necessary preconditions for Russia to use a nuclear weapon.[1] Putin shared two "clarifications" to the nuclear doctrine: that the Kremlin will consider using nuclear weapons in the case of "aggression against Russia by a non-nuclear state with support or participation from a nuclear state" or in the case of "the receipt of reliable information about the massive launch of air and space weapons" against Russia and these weapons crossing Russia's borders. Putin specified that these "air and space weapons" that could justify Russian nuclear weapons use include strategic and tactical aviation, cruise missiles, drones, and/or hypersonic missiles. Putin likely intends for the hyper-specificity of his nuclear threats to breathe new life into the Kremlin's tired nuclear saber-rattling information operation and generate a new wave of panic among Western policymakers during a particularly critical moment in Western policy discussions about

Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided weapons. Kremlin officials routinely invoke thinly veiled threats of nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West during key moments in Western political debates regarding further military assistance to Ukraine — such as the ongoing debate about Ukraine's right to use Western-provided systems to conduct long-range strikes against Russian military objects — to induce fear among decision makers.[2] US Central Intelligence Agency Director (CIA) William Burns cautioned Western policymakers on September 7 against fearing boilerplate Russian nuclear saber-rattling, and ISW has long identified Russia's nuclear saber-rattling as part of the Kremlin's effort to promote Western self-deterrence and not as indicative of Russia's willingness to use nuclear weapons.[3] ISW continues to assess that Russia is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.[4]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia is preparing for potential strikes against Ukraine's three remaining operational nuclear power plants ahead of the coming winter, highlighting the Kremlin's unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations and continued commitment to the destruction of the Ukrainian state and its people. Zelensky gave speeches to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly (UNGA) on September 25 stating that Ukrainian intelligence found that Russia aims to target Ukraine's three operational nuclear power plants in order to degrade Ukraine's energy infrastructure and power generation capacity before winter 2024–2025 and cause “nuclear disaster.”[5] Zelensky recently noted that Russia is using unspecified Chinese satellites to photograph Ukraine's nuclear power plants in preparation for strikes and emphasized in his UNGA speech that Russia's previous winter strike campaigns against Ukrainian energy infrastructure have already destroyed Ukraine's thermal power generation capacity and severely degraded its hydroelectric power generation capacity.[6] Russian authorities and sources have repeatedly falsely accused Ukrainian forces of targeting Russian and Russian-occupied nuclear power plants likely as part of Russia's overarching informational effort to falsely paint Ukraine and the Zelensky government as illegitimate actors and war criminals with whom Russia cannot engage in peace negotiations.[7] Zelensky's UN speeches also emphasized the principles of international law and the UN Charter as the main avenue through which Ukraine can achieve peace and highlighted the illegality of Russia's war under international law alongside Russia's ongoing destabilizing global efforts to enhance its war in Ukraine.[8]

A Russian company is reportedly collaborating with entities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to develop an attack drone for Russia's war in Ukraine. *Reuters*, citing two European intelligence sources and documents it reviewed, reported on September 25 that Russia has established a secret weapons program in the PRC through Russian and PRC business entities in order to develop long-range attack drones for use in Ukraine.[9] Russian weapons manufacturer IEMZ Kupol reportedly developed and tested the long-range “Garpiya-3” attack drone in collaboration with PRC specialists and informed the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) that it can produce these drones at a factory in the PRC. The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) denied knowledge of such a project to *Reuters* and emphasized the PRC's strict drone export controls. The White House expressed concern to *Reuters* about the prospect of a PRC-based entity providing lethal assistance to a sanctioned Russian company and noted that, while it has no evidence that the PRC government is aware of this assistance, the PRC has an obligation to act against such assistance. *Reuters* reported that IEMZ Kupol has delivered at least seven Garpiya-3 drones to Russia for testing. The Garpiya-3 drones reportedly have a range of 2,000 kilometers and a 50-kilogram payload and are upgraded versions of the Russian-produced Garpiya-A1 attack drones (which have some PRC components). The *Reuters* report comes amid enhanced Chinese assistance to Russia's war effort. [10] *Bloomberg* previously reported that unspecified Russian and PRC companies are collaborating in the development of a drone similar to the Iranian-designed Shahed loitering munition for Russian use in Ukraine.[11] The PRC has repeatedly attempted to depict itself as a neutral mediator in the war in Ukraine, and reports of increased military cooperation between Russia and the PRC as well as other assistance to Russia's war effort undermine this claim. Repeated reports of joint Russia-PRC endeavors to enhance military cooperation in areas such as drone production and the ongoing Russia-PRC “Beibu/Interaction-2024” joint naval exercise that started on September 21 represent significant avenues for military knowledge sharing between the two countries.[12] Russian-PRC cooperation may be aimed at countering Western-made air defense systems used in Ukraine and elsewhere and at diminishing Western military influence globally.

Russia continues to deepen its relationship with Iran's Axis of Resistance, this time reportedly via Iran-brokered talks facilitating Russian missile transfers to Yemen's Houthi rebels. *Reuters* reported on September 25, citing Western and regional sources, that Iran has brokered “secret talks” between Russia and the Houthis to transfer Russian Yakhont (P-800 Oniks) anti-ship cruise missiles to the Houthis.[13] *Reuters'* sources noted that Russia has not yet made the decision to transfer the missiles. *CNN* reported on August 2 that the Kremlin had planned to transfer missiles to the Houthis but reneged due to diplomatic pressure, although Iran's role in brokering the Russia-Houthi talks, or the specifics of the missiles, were unknown at the time of *CNN's* original reporting.[14] Russia's hypothetical transfer of Yakhont missiles to the Houthis would likely bolster the Houthis' ability to conduct long-range precision strikes against commercial vessels and threaten the security of the Red Sea.[15] Russia has substantial experience employing Yakhont missiles against various targets in Ukraine, and the Houthis could learn from such experience if they are able to procure the missiles.[16] ISW-CTP have recently reported on Russia's efforts to align itself more explicitly with both Iran, on which Russia is reliant for military aid, and with Iran's Axis of Resistance. [17]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to threaten the possibility of a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West in order to exert further control over Western decision-making and discourage the West from allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike military objects in Russia.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia is preparing for potential strikes against Ukraine's three remaining operational nuclear power plants ahead of the coming winter, highlighting the Kremlin's unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations and continued commitment to the destruction of the Ukrainian state and its people.
- A Russian company is reportedly collaborating with entities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to develop an attack drone for Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Russia continues to deepen its relationship with Iran's Axis of Resistance, this time reportedly via Iran-brokered talks facilitating Russian missile transfers to Yemen's Houthis rebels.
- Neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made confirmed advances in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces continued to regain positions in Vovchansk.
- Russian forces advanced northwest of Kreminka, in Toretsk, and southeast of Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces reportedly advanced within and around Vuhledar (southwest of Donetsk City) amid continued offensive efforts to seize the settlement.
- Veterans of Russia's war in Ukraine continue to commit crimes upon returning to Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 24, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, George Barros, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 24, 2024, 8:30pm ET

Russian forces have reached the outskirts of Vuhledar amid what appears to be an intensified offensive push near the settlement, but the capture of Vuhledar is unlikely to afford Russian forces any particular operational edge for further offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on September 24 shows that Russian forces advanced into eastern Vuhledar up to 12 Desantnykiv Street, confirming reports from Russian and Ukrainian sources that Russian troops broke into eastern Vuhledar between September 23 and 24.[1] Russian forces are additionally trying to advance on Vuhledar's northeast flank via Vodyane and southwestern flank via Prechystivka, likely in an effort to encircle the Ukrainian grouping in Vuhledar and force it to withdraw. ISW geolocated footage published on September 24 that additionally indicates that Russian forces, likely assault elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army (CAA) (Eastern Military District [EMD]), seized the Pivdennodonbaska Mine No. 3 in western Vodyane, which creates a sharper salient about five kilometers north of Vuhledar in the area west of Vodyane.[2] Several Russian sources claimed that Russian forces have fire control (the ability to prosecute close-range artillery fires on an area to inhibit movement) over the C-051134 Vuhledar-Bohoyavlenka road, which is reportedly Ukraine's final supply route into Vuhledar.[3] Western media and Ukrainian military experts and journalists widely warned on September 23 and 24 that constant Russian assaults and advances on the flanks of Vuhledar are threatening to encircle the Ukrainian garrison within the settlement, which may force Ukrainian troops to withdraw from the area, which has been an important Ukrainian stronghold for over two years.[4]

Russian forces may manage to seize all of Vuhledar, but how quickly or easily they are able to do so will likely be contingent on partially on Ukrainian decision-making. If the Ukrainian command decides that the risk of a Russian encirclement of Vuhledar or the costs of defending the settlement itself in urban combat are too great, Ukrainian forces may withdraw, allowing Russian forces to seize Vuhledar relatively rapidly and without engaging in close combat fighting. If Ukrainian forces decide to defend Vuhledar and can prevent Russian efforts to envelop or encircle it, however. Russian forces may struggle to fight through a settlement that Ukrainian forces have had over two years to fortify.[5] If the Russians do not take the settlement relatively rapidly, Russian maneuver along the flanks of Vuhledar may also be impacted by the onset of autumn rains, which would make it much more difficult for Russian forces to advance through the mainly rural and agricultural terrain surrounding Vuhledar as it becomes much muddier. Russian milbloggers have identified Vuhledar's fortifications and the terrain along its flanks as major obstacles to Russia's ability to advance in the area, both during previous offensive efforts and during the current set of attacks.[6] Russia attempted at least two major offensive efforts to seize Vuhledar in late 2022 and early 2023, both of which led to considerable Russian personnel and equipment losses while affording Ukrainian forces the ability to further commit to fortifying the settlement and observe how the Russian grouping in this area plans and prosecutes offensive operations.[7] Elements of the EMD, particularly the Pacific Fleet's 40th Naval Infantry Brigade, have notably been committed to this area and engaged in offensive efforts on Vuhledar since 2022, and the Ukrainian brigade and other Ukrainian formations that have been defending Vuhledar

during the same time period have likely learned certain valuable lessons about how these Russian formations fight.[8]

Russia's potential seizure of Vuhledar is unlikely to fundamentally alter the course of offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast, however. Vuhledar is not a particularly crucial logistics node—Russian forces already control most of the main roads running into Vuhledar (the T0509 Vuhledar-Prechystivka road, the C050524 Pavlivka-Vuhledar road, and the T0524 Vuhledar-Marinka road) and are likely already credibly threatening the C051134 route into Bohoyavlenka with close range artillery fires, so the capture of the settlement would not immediately offer Russian forces access to a new roadway, nor cut Ukrainian forces off from a roadway that is crucial to their logistical supply. The potential seizure of Vuhledar will also not necessarily afford Russian forces a beneficial position from which to launch subsequent offensive operations elsewhere in western Donetsk Oblast. Vuhledar is 23 kilometers south of the H-15 highway, which runs from Donetsk City to the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, but the area between Vuhledar and the highway is mainly comprised of open fields that would require Russian forces to conduct successful mechanized assaults across areas that may soon become too muddy to make more rapid tactical gains.[9] Vuhledar is also about 30 kilometers south of the areas southeast of Pokrovsk that Russian forces are currently prioritizing, and Russian forces would have to maneuver across more than 30 kilometers of open terrain to meaningfully support offensive efforts southeast of Pokrovsk. ISW previously assessed that Russian offensive efforts near Vuhledar and Pokrovsk are mutually reinforcing and intended to stretch Ukrainian forces along a wider front in Donetsk Oblast, but the hypothetical Russian seizure of Vuhledar would not necessarily be operationally significant enough to stretch Ukrainian forces even further in this area.[10]

Recent Ukrainian strikes against Russian rear ammunition depots demonstrate the extent to which Russian military logistics still benefit from Western-provided sanctuary that secures Russia's rear. Maxar collected satellite imagery demonstrating dramatic damage to three large Russian ammunition depots in western and southwestern Russia following Ukrainian strikes in September 2024.[11] The imagery of the damage at the Oktyabrskii and Toropets depots in Tver Oblast and the Tikhoretsk depot in Krasnodar Krai depicts the destruction of dozens of ammunition storage buildings, rail cars that Russian forces likely used to transport ammunition to the depots, and masses of probable rocket canisters and other material that Russian forces had haphazardly left in the open. Such a crowded disposition of massed materiel underscores the lack of operational security in Russia's rear supply depots, demonstrating the extent to which Western restrictions prohibiting Ukraine from firing Western-provided weapons into Russia has granted the Russian command flexibility to not properly protect its rear areas. This flexibility has granted Russia the ability to optimize large rear staging facilities to marshal massed materiel to Ukraine at scale.

The Russian military's continued use of known large-scale logistics facilities is a considerable vulnerability that Ukraine could exploit if Western states removed restrictions against Ukraine. A Russian milblogger wrote a short essay on September 24 in which he complained about the lack of concealment of Russian military facilities, including warehouses and airfields.[12] The milblogger bemoaned how open sources such as Google Maps and Yandex show all Russian facilities and that private space companies provide regularly updated high-resolution imagery of Russian military objects.[13] The blogger also complained that Russia has not yet created a system for partitioning its ammunition deliveries to ensure that when Ukrainian forces interdict Russian ammo supplies, they would only destroy small caches of ammunition as opposed to strikes that cause catastrophic and widespread damage. ISW continues to assess that Western states can degrade Russia's ability to leverage mass materiel at scale by eliminating restrictions on Ukraine's use of precision fires in Russia and by forcing the Russian command to partition ammunition depots into smaller and less efficient facilities, some of which will be further away from Ukraine.[14]

Russia continues to expand and leverage its bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to support its war effort in Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on September 23 that Russia is using unspecified Chinese satellites to photograph Ukraine's nuclear power plants possibly in preparation to strike them.[15] The US government warned in April 2024 that the PRC is providing Russia with unspecified geospatial intelligence, which coheres with Zelensky's warning about Russia's use of Chinese satellites.[16] Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Vladyslav Vlasnyuk stated on September 23 that China supplies approximately 60 percent of all foreign components found in the weapons Russia uses against Ukraine.[17] Russian milbloggers circulated images on September 23 showing Russian forces operating Chinese Shaanxi Baoji Tiger armored vehicles equipped with counter-drone technology in Ukraine.[18] Another Russian source noted that Russian forces acquired these vehicles via a third party and not directly from the PRC, but the use of PRC-product military assets in Ukraine, no matter how they were acquired, confirms that Russia is continuing efforts to circumvent sanctions to obtain foreign materiel to support its war effort.[19] These various reports come amid the joint, week-long Russia-PRC "Beibu/Interaction-2024" naval exercise that started on September 21 and during which Russian Pacific Fleet ships and unspecified Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) warships conducted maneuvers and exercises in the Sea of Okhotsk.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on September 24 that Russian and PLA ships practiced joint maneuvering, countered mock enemy unmanned boats, conducted reconnaissance and monitored the sea surface situation with deck helicopters.[21] ISW has assessed that Russia seeks to enhance diplomatic, trade, and security ties with non-Western states, particularly the PRC, Iran, and North Korea, in an attempt to boost its war effort in Ukraine by obtaining weapons and critical, dual-use items, machine components, and materiel, through the development of mechanisms aimed at

evading Western sanctions.[22] The PRC has repeatedly postured itself as a neutral actor in the war in Ukraine, recently promoting its joint "Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" six-point peace plan (whose key principles nevertheless favor Russia) with Brazil despite a plethora of reports suggesting PRC support to the Russian war effort.[23]

The Russian MoD has failed to appease the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community by downplaying the Russian military command's responsibility for its insistence on misusing technical specialists in infantry-led frontal assaults in eastern Ukraine. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger who is a member of the Kremlin's Human Rights Council published the alleged results of the Russian MoD's and Federal Security Service's (FSB) Department of Military Counterintelligence investigation into the deaths of drone operators of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment (1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade, 51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) Junior Sergeant Dmitry Lysakovskiy (alias Goodwin) and Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Gritsai (alias Ernest).[24] The drone operators died in combat after the Russian military command disbanded their specialized drone unit and committed them to a frontal assault in Donetsk Oblast (likely in the Pokrovsk direction) as punishment for criticizing their command, resulting in Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov starting an investigation into the case following mass outcry online.[25] The milblogger, citing unnamed sources familiar with the investigation, claimed on September 23 that Russian authorities found that the commander of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment did not exceed his powers by committing the drone platoon to combat operations given the tactical situation on the ground and the official purpose of the military personnel.[26] The investigation also reportedly did not find any instances of drug trafficking on the frontline — an issue that Lysakovskiy, Gritsai, and now arrested assault detachment commander of the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA) Vladimir Novikov (alias Belyi) reportedly raised to the Russian military command.[27] The investigation reportedly stated the situation is the result of commanders generally neglecting to appropriately select manpower based on professional qualities, and Belousov reportedly appointed two unnamed experienced officers as 87th Separate Rifle Regiment's chief of staff — deputy commander and deputy commander. The milblogger noted that the Russian MoD "brought to disciplinary liability" a number of military commanders, including 51st CAA, 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade, and 87th Separate Rifle Regiment commanders, but another milblogger pointed out that Belousov did not fire the regiment's commander (alias "Zloy") whom the drone operators identified as responsible for disbanding their unit before their deaths.[28] Belousov reportedly ordered the Russian MoD's Main Directorate for Control and Supervision Activities to inspect the problems of manning and equipping drone units and to assess these units' effectiveness and tasked the Russian General Staff with submitting proposals on the creation of regular drone units within the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment and other military units.

Russian milbloggers overwhelmingly questioned the legitimacy of the milblogger's account of the investigation, even though this milblogger is a member of numerous Kremlin initiatives and appears to be downplaying the backlash over these deaths in the information space.[29] Several Russian milbloggers implied that the Russian MoD used the Kremlin-affiliated milblogger to gauge the public reaction to the claimed results of the investigation and urged their audiences to wait for the Russian MoD to publish the official report.[30] The Kremlin-affiliated milblogger previously shared parts of the investigation claiming that Gritsai died during a Ukrainian drone strike on a rear position and implied that the platoon used mobile devices during the strike, essentially accusing them of being responsible for the circumstances of their deaths.[31] The Russian MoD had recently intensified its efforts to ban personal devices on the frontlines, and it is likely that the Russian MoD is using the milblogger's platform to deny responsibility and to advance the Kremlin's force centralization and information space control efforts.[32]

The claimed results of the investigation indicate that the Russian MoD is disinterested in addressing the systematic misuse of semi-independent Russian military innovators, specialists, and irregular commanders due to its commitment to the force centralization campaign and to maintaining the current tempo of offensive operations. A Russian milblogger and former Storm Z instructor claimed that the unofficial reports of the results of the investigation indicate that the Russian MoD has committed to downplaying the situation in the information space and is disinterested in conducting an objective investigation and improving the overall quality of the Russian Armed Forces.[33] One milblogger, who has remained very critical of the Russian MoD, reported that the Russian military command recently committed a Spetsnaz officer to a regular infantry assault unit because the unit lacked assault elements.[34] The milblogger recalled similar recent instances of misuse of Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) engineers, Baltic Fleet sailors, missilemen, and disabled Russian servicemen in infantry-led assaults. The milblogger recalled that the Russian military command "senselessly" reduced Russian elite airborne (VDV) and Spetsnaz forces at the beginning of the war by committing them to operations for which they were not trained.[35] The Russian military command also formed the 3rd "Frigate" Mechanized Battalion, which fighting in Pokrovsk, northern Kharkiv, and Lyman directions as part of the 245th Motorized Rifle Regiment (1st Guards Tank Army, Moscow Military District [MMD]) with sailors of the *Admiral Kuznetsov* aircraft carrier[36] The systematic misuse of Russian specialists also indicates that Russia is struggling to meet the manpower demands of its war in Ukraine.[37]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have reached the outskirts of Vuhledar amid what appears to be an intensified offensive push near the settlement, but the capture of Vuhledar is unlikely to afford Russian forces any particular operational edge for further offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast.
- Recent Ukrainian strikes against Russian rear ammunition depots demonstrate the extent to which Russian military logistics still benefit from Western-provided sanctuary that secures Russia's rear.
- Russia continues to expand and leverage its bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to support its war effort in Ukraine.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has failed to appease the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community by downplaying the Russian military command's responsibility for its insistence on misusing technical specialists in infantry-led frontal assaults in eastern Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced west of the Kursk Oblast salient.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced within Vovchansk and in eastern Toretsk.
- Russian opposition outlet *Meduza*, citing its own conversations with various unspecified Russian officials close to the Russian Presidential Administration, an interlocutor in the federal government, and regional officials, reported on September 24 that mobilization is a very sensitive topic among Kremlin officials.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 23, 2024

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

Christina Harward, George Barros, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 23, 2024, 6:15pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in the United States on September 23 and reiterated Ukraine's need for timely and uninterrupted US military assistance. Zelensky visited the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant in Pennsylvania and discussed the need for timely delivery of Western aid to Ukraine, the importance of starting joint American-Ukrainian weapons production in Ukraine as well as the possibility of US investments in the Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB).[1] The Scranton plant significantly increased its production of 155mm artillery shells in 2024, and Zelensky noted that the plant employs 400 people. Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia Oblast Military Administration Head Ivan Fedorov met with Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and signed a cooperation agreement between Zaporizhzhia Oblast and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that calls for interaction between state bodies, scientific institutions, civil society organizations, and businesses in the fields of energy, agriculture, digital technologies, and defense.[2] The agreement also calls for Pennsylvania to support the reconstruction of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Ukraine has signed five similar agreements with US states previously: between Kyiv Oblast and Washington and Utah, between Zhytomyr Oblast and Indiana, and between Chernihiv Oblast and Minnesota.

The Kremlin continues to publicly signal its disinterest in any peace settlement short of total capitulation of the Ukrainian government and destruction of the Ukrainian state. Zelensky stated in an interview with the *New Yorker* about Ukraine's "Victory Plan" published on September 22 that Russia is not interested in ending the war on any reasonable terms and is feigning interest in negotiations.[3] Zelensky highlighted that Ukraine invited Russia to attend Ukraine's second peace summit but that the Kremlin had not demonstrated any interest in participating. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov notably stated on September 22 that there is "no alternative" to Russian victory in Ukraine, reiterating Russia's unwillingness to negotiate on terms other than Ukrainian capitulation.[4] Peskov also identified NATO and the West as a "collective enemy." Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova recently announced that Russia will not participate in the second Ukrainian peace summit or any "such summits." [5] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is not interested in good faith peace negotiations with Ukraine and that the Kremlin will only invoke the concept of "peace plans" and "negotiations" to prompt the West to pressure Ukraine into preemptive concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[6]

Russian forces conducted glide bomb strikes against Zaporizhzhia City for the first time overnight on September 22 to 23.[7] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces conducted seven airstrikes with KAB glide bombs at Zaporizhzhia City overnight, damaging 13 residential buildings and two educational facilities, and injuring at least 21 civilians.[8] Zaporizhzhia Oblast Military Administration Head Ivan Fedorov stated that Russian forces conducted another strike against a critical infrastructure facility in Zaporizhzhia City on September 23 but did not specify whether Russian forces used glide bombs or another weapon.[9] Some Russian and Ukrainian sources claimed that Russian forces did not use KAB glide bombs, which are largely guided but rather used FAB-250 bombs equipped with unified planning and correction modules (UMPCs).[10] Soviet-era FAB bomb variants are largely unguided, and other iterations of Russian FABs with UMPCs have been unguided, though it is unclear whether the glide bombs that struck Zaporizhzhia City had guidance systems.[11] Russian glide bombs have a glide range of 40-60 kilometers, and Zaporizhzhia City is roughly 25-35 kilometers from the current frontline in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast.[12] Russian milbloggers celebrated the strike as an inflection in Russian strike capabilities and called on Russian forces to target logistics assets near the city, including bridges across the Dnipro River.[13] Ukrainian

forces are only able to counter the threat of Russian glide bombs by shooting down the aircraft that launch them, further demonstrating Ukraine's need for increased air defense capabilities on the frontline and in rear areas.[14]

A high-ranking Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) commander reportedly recently committed suicide due to conflicts within his unit's leadership. A Russian insider source claimed on September 23 that Yuri Annekov, head of the 678th Communications Center of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), committed suicide at the end of last week in Balashikha, Moscow Oblast.[15] The insider source claimed that Annekov had recently complained about insufficient rest and the command's "inadequate" behavior. The insider source claimed that Annekov had served in the VKS for roughly 20 years and had tried to resist the "chaos and disorder" within the VKS that began after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. ISW cannot verify the insider source's claims.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in the United States on September 23 and reiterated Ukraine's need for timely and uninterrupted US military assistance.**
- **The Kremlin continues to publicly signal its disinterest in any peace settlement short of total capitulation of the Ukrainian government and destruction of the Ukrainian state.**
- **Russian forces conducted glide bomb strikes against Zaporizhzhia City for the first time overnight on September 22 to 23.**
- **A high-ranking Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) commander reportedly recently committed suicide due to conflicts within his unit's leadership.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Hlyboke, Kupyansk, and Pokrovsk. Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.**
- **The Russian government informally supported a bill on September 23 that would allow Russian authorities to fine individuals who promote "child-free propaganda," likely as part of an ongoing Kremlin effort to address Russia's demographic problem.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 22, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 22, 2024, 5:55pm ET

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

Ukraine's September 18 strike against a Russian missile and ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast reportedly destroyed enough Russian munitions to affect Russian operations in the coming months.[1] Estonian Defense Forces Intelligence Center Head Colonel Ants Kiviselg stated on September 20 that the strike caused 30,000 tons of munitions to explode, noting that the size of the explosion equates to 750,000 artillery shells and that Russian forces on average fire 10,000 shells per week. His calculations suggest the Ukrainian strike destroyed two to three months of Russia's ammunition supply. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on September 18 that a source within Ukrainian special services stated that the Toropets facility stored Iskander missiles, Tochka-U ballistic missiles, glide bombs, and artillery ammunition.[2] It is unclear if Kiviselg's statement about 30,000 tons of explosives includes both missiles and artillery ammunition, but the strike destroyed significant Russian materiel stockpiles in any case. ISW continues to assess that continued Ukrainian strikes against rear Russian logistics facilities within Russia will generate wider operational pressures on the Russian military, including forcing the Russian military command to reorganize and disperse support and logistics systems within Russia to mitigate the impact of such strikes.[3]

The Kremlin is reportedly reconsidering the effectiveness of nuclear saber-rattling as part of its efforts to influence the ongoing Western policy debate about supporting Ukraine and specifically permitting Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons against military objects in Russia. The *Washington Post*, citing officials close to senior Russian diplomats, stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin may be realizing that Russian nuclear threats are starting to lose their power over Western officials and that Putin may be developing an unspecified more nuanced and limited informational response to future Western approval of long-range strikes into Russia.[4] An unnamed Russian official claimed that Russian officials have realized that nuclear threats "don't frighten anyone," and a Russian academic with close ties to senior Russian diplomats claimed that Russia's partners in the "Global South" are dissatisfied with Russia's nuclear threats. ISW cannot independently verify the veracity of the *Washington Post's* sources, but these reports are consistent with ISW's various assessments about how the Kremlin uses nuclear saber-rattling to promote Western self-deterrence and that such statements are not an indication of Russia's willingness to use nuclear weapons.[5] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin's thinly veiled threats of nuclear confrontation are aimed at disrupting and delaying key decision points in Western political discussions about further military assistance to Ukraine.[6] ISW continues to assess that Russia is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.[7]

Satellite imagery of damage at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in Arkhangelsk Oblast captured on September 21 suggests that the Russian military recently conducted an unsuccessful RS-28 "Sarmat" nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test.^[8] The imagery shows a large crater at the Yubileynaya launch silo, where Russian forces have previously conducted test launches of the Sarmat missile, and four fire trucks responding to active small fires near the destroyed silo.^[9] Open-source intelligence analysts reported that imagery indicates that an unsuccessful Sarmat test caused the damage but offered differing analyses about whether an explosion occurred close to or at launch or before launch during fueling.^[10] The silo at the Yubileynaya site was reportedly converted especially to conduct Sarmat launches.^[11] Russia intends for the Sarmat ICBM to replace the Soviet-era Voevoda ICBM and accelerated the development of the Sarmat after an agreement to source components parts for Voevoda from Ukraine collapsed following the start of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014.^[12] Sarmat's development has faced repeated delays, however, and this recent apparent failed test would be the fourth reported failed test of the Sarmat to date.^[13] Russia has only successfully tested the Sarmat once, in April 2022, and the Russian military reportedly put the missile on combat duty in September 2023.^[14] The latest apparent failed Sarmat test does not necessarily indicate that Russia's existing nuclear triad is any less effective than it has been but does suggest that Russia continues to struggle with developing new missile capabilities under the pressures of international sanctions and the demands on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) amid the war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on September 21 that Ukraine will increase its production of drones by "several times" in 2025 in order to maintain Ukraine's quantitative superiority over Russian drone production.^[15] Umerov stated that Ukraine can produce "several million" drones and that the Ukrainian state budget and funding from Ukraine's partners finance this production. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently discussed ongoing efforts to increase Russian drone production and claimed that Russian companies delivered roughly 140,000 drones to Russian forces in 2023 and that Russia plans to increase its drone production by tenfold (to 1.4 million drones) in 2024.^[16] The Russian military, however, continues to make decisions that degrade the overall quality of its technical specialists. Russian authorities recently reportedly arrested an assault detachment commander who developed a counter-drone system to train Russian counter-drone specialists that was against the staff's protocol.^[17] Russian field commanders, particularly those amongst units of the 51st Combined Arms Army, are also reportedly often sending drone operators to conduct frontal assaults as punishment for dissent.^[18]

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova announced on September 22 that Russia will not participate in Ukraine's second peace summit later in 2024 or in any "such summits."^[19] Zakharova reiterated boilerplate Russian information operations aimed at discrediting Ukraine and the Ukrainian Peace Formula – which is based on the principles of international law – as an unfair "ultimatum."^[20] Zakharova claimed that Russia is ready to discuss "serious" peace proposals that account for Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 14 "proposal." Putin outlined uncompromising demands on June 14 for Ukrainian capitulation as prerequisites for any "peace" negotiations, including Ukraine's recognition of Russian control over the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts – including the areas of these oblasts that Russian forces currently do not occupy.^[21] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is not interested in good faith peace negotiations with Ukraine and that the Kremlin will only invoke the concept of "peace plans" and "negotiations" to prompt the West to pressure Ukraine into preemptive concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.^[22]

Russia is reportedly expanding intelligence operations in Mexico to undermine the United States and support for Ukraine. *NBC News*, citing unspecified US officials and former intelligence officers, reported on September 21 that Russian intelligence services have been increasing their presence in Mexico for the past few years in order to spy on the United States and to enhance propaganda meant to undermine the United States and Ukraine.^[23] US officials reportedly expressed concern over Russia's addition of dozens of employees to its embassy staff in Mexico City, despite notably lacking strong trade relations with Mexico, and interpreted this growth as a return to Cold War-style tactics to enhance intelligence operations in Mexico. CIA Director William Burns recently noted that this increase is a result of the expulsion of Russian spies from Europe.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukraine's September 18 strike against a Russian missile and ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast reportedly destroyed enough Russian munitions to affect Russian operations in the coming months.**
- **The Kremlin is reportedly reconsidering the effectiveness of nuclear saber-rattling as part of its efforts to influence the ongoing Western policy debate about supporting Ukraine and specifically permitting Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons against military objects in Russia.**
- **Satellite imagery of damage at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in Arkhangelsk Oblast captured on September 21 suggests that the Russian military recently conducted an unsuccessful RS-28 "Sarmat" nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test.**
- **Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on September 21 that Ukraine will increase its production of drones by "several times" in 2025 in order to maintain**

Ukraine's quantitative superiority over Russian drone production.

- Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova announced on September 22 that Russia will not participate in Ukraine's second peace summit later in 2024 or in any "such summits."
- Russia is reportedly expanding intelligence operations in Mexico to undermine the United States and support for Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Svatove.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk, southwest of Donetsk City, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- A Ukrainian officer in a drone crew stated on September 22 that the Russian military command is forcing soldiers to dig trenches at Russian positions in unspecified areas of Ukraine without weapons and sometimes without armor, helmets, or military uniforms.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 21, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 21, 2024, 9:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:15 pm ET on September 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. |

Ukrainian forces conducted another successful drone strike against Russian missile and ammunition storage facilities as well as a mobile radar system in Russia overnight on September 20 to 21. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 21 that drone operators of the Ukrainian military, Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), Special Operations Forces (SSO), and Unmanned Systems Forces struck the Tikhoretsk Arsenal just north of Kamenny, Krasnodar Krai and the Russian Main Artillery Directorate of the Ministry of Defense's (MoD) 23rd Arsenal near Oktyabrsky, Tver Oblast (14km south of Toropets).[1] Footage published on September 20 and 21 shows explosions and secondary detonations at both arsenals, and fires continued at both locations during the day on September 21.[2] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Tikhoretsk Arsenal contained at least 2,000 tons of munitions, including munitions from North Korea, at the time of the strike.[3] An SBU source told Ukrainian outlet *Hromadske* that the Russian 23rd Arsenal contained Iskander and Tochka-U ballistic missiles and that Ukrainian forces also struck the Shaykovka Airfield in Kaluga Oblast, and *Hromadske* included footage of an explosion though it is unclear whether the footage shows the Shaykovka Airfield.[4] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces intercepted 101 Ukrainian drones overnight, including 18 drones over Krasnodar Krai and three drones over Tver Oblast.[5] Krasnodar Krai regional authorities blamed the Tikhoretsk Arsenal explosion on falling Ukrainian drone debris, declared a local state of emergency, altered railway schedules and routes, and evacuated about 1,200 civilians from the area.[6] The United Kingdom (UK) MoD reported that the Russian Main Artillery Directorate's 103rd Arsenal near Toropets, which Ukrainian forces struck on September 17 to 18, had recently undergone modernization because Russian forces had been improperly storing munitions at their arsenals, causing explosions at several depots.[7]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also struck a Russian Podlet K1 mobile long-range radar system that was protecting the Tikhoretsk Arsenal, and this system is at least the fifth Podlet K1 system that Ukrainian forces have reportedly damaged or destroyed since February 2022.[8] The Podlet K1 system can detect up to 200 aerial targets simultaneously at a range of up to 300 kilometers and the Russian military introduced the system into service in 2015.[9] Russian forces use the Podlet K1 system to detect air targets at low and very low altitudes for Russian air defenses, including S-300 and S-400 systems.[10] Ukrainian forces have reportedly damaged or destroyed at least four other Russian Podlet K1 systems since the onset of the full-scale invasion, including in Lazurne, Kherson Oblast as of July 20, 2022; near Zelenotropynske, Kherson Oblast as of July 24, 2022; in Belgorod Oblast as of November 1, 2023; and in an unspecified location as of April 27, 2024.[11] Ukrainian forces also found a destroyed Russian Podlet K1 system in Chornobaivka, Kherson Oblast on November 14, 2022, following Ukraine's liberation of west (right) bank Kherson Oblast as of November 11, 2022, though the cause of this Podlet K1's destruction was unclear.[12]

The Kremlin appears to be reorganizing Russia's decentralized, regional volunteer recruitment campaigns into a federal effort, indicating that Russia is struggling to meet the manpower demands of its war in Ukraine despite previous claims that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast caused a spike in Russia's volunteer recruitment. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on September 20 forming an interdepartmental commission under the Russian Security Council to more fully staff the Russian Armed forces with contract servicemembers (*kontraktniki*).[13] The commission will coordinate the activities of federal, regional, and municipal government bodies and organizations in selecting candidates for contract military service, including improving the selection process; assessing ongoing efforts to attract candidates to volunteer formations; and considering proposals to improve material incentives and social support for *kontraktniki* and their families. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev will chair the commission

and Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov will be the deputy chairperson of the commission. Russian authorities have previously signaled their intention to centralize volunteer recruitment efforts by opening a "Military Service Consulting Center" in Moscow City, posturing Moscow as the center of Russia's federal recruitment efforts, investing in higher-quality recruitment ads, and leveraging national figures in this federal-level recruitment campaign.[14] Russian officials claimed in August and September 2024 that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast prompted more people to express interest in becoming volunteers (whom the Kremlin also began to call *kontraktniki*), but Putin's decision to centralize Russia's volunteer recruitment efforts indicates that Putin assesses that Russia is not recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers to meet Russia's manpower needs.[15] Putin notably signed the decree on the eve of the second anniversary of the Fall 2022 partial mobilization, and this decree further signals his aversion to involuntary mobilization at this time.[16]

Russian federal subjects (regions) have historically formed the basis of Russia's volunteer recruitment campaigns, and at least 36 Russian regions have reportedly increased one-time payments to volunteers/*kontraktniki* in 2024, indicating difficulties in Russia's ability to recruit additional personnel. [17] Three sources close to the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) told *Bloomberg* in August 2024 that the Russian military has struggled to recruit enough people to replace increasing Russian manpower losses throughout the war, and one individual told *Bloomberg* that Russian regions, on average, fell short of their recruitment quotas by about one-third.[18] Medvedev claimed in July 2024 that the MoD's average daily recruitment rate for *kontraktniki* was 1,000 people, and an unnamed Western official estimated in August 2024 that Russian forces were suffering on average roughly 1,000 casualties per day, presumably throughout the frontline in Ukraine and Kursk Oblast, during an interview with UK outlet *Independent*. [19] ISW cannot independently confirm these numbers, however. The Kremlin will likely be able to continue the current tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine with its current recruitment rate but will likely have to substantially increase its recruitment rates or decrease its daily personnel losses in order to further intensify offensive operations in Ukraine. The Kremlin has likely assessed that it can better control and improve Russia's volunteer recruitment rates by centralizing and consolidating control over recruitment efforts and can no longer rely on underperforming regional recruitment campaigns to meet Russia's manpower needs.

The Russian military leadership and government are continuing to reduce the class of semi-independent Russian military innovators, specialists, and irregular commanders to advance force centralization objectives, maintain the offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast, and compensate for personnel shortages. Russian actress Yana Poplovskaya, numerous Russian milbloggers (including supporters of arrested former Russian officer Igor Girkin), and Russian neo-nationalist outlet *Tsargrad* reported as early as September 13 that Russian authorities arrested an assault detachment commander of the 110th Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army, formerly 1st Donetsk People's Republic's [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) Vladimir Novikov, also known under the alias "Beliy." [20] Poplovskaya published an appeal asking Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov to return Novikov to the frontlines, noting that Novikov had played a key role in the Russian seizure of Avdiivka and Krasnohorivka, has three state courage orders, and has received many of letters from his subordinates demanding his release. [21] Some of Novikov's subordinates and several milbloggers also noted that they joined the detachment solely because he inspired them. [22] Poplovskaya and a Russian milblogger, who claims to have worked alongside Novikov, claimed that Novikov was arrested after he attempted to stop Chechens from trafficking drugs to his servicemen. [23] Poplovskaya stated that Chechens made a false complaint about Novikov in retaliation, and a milblogger affiliated with Novikov implied that the Russian military command may not have approved of Novikov's efforts to teach Russian military personnel and Storm-Z convicts to neutralize Ukrainian drone threats because the military command seeks to advance their own career aspirations. [24] The milblogger added that he and Novikov independently developed a counter-drone system called "seizure of the small sky" with the aim of training Russian counter-drone specialists and that this initiative was against the staff's protocol. [25] Russian officials did not publicly acknowledge Novikov's arrest, and Belousov has yet to respond to any appeals.

Tsargrad notably linked Novikov's arrest to the recent deaths of prominent Russian milbloggers and drone operators of the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment of the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st CAA) Dmitry Lysakovsky (better known under the alias Goodwin) and Lieutenant Colonel Sergey Gritsai (also known as Ernest) possibly overnight on September 12. [26] *Tsargrad* and several Russian milbloggers familiar with the drone operators claimed that Lysakovsky and Gritsai were suddenly committed to a direct assault operation on September 11 alongside at least 12 other long-range aerial reconnaissance specialists, resulting in 14 people dying in the Pokrovsk direction. *Tsargrad* implied that the deaths and Novikov's arrest could be related because both Lysakovsky and Gritsai also expressed concerns over drug usage in combat, and Russian state media amplified claims from Kremlin co-opted milbloggers that drone operators died in the aftermath of a Ukrainian drone strike in an unspecified rear area. [27] The two cases, however, may be linked by the Russian military's command increasing desperation to generate more infantrymen to maintain the initiative in Pokrovsk and Donetsk City directions. Russian sources noted that the assault took place shortly after the Russian military command disbanded Lysakovsky's and Gritsai's drone detachment. [28] A Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor claimed that the Russian military command increasingly began to use servicemembers in the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade, especially niche specialized detachments, in assaults and that the leadership of 51st CAA follows the motto of "we do not need smart people, we are smart ourselves. We need assaults [and] meat." [29] The former Storm-Z instructor noted that the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade disbanded drone detachments of its

268th Infantry Battalion and committed engineers of the 1st Reserve Battalion to battle as infantrymen.
[30]

The particularly close timing between two incidents, the recent formal integration of the 1st DNR AC into the Russian military as the 51st CAA, and complaints about the Russian military command's disregard for specialists in Donetsk Oblast may be symptoms of Russia's manpower shortages and poor command culture. Novikov's efforts to train Storm-Z elements to operate counter-drone systems may have contradicted the Russian military command's intended use of these elements as purely "disposable" assault infantrymen. ISW had previously observed the Russian higher military command dismiss and imprison some popular and effective military commanders who raised concerns about the tempo of Russian operations and persistent issues with Russia's campaign in Ukraine.[31] The Russian military-political leadership also destroyed the Wagner Group in an effort to reestablish control over and formalize Wagner, despite the fact that the Wagner Group contributed to some Russian innovations and accomplished some tactical military victories.[32]

Iran reportedly did not send mobile launchers for the Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles it recently supplied to Russia, likely due a decision to prioritize sending additional missiles over bulky and easily replaceable launchers. *Reuters*, citing three unnamed US and EU officials alongside several other experts, reported on September 21 that Iran did not provide mobile launchers for the Fateh-360 missiles it recently supplied to Russia.[33] *Reuters* reported that it is unclear why exactly Iran withheld the launchers although its sources suggested that Russia might instead use modified Russian-made vehicles to launch the missiles. Both Russia and Iran have repeatedly denied the Iranian supply of Fateh-360 missiles to Russia.[34] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated on September 20 that US statements regarding Iranian and North Korean missile supplies to Russia are "fables" and that Russia has a sufficient stockpile of weapons.[35] Iran likely did not supply Russia with the mobile launchers given that shipping the launchers would require additional transportation and because, as noted by *Reuters*, Russia has alternative capabilities for launching the missiles. This arrangement enables both countries to avoid the logistical burden of transporting the launchers while allowing for more discreet transfer of the Fateh-360 missiles, enabling them to better obscure the supply chain and deny Iranian involvement in the Russian war effort. The fact that Iran did not send launchers does not in itself indicate anything about Iran's commitment to supporting the Russian war effort.

Russian officials have designated 47 countries as having opposing and dangerous moral attitudes to Russia, highlighting that the Kremlin is reviving a Soviet era tactic and mindset that defines a clear ideological division in the world. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin approved the list of 47 countries deemed to have "destructive attitudes" that clash with "Russian spiritual and moral" values on September 20 following a recent presidential decree facilitating immigration to Russia for individuals who reject "destructive neoliberal values" in their home countries.[36] The list includes Western and other allied countries that have largely supported Ukraine, but notably does not include Slovakia, Hungary, Turkey, Moldova, and Georgia.[37] This move underscores a pattern in which Russian officials accuse the West and the US of creating ideological divides supposedly aimed at isolating Russia, while engaging in this Cold War-style behavior, promoting global ideological camps and separation themselves.[38] Russia has recently enhanced efforts at establishing Eurasian security forums and mechanisms such as the Russian-proposed "Eurasian security architecture" that aim to exclude the West and enhance divides based on these alleged ideological lines.[39] ISW has also observed that the Kremlin recently intensified efforts to codify a state ideology based on vague Russian "traditional values" while bypassing the Russian Constitution, which notably forbids such endeavors.[40]

Russian milblogger analyses of Russia's war in Ukraine continue to suggest that the Kremlin perceives Western commitment to Ukraine as feeble. Prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger Mikhail Zvinchuk gave an interview to Belarusian state newswire *Belta* on September 20 describing the war in Ukraine as a "strange under-war" that predominantly operates on a political plane.[41] Zvinchuk claimed that the West's primary objective of the war in Ukraine is not to achieve a strategic military defeat of Russia, but rather to secure profits and political advantages domestically. He noted that if the West genuinely aimed to defeat Russia, it would have provided Ukraine with more weapons and means of combat along with greater NATO involvement. Zvinchuk argued that the West's actions have not significantly challenged Russia and suggested that the West's slow and limited support has given Russia enough time to strengthen its defenses and build up its forces. Zvinchuk also falsely claimed that Ukraine is simply a testing ground for Western artificial intelligence (AI) and command and control (C2) systems, echoing previous Russian statements suggesting that Ukraine is simply a military testing site for the West.[42] Western hesitation in approving Ukraine's ability to use long-range Western-provided weapons to strike military objects in Russia and previous delays in Western aid provision to Ukraine may have further confirmed the Kremlin's assessment that Russia can outlast Western support for Ukraine.[43] Western-policymakers maintain the power to properly equip Ukraine and challenge the Kremlin's assessment of Western commitment to Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces conducted another successful drone strike against Russian missile and ammunition storage facilities as well as a mobile radar system in Russia overnight on September 20 to 21.**

- The Kremlin appears to be reorganizing Russia's decentralized, regional volunteer recruitment campaigns into a federal effort, indicating that Russia is struggling to meet the manpower demands of its war in Ukraine despite previous claims that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast caused a spike in Russia's volunteer recruitment.
- The Russian military leadership and government are continuing to reduce the class of semi-independent Russian military innovators, specialists, and irregular commanders to advance force centralization objectives, maintain the offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast, and compensate for personnel shortages.
- Iran reportedly did not send mobile launchers for the Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles it recently supplied to Russia, likely due a decision to prioritize sending additional missiles over bulky and easily replaceable launchers.
- Russian officials have designated 47 countries as having opposing and dangerous moral attitudes to Russia, highlighting that the Kremlin is reviving a Soviet era tactic and mindset that defines a clear ideological division in the world.
- Russian milblogger analyses of Russia's war in Ukraine continue to suggest that the Kremlin perceives Western commitment to Ukraine as feeble.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces advanced north of Kharkiv City and near Kupyansk, Kreminna, Tortesk, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Kremlin has not fully suppressed localized protests organized by wives of Russian mobilized servicemen since declaring partial mobilization on September 21, 2022.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 20, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 20, 2024, 7:15 pm ET

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced two new loan mechanisms worth up to 45 billion euros (roughly \$50 billion) and 35 billion euros (roughly \$39 billion) respectively during a visit to Kyiv on September 20.[1] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with von der Leyen in Kyiv and stated afterward that Ukraine will use part of the 35 billion euro European loan to purchase domestically produced long-range missiles and drones, address Ukraine's energy needs, and construct bomb shelters to defend Ukrainian schools against Russian strikes.[2] The European Commission will distribute the 35 billion euro loan to Ukraine in one installment before December 31, 2024, and Ukraine can further disburse the money in one or more tranches before December 31, 2025.[3] Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov stated on September 14 that Ukraine will be able to domestically produce \$20 billion worth of defense equipment in 2025 if Ukraine receives additional funding from its partners.[4] Umerov noted that Ukraine's defense industrial production capabilities significantly exceed the amount of investment that Ukraine can provide alone.

Russian authorities were reportedly aware of the threat of a future Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in the months leading up to August 2024 but failed to take adequate steps to address such a threat. *The Guardian*, citing Russian government and military documents that Ukrainian forces seized in Kursk Oblast, reported on September 20 that Russian forces stationed in Kursk Oblast repeatedly warned the Russian military command about the possibility of a Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast beginning in late 2023.[5] The documents, which *The Guardian* reviewed but could not independently verify, show that local military commanders repeatedly ordered additional training exercises for Russian military personnel serving in Kursk Oblast, the construction of additional fortifications, and the preparation of decoy trenches and military equipment in preparation for a future Ukrainian incursion. One of the documents noted that Russian military units stationed along the international border were only staffed at between 60 and 70 percent of their intended end strength on average and were primarily staffed by poorly trained reservists as of June 2024. Russian authorities do not appear to have made any substantive efforts to improve the preparedness of the Russian military units serving in border areas of Kursk Oblast or construct additional fortifications along the international border prior to the incursion, and Russian authorities may have decided to ignore these requests due to a miscalculation of Ukraine's ability to advance deep into Kursk Oblast.

These documents support ISW's recent assessment that Ukrainian forces achieved operational surprise during the incursion into Kursk Oblast despite Russian authorities' reported awareness of the possibility of an incursion.[6] The American doctrinal definition of surprise is to "attack the enemy in a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared." [7] Although Russian forces were likely aware of various points along the international border at which Ukraine could conduct an incursion, Ukrainian forces were able to leverage ambiguity around their operational intent and capabilities to maintain operational surprise. Ukrainian forces also reportedly experimented with innovative techniques integrating ground activity and unmanned systems that ISW will not cover in-depth to maintain Ukrainian operational security. ISW has previously noted that both Russian and Ukrainian forces have struggled to achieve operational surprise over the past year and a half due to the partially transparent battlefield in Ukraine.[8] Ukraine's campaign in Kursk Oblast demonstrates

that surprise is still possible even on a partially transparent battlefield where an adversary can observe force concentrations but not reliably discern an enemy's operational intent and capabilities.

Russian officials attempted to use a meeting with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to legitimize Russia's occupation of Ukraine and promote false narratives about alleged Ukrainian human rights abuses. ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric met with Russian officials, including Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Kremlin Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, Kremlin-appointed Russian Commissioner for Human Rights Tatiana Moskalkova, and President of the Russian Red Cross (RRC) Pavel Savchuk, in Moscow on September 17.[9] Spoljaric reiterated that states must follow international humanitarian law, including by granting the ICRC access to prisoners of war (POWs), and emphasized the need to protect humanitarian workers following the recent deaths of three ICRC employees due to frontline shelling in Donetsk Oblast.[10] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), however, claimed that the meeting focused on humanitarian issues in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, Europe, and Asia as well as the ICRC's activities in Russia.[11] The Russian MFA claimed that the Russian delegation at the meeting spoke about alleged Ukrainian human rights violations, including those concerning the treatment of POWs and civilians. ISW has observed widespread reports of Russian forces abusing and executing Ukrainian POWs and has reported at length on Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine, including the illegal deportation of Ukrainian civilians and children to Russia.[12] Russia has reportedly not fully opened its POW facilities to ICRC inspectors, whereas Ukraine has regularly opened its main POW camp to the ICRC.[13] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated in July 2024 that a majority of the Ukrainian POWs who have returned home to Ukraine report that they did not see or communicate with ICRC representatives while in captivity.[14] The RRC is reportedly functioning as a Kremlin propaganda tool in occupied Ukraine.[15] The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent suspended the Belarusian Red Cross due to its involvement in the deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarus.[16] The Kremlin is likely attempting to use the participation of the RCC president in the September 17 meeting to legitimize the RCC and its illegal activities in occupied Ukraine. Russian officials have similarly used meetings with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to legitimize Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and Zaporizhzhia Oblast and promote false narratives about a Ukrainian threat to the ZNPP and Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP).[17]

Key Takeaways:

- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced two new loan mechanisms worth up to 45 billion euros (roughly \$50 billion) and 35 billion euros (roughly \$39 billion) respectively during a visit to Kyiv on September 20.
- Russian authorities were reportedly aware of the threat of a future Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in the months leading up to August 2024 but failed to take adequate steps to address such a threat.
- These documents support ISW's recent assessment that Ukrainian forces achieved operational surprise during the incursion into Kursk Oblast despite Russian authorities' reported awareness of the possibility of an incursion.
- Russian officials attempted to use a meeting with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to legitimize Russia's occupation of Ukraine and promote false narratives about alleged Ukrainian human rights abuses.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Kreminna, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk, and Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in Vovchansk and Siversk.
- Russian state media is increasingly emphasizing the participation of foreign nationals in the Russian war effort in Ukraine, likely to reassure domestic audiences that Russia continues to recruit sufficient manpower and will not need to declare another mobilization wave.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 19, 2024

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

Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 19, 2024, 9:25pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 13:00 pm ET on September 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly declined a request from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to offset Russian losses by declaring another mobilization wave in spring 2024 likely to avoid political costs associated with involuntary reserve call-ups. Putin has since remained committed to his crypto mobilization campaign, constraining Russia's mobilization potential. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), citing a source "briefed" on an exchange between Putin and Russian MoD officials several months prior to the presidential inauguration in May 2024, reported that Putin dismissed the Russian MoD's calls for another mobilization wave.[1] The source claimed that Putin instead stated his intent to only recruit people who were voluntarily signing military service

contracts but that more Russian officials are convinced that mobilization is inevitable. The source added that the Russian military's current manpower is insufficient to achieve Russia's long-term goal of occupying all of Ukraine, degrading overall Ukrainian combat capability, and protecting the Russian state border. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated that Russia continues to rapidly recruit contract servicemen (*kontraktniki*) and volunteers and that these forces are sufficient for Russia's aggression against Ukraine in response to a request from *WSJ*. Putin has avoided declaring another partial mobilization call-up of reservists since his decision to mobilize 300,000 troops in late September 2022 in response to successful Ukrainian counteroffensive operations, and Russia appears to lack the necessary manpower resources to simultaneously sustain the scale and tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine and defensive efforts in Russian border regions.[2] A mobilized Russian servicemember and milblogger claimed in late August 2024 that the Russian government continues to rely on the remnants of regular military forces, mobilized personnel, and deceived short-term volunteers to continue Russian offensive operations in Ukraine, even though these elements are ill-prepared and have been suffering significant losses since October 2023.[3]

Mobilization in Russia remains unlikely in the near to medium term due to Putin's personal fear that mobilization is a direct threat to his regime's stability. ISW observed reports speculating about the possibility of Russia declaring another mobilization wave prior to Putin's inauguration and following the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast in August 2024, but Putin has not yet authorized such mobilization.[4] Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that sources close to the Russian government claimed that the Kremlin entertained the idea of mobilization immediately after Ukraine's incursion, but that the Russian Cabinet of Ministers and Kremlin-affiliated businessmen opposed these considerations.[5] Putin has also been consistently signaling throughout the incursion his commitment to recruiting volunteers by boasting about the number of volunteers interested in fighting in Ukraine and meeting with Russian volunteers in response to the incursion.[6] Putin notably did not seize on the incursion as an opportunity to condition Russian society for mobilization in the immediate to medium term, instead choosing to form new irregular formations and expand Russian volunteer recruitment efforts.[7] The Kremlin and the Russian MoD notably shocked Russian society with the declaration of partial mobilization in late September 2022, and Putin likely seeks to avoid societal backlash in response to a new mobilization wave at this time.[8]

Russian authorities have reportedly tasked Russian forces with pushing Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast by mid-October 2024 and establishing a "buffer zone" into Ukrainian border areas along the international border with Russia in northeastern Ukraine by the end of October — significant undertakings that the Russian military is very unlikely to achieve in such a short period of time. Ukrainian newswire *RBC-Ukraine* reported on September 19 that unspecified sources stated that Russian forces have concentrated 37,000 personnel in Kursk Oblast and that Russian authorities have instructed these forces to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast by mid-October. [9] *RBC-Ukraine's* sources stated that the Kremlin wanted to concentrate a grouping of forces in Kursk Oblast that had a five-to-one manpower advantage over Ukrainian forces before launching a counteroffensive operation but did not establish such a grouping before launching a "counteroffensive" on September 10.[10] Russian forces have begun counterattacks within the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast but have not yet started large-scale combat operations that would indicate a concerted counteroffensive operation aimed at completely expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.[11] Sustained Russian counteroffensive operations within Kursk Oblast will require Russian forces to redeploy additional elements from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast and/or commit newly generated forces from within Russia to the area instead of the frontline in Ukraine.[12] Ukrainian forces have not established control of all areas throughout the entire salient in Kursk Oblast, but Ukrainian forces most certainly have prepared positions within some areas of the salient that will pose challenges to any concerted Russian counteroffensive effort.[13]

RBC-Ukraine's sources stated that Russian authorities have also tasked Russian forces with creating a "buffer zone" on the territory of "border oblasts bordering Russia" by October 30 — presumably an order to advance into Ukrainian territory along the international border to push Ukrainian fire elements further back from Russian territory.[14] Russian forces aimed to create a "buffer zone" in northern Kharkiv Oblast when they launched their offensive operation in the area on May 10, but have since only advanced roughly 10 kilometers in depth at most in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[15] The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast reportedly spoiled planned Russian offensive operations outside of northern Kharkiv Oblast in the international border area that likely aimed to expand the area of combat operations across a broader front in northeastern Ukraine and further fix and stretch Ukrainian forces along a longer front.[16] A Russian counteroffensive operation to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast followed immediately by a subsequent incursion into Ukrainian border oblasts reminiscent of Russia's offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast would be a massive operational effort that would require a substantial allocation of manpower and materiel. The Russian military command has demonstrated a desire to shield the priority Russian offensive operation in the Pokrovsk direction from the operational pressures caused by Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast, but a Russian counteroffensive followed immediately by an offensive operation along the international border would most certainly generate operational requirements that would impact Russia's already degraded capability to funnel more manpower and materiel into the drive on Pokrovsk.[17]

The Kremlin continues to signal its commitment to improving Russian drone operations in Ukraine and drone production capabilities amid efforts to offset the social and economic impacts of a protracted Russian war effort. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Russia's

Military-Industrial Commission on September 19 and discussed ongoing efforts to increase Russian drone production.[18] Putin acknowledged that drones are an integral part of modern warfare and that Russia's war in Ukraine has further confirmed this assessment. Putin claimed that Russian companies delivered roughly 140,000 drones to Russian forces in 2023 and claimed that Russia plans to increase its drone production by ten-fold (to 1.4 million drones) in 2024. Putin emphasized that Russia must "consistently" increase its drone production capabilities and improve the effectiveness of Russian-produced drones in order to meet the needs of the Russian military. Putin praised Russia's private drone production initiatives or "people's defense industry" and noted that these private initiatives have joined forces with state defense enterprises to increase Russia's national drone production capabilities. Putin noted that privately produced drones are not "inferior" to drones produced by state defense companies and that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) extensively tests all drone models before transferring the drones to frontline Russian forces. A *DW* investigation, however, observed evidence that suggests that some Russian irregular forces may be testing newly-developed drones in strikes on Ukrainian civilians, possibly to speed up the testing periods.[19] Putin thanked Russian volunteer organizations for providing drones and electronic warfare (EW) systems to frontline Russian units. Putin also visited Russia's Special Technology Center in St. Petersburg, which specializes in drone, EW system, and communication systems production and inspected new drone types at the facility.[20] Russian milbloggers also reported that Putin met with and inspected drones from private drone production initiatives and praised the drone producers for their work.[21] Russian milbloggers have consistently complained about the poor quality of state-produced drones and often praise private drone production initiatives for producing more effective drones.[22]

Putin's claims that Russian plans to increase the drone-production to 1.4 million drones in 2024 is slightly lower than planned Ukrainian drone production rates in 2024. Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Strategic Industrial Hanna Hvozdyar noted in March 2024 that Ukraine intends to produce two million drones in 2024, and Ukrainian officials have repeatedly emphasized that Ukraine is prioritizing modernizing and constantly developing new drones to meet the needs of Ukrainian servicemembers.[23]

Putin claimed that Russia must ensure that there are "no barriers" to the movement of Russian citizens between mainland Russia and Kaliningrad Oblast.[24] Putin claimed during a meeting with recently elected heads of Russian federal subjects (regions) and occupied Crimea on September 19 that Kaliningrad Oblast is Russia's "western outpost" and that Russia must strive to ensure that Kaliningrad Oblast is not only an "outpost" or a "fortress" on Russia's western borders but is also well integrated into Russian society and the Russian economy. Putin stated that Russia will never "forget" about Kaliningrad Oblast and that Kaliningrad Oblast must continue to develop in accordance with Russia's social and cultural values. Kaliningrad Oblast is a Russian federal subject situated between Lithuania and Poland on the coast of the Baltic Sea, and some Russians travel between mainland Russia and Kaliningrad by train or car via Belarus and NATO member states Latvia and Lithuania.[25] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed in May 2024 that the Russian government should reassess Russia's maritime borders in the Baltic Sea, including around Kaliningrad Oblast, so that these borders "correspond to the modern geographical situation," and Russian authorities repeatedly threatened NATO member states, including Finland and the Baltic States, in late 2023 and early 2024.[26] Putin's comments about maintaining Kaliningrad's cultural and social ties to Russia are likely aimed at his domestic audience, although Putin may be setting conditions for future Russian aggression against the Baltic States under the guise of defending Kaliningrad Oblast.

The reported transfer of Indian artillery shells through European intermediaries to Ukraine is reportedly generating tensions within the Russian-Indian relationship. *Reuters*, citing 11 Indian and European government officials and unspecified defense industry sources, reported on September 19 that Ukraine has acquired Indian artillery shells procured through European intermediaries for over a year despite Russian objections.[27] *Reuters* noted that European countries, including Italy and Czechia, have purchased empty artillery shells from India, filled them with explosives, and shipped them to Ukraine. *Reuters* stated that customs records reveal that shipments to Ukraine included 155mm, 120mm, and 125mm ammunition shells. *Reuters* stated that the Kremlin has addressed the supply issue with Indian officials on multiple occasions including during a July 2024 meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, but that New Delhi has reportedly not intervened to halt the trade. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs dismissed the *Reuters* report as "speculative and misleading" on September 19.[28] The *Reuters* report comes amid complications in Russian-Indian bilateral relations and following Modi's August 23 visit to Ukraine during which Modi highlighted principles of international law, including sovereignty and territorial integrity, in discussions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.[29] Modi's comments with Zelensky contrast with his July 9 meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin during which Modi made rather vague statements of peace.[30]

The European Parliament called on member states to lift restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided long-range systems to strike military objects in Russia. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on September 19 encouraging its members to allow Ukraine to use western-provided weapons to strike "legitimate military targets" in Russia.[31] The European Parliament called on all European Union (EU) and NATO members to commit to providing annual military support to Ukraine at a minimum of 0.25 percent of the member's GDP. The statement comes against the backdrop of ongoing Western hesitation to lift restrictions on long-range strikes into Russia.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly declined a request from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to offset Russian losses by declaring another mobilization wave in spring 2024 likely to avoid political costs associated with involuntary reserve call-ups. Putin has since remained committed to his crypto mobilization campaign, constraining Russia's mobilization potential.
- Mobilization in Russia remains unlikely in the near to medium term due to Putin's personal fear that mobilization is a direct threat to his regime's stability.
- Russian authorities have reportedly tasked Russian forces with pushing Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast by mid-October 2024 and establishing a "buffer zone" into Ukrainian border areas along the international border with Russia in northeastern Ukraine by the end of October — significant undertakings that the Russian military is very unlikely to achieve in such a short period of time.
- The Kremlin continues to signal its commitment to improving Russian drone operations in Ukraine and drone production capabilities amid efforts to offset the social and economic impacts of a protracted Russian war effort.
- Putin claimed that Russia must ensure that there are "no barriers" to the movement of Russian citizens between mainland Russia and Kaliningrad Oblast.
- The reported transfer of Indian artillery shells through European intermediaries to Ukraine is reportedly generating tensions within the Russian-Indian relationship.
- The European Parliament called on member states to lift restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided long-range systems to strike military objects in Russia.
- Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kharkiv City, Svatove, Siversk, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Hulyaipole.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated during a meeting on the development of the Russian Armed Forces on September 18 that the Kremlin aims to improve Russia's federal level training system.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 18, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Riley Bailey, Haley Zehrung, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 18, 2024, 7:45pm ET

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

Ukrainian forces conducted a successful drone strike against a Russian missile and ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast on September 18. A source within Ukrainian special services told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* on September 18 that drone operators from Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO) struck a facility at the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Main Missile and Artillery Directorate's 107th Arsenal in Toropets, Tver Oblast.[1] *Suspilne's* sources stated the facility stores Iskander missiles, Tochka-U ballistic missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, and artillery ammunition and that there were significant secondary detonations following the initial Ukrainian drone strike. Head of Ukraine's Center for Combatting Disinformation, Andriy Kovalenko, stated that Russian forces may have also stored ammunition for Grad multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), S-300 and S-400 air defense missiles, and North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles at the facility.[2] Footage published on September 16 shows large secondary detonations, presumably of missile stockpiles and artillery ammunition, following the initial drone strike.[3] Geolocated footage published on September 18 shows several large smoke plumes over the facility and satellite imagery shows significant damage to the building in the southern part of the facility, although most of the facility is obscured by smoke.[4] Russian authorities claimed that wreckage from a downed Ukrainian drone struck the facility and prompted the secondary detonations, and Russian authorities temporarily evacuated the area near the facility.[5] Russian milbloggers largely criticized Russian authorities for poorly constructing the facility and accused Russian forces of possibly mishandling missiles and artillery ammunition stockpiles at the facility.[6] Milbloggers accused the detained former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitri Bulgakov of engaging in corrupt practices leading to poor construction quality at the facility.[7]

Continued Ukrainian strikes against rear Russian logistics facilities within Russia will generate wider operational pressures on the Russian military beyond the individual destruction of ammunition stockpiles and logistics facilities. *Suspilne's* sources noted that Ukrainian strikes are undermining Russia's ability to conduct long-range missile strikes against Ukraine.[8] Ukrainian forces conducted a series of HIMARS strikes against Russian ammunition depots throughout occupied Ukraine in Summer 2022, prompting Russian forces to disperse ammunition storage facilities and degrading the efficiency of Russian logistics at the time.[9] Repeated strikes against ammunition depots within Russia that cause similar levels of damage to the strike in Toropets may force a similar

decision point on the Russian military command to reorganize and disperse support and logistics systems within Russia to mitigate the impact of such strikes. Russian forces may not have addressed vulnerabilities at many logistics facilities within Russia due to the sanctuary space that restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons have generated, although the Toropets facility is not within range of Western systems fired from Ukraine. The 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. Ukrainian forces struck another Russian ammunition depot near Sergeevka, Voronezh Oblast in July 2024 and continued Ukrainian strikes against Russian ammunition and missile storage facilities could also destroy an important portion of Russia's materiel reserves.[10] 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 supports facilities within Russia at scale.

Russian authorities arrested the head of the Central Military District (CMD)'s armor service on September 18 on suspicion of receiving a large bribe, marking yet another corruption case against a high-ranking Russian military official since the April 2024 appointment of Andrei Belousov as Russian Defense Minister.[11] The Russian Investigative Committee announced on September 18 that it opened a case against CMD armor service head Denis Putilov for accepting a 10-million-ruble (\$107,000) bribe in exchange for issuing contracts on the repair and maintenance of military vehicles to an individual entrepreneur named "Chudinov." [12] The CMD is notably home to Russia's 90th Tank Division, and Putilov was very likely closely involved in overseeing the repair and maintenance of the suite of tanks and other armored vehicles that the 90th Tank Division uses in combat operations in Ukraine.[13] Since the start of Belousov's tenure as Minister of Defense in April 2024, such corruption cases against senior Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials have become much more frequent — a result of Belousov's apparent commitment to rooting out the corruption and addressing the mismanagement that plagued the MoD under former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. [14] Putilov's links to Shoigu remain unclear as of the time of this publication, but his arrest suggests that Belousov is attempting to crack down on corrupt and ineffective officials who are responsible for the sustainment of Russia's military assets, particularly increasingly scarce armored vehicles.

An unsuccessful armed assault against several offices of Russia's largest online retailer Wildberries in Moscow City highlights the fragility of Russia's domestic stability. Wildberries' press service reported on September 18 that Vladislav Bakalchuk, Wildberries co-founder and ex-husband of Wildberries co-founder CEO Tatyana Bakalchuk, along with 20 to 30 armed accomplices, conducted simultaneous armed assaults against two Wildberries offices in Moscow City.[15] Russian law enforcement closed off the immediate area around the offices and later detained 28 people involved in the assault, although the attackers shot and killed at least two Wildberries security guards and injured two other people before their apprehension.[16] The Bakalchuks filed for divorce in July 2024 after Vladislav appealed to Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov to help prevent Tatyana from taking over Wildberries, and Kadyrov promised to "return" Tatyana to "the family." [17] Wildberries has previously been involved in ongoing Russian efforts to crackdown against migrants in Russia and coerce migrants into joining the Russian military.[18] Russian authorities have attempted to posture themselves as taking steps to address domestic security issues following the March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack and June 2024 shooting in the Republic of Dagestan, although this unsuccessful yet well-planned assault in Moscow City calls into question the existence and effectiveness of any such efforts and particularly highlights vulnerabilities in the security apparatus in Russia's metropolitan core.[19]

Armenian officials continue to criticize the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) amid worsening Armenia-Russia bilateral relations. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced on September 18 that Armenia has frozen its CSTO membership due to the bloc's failure to meet security obligations to Armenia and that, in his opinion, the CSTO is a threat to Armenia's "security, future existence, sovereignty, and statehood." [20] Pashinyan stated that if the CSTO fails to provide answers to the reason behind its failures, Armenia will continue to distance itself from the security organization and possibly reach a "point of no return." Pashinyan previously announced on August 31 that Armenia froze its participation in the CSTO, although he has yet to concretely announce a formal *de jure* Armenian withdrawal from the organization.[21] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded to Pashinyan by stating that he strongly disagreed with Pashinyan's assessment and claiming that the CSTO serves to safeguard the sovereignty of all its member states, including Armenia.[22] This spat comes amid an announcement by the Armenian Investigative Committee on September 18 about the arrest of three individuals accused of attempting to form an armed group to overthrow the Armenian government.[23] The Armenian Investigative Committee stated that the three suspects, along with four accomplices not yet in Armenian detention, recruited Armenian citizens to undergo paid three-month military training at the "Arbat" military base in Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast. ISW has not been able to confirm the location of this base. ISW has previously observed worsening Armenia-Russia relations particularly following the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Armenia's recently increasing pro-European foreign policy trajectory under Pashinyan.[24] Armenian officials have repeatedly criticized the CSTO for failing to meet Armenia's security needs — particularly faulting Russia and Belarus — while Russian officials and the Russian information space have increasingly discredited the Pashinyan government by accusing it of pursuing an allegedly destructive pro-Western agenda aimed at straining their bilateral ties.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova condemned Israel for simultaneously detonating thousands of pagers belonging to Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) members across Lebanon and Syria on September 17, signaling Russia's continued rhetorical alignment with Iran's Axis of Resistance against Israel.[25] Zakharova called the attack "another act of hybrid war against Lebanon" and warned that the circumstances risk further escalating the situation in the Levant. [26] Kremlin officials have previously voiced their support for LH and other elements of Iran's Axis of Resistance, including by condemning US and UK strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen.[27] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported in February 2024 that LH and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were working together to train Russian drone operators on the use of Iranian-made drones in Syria, and Western media reported in August 2024 that Russia was considering transferring missiles and equipment to the Houthis—strongly suggesting that Russia's backing of and interactions with the Axis of Resistance extend beyond rhetorical support.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a successful drone strike against a Russian missile and ammunition storage facility near Toropets, Tver Oblast on September 18.
- Continued Ukrainian strikes against rear Russian logistics facilities within Russia will generate wider operational pressures on the Russian military beyond the individual destruction of ammunition stockpiles and logistics facilities.
- Russian authorities arrested the head of the Central Military District (CMD)'s armor service on September 18 on suspicion of receiving a large bribe, marking yet another corruption case against a high-ranking Russian military official since the April 2024 appointment of Andrei Belousov as Russian Defense Minister.
- An unsuccessful armed assault against several offices of Russia's largest online retailer Wildberries in Moscow City highlights the fragility of Russia's domestic stability.
- Armenian officials continue to criticize the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) amid worsening Armenia-Russia bilateral relations.
- Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova condemned Israel for simultaneously detonating thousands of pagers belonging to Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) members across Lebanon and Syria on September 17, signaling Russia's continued rhetorical alignment with Iran's Axis of Resistance against Israel.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Kursk Oblast salient.
- Russian forces regained positions within Kursk Oblast salient.
- Russian forces recently advanced along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, within Toretsk, east and southeast of Pokrovsk, southwest of Donetsk City, and in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian State Duma announced on September 18 that it approved a bill in its first reading that proposes releasing Russian servicemembers serving in Ukraine from criminal punishment associated with cases actively being tried in Russia courts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 17, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, and George Barros

September 17, 2024, 6:35pm ET

The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened an investigation into another case of apparent Russian abuse and execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW). Graphic social media images circulated on September 16 shows the body of a Ukrainian servicemember whom Russian forces evidently executed with a sword bearing the inscription "for Kursk." [1] X (formerly Twitter) users geolocated the images to Novohrodivka, Donetsk Oblast. [2] Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov recently confirmed that elements of the Russian 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) and 1435th Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized regiment) seized Novohrodivka in early September — potentially implicating members and command of these two formations with the execution. [3] The footage shows the Ukrainian servicemember clearly disarmed, wearing no protective equipment, and with remnants of duct tape around his wrists, suggesting that Russian forces captured, disarmed, and forcibly detained the servicemember. [4] 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*. [5] The apparent circumstances of this particular execution, particularly the use of a sword with an inscription that implies that Russian forces executed the POW in some sort of retaliation for Ukraine's Kursk operation, likely fall firmly into the category of mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture of an unarmed POW. This most recent report of Russia's abuse of Ukrainian POWs is consistent with the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU)'s March 2024 report, which documented and verified widespread abuse and executions of Ukrainian POWs at the hands of Russian forces. [6] The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office announced that it started an investigation into violation of the laws and customs of war and intentional murder in regard to the apparent execution of the servicemember. [7] Ukrainian law enforcement is also currently investigating 84 cases of potential Russian execution of Ukrainian POWs. [8] ISW has reported on apparent Russian

executions of Ukrainian POWs in August 2024, July 2024, June 2024, May 2024, and several different incidents in February 2024 alone and has routinely assessed that Russian commanders are either complacent or enabling their subordinates to engage in such atrocities in clear violation of international law.[9]

Leaked documents outlining large-scale Kremlin information operation campaigns targeting Ukraine and the West continue to demonstrate the Kremlin's commitment to leveraging its global information instruments to advance Moscow's interests using social media. Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, banned Russian state media outlet *Russia Today* (RT) and "other related entities" on September 17 for "foreign interference activity." [10] The US State Department announced sanctions on September 13 against entities and individuals connected with RT, which the State Department accused of engaging in information operations, covert influence, and military procurement efforts for the Kremlin by targeting states in Europe, Africa, and North and South America. [11] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* (RFE/RL) "Schemes" investigative project analyzed thousands of leaked documents that German and Estonian outlets previously received that outline the work of the Russian "Social Design Agency" (SDA) company, which the US Department of Justice (DoJ) recently announced as part of the Kremlin's "Doppelganger" complex malign influence operations. [12] The "Schemes" project reported that the SDA has distributed fake official documents, including fabricated orders from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskiy, as part of its self-described efforts to "discredit the military-political leadership of Ukraine and demoralize the [Ukrainian] Armed Forces." The SDA reportedly created fake documents allegedly from European government entities, fake news stories allegedly from European outlets, and anti-Ukrainian memes that spread widely on social media. ISW continues to assess that Russia is continuing its efforts to develop capabilities to use information operations on social media platforms to trigger kinetic activity and conduct election interference, destabilization measures, and sanctions evasion schemes. [13]

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu arrived in Iran for an unannounced visit on September 17 following recent visits to Syria and North Korea amid ongoing Russian efforts to secure military cooperation and support from non-Western allies. Shoigu met with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian during a previously unannounced visit to Tehran on September 17 and conveyed an unspecified message from Russian President Vladimir Putin. [14] The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) reported that Shoigu and Ahmadian discussed upcoming bilateral agreements and emphasized that Iran continues to support Iran's official policy regarding corridors and communication routes with Azerbaijan. [15] Pezeshkian told Shoigu that the Iranian government will work to increase cooperation and deepen bilateral relations between the two countries to reduce the impact of Western sanctions. [16] Shoigu also met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, Syria on September 16 and discussed strengthening bilateral relations and regional and international security issues. [17] Shoigu previously recently visited Pyongyang, North Korea on September 13 and met with North Korean President Kim Jong Un for unspecified bilateral discussions. [18] Shoigu's international visits are coming against the backdrop of Iran's recent delivery of over 200 Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to Russia, ongoing North Korean military support for the Russian war in Ukraine, and Ukrainian reports that Russia is hiring Syrian mercenaries to fight in Ukraine. [19] Russia's deepening engagement with the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran is part of a wider Kremlin effort to establish a coalition of friendly states which can bolster Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) and secure strategic economic cooperation to support its war in Ukraine. [20]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui in Moscow on September 17. [21] Lavrov and Choe discussed further developing Russian-North Korean bilateral relations in unspecified manners, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) noted that Choe will attend the BRICS Women's Forum on the sidelines of the Eurasian Women's Forum in St. Petersburg on September 18-20. [22] Lavrov has recently fostered increased dialogue and cooperation with Russia's non-Western partners through various meetings on the ministerial level, including with Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umrah Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabieh on September 11, a BRICS foreign ministers meeting on September 12, and a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty on September 16. [23]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office opened an investigation into another case of apparent Russian abuse and execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW).**

- Leaked documents outlining large-scale Kremlin information operation campaigns targeting Ukraine and the West continue to demonstrate the Kremlin's commitment to leveraging its global information instruments to advance Moscow's interests using social media.
- Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu arrived in Iran for an unannounced visit following recent visits to Syria and North Korea amid ongoing Russian efforts to secure military cooperation and support from non-Western allies.
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui in Moscow.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on September 17 that Russia continues to recruit citizens from Syria to fight in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 16, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Haley Zehrung, Annika Ganzeveld, and George Barros

September 16, 2024, 8:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:20 pm ET on September 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukraine has taken steps to address its manpower shortages, but delays and insufficiencies in Western military aid to Ukraine continue to limit its ability to generate effective combat units that can defend critical areas and contest the theater-wide initiative. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with *CNN* on September 13 that Ukraine "needs 14 brigades to be ready" for an unspecified requirement and that Ukraine has not been able to equip "even four" of these brigades with slowly arriving Western aid.[1] Zelensky noted that Ukraine has been increasing its domestic production of drones and transferring equipment from warehouses or reserve brigades to attempt to offset insufficient Western military assistance to Ukraine. Zelensky stated that these insufficient provisions, particularly of armored vehicles and artillery ammunition, have led to Ukrainian personnel losses. Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Defense Committee Chairperson Oleksandr Zavitnevych told the *Financial Times* on September 16 that Ukrainian mobilization is "on track" and that newly trained forces could "impact" the battlefield likely in three months.[2] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk stated in May 2024 that Ukraine was working to stand up 10 new Ukrainian brigades but that equipment, not manpower, was the main bottleneck in Ukraine's defensive operations.[3] ISW has long assessed that Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian offensive operations and challenge the theater-wide initiative heavily depends on both the Western provision of military aid and Ukraine's efforts to reconstitute existing units and create new ones — the latter of which Ukraine has taken significant steps to resolve.[4] Ukrainian forces have partially mitigated the artillery ammunition shortages that resulted from delays in Western aid provisions by using first-person view (FPV) drones to blunt Russian infantry and armored vehicle assaults, but current FPV drones are unable to offset the tactical requirements of traditional field artillery.[5] Ukraine has taken steps to boost its domestic production of 155mm artillery ammunition, but Ukraine has had to build these industries largely from scratch during wartime.[6] Ukraine has also been working to increase its production of armored vehicles, including armored personnel carriers (APCs), since 2022, but Ukraine cannot manufacture complete tanks.[7] The US and other foreign allies likely can greatly increase the effectiveness of Ukrainian force-generation and force-reconstitution efforts by providing Ukrainian forces with more mechanized equipment, such as M113 armored personnel carriers, Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, and main battle tanks. Ukraine's 155th Infantry Brigade was recently upgraded to a mechanized infantry brigade after the brigade was equipped with Leopard tanks, for example.[8] The generation of more Ukrainian infantry without a commensurate increase in mechanized equipment will not substantially increase Ukraine's combat power or increase Ukraine's warfighting capabilities.

Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has forced Russia to redirect some resources from Ukraine to defend in Russia but that Ukraine still needs sufficient resources and Western permission to strike military targets in Russia to mitigate the theater-wide strain on Ukrainian forces. Zelensky stated that the ratio of Russian to Ukrainian artillery ammunition usage was 12-to-1 in favor of Russian forces prior to the incursion in Kursk Oblast and that the incursion intended to force the Russian military to redeploy forces to Russia from Ukraine.[9] Zelensky also emphasized that Ukraine needs permission to use Western-provided precision weapons to strike military targets in Russia, as Russia has already begun to take advantage of Western restrictions and policy delays and move aircraft from airfields within range of Western-provided precision weapons.[10] ISW has previously assessed that there are over 200 military objects in Russia within range of US-provided ATACMS that are not airfields, and significant delays in allowing Ukraine to strike these objects gives the Kremlin more time to fortify or relocate these assets beyond the range of Western-provided weapons before Ukrainian forces are able to strike them with these weapons.[11]

ISW has previously assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin is attempting to outlast both Western military assistance to Ukraine and Ukraine's own willingness to defend itself through attritional warfare and efforts to undermine the legitimacy of and trust in the Ukrainian government.[12] Zelensky suggested that Ukraine is taking the war to Russian territory, both through strikes in Russia and the ongoing Kursk Oblast incursion, to degrade Russian domestic support for the war.[13] Zelensky emphasized that Russia will not be interested in negotiations with Ukraine unless Ukraine is militarily strong.[14]

Russia continues to build out its long-term military capacity by gradually increasing the size of its armed forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on September 16 establishing the staffing level of the Russian Armed Forces at 1.5 million combat personnel.[15] This marks a 180,000-person increase from the last decree increasing the staffing level of the Russian Armed Forces, which Putin signed in December 2023.[16] The December 2023 decree increased the staffing level of combat personnel by 170,000 compared with August 2022, meaning that the target staffing level of the Russian military has expanded by around 350,000 combat personnel since 2022.[17] The September 16 decree will notably come into force on December 1, 2024, suggesting that Russian military authorities will increase recruitment and force-generation efforts to meet the 1.5 million combat personnel benchmark starting December 2024. This decree is notably *not* an indicator of a new wave of Russian mobilization — rather it encompasses the breadth of recruitment avenues that the Russian military is currently undertaking.[18] Former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu first set the 1.5 million combat personnel goal in December 2022, noting that this number includes a goal of 695,000 contract personnel.[19]

Russian efforts to increase the size of the armed forces are part of a longer-term Russian objective that extends beyond the war in Ukraine and aims to increase the size and overall capacity of the Russian military via long-term, large-scale force reforms. ISW has reported at length on these reforms, which have been ongoing since early 2023 and include the re-establishment of the Moscow and Leningrad military districts and the formation of new army corps, combined arms armies, and mechanized and airborne divisions.[20] Current Russian military reforms appear to be in large part reversing the main tenants of the reforms of former Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov of 2008–2012, which decreased the size of the Russian armed forces from 1.3 million to 1 million combat personnel and tightened and centralized command and control (C2) by eliminating division-level echelons in favor of brigade-level units.[21] As the Russian military begins to stand up new divisions, army corps, and armies, its staffing level must increase in tandem, at least on paper. Russia's ability to properly implement these reforms and integrate the increase in combat personnel, however, is in part contingent on its prosecution of the war in Ukraine, as ISW has previously assessed.[22] Medium- to long-term force-generation and economic constraints will continue to degrade Russia's ability to sustain an increase in the size of its military and to soundly implement its intended reforms.[23]

Iran is simultaneously setting conditions to build a nuclear weapon while continuing to signal its willingness to resume nuclear negotiations with the West. NOTE: A version of this text appears in the September 16 ISW-CTP Iran Update. Russia has increased nuclear cooperation with Iran in recent months in line with "[Iranian] ambitions to obtain atomic weapons," according to unspecified Western officials speaking to *Bloomberg* on September 14.[24] It is unclear whether the Western officials meant that Iran has decided to produce a nuclear weapon or that Iran seeks to develop the *capability* to develop a nuclear weapon but has not actually decided to produce one. The Western officials stated that US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer discussed on September 13 how Russia may be sharing unspecified nuclear technology and secrets with Iran in return for Iran providing Russia with ballistic missiles.[25] Iran recently delivered over 200 Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia on September 4.[26] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken similarly stated on September 10 that "Russia is sharing technology that Iran seeks . . . including on nuclear issues." [27] Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Iran and Russia have increased "peaceful nuclear cooperation" during a meeting with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 12.[28]

The Masoud Pezeshkian administration is simultaneously continuing to signal its willingness to resume nuclear negotiations with the West. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran head Mohammad Eslami emphasized that President Pezeshkian seeks to "expand constructive interactions" with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a speech at the 68th IAEA General Conference in Vienna, Austria, on September 16.[29] Pezeshkian separately suggested that Iran could engage in direct talks with the United States if Washington abandons its "hostile" policy toward Iran.[30] These statements do not necessarily contradict Iran's growing nuclear cooperation with Russia. Iran could seek Russian assistance with its nuclear program to try to increase pressure on the West and build leverage for itself in future negotiations.

Select Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials continue to face corruption charges as the Russian military leadership is undertaking a wider effort to root out corruption in the MoD. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on September 16 that the Russian Investigative Committee detained the head of the Russian 4924th military representative office, Ivan Papulovsky, and his subordinate Grigory Zorin on the suspicion of accepting 11 million rubles (\$120,300) in bribes over the span of three years.[31] Russian opposition outlet SOTA reported that Papulovsky and Zorin received the bribes from two Russian companies contracted to supply the Russian MoD with electrical products and cables in exchange for preferential treatment and lax product inspections.[32] Russian opposition

outlet *Meduza* added that Papulovsky and Zorin awarded a contract worth 1.2 billion rubles (\$13 million) to the two electrical and cable product companies.[33] A Russian milblogger noted that such arrests and investigations are becoming more common due to a broader purge within the Russian MoD, spearheaded by new Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov.[34] ISW has observed that the new MoD leadership under Belousov has recently pushed for investigations into similar scandals involving property services, military uniforms, and a military-themed park near Moscow in an effort to curb corruption and mismanagement.[35]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine has taken steps to address its manpower shortages, but delays and inefficiencies in Western military aid to Ukraine continue to limit its ability to generate effective combat units that can defend critical areas and contest the theater-wide initiative.
- Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has forced Russia to redirect some resources from Ukraine to defend in Russia but that Ukraine still needs sufficient resources and Western permission to strike military targets in Russia to mitigate the theater-wide strain on Ukrainian forces.
- Russia continues to build out its long-term military capacity by gradually increasing the size of its armed forces.
- Iran is simultaneously setting conditions to build a nuclear weapon while continuing to signal its willingness to resume nuclear negotiations with the West.
- Select Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials continue to face corruption charges as the Russian military leadership is undertaking a wider effort to root out corruption in the MoD.
- Ukrainian forces advanced in Glushkovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recaptured territory in the area as of September 16. Ukrainian and Russian forces recently advanced in the Kursk salient.
- Ukrainian forces regained territory near Kharkiv City and Pokrovsk.
- Russian forces advanced near Kreminna, Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- Russia reportedly continues to coerce migrants to fight in the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 15, 2024

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

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

September 15, 2024, 7:50 pm ET

Russia reportedly aims to achieve a decisive victory in Ukraine by 2026 before likely medium- to long-term economic and force generation constraints begin to significantly degrade Russia's ability to sustain its war effort in Ukraine. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrlo Budanov announced on September 15 at the 20th Yalta European Strategy meeting in Kyiv that the Kremlin considers 2025 to be a pivotal year because failure to secure a victory in Ukraine by early 2026 will undermine Russia's aspirations of remaining a global superpower for the next 30 years.[1] Budanov noted that Russia anticipates a worsening economic and socio-political situation by mid-2025, alongside increasing difficulties with military recruitment.[2] Budanov stated that the Russian military is experiencing personnel shortages and a decrease in the number of new volunteers signing contracts.[3] Recent significant rises in one-time payments to contract military personnel (*kontraktniki*), with at least 36 Russian federal subjects (regions) reportedly having increased their one-time payments to *kontraktniki* in 2024 and at least 11 federal subjects paying Russian *kontraktniki* one million rubles (\$11,000) or more, are likely evidence of mounting costs and difficulties with the Russian military's ability to continue recruiting personnel. [4] Budanov also stated that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, coupled with constant Ukrainian strikes into Russian territories, has demoralized Russian citizens and eroded the Russian public's perception of Russian invincibility.[5] Budanov assessed that mounting issues will force Russian President Vladimir Putin to make a critical decision: either launch another risky and controversial mobilization or reduce the intensity of combat operations in Ukraine. Budanov's assessment implicitly assumes that Western states will maintain support for Ukraine at current levels over the next one to two years. It remains unclear what Putin may do between now and 2026 or how effective Putin's efforts to offset the impacts of Russia's war in Ukraine, including via foreign partners like Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), will be. ISW continues to assess that Putin remains averse to announcing another partial mobilization out of fear of domestic discontent and will likely continue to instruct the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to pursue ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts until such efforts begin to fall far short of operational requirements in Ukraine.[6] Putin maintains the option to call another round of mobilization - as he did in Fall 2022 - despite his desire to avoid having to do so. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is also unwilling to accept reducing the intensity of Russian forces' combat operations because the Kremlin sees maintaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative.[7] 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, as Russia's investments to grow Russia's force generation system, war economy, and international defense relationships have matured over the past two years, and likely will continue to do so through 2026.

Russia will likely face growing challenges in the production and procurement of the materiel that Russian operations in Ukraine require, and the Kremlin will likely become increasingly reliant on foreign partners to meet its materiel needs. The Russian military has extensively relied on refurbishing stocks of Soviet-era weapons and military equipment, particularly armored vehicles, to sustain the tempo of its offensive operations in Ukraine.[8] The Russian government will likely have to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry and invest in capacity building if the Russian military intends to sustain its current tempo of operations in the medium- to long-term as Russia depletes its finite Soviet stockpiles, but it is unclear if the Russian defense industry will be able to produce enough to sustain the high level of equipment losses that Russian forces suffer in Ukraine even with further economic mobilization.[9] ISW has previously assessed that Russia's efforts to expand its DIB are unlikely to be sustainable in the medium- to long-term due to anticipated labor shortages and the impacts of Western sanctions.[10] Putin acknowledged on April 4 that Russia will experience a high demand for human capital and face labor shortages in the coming years. [11] Kremlin-affiliated outlet *Izvestiya* reported on December 24, 2023, that Russia's labor shortages, partly driven by the war in Ukraine, reached 4.8 million people in 2023 and would likely worsen and impair Russia's ability to enhance domestic defense industrial initiatives.[12]

Budanov drew attention to North Korea's role as Russia's most impactful military ally. Budanov noted that North Korean artillery ammunition deliveries to Russia have a direct and rapid effect on the war's dynamics, with Ukrainian forces experiencing increased Russian operational tempo just days after North Korean-provided artillery ammunition arrives.[13] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated in January 2024 that Russia's defense industrial base (DIB) cannot produce enough artillery ammunition to sustain Russia's rate of fire and that North Korea delivered one million rounds of artillery ammunition to Russia between September and November 2023, offsetting some of Russia's crucial shortages.[14] North Korea had reportedly delivered 4.8 million artillery shells to Russia as of June 2024.[15] North Korean support has previously enabled Russia to maintain significant artillery advantages over Ukraine, and Russia has used these advantages to support consistent offensive operations designed to prevent Ukrainian forces from being able to contest the initiative.[16] ISW has noted that Russian authorities have recently intensified military cooperation with North Korea, as evidenced by Russian Security Council head Sergei Shoigu's September 13 visit to Pyongyang and Putin's visit in June 2024, when Putin signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement with North Korean President Kim Jong Un. [17] Russia's deepening military partnership with North Korea is emblematic of the relationship that Russia aims to create with Iran, the PRC, and other desired partners. Russia will likely face dwindling weapons and equipment stockpiles and struggle to offset these shortages unless it can circumvent Western sanctions at scale and significantly expand its engagements with foreign partners to obtain sufficient military materiel, component parts, and dual-use items. ISW will soon launch an initiative to study Russia's growing partnerships with other hostile state actors.

Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Oleksandr Kamyshin stated on September 15 that Ukraine has started domestic serial production of 155mm artillery shells.[18] Kamyshin stated that Ukrainian production of defense products doubled while he oversaw the Ministry of Strategic Industries (March 2023 to September 2024) and will triple by the end of 2024. Ukraine began domestically producing NATO-standard 155mm shells in small volumes no later than September 2023 after having never produced these shells before.[19]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) promptly responded to ultranationalists' outcry surrounding the controversial deaths of two drone operators in Ukraine, highlighting how Russian authorities continue to be highly attentive to backlash from the ultranationalist community. The Russian MoD stated on September 14 that Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov personally ordered Head of the MoD's Main Military-Political Directorate and Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Viktor Goremykin and Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov, alongside the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) Military Counterintelligence Department, to "sort out information" related to the death of the two drone operators within the 87th Separate Rifle Regiment of the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]). [20] Various Russian milbloggers reported on September 13 that two drone operators from the 87th Rifle Regiment died in combat near Pokrovsk after their field commander forced them into an assault detachment as punishment for criticizing their command.[21] The death of the drone operators generated pronounced outrage among Russian ultranationalist milbloggers about poor command discipline, and the Russian MoD appears to be trying to promptly address this outrage by issuing a statement on the matter within 24 hours.[22]

The MoD's response is the latest in a series of incidents in which ultranationalist outcries have influenced Russian officials' decision-making. The Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor published and immediately deleted a draft procedure to implement a recently adopted law designed to deanonymize Russian Telegram channels following backlash from the Russian ultranationalist Telegram community on September 5.[23] Russian ultranationalist outcries about controversies tied to migrants have also previously prompted the Russian Investigative Committee to open criminal investigations.[24] Russian officials' attentiveness to the Russian ultranationalist community underscores the importance the Kremlin has placed on leveraging the community's favor to support its war effort in Ukraine and the Kremlin's concerns about the consequences of pronounced ultranationalist discontent.[25]

Russian ultranationalist milbloggers praised the Russian MoD's response to the drone operators' deaths but expressed concern about the MoD's ability to solve the systemic issues that led to the deaths. The Russian milbloggers broadly expressed concern about various systemic issues within the 51st CAA and the Russian military, including a culture of lying to senior military commanders to falsely portray the military situation as positive; the practice of sending soldiers with specializations to conduct attritional, infantry-led "meat" assaults, command and control (C2) issues, and commanders' abuses of power.[26] A milblogger claimed that the Russian military command only ordered the assault that led to the drone operators' deaths because of false reports that Russian forces had seized a settlement near Pokrovsk.[27] Another milblogger noted that the Russian MoD only responded to the drone operators' deaths because of the significant outcry online and claimed that Russian authorities have previously investigated the Russian 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade for sending engineers to conduct infantry assaults.[28] Some milbloggers described the persistent issues within the Russian military as "Augean Stables," comparing the work necessary to eliminate the issues to the mythological Herculean task.[29] One milblogger pointed to another unresolved problem with Russian commanders sending wounded soldiers back to the frontline without treatment - an issue about which milbloggers have widely complained recently, prompting the Russian MoD to posture itself as making an effort to focus on soldiers' medical care.[30] Another milblogger provided insight into the struggles involved in the formalization and force structure of irregular Russian forces, claiming that regiments of the 51st CAA and 3rd Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Army Corps are severely understrength as the regiments have reduced tables of organization and equipment (TO/E) that do not include organic artillery; drone; air defense; or radiation, chemical, and biological defense elements that Russian regulations require of all Russian regiments.[31] The milblogger stated that regiments of the 51st CAA and 3rd CAA are inadequately provisioned, drastically reducing the units' combat capabilities. The Kremlin's efforts are unlikely to be sufficient to solve the broader issues that pervade the 51st CAA and other Russian regular and irregular formations in the near or medium term, especially as the Russian military is in the process of formalizing irregular formations into the regular Russian forces.

Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov aggravated Kremlin efforts to conduct prisoner of war (POW) exchanges for soldiers who defended against the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast while balancing his attempts to appeal to both the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and hardline facets of Chechen society. Alaudinov responded on September 15 to requests for help from the relatives of Chechen servicemembers whom Ukrainian forces have captured in Kursk Oblast, claiming that "Chechens have always considered surrender to be the greatest disgrace." [32] Alaudinov claimed that Chechen prisoners of war (POWs) "didn't deserve to live" and that Chechen soldiers should have attacked the Ukrainian personnel who were guarding them in order to provoke Ukrainian forces to kill them. Alaudinov claimed that he is prepared to help secure the release of other Russian prisoners of war (POWs), however. Alaudinov has been posturing himself as the spokesperson for the Russian forces operating in Kursk Oblast since the start of the Ukrainian incursion, and Russian state media has widely amplified his statements.[33] His September 15 statement denouncing Chechen soldiers who choose surrender over death is likely an attempt to rebalance his posturing to facets of Chechen society that hold similar beliefs and to portray Chechen forces as elite and making extreme sacrifices in the war. Ukraine and Russia conducted two POW exchanges on September 13 and 14, and Russia reportedly returned individuals whom Ukrainian forces captured in the Kursk direction, including many conscripts.[34] Russia has increasingly conducted POW exchanges with Ukraine since the start of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast following months of reportedly rebuffing Ukrainian overtures for POW exchanges - demonstrating the importance the Kremlin is placing on the return of Russian POWs captured in Kursk Oblast, particularly conscripts.[35] Alaudinov similarly recently berated the relatives of Russian conscripts fighting in Kursk Oblast for their complaints about their relatives' participation in combat operations, which likely exacerbated Kremlin efforts to respond to this socially and politically sensitive issue.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia reportedly aims to achieve a decisive victory in Ukraine by 2026 before likely medium- to long-term economic and force generation constraints begin to significantly degrade Russia's ability to sustain its war effort in Ukraine.
- Russia will likely face growing challenges in the production and procurement of the materiel that Russian operations in Ukraine require, and the Kremlin will likely become increasingly reliant on foreign partners to meet its materiel needs.
- Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Oleksandr Kamyshev stated on September 15 that Ukraine has started domestic serial production of 155mm artillery shells.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) promptly responded to ultranationalists' outcry surrounding the controversial deaths of two drone operators in Ukraine, highlighting how Russian authorities continue to be highly attentive to backlash from the ultranationalist community.
- Russian ultranationalist milbloggers praised the Russian MoD's response to the drone operators' deaths but expressed concern about the MoD's ability to solve the systemic issues that led to the deaths.
- Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov aggravated Kremlin efforts to conduct prisoner of war (POW) exchanges for soldiers who defended against the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast while balancing his attempts to appeal to both the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and hardline facets of Chechen society.

- Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced in Glushkovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces reportedly recently recaptured territory in the area as of September 15. Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations throughout their salient in Kursk Oblast, and Russian forces recently advanced in the salient.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Siversk, and Donetsk City.
- Russian authorities continue to strengthen coercive mechanisms to support ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts in order to avoid conducting a wider mobilization.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 14, 2024

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

Davit Gasparyan, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

September 14, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Ukrainian officials and sources indicated that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has prompted the Russian authorities to increase the size of the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast by upwards of a factor of three. Ukrainian Pivnich (Northern) Operational Command Spokesperson Vadym Mysnyk stated on September 14 that Russian forces had 11,000 personnel deployed in Kursk Oblast at the start of Ukraine's incursion in early August 2024.[1] Mysnyk stated that there are various estimates that place the current size of the Russian grouping in Kursk Oblast between 30,000 and 45,000 personnel.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on September 13 that Russian forces have concentrated 40,000 personnel in Kursk Oblast and aim to concentrate a total of 60,000 to 70,000 personnel in the area.[3] The individual number breakdown for each of the Russian services (Rosgvardia, border guards, regular units, irregular units, and conscript forces) contributing to these figures remains unclear. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on September 14 that there are roughly 61 various Russian units of various sizes comprised of roughly 35,500 Russian personnel within the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces' Kursk Group (which has responsibility for Glushkovsky, Korenevsky, Sudzhansky, Rylsky, Lgovsky, Kurchatovsky, and Kursky raions).[4] The reported growth in the size of the Russian grouping in Kursk Oblast is reflective of how operational pressures caused by the incursion have forced the Russian military command to redeploy elements from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast and commit newly generated forces from within Russia to the area instead of the frontline in Ukraine.[5] A Russian counteroffensive operation to retake territory seized by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast will very likely require even more manpower and materiel than Russia has already concentrated in the area and therefore additional Russian redeployments from Ukraine.[6]

Ukraine and Russia conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on September 14 — the third POW exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, which appears to have generated the short-term effect of increasing incentives for Russia to engage in POW exchanges. Ukrainian officials reported that Russia returned 103 prisoners to Ukraine including Ukrainian servicemembers who defended the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol in early 2022, servicemembers of the Ukrainian National Police and State Border Service, servicemembers of the Ukrainian State Transport Special Service, and other Ukrainian military personnel.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on September 14 that Ukraine returned 103 individuals to Russia whom Ukrainian forces captured in Kursk Oblast.[8] Russian sources suggested that the returned Russian prisoners were conscripts.[9] The POW swap directly follows a similar exchange that Russia and Ukraine conducted on September 13, during which they returned 49 prisoners each.[10] Ukrainian officials have repeatedly emphasized that the Kursk incursion has enhanced Ukraine's negotiating power in POW exchanges with Russia, following the Kremlin's consistent rejection of Ukraine's attempt to negotiate exchanges.[11] The frequency of POW exchanges between Ukraine and Russia has significantly increased since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on August 6, with both sides exchanging a total of 267 POWs each in three separate exchanges.[12] Russia and Ukraine only conducted three other POW exchanges, encompassing roughly 405 Ukrainian POWs and 423 Russian POWs, between January 1 and August 6, 2024.[13]

Some Russian field commanders continue to make decisions that degrade the overall quality of their subordinate forces—prioritizing infantry-led frontal assault tactics over cultivating technical specialists who would allow the Russian military to better field technologies and innovations in combat operations. Various Russian milbloggers reported on September 13 that two drone operators from the 87th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade (51st Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) died in combat near Pokrovsk after their field commander forced them into an assault detachment as punishment for criticizing their command.[14] The two drone operators posted footage explaining the situation and their forced reassignment to assault tasks before their deaths, which milbloggers widely amplified.[15] Several milbloggers claimed to have heard numerous similar stories and claimed that the practice of sending specialists, such as electronic warfare (EW) specialists, snipers, machine

gunners, and drone operators, to conduct frontal assaults as punishment for dissent is commonplace, particularly amongst units of the 51st CAA.[16] DNR First Deputy Information Minister Danil Bezsonov claimed that the commander of the "Komendant" naval Spetsnaz group, which was operating in Kherson Oblast, similarly divided his subordinates into assault groups based on personal vendettas and that a commander operating in Donetsk Oblast sent a talented cyberhacker to an assault unit for disagreeing with the command, after which the hacker died in combat.[17]

Milbloggers argued that this practice is indicative of poor command discipline and is degrading the quality of Russian forces.[18] ISW has previously noted that the Russian military command's reliance on infantry-led frontal assault tactics has flattened the distinctions between formerly elite (such as Airborne and Naval Infantry forces) and ordinary Russian combat services and degraded Russian combat capability throughout the frontline.[19] Reports of Russian commanders forcing personnel with more technical specialties to conduct such frontal assaults are consistent with this wider observed pattern. Machine gunners and snipers are not necessarily specialists in a technical sense, but they possess unique skills that accomplish different effects than foot-mobile infantry conducting a frontal assault against a tactical objective. By using specialists of any variety as additional bodies for frontal assaults, the Russian command is forgoing the opportunity to properly leverage whatever specialties they could integrate into their respective units, further illustrating that most Russian frontline troops have been reduced to understrength and low-quality motorized rifle units.[20] The use of specialists who are familiar with more advanced battlefield technologies, such as drones and EW systems, is likely compounding these effects. While Ukrainian forces have consistently displayed high degrees of tactical and technical innovation, the Russian military appears to be willfully undermining its own ability to integrate innovations into combat operations.[21]

The Kremlin continues efforts to leverage global informational instruments of influence to develop new capabilities to conduct election interference, destabilization measures, and sanctions evasion schemes. The US State Department announced new sanctions on September 13 against entities and individuals connected to Russian state media outlet *Russia Today* (RT), which the State Department noted is engaging in information operations, covert influence, and military procurement efforts for the Kremlin by targeting states in Europe, Africa, and North and South America.[22] The State Department reported that the Kremlin created a cyber operations entity within RT in Spring 2023 that provided information to Russian intelligence, media, and mercenary groups. RT is reportedly also crowdfunding money to purchase equipment for the Russian military in small orders, including from the People's Republic of China (PRC), "to avoid unwanted scrutiny." The State Department noted that RT is coordinating with the Kremlin to influence the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election and to foment violent protests in Moldova. The State Department stated that the Kremlin is using Russian state-owned bank Promsvyazbank's (PSB) recent pension funding agreement with Moldovan autonomous region Gagauzia to buy votes in support of pro-Kremlin presidential candidates, as ISW similarly assessed in April 2024.[23] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on September 14 that RT is "functioning like a de facto arm of Russia's intelligence apparatus." [24] The US Department of Justice (DOJ) reported on September 4 that the Kremlin is conducting complex malign influence operations called "Doppelganger" to reduce Western support for Ukraine and influence US and foreign elections.[25] ISW assessed at that time that Russia was continuing its efforts to develop a capability to use information operations on social media platforms to trigger kinetic activity.[26]

Officials of Georgia's ruling Georgia Dream party continue to elevate narratives echoing Kremlin information operations justifying Russia's occupation of internationally recognized Georgian territories. Georgian Dream party's founder and former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili attributed the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and subsequent Russian occupation of Georgian territories to unspecified "external actors" and the former pro-Western Georgian United National Movement (UNM) ruling party during an election rally in Gori, a city bordering Russian-occupied South Ossetia.[27] Ivanishvili notably omitted any mention of Russia and Russian aggression against Georgia. Ivanishvili claimed that Georgian Dream would hold UNM, particularly former pro-Western Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, accountable should Georgia Dream obtain a constitutional majority in the upcoming October 2024 Georgian parliamentary elections. Ivanishvili also stated that the Georgian government, under the Georgian Dream party, would seek reconciliation with South Ossetia and work towards forgiveness for the alleged violence that UNM caused. Ivanishvili's rhetoric closely echoes the larger Georgian Dream election campaign that seeks to present itself as the party of peace while framing opposition parties, such as UNM, as parties supporting instability and war. [28] ISW previously assessed that Georgian Dream has used narratives that closely mirror Kremlin information operations aimed at justifying Russian aggression against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states that the Russian Empire and Soviet Union formerly colonized by blaming domestic, pro-Western parties who allegedly cooperate with unspecified "external actors" to instigate violence.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian officials and sources indicated that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has prompted the Russian authorities to increase the size of the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast by upwards of a factor of three.**
- **Ukraine and Russia conducted a prisoner of war (POW) exchange on September 14 — the third POW exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, which appears**

to have generated the short-term effect of increasing incentives for Russia to engage in POW exchanges.

- Some Russian field commanders continue to make decisions that degrade the overall quality of their subordinate forces—prioritizing infantry-led frontal assault tactics over cultivating technical specialists who would allow the Russian military to better field technologies and innovations in combat operations.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to leverage global informational instruments of influence to develop new capabilities to conduct election interference, destabilization measures, and sanctions evasion schemes.
- Officials of Georgia's ruling Georgia Dream party continue to elevate narratives echoing Kremlin information operations justifying Russia's occupation of internationally recognized Georgian territories.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- Russian forces are reportedly repairing captured Soviet-era Ukrainian equipment to replenish Russian vehicle stocks.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 13, 2024](#)

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Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Haley Zehrung, and George Barros

September 13, 2024, 8:30pm ET

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has reportedly spoiled planned Russian offensive operations along the international border area that likely aimed to expand the area of active combat operations across a broader front in northeastern Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on September 13 that the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast stopped Russian plans to create several buffer zones along the Ukrainian border "from the east to the north," including in Sumy Oblast.[1] Zelensky stated that Russian forces wanted to launch major offensives to seize regional centers, likely referring to the regional capitals of Sumy and Kharkiv cities. Sumy and Kharkiv cities are roughly 25 and 30 kilometers from the international border, respectively – significantly further than the approximately six to 10 kilometers that Russian forces currently occupy near Lyptsi (north of Kharkiv City) and Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City).

Zelensky's statement suggests that Russian forces planned to start new offensive operations aimed at penetrating at least 25 kilometers deep into Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts and activating along a much wider front between at least Sumy and Kharkiv cities. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi similarly stated on September 5 that the Ukrainian incursion spoiled a planned Russian attack into Sumy Oblast and "reduced the threat" of Russian incursions into northern Ukraine. [2] ISW previously assessed that the Russian offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast aimed to fix Ukrainian manpower and materiel along the northern border, granting Russian forces opportunities to re-intensify offensive operations in other higher-priority areas of the theater.[3] Ukrainian forces have largely stabilized the frontline in the Kharkiv direction since Summer 2024 and continue to contest the tactical initiative through counterattacks that have regained limited positions in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[4] The Russian military command may have intended for additional offensive operations along a wider and more continuous front in northeastern Ukraine to significantly stretch Ukrainian forces along the international border following the Ukrainian stabilization of the frontline north and northeast of Kharkiv City.

Zelensky noted that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has also impacted Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast. Zelensky stated that the Ukrainian incursion "slowed" Russian advances throughout Donetsk Oblast and reduced the advantage in artillery ammunition that Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction had over Ukrainian forces from 12-to-1 to 2.5-to-1.[5] ISW is unable to verify Zelensky's statement, though the rate of Russian advance in the Pokrovsk area has notably slowed since the start of September 2024. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated during an interview published on September 7 that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast complicated Russia's plans for offensive operations, including in Russia's "main direction" (likely referring to the Pokrovsk direction), in August 2024 and later this fall. [6] ISW has recently observed indications that Russian authorities have transferred limited elements of likely Russian reserve units from Donetsk Oblast, including from the Pokrovsk direction, to Kursk Oblast to counter the Ukrainian incursion.[7] Such limited redeployments are unlikely to have an immediate impact on the tempo of Russian offensive operations, although Russian forces may struggle to maintain their current offensive tempo into the future if Russian authorities conduct additional redeployments from reserve forces in Donetsk Oblast.

Russian forces continue to counterattack throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, but the Russian military will likely have to redeploy additional elements from elsewhere in the theater to Kursk Oblast to establish a force grouping capable of pursuing a sustained counteroffensive operation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated on September 13 that Russian forces have begun counteroffensive operations in Kursk Oblast, and Pentagon Spokesperson Major General Patrick Ryder stated on September 12 that the US has observed Russian units beginning to try to conduct "some type of counteroffensive" operation that Ryder described as "marginal." [8] ISW continues to track observable Russian counterattacks in Kursk Oblast

but has not yet observed large-scale combat operations indicating that Russian forces have started a large-scale concerted counteroffensive operation aimed at completely expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.

Zelensky stated that Russian forces have concentrated 40,000 personnel in Kursk Oblast but did not specify the composition of the Russian grouping, and it remains unclear whether Zelensky's count is representative exclusively of combat-effective Russian soldiers or a joint force that includes contract soldiers, plus less effective conscripts, irregular forces, border guards, Rosgvardia elements, and Russian Interior Ministry forces.[9] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on September 13 that there are roughly 33,000 to 35,000 Russian personnel in Kursk Oblast.[10] Zelensky stated that the Russian military command intends to concentrate 60,000 to 70,000 personnel in Kursk Oblast, a number notably higher than the 50,000 personnel that US officials reportedly assessed that Russia would need to push Ukrainians out of Kursk Oblast.[11] Russian authorities have largely relied on poorly-trained and equipped conscripts and small elements of Russian regular and irregular forces to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast thus far, and it is unlikely that most of the current Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast is comprised of combat experienced units.[12]

A Russian counteroffensive operation to retake territory seized by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast will very likely require even more manpower and materiel than Russia has already concentrated in the area — especially if most of the already committed units lack combat experience. Russian Airborne (VDV) forces that recently redeployed to Kursk Oblast from the frontline in Ukraine currently appear to be heavily responsible for counterattacks in Kursk Oblast, suggesting that the Russian military command may intend to field units perceived to be more "elite" or combat effective to regain territory.[13] The Russian military will most certainly have to redeploy units already committed to ongoing offensive operations or operational reserves from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast in order to field the combat-effective units needed for a large counteroffensive operation and then subsequently guard the international border against future Ukrainian incursion.

Russian forces appear to be testing more effective mechanized assault tactics west of Donetsk City, although Russian armored vehicles remain vulnerable to Ukrainian strike and drone capabilities. Geolocated footage published on September 12 shows Russian forces conducting a reinforced battalion-sized mechanized assault and advancing across the fields southwest of Krasnohorivka and into eastern Hostre (west of Donetsk City).[14] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced during the mechanized assault and one Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces control one-third of Hostre.[15] The Ukrainian brigade that repelled the attack reported that Russian forces launched four waves of assaults over six hours on the morning of September 12 and that Russian forces used 46 pieces of mechanized equipment, including armored vehicles, tanks, and motorcycles during the assaults.[16] The brigade reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed 15 armored vehicles, tanks, and motorcycles and damaged 11 additional armored vehicles while repelling the assault. Although Ukrainian forces reportedly destroyed over half of the armored vehicles that Russian forces used during the mechanized assault near Hostre, Russian forces managed to advance between six and eight kilometers southwest of Krasnohorivka during the battle. Russian forces have historically struggled with rapid mechanized maneuver through open fields due to a lack of cover and concealment from Ukrainian drones and fires, but Russian forces may have assessed that the recent intensification of Russian offensive operations southwest of Pokrovsk and west and southwest of Donetsk City had sufficiently strained Ukraine's defensive capabilities in this area to enable Russian forces to make tactically significant advances.[17]

The commander of another Ukrainian brigade operating in the Donetsk direction reported on September 13 that Russian forces are using a new tactic during mechanized assaults in this direction.[18] The commander reported that Russian forces are using a task-organized, small mechanized unit that features a heavily armored "turtle" tank (a tank with extra armored plating) equipped with mine-clearing equipment as the lead vehicle followed by several armored personnel carriers. The armored personnel carriers then carry Russian infantry close to Ukrainian positions before the infantry dismount to begin the assault and the personnel carriers presumably return to the point of departure. The commander reported that Russian forces are still suffering significant armored vehicle losses and estimated that Russian forces are losing up to 90 percent of the vehicles used in mechanized assaults in the Donetsk direction. Russian forces conducted a series of costly mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast in late July 2024 but made very marginal territorial advances in exchange for their comparative heavy armored vehicle losses.[19] Russian forces most recently conducted a tactically significant mechanized assault up to the eastern outskirts of Chasiv Yar in April 2024, and Russian forces may attempt to model future mechanized assaults after these more tactically successful outcomes.[20]

Ukraine and Russia conducted their second prisoner of war (POW) exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on September 13. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Ukraine and Russia each returned 49 prisoners and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) mediated the swap.[21] Zelensky stated that Ukraine returned servicemembers who defended the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol, servicemembers of the Ukrainian National Police and State Border Service, and civilians. Russian officials have not yet confirmed the details of their returned prisoners, but Russian sources claimed that Russia returned individuals whom Ukrainian forces captured in the Kursk direction, including conscripts.[22] Ukrainian officials have previously suggested that the

Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has forced Russia to more readily consider POW exchanges.[23] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that Russian citizens wrote a record number of 1,927 requests to Russian President Vladimir Putin to search for Russian servicemembers missing or captured in August 2024 following the beginning of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[24]

Russia continues efforts to strengthen strategic military ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran to support its war effort in Ukraine. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin traveled to Beijing on September 13 to partake in the Xiangshan Forum where he highlighted the deepening strategic partnership between Russia and the PRC.[25] Fomin emphasized Russian-PRC plans for over 100 joint military cooperation events in 2024, blamed NATO and the US for intensifying the war in Ukraine, and criticized the US for pursuing an alleged dual containment policy of Russia and the PRC.[26]

Reuters, citing two undisclosed European intelligence sources and obtained documents, reported on September 13 that Russia has been producing the long-range "Garpiya-A1" attack drone using Chinese engines and other dual-use parts since 2023 and that Russian forces have used the drone to strike military and civilian targets in Ukraine.[27] The Garpiya-A1 drone has a range of 1,500 kilometers, similar to the Iranian Shahed-136 drones. Reuters reported that Russian weapons manufacturer IEMZ Kupol reportedly produced over 2,500 Garpiya-A1 drones between July 2023 to July 2024.

TASS also reported on September 13 that Russian Security Council head Sergei Shoigu traveled to Pyongyang, North Korea and met North Korean President Kim Jong Un for unspecified bilateral discussions.[28] This follows Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea in June 2024, where he signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement with Kim and continued shipments of North Korean artillery shells and ballistic missiles to Russia.[29] Shoigu's visit also follows Iran's recent delivery of over 200 Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia and Putin's meeting with Iranian Secretary of the National Security Council, Ali Akbar Ahmadian on September 12.[30]

Russia's deepening engagement with the PRC, North Korea, and Iran is part of a wider Kremlin effort to establish a coalition of friendly states aimed directly at enhancing the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) and securing strategic economic cooperation to support its war in Ukraine.[31]

Key Takeaways:

- The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has reportedly spoiled planned Russian offensive operations along the international border area that likely aimed to expand the area of active combat operations across a broader front in northeastern Ukraine.
- Russian forces continue to counterattack throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, but the Russian military will likely have to redeploy additional elements from elsewhere in the theater to Kursk Oblast to establish a force grouping capable of pursuing a sustained counteroffensive operation.
- Russian forces appear to be testing more effective mechanized assault tactics west of Donetsk City, although Russian armored vehicles remain vulnerable to Ukrainian strike and drone capabilities.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted their second prisoner of war (POW) exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on September 13.
- Russia continues efforts to strengthen strategic military ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran to support its war effort in Ukraine.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast amid continued Russian and Ukrainian assaults in the area on September 13.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kupiansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- Russian authorities continue attempts to coerce minorities and Ukrainian youth living in occupied Ukraine to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to avoid conducting a wider mobilization.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 12, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, Katherine Wells, and Karolina Hird

September 12, 2024, 8:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on September 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continued counterattacking throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on September 12 but made only marginal gains, likely due to continued Ukrainian offensive

operations and defensive counterattacks in the area. Geolocated footage published on September 12 indicates that Russian forces made marginal advances west of Vishnevka (southwest of Korenevo) and in northern Krasnooktyabrskoye (southwest of Korenevo).[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces have recaptured 10 settlements south and southwest of Korenevo since starting counterattacks on the night of September 10 to 11, including Apanasovka, Byakhovo, Vishnevka, Viktorovka, Vnezapnoye, Gordeevka, Krasnooktyabrskoye, Obukhovka, Snagost, and 10-y Oktyabr.[2] All of these settlements are within the existing claimed limit of Russian advances, and ISW has yet to observe visual confirmation that Russian forces have recaptured any of these settlements except parts of Snagost and Krasnooktyabrskoye. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces continued advancing southeast of Korenevo and northeast of Snagost (southwest of Korenevo), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[3] Ukrainian forces continued counterattacking in areas where Russian forces have launched counterattacks and launched additional attacks outside of the salient, making gains in Glushkovsky Raion (west of Korenevsky Raion). Geolocated footage published September 12 indicates that Ukrainian infantry have advanced across the border and into southwestern Tetkino (about 40km southwest of the current Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast).[4] Additional geolocated footage published on September 12 shows Ukrainian armored vehicles and infantry bypassing Russian dragon's teeth anti-tank obstacles on the Russian-Ukrainian border southwest of Novy Put (southwest of Glushkovo) unopposed, indicating that Ukrainian forces have advanced in the area and that Russian forces were not prepared to leverage the obstacles to repel cross-border Ukrainian assaults.[5] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued assaults near Novy Put, Medvezhye (southeast of Glushkovo), Snagost, Olgovka (east of Korenevo), and Fanaseyevka (southeast of Sudzha).[6]

Russian forces have so far advanced in areas of Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces were not yet fully controlling nor attempting to control, and Russian forces will likely face more difficulty when counterattacking further into areas of the salient where Ukrainian forces do have control. ISW uses the doctrinal definition of "control" when referring to control of terrain in which "control is a tactical mission task that requires a commander to maintain physical influence over a specified area to prevent its use by an enemy or to create conditions necessary for successful friendly operations."[7] Russian forces have advanced roughly 58 square kilometers in areas where ISW has observed either maximalist claims or visual evidence of Ukrainian forces operating since starting counterattacks on the night of September 10 to 11. ISW previously was not mapping control of terrain within the Ukrainian salient in Russia, and Russian forces have not advanced in recent days through areas which ISW formally assessed were under Ukrainian control. ISW has been mapping the maximalist extent of claims and unverified reports about Ukrainian advances, however, and ISW's mapping never excluded the possibility that Russian forces were operating in areas within the maximalist extent of claimed Ukrainian advances. Ukrainian forces have not attempted to consolidate positions everywhere in their salient in Kursk Oblast, and it is likely that Ukrainian forces had fewer consolidated positions in forward areas at the edges of the salient where Russian forces have recently advanced. Ukrainian forces most certainly control territory within some areas of the salient in Kursk Oblast, although ISW will continue to refrain from mapping Ukrainian control of terrain in Russia. Russian counterattacks against better prepared and consolidated positions in territory where Ukrainian forces exert control will likely be far less successful than the counterattacks Russian forces launched on September 10 to 11.

A Ukrainian HIMARS strike reportedly damaged a temporary pontoon bridge across the Seym River and inflicted casualties on a group of nearby Russian troops on September 12. The Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces published footage on September 12 showing cluster munitions from a Ukrainian HIMARS rocket striking a group of Russian infantry along the bank of the Seym River in an unspecified area of Kursk Oblast.[8] The Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces stated that the Russian troops were preparing to conduct assaults against Ukrainian positions in the area. Ukrainian forces previously struck several Russian pontoon bridges over the Seym River in Glushkovsky Raion in late August 2024.[9]

Russian authorities have reportedly deployed additional elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division to Kursk Oblast and may begin redeploying more combat experienced forces to support ongoing Russian counterattacks and future counteroffensive operations against Ukrainian forces in Russia. Footage published on September 11 purportedly shows elements of the Russian 137th VDV Regiment (106th VDV Division) participating in assaults northwest of Snagost.[10] ISW observed reports that elements of the 137th VDV Regiment were operating in the Siversk direction as of late August 2024.[11] Elements of the 106th VDV Division's 51st VDV Regiment are also reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast.[12] Russian authorities have largely relied on poorly trained and equipped conscripts and small elements of Russian regular and irregular forces to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast thus far and will likely require additional manpower and more combat experienced units to fully push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.[13] Russian authorities may concentrate additional elements of the 106th VDV Division and other more combat experienced formations in Kursk Oblast as Russian forces continue counterattacks against the Ukrainian salient.

The United Kingdom (UK) will reportedly allow Ukraine to use UK-provided long-range Storm Shadow missiles to strike military objects in Russia in the coming days. UK outlet *The Guardian* reported on September 11 that sources within the UK government stated that the UK has already made a decision to allow Ukraine to use US-provided Storm Shadow missiles to strike objects in Russia, but that the UK will not announce the policy change until after US President Joe Biden's

September 13 meeting with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer.[14] UK outlet *The Times* reported on September 12 that two sources familiar with the discussions stated that the US may allow Ukraine to use UK- and French-provided Storm Shadow and SCALP missiles to strike military objects in Russia but likely will not allow Ukrainian forces to use US-provided ATACMS missiles to strike military objects in Russia.[15] Two unspecified US officials told *CNN* on September 11 that the Biden administration has not changed its policy of prohibiting Ukrainian forces from using US-provided ATACMS missiles to strike within Russia despite discussing the issue regularly.[16] Biden stated on September 10 that his administration was “working that out” when asked about potential plans to lift US restrictions on Ukraine’s use of long-range weapons in Russia, however.[17] Zelensky stated on September 12 that Ukrainian officials presented a detailed request to lift Western restrictions on long-range strikes into Russia during recent meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy and emphasized that delays in lifting the restrictions have allowed Russia to move some military objects “deeper” into Russia.[18]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues rhetorical efforts aimed at influencing the ongoing Western policy debate about granting Ukraine permission to use Western-provided weapons against military objects in Russia, although Russia has not previously escalated militarily against perceived Western violations of Russia’s “red lines.”[19] Putin reiterated claims on September 11 that Ukrainian strikes against Russia using Western-provided weapons would represent an escalation in the war in Ukraine and directly involve Western countries in the war.[20] Putin and other Kremlin officials routinely accuse the West of escalating and being directly involved in the war as part of the Kremlin’s ongoing reflexive control campaign aimed at coercing the West into making policy decisions that benefit the Kremlin, such as not allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike military objects in Russia or delaying Western military assistance to Ukraine.[21] The Kremlin has previously threatened military escalation should the West cross its so-called “red lines,” but has never significantly responded to any US or Western provision of military assistance to Ukraine.[22] The Kremlin has also demonstrated that it is unwilling to escalate in response to Ukraine’s ongoing incursion into Kursk Oblast, which has lasted for over a month and has included Western-provided equipment and conducting strikes with Western-provided HIMARS within Russia.[23] Putin’s September 11 rhetoric is therefore not an inflection in typical Russian rhetoric about the risk of escalation of the war in Ukraine and is likely intended to influence the ongoing Western policy debates about Ukraine’s ability to strike military targets in Russia with Western-provided precision weapons. [24] Delays in Western policy decisions in support of Ukraine’s defense have resulted in critical delays of military assistance to Ukraine, forcing Ukrainian counteroffensives to culminate and allowing Russia to seize the theater-wide initiative, as ISW has previously reported.[25]

Russian forces struck a civilian cargo ship transiting through the Ukrainian grain corridor in the western Black Sea on September 11, likely as part of a renewed Russian effort to undermine international confidence in the safety of the corridor. 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.[26] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that preliminary data suggests there were no casualties but noted that Ukrainian food shipments to countries in Africa and the Middle East are critical for the global market.[27] The Romanian Coast Guard reported that the Russian missile struck the ship while in Romania’s maritime economic zone. [28] Russian forces have previously heavily targeted Ukrainian port 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 confidence in the Ukrainian grain corridor.[29] 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 and negatively impact Ukraine’s efforts to economically recover amid the ongoing war. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on September 10 that Ukrainian has so far sent 66 million tons of cargo through the trade corridor in the Black Sea in 2024 and that this is close to the level of exports before the full-scale invasion.[30]

Russia continued its efforts to enhance relations with non-Western countries at the meeting of BRICS high-ranking security officials and advisors in St. Petersburg. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with officials from the People’s Republic of China (PRC), India, and Iran on September 12 to discuss bilateral ties and promote Russia’s BRICS presidency and the upcoming October BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan.[31] Kremlin newswire *TASS* claimed on September 12 that Putin met with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi and discussed Russia-China bilateral relations and cooperation within BRICS, while Wang confirmed that PRC President Xi Jinping will attend the upcoming BRICS summit in Kazan.[32] Putin met with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval with whom he reportedly discussed India’s peace proposal for the war in Ukraine and the possibility of holding a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the BRICS summit.[33] Putin also reportedly discussed with Iranian Secretary of the National Security Council, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the strengthening nature of Iran-Russia relations, the signing of an interstate agreement at the strategic partnership level, and the development of the proposed north-south corridor passing through Russia into Iran through the South Caucasus.[34] These developments likely demonstrate a broader Russian diplomatic outreach effort to enhance relations with non-Western countries, convey an image of global leadership, and garner support for its war effort.

Iran and Russia are downplaying their disagreement over the Zangezur Corridor project in the Caucasus. NOTE: A version of this text appears in the September 12 ISW-CTP Iran

Update. Tension has erupted between Moscow and Tehran since Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov announced on August 19 that Russia supports the Zangezur Corridor, which would connect Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhchivan Autonomous Region through southern Armenia.[35] Iran has long opposed the development of the Zangezur corridor, arguing that it would sever Iranian land access to Europe and Russia.[36] Ahmadian met Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 10, during which Shoigu insisted that the Russian position vis-a-vis the Zangezur Corridor has not recently changed.[37] Ahmadian similarly said that nothing has changed in the Iran-Russia relationship during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 12.[38] Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova likewise said on September 11 that Russia "provided all the necessary clarifications," on the issue, which Tehran has accepted.[39] Neither Iran nor Russia likely seeks to antagonize the other, despite their differing positions, especially as they implemented their agreement to provide Iranian missiles to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[40]

Russia is continuing to balance its relationships with Iran and the Gulf states. Ahmadian and Shoigu also discussed the dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over ownership of three islands in the Persian Gulf — Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa.[41] Tehran has claimed the three islands as Iranian territory since 1971.[42] Iranian state media reported that Shoigu expressed Russian support for Iranian sovereignty over the three islands, though this Iranian media report should be treated with skepticism.[43] Russia has historically indicated support for the Emirati claim to the islands, which has been a consistent point of tension between Moscow and Tehran.[44]

Russian investigative outlet *Dossier Center* published an investigation on September 12 into the Kremlin's efforts to consolidate its influence over the Russian information space via Telegram ahead of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. *Dossier Center* obtained documents indicating that the Russian Presidential Administration invested millions of rubles in creating a network of Telegram channels and co-opting existing Telegram channels as part of the Kremlin's efforts to gain further influence and control over information space narratives between 2018 and 2021.[45] The documents acknowledged that the Presidential Administration competed with Russian propagandist and RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan for influence over prominent Russian channels on Telegram. *Dossier Center* reported that the Presidential Administration also prioritized maintaining the appearance of Telegram as an independent and impartial organization while simultaneously attempting to gain leverage and influence over Telegram employees living in Russia. *Dossier Center's* investigation is consistent with the ongoing Kremlin effort to consolidate greater control over Telegram and the wider Russian information space, on which ISW routinely reports.[46]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continued counterattacking throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on September 12 but made only marginal gains, likely due to continued Ukrainian offensive operations and defensive counterattacks in the area.
- Russian forces have so far advanced in areas of Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces were not yet fully controlling nor attempting to control, and Russian forces will likely face more difficulty when counterattacking further into areas of the salient where Ukrainian forces do have control.
- A Ukrainian HIMARS strike reportedly damaged a temporary pontoon bridge across the Seym River and wounded a group of nearby Russian troops on September 12.
- Russian authorities have reportedly deployed additional elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division to Kursk Oblast and may begin redeploying more combat experienced forces to support ongoing Russian counterattacks and future counteroffensive operations against Ukrainian forces in Russia.
- The United Kingdom (UK) will reportedly allow Ukraine to use UK-provided long-range Storm Shadow missiles to strike military objects in Russia in the coming days.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues rhetorical efforts aimed at influencing the ongoing Western policy debate about granting Ukraine permission to use Western-provided weapons against military objects in Russia, although Russia has not previously escalated militarily against perceived Western violations of Russia's "red lines."
- Russian forces struck a civilian cargo ship transiting through the Ukrainian grain corridor in the western Black Sea on September 11, likely as part of a renewed Russian effort to undermine international confidence in the safety of the corridor.
- Russia continued its efforts to enhance relations with non-Western countries at the meeting of BRICS high-ranking security officials and advisors in St. Petersburg.
- Iran and Russia are downplaying their disagreement over the Zangezur Corridor project in the Caucasus.
- Russia is continuing to balance its relationships with Iran and the Gulf states.
- Russian investigative outlet *Dossier Center* published an investigation on September 12 into the Kremlin's efforts to consolidate its influence over the Russian information space via Telegram ahead of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently north of Chasiv Yar, southeast of Pokrovsk, and west of Donetsk City.
- Former Roscosmos (Russian space agency) head and Zaporizhia Oblast occupation senator Dmitry Rogozin claimed on September 12 that the first group of the newly-

formed "BARS-Sarmat" volunteer detachment (Russian Combat Army Reserve) signed military service contracts with the Russian MoD and are training for deployment to the frontline in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 11, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Haley Zehrung, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

September 11, 2024, 8:25 pm ET

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

Russian forces began counterattacks along the western edge of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and reportedly seized several settlements northeast and south of Korenevo on September 10 and 11. The size, scale, and potential prospects of the September 11 Russian counterattacks in Kursk Oblast are unclear and the situation remains fluid as of this report. It is premature to draw conclusions about Russia's new counterattacks and ISW will continue following the situation. Geolocated footage published on September 11 indicates that Russian forces retook positions east of Zhuravli (northeast of Korenevo).[1] Additional geolocated footage published on September 10 indicates that elements of the Russian 51st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) advanced north and northeast of Snagost (south of Korenevo) during a company-sized mechanized assault.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces launched the mechanized counterattack from the north near Korenevo and that Russian forces quickly advanced into Snagost.[3] Several Russian sources claimed that Russian forces fully seized Snagost, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[4] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 51st VDV Regiment and 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) advanced northwest of Snagost and seized Krasnooktyabrskoye; advanced west of Snagost and seized Komarovka and Vishnevka; advanced southwest of Snagost and seized Apanasovka and 10-y Oktyabr; advanced southeast of Snagost and seized Obukhovka; and advanced south of Snagost and seized Byakhovo, Vnezapnoye, and Gordeevka.[5] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) seized Olgovka (just east of Korenevo).[6]

Ukrainian forces reportedly began new attacks against the Russian counterattack west of Snagost and throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast. A Ukrainian brigade reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast reported on September 11 that Ukrainian forces began attacking Russian forces' flank west of Snagost after the initial Russian counterattack into Snagost.[7] An open-source X (formerly Twitter) user claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating near Kulbaki (southwest of Snagost and roughly five kilometers from the international border), suggesting that Ukrainian forces recently advanced near the settlement, reportedly after crossing the international border.[8] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting small mechanized cross-border assaults into Glushkovo Raion near Medvezhye (southwest of Snagost and along the international border) and in another unspecified area along the international border.[9] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks south of Snagost near Apanasovka; east of Korenevo near Kremyanoye; and southeast of Sudzha near Cherkasskaya Konopelka, Fanaseyevka, and Borki.[10] It remains unclear how much force Ukraine has committed to the reported Ukrainian counterattack.

Available visual evidence suggests that Russian forces counterattacking in Kursk Oblast are operating in company-sized units and may be using elements of more combat-experienced units to conduct counterattacks. Geolocated footage published on September 10 shows elements of the Russian 51st Airborne (VDV) Regiment (106th VDV Division) conducting a company-seized mechanized assault north of Snagost.[11] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian naval infantry and airborne "battalion tactical groups" (BTGs) are conducting offensive operations in Kursk Oblast, although ISW has only observed geolocated footage of a company-sized mechanized assault.[12] The milblogger could be referring to a BTG-sized force (roughly a unit with the strength of a reinforced battalion but not necessarily operating in the structure of a traditional BTG), and Russian forces could theoretically deploy a detached company from a BTG. Russian forces notably have not utilized BTGs at scale on the battlefield since mid-2022, following the widespread failure of BTGs to accomplish Russian offensive objectives in the early stages of the war, as well as damage accrued to BTGs during costly Russian offensive operations on Kyiv, Severodonetsk, Mariupol, and Lysychansk.[13] The Russian military has transitioned away from using BTGs in the past two years as a task-organized unit and their re-emergence in Kursk Oblast, if confirmed, would be a noteworthy inflection.[14] ISW has not observed any confirmation that Russian forces in Kursk Oblast are operating BTG as of this publication. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division) and 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are operating in Kursk Oblast and involved in the counterattacks.[15] The Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade most notably participated in the failed Russian push for Vuhledar in late 2022 to early 2023, then fought southwest of Donetsk City near Marinka, and deployed to participate in the Russian offensive

north of Kharkiv City in May 2024 — largely without significant rest, and the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade has been degraded to the point of being reconstituted several times.[16] Elements of the 56th VDV Regiment participated in repelling Ukrainian counteroffensive operations near Verbove in Summer 2023 and were reportedly still operating in the area as of July 2024.[17] The Russian military may be relying on relatively combat-experienced units to conduct assault operations in Kursk Oblast, although it is unclear how effective these operations will be since these units, especially units which have been heavily degraded and reconstituted many times, like the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade. It is also unclear if Russian forces have enough forces necessary to fully repel Ukrainian forces — or defend against reported Ukrainian counterattacks — from Kursk Oblast since the Russian military command likely deployed elements of these units, instead of the entire formations, to Kursk Oblast, making it premature to assess the longer-term strategic-level effects of the Ukrainian incursion.

Russian forces may intend to temporarily bisect the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast before beginning a more organized and well-equipped effort to push Ukrainian forces out of Russian territory. Russian forces are currently conducting counterattacks along the western edge of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast, in an area that is largely comprised of fields and small settlements. Russian forces may be working to establish more tactically favorable positions during these initial counterattacks before beginning a wider counteroffensive operation against Ukrainian forces operating northeast of Korenevo and near Sudzha. Russian forces may intend to cut the Ukrainian salient and advance to the international border southeast of Snagost to complicate existing Ukrainian logistics routes and fire support positions closer to the international border before beginning a larger-scale counteroffensive operation. The Russian military command appears to be relying on elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade and 56th and 51st VDV regiments for these initial counterattacks but will likely introduce other elements of the Russian force grouping in this area in future counterattacks. It remains unclear if the Russian authorities responding to the Kursk incursion assess that the current Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast — largely comprised of conscripts, irregular Russian forces, and smaller elements of regular and more elite Russian units — can successfully push Ukrainian forces from the area. Russian authorities may also plan to transfer additional, more combat-capable Russian units from Ukraine to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, although it is unclear when Russian authorities may conduct such redeployments. It would be premature to assess the impact of two days of Russian counterattacks on the month-long Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, particularly amid ongoing Ukrainian cross-border assaults, and ISW will continue to evaluate the impact of the Russian counterattacks in the coming days.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy arrived in Kyiv on September 11 and reiterated support for Ukraine but did not clarify current Western policy on Ukraine's ability to strike military objects in Russia with Western-provided weapons.[18] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal met with Lammy on September 11 and emphasized that Ukraine is still waiting for permission from the UK to use UK-provided long-range weapons to strike military objects in Russia. Two unspecified US officials told CNN on September 11 that the Biden administration has not changed its policy of prohibiting Ukrainian forces from using US-provided ATACMS missiles to strike within Russia despite discussing the issue regularly. One unnamed senior administration official said that there is "no openness" to lifting these restrictions.[19] US President Joe Biden stated on September 10 that his administration was "working that out," when asked about potential plans to lift US restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range weapons in Russia.[20]

The People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to promote its alternative peace plan for the war in Ukraine. PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in St. Petersburg on September 11 and reiterated that the PRC will continue to promote its own vision to end Russia's war in Ukraine and will aim to convince other countries to support the PRC's peace plan.[21] Shoigu reiterated Russia's support for the joint PRC-Brazilian peace plan during the meeting.[22] PRC officials have routinely promoted the PRC-Brazilian peace plan and allowed Russian officials to posture themselves as willing to negotiate with Ukraine in good faith despite consistent Kremlin statements outright rejecting negotiations or otherwise indicating that Russia will only negotiate on terms that amount to complete Ukrainian capitulation.[23]

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterated his support for Ukraine on September 11. Erdogan gave a virtual speech to the Fourth Summit of the International Crimea Platform on September 11 in which he reiterated support for Ukraine's territorial sovereignty, independence, and autonomy and asserted that Crimea "must be returned" to Ukraine under international law.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces began counterattacks along the western edge of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast and reportedly seized several settlements northeast and south of Korenevo on September 10 and 11.
- Available visual evidence suggests that Russian forces counterattacking in Kursk Oblast are operating in company-sized units and may be using elements of more combat-experienced units to conduct counterattacks.
- Russian forces may intend to temporarily bisect the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast before beginning a more organized and well-equipped effort to push Ukrainian forces out of Russian territory.

- US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary Davit Lammy arrived in Kyiv on September 11 and reiterated support for Ukraine but did not clarify current Western policy on Ukraine's ability to strike military objects in Russia with Western-provided weapons
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to promote its alternative peace plan for the war in Ukraine.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterated his support for Ukraine on September 11.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupyansk, near Toretsk, and near Pokrovsk.
- Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vitaly Sarantsev reported on September 11 that Russian forces are replenishing their tactical, operational, and strategic reserves.
- Russian occupation authorities illegally held regional elections in occupied Crimea on September 6 to 8 and likely fabricated increased voter turnout numbers to claim that residents broadly support Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 10, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Haley Zehrung, and Karolina Hird

September 10, 2024, 8:15pm ET

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed on September 10 that Iran has sent short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to Russia amid growing international condemnation of Tehran's support for Russia's war in Ukraine.[1] Blinken confirmed that Russia has received an unspecified number of SRBM shipments from Iran and warned that Russian forces will likely use them on the battlefield "within weeks." Iranian officials continue to deny that Tehran has sent weapons to Moscow, however.[2] Blinken and United Kingdom (UK) Foreign Secretary David Lammy affirmed on September 10 that the US and UK are "completely aligned" on the need to tackle Iranian influence both in Ukraine and the Middle East.[3] France, Germany, and the UK jointly condemned Iran's SRBM deliveries and emphasized that they are taking steps to cancel bilateral air services with Iran (including by sanctioning Iranian national airline Iran Air), designate individuals and organizations involved in Iran's ballistic missile program and in the transfer of SRBMs to Russia, and sanction Russian cargo ships.[4] UK outlet *The Times*, citing Ukrainian intelligence sources, reported that Iran had delivered over 200 Fateh-360 SRBMs to Russia via a Caspian Sea port on September 4, and ISW continues to assess that Russia will use Iranian-supplied SRBMs to target Ukrainian critical infrastructure in the coming months, thus alleviating the strain on Russia's domestic missile production capacity.[5]

Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) continue to pursue various avenues of military-technical cooperation. US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell told *POLITICO* on September 10 that the PRC is giving Russia's defense industry "very substantial" support in exchange for secretive Russian military technologies.[6] Campbell emphasized that the PRC is not just supplying dual-use products to Russia but is instead engaged in a "substantial effort...to help sustain, build, and diversify elements of the Russian war machine." Campbell warned that Russia is sending the PRC safeguarded submarine, aeronautical design, and missile technologies in return, which Russia has previously been reluctant to share with Beijing. PRC officials continue to deny their support for the Russian war effort and claim that the PRC remains "impartial" when it comes to Russia's war in Ukraine, despite frequent Western reporting of the PRC's material support for Russian defense industrial output and geospatial intelligence capabilities.[7] Reports of more direct PRC support to Russia come against the backdrop of the Russia-led "Okean-2024" international naval exercises, which are currently taking place in the Pacific and Arctic oceans and Mediterranean, Caspian, and Baltic seas with the involvement of three ships, one vessel, and 15 aircraft of the PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA).[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the start of Okean-2024 on September 10 and accused the US of placing pressure on Russia and the PRC, necessitating the conduct of joint naval exercises.[9] PLA and Russian forces are also currently conducting the "Northern/Interaction-2024" joint "strategic collaboration" exercise, comprised of air force and naval drills in the Sea of Japan and Sea of Okhotsk, and a joint maritime patrol in the Pacific.[10]

Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes in Russia on the night of September 9 to 10. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces intercepted 144 Ukrainian drones in total, including 72 drones over Bryansk Oblast, 20 drones over Moscow Oblast, 14 drones over Kursk Oblast, 13 drones over Tula Oblast, eight drones over Belgorod Oblast, seven drones over Kaluga Oblast, five drones over Voronezh Oblast, four drones over Lipetsk Oblast, and one drone over Oryol Oblast.[11] Footage published on September 10 reportedly shows the aftermath of a drone strike in Ramenskoye, Moscow Oblast, and Ramenskoye Urban Raion Acting Head Eduard Malyshev claimed that Ukrainian drones damaged two buildings in the raion.[12] Moscow Oblast Governor Andrei Vorobyov claimed that Russian forces shot down 14 drones near Podolsk, Ramenskoye, Lyubertsy, Domodedovo, and Kolomna.[13] Domodedovo Urban Raion Head Yevgenia

Krustaleva claimed that falling drone debris blocked a section of the Kashirskoye Highway from Domodedovo to Moscow City.[14] Russian Federal Aviation Agency Rosaviatsiya stated that it introduced temporary restrictions at the Vnukovo, Domodedovo, and Zhukovsky airports near Moscow City and limited airport operations in Kazan, Tatarstan Republic in response to the drone strikes.[15] Tula Oblast authorities stated that drone debris fell on an unspecified fuel and energy facility in an unspecified location in Tula Oblast but did not damage the facility.[16] Russian milbloggers criticized Russian regional authorities for claiming that falling "debris" caused damage to infrastructure during the strikes and reiterated calls for Russian authorities to allow the Russian military, Rosgvardia, border guards, and private security companies to create mobile fire groups to repel drone strikes.[17]

US President Joe Biden stated on September 10 that the presidential administration is working on lifting restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to strike military objects within Russia.[18] Biden stated that his administration is "working that out now," in response to a question about whether the United States would lift restrictions prohibiting Ukraine from using US-provided long-range weapons to strike within Russia. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated earlier on September 10 during a press conference with UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy that Biden and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer will likely discuss lifting these restrictions during a meeting on September 13.[19] House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Michael McCaul stated on September 10 that he believes that Blinken will use the visit to Kyiv to inform Ukrainian officials that the United States will allow Ukrainian forces to use US-provided ATACMS missiles to strike within Russia.[20]

The Kremlin is reportedly allocating roughly 59 billion rubles (about \$648 million) to strengthen its technical ability to restrict internet traffic on its sovereign internet. *Forbes'* Russia service reported on September 9 that it obtained documents on Russia's federal "Cybersecurity Infrastructure" project detailing how Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor will spend 59 billion rubles between 2025 to 2030 to update its "technical means of countering threats" (TSPU) system, which the Kremlin uses to block certain websites.[21] The 59-billion-ruble budget is roughly 86 percent of the 68 billion rubles (about \$747 million) that the Kremlin is dedicating to the broader federal "Cybersecurity Infrastructure" project. This TSPU update will reportedly include the modernization of existing TSPU systems and installation of new TSPU systems to account for an increase in user traffic. *Forbes* noted that modernizing and increasing TSPU systems will increase Roskomnadzor's ability to block virtual private networks (VPNs), which Russians can use to bypass Roskomnadzor's restrictions on which websites they can view while in Russia. Roskomnadzor Head Andrei Lipov previously stated that Roskomnadzor finished equipping all communications nodes with TSPU as of September 2023, and Roskomnadzor's Main Radio Frequency Center's Center for Special Projects Head Sergei Temny stated in June 2024 that Roskomnadzor no longer purchases foreign equipment for TSPU and is working to replace existing foreign TSPU equipment with domestically produced alternatives.[22] Roskomnadzor has previously used TSPU to slow down access to X (formerly Twitter) and likely recently did the same for YouTube.[23] The Kremlin has recently intensified efforts to compel Russians to abandon Western social media sites in favor of Kremlin-approved alternatives, and strengthening TSPU supports technical aspects of this effort.[24] The Kremlin is likely trying to balance encouraging self-censorship as a self-deterrent among Russian ultranationalists and other critics of Russian authorities with imposing actual technical restrictions on the types of information and internet services that Russians can access.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **US Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed on September 10 that Iran has sent short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to Russia amid growing international condemnation of Tehran's support for Russia's war in Ukraine.**
- **Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) continue to pursue various avenues of military-technical cooperation.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes in Russia on the night of September 9 to 10.**
- **US President Joe Biden stated on September 10 that the presidential administration is working on lifting restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to strike military objects within Russia.**
- **The Kremlin is reportedly allocating roughly 59 billion rubles (about \$648 million) to strengthen its technical ability to restrict internet traffic on its sovereign internet.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in the area on September 10.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.**
- **The German-based Kiel Institute for the World Economy published a report on September 9 warning that Russia has significantly increased its defense industrial base (DIB) capabilities since 2022 and that depleting weapons and equipment stockpiles may not significantly impact future Russian DIB production.**

September 9, 2024, 8:10 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:15pm ET on September 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attended the Russia–Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Joint Ministerial Meeting of Strategic Dialogue in Saudi Arabia on September 9, likely as part of Kremlin efforts to advance the creation of its envisioned “Eurasian security architecture.”^[1] Lavrov held talks with GCC Secretary General Jassem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman on the sidelines of the Russia-GCC Strategic Dialogue and emphasized Russia's interest in enhancing cooperation with Gulf states.^[2] Lavrov and Saudi officials discussed strengthening trade, cultural relations, and bilateral investments, and Lavrov invited bin Salman to the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia in October 2024.^[3] Lavrov claimed in July 2024 that Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are advocating within the GCC for the creation of a Eurasian security architecture, and Lavrov likely used his meetings with Gulf state leaders to promote this agenda.^[4] ISW previously assessed that Russia's proposal of a Eurasian security architecture is consistent with Russia's long-term strategic goal of disbanding Western unity, disbanding NATO from within, and destroying the current world order.^[5]

Kremlin officials are likely trying to shape international peace mediation efforts in the war in Ukraine while demonstrating Russia's unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on the sidelines of the Russia-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting in Saudi Arabia on September 9.^[6] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed that Lavrov discussed the war in Ukraine with Vieira and Jaishankar but did not offer details.^[7] Brazil and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have promoted their “Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis” six-point peace plan — whose key principles favor Russia — since May 2024.^[8] Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi notably recently reaffirmed India's support for peace in Ukraine based on principles of international law such as respect for territorial integrity and the sovereignty of states.^[9] Lavrov, however, reiterated boilerplate Kremlin narratives on September 9 demonstrating Russia's unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine, claiming that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's Peace Formula — which is indeed based on principles of international law — is an “ultimatum” and that Russia has never seriously considered the plan.^[10] Ukrainian officials have openly invited a Russian representative to attend Ukraine's second peace summit later in 2024.^[11]

The Kremlin leveraged Russian regional elections from September 6 to 8 to integrate trusted Russian military veterans of the war in Ukraine into the Russian government, likely as part of an ongoing attempt to appease Russian servicemembers, boost domestic support for the war, and build out a cadre of Kremlin-affiliated local officials. Acting Secretary of Russia's ruling United Russia political party Vladimir Yakushev stated on September 9 that 308 of the total 380 Russian veterans (or 81 percent) who ran for various positions in regional Russian elections won.^[12] United Russia announced in July 2024 that it would nominate over 300 Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine, some of whom were participants of the Kremlin's “Time of Heroes” program to run in the elections, and Yakushev stated in August 2024 that United Russia's main priority was to support veteran candidates during the September 2024 election cycle.^[13] Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the Time of Heroes program in February 2024 to prepare Russian veterans to serve in the Russian government, and ISW assessed that the program may also aim to incentive Russians to fight in Ukraine by portraying Russian military service as a pathway to a government career.^[14]

The Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) announced on September 9 that former United Russia Secretary Andrei Turchak won the regional election in Altai Republic and officially became the head of the Altai Republic for the next five years.^[15] The Kremlin reportedly originally tasked Turchak with expanding the Time of Heroes program before the Russian presidential election in March 2024.^[16] Putin later demoted Turchak to acting head of Altai Republic — one of the most economically depressed regions in Russia over 4,000 kilometers from the Kremlin — possibly due to Putin's perception of Turchak's disloyalty in 2023 due to his prior affiliation with the Wagner Group and Turchak's failure to integrate veterans into the government.^[17] Several Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers publicly celebrated Turchak's electoral victory and highlighted his efforts to support the war.^[18] Turchak's electoral victory and the surrounding media campaign celebrating his accomplishments during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine may be part of the Kremlin's effort to advance the Time of Heroes program. The Kremlin may be attempting to rebrand United Russia as a leading party in veteran affairs to prepare Russian society for a long-term war effort by preempting the rise of alternative political parties or movements that could court Russian veterans. **The Time of Heroes program also indicates that the Kremlin is increasingly militarizing its society and government, which may have long-term implications on Russian domestic and foreign policy.**

The Kremlin refrained from replacing Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov during the Russian regional elections, likely in support of an ongoing effort to downplay the societal

impacts of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. The Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) announced on September 9 that Smirnov won the Kursk Oblast gubernatorial election with over 65 percent of the vote.[19] Sources close to the Kremlin told Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* that the Kremlin did not consider canceling the Kursk Oblast gubernatorial and local elections because such an approach would create panic in the region and undermine the Kremlin's efforts to condition Russians to accept the incursion as a "new normal." [20] CEC Chairperson Ella Pamfilova also claimed on September 7 that Kursk Oblast had one of the highest turnouts in the gubernatorial elections, likely as part of the Kremlin's effort to convince Russians that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has not impacted Russian society.[21] Russian President Vladimir Putin similarly claimed on September 5 that Ukraine intended for the incursion to divide Russian society but that the incursion instead further unified Russia — likely to undersell the implications of the incursion on Russia's territorial integrity and society.[22]

Ukrainian officials continue to warn that Russian forces are increasingly using chemical weapons in Ukraine. Ukraine's Support Forces Command reported on September 9 that Russian forces used ammunition equipped with dangerous chemicals and chemical agents 447 times in August 2024 and 4,035 times between February 15, 2023 and August 24, 2024.[23] The Ukrainian Support Forces Command stated that Russian forces are using K-51 and RG-VO gas grenades to deliver munitions containing banned chemical agents and are also using unidentified chemical compounds. Ukrainian officials, and a Russian military unit, have previously reported on increasingly common instances of Russian forces using chemical agents in combat that are banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a signatory.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attended the Russia-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Joint Ministerial Meeting of Strategic Dialogue in Saudi Arabia on September 9, likely as part of Kremlin efforts to advance the creation of its envisioned "Eurasian security architecture."
- Kremlin officials are likely trying to shape international peace mediation efforts in the war in Ukraine while demonstrating Russia's unwillingness to engage in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine.
- The Kremlin leveraged Russian regional elections from September 6 to 8 to integrate trusted Russian military veterans of the war in Ukraine into the Russian government, likely as part of an ongoing attempt to appease Russian servicemembers, boost domestic support for the war, and build out a cadre of Kremlin-affiliated local officials.
- The Kremlin refrained from replacing Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov during the Russian regional elections, likely in support of an ongoing effort to downplay the societal impacts of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian officials continue to warn that Russian forces are increasingly using chemical weapons in Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently regained lost positions in Kursk Oblast amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in the area on September 9.
- Russian forces recently advanced along the Kupyansk-Svatove line, near Siversk, near Pokrovsk, and southwest of Donetsk City, and Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Siversk.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin expanded Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov's powers on September 9 by allowing him to grant eligible parties within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) access to Russian state secrets (classified information).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 8, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

September 8, 2024, 5:45 pm ET

Central Intelligence Agency Director (CIA) William Burns cautioned the West against concern about boilerplate Russian nuclear saber-rattling, which ISW has long identified as part of a Kremlin effort to promote Western self-deterrence and influence key moments in Western policy debates about support for Ukraine. Burns stated during a panel with United Kingdom Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) Chief Richard Moore on September 7 that Russian President Vladimir Putin will continue to issue periodic threats of direct confrontation against the West but that these threats should not intimidate the West.[1] Burns stated that the CIA had assessed that Russian forces may have considered using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine in the fall of 2022 and that he was in contact with Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin on the matter. [2] The CIA's assessment of possible Russian readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine in the fall of 2022 corresponded with intensified Russian rhetoric about nuclear confrontation amid the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kherson and Kharkiv oblasts.[3] This rhetoric was likely more a part of a routine information operation designed to deter Western security assistance to Ukraine than an indicator of Russian readiness to use nuclear weapons, however.[4] The Kremlin has repeatedly invoked thinly veiled threats of a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West

during key moments in Western political discussions about further military assistance to Ukraine, such as in the fall of 2022, to induce fear among decision makers.[5] ISW continues to assess that Russia is very unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.[6]

Russian milbloggers continue to offer insights into how the Kremlin is co-opting select milbloggers to regulate the spread of information in Russia. Prominent Russian milblogger Alexander Sladkov claimed on September 7 that former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his team in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) punished milbloggers, including Sladkov, for being "too frank and harsh" about Russian military failures and disasters.[7] Sladkov claimed that the Russian Main Military Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal case against him for discrediting the Russian military at an unspecified time, presumably several months ago during Shoigu's tenure in the Russian MoD. Sladkov implied, however, that the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, for which Sladkov works as a war correspondent, and the Russian Presidential Administration stopped the case and "protected" him. Sladkov claimed that Russian MoD officials under Shoigu, many of whom Russian authorities have arrested for bribery and fraud in recent months, were hypocritically trying to teach milbloggers how to "act morally" and "state-like." Sladkov complained that Russian MoD officials were trying to punish milbloggers despite the fact that select milbloggers had personally met with Russian President Vladimir Putin four times to inform Putin about issues on the frontline and within the Russian MoD. Sladkov claimed that milbloggers "breathed a sigh of relief" with the appointment of current Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, whom Sladkov praised for "seriously increasing" the Russian military's capabilities. Sladkov's anecdote and mention of the Russian Presidential Administration imply that the Kremlin intervened and spared Sladkov (and other Russian milbloggers) from criminal prosecution, likely as part of a Kremlin effort to co-opt pliable milbloggers who tended to be critical of the Russian state's conduct of the war in Ukraine, to ensure that they do not pose a liability to the Kremlin in the future.[8] The Kremlin began an effort to co-opt pliable Russian milbloggers in late 2022 and continues to use awards to co-opt Russian milbloggers and buy their loyalty.[9] The Russian state-funded Union of Journalists awarded Russian milblogger Yevgeny Poddubny with the Solidarity Prize on September 8 for "demonstrating courage" while exposed to danger during professional duties and for "demonstrating a civic position in defending the freedom of speech." [10] ISW assessed in 2022 and 2023 that the Kremlin was trying to co-opt Sladkov and Poddubny, both of whom previously had been more critical of the Russian military's failures in Ukraine before being co-opted.[11]

The Kremlin has not yet succeeded in co-opting or silencing all Russian milbloggers, however. Another Russian milblogger, who is often openly critical of the Kremlin and Russian MoD, posted three since-deleted videos on September 8 in which he claimed that "traitors are sitting in the Kremlin" and that Russian authorities have "removed" and imprisoned "inconvenient people," such as imprisoned ardent nationalist and former Russian officer Igor Girkin.[12] The administration that runs the milblogger's channel later posted an audio recording on September 8, claiming that the milblogger was emotional due to his strong nationalism.[13] The administration claimed that most Russians in private have said something to "discredit" others, likely in an attempt to prevent Russian authorities from charging the milblogger with discrediting the Russian military.

The milbloggers' insights into such incidents suggest that the Kremlin is attempting to co-opt milbloggers or encourage them to self-censor, as opposed to a more aggressive policy of direct censorship. The initial publication of the milblogger's critical videos demonstrates how the Kremlin has not been successful at co-opting or silencing the entire Russian information space, but the channel's later retraction of the videos suggests that the Kremlin has been successful at coercing milbloggers (and their administrative teams) to self-censor out of fear of punishment. Sladkov's claims about the Russian Presidential Administration's intervention into his case and Putin's attention to milblogger complaints further suggest that Putin did not support the Russian MoD's previous attempts to directly censor milbloggers, preferring a policy aimed at co-opting prominent milbloggers, likely in order to maintain a veneer of freedom of speech in Russia and prevent an inadvertent viral spread of explicitly censored dissident material. ISW recently assessed that the Kremlin will likely continue its efforts to establish full control over the Russian information space in the future but is still sensitive to the sentiments of the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community.[14]

The Russian Investigative Committee is investigating a "mass brawl" between Russian ultranationalists and Central Asian residents in Afipsky, Krasnodar Krai, amid increased xenophobia against migrants and ethnic minorities in Russia. The Investigative Committee stated on September 8 that its Krasnodar Krai office is investigating a mass brawl in Afipsky between local residents and "people of non-Slavic appearance." [15] Footage published on September 8 purportedly from the incident in Afipsky shows a large crowd of people and limited fighting.[16] The regional Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) reported that law enforcement detained 43 people at the scene of the fight.[17] Russian opposition outlet *SOTA* noted that the Russian ultranationalist online community "Russian Sword," which espouses xenophobia against migrants and ethnic minorities in Russia, promoted the incident and likely influenced more ultranationalists to join the crowd. *SOTA* also reported that a subscriber to the Russian Sword online community claimed that Russian authorities conducted a raid against migrant communities after the brawl.[18] *SOTA* noted that members of another Russian far-right ultranationalist online community, the "Russian Community," have previously organized demonstrations against migrants.[19] *BBC Russian Service* reported in June 2024 that affiliates of Russian *Tsargrad* outlet founder and Russian Orthodox nationalist Konstantin Malofeev founded the "Russian Community" project in late 2020.[20]

Ukrainian officials continued to announce a series of appointments among senior members of the Ukrainian cabinet on September 8. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed presidential decrees on September 8 appointing Iryna Vereshchuk and Viktor Mykyta to the positions of Deputy Heads of the Presidential Office and appointing Oleksandr Kamyshin and Dmytro Lytvyn as his advisors.[21] Kamyshin will advise Zelensky on strategic issues, and Lytvyn will advise him on communications. Zelensky reassigned Mykyta from his previous position as the Head of the Zakarpattia Oblast Military Administration on September 8 and Vereshchuk resigned from her previous post as Ukrainian Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories (TOT) on September 3.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Central Intelligence Agency Director (CIA) William Burns cautioned the West against concern about boilerplate Russian nuclear saber-rattling, which ISW has long identified as part of a Kremlin effort to promote Western self-deterrence and influence key moments in Western policy debates about support for Ukraine.
- Russian milbloggers continue to offer insights into how the Kremlin is co-opting select milbloggers to regulate the spread of information in Russia.
- The Kremlin has not yet succeeded in co-opting or silencing all Russian milbloggers, however.
- The milbloggers' insights into such incidents suggest that the Kremlin is attempting to co-opt milbloggers or encourage them to self-censor, as opposed to a more aggressive policy of direct censorship.
- The Russian Investigative Committee is investigating a "mass brawl" between Russian ultranationalists and Central Asian residents in Afipsky, Krasnodar Krai, amid increased xenophobia against migrants and ethnic minorities in Russia.
- Ukrainian officials continued to announce a series of appointments among senior members of the Ukrainian cabinet on September 8.
- Russian forces conducted counterattacks in Kursk Oblast amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in the area on September 8.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and marginally advanced near Chasiv Yar.
- A Russian milblogger who formerly served as a "Storm-Z" unit instructor claimed on September 8 that the Russian military needs to improve the training of drone unit commanders.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 7, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Riley Bailey, and Kateryna Stepanenko

September 7, 2024, 5:20pm ET

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

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov noted that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast is having theater-wide impacts on Russian offensive operations in Ukraine and addressed the prospects for continued Russian offensive operations in Winter 2024–2025. Budanov stated during an interview published on September 7 that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast complicated Russia's plans for offensive operations in August 2024 and later this fall.[1] Budanov noted that the Russian military command is committing any available manpower and equipment to achieve their objective in Russia's "main direction," likely referring to the seizure of Pokrovsk, and that Russian forces are focusing their attention on this direction. Russian forces recently intensified offensive operations and made further advances near Pokrovsk and west and southwest of Donetsk City, but ISW has not observed intensified Russian offensive operations in other frontline areas in Ukraine.[2] The Russian military command has almost certainly decided to prioritize Russian advances near Pokrovsk and is committing available manpower and materiel to the area at the expense of Russian offensive operations in other directions.[3] A Russian milblogger claimed that manpower constraints are forcing the Russian military command to adjust their plans in Donetsk and Kursk oblasts and that Russian officials do not have a "systemic solution" to generate the forces necessary to reinforce offensive operations in Ukraine and repel Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[4] The milblogger noted that Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction have begun to slow as Russian units are suffering personnel losses and are increasingly understaffed and that Russian forces are continuing offensive operations in the area despite being "exhausted." [5] The Russian military command will likely be able to funnel enough forces into the area to continue Russia's ongoing offensive operations and possibly eventually seize Pokrovsk, although Russian forces may culminate before seizing the city.[6]

Budanov noted during the interview that winter weather conditions will likely complicate Russian offensive operations in the coming months, but that this does not mean that Russian forces will completely stop assaults on Ukrainian positions.[7] The fall mud season has historically hampered Russian and Ukrainian ground maneuver, but periods of prolonged freezing temperatures that typically begin in late December freeze the ground and allow armored vehicles to move more easily than in autumn and spring months.[8] Russian forces notably fought to seize the initiative and pursued offensive operations in Fall 2023 during the most challenging weather conditions of the year instead of waiting for improved weather conditions later in Winter 2023–2024, however.[9] Fall and winter weather conditions will likely complicate Russian and Ukrainian battlefield activity but are very unlikely to completely stall activity along the frontline.

Iran reportedly recently delivered more than 200 Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.[10] UK outlet *The Times*, citing a Ukrainian military intelligence source, reported on September 6 that a Russian ship delivered the Fateh-360 missiles to an undisclosed port in the Caspian Sea on September 4. US and European officials recently confirmed that Iran began supplying Russia with short-range ballistic missiles, and ISW assessed that Russian forces will likely use the Iranian-supplied missiles to target Ukrainian energy, military, and civilian infrastructure over the coming fall and winter.[11]

Ukraine continues to successfully adapt and develop its anti-drone capabilities, allowing Ukrainian forces to leverage lower-end systems to offset Russian pressures on Ukraine's limited air defense umbrella. Ukrainian military analyst Petro Chernyk stated on September 7 that Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) systems are disrupting radar-guided Shahed-136/131 drones, causing the drones to change course and crash after running out of fuel.[12] Ukrainian officials have recently reported that some Russian Shahed drones have not reached their targets for unspecified reasons, but the Ukrainian Air Force acknowledged on August 31 and September 6 that Ukrainian EW affected the drones.[13] Ukrainian drone production company Besomir stated on September 7 that it developed an interceptor drone that can shoot down unspecified Russian drones and that Ukrainian forces are already using these interceptor drones in the combat zone.[14] ISW has also recently observed reports of Ukrainian forces using first-person view (FPV) drones to down Russian helicopters and reconnaissance and strike drones.[15] These Ukrainian countermeasures are part of wider efforts aimed at offsetting the pressure that repeated, large-scale Russian strike series exert on Ukraine's limited air defense umbrella in the face of delayed and inconsistent deliveries of Western security assistance.[16] Ukraine's use of EW to counter Shahed drones will notably allow Ukrainian forces to conserve the limited air defense systems and missiles that Ukraine needs to protect against Russian missile strikes targeting Ukrainian frontline areas, critical infrastructure, and major population centers. ISW continues to assess that Russian and Ukrainian forces are engaged in a technological offense-defense race and that Ukraine's ability to field technological innovations at scale ahead of Russian adaptations is crucial for Ukraine's ability to offset Russia's current materiel advantages.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov noted that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast is having theater-wide impacts on Russian offensive operations in Ukraine and addressed the prospects for continued Russian offensive operations in Winter 2024–2025.**
- **Iran reportedly recently delivered more than 200 Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.**
- **Ukraine continues to successfully adapt and develop its anti-drone capabilities, allowing Ukrainian forces to leverage lower-end systems to offset Russian pressures on Ukraine's limited air defense umbrella.**
- **Russian forces recently regained territory and Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Kursk Oblast amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in the area on September 7.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City and in the Dnipro River Delta.**
- **Russian officers continue to mistreat and abuse their subordinates likely due to poor command training and discipline.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 6, 2024

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

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

September 6, 2024, 9pm ET

US and European officials reported that Iran delivered hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles to Russia to support Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.[1] An anonymous US official confirmed to the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) that Iran delivered the missiles to Russia and a senior European official stated that more shipments of Iranian missiles to Russia are

expected.[2] Iran and Russia previously signed a contract in December 2023 to send Iranian Ababil close-range ballistic missiles and Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.[3] It is unclear, however, exactly what kind of missiles are included in the recently delivered shipment to Russia. *Reuters* reported on July 7 that Iran expanded at least two of its defense industrial sites outside Tehran since August and October 2023 to support the production of drones and missiles, some of which are meant to go to Russia.[4] Russia recently intensified missile and drone attacks against Ukraine, notably continuing to use Iranian-developed Shahed-131/136 drones and North Korean ballistic missiles.[5] Russia will likely use Iranian-provided ballistic missiles to target Ukrainian energy, military, and civilian infrastructure over the coming fall and winter to further destabilize Ukrainian society and disrupt Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).

The transfer of Iranian ballistic missiles is part of the deepening strategic partnership between Iran and Russia. CTP-ISW has reported extensively on how Moscow and Tehran have expanded their economic, media, military, and political cooperation since Russian forces launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[6] Iran seeks to benefit economically and militarily from its expanding partnership with Russia. Iran has sought cash for its ailing economy in return for selling weapons to the Kremlin, as CTP-ISW reported in September 2023.[7] Iran has also sought to procure Russian Su-35 fighter jets and Iranian officials "pressed" Russia for the delivery of Su-35s during a meeting with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in Tehran in August 2024.[8] The acquisition of Su-35s could enable Iran to more readily and independently project air power, given that the current Iranian air fleet is outdated and poorly maintained.[9] Iranian leaders have separately sought Russian support in upgrading their cyber capabilities and missile and space programs as part of the expanding military collaboration.[10] The United States and unspecified European countries have reportedly prepared a sanctions package against Iran for this contingency.[11]

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated on September 6 that no specific weapon would be a "game changer" for Ukraine and that allowing Ukrainian forces to use US-provided weapons for long-range strikes against Russian military targets within Russia would not change the status of the war.[12] Austin is correct that no single weapon system will change the course of the war, but his comments ignore how weapon systems and their accompanying rules of engagement do affect Ukrainian capabilities, and that changes in capabilities can change the course of wars. Western military assistance remains crucial for Ukraine's ability to defend itself, and Austin's statement ignores the Ukrainian long-range strike capability requirement necessary to disrupt Russian rear staging areas. Austin reiterated a Biden Administration talking point that since Russia has moved aircraft conducting glide bomb strikes out of range of US-provided ATACMS missiles, it somehow renders Ukraine's request to use ATACMS in Russian territory against hundreds of known stationary military objects moot.[13] ISW has previously noted there are at least 209 of 245 (over 85 percent) known Russian military objects in range of ATACMS that are not air bases and not within range of US-provided HIMARS that the US does allow Ukraine to use in Russia under limited circumstances.[14] Austin also argued that Ukraine has its own domestically produced capabilities that can attack Russian targets well beyond the range of Western-provided Storm Shadow cruise missiles.[15] Most of Ukraine's long-range strike capabilities come from domestically produced long-range drones, which Ukraine cannot use to cause the same level of damage as long-range missiles due to drone payload limitations. Russian forces can also more easily harden facilities against Ukrainian drones than Western-provided missiles. Ukraine has begun to produce and successfully field long-range precision weapons with payloads more comparable to Western-provided long-range missiles but currently lacks the quantity of these domestically produced systems to significantly threaten Russian military targets within Russia at scale.[16]

Ukraine therefore can only use a limited number of domestically produced long-range strike systems and Western-provided HIMARS to significantly threaten a limited number of Russian military objects within Russia. This scarcity is not reflective of all the long-range strike capabilities that Ukraine possesses, and Western decision-making continues to artificially suppress Ukraine's overall long-range strike capability. ISW has assessed at length that long-range strikes against Russian military targets within Russia would degrade Russia's ability to leverage sanctuary space in Russia for offensive operations in Ukraine and place significant operational pressures on the deployment of Russian air defense, electronic warfare (EW), logistics, command and control (C2), and military support assets.[17] Russia, on the contrary, continues to actively expand its ability to maintain deep precision strikes against Ukraine by increasingly procuring ballistic missiles from Iran and North Korea, and continuing to expand its missile production.[18]

Ukraine's Western partners pledged additional military aid to Ukraine during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Airbase in Germany on September 6, a significant portion of which will reportedly not be delivered in the immediate future. The US Department of Defense (DOD) announced that it will provide an aid package for Ukraine worth \$250 million from the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), which includes missiles for RIM-7 anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems; Stinger missiles, HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery shells; Tube-Launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Bradley infantry fighting vehicles; and M113 armored personnel carriers.[19] United Kingdom (UK) Defense Secretary John Healey announced that the UK will provide Ukraine with 650 Lightweight Multirole Missiles (LMM) worth £162 million (about \$212 million) in order to strengthen Ukraine's air defense capabilities.[20] Healey stated that the UK expects to deliver the LLMs by the end of 2024. German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius announced a new military aid package for Ukraine worth 150 million euros (about \$166 million), including 12

Panzerhaubitze 2000 self-propelled howitzers – six of which Germany will deliver in 2024 and six of which will arrive in 2025.[21] Pistorius also stated that Germany will deliver 77 Leopard 1A5 tanks "as quickly as possible." Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced that Canada will send 80,840 CRV-7 rocket motors, 1,300 unspecified warheads, 970 C6 machine guns, and 10,500 9mm pistols to Ukraine and that the rocket motors will arrive in the coming months.[22] Blair also stated that Canada will provide decommissioned chassis from 29 M113 and 64 Coyote LAV armored personnel carriers that Ukraine can use for spare parts. Blair stated that 10 of the 50 armored combat support vehicles (ACSVs) that Canada donated to Ukraine in June 2024 will arrive in Ukraine in September 2024 and that the remaining 40 will begin arriving in Spring 2025. Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Brekelmans stated that the Netherlands will provide Ukraine with 80 million euros (about \$88 million) worth of maintenance equipment, spare parts, and air-to-air missiles for Ukraine's F-16 aircraft but did not specify a timeline for delivery.[23] Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles announced the immediate dispatch of a complete HAWK air defense system battery, including six missile launchers that Spain donated to Ukraine and that are already in Poland.[24]

Russian forces are increasingly executing surrendering Ukrainian soldiers throughout the frontline likely in part because Russian commanders appear to be endorsing the proliferation of such war crimes. *CNN* reported on September 6 that it obtained footage showing Russian forces executing surrendering Ukrainian soldiers near Pokrovsk, Donetsk Oblast in late August 2024 and Zaporizhia Oblast in May 2024.[25] Ukrainian defense intelligence reportedly gave *CNN* transcripts of audio intercepts from the May 2024 execution that showed that a Russian commander gave his subordinates the order to kill the surrendering Ukrainian soldiers. Ukrainian defense intelligence sources also reportedly gave *CNN* a list of 15 cases of Russian forces executing surrendering Ukrainian soldiers on the frontline since November 2023 - most of which included supporting drone footage or audio intercepts, and an anonymous Ukrainian official told *CNN* that the "pattern" of such executions has increased in 2024. Ukraine's Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin told *CNN* that the Prosecutor General's office has investigated at least 28 such executions since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Kostin stated that different Russian units operating in different sectors of the front have committed these crimes leading Ukraine to assert that this Russian policy could amount to crimes against humanity. A United Nations (UN) investigative source told *CNN* that the "pattern" of these Russian executions "suggests complacency, if not orders to give no quarter" and that together they could amount to crimes against humanity. Attacking soldiers who are *hors de combat*, specifically those who have clearly expressed an intention to surrender, is a violation of Article 41 of the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Victims of International Arms Conflict.[26] ISW has extensively reported on previous footage and reports of Russian servicemembers executing Ukrainian prisoners of war (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.[27]

Russian officials attempted to use a meeting with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to pursue longstanding efforts to legitimize Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and Zaporizhia Oblast, while also promoting false narratives about a Ukrainian threat to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) to weaken Western support for Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. Grossi met with Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom CEO Alexei Likhachev; Russian Chief of the Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Protection (CBRN) Forces Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov; and representatives from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Defense (MoD), and the Russian Federal Service for Environmental, Technological and Nuclear Supervision (Rostekhnadzor) in Kaliningrad Oblast on September 6.[28] Likhachev repeatedly accused Ukrainian forces of threatening the safety of the ZNPP and KNPP and claimed that Ukrainian forces are targeting ZNPP employees and occupation officials operating near the ZNPP.[29] The Kremlin routinely accuses Ukraine of endangering the Russian-occupied ZNPP and extended this information operation to the KNPP shortly after Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[30] The Kremlin aims to convince the IAEA and the West that Ukrainian forces pose a threat and could cause a radiological incident at the KNPP in order to encourage Western fears about continued Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast and weaken Western support for the incursion.[31] The Kremlin has long sought to use Russia's physical control over the ZNPP to force the IAEA to meet with Russian officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the ZNPP, and by extension, Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory.[32]

Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor published and immediately deleted a draft procedure to implement a recently adopted law designed to deanonymize Russian Telegram channels, possibly after receiving backlash from the Russian ultranationalist Telegram community. The published draft document appeared on the Russian federal portal of legal acts on September 5, before promptly disappearing from the website overnight on September 6.[33] The deleted draft stated that Russian social media bloggers and Telegram channels with over 10,000 followers would be required to provide their personal information, such as their names, phone numbers, email, and IP addresses, to Roskomnadzor in accordance with the new federal law that Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into effect on August 9.[34] The deleted draft stated that these procedures would come into force in November 2024. Roskomnadzor later told Russian state outlet *RBK* that it deleted the draft after it was "prematurely" published due to a technical error.[35] Russian milbloggers immediately criticized the draft on September 5 and 6, stating that these procedures would threaten milbloggers' safety due to potential data leaks and observed that the law had already "scared" many independent bloggers away – leaving behind only well-funded and foreign Telegram channels.[36] Some Russian milbloggers

claimed that Russian officials may have rushed the draft to meet a certain deadline and speculated that Roskomnadzor deleted the draft following a backlash online to further revise it for a later publication.[37] One milblogger forecasted that the Kremlin will directly mandate authorization and deanonymization of all Internet users in Russia by the end of the 2020s.[38] The sudden deletion of the draft suggests that the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community still has some influence over the Kremlin's decisions and that the Kremlin continues to fear backlash from this community.

The Kremlin signaled its commitment to establish full control over the Russian information space in the future and will likely reattempt to deanonymize Russian social media and Telegram channels even though Roskomnadzor withdrew its recently proposed regulations for now. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on September 5 that censorship is justified during periods of war and implied that freedom of information would return in peacetime.[39] Peskov also added that Russian media outlets often compete with international media for Russian domestic audiences and argued that Russian content and technological means should not lag in such a "tough" information environment. The Kremlin passed a law in 2014 that tasked Roskomnadzor with creating a registry of all social media users with an audience of over 3,000 people, but Roskomnadzor stopped updating this registry by 2017 and instead created a list of "information dissemination organizers." [40] These "information dissemination organizers" include social media platforms and websites that were visited by more than 500,000 Russian users per day such as Yandex, VK, HeadHunter, and Qiwi. Roskomnadzor's recent reversal is not indicative of a permanent policy shift, as the Kremlin has passed laws and regulations that Russian milbloggers have vocally opposed before. The Kremlin recently passed laws that Russian milbloggers avidly scrutinized in the past, such as banning the use of personal cell phone devices on the frontlines in Ukraine, for example.[41]

The Kremlin continues to appoint Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko to positions overseeing Russia's informational efforts as part of efforts aimed at shaping Russian identity and ideology. Russian President Vladimir Putin created the "Rossiya" National Center in Moscow on July 1 to preserve the "Rossiya" ("Russia") Exhibition and Forum that ran from November 2023 to July 2024.[42] Putin signed a decree on September 6 creating an organizing committee for the "Rossiya" National Center, which will "demonstrate [Russia's] achievements, strengthen national identity,...create a sense of pride for the country, [and] develop the professional skills of children and youth." [43] Putin appointed Kiriyenko as the chairperson of the center's organizing committee, which will plan the center's activities, propose events that include representatives of foreign governments, and assist Russian media with their coverage of the center's events. Kiriyenko has a prominent role overseeing multiple Kremlin information operations targeting Russian, Ukrainian, and Western information spaces, and his appointment to supervise the development of the center suggests that the center will play a role in shaping domestic and foreign perceptions of Russia.[44] The "Rossiya" National Center will likely continue these informational efforts to legitimize Russia's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories and to promote Russia's justification of its war against Ukraine. The eight-month-long "Rossiya" exhibition forum featured exhibits claiming that Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts are part of Russia.[45] The Kremlin has recently appeared to be taking steps to codify a Russian state ideology while bypassing the Russian Constitution, which forbids Russia from establishing a state ideology, by vaguely defining Russia's "traditional values," and the "Rossiya" National Center's emphasis on Russia's "national identity" will likely further these Kremlin ideological efforts.[46]

Russia continues efforts to develop a capability to use information operations on social media platforms to trigger kinetic activity and has been using the Ukrainian information space for several years to hone this capability.[47] The US Department of Justice (DOJ) announced on September 4 the ongoing seizure of 32 internet domains that the Russian government used in foreign malign influence campaigns called "Doppelganger." [48] Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko directed the campaigns, which promoted Russian propaganda in order to reduce Western support for Ukraine and influence US and foreign elections. The US DOJ stated that the Doppelganger campaigns registered domain names that imitated Western media websites in order to publish Russian narratives falsely presented as content from legitimate news outlets. The Doppelganger campaigns also used "sleepers" channels on social media claiming to be Ukrainian news outlets that would start to disseminate Russian-friendly information after spending at least four months developing trust among their Ukrainian audiences. The US DOJ noted that the Kremlin developed the tactic of using "sleepers" channels after many Ukrainians started rejecting messages that favored Russia during the war. The US DOJ reported that the "Morning Dagestan" Telegram channel, which the DOJ labeled as "anti-Russian," is the most "famous recent" example of such a "sleepers" channel. The "Morning Dagestan" channel notably promoted rumors that sparked antisemitic riots at the Makhachkala airport in the Republic of Dagestan in October 2023.[49] The description of the Doppelganger campaigns' tactics, particularly the use of "sleepers" channels to provoke riots, indicates that the Kremlin is developing ways to trigger kinetic activity via information operations promoted on social media platforms, and the current Ukrainian information space offers the West the best opportunity to study this latent, growing Russian threat.

Key Takeaways:

- **US and European officials reported that Iran delivered hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles to Russia to support Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.**

- The transfer of Iranian ballistic missiles is part of the deepening strategic partnership between Iran and Russia.
- US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated on September 6 that no specific weapon would be a "game changer" for Ukraine and that allowing Ukrainian forces to use US-provided weapons for long-range strikes against Russian military targets within Russia would not change the status of the war.
- Austin is correct that no single weapon system will change the course of the war, but his comments ignore how weapon systems and their accompanying rules of engagement do affect Ukrainian capabilities, and that changes in capabilities can change the course of wars. Western military assistance remains crucial for Ukraine's ability to defend itself, and Austin's statement ignores the Ukrainian long-range strike capability requirement necessary to disrupt Russian rear staging areas.
- Ukraine's Western partners pledged additional military aid to Ukraine during the Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein Airbase in Germany on September 6, a significant portion of which will reportedly not be delivered in the immediate future.
- Russian forces are increasingly executing surrendering Ukrainian soldiers throughout the frontline likely in part because Russian commanders appear to be endorsing the proliferation of such war crimes.
- Russian officials attempted to use a meeting with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to pursue longstanding efforts to legitimize Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and Zaporizhia Oblast, while also promoting false narratives about a Ukrainian threat to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) to weaken Western support for Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor published and immediately deleted a draft procedure to implement a recently adopted law designed to deanonymize Russian Telegram channels, possibly after receiving backlash from the Russian ultranationalist Telegram community.
- The Kremlin signaled its commitment to establish full control over the Russian information space in the future and will likely reattempt to deanonymize Russian social media and Telegram channels even though Roskomnadzor withdrew its recently proposed regulations for now.
- The Kremlin continues to appoint Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko to positions overseeing Russia's informational efforts as part of efforts aimed at shaping Russian identity and ideology.
- Russia continues efforts to develop a capability to use information operations on social media platforms to trigger kinetic activity and has been using the Ukrainian information space for several years to hone this capability.
- Russian forces recently regained lost positions in Kursk Oblast amid continued fighting throughout the Ukrainian salient on September 6.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Pokrovsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk.
- Open-source tracking of confirmed Russian military deaths in Ukraine suggests that more Russian volunteers have died in Ukraine than Russian convict recruits and mobilized personnel.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 5, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 5, 2024, 8:30 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on September 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces have recently intensified their longstanding offensive effort to eliminate the broad Ukrainian salient west and southwest of Donetsk City and advance up to and along the H-15 (Donetsk City-Zaporizhzhia City) highway. Apparently coordinated Russian offensive operations from the southern flank of the Pokrovsk direction to the western flank of the Ukrainian defense around Vuhledar likely aim to increase pressure on Ukrainian forces defending in western Donetsk Oblast and set conditions for further gains in Russia's prioritized offensive effort in the Pokrovsk direction. Russian forces have recently significantly intensified their offensive operations near Vuhledar as of September 1 (southwest of Donetsk City) and have so far made marginal tactical gains in the area.[1] Geolocated footage published on September 5 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced into central Prechystivka (west of Vuhledar) during a roughly company-sized mechanized assault.[2] Additional geolocated footage published on September 5 shows reported elements of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) raising a Russian flag in northwestern Prechystivka, indicating that Russian forces have likely seized the settlement.[3] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from Zolota Nyva (immediately west of Prechystivka) and that Russian forces are continuing to advance in the area.[4] Geolocated footage published on September 5 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced immediately east of Vuhledar near the Pivdennodonbaska Mine No.

1.[5] A Ukrainian open-source account published additional footage showing Russian forces conducting several platoon-sized mechanized assaults near Makarivka (south of Velyka Novosilka and west of Vuhledar) and Prechystivka in recent days.[6] The Ukrainian account stated that elements of the Russian 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army [CAA], EMD), 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, EMD), and 218th Tank Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, EMD) attacked near Makarivka and that elements of the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade, 5th Tank Brigade (36th CAA, EMD), 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th CAA, EMD), and 430th Motorized Rifle Regiment (likely a mobilized unit) are attacking near Prechystivka.[7] Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged the intensified Russian offensive operations in the area during a speech at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai on September 5, claiming that the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces (responsible for the front roughly from Vuhledar to Hulyaipole) seized "a triangle" of territory five to seven kilometers deep on September 3.[8]

Russian forces are conducting relatively intensified offensive operations elsewhere southwest and west of Donetsk City, and the intensification of Russian offensive operations near Vuhledar likely does not presage decreased Russian offensive tempo elsewhere in western Donetsk Oblast in the near-term. A Ukrainian airborne brigade operating southwest of Donetsk City published footage on September 4 of Ukrainian forces repelling a reinforced company-sized Russian mechanized assault comprised of four tanks and 17 armored combat vehicles near Kostyantynivka.[9] Russian forces intensified both the regularity and size of mechanized assaults west and southwest of Donetsk City in late July 2024 and have since routinely conducted relatively large mechanized assaults in the area — although these assaults have only resulted in marginal tactical gains.[10] Russian forces appeared to initially intensify offensive operations southwest of Donetsk City in late July in order to achieve their longstanding tactical objective of cutting the 0-0532 (Kostyantynivka-Vuhledar) highway, but have since continued large mechanized assaults in the area after achieving this objective.[11] Intensified Russian efforts to exploit gains in the Pokrovsk direction and Russian redeployments in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast have yet to disrupt the Russian offensive tempo west and southwest of Donetsk City, however. Continued large and costly Russian mechanized assaults suggest that the Russian military command has tasked elements of both the Eastern and Southern Grouping of Forces in the area with a wider operational objective.

Russian forces intensified offensive operations near Vuhledar shortly after starting to widen the southern flank of the Pokrovsk salient, suggesting that Russian forces intend to conduct mutually reinforcing offensive operations along the southern flank of the Pokrovsk direction, immediately west of Donetsk City, along the 0-0532 highway, and near Vuhledar. Russian forces began an immediate tactical effort in late August 2024 along the Selydove-Ukrainisk-Hirnyk line southeast of Pokrovsk aimed at widening Russia's salient in the Pokrovsk direction and eliminating the salient's vulnerabilities to Ukrainian counterattacks.[12] Russian forces have already succeeded in partially widening the southern section of the Pokrovsk salient and are continuing efforts to tactically envelop limited Ukrainian positions in rural areas east of Hirnyk and north of Krasnohorivka. Russian forces have reportedly advanced to the outskirts of Ukrainisk and are approaching the outskirts of Hirnyk, and the seizure of these towns would allow Russian forces to assault Kurakhove — a significant Ukrainian defensive node for the front west and southwest of Donetsk City — from the north as well as from the east from Krasnohorivka and Maksymilianivka. Russia's intensification near Vuhledar likely aims to pressure the western flank of the Ukrainian defense in the area west and southwest of Donetsk as Russian forces approach Kurakhove on the eastern flank. Russian offensive operations along the 0-0532 highway between Kostyantynivka and Vuhledar offer Russian forces avenues for advance that would support both an effort to seize Kurakhove to the north and Russian efforts to envelop and seize Vuhledar to the west. Russian forces conducted a failed offensive effort in western Donetsk Oblast in Winter 2022–2023 characterized by mass frontal mechanized assaults against Vuhledar itself, but Russian forces now appear to be pursuing gradual advances along multiple mutually supporting lines of advance — a Russian campaign design that has become more common as the Russian military has abandoned attempts at operationally significant break throughs through mechanized maneuver.[13]

The Russian military command likely aims for the intended seizure of Kurakhove and Vuhledar to allow Russian forces to make more rapid tactical gains up to and along the H-15 highway, although Russian forces will likely face challenges in leveraging the envisioned seizure of these settlements to eliminate the broad Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast. The envisioned Russian seizure of Vuhledar would remove a Ukrainian strongpoint that Ukrainian forces have successfully leveraged to prevent Russian efforts to advance to the H-15 highway from the south, although seizing Vuhledar will not be the decisive factor for whether Russian forces can reach the highway. Vuhledar is 23 kilometers south of the H-15 highway, and the area between Vuhledar and the highway is mainly comprised of open fields that would require Russian forces to conduct successful mechanized assaults to make more rapid tactical gains. Intensified Russian mechanized assaults west and southwest of Donetsk City since late July have so far facilitated only a couple of kilometers of advance, and Russian forces have historically proven inept at conducting effective operational-level mechanized maneuver.[14] The intended Russian seizure of Kurakhove would take another significant defensive point away from Ukrainian forces, but the settlements west of Kurakhove along the H-15 highway also provide opportunities for defense and there is no reason to assess that Russian forces would be able to advance more rapidly west of Kurakhove if Ukrainian forces decide to defend in these settlements. The Russian Eastern and Southern groupings of forces have generally proven ineffective at conducting successful offensive operations, and more combat effective elements

of the Central Grouping of Forces that are driving on Kurakhove's northern flank may improve Russian prospects for seizing Kurakhove.[15] It is unlikely that the Russian military command will commit Central Grouping of Forces elements to a prolonged effort to advance further along the H-15 highway and away from the Central Grouping of Force's priority effort to seize Pokrovsk, however.[16]

The Russian military command continues to prioritize the offensive effort on Pokrovsk and will likely treat the intensified effort in western Donetsk Oblast as a secondary effort. The Russian military command likely intends for this secondary effort, regardless of its success, to fix Ukrainian forces in western Donetsk Oblast and prevent Ukrainian redeployments to reinforce the defense of Pokrovsk. The Russian military command has shown a pronounced desire to insulate its offensive effort in the Pokrovsk direction from the operational pressures caused by Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast and is likely holding back its remaining operational reserves for the effort to seize the city of Pokrovsk itself.[17] This level of prioritization will likely remain regardless of the success of the intensified Russian offensive effort in western Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces began efforts to widen the Pokrovsk salient along the Selydove-Ukrainsk-Hirnyk line as a preparatory step for the upcoming attempt to seize Pokrovsk itself, and any participation by elements of the Central Grouping of Forces in the offensive effort in western Donetsk Oblast will likely be further conditions-setting for the Pokrovsk effort.[18] The Russian military command has pursued a theater wide campaign design aimed at stretching Ukrainian forces through consistent offensive pressure and appears to be replicating this theater-wide effort in a more intensified way along the frontline in Donetsk Oblast.[19] **Russian forces will not be able to retain the initiative throughout eastern Ukraine indefinitely, and multiple intensified offensive efforts in Donetsk Oblast, in addition to the persisting operational pressures caused by Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast, will likely cause Russian offensive operations to culminate sooner than the Russian military command intends.**

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to downplay the theater-wide operational impacts of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and continues efforts to convince the Russian people that the Kremlin's delayed and disorganized response to the Kursk incursion is an acceptable price to pay for further Russian advances in Donetsk Oblast. Putin claimed during his speech at the Eastern Economic Forum on September 5 that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has failed to force Russia to redeploy forces from frontline areas in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast or stop Russia's offensive operations in "key directions" of eastern Ukraine.[20] Putin claimed that the incursion has not impacted Russia's "primary goal" of seizing the remainder of Donbas. Putin claimed that Ukraine also intended for the incursion to divide Russian society, but that instead the incursion has further unified Russia and there has been a sharp increase in the number of people interested in signing military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). Putin claimed that Russian forces have "stabilized" the situation in Kursk Oblast and are beginning to push Ukrainian forces from Russian territory. Putin claimed that Russian forces are making significant territorial advances in Ukraine and have accelerated their offensive operations. Putin also claimed that Ukrainian forces are suffering "heavy" manpower and equipment losses, but did not provide specific numbers for these losses. Putin's claims about the Kursk incursion having no operational impacts are demonstrably false, however, as ISW has reported.[21]

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has had theater-wide impacts and these impacts will likely continue to affect Russian offensive and defensive capabilities beyond the culmination of the Pokrovsk offensive. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated during an interview with CNN published on September 5 that the Ukrainian incursion spoiled a planned Russian attack into Sumy Oblast and "reduced the threat" of Russian incursions into northern Ukraine.[22] Syrskyi stated that Ukraine's key objectives for the incursion were to stop Russian forces from using Kursk Oblast as a sanctuary to prepare offensive operations into Ukraine, divert Russian forces from other unspecified areas in Ukraine, create a "security zone," take Russian prisoners of war (POWs), and boost Ukrainian morale. Syrskyi stated that Russian forces have moved "tens of thousands" of troops previously intended to reinforce Russian offensive operations in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, including small elements of several elite Russian Airborne (VDV) units. Russian forces have reportedly redeployed elements of the 56th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) and the 11th and 83rd VDV brigades to Kursk Oblast.[23] The Russian military command has largely relied on conscripts and regular and irregular forces redeployed from lower priority sectors of Ukraine, such as northern Kharkiv Oblast, to conduct defensive operations in Kursk Oblast.[24] These forces are extremely unlikely to be sufficient to expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk if the Ukrainians choose to defend. The Russian military command may have also redeployed at least a company of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) from the Pokrovsk direction in mid-August 2024.[25] The redeployment of elements of the CMD — which is reportedly tasked with completing the seizure of Pokrovsk — suggests that the Russian military command has not been able to fully insulate its priority offensive operations from the impacts of the Ukrainian incursion, despite Putin's claims.

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has also allowed Ukraine to challenge Russia's control of the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine. Russia has possessed the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine since at least November 2023, which has allowed the Russian military command to determine the location, time, scale, and requirements of fighting in Ukraine at will and has forced Ukraine to expend manpower and materiel in reactive defensive operations.[26] Syrskyi recently stated that Russia has redeployed roughly 30,000 troops from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast to respond to the Ukrainian incursion.

[27] A significant additional redeployment of Russian troops from the frontline in Ukraine would very likely be necessary to let Russia regain control of its territory in Kursk, as US intelligence officials have reportedly assessed, and would significantly impact Russia's offensive operations and Russia's ability to prepare for future operations.[28]

Putin's informational efforts are likely intended to convince the Russian public that an ongoing Ukrainian presence in Kursk Oblast is tolerable in exchange for the Russian seizure of Pokrovsk. The Kremlin is reportedly trying to condition Russian society to accept that the limited Ukrainian presence in Kursk Oblast is a "new normal," possibly in order to afford itself time and space to respond to the incursion after seizing Pokrovsk.[29] Putin delayed declaring a "counterterrorism operation" for several days following the incursion and has largely avoided redeploying the large numbers of experienced and combat effective forces that Russia will likely need to push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.[30] ISW continues to assess that Putin is likely prioritizing Russian offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction over pushing Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast, and Putin's rhetorical efforts further support this assessment.[31] Putin also attempted to marginally rehabilitate the Russian MoD's public image during his speech by claiming that the MoD is "objective" and by presenting battlefield reports from the MoD as accurate.[32] Putin may also intend to influence select Western audiences with his comments about the Ukrainian incursion. Putin may assess that he can encourage Western decision-makers to pressure Ukraine into withdrawing its forces from Kursk Oblast, which would allow Putin to continue his offensive operations in Ukraine without having to redeploy additional forces to Kursk Oblast. **Putin's ostensible comfort with allowing Ukrainian forces to hold Russian territory for a protracted time is a stunning reversal of longstanding Russian rhetoric and doctrine about the inviolability of Russia's borders and calls into question the significance of Russia's supposed "red lines."**[33]

Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast do not portend the imminent collapse of the frontline throughout Ukraine, despite Putin's efforts to portray the advances in Donetsk Oblast as dramatic. Russian forces have advanced at most roughly 40 kilometers from the 2022 frontline in Pokrovsk Raion since the beginning of the Russian offensive effort to seize Avdiivka in October 2023 and appear to have suffered significant manpower and armored vehicle losses in exchange for these territorial gains.[34] A Russian seizure of Pokrovsk would almost certainly complicate Ukrainian logistics, and further Russian advances west and southwest of Donetsk City will challenge Ukraine's defensive positions in the area to be sure. The loss of Pokrovsk, and the loss and occupation of any Ukrainian territory and people, would be a significant blow to Ukrainian morale. The Russian seizure of Pokrovsk is by no means inevitable, however. Russian forces have failed to seize Chasiv Yar and threaten Ukraine's fortress belt from Sloviansk to Kostyantynivka after months of assaults, and Ukrainian forces have proven their ability to limit Russian advances elsewhere in the theater, particularly when well-staffed and equipped. **It remains too soon to forecast the outcome of the current Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast, and far too soon to assess the effects of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk that were intended to go far beyond affecting the immediate situation around Pokrovsk.**

The US, Ukraine's other supporters, and Ukraine itself maintain the ability to make decisions that can impact the battlefield situation — including by addressing Ukraine's manpower and training restraints and adequately arming and equipping Ukraine so that the Ukrainian military command can properly prepare for future defensive and counteroffensive operations.

Russia continued its efforts to bolster economic relations with non-Western countries on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai. Russian President Vladimir Putin shared the stage during his speech with officials from Malaysia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on September 5 to discuss bilateral cooperation and multilateral projects.[35] Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told Putin during a plenary session that Malaysia is interested in joining BRICS and claimed that Russian-Malaysian collaboration on what Ibrahim called "Islamic finance" would help Russia attract more investment from majority Muslim countries.[36] Indian Ambassador to Russia Vinay Kumar stated that India expects to increase imports of Russian oil until 2030 and that India and Russia are developing a new interbank exchange system.[37] Kumar also expressed hope that Russia will increase its exports of fertilizer to India. Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom CEO Alexei Likhachev highlighted Rosatom's ongoing work with India and Vietnam to develop the Northern Sea Route through the Arctic, a shipping route between western Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific region.[38] Putin also discussed joint PRC-Russian efforts to address and mitigate external challenges to bilateral cooperation between the two countries with PRC Vice President Han Zheng.[39] This conversation occurred against the backdrop of a statement by the CEO of Russian metals and renewables company En+, Vladimir Kolmogorov, at the EEF, who claimed that a large joint Russia-PRC coal project in Siberia is facing financial difficulties due to concern among PRC companies about Western secondary sanctions.[40] ISW previously noted that Russian efforts at the EEF are largely centered around diplomatic efforts with non-Western countries to evade Western sanctions.[41]

Ukrainian officials announced a series of appointments among senior members of the Ukrainian cabinet on September 5. Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Deputy Yaroslav Zheleznyak reported on September 5 that the Verkhovna Rada voted to appoint First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha as Foreign Minister; Head of Ukraine's state-owned defense enterprise Ukroboronprom, Herman Smetanin, as Strategic Industries Minister; former Deputy Prime Minister for European

Integration Olha Stefanishyna as Justice Minister; Presidential Office Deputy Head Oleksiy Kuleba as Development of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Minister; and Deputy Defense Minister Nataliya Kalmykova as Veterans Affairs Minister.[42]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have recently intensified their longstanding offensive effort to eliminate the broad Ukrainian salient west and southwest of Donetsk City and advance up to and along the H-15 (Donetsk City-Zaporizhzhia City) highway.
- Apparently coordinated Russian offensive operations from the southern flank of the Pokrovsk direction to the western flank of the Ukrainian defense around Vuhledar likely aim to increase pressure on Ukrainian forces defending in western Donetsk Oblast and set conditions for further gains in Russia's prioritized offensive effort in the Pokrovsk direction.
- Russian forces are conducting relatively intensified offensive operations elsewhere southwest and west of Donetsk City, and the intensification of Russian offensive operations near Vuhledar likely does not presage decreased Russian offensive tempo elsewhere in western Donetsk Oblast in the near-term.
- Russian forces intensified offensive operations near Vuhledar shortly after starting to widen the southern flank of the Pokrovsk salient, suggesting that Russian forces intend to conduct mutually reinforcing offensive operations along the southern flank of the Pokrovsk direction, immediately west of Donetsk City, along the 0-0532 highway, and near Vuhledar.
- The Russian military command likely aims for the intended seizure of Kurakhove and Vuhledar to allow Russian forces to make more rapid tactical gains up to and along the H-15 highway, although Russian forces will likely face challenges in leveraging the envisioned seizure of these settlements to eliminate the broad Ukrainian salient in western Donetsk Oblast.
- The Russian military command continues to prioritize the offensive effort on Pokrovsk and will likely treat the intensified effort in western Donetsk Oblast as a secondary effort. The Russian military command likely intends for this secondary effort, regardless of its success, to fix Ukrainian forces in western Donetsk Oblast and prevent Ukrainian redeployments to reinforce the defense of Pokrovsk.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to downplay the theater-wide operational impacts of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and continues efforts to convince the Russian people that the Kremlin's delayed and disorganized response to the Kursk incursion is an acceptable price to pay for further Russian advances in Donetsk Oblast.
- The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has had theater-wide impacts and these impacts will likely continue to affect Russian offensive and defensive capabilities beyond the culmination of the Pokrovsk offensive.
- Putin's informational efforts are likely intended to convince the Russian public that an ongoing Ukrainian presence in Kursk Oblast is tolerable in exchange for the Russian seizure of Pokrovsk.
- Russian offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast do not portend the imminent collapse of the frontline throughout Ukraine, despite Putin's efforts to portray the advances in Donetsk Oblast as dramatic.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, southeast of Kupyansk, and in the Kherson direction and Ukrainian forces recently regained positions north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian forces continue to forcibly redeploy mobilized Russian military personnel from occupied Ukraine to frontline positions to bolster Russia's crypto-mobilization efforts.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 4, 2024](#)

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Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:25pm ET on September 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia appears to be relying on several countries, including India, Serbia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), as part of its efforts to evade Western sanctions. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on September 4, citing leaks from Russian state correspondence, that Russia's Industry and Trade Ministry devised a plan to spend nearly \$1 billion on securing critical electronic components in October 2022, which reportedly included the possibility of building facilities in India to gain access to such components.[1] FT reported that the leaked documents reveal 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. The extent to which Russia has implemented this plan remains unclear, although ISW assesses Russia is engaged in a wider effort to evade Western sanctions and procure sanctioned electronic components and machinery necessary for Russia's defense industry production via foreign actors.[2]

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin on September 4 on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai.[3] Putin and Vulin discussed the removal of bilateral trade barriers to reverse declining trade levels, and Vulin stated that Serbia will not impose sanctions on Russia and will not allow its territory to be used for "anti-Russian" actions. Vulin's comment may have been intended in part to avert some of Putin's annoyance following Serbia's recent purchase of 12 Rafale jets from France in a likely effort to diversify the country's arms suppliers away from Russia.[4] Putin stated that he hopes to see Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic at the upcoming October 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan.[5] Putin also met PRC Vice President Han Zheng on September 4 and emphasized that the EEF serves as a valuable platform for enhancing mutual understanding and fostering Russia–PRC economic cooperation.[6] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on September 3 that Putin briefed PRC officials about the outcomes of his recent trip to Mongolia, during which Putin emphasized growing regional trade and cooperation with the PRC and Mongolia.[7] ISW has previously observed indications that foreign companies and banks, including in the PRC, have been increasingly reluctant to conduct transactions with Russian actors due to fears of Western secondary sanctions, which could be affecting Russia's sanctions evasion efforts.[8]

Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure in Lviv City, Lviv Oblast and Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast during another mid-sized combined drone and missile strike on the night of September 3 to 4. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched two Kh-47 Kinzhal aeroballistic missiles from MiG-31K aircraft over Tula Oblast; two Kh-22 cruise missiles from Tu-22M3 strategic bombers over the Black Sea; six Kh-101 cruise missiles from Tu-95 strategic bombers from Volgograd Oblast airspace; three Iskander-K cruise missiles from occupied Crimea; and 29 Shahed-136/131 drones from launch areas in Kursk Oblast.[9] Ukrainian forces shot down four Kh-101 missiles, three Iskander-K missiles, and 22 Shahed drones; six other Shaheds did not reach their targets likely due to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) suppression, and one Shahed flew into Belarusian airspace. Russian missiles struck civilian objects in both Kryvyi Rih and Lviv City, wounding and killing civilians. Kryvyi Rih City Head Oleksandr Vilkul stated that the Russian strike on Kryvyi Rih damaged a hotel in the city center, apartment buildings, four educational institutions, and other civilian facilities and wounded up to six people.[10] Russian missiles also struck Lviv City and killed seven civilians, including two children, and damaged up to 188 buildings, including residential and historical heritage buildings as well as schools.[11] International humanitarian law forbids strikes on civilian objects (defined as any object that does not have an explicit military purpose or objective), and furthermore prohibits strikes that indiscriminately target both military and civilian objects.[12] Russian sources attempted to justify the strikes as targeting military objects, but under international law even strikes on military objects do not justify indiscriminate collateral harm to civilians or civilian objects.[13]

Ukrainian authorities are investigating another report of apparent Russian war crimes against Ukrainian soldiers. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported on September 3 that the Donetsk Oblast Prosecutor's Office launched a pre-trial investigation into footage published on a Telegram channel purportedly showing Russian forces executing three Ukrainian servicemen point-blank near Toretsk after they had clearly surrendered and been disarmed.[14] ISW cannot independently verify the footage. Attacking soldiers who are *hors de combat*, specifically those who have clearly expressed an intention to surrender, is a violation of Article 41 of the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict.[15]

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced on September 4 that Germany will provide 17 additional IRIS-T air defense systems to Ukraine by 2026.[16] Scholz stated that Germany has already delivered seven IRIS-T systems previously pledged to Ukraine and that Germany will send four of the 17 additional systems by the end of 2024. A German government official told *Bloomberg* on September 4 that Ukraine will receive 12 medium-range and 12 shorter-range IRIS-T systems from Germany by 2026.[17] Other European countries also continue to demonstrate their support for Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Simon Harris signed a ten-year bilateral agreement on support and co-operation on September 4 during Harris' visit to Kyiv.[18] The agreement stipulates that Ireland will continue diplomatic efforts promoting Ukraine's peace formula, security support, and the provision of non-lethal military aid to Ukraine.[19]

Ukrainian officials announced a series of resignations and appointments among senior members of the Ukrainian cabinet on September 3 and 4. Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Chairperson Ruslan Stefanchuk announced on September 3 and 4 that Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Strategic Industries Minister Oleksandr Kamyshin, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Olha Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territory Iryna Vereshchuk, State Property Fund Head Vitaliy Koval, Justice Minister Denys Maliuska, and Ecology Minister Ruslan Strilets submitted their resignation letters.[20] Vereshchuk and Kamyshin will both reportedly transition to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's office, and the Verkhovna Rada is still considering several of the resignations.[21] Zelensky responded to the reshuffling on September 3 and stated that he intends to "weight" areas of Ukraine's foreign and domestic policy differently in the future.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia appears to be relying on several countries, including India, Serbia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), as part of its efforts to evade Western sanctions.
- Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure in Lviv City, Lviv Oblast and Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast during another mid-sized combined drone and missile strike on the night of September 3 to 4.
- Ukrainian authorities are investigating another report of apparent Russian war crimes against Ukrainian soldiers.
- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced on September 4 that Germany will provide 17 additional IRIS-T air defense systems to Ukraine by 2026.
- Ukrainian officials announced a series of resignations and appointments among senior members of the Ukrainian cabinet on September 3 and 4.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly made marginal advances in Kursk Oblast amid continued fighting throughout the Ukrainian salient on September 4.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Pokrovsk and southwest of Donetsk City, and Ukrainian forces recently regained positions west of Donetsk City.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to portray itself as suitably addressing its obligations towards Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 3, 2024

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

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NOTE: ISW is introducing a new section of the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, "Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation," in which ISW will track Ukrainian ground attacks, offensive operations, and long-range strikes within Russia. ISW will hereafter report on tactical updates on Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast in this section, unless there is a major inflection in the situation on the ground. ISW will also track Ukrainian long-range strikes on targets within the Russian Federation in this section. ISW will not, however, offer assessments about Ukrainian objectives or capabilities in this new section.

Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure and a military educational facility in Poltava City with two Iskander-M ballistic missiles, killing and wounding a significant number of people, as part of a wider strike series on the night of September 2 to 3. The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces launched three Iskander-M/North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea, a Kh-59/69 cruise missile from Kursk Oblast, and 35 Shahed-136/131 drones from Kursk Oblast and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[1] The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Ukrainian forces downed 27 Shahed drones over Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Poltava, Chernihiv, and Sumy oblasts, that six Shaheds did not strike their target, and that two Shahed drones flew toward Belgorod Oblast and occupied Donetsk Oblast.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported that two Iskander missiles struck a military educational institution and a nearby hospital in Poltava City, partially destroying a building at the Poltava Military Communications Institute.[3] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated the strike killed at least 51 and injured at least 271.[4] Zelensky highlighted Ukraine's need for more air defense systems and interceptors and called on Western countries to lift restrictions on Ukrainian forces conducting long-range strikes against military targets within Russia as such restrictions inhibit Ukraine from defending against long-range Russian strikes.[5] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told CNN on September 3 that only Patriot and SAMP/T air defense systems are capable of intercepting Russia's ballistic missiles.[6] Russian milbloggers celebrated the strike and amplified footage of the strike and its aftermath.[7]

The wider impacts of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on the war and any envisioned diplomatic solution to the war are not yet clear, and assessments of these impacts are premature. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated during an interview with NBC on September 3 that Ukrainian forces are "conceptually" planning to hold territory in Kursk Oblast for an unspecified period of time, but did not offer further details about Ukraine's objectives for the incursion due to concerns about operational security.[8] Zelensky reiterated that the Ukrainian incursion is an aspect of Ukraine's "victory plan" to end the war on just terms and bring Russia to the negotiating table.[9] Zelensky noted that Ukraine intends to exchange Russian prisoners of war (POWs) captured in Kursk Oblast for Ukrainian POWs currently in Russian captivity and reiterated that one of the goals of the incursion was to force Russia to redeploy troops from the frontline throughout Ukraine, particularly eastern Ukraine. Zelensky stated that Russia has diverted roughly 60,000 troops from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on August 27 that Russia has redeployed over 30,000 troops from the frontline in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast.[10] ISW has observed indications for several weeks that the Russian military command was

redeploying forces from northern Kharkiv Oblast, the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, and western Zaporizhia Oblast to Kursk Oblast and recently observed indications that the Russian military command is redeploying forces likely intended for future higher priority offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction to Kursk Oblast.[11] Russian President Vladimir Putin has thus far avoided redeploying the type of combat effective and experienced frontline units that will likely be necessary to push Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast, and Zelensky's statement suggests that Ukrainian forces will likely maintain positions in the over 1,100 square kilometers of territory where Ukrainian forces are reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast until Putin chooses to commit such forces. ISW assesses that Putin is attempting to preserve the Russian drive on Pokrovsk at the expense of delaying the clearing of Kursk but that the incursion is likely to have a variety of other important impacts on Russian military operations over various time periods regardless of its impact on the current Pokrovsk operation.[12]

While the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast appears to be having operational-level impacts on the Russian military, the incursion has likely not yet shifted Putin's strategic-level thinking. ISW assesses that Putin maintains that Russia can slowly and indefinitely subsume Ukraine through grinding advances and that Russia can achieve its goals through a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces and by outlasting Western support for Ukraine — assessments that make Putin averse to peace negotiations on terms other than Ukrainian and Western capitulation to his demands.[13]

Attempts to assess the impacts of the Ukrainian incursion at this premature stage will likely come to partial and inaccurate conclusions about Ukraine's ability to change the trajectory of the conflict and the Kremlin's appetite for peace negotiations on acceptable terms. Ukrainian counteroffensives in Fall 2022 both successfully pushed the frontline back from Kharkiv City — Ukraine's second largest city — and liberated Kherson City and established a defensible frontline along the Dnipro River.[14] Ukraine demonstrated its ability to conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations and liberate large swaths of territory when properly aided and equipped by the West in Fall 2022, and the assumption that Ukraine is permanently unable to conduct future counteroffensive operations that result in operationally significant gains with timely and reliable deliveries of Western aid is premature. Delays in the provision of Western aid, among other factors, hindered the Ukrainian 2023 counteroffensive and generated a military crisis in Ukraine in 2024 from which Ukraine is still attempting to recover.[15] Russian forces were able to make tactically significant advances in northern Kharkiv Oblast and Donetsk Oblast in Spring and early Summer 2024 in large part because of the shortages of artillery and air defense munitions caused by the suspension of US military assistance.[16] ISW continues to assess that prompt and reliable Western security assistance will be critical to Ukraine's ability to conduct future counteroffensive operations, and that the US and wider Western alliance can make decisions to redress Ukrainian materiel constraints caused by delays in Western security assistance.[17]

Russia will very likely resolve to continue its genocidal war against Ukraine unless faced with significant battlefield setbacks and strong Western support for Ukraine, and it is highly unlikely that any foreseeable Russian leader after Putin will be more amenable to peace negotiations and a just resolution to the war. The Kremlin has spent years denying the existence of a Ukrainian nation and delegitimizing Ukrainian sovereignty, and this effort has had widespread and likely long-term impacts on Russian society and elite opinion.[18] Russian officials in both Putin's inner circle and the wider Russian government have publicly stated their aversion to peace negotiations with Ukraine on terms other than capitulation, and Putin's successor is far more likely to hold such views than to reject them in the absence of significant Russian setbacks.[19] 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.[20] The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has highlighted that the war in Ukraine is not indefinitely stalemated, however, and shown that Ukraine, Russia, and the West maintain the ability to make decisions that significantly impact current battlefield realities and the future end state of the war.

Reuters reported that the US is considering providing Ukraine with long range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSMs) but that Ukraine would not receive the missiles for months. *Reuters* reported, citing three sources including US officials, that the US is close to an agreement to provide JASSMs to Ukraine and that the missiles would be announced in a military assistance package in Fall 2024 but that the US has not yet finalized the deal.[21] *Reuters* noted that the JASSM has only been integrated into US-designed aircraft, and one US official told *Reuters* that "there were efforts" to integrate the JASSM with other fighter jets in Ukraine's air fleet. The standard JASSM has a range of roughly 370 kilometers, and the extended-range JASSM (JASSM-ER) has a range of about 1,000 kilometers.[22] *Reuters* reported that it is unclear which variant the US would send to Ukraine under this deal, although both variants have ranges longer than the maximum range of ATACMS missiles that the US has already provided to Ukraine.[23] ISW has previously assessed that there are at least 245 Russian military objects — at least 85 percent of which are not airfields — within range of ATACMS, and even just the standard JASSM launched from over Ukrainian airspace would likely further expand the set of military objects within Russia that would be in range of Ukrainian missiles.[24] It is unclear whether Ukraine would be able to take advantage of the JASSM's extended range given that current US policy restricts Ukraine from using the US-provided long-range precision weapons to strike military targets in Russia.[25] ISW continues to assess that current US restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to strike military targets within Russia and the slow

provision of small numbers of such weapons are actively hindering Ukraine's ability to conduct offensive operations and substantially disrupt Russian operations.[26]

Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded his trip to Mongolia by signing agreements that strengthen bilateral economic ties and trilateral energy relations between Russia, Mongolia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).[27] Putin and Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh emphasized increasing projects under the Mongolia-Russia-China Economic Corridor program, which supports the Russian "Greater Eurasian partnership" economic initiative, China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative, and Mongolia's "Steppe Road" development plan.[28] Putin emphasized that the Soyuz Vostok gas pipeline connecting Russia, Mongolia, and the PRC is fully constructed and awaits state examination.[29] Putin invited Kurelsukh to the BRICS forum in Fall 2024 and suggested that Mongolia join the BRICS Plus/Outreach format.[30] Mongolia is also reportedly close to completing a temporary trade agreement with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).[31] Russia and Mongolia also signed bilateral agreements to increase oil and petroleum product exports from Russia to Mongolia, and Putin announced that Russian energy company Inter RAO will assist in restoring Ulaanbaatar Thermal Power Plant No. 3 (TPP-3).[32]

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping issued a joint statement praising each other's purported efforts to address the war in Ukraine. The two presidents released a joint statement on September 2 expressing support for the joint PRC–Brazilian proposal on the "Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" and the African Union's efforts to solve the war in Ukraine.[33] The two leaders affirmed that inclusive dialogue and peaceful negotiations are essential for a lasting solution to the war and called on Russia and Ukraine to adhere to three key principles that favor Russia: avoiding battlefield expansion, preventing escalation of fighting, and refraining from provocations. ISW continues to assess that the PRC's peace plan is favorable to Russia and that several African states seek to balance Ukraine and Russia to maintain longstanding bilateral relationships with Russia without officially voicing support for Russia.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces struck civilian infrastructure and a military educational facility in Poltava City with two Iskander-M ballistic missiles, killing and wounding a significant number of people, as part of a wider strike series on the night of September 2 to 3.
- The wider impacts of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast on the war and any envisioned diplomatic solution to the war are not yet clear, and assessments of these impacts are premature.
- Attempts to assess the impacts of the Ukrainian incursion at this premature stage will likely come to partial and inaccurate conclusions about Ukraine's ability to change the trajectory of the conflict and the Kremlin's appetite for peace negotiations on acceptable terms.
- *Reuters* reported that the US is considering providing Ukraine with long range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSMs) but that Ukraine would not receive the missiles for months.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded his trip to Mongolia by signing agreements that strengthen bilateral economic ties and trilateral energy relations between Russia, Mongolia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping issued a joint statement praising each other's purported efforts to address the war Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to advertise Russian military service to civilians in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Annika Ganzeveld, and Frederick W. Kagan

NOTE: ISW is introducing a new section of the Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, "Ukrainian Operations in the Russian Federation," in which ISW will track Ukrainian ground attacks, offensive operations, and long-range strikes within Russia. ISW will hereafter report on tactical updates on Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast in this section, unless there is a major inflection in the situation on the ground. ISW will also track Ukrainian long-range strikes on targets within the Russian Federation in this section. ISW will not, however, offer assessments about Ukrainian objectives or capabilities in this new section.

Iran is expected to "imminently" deliver ballistic missiles to Russia to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[1] *NOTE: A version of this text appears in the September 2 ISW-CTP Iran*

Update. An unspecified European official told *Bloomberg* on September 2 that Iran could begin shipping ballistic missiles to Russia "within a matter of days." [2] European intelligence sources previously told *Reuters* in August 2024 that Iran and Russia signed a contract in December 2023 for Iran to deliver Ababil close-range ballistic missiles and Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to Russia. [3] The intelligence sources added that dozens of Russian military personnel are currently in Iran training to operate Fateh-360 missiles. Russia's acquisition of Ababil or Fateh-360 ballistic missiles would likely allow Russian forces to strike Ukrainian near-rear targets while preserving Russia's stockpiles of domestically-produced missiles, such as Iskanders, for deep-rear Ukrainian targets, as CTP-ISW previously assessed. [4]

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave an interview to Mongolian outlet *Unuudur* ahead of his visit to Mongolia on September 2-3, emphasizing historical and modern Russian-Mongolian relations and current trilateral economic and energy initiatives with Mongolia and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Putin emphasized Soviet-Mongolian relations and the 2019 Russian-Mongolian comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in the interview published on September 2. [5] Putin also highlighted economic and energy cooperation initiatives to deepen relations between Russia, Mongolia, and the PRC and expressed confidence in developing the Russia-Mongolia-China Economic Corridor and the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, which will run from Russia through Mongolia to the PRC upon its completion. Putin also asserted that the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Mongolia have made significant progress in drafting a temporary free trade agreement. Putin notably published articles in North Korean and Vietnamese state newspapers before his visits to the countries in June 2024 and is likely attempting to pursue stronger relations with countries that historically had friendly ties to the Soviet Union to form a coalition to act as an alternative to the West. [6]

Russian and Mongolian officials indicated that the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant for Putin's arrest will not impact Putin's ongoing visit to Mongolia, despite Mongolia's legal obligation to enforce this warrant. Putin arrived in Ulaanbaatar on September 2, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) noted that Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh invited Putin and that Putin will discuss bilateral relations and sign bilateral agreements during the visit. [7] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on August 30 that the Kremlin is not worried about Mongolia's obligation to arrest Putin as Russia and Mongolia maintain an "excellent dialogue," and Peskov reiterated similar sentiments on September 2. [8] Russian state media claimed that Mongolian Presidential Spokesperson Ulziibayar Zolbayar reportedly rejected reports that the ICC appealed to Mongolia to enforce the arrest warrant for Putin. [9] Russian authorities have previously stated that Russia does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, but Mongolia has been party to the Rome Statute (which gives the ICC its power) since 2002. [10]

Russian authorities detained Leningrad Military District (LMD) Deputy Commander Major General Valery Mumindzhanov on corruption charges on September 2. Kremlin newswire TASS reported that the Russian Investigative Committee suspects that Mumindzhanov accepted bribes worth over 20 million rubles (about \$222,000) while he was the Resource Provision Head within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and oversaw contracts for the supply of Russian military uniforms. [11] A Russian insider source, who has previously correctly predicted several command changes within the Russian MoD, claimed that Mumindzhanov was a direct subordinate of former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitry Bulgakov, whom Russian authorities arrested on corruption charges on July 26. [12] The insider source also claimed that Mumindzhanov had ties to current Russian Security Council Secretary and former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. [13] A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Mumindzhanov's arrest indicates that the Kremlin does not intend to curtail current Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov's efforts to "cleanse" the Russian MoD and that arrests are not limited to several high-profile MoD officials but have been ongoing for five months. [14] The milblogger also claimed that continued investigations into high-ranking Russian MoD officials will satisfy the public's demand for justice and the fight against corruption.

Key Takeaways:

- Iran is expected to "imminently" deliver ballistic missiles to Russia to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin gave an interview to Mongolian outlet *Unuudur* ahead of his visit to Mongolia on September 2-3, emphasizing historical and modern Russian-Mongolian relations and current trilateral economic and energy initiatives with Mongolia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Russian and Mongolian officials indicated that the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant for Putin's arrest will not impact Putin's ongoing visit to Mongolia, despite Mongolia's legal obligation to enforce this warrant.
- Russian authorities detained Leningrad Military District (LMD) Deputy Commander Major General Valery Mumindzhanov on corruption charges on September 2.
- Russian forces recently regained lost positions east of Korenevo amid continued Ukrainian assaults in Kursk Oblast on September 2.
- Russian forces recently advanced in the Siversk, Chasiv Yar, and Pokrovsk directions and southwest of Donetsk City.

- Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials are highlighting Russian military training capabilities, likely in an attempt to promote military recruitment and as part of long-term efforts to rebuild the Russian officer corps.
- Russian occupation officials announced the start of the school year in occupied Ukraine, highlighting Russia's various efforts to coopt the educational system and forcibly Russify and militarize Ukrainian children and youth.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 1, 2024

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

September 1, 2024, 6:00 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on September 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted the largest series of drone strikes against targets within Russia on the night of August 31 to September 1. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed 158 Ukrainian drones over 16 oblasts: 46 drones over Kursk Oblast, 34 over Bryansk Oblast, 28 over Voronezh Oblast, 14 over Belgorod Oblast, nine over Moscow City and Oblast, eight over Ryazan Oblast, five over Kaluga Oblast, four over Lipetsk Oblast, three over Tula Oblast, two over Tambov and Smolensk oblasts each, and a drone each over Oryol, Tver, and Ivanovo oblasts.[1] Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin claimed that Russian forces shot down two Ukrainian drones near the Moscow Oil Refinery in Kapotnya and that drone debris damaged a technical room at the facility and caused a fire.[2] Russian sources posted footage of the Ukrainian drone striking the Moscow Oil Refinery and a small fire in the area, although some characterized the fire as a normal gas flare at the facility.[3] Kashira Raion Head Mikhail Shuvalov stated that Ukrainian forces targeted the Kashira State District Power Plant in Kashira Raion, Moscow Oblast with three drones, and Russian sources amplified footage of Russian air defense activating and explosions near the plant.[4] The Tver Oblast press service stated that a Ukrainian drone caused a fire in Konakovo Raion, and Russian sources amplified footage of the drone striking the Konakovo State District Power Plant, a subsequent large fire at the plant, and damage within the plant.[5] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that there was also a fire at the Konakovo gas distribution network along the "KGMO-Konakovo" main gas pipeline following Ukrainian drone strikes in Tver Oblast.[6] Kaluga Oblast Governor Vladislav Shapsha claimed that a Ukrainian drone damaged a cell tower in Tarusa Raion, Kaluga Oblast.[7] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* noted that data available from NASA FIRMS shows heat anomalies at the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant (NLMK) in Lipetsk Oblast, a military facility for a unit of the 106th Airborne (VDV) Division in Tula Oblast, two cement plants in Voskresensk and Kolomna, Moscow Oblast, and the Ferzikovo cement plant in Kaluga Oblast on the night of August 31 to September 1.[8] Only the FIRMS data from the site in Tula Oblast appears to be anomalous, as the other facilities routinely give off heat signatures due to normal industrial activities.

Ukrainian forces continued to conduct assaults in Kursk Oblast on September 1, but there were no confirmed Ukrainian advances. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted assaults near Korenevo; east of Korenevo near Matveyevka; northeast of Korenevo near Aleksandrovka; northwest of Sudzha near Malaya Loknya and Pogrebki; north of Sudzha near Kamyshevka; and northeast of Sudzha near Nizhnyaya Parovaya, Bakhtinka, and Nechayev.[9] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced west of Pogrebki, and geolocated footage published on September 1 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating within Pogrebki.[10] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces failed to establish a foothold in Borki (southeast of Sudzha) and continue to attack Ukrainian positions within the settlement.[11] A Russian source claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back from Korenevo, cleared Komarovka (southwest of Korenevo), and counterattacked near Kauchuk (northeast of Korenevo).[12] Elements of the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz's "Varvar" detachment are reportedly operating near Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha).[13] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet, Southern Military District [SMD]), the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]), the 56th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division), and the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz's "Aida" group are reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast.[14]

Recent Russian domestic polls suggest that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has not yet degraded Russian domestic support of the war in Ukraine in the short-term following the Kursk incursion and that Russian support for the war has remained high since 2022. Independent Russian polling organization Levada Center published the results of a monthly poll on August 30 and found that about 78 percent of respondents support Russian military operations in Ukraine — an increase from 75 percent in July 2024 and 77 percent in June 2024.[15] The Levada Center's polling indicates that the lowest Russian support for the war in Ukraine was in February 2022 with 68 percent of respondents supporting the war and that war support among poll respondents has not fallen below 70 percent since March 2022. The Levada Center also asked respondents in August 2024 about the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and found that 91 percent of respondents are concerned about Ukrainian military operations on Russian territory. The Levada Center also reported that 57 percent of respondents do not expect a second wave of mobilization and 60 percent do not see a need for a

second wave of mobilization in the coming months — both decreasing from 65 percent and 69 percent, respectively. Levada Center's polling data indicates that the Kremlin's refusal to fully transition Russian society at large to a wartime footing and the Kremlin's ongoing domestic information operations aimed at normalizing the war to Russian society have mitigated against domestic war weariness thus far and that the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has not changed this mindset. The fact that Russian society in general appears to not be experiencing war fatigue likely grants the Kremlin flexibility in how it strategizes to wage a protracted war of attrition against Ukraine.[16]

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed at an August 31 press conference that "Armenia has frozen its participation in the [Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization] CSTO at all levels," after Armenia has effectively abstained from participating in the CSTO for nearly a year.[17] Pashinyan also acknowledged that other government officials and the public may have differing views on Armenia's decision to freeze its participation in the CSTO but noted that the Armenian government does not currently see the need to reconsider the decision. Pashinyan stated that Armenia may "see the need to make another decision" in the future, however. [18] Armenia has effectively abstained from participating in the CSTO since Pashinyan and Armenian representatives failed to attend several consecutive CSTO events — both political meetings and military exercises — starting in mid-to-late 2023.[19] Pashinyan acknowledged in February 2024 that Armenia had "essentially" frozen its participation in the CSTO because the CSTO "failed to fulfill its obligations in the field of security" to Armenia, particularly in 2021 and 2022.[20] Armenia has also appeared to be reducing its bilateral security relations with Russia, and Russian border guards left the Zvartnots International Airport in Yerevan — where Russian border guards had been serving previously since 1992 — on July 31, 2024.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted the largest series of drone strikes against targets within Russia on the night of August 31 to September 1.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued to conduct assaults in Kursk Oblast on September 1, but there were no confirmed Ukrainian advances.**
- **Recent Russian domestic polls suggest that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has not yet degraded Russian domestic support of the war in Ukraine in the short-term following the Kursk incursion and that Russian support for the war has remained high since 2022.**
- **Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan confirmed at an August 31 press conference that "Armenia has frozen its participation in the [Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization] CSTO at all levels," after Armenia has effectively abstained from participating in the CSTO for nearly a year.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City, southeast of Kupyansk, southeast of Pokrovsk, and southwest of Donetsk City.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 31, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, and George Barros

August 31, 2024, 7:20pm ET

The Russian military command may have redeployed limited elements intended to reinforce Russia's priority offensive operation in the Pokrovsk direction to defend against the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast — suggesting that operational pressures from the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast are impacting Russian operations in every sector throughout the theater. Russian sources, including social media users, claimed on August 14 and 17 that at least a company of the Russian 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) redeployed from the Pokrovsk direction to Kursk Oblast.[1] Select Russian and Ukrainian open-source communities also stated that unspecified elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade redeployed to Kursk Oblast.[2] Elements of the Russian 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade have been committed to Russian offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction. ISW observed reports that elements of the brigade are operating east of Pokrovsk in mid-August and as recently as today.[3] A volunteer-led OSINT organization *Evocation.info* stated on August 19 that Russia has also redeployed elements of the 1st "Slavic" Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) from the Donetsk direction to Kursk Oblast, and ISW observed claims that elements of the brigade were operating in the Toretsk and Pokrovsk directions in late July and August 2024.[4] ISW has observed no indications that these redeployed elements were previously engaged in frontline combat in Russia's assessed priority Toretsk and Pokrovsk direction, and the Russian military command likely remains extremely averse to pulling combat effective units from frontline areas in these directions.[5] The redeployed units were likely reserve units that the Russian military command intended to use to reinforce the Russian grouping in these directions and stave off the threat of premature operational culmination, however.

The Russian military command's decision to redeploy limited elements to Kursk Oblast instead of committing the elements to the operation to seize Pokrovsk or Toretsk suggests that the Russian military command has not been able to fully insulate its priority offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast from the manpower demands brought about by the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast. The Russian military command thus far has avoided redeploying any forces slated to participate in offensive operations in the Toretsk or Pokrovsk directions to defensive operations in Kursk Oblast and thus far mainly has pulled forces from lower priority directions — northern Kharkiv Oblast, the Kupiansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, and western Zaporizhia Oblast.[6] The redeployment of limited elements of the 15th and 1st motorized rifle brigades will not have an immediate impact on the battlefield situation in the Pokrovsk or Toretsk directions, as these are small forces, however. It remains unclear if the Russian military command has already or will redeploy additional reserve forces intended for Russia's offensive operations in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.

Ukrainian forces continued to conduct assaults in Kursk Oblast on August 31, but there were no confirmed or claimed Ukrainian advances. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted assaults southwest of Korenevo near Komarovka and Krasnooktyabrskoye; south of Korenevo near Snagost; near Korenevo itself; east of Korenevo near Matveyevka and Kremyanoye; northwest of Sudzha near Bakhtinka and Malaya Loknya; north of Sudzha near Kamyshevka and Kireyevka; northeast of Sudzha near Nechayev and Martynovka; south of Sudzha near Plekhovo; and southeast of Sudzha near Borki and Cherkasskaya Konopelka.[7] Select Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of Nizhnyaya Parovaya (northeast of Sudzha), while another milblogger claimed that the settlement is a contested "gray zone." [8] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces regained 1.5 kilometers of territory near Korenevo and pushed Ukrainian forces out of Nechayev.[9] The Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces reported that Ukrainian unmanned systems and rocket artillery conducted a combined mission and struck a Russian pontoon crossing over the Seim River, likely in Glushkovo Raion.[10] Elements of the "Kashtan" detachment (Chechen "Akhat" Spetsnaz), the "Arbat" detachment (Russian Volunteer Corps), the 1427th Motorized Rifle Regiment (Territorial Troops), and unspecified Ossetian volunteer elements are reportedly operating near Nechayev.[11] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 11th and 83rd Airborne (VDV) brigades, 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), and "Shir" detachment (Russian Volunteer Corps) are reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast.[12]

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov reported on August 30 that Russian forces continue to use airfields in Russia within Ukrainian ATACMS range — further highlighting how US restrictions against Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia are allowing Russia to leverage sanctuary space in deep rear areas to support military operations against Ukraine. Umerov met with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in Washington, D.C. on August 31 and discussed the battlefield situation; Ukraine's air defense, weapons, and training needs; and the development of Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB).[13] Umerov stated in an interview with *CNN* published on August 30 that he presented a list of military targets within Russia to senior US government officials.[14] Umerov noted that the list included Russian airfields that are within range of US-provided weapons and that Russian forces are using to conduct strikes against Ukraine. Senior US officials reportedly recently stated that Russian forces moved 90 percent of the aircraft that conduct glide bomb strikes against Ukraine from Russian airspace away from airfields within range of Storm Shadow and ATACMS missiles.[15] ISW additionally recently assessed that there at least 209 of the 245 known Russian military objects in range of ATACMS are not air bases.[16]

The Russian military command reportedly reorganized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' (DNR and LNR) 1st and 2nd army corps (AC) to create two new combined arms armies (CAA): the 51st CAA and 3rd CAA, respectively.[17] A Russian milblogger who focuses on Russian military force restructuring claimed on August 28 that the 1st DNR AC became the Russian 51st CAA and that the 2nd LNR AC became the Russian 3rd Guards CAA, and a Donetsk City-based source claimed on August 29 that the newly reformed 51st CAA is based out of occupied Donetsk Oblast.[18] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger identified Lieutenant General Sergey Milchakov both as the commander of the 51st CAA and the commander of the 1st DNR AC on August 28 in a post announcing that Milchakov received the title "Hero of Russia" following his successes in the Avdiivka and Toretsk directions.[19] A volunteer-led OSINT organization *Evocation.info* on July 20 also identified Milchakov as the commander of the 51st CAA, noting that this army was created on the basis of the 1st DNR AC.[20] *Evocation.info* also identified former Commander of the 138th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) Major General Alexei Kolesnikov as the commander of the 3rd CAA, which reportedly "replaced" the 2nd LNR AC. *Evocation.info* observed that the 51st CAA and 3rd CAA structurally are significantly larger in size than their previous formations as army corps and thus the Russian military command is likely to recruit more personnel to staff the two new army-sized formations permanently based in occupied Ukraine. One Russian social media user questioned on August 17 whether the 1st DNR AC was no longer operationally subordinate to the command of the 8th CAA (Southern Military District [SMD]) and whether the Russian military command was reviving the Soviet 51st Army.[21] Ukrainian officials started describing the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) as part of the "51st Army" as early as late June 2024.[22] ISW observed Russian reports in early August 2024 that the 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade, "Sparta" Reconnaissance Battalion, and "Somalia" Battalion (all historically part of the 1st DNR AC) were also operating as part of the 51st Army, which suggests that the Russian military likely reformed the Second World War-era 51st Army using longstanding DNR military units.[23] The Russian Ministry of

Defense (MoD) has yet to officially confirm the reformation of the 1st DNR and 2nd LNR ACs into combined arms armies, although this restructuring is consistent with the Kremlin's ongoing effort to officially integrate these legacy irregular forces into the Russian Armed Forces.[24]

The source who reported the creation of these two combined arms armies has accurately reported major Russian force restructuring in the past. The Russian milblogger who focuses on Russian military restructuring also previously accurately reported that the Russian military command created the 69th Motorized Rifle Division on the basis of the 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade and as part of the 6th CAA in May 2024.[25] ISW has routinely observed elements of the 69th Motorized Rifle Division operating in the Kharkiv direction.[26] The milblogger added that the Russian military command also reformed the 72nd Motorized Rifle Division and the "128th Assault Brigade" (likely referring to the 128th Motorized Rifle Brigade) as part of the 44th AC (LMD) and formed the 11th Tank Brigade as part of the 25th CAA (Central Military District [CMD]). ISW observed elements of the 128th Motorized Rifle Brigade operating in the Kharkiv direction and elements of the 72nd Motorized Rifle Division operating in the Kursk direction.[27]

The milblogger also noted that the Russian MoD recently mentioned an unspecified 114th Artillery Brigade (likely a restored World War II unit) operating in the Donetsk direction, and Russian media reported that the Russian military command formed a new 673rd Airborne (VDV) Regiment in Omsk City and deployed the regiment to Luhansk Oblast.[28] It is unclear to which formation the 673rd VDV Regiment is subordinated, though the VDV's principal training center and two training regiments are based in Omsk. The milblogger assessed that the creation of the 673rd VDV Regiment may support the formation of a new VDV division.

The Kremlin continues efforts to define Russia's traditional and cultural values as part of ongoing efforts to codify a Russian state ideology. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on August 26 tasking the Russian Presidential Administration's recently formed Directorate for State Humanitarian Policy to oversee the strengthening of Russia's "spiritual and moral foundations," preservation of Russia's "traditional values," and implementation of state historical education policies.[29] The Kremlin formed the directorate in June 2024, and the directorate will also oversee Putin's interactions with unspecified "specialized organizations" and Putin's Council for Culture and Art and advise Putin on issues related to monitoring and implementing policy in correlation with Russia's values.[30] A source within the Russian Presidential Administration told Kremlin newswire TASS on August 31 that Russian propagandist Vladimir Medinsky will oversee the recently formed directorate.[31] The Kremlin has recently intensified efforts to codify a state ideology based on vague "traditional values" while bypassing the Russian Constitution, which notably forbids Russia from establishing a state ideology and requires the Russian state to recognize ideological diversity.[32]

The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) announced on August 31 that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi officially appointed Captain First Rank Roman Hladkyi as the Chief of Staff of the newly created Unmanned Systems Forces.[33] Ukrainian Unmanned Systems Forces Spokesperson Major Vitaly Medvedev stated on August 30 that Hladkyi has been acting Unmanned Systems Forces Chief of Staff for several weeks.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian military command may have redeployed limited elements intended to reinforce Russia's priority offensive operation in the Pokrovsk direction to defend against the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast — suggesting that operational pressures from the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast are impacting Russian operations in every sector throughout the theater.
- Ukrainian forces continued to conduct assaults in Kursk Oblast on August 31, but there were no confirmed or claimed Ukrainian advances.
- Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov reported on August 30 that Russian forces continue to use airfields in Russia within Ukrainian ATACMS range — further highlighting how US restrictions against Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia are allowing Russia to leverage sanctuary space in deep rear areas to support military operations against Ukraine.
- The Russian military command reportedly reorganized the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' (DNR and LNR) 1st and 2nd army corps (AC) to create two new combined arms armies (CAA): the 51st CAA and 3rd CAA, respectively.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to define Russia's traditional and cultural values as part of ongoing efforts to codify a Russian state ideology.
- The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) announced on August 31 that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi officially appointed Captain First Rank Roman Hladkyi as the Chief of Staff of the newly created Unmanned Systems Forces.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- Russian forces are reportedly unable to fight in Ukraine at full strength due to manpower and equipment shortages that resulted from the Kremlin's ineffective wartime policies.

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

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

August 30, 2024, 8:10pm ET

European Union (EU) member state officials continue to express divergent views about Ukraine's ability to use European-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia. EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated on August 30 that the decision to lift such restrictions is up to each EU member state individually, as not all EU states have provided Ukraine with long-range weapons.[1] Czech President Petr Pavel stated on August 30 that Ukraine should decide how to use its Western-provided weapons in accordance with the United Nations (UN) Charter.[2] Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur urged Western partners to lift restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.[3] Polish Deputy Defense Minister Pawel Zalewski stated on August 30 that Poland supports lifting restrictions on Ukraine's ability to conduct long-range strikes against military targets in Russia using Polish-provided weapons.[4] Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani stated on August 29 that Italy will not allow Ukraine to use Italian-provided weapons for strikes against military targets on Russian territory as neither NATO nor Italy are at war with Russia.[5] Italy has reportedly supplied Ukraine with Storm Shadow missiles.[6] The United Kingdom reportedly seeks to allow Ukrainian forces to use UK-provided Storm Shadows for strikes into Russia, but US prohibitions are preventing the United Kingdom from unilaterally doing so.[7] Italy's refusal to allow Ukraine to use Italian-provided Storm Shadows for such strikes suggests that Ukrainian forces may have to abide by different rules for the use of the same missile type depending on the country of origin. ISW has previously assessed that Western allies' divergent policies on weapons use complicate logistics for Ukrainian forces, who must carefully navigate the origins and guidelines of the weapons to abide by specific regulations.[8]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces made marginal gains in Kursk Oblast on August 30. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced on the southern outskirts of Korenevo, in the fields north of Olgovka (east of Korenevo), and south of Sheptukhovka (northeast of Korenevo).[9] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced east of Cherkasskoye Porechnoye and Nizhnyaya Parovaya (both north of Sudzha).[10] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted assaults southwest of Korenevo near Snagost and Krasnooktyabrskoye; near Korenevo itself; east of Korenevo near Kremyanoye; north of Sudzha near Cherkasskoye Porechnoye, Kamyshevka, and Kireyevka; northeast of Sudzha near Martynovka; and southeast of Sudzha near Borki on August 30.[11] Elements of the Russian 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly operating near Malaya Loknya (northwest of Sudzha).[12]

Russian state-owned polling agencies are recognizing limited upticks in Russian domestic discontent towards Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian authorities amid the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. The Public Opinion Foundation, a Russian state-owned polling institution, published a poll on August 30 that it conducted on August 25 showing that 28 percent of respondents expressed outrage or dissatisfaction with the actions of Russian authorities over the past month.[13] This is up from 25 percent and 18 percent in polls that the Public Opinion Foundation conducted on August 11 and July 28, respectively.[14] Respondents to the Public Opinion Foundation poll have not expressed such high dissatisfaction since polling conducted in November 2022, following the first month of the deeply unpopular partial mobilization in Russia.[15] The Russian state-owned Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) noted that Putin's approval rating fell by 3.5 percent to 73.6 percent between August 12 and 18 — a record fall in Putin's approval rating, even among Kremlin pollsters, since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022.[16] VCIOM released its latest polling on Putin's approval rating on August 30, showing an additional 1.2 percent decline to 72.4 percent between August 19 and 25.[17] These polls from Russian state-owned polling agencies do not suggest particularly pronounced discontent nor are they reliable reflections of the actual sentiments in Russian society. The polls do suggest, however, that the Kremlin assesses that it must recognize that societal discontent has risen since the start of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. The Kremlin likely hopes that limited acknowledgment of societal discontent will guard against accusations that it is ignoring Russian society's concern about the Ukrainian incursion. The Kremlin appears to have launched an intricate messaging campaign aimed at justifying to its domestic audience why Russia is prioritizing the maintenance of offensive operations in eastern Ukraine over immediately expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast, and limited acknowledgments of discontent may be a part of this campaign.[18]

Venezuela extradited Colombian citizens who fought as members of the Ukrainian military to Russia, demonstrating growing Russian-Venezuelan cooperation and Venezuelan support for Russia's war. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested two Colombian citizens for fighting as mercenaries in the Ukrainian military on August 30.[19] The Colombian citizens were flying from Ukraine to Colombia via Caracas in July 2024, and Venezuelan authorities in Caracas detained and extradited them from Venezuela to Russia. Foreign states have charged their citizens for mercenarism for fighting with Russian forces, and Russia has placed accused "mercenaries" who served in the Ukrainian military on the Russian wanted list.[20] *Politico* noted on August 30, however,

that this is the first public case of a foreign state extraditing accused mercenaries from other states to Russia.[21] Venezuela's extradition comes against the backdrop of recent growing Russian-Venezuelan ties and Russian efforts to demonstrate its influence among "friendly" states in the Western hemisphere.[22]

Hungary and Russia continue to deepen their bilateral cooperation. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto met with Alexey Miller, the head of Russian state energy company Gazprom, to discuss Russia's export of gas to Hungary and bilateral cooperation.[23] Russian state news outlet TASS reported that Hungary imports more than half of its gas from Russia, importing 4.8 billion cubic meters of Russian gas through the Turkish Stream pipeline in 2022 and 5.6 billion cubic meters in 2023.[24] Miller has recently made or sought to make gas deals with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Iran - both of which are close Russian partners - so his meeting with Szijarto is notable. Intensified Russian-Hungarian cooperation follows Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's recent efforts to posture himself as a possible mediator between Russia and Ukraine and statements amplifying several Kremlin information operations.[25]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk as Ukrainian Air Force Commander on August 30.[26] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi appointed the commander of Ukraine's Central Air Command, Lieutenant General Anatoly Kryvonozhko, as acting Ukrainian Air Force Commander.[27]

Key Takeaways:

- European Union (EU) member state officials continue to express divergent views about Ukraine's ability to use European-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.
- Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian and Russian forces made marginal gains in Kursk Oblast on August 30.
- Russian state-owned polling agencies are recognizing limited upticks in Russian domestic discontent towards Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian authorities amid the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Venezuela extradited Colombian citizens who fought as members of the Ukrainian military to Russia, demonstrating growing Russian-Venezuelan cooperation and Venezuelan support for Russia's war.
- Hungary and Russia continue to deepen their bilateral cooperation.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk as Ukrainian Air Force Commander on August 30.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- French outlet *Le Monde* reported on August 30 that about 100 mercenaries from the Russian "Bear Brigade" private military company departed Burkina Faso to join Russian forces fighting in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 29, 2024

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

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

August 29, 2024, 8:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on August 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces are currently pursuing two immediate tactical efforts as part of their ongoing offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk — a tactical effort along the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka line east of Pokrovsk to seize Myrnohrad and advance up to Pokrovsk's outskirts, and another tactical effort along the Selydove-Ukrainsk-Hirnyk line southeast of Pokrovsk aimed at widening Russia's salient in the Pokrovsk direction and eliminating vulnerabilities to Ukrainian counterattacks. The Russian military command likely views both of these tactical efforts as desired prerequisites for launching an intensified offensive effort against Pokrovsk itself. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on August 29 that the most intense battles in the Pokrovsk direction are ongoing on the eastern outskirts of Hrodivka (east of Pokrovsk), southwest of Hrodivka near Krasnyi Yar, within Novohrodivka (southeast of Pokrovsk), and immediately east of Selydove near Mykhailivka (southeast of Pokrovsk).[1] ISW has observed Russian gains in these areas in recent days, but Russian milbloggers have claimed that Russian forces have made more significant tactical gains in the Pokrovsk direction than what observed visually confirmed evidence currently supports.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to the southeastern outskirts of Myrnohrad (immediately east of Pokrovsk) and have begun small arms battles with Ukrainian forces in the town, although a Ukrainian military observer described the Russian forces operating in the town as sabotage and reconnaissance groups.[3] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have advanced in much of eastern Selydove and have reached the center of the town.[4] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces are fighting on the northeastern

outskirts of Ukrainsk (southeast of Pokrovsk), seized Memryk (immediately northeast of Ukrainsk), and entered Halitsynivka (immediately east of Ukrainsk).[5]

Russian forces appear to be attempting to maintain their rate of advance along the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka line to quickly seize Myrnohrad and reach the outskirts of Pokrovsk.

The reported Russian advance from Novohrodivka to Myrnohrad's outskirts likely aims to bypass what Russian sources have characterized as major Ukrainian defensive positions northwest and west of Hrodivka.[6] Russian forces recently enveloped Ukrainian positions southeast of Pokrovsk along the Karlivske Reservoir and prompted Ukrainian forces to withdraw from limited positions in the area.[7] Russian forces likely hope to achieve a similar effect by trying to envelop Ukrainian positions between Myrnohrad and Hrodivka, although it remains unclear if Russian forces can maintain their relatively rapid rate of advance through the comparatively larger town of Myrnohrad and its surroundings. Russian forces may attempt to fight directly through Ukrainian defensive positions along the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka line, despite the higher costs, in order to maintain their rate of advance and try to seize Myrnohrad more quickly. Russian efforts to seize Myrnohrad do not preclude Russian forces from advancing up to the eastern outskirts of Pokrovsk, and the Russian military will likely pursue these tactical goals in tandem.

Reported Russian advances into Selydove and in the direction of Ukrainsk and Hirnyk likely aim to eliminate a relatively large Ukrainian salient on the southern edge of the wider Russian salient in the Pokrovsk direction that could threaten Russia's offensive effort in the area.

Ukrainian positions east of the Selydove-Ukrainsk-Hirnyk line offer Ukrainian forces opportunities to threaten the Russian rear in the Pokrovsk direction, and the Russian military command is likely concerned about Ukrainian counterattacks and fires disrupting Russian offensive efforts as Russian forces deploy logistics, artillery elements, and force concentrations westward into the forward part of the salient to support the intensified effort on Pokrovsk itself. The Russian military command also likely aims to expand and stabilize the southern flank of the Russian salient in the area in order to prevent Ukrainian forces from threatening the gains Russia has made in its 2024 offensive effort once Russian offensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction culminate.[8] The Russian salient is roughly 21 kilometers wide at its base from the Ukrainian salient east of the Selydove-Ukrainsk-Hirnyk line to Ukrainian positions north of Avdiivka along the H-20 (Avdiivka-Kostyantynivka) highway. Russian positions along the E-50 (Donetsk City-Pokrovsk) highway southwest of Avdiivka are roughly 13 kilometers from Avdiivka, whereas the current line of Russian advance along the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka line is 30 kilometers from Avdiivka. Significant Ukrainian counterattacks from the base of the salient towards Avdiivka could threaten to encircle the Russian force grouping deployed forward in the salient, and the Russian military command likely aims to preempt this possibility by eliminating the Ukrainian salient on the southern flank of the Pokrovsk direction.

Russian forces likely hope that advances in the direction of Ukrainsk and Hirnyk will mutually support ongoing offensive operations west of Donetsk City and that offensive pressure from both directions will overwhelm Ukrainian forces or prompt Ukraine to withdraw from the limited positions in the rural open areas east of Ukrainsk and Hirnyk. The area north of Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City) is mainly comprised of open fields with limited cover or concealment from relatively few windbreaks, and Russian advances through this terrain would likely require significant successful mechanized assaults, which Russian forces have routinely struggled to conduct.[9] Russian forces have proven more adept at advancing from settlement to settlement with small infantry groups in the Pokrovsk direction, although it remains to be seen if Russian infantry groups can maintain their rate of advance as they approach Ukrainsk and Hirnyk.[10]

The Russian military command likely aims to achieve both of these tactical efforts before launching the more resource-intensive effort to seize Pokrovsk itself, although Russian forces may begin urban combat in Pokrovsk regardless, if progress stalls on these preparatory efforts.

It remains unclear if the Russian military command intends for Russian forces to fight their way entirely through Pokrovsk in frontal urban combat, as they have through the smaller towns east and southeast of Pokrovsk, or aims to envelop or encircle the city as Russian forces previously attempted and failed to do against Bakhmut and Avdiivka.[11] The Russian military command's calculus about what preparatory actions are required for launching offensive operations on the city of Pokrovsk and how Russian forces will attempt to seize the city will likely depend on where Ukrainian forces decide to engage in significant defensive efforts. ISW will not speculate or forecast about future Ukrainian defensive efforts, however.

Russian authorities are creating new volunteer territorial defense units in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, highlighting Russian President Vladimir Putin's unwillingness to counter the incursion more seriously with a mobilization due to the risks of societal discontent or with large-scale redeployments due to possible disruptions to Russia's ongoing offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.

Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov publicly announced on August 29 the creation of the "BARS-Kursk" volunteer detachment and stated that the detachment's main function will be to "ensure security" in Kursk Oblast during the incursion and the re-settlement of border settlements in Kursk Oblast at an unspecified later date.[12] Smirnov stated that the detachment will cooperate with the Russian military and the counterterrorism operational headquarters — which are overseeing the ongoing Russian response in Kursk Oblast — and will also provide humanitarian support for residents of border settlements. Smirnov stated that volunteers will sign six-month contracts, undergo training, and receive any "necessary" weapons to

perform their duties. Kursk Oblast officials published a recruitment ad for the detachment on August 24.[13] Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vitaly Sarantsev reported that Russian authorities are also forming "BARS-Bryansk" and "BARS-Belgorod" detachments and that the three detachments will support the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces.[14] Sarantsev estimated that the three detachments will be comprised of 4,921 volunteers in total.

The formation of these new BARS (Russian Army Combat Reserve) volunteer detachments is consistent with the Kremlin's apparent strategy to avoid re-deploying experienced or combat effective units engaged in fighting in the Pokrovsk or Toretsk directions to Kursk Oblast due to concerns about slowing the tempo of Russian offensive operations in these higher priority directions. ISW previously noted that the Kremlin appears to be largely relying on conscripts and irregular forces redeployed from lower-priority directions in Ukraine to defend against the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[15] Putin indicated a possible desire to continue relying on Russian volunteer servicemembers (*dobrovoltsy*) to address the Ukrainian incursion during his August 12 meeting with Russian military, security, and civilian officials by alluding to increased willingness to sign military service contracts among prospective *dobrovoltsy*. [16] Putin has consistently relied on volunteer and irregular formations to alleviate Russia's manpower constraints during the war and has avoided declaring general mobilization or another round of partial mobilization, both of which would be incredibly unpopular among Russian society.[17] Putin almost certainly remains extremely averse to declaring general mobilization and will likely continue to rely on irregular formations to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast until Russian offensive operations culminate in eastern Ukraine — at which point Putin may consider re-deploying more combat effective Russian forces from these directions to push Ukrainian units back across the border.

Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced north of Sudzha as Russian forces recaptured some areas of Kursk Oblast on August 29. Geolocated footage published on August 29 shows that Ukrainian forces have reached Nizhnaya Parovaya (north of Sudzha) and advanced into the northwestern part of the settlement.[18] Additional geolocated footage published on August 29 shows that Russian forces have likely recaptured Ulanok (southeast of Sudzha) and eastern Korenevo.[19] Ukrainian forces continued attacking near Korenevo, Komarovka (southwest of Korenevo), Kremyanoye (east of Korenevo), Lyubimovka (southeast of Korenevo), Leonidovka (northwest of Sudzha), Malaya Loknya and Russkoye Porechnoye (both north of Sudzha), Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha), and within Borki (southeast of Sudzha).[20] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are continuing to storm Korenevo to try to create a route to Rylsk (northwest of Korenevo).[21] Elements of the Russian "Kaskad" Operational Combat Tactical Formation (formerly of the Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Ministry of Internal Affairs [MVD], reportedly since subordinated to Rosgvardia) are reportedly fighting near Korenevo, though the Russian military command reportedly previously dissolved the formation.[22]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 29 that a Ukrainian F-16 fighter jet recently crashed while defending against a large-scale Russian drone and missile strike.[23] An unnamed US official told Western media on August 29 that the jet crashed on August 26, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appointed a special commission to determine the cause of the crash.[24] The loss of equipment and aircraft during combat operations is not particularly novel, and it is expected that Ukraine will lose some Western-provided military equipment during combat. However, any loss among Ukraine's already limited allotment of Western-provided F-16s and trained pilots will have an outsized impact on Ukraine's fledgling ability to operate F-16s in the near term as part of its combined air defense umbrella or in an air-to-ground support role.

Russian authorities arrested and charged former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Pavel Popov with large-scale fraud on August 29. The Russian Investigative Committee charged Popov with embezzling money meant for the maintenance of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Patriot Park, a Russian military exhibition in Moscow.[25] Russian authorities did not disclose how much money Popov is suspected of embezzling personally but noted his case is connected to the large-scale fraud cases of the Patriot Park Head Vyacheslav Akhmedov and MoD Directorate for Innovative Development Deputy Head Major General Vladimir Shesterov, whom Russian authorities arrested on August 5 for embezzling over 40 million rubles (roughly \$471,000).[26] Russian state news outlet TASS reported, citing Russian law enforcement sources, that Akhmedov testified against Popov.[27] A Russian source that has previously correctly preemptively reported several command changes within the Russian MoD assessed on August 5 that Popov could be the next high-ranking MoD official to be arrested.[28] Russian sources have previously theorized that the arrests of high-ranking MoD officials who served under former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu may be part of an effort to "clean house" of Shoigu's affiliates within the MoD, which the sources claimed indicates that Shoigu's influence within the Kremlin may be declining.[29]

Russian President Vladimir Putin will conduct an official visit to Mongolia despite Mongolia's status as a signatory to the Rome Statue and Mongolia's legal obligation to enforce an arrest warrant for Putin from the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Kremlin press service announced on August 29 that Putin will travel to Mongolia on September 3, marking his first visit to a state party to the Rome Statute since the ICC issued the arrest warrant in March 2023 for Putin's role in the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.[30] Putin notably avoided traveling to South Africa for a BRICS summit in August 2023 on similar grounds.[31] Putin's upcoming visit to Mongolia for negotiations on a "strategic partnership" suggests that Mongolian authorities likely will not enforce

the ICC arrest warrant.[32] This visit also follows the annual "Selenga" bilateral Russian–Mongolian military exercises which began on August 15, further highlighting the strong bilateral relations between the two countries.[33] Russia has previously stated that it does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, and Russian officials have not yet commented on the possibility of Putin's arrest in Mongolia. [34]

The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed on August 29 that Ukrainian forces struck the Atlas Oil Refinery in Rostov Oblast and the Zenit Oil Depot in Kirov Oblast on the night of August 27 to 28.[35] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that members of Ukraine's Special Operations Forces, Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Ukrainian forces struck the Atlas Oil Refinery, causing a fire at the refinery's vertical reservoirs. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces also struck the Zenit Oil Depot and a field artillery warehouse of the Russian Western Grouping of Forces in Voronezh Oblast and are clarifying the effect of these strikes. Russian and Ukrainian sources stated on August 28 that Ukrainian forces struck targets in Rostov, Kirov, and Voronezh oblasts.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces are currently pursuing two immediate tactical efforts as part of their ongoing offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk — a tactical effort along the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka line east of Pokrovsk to seize Myrnohrad and advance up to Pokrovsk's outskirts, and another tactical effort along the Selydove-Ukrainsk-Hirnyk line southeast of Pokrovsk aimed at widening Russia's salient in the Pokrovsk direction and eliminating vulnerabilities to Ukrainian counterattacks.
- The Russian military command likely aims to achieve both of these tactical efforts before launching the more resource-intensive effort to seize Pokrovsk itself, although Russian forces may begin urban combat in Pokrovsk regardless, if progress stalls on these preparatory efforts.
- Russian authorities are creating new volunteer territorial defense units in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, highlighting Russian President Vladimir Putin's unwillingness to counter the incursion more seriously with a mobilization due to the risks of societal discontent or with large-scale redeployments due to possible disruptions to Russia's ongoing offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced north of Sudzha as Russian forces recaptured some areas of Kursk Oblast on August 29.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 29 that a Ukrainian F-16 fighter jet recently crashed while defending against a large-scale Russian drone and missile strike.
- Russian authorities arrested and charged former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Pavel Popov with large-scale fraud on August 29.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin will conduct an official visit to Mongolia despite Mongolia's status as a signatory to the Rome Statue and Mongolia's legal obligation to enforce an arrest warrant for Putin from the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed on August 29 that Ukrainian forces struck the Atlas Oil Refinery in Rostov Oblast and the Zenit Oil Depot in Kirov Oblast on the night of August 27 to 28.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- The Russian government continues to expand pathways for accused criminals to sign military service contracts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 28, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

August 28, 2024, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on August 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Multiple reports from Western media indicate that the US government is prohibiting the United Kingdom (UK) from allowing Ukraine to use Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets in Russia. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on August 27 that a source familiar with the matter stated that Ukraine's use of British and French Storm Shadows may require access to American intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in areas where Russian forces are jamming the GPS signals that the missiles use for targeting.[1] *FT* reported that "well-placed" sources stated that the UK government sent a request to both the US and France earlier in summer 2024 to grant Ukraine permission to use Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia, and French President Emmanuel Macron stated in May 2024 that Ukraine should be allowed to strike military sites in Russia from which Russian forces attack Ukraine. The *Telegraph* reported on August 27 that the UK government supports Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russia with Storm Shadow missiles but that the missiles also use unspecified, classified American systems, whose use requires US permission.

[2] The *Telegraph* stated in a since-deleted section of its original web article that the UK has not formally asked the US to allow Ukraine to use Storm Shadows to strike military targets within Russia, and that a White House source stated that the US is concerned about how the use of the missiles — even without US approval — could escalate the situation and draw the US into the war in Ukraine. The *Telegraph* reported that British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is taking a "consultative approach" to negotiations with the US and does not want to spark a disagreement over the issue. A source in the UK government reportedly stated that Russia is aware that Ukraine is asking for permission to strike military targets in Russia, so Russia has moved its "most critical assets" out of range of long-range missile systems. ISW continues to assess that although Russian forces have moved aircraft out of range of Western-provided Storm Shadow and ATACMS missiles, a significant number of Russian military objects remain within striking distance of Western weapons, which is allowing Russian forces to leverage sanctuary space in deep rear areas within Russia to support military operations against Ukraine.[3]

Several Russian milbloggers claimed on August 28 that the tempo of Ukrainian attacks in Kursk Oblast has slowed and that Ukrainian forces are now attempting to dig in and hold select areas they recently seized. These milbloggers claimed the intensity of Ukrainian attacks within Kursk Oblast has decreased and that Ukrainian forces are attempting to hold and fortify select areas, amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations within the salient in Kursk Oblast.[4] Other milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are gradually stabilizing the situation in Kursk Oblast.[5] Geolocated footage published on August 28 showing Russian forces operating in eastern Korenevo indicates that Ukrainian forces likely recently withdrew from the area and that Russian forces regained some lost positions.[6] A Russian milblogger claimed on August 28 that Ukrainian forces advanced past Vetreno, Kremyanskoye, and Sheptukhovka (all east and northeast of Korenevo); within eastern Nechayev and Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (both northeast of Sudzha); and in the fields south of Spalnoye (southeast of Sudzha).[7] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) cleared Spalnoye and that Russian forces have regained control of the settlement.[8] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also attacked east of Korenevo near Olgovka, north of Sudzha near Malaya Loknya, east of Sudzha near Russkaya Konopelka, and southeast of Sudzha near Borki.[9] A Russian milblogger claimed on August 28 that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to cross the international border near Zhuravlevka, Belgorod Oblast (southwest of Belgorod City and north of Kharkiv City).[10]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied reports on August 28 that Russian conscripts are fighting in Kursk Oblast and called such reports a "distortion of reality," despite a plethora of evidence, including Russian evidence and admissions, to the contrary.[11] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apti Alaudinov, and other Russian sources have notably acknowledged that Russian conscripts are fighting in Kursk Oblast.[12] Russian opposition outlet *Horizontal 7x7* reported on August 28 that Kremlin-controlled social media site *Vkontakte* (VK) removed a local Ivanovo Oblast news outlet's post claiming that the Russian military is sending Airborne Forces (VDV) conscripts to Kursk oblast.[13] *Horizontal 7x7* noted that the Ivanovo Oblast Human Rights Ombudsman previously stated that a conscript from Ivanovo Oblast returned to Russia during a prisoner-of-war exchange.[14] Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported that the Russian military plans to deploy Russian conscripts from the 290th Missile Regiment (7th Missile Corps, 27th Missile Army, Strategic Missile Forces) and 2187th VDV Regiment (98th VDV Brigade) to Kursk Oblast.[15]

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against oil infrastructure in Rostov and Kirov oblasts and reportedly conducted a drone strike against Voronezh Oblast overnight on August 27 to 28. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that sources within the Ukrainian special services stated that Ukraine's Main Military Directorate (GUR) and Special Operations Forces conducted a strike with Ukrainian-made drones against the Atlas oil depot in Rostov Oblast.[16] *Suspilne* reported that the Atlas oil depot is part of the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) and supplies Russian forces. Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev claimed that a drone strike caused a fire at a fuel depot in Kamensky Raion.[17] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that wreckage of one of the downed drones fell near the oil depot, starting a fire in one of the technical buildings that spread to tanks containing flammable materials.[18] *Suspilne* also reported that GUR conducted a strike with Ukrainian-made drones against the "Zenit" oil depot near Kotelnich, Kirov Oblast — the first time Ukrainian drones have struck Kirov Oblast, which is more than 1,200 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.[19] *Suspilne* stated that the "Zenit" oil depot provides fuel to the Russian military. Kirov Oblast Governor Alexander Sokolov claimed that Russian forces shot down two drones but that a third drone fell on a plant in Kotelnich and started a fire.[20] Russian state news outlet *RIA Novosti* reported that regional dispatch services stated that there was a small fire at the "Vyatka" Federal State Institution in Kotelnich that stores oil and refined products.[21] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that Russian forces destroyed a drone in Rossoshansky Raion and that falling drone debris caused a fire near explosive objects but there was no detonation.[22] A prominent milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces were likely targeting the Minudobreniya agricultural chemical manufacturing plant south of Rossosh.[23] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed eight drones over Voronezh Oblast and four over Rostov Oblast overnight.[24] Russian sources denied claims on August 28 that there was also a fire at the Ryazan State District Power Plant in Pronsky Raion, Ryazan Oblast, alleging that dry grass caught fire on August 27.[25]

The prominent Kremlin-linked *Rybar* Telegram project's continued meetings with Iraqi officials appear to be supporting Iranian-backed Iraqi efforts to gain greater control of their information and media space. The *Rybar* team announced on August 28 that they met with the head of the media service of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Muhhanad al Aqaabi to discuss the role of foreign media organizations in Iraq's information environment.[26] Iran has notably co-opted the PMF and uses the organization to covertly enable its objectives in Iraq.[27] *Rybar* claimed that al Aqaabi spoke about Western media "propaganda" and information space manipulations during the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), particularly in 2015 to 2017, and praised Russian and Chinese media for reporting "impartially" on the war with ISIS. The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (controlled by Iranian-aligned factions within Iraq), has taken efforts over the past year to institute media and information space controls to stifle opposition voices.[28] Russia has undertaken its own multifaceted and multidomain efforts to similarly restrict and control domestic media and information space, including by co-opting well-known media voices such as the *Rybar* project. [29] Iranian-backed Iraqi political actors may seek to learn similar tactics from *Rybar* and other Russian sources as they continue efforts to crack down on opposition in the information space.

Kremlin newswire TASS will soon open an office in Iran, supporting Moscow's efforts to deepen its partnership with Tehran.[30] TASS Director General Andrei Kondrashov announced on August 28 that TASS plans to open a correspondent office in an unspecified location in Iran, adding to the 62 international offices that TASS has in 57 countries.[31] Russia and Iran have deepened their military, economic, financial, technical, industrial, and political control over the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and TASS's expansion into Iran is likely intended in part to extend that cooperation into the media sphere.[32] TASS's expansion into Iran indicates growing media cooperation between Moscow and Tehran as well.

Russia's allies appear to be increasingly restricting their transactions with Russian companies and financial institutions amid ongoing concern about the impact of secondary US sanctions. Kremlin-affiliated business outlet *Kommersant* reported on August 28 that "market participants" stated that banks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), specifically in Dubai, began blocking payments for electronic components and equipment from Russian companies in August 2024. [33] *Kommersant* noted that the UAE has previously served as a payment point between Russian importers and electronics companies in the People's Republic of China (PRC), but that UAE banks are growing increasingly concerned about the risk of secondary sanctions. General Director of Russian Beshtau Electronics company Oleg Osipov confirmed to *Kommersant* that the issues with the banks in Dubai began roughly at the end of July to the beginning of August 2024 and claimed that the "PRC side" is initiating the blocking, but did not provide additional details. Another source told *Kommersant* that Russian companies previously paid for PRC electronics via banks in the UAE, although the goods themselves were immediately sent to Russia, and that the UAE banks were accepting a commission of only 1–3 percent on the transactions. UAE electronic company Jacky's Electronics founder Guseyn Imanov told *Kommersant* that he is also aware of issues with paying for consumer electronics and components through banks in Dubai and claimed that Russian companies have found an unspecified alternative way to conduct financial transactions at an increased commission. Russian and Kyrgyz media recently reported that at least 12 Kyrgyz commercial banks have suspended personal monetary transfers through Russian banks, including Sberbank, T-Bank, and MTS Bank, for an indefinite period.[34] Kyrgyzstan's National Bank told Kyrgyz outlet *24.kg* that commercial banks in Kyrgyzstan are taking measures to prevent negative consequences of international sanctions.[35] The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued a series of additional sanctions on August 23 against Russian and Chinese companies and actors accused of being involved in Russia's war effort and supporting Russia's defense industry. [36] Russia's allies appear to be responding more strongly to these more recent sanctions, and additional foreign banks may take steps to avoid the wider risk of secondary US sanctions in the coming weeks and months.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) reportedly prevented a terrorist attack in the Republic of Ingushetia on August 28. The FSB detained six residents of the Republic of Ingushetia on August 28 for preparing sabotage and terrorist attacks on law enforcement officers and a Russian Orthodox church in Sunzha.[37] The FSB claimed that "supporters of international terrorist organizations" contacted one of the suspects, who received orders from a militant in Syria to attack the church.[38] The Investigative Committee for the Republic of Ingushetia opened a criminal case against three residents for participating in a terrorist organization and organizing a terrorist act and against three other locals for illegal possession of explosives.[39] ISW is unable to verify the FSB's claims.

Key Takeaways:

- Multiple reports from Western media indicate that the US government is prohibiting the United Kingdom (UK) from allowing Ukraine to use Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets in Russia.
- Several Russian milbloggers claimed on August 28 that the tempo of Ukrainian attacks in Kursk Oblast has slowed and that Ukrainian forces are now attempting to dig in and hold select areas they recently seized.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against oil infrastructure in Rostov and Kirov oblasts and reportedly conducted a drone strike against Voronezh Oblast overnight on August 27 to 28.

- The prominent Kremlin-linked *Rybar* Telegram project's continued meetings with Iraqi officials appear to be supporting Iranian-backed Iraqi efforts to gain greater control of their information and media space.
- Kremlin newswire TASS will soon open an office in Iran, supporting Moscow's efforts to deepen its partnership with Tehran.
- Russia's allies appear to be increasingly restricting their transactions with Russian companies and financial institutions amid ongoing concern about the impact of secondary US sanctions.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) reportedly prevented a terrorist attack in the Republic of Ingushetia on August 28.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions in the Siversk direction.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupiansk, within Toretsk, southeast of Pokrovsk, and northeast of Vuhledar.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is reportedly supporting the creation of a new type of combat unit that will specialize in using and countering drones, unmanned systems, and other electronic equipment in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 27, 2024

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Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

August 27, 2024, 8:45pm ET

Russian forces have made significant tactical advances in the Pokrovsk direction amid reports that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from select areas southeast of Pokrovsk. Geolocated footage published on August 27 confirms that Russian forces have advanced over two kilometers from their last confirmed position into northwestern Novohrodivka (southeast of Pokrovsk) along Dubinina Street, suggesting that Russian forces additionally hold positions within the central part of the town. [1] A Ukrainian soldier reported in a now-deleted Telegram post that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Novohrodivka, which Russian state media and several Russian milbloggers amplified and used to claim that Russian forces control the majority of the settlement.[2] Additional geolocated footage published on August 27 indicates that Russian forces have marginally advanced in southeastern Hrodivka (east of Pokrovsk and northeast of Novohrodivka) and have seized Kalynove (further southeast of Pokrovsk and southeast of Novohrodivka).[3] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces "lost" Marynivka (directly south of Novohrodivka) and that elements of the 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment (90th Tank Division, 41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) seized Memryk (southeast of Novohrodivka), although ISW has not yet observed visual evidence of Russian forces operating in these settlements.[4] Some Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces advanced into southern Mykhailivka (south of Novohrodivka) and are attacking into northeastern Selydove (southwest of Novohrodivka).[5]

The recent rate of Russian advance in the Pokrovsk direction has been relatively rapid, and Russian forces have advanced through most of Novohrodivka in a matter of days. Russian forces appear to be prioritizing advancing along the railway line in Novohrodivka toward Pokrovsk instead of fighting through the entire urban area of the settlement. The comparatively rapid Russian advance into Novohrodivka over the past 24 hours is likely in part enabled by apparent Ukrainian withdrawals from Novohrodivka. Russian forces in theory could advance with relative ease through Novohrodivka despite its relative urban build-up if there are no Ukrainian defenders receiving their advances. ISW previously assessed that it would take Russian forces longer to seize Novohrodivka, but that assessment has been proven as incorrect and was premised on Ukrainian forces maintaining a positional defense within the urbanized areas of Novohrodivka—which does not appear to currently be the case.[6] Urbanized areas without sufficient defending forces are not inherent battlefield obstacles, and the Ukrainian command likely deemed that defending Novohrodivka was not worth the potential losses. Novohrodivka is not an operationally significant town in isolation—its potential capture would in theory open the road to Pokrovsk (Russia's articulated operational objective on this sector of the front), but Pokrovsk is larger, more fortified, and ultimately more significant than Novohrodivka due to its central position as a key logistics node in western Donetsk Oblast, and Ukrainian forces are unlikely to withdraw from Pokrovsk without defending the city.[7] The Russian military command will likely be forced to expend significant manpower and materiel in order to seize the more defensible and significant town of Pokrovsk if the Ukrainian military command chooses to reinforce this direction. Advancing Russian forces are therefore unlikely to be able to sustain the current rate of gains indefinitely, especially if they begin assaults on Pokrovsk itself.

Russia's most combat-capable troops are currently sustaining Russian advances towards Pokrovsk, and Russia's offensive operations are emblematic of the wider Russian theory of victory in Ukraine, premised on seemingly indefinite grinding tactical advances. Russia's continuous and complete prioritization of the Pokrovsk direction will likely impact Russia's overall combat capabilities in Ukraine in the aftermath of any Pokrovsk scenario, especially as the Kremlin tries to balance gains in Pokrovsk with defending against the Ukrainian incursion

into Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated during a press conference on August 27 that one of Ukraine's main goals in launching the Kursk incursion was to divert Russian forces from critical areas of the front, and that Russia anticipated this goal and is instead concentrating its main efforts and strengthening its presence in the Pokrovsk direction. [8] Syrskyi also reported that Russia has redeployed over 30,000 troops from other unspecified sectors of the frontline in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast and forecasted that this number will continue to grow while noting that Russia is simultaneously intensifying its efforts in the Pokrovsk direction. Syrskyi's observations cohere with ISW's current assessment that the Russian military command continues to prioritize the Pokrovsk front over pushing Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast. ISW has previously noted that ISW has not observed evidence of Russia redeploying units currently engaged near Pokrovsk to Kursk Oblast but has observed evidence of Russia instead deploying reserve units and units from non-critical sectors of the front, which likely accounts for the bulk of the 30,000 troops redeployed to Kursk Oblast that Syrskyi noted.[9] Syrskyi's statements suggest that the Russian military command remains unwilling to redeploy troops currently fighting near Pokrovsk and will continue to prioritize using these relatively more combat-capable troops to secure tactical gains and maintain the initiative in Donetsk Oblast. The apparent continued Russian prioritization of territorial gains near Pokrovsk is consistent with Russian President Vladimir Putin's articulated theory of victory in Ukraine, which assumes that Russian forces maintain the initiative and pursue a constant grinding war of attrition to outlast Ukraine and Ukraine's partners.

The Russian offensive effort around Pokrovsk will eventually culminate, although the timeline for which Russian forces will reach culmination remains unclear. ISW is not prepared to forecast an imminent culmination, especially as Russian forces escalate the rate of advances in this area and Ukrainian forces retreat to prepared defensive positions west of Hrodivka that in principle should be more advantageous to defend. The redeployment of 30,000 Russian troops to Kursk Oblast could eventually degrade Russian capabilities in the Ukrainian theater writ large, however, following the culmination of the Pokrovsk offensive. ISW has previously assessed that Ukraine's operations in Kursk Oblast have already had theater-wide operational and strategic effects on Russian forces, and Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has challenged Putin's theory of victory by seizing the initiative in a new area of operations while degrading Russia's ability to maintain the long-term initiative in certain sectors of the front within Ukraine.[10] The Russian command is clearly currently prioritizing Pokrovsk, but that calculus will likely change depending on when Russian forces culminate in the area, and the command will eventually need to fully reckon with reorienting its priorities to repelling Ukrainian troops from Kursk Oblast. Russian forces have notably advanced fewer than 10 km west of Bakhmut following Russia's pyrrhic seizure of Bakhmut in May 2023 and Russian forces that expend themselves in the Pokrovsk direction may face similar exhaustion following their culmination. ISW maintains that it is too early to draw definitive conclusions on the long-term effects of the Kursk operation but offers an assessment of the implications of Syrskyi's statements to provide an analysis of how and to what effect Russian battlefield priorities may impact their future offensive capacity.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast was in part an effort to preempt a Russian offensive operation into Sumy or Chernihiv oblasts and noted that the incursion is an aspect of Ukraine's wider efforts to achieve a just and lasting diplomatic solution to the war based on the principles of international law and the inviolability of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Zelensky stated on August 27 that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast stalled Russia's ongoing offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and preempted an apparent Russian plan to conduct cross-border attacks into either Sumy or Chernihiv oblasts. [11] Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces have defeated a large number of Russian troops during the incursion into Kursk Oblast. Zelensky added that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast is one aspect of Ukraine's plan to resolve the war and that Ukraine's plan also includes aspects of "Ukraine's strategic place in the global security architecture," "powerful coercion" against Russia, and unspecified economic policies aimed at bringing Russia to the negotiating table. Zelensky stated that he will present Ukraine's plan to US policymakers in September 2024. Pentagon Spokesperson Major General Patrick Ryder reiterated US support for the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast during a press conference on August 26 and noted that Ukraine has the right to conduct its own operations and hold its own calculus regarding the incursion.[12]

Ukrainian forces reportedly attempted to advance into two areas of Belgorod Oblast on August 27 amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast. Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov claimed on August 27 that Russian authorities restricted access to Vyazovoye (less than two kilometers from the Sumy Oblast border and northwest of Grayvoron) due to an unspecified "difficult operational situation" in the area and later claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to cross the international border into Belgorod Oblast.[13] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces also repelled several Ukrainian attacks near Nekhoteevka and Zhuravlyovka (both southeast of Grayvoron and south of Belgorod City), although Russian sources issued competing claims about the size of these attacks.[14] Select Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also attacked near the Shebekino border checkpoint (south of Belgorod City), which is currently behind

ISW's assessed Russian forward line of owned troops (FLOT) in northern Kharkiv Oblast. [15] Geolocated footage published on August 26 and 27 indicates that Ukrainian forces continue to operate immediately southeast of Korenevo and near Viktorovka (south of Koreveno); near Sudzha; and north of Sudzha within Cherkasskoye Porechnoye and Mikhailovka.[16] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces re-took Nizhnyaya Parovaya and Nechayev (both northeast of Sudzha) in Bolshesoldatsky Raion, suggesting that Ukrainian forces were recently operating in the area. [17] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces, possibly elements of the 1009th Motorized Rifle Regiment (a mobilized unit reportedly subordinated to the 6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Leningrad Military District [LMD]), repelled several Ukrainian attacks near Malaya Loknya (northwest of Sudzha) and are preparing defensive positions near a penal colony in the settlement.[18]

Russian officials attempted to use International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi's visit to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) to falsely portray Ukraine as threatening a radiological incident, likely to undermine Western support for Ukraine by stoking unfounded fears about Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. Grossi stated on X (formerly Twitter) on August 27 that the situation at the KNPP is "serious" and that "attacking any NPP is unacceptable, no matter the location." [19] Grossi reportedly stated that the KNPP is particularly vulnerable because its reactor has no containment vessel and is located in an "ordinary building," leaving it vulnerable to shelling or drone strikes.[20] Russian government-affiliated news outlets claimed that Grossi stated that he saw evidence of "nearby" combat operations including drones and drone debris.[21] Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom CEO Alexei Likhachev claimed that Russian authorities presented evidence of Ukrainian strikes against the KNPP and claimed that "there can be no ambiguity about who conducted these strikes." [22] Kremlin newswire TASS also purposefully misrepresented Grossi's previous statement about his plans to visit the KNPP, claiming that Grossi stated that Ukrainian forces' actions endangered the KNPP.[23] The IAEA acknowledged that Russia informed the IAEA that it found drone debris at the KNPP, but the IAEA did not provide any assessments from where the drone came or verifications of Russia's claim.[24] ISW previously noted that Ukrainian forces have consistently demonstrated capabilities to conduct rear area strikes within Russia and occupied Ukraine at distances exceeding the roughly 60 kilometers between the KNPP and the international border or the roughly 30-40 kilometers from the current Ukrainian FLOT within Kursk Oblast, suggesting that the Ukrainian military command has deliberately avoided striking the KNPP.[25]

The Kremlin routinely attempts to portray Ukraine as endangering the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and extended this information operation to the KNPP shortly after Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[26] Russian government-affiliated media has also purposefully misrepresented IAEA statements to cohere with Russian information operations aimed at portraying Ukraine as threatening the ZNPP and legitimizing Russia's occupation of the ZNPP.[27] The Kremlin likely also attempting to obfuscate its own routine endangerment of the Russian-occupied ZNPP - through its routine militarization of the ZNPP - by drawing focus onto Ukraine's alleged endangerment of the KNPP. Russian forces fired at the ZNPP during their seizure of the ZNPP in March 2022 and have since stored and operated military equipment within the territory of the plant.[28]

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized India's commitment to ending the war in Ukraine to Russian President Vladimir Putin following Modi's recent visit to Ukraine. In a call with Putin on August 27, Modi informed Putin about his visit to Ukraine on August 23 and emphasized India's commitment to supporting a swift, abiding, and peaceful solution to the war.[29] The Kremlin's readout reported that Putin provided Modi with a detailed assessment of the West's and Ukrainian authorities' "destructive" actions while outlining Russia's approaches to the solution to the war.[30] The Indian government readouts did not emphasize Putin's accusations against the West and Ukraine, instead using neutral language focusing on bilateral relations. The two leaders also discussed the enhancement of economic ties and cooperation within the BRICS framework.[31] ISW previously reported on the importance of Modi's visit to Ukraine and highlighted Modi's emphasis on principles of international law in discussions of peace with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and assessed that enhanced Ukraine-India bilateral relations could indicate an inflection point in Indian foreign policy that has traditionally featured close relations with Russia.[32] Putin was likely hoping to further court Modi following Modi's visit to Russia in early July, and Modi's visit and positive impressions of Ukraine may be challenging Putin's perception of Indian-Russian relations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed on August 27 that Ukrainian forces used F-16 fighter jets to down missiles during Russia's most recent massive drone and missile strike against Ukraine. [33] Zelensky previously noted that Ukraine intended to use F-16s are part of a combined air defense and fighter aircraft system to protect Ukrainian positions and cities from Russian air, drone, and missile strikes.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have made significant tactical advances in the Pokrovsk direction amid reports that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from select areas southeast of Pokrovsk.
- Russia's most combat-capable troops are currently sustaining Russian advances towards Pokrovsk, and Russia's offensive operations are emblematic of the wider Russian theory of victory in Ukraine, premised on seemingly indefinite grinding tactical advances. Russia's continuous and complete prioritization of the Pokrovsk direction will likely impact Russia's overall combat capabilities in Ukraine in the aftermath of any Pokrovsk scenario, especially as the Kremlin tries to balance gains in Pokrovsk with defending against the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast was in part an effort to preempt a Russian offensive operation into Sumy or Chernihiv oblasts and noted that the incursion is an aspect of Ukraine's wider efforts to achieve a just and lasting diplomatic solution to the war based on the principles of international law and the inviolability of Ukraine's territorial integrity.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly attempted to advance into two areas of Belgorod Oblast on August 27 amid continued Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast.
- Russian officials attempted to use International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi's visit to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) to falsely portray Ukraine as threatening a radiological incident, likely to undermine Western support for Ukraine by stoking unfounded fears about Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized India's commitment to ending the war in Ukraine to Russian President Vladimir Putin following Modi's recent visit to Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kremenna and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has reportedly heightened willingness among Russian citizens to sign military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 26, 2024

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Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

August 26, 2024, 7:30pm ET

Russia conducted one of the largest combined series of drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure to date on August 26. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported that Russian forces launched three Kh-47M2 "Kinzhal" aeroballistic missiles from Ryazan and Lipetsk oblasts; six Iskander-M or North Korean KN-23 ballistic missiles from Kursk and Voronezh oblasts and occupied Crimea; 77 Kh-101 cruise missiles from Tu-95MS strategic bombers from Volgograd Oblast and the Caspian Sea; 28 Kalibr cruise missiles from both surface and underwater missile carriers in the eastern Black Sea; three Kh-22 cruise missiles from Voronezh Oblast; 10 Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from an unspecified number of Su-57 fighter aircraft and Su-34 fighter-bombers in airspace over Belgorod Oblast and occupied Mariupol; and 109 Shahed drones from Yeysk and Primorsk-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai, Kursk Oblast, and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[1] Oleshchuk noted that Ukrainian forces shot down one Kh-47 "Kinzhal," one Iskander-M, one Kh-22, 99 total Kh-101s, Kalibrs, and Kh-59s, and 99 Shaheds, and that an unspecified number of Shaheds missed their targets and crashed elsewhere in Ukraine, while two more crossed into Belarusian airspace. Polish Armed Forces Commander Major General Maciej Klisz noted that at least one drone temporarily crossed into Polish airspace during the Russian strike series. [2] The massive Russian strike series damaged objects in 15 Ukrainian oblasts, largely targeting Ukrainian critical infrastructure and causing significant damage to Ukraine's energy grid.[3] Geolocated footage published on August 26 shows the aftermath of a likely Russian missile strike against the Kyiv Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP) dam in Vyshhorod (just north of Kyiv City), although Kyiv Oblast Head Ruslan Kravchenko noted that the strike on the dam did not cause significant damage to Kyiv HPP infrastructure.[4] Ukrainian officials reported additional damage to critical infrastructure and energy disruptions as a result of Russian strikes in Lviv, Odesa, Volyn, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, and Zaporizhia oblasts.[5]

Russian milbloggers largely responded gleefully to the August 26 strikes, framing them as a Russian "retaliation" for Ukraine's offensive into Kursk Oblast.[6] One milblogger noted, however, that such massive and devastating strikes should not be a one-off, calling for Russian military commanders to conduct such strikes on a regular basis to accomplish strategic and systemic impacts of Ukraine -- echoing similar milblogger calls for sustained Russian strike series following larger strikes targeting Ukrainian infrastructure.[7] Russia likely lacks the defense-industrial capacity to sustain such massive

strikes at a similar scale with regularity, but Ukrainian officials emphasized that this strike series shows the exigent need for Ukraine to receive more air defense systems from its partners, and for Ukraine's partners to remove limitations on Ukraine's ability to conduct long-range strikes into Russia with Western provided weapons.[8] ISW recently assessed that there are at least 250 military and paramilitary objects in Russia within range of US-provided ATACMS missiles, which US policy prevents Ukraine from using to strike inside of Russia.[9]

Ukraine issued a warning to Belarus amid the recent buildup of Belarusian forces at the Ukrainian border in Belarus' Gomel Oblast. Ukrainian intelligence services reported on August 25 that Belarus amassed forces in Gomel Oblast (which shares a border with northern Ukraine) and has deployed a significant number of personnel, including special operations forces (likely in reference to Spetsnaz units), weapons, military equipment, and fighters from the former Wagner Group.[10] The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reported on August 25 that the Belarusian forces deployed under the pretext of a military exercise near the border with Ukraine and are particularly close to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, which raises security concerns for Ukraine.[11] A Belarusian milblogger claimed on August 25 that the Ukrainian reports were correct and confirmed that Belarusian forces are amassing at the border.[12] The Ukrainian MFA urged Belarus to withdraw its troops from the border and warned that any violation of the Ukrainian state border would prompt Ukraine to take necessary defensive measures in accordance with international law.[13] The Ukrainian MFA also cautioned Belarus against succumbing to Russian pressure and supporting Russia's war efforts against Ukraine. Ukraine's State Border Service Spokesperson Andriy Demchenko announced on August 26 that Ukrainian forces are fortifying the border area with Belarus in response.[14]

The current Belarusian build-up along the Ukrainian border is likely intended to divert and stretch Ukrainian forces along a wider frontline, as ISW continues to assess that Belarusian forces remain unlikely to invade Ukraine due to constraints facing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. An analysis by Ukraine-based open-source intelligence organization Frontelligence Insight and Rochan Consulting suggests that Belarusian combat units typically operate at only 30 to 40 percent of their total end strength and rely on mobilization to staff units, indicating that serious preparations for a major Belarusian invasion of Ukraine would be more apparent as Belarus has not announced general mobilization.[15] The Frontelligence investigation stated the scale of a hypothetical Belarusian attack into Ukraine would likely be limited and suggested that the Belarusian forces could be conducting this operation to distract Ukrainian forces from their efforts elsewhere along the frontline, consequently supporting Russian forces committed throughout Ukraine and Kursk Oblast. Andriy Demchenko reported on August 26 that the current number of Russian forces in Belarus is insufficient for a significant coordinated invasion of Ukraine from the Gomel Oblast border.[16] A Belarusian invasion of Ukraine, or even Belarus' military involvement in the war, would degrade Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's ability to defend his regime (and be very unpopular domestically), and ISW has previously assessed that Lukashenko is extremely unlikely to risk combat with Ukraine that could weaken his regime or drastically increase Belarusian domestic discontent. [17] Belarusian presidential elections are approaching in February 2025, and Lukashenko likely desires to retain control over public sentiment, as well as access to his military to crack down on any protests surrounding the elections, as he did in late 2020. Lukashenko leveraged his military to crack down against previous mass protests against Lukashenko's staged presidential elections in 2020, and a loss of capabilities among the Belarusian military that could result from combat operations in Ukraine would degrade Lukashenko's ability to crush future protests. Lukashenko likely also seeks to avoid being dragged into Russia's war with Ukraine to avoid the domestic political costs that such involvement would incur. Possible Belarusian mobilization expected battlefield casualties, Belarus' further international isolation, and negative economic ramifications would likely increase public discontent and undo Lukashenko's efforts to restore his regime's stability since 2020. Additionally, Lukashenko has worked to maintain some level of Belarusian autonomy and sovereignty vis-a-vis Russia while portraying Belarus as Russia's equal partner in order to safeguard his power from the Kremlin's increased desire to subordinate Belarus to Moscow through the Union State.[18] Belarus directly joining Russia's war would indicate that Moscow has succeeded in eliminating Lukashenko's maneuvering space and established suzerainty over Belarus. ISW has previously observed Belarus deploy personnel to the Ukrainian border at the end of 2022 and early 2023 in a similar manner to current deployments and assessed that these efforts served primarily to stretch Ukrainian forces along the theater of war and disrupt their operations thereby supporting Russian operations.[19] Belarus may be once again conducting such activity to fix Ukraine's limited forces near Ukraine's international border with Belarus in support of a Russian campaign design that seeks to stretch Ukrainian forces thin throughout the theater. Belarus' support of Russian efforts is a strong indicator of the extent to which the Kremlin has been consolidating its control over Belarus since 2020.

Ukrainian forces reportedly attempted to strike Engels Air Base in Saratov Oblast and an oil refinery in Yaroslavl Oblast with drones on the morning of August 26. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on August 26 that Russian forces intercepted nine drones over Saratov Oblast, three over Kursk Oblast, two each over Belgorod, Bryansk, and Tula oblasts, and one each over Oryol and Ryazan oblasts on the night of August 25 to 26.[20] Geolocated footage published on August 26 shows a fixed-wing drone striking a building in Saratov City.[21] Saratov Oblast Governor Roman Busargin claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed all of the drones near Saratov City and Engels (just across the Volga River southeast of Saratov City), but that falling drone debris damaged infrastructure in both cities.[22] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated source speculated that Ukrainian forces attempted to strike the Engels Air Base, which Ukrainian forces have struck previously - most recently

in March and April 2024.[23] Yaroslavl Oblast Governor Mikhail Yevrayev claimed on August 26 that Russian forces shot down a drone attempting to strike an oil refinery in Yaroslavl City.[24] Oryol Oblast Governor Andrei Klychkov claimed that Russian forces destroyed three Ukrainian drones over Oryol Oblast on the morning of August 26.[25] Volgograd Oblast Governor Andrei Bocharov claimed that Russian forces downed several drones over Yelansky Raion but that falling drone debris damaged several buildings.[26] ISW has not observed any official Ukrainian sources commenting on the strikes.

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations within their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 26, but neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made any significant confirmed or claimed advances.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Komarovka (southwest of Korenevo).[27] Several Russian sources claimed on August 26 that fighting is ongoing in Olgovka and Kremyanoye (both east of Korenevo) despite claims on August 25 that Russian forces had recaptured these settlements.[28] One Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces previously seized Matveevka (east of Korenevo), although ISW has not observed other Russian or Ukrainian sources making a similar claim within the past several days.[29] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing near Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha), although one Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces are advancing in the area.[30] Geolocated footage published on August 26 shows Ukrainian forces operating just west of Nechayev (northeast of Sudzha), and Russian claims of fighting near the settlement also indicate that Ukrainian forces continue operating near Nechayev.[31] Geolocated footage published on August 25 shows Ukrainian forces operating in Borki (southeast of Sudzha), and Russian sources claimed on August 26 that fighting is ongoing near the settlement.[32] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) and 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade are reportedly counterattacking in the Plekhovo-Borki-Spalnoye area (south to southeast of Sudzha).[33] Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 83rd VDV Brigade are operating in Kursk Oblast, which ISW most recently observed operating in the Kharkiv direction.[34]

The Kremlin may be leveraging the leadership of the prominent Kremlin-linked *Rybar* Telegram channel to set cultivate increased Russian influence in Iraq.

The *Rybar* channel claimed on August 26 that members of the *Rybar* team – likely including its founder Mikhail Zvinchuk – met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on August 25 in Baghdad, marking the team's first engagement with a current leader of a foreign country.[35] *Rybar* claimed that al Sudani emphasized the importance of allowing foreign journalists to report from Iraq to boost Iraq's global image, and *Rybar* assessed that Iraqi officials understand the importance of Telegram in the "modern information war" given that they are inviting Russian media representatives to the country. Members of the *Rybar* team also claimed on August 25 that they met with former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and argued that Russia should pursue cooperation with Iraq and other countries in the Middle East and the "Global South." [36] This is the first time ISW has observed reports of a Russian milblogger meeting with a senior foreign official. ISW-CTP previously assessed that Russia may be setting conditions to supplant the United States as a security partner in Iraq in anticipation of the United States possibly reducing its military presence there.[37] An increased Kremlin-affiliated media presence in Iraq may be part of a Russian effort to deepen non-security related relations with Iraq as Russia is likely wary of complex Iran-Iraq relations, given Russia's increasing alignment with Iran. Russia has continued efforts to court Iranian-backed proxies within Iraq, notably.[38]

Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko was reportedly in charge of a Kremlin think tank that tried and failed to establish rhetorical justifications for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine after the fact, underscoring the Kremlin's rhetorical failures in the first months of the war and Russian President Vladimir Putin's continued prioritization of loyalty over competency in officials.

Russian-language opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on August 26 that Kiriyenko established and appointed political strategists to the Expert Institute for Social Research (EISI), a think tank that was supposed to take responsibility for the Kremlin's informational justifications for the Kremlin's political decisions and establish the "image of the future" of Russia, in 2017 but that EISI has largely failed in this mission.[39] *Meduza* assessed that EISI instead managed to eliminate challengers to Putin's regime, monitor alleged "stability" amid regional elections, and praise Putin.[40] *Meduza* cited several sources affiliated with the Russian presidential administration and noted that creating EISI was not Kiriyenko's "idea" but a precedent set by then-Presidential Administration first deputy heads Vladislav Surkov and Vyacheslav Volodin, who each established separate think tanks responsible for the Kremlin's "public and private" political "steps." [41] *Meduza* noted that the EISI did not have advance notice for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and had to develop informational justifications for the invasion after the Kremlin realized it could not rapidly conquer Ukraine.[42] *Meduza's* sources claimed that Russians failed to understand Russian President Vladimir Putin's concepts of "denazification" and "demilitarization."

[43] *Meduza* reported that the EISI did develop rhetorical lines to justify the war, including portraying the war as Russia's struggle against Western colonialism, framing Russia as "fated" to lead a coalition of several "friendly" states, and Russia as the "guardian" of "correct" European culture and values – but *Meduza's* sources stated that the EISI realized it was "impossible" to completely justify the war, much less incorporate the war into EISI's vision for Russia's future.[44] ISW is unable to confirm this report, but if true, this Kremlin messaging failure coheres with ISW's observations about Russian information operations and Kremlin information space incompetence throughout the war. The Kremlin largely failed to establish coherent messaging about the war in Ukraine in 2022 and throughout much of 2023, and Putin has prioritized leaders who are personally loyal to Putin over those who are

competent.[45] Kiriyyenko has a prominent role in Kremlin information operations and oversees Kremlin information operations to undermine support for Ukraine and NATO outside of EISI, so it is feasible that Kiriyyenko has prioritized these other efforts over rehabilitating EISI following the onset of the full-scale invasion.[46]

Key Takeaways:

- Russia conducted one of the largest combined series of drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure to date on August 26.
- Ukraine issued a warning to Belarus amid the recent buildup of Belarusian forces at the Ukrainian border in Belarus' Gomel Oblast.
- The current Belarusian build-up along the Ukrainian border is likely intended to divert and stretch Ukrainian forces along a wider frontline, as ISW continues to assess that Belarusian forces remain unlikely to invade Ukraine due to constraints facing Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly attempted to strike Engels Air Base in Saratov Oblast and an oil refinery in Yaroslavl Oblast with drones on the morning of August 26.
- Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations within their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 26, but neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made any significant confirmed or claimed advances.
- The Kremlin may be leveraging the leadership of the prominent Kremlin-linked Rybar Telegram channel to set cultivate increased Russian influence in Iraq.
- Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyyenko was reportedly in charge of a Kremlin think tank that tried and failed to establish rhetorical justifications for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine after the fact, underscoring the Kremlin's rhetorical failures in the first months of the war and Russian President Vladimir Putin's continued prioritization of loyalty over competency in officials.
- Russian forces recently advanced northeast of Kharkiv City, north of Chasiv Yar, southeast of Pokrovsk, and west of Donetsk City.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to recruit foreigners to fight with the Russian military in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 24, 2024

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

August 25, 2024, 5:35pm ET

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recently regained lost positions in Kursk Oblast amid reports of continued Ukrainian attacks in the area on August 25. A Russian milblogger claimed on August 25 that Russian forces regained lost positions in Komarovka (southwest of Korenevo) and are repelling small Ukrainian attacks in the area.[1] Several Russian milbloggers claimed on August 25 that Russian forces recaptured Olgovka and Kremyanoye (both east of Korenevo) and that Russian forces are advancing west of Kremyanoye.[2] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces still control Kremyanoye, however.[3] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces encircled elements of the Russian 18th Motorized Rifle Division (11th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) in Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha) and that elements of either the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) or 1427th Motorized Rifle Regiment (Territorial Troops) broke through the Ukrainian encirclement and allowed the personnel of the 18th Motorized Rifle Division to withdraw.[4] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continues within Malaya Loknya, although fighting in the settlement does not preclude Ukrainian forces from operating deeper into Kursk Oblast in the area.[5] Russian forces likely continue to operate within select areas of the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast as Ukrainian forces likely do not control all of the territory within the maximalist extent of claims about Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast. Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov similarly claimed on August 25 that elements of the Russian 14th Motorized Rifle Battalion of the Akhmat-Chechnya Regiment under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) successfully evacuated 51 conscripts from combat near Ulanok (southeast of Sudzha).[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attacking near Russkoye Porechnoye, Cherkasskoye Porechnoye, and Martynovka (all northeast of Sudzha).[7] A Russian milblogger claimed on August 24 that Russian forces retook and cleared Spalnoye (southeast of Sudzha), following similar claims from August 23 that Russian forces retook the settlement.[8] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in the direction of Borki and Spalnoye on August 25.[9] Russian opposition outlets reported that conscripts of the Russian 217th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) deployed from Ivanovo City - where the regiment's and division's garrison is located - to Kursk Oblast.[10]

The Russian military likely continues to redeploy forces from lower priority sectors of the frontline in Ukraine to the frontline in Kursk Oblast. Commanders of the Russian 810th Naval

Infantry Brigade, 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]), 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade, 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), and 51st VDV Regiment (106th VDV Division) briefed Russian President Vladimir Putin on combat missions in Russian territories bordering Ukraine (likely referring to Kursk Oblast) on August 24.[11] Earlier in the day, Putin met with Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov and Chief of the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate Colonel General Sergei Rudskoy to discuss the Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[12] ISW has observed elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, and 11th VDV Brigade fighting in Kursk Oblast and has observed evidence that the Russian military command recently redeployed elements of the 56th VDV Regiment from the Robotyne area in western Zaporizhia Oblast to Kursk Oblast.[13] ISW has not yet observed reports of elements of the 51st VDV Regiment fighting in Kursk Oblast, but the fact that the 51st VDV Regiment commander briefed Putin alongside the commanders of other units that have recently redeployed elements to Kursk Oblast suggests that the elements of the 51st VDV Regiment have also likely redeployed to the area. Elements of the 51st VDV Regiment have been fighting in the Siversk direction in recent months alongside other units of the 106th VDV Division.[14] Russia appears to have redeployed elements of the 810th and 155th naval infantry brigades from the frontline in northern Kharkiv Oblast and likely redeployed elements of the 11th VDV Brigade from the wider Chasiv Yar area.[15] The Russian military command is resisting operational pressures to redeploy forces away from its high priority offensive effort to seize Pokrovsk in Donetsk Oblast and will likely continue to draw forces from lower priority offensive operations elsewhere throughout the theater to defend in Kursk Oblast.[16]

French authorities arrested Telegram founder Pavel Durov on August 24, prompting concern among Russian ultranationalist milbloggers about their ability to report freely on the war in Ukraine. ISW has not observed any direct evidence indicating that Durov's arrest will affect Telegram operations in the near term, however. Western media reported citing sources in French law enforcement that French authorities arrested Durov (who has French citizenship) at the Le Bourget Airport near Paris as part of a preliminary investigation into multiple crimes involving inadequate Telegram moderation and lack of Telegram's cooperation with law enforcement.[17] The Russian Embassy in France claimed that it immediately demanded that French authorities explain the reasons for Durov's arrest but that French authorities have not responded.[18] Russian milbloggers broadly reacted by expressing fear about their continued ability to communicate on Telegram, with some worried about Telegram's ability to continue operating without its head, while others expressed concern that Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor will block domestic access to Telegram.[19] Some milbloggers advertised newly-created or existing pages on Kremlin-controlled social media site Vkontakte (VK) as an alternative method to access their war reporting if Telegram suddenly stopped functioning or if Roskomnadzor suddenly blocked Telegram.[20] The Kremlin has long sought to compel Durov and Telegram into complying with Russian censorship efforts and to strengthen its control over Russian ultranationalist milbloggers.[21] Russian President Vladimir Putin and Durov were both in Baku, Azerbaijan on August 20, and Putin reportedly refused an invitation to meet with Durov for unspecified reasons.[22] Durov's arrest does not necessarily portend significant changes to Telegram's content moderation or access to Telegram in Russia and Ukraine, and ISW has not yet observed any changes in how Russian sources use Telegram to report on the war in Ukraine following Durov's arrest.

The potential loss of Telegram within Russia would further hamper Russian milbloggers' ability to speak relatively freely under the Putin regime. Russian ultranationalist milbloggers and other groups have routinely used Telegram to levy complaints about the Russian conduct of the war in Ukraine, Russian government policies, and even specific officials without being subject to direct censorship on Telegram.[23] Russian authorities have resorted to public arrests of prominent information space figures, quietly fostering a culture of self-censorship, and creating a group of Kremlin-loyal milbloggers to exert control over the ultranationalist information space on Telegram.[24] An exodus of Russian milbloggers and other groups from Telegram to VK would allow the Kremlin more direct control to censor such voices on the platform itself, as VK – though founded by Durov – is currently headed by Vladimir Kiriyyenko, son of Presidential Office Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyyenko.[25]

Russian milbloggers reacted to Durov's arrest by focusing on how Russian soldiers rely on ad-hoc communications, including Telegram, for organizing operations in Ukraine and called on the Russian military command to establish an adequate official communication system. Milbloggers widely characterized Telegram as the main alternative to official communications for Russian military personnel in Ukraine and argued that it is now vital for the Russian military command to establish an official communications system.[26] The Russian milbloggers could not agree, however, whether the Russian military command has already created such a centralized communications system and that it is just poorly implemented or if there is no such system.[27] Russian forces have broadly struggled with effective communications throughout the war. Russian milbloggers have previously described official communications systems as overcentralized to the point of inhibiting Russian indirect fire operations, and more recently Russian forces have failed to establish

adequate command and control (C2) structures to support their offensive in northern Kharkiv Oblast and defense in Kursk Oblast.[28] Russian forces have largely compensated for this lack of adequate official communications by relying on their insecure personal devices to organize frontline C2, logistics, and combat operations, and the Kremlin has recently temporarily sought to criminalize Russian forces' use of these devices without offering a meaningful alternative.[29] The sudden uncertainty around Telegram's continued ability to operate within Russia and any falter in Telegram operations will likely impact Russian frontline operations, and if blocked completely, degrade these operations in the near term. Russian military Telegram users may start migrating from Telegram, anyway, out of fear of the system being compromised while Durov is under arrest, and Russian forces may start decoupling from Telegram communications even if Telegram's operations are not ostensibly or actually impacted by Durov's arrest.[30]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recently regained lost positions in Kursk Oblast amid reports of continued Ukrainian attacks in the area on August 25.
- The Russian military likely continues to redeploy forces from lower priority sectors of the frontline in Ukraine to the frontline in Kursk Oblast.
- French authorities arrested Telegram founder Pavel Durov on August 24, prompting concern among Russian ultranationalist milbloggers about their ability to report freely on the war in Ukraine. ISW has not observed any direct evidence indicating that Durov's arrest will affect Telegram operations in the near term, however.
- Russian milbloggers reacted to Durov's arrest by focusing on how Russian soldiers rely on ad-hoc communications, including Telegram, for organizing operations in Ukraine and called on the Russian military command to establish an adequate official communication system.
- Russian forces recently advanced near and within Toretsk and southwest of Donetsk City.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 24, 2024

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

August 24, 2024, 8:20pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on August 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian long-range strikes against Russian military targets within Russia's rear are crucial for degrading Russian military capabilities throughout the theater, and the lifting of restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons would allow Ukrainian forces to strike a wide range of significant targets undergirding Russia's war effort. An unnamed senior Biden administration national security official reportedly stated that Ukrainian strikes with Western-provided weapons against targets within Russia would not be effective because the Russian military has redeployed military aircraft from Russian airbases near Ukraine — but this assessment ignores how Russian forces are leveraging sanctuary space in deep rear areas within Russia for a wide array of infrastructure besides airfields to support military operations against Ukraine. *Politico* reported on August 23 that an unnamed senior Biden administration national security official stated that Russian officials have moved some targets out of range of Western-provided Storm Shadow and ATACMS missiles and that Ukrainian forces only have a limited supply of these missiles.[1] An unnamed administration official also reportedly stated that Russian forces have moved 90 percent of the aircraft that conduct glide bomb strikes from Russian airspace away from airfields within range of Storm Shadow and ATACMS missiles.[2] ISW has observed confirmation of redeployments of Russian aircraft to airfields out of range of Western-provided long-range weapons; and the reported decreased Russian aviation activity throughout the theater is consistent with reports that Russian forces have been redeploying aviation assets.[3]

The redeployment of Russian air assets from Russian air bases in range of ATACMS does not remove the utility of using ATACMS against other Russian military targets, however. ISW assesses that there are at least 250 military and paramilitary objects in Russia within range of ATACMS missiles that the United States has provided Ukraine. The United States currently prohibits Ukrainian forces from using ATACMS missiles to strike military targets in Russia, however, and only allows strikes using US-provided HIMARS equipped with GMLRS — at maximum permitting Ukraine to strike only 20 out of the 250 objects it could strike with ATACMS. Only 17 of these 250 objects are airfields, and it is unlikely that the Russian military has redeployed assets away from all the other 233 objects to the same degree as it has reportedly done with aviation assets.

US officials' comments centered on Russia's redeployment of air assets have so far largely ignored the majority of targets in range of ATACMS that Ukrainian forces could strike if US prohibitions were lifted. Many of the 233 military and paramilitary objects in range of ATACMS are large military bases, communications stations, logistics centers, repair facilities, fuel depots, ammunition warehouses, and permanent headquarters that would be extremely difficult or impossible to quickly redeploy assets from or rapidly harden. ISW has not collected open-source evidence of redeployments of military assets from the majority of Russia's rear areas. The mass redeployment of assets away from such facilities would present significant challenges to Russian logistics throughout the theater, and open sources and US officials have not indicated that Russian forces have engaged in such logistical upheavals. Such disruptions to Russian logistics throughout the deep rear would have also constrained ongoing Russian offensive operations throughout the frontline, and ISW has not observed evidence of such widespread logistical constraints. The 233 Russian military and paramilitary objects within ranges of ATACMS missiles that are not airfields support Russian command and control (C2), intelligence, reconnaissance, logistical, and repair support for Russian forces fighting in Ukraine and in Kursk Oblast, and the assessment that there is no utility in granting Ukraine the ability to use ATACMS in Russia on the basis of limited redeployments of air assets from some airfields ignores these facilities. Any assessment that argues that there is no point in allowing Ukraine to strike targets in Russia on the exclusive basis of air asset redeployments is incomplete without also accounting for the hundreds of other facilities supporting Russia's war against Ukraine and would thus be incorrect.

Ukrainian forces do not have to strike every single Russian military and paramilitary object in Russia within range of Western-provided weapons to start generating significant operational pressures on the Russian military. The lifting of the current Western restrictions would generate a serious Ukrainian long-range strike threat that would force a decision point on the Kremlin and likely prompt the Russian military command to significantly reconfigure assets throughout the deep rear to protect against Ukrainian strikes. Ukraine's successful use of HIMARS against Russian logistics, C2, and aviation facilities in occupied Ukraine in Summer and Fall 2022 eventually forced the Russian military to disperse many of these assets, causing disruptions to Russian operations throughout the theater and significantly contributing to Russia's pace of advance grinding to a halt by late 2022. [4] Russian forces have since appeared adapted many of their logistics systems in occupied Ukraine to protect against Ukraine's long-range strike capabilities at the expense of sacrificing logistical efficiency in part by offloading many requirements to military and paramilitary facilities out of range of HIMARS and within sanctuary space in Russia.[5] Russia also deployed air defense and electronic warfare assets to protect vulnerable targets against Ukrainian precision fires, degrading the effectiveness of those fires. It is unlikely that Russian forces have been hardening all facilities in Russia against potential Ukrainian strikes or dispersing assets throughout the deep rear at scale without a pressing threat to do so. Persistent Ukrainian drone strikes into the Russian rear have threatened some of these facilities but not to the extent that would compel the Russian military command to consider the highly disruptive process of redeploying logistics and support systems at scale. Bringing Russia's rear areas under threat would likely also prompt the Russian military command to make decisions about how to allocate its limited air defense and electronic warfare assets to protect a largest geographic area.

The Russian military could seek to avoid such redeployments in the event of lifted Western restrictions by heavily concentrating air defense and electronic warfare assets to protect military and paramilitary facilities in the rear, although it is not clear if Russian forces have the available air defense assets to do so. Ukraine's drone strike campaign against Russia has illustrated that many rear areas within Russia have poor air defense coverage or none at all.[6] Russian forces would likely have to redeploy air defense and electronic warfare assets from all over Russia as well as from the frontline in Ukraine to generate the necessary protection coverage for rear areas in Russia within range of Western-provided weapons, possibly setting conditions for Ukraine to scale up aviation operations of its own along the frontline. **The lifting of the restrictions would therefore allow Ukraine to start striking significant Russian military targets while also immediately forcing a decision point on Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command about the allocation of limited air defense and electronic warfare assets and the configuration of Russian military logistics and support systems across the theater and the deep rear.**

Recent successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian military targets within ATACMS range with Ukraine's own domestically produced precision weapons demonstrate that Ukraine still has a requirement to conduct strikes that lifting the US restrictions could help fill. Ukrainian forces have been able to develop deep-strike capability throughout two and a half years of war primarily with long-range strike drones and partially with modified Neptune anti-ship missiles. Ukrainian strike campaigns with domestically-produced weapons pushed the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) out of the western Black Sea and most recently, Ukrainian strikes against Russian oil refineries compelled the Kremlin to entertain negotiations for a possible moratorium against strikes on Ukraine's own energy infrastructure. Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian ammunition depot near Ostrogozhsk, Voronezh Oblast on August 24, sparking fires in the area and reportedly causing at least three explosions. [7] The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that this large depot contained artillery and tank shells, small arms rounds, and surface-to-air missiles for the Russian Western Grouping of Forces (responsible for the Kupiansk-Svatove-Kreminna line).[8] This facility is within range of ATACMS fired from Ukrainian-controlled areas of Kharkiv Oblast. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on August 24 that Ukraine has produced and successfully fielded the "Palyanytsia missile-drone" for the first time, and Ukrainian Strategic Industries Minister

Oleksandr Kamyshin stated that Ukrainian forces used this "missile-drone" to hit an unspecified Russian military facility in occupied Ukraine.[9] Ukrainian officials have not provided details on the drone's range or technical specifications but did confirm that this weapon meets the technical specifications of both a drone and missile, and Zelensky called it a "new class of weapon." [10]

Some US officials assess that the Russian military will likely need to redeploy significant forces from Ukraine and/or operational reserves to repel Ukrainian forces from Russian territory. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on August 23 that unspecified US officials assess that Russia likely needs 15 to 20 brigades — at least 50,000 troops — to push Ukrainian forces out of Kursk Oblast.[11] The US assess that the Russian military would likely need to redeploy significant elements from Ukraine or draw on operational reserves accumulated for its planned summer 2024 offensive effort to Kursk Oblast, or both, to successfully retake territory. ISW has already observed reports that the Russian military has redeployed elements of several Russian battalions, regiments, and brigades mostly from lower priority sectors of the frontline to Kursk Oblast.[12] The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on August 17 that a source familiar with the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast stated that Russian forces have redeployed roughly 5,000 personnel from unspecified areas in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast by August 14 and assessed that Russian forces would likely need over 20,000 properly trained personnel to retake territory in the area.[13]

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations within their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 24, and neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made any significant claimed advances. Some milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recaptured Borki (southeast of Sudzha), but a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that these reports are unconfirmed.[14] A milblogger claimed that fighting also continued southeast of Borki near Spalnoye, Krupets, and Kamyshnoye.[15] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are attempting to bypass Korenevo by attacking near Olgovka and that Russian forces also repelled attacks near Komarovka (southwest of Korenevo) and Snagost.[16] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are attacking near Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha) Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (northeast of Sudzha), and Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha).[17] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]), Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz, and likely elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 22nd Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are reportedly defending Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha) from Ukrainian assaults with small infantry groups and armored vehicle support.[18] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Kamyshevka (northeast of Malaya Loknya).[19]

Ukrainian open-source intelligence project *Frontelligence Insight* published satellite imagery on August 24 indicating that Russian forces are rapidly building field fortification defensive lines south and southwest of Kurchatov (west of Kursk City).[20] The satellite imagery captured on August 14 and 18 indicates that Russian forces rapidly developed and began reinforcing a trench line near Dolgiy (south of Kurchatov) between August 14 and 18.[21] *Frontelligence Insight* also reported that Russian forces may be extending these defensive lines into windbreaks that would conceal these defensive lines from view in satellite imagery.[22]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky commented on some of the objectives of the Ukrainian operation into Kursk Oblast on August 24. Zelensky characterized the Ukrainian operation into Kursk Oblast as a spoiling attack that successfully prevented Russian forces from attempting to encircle part of Sumy Oblast and seize Sumy City.[23] A Russian attack into Sumy Oblast would likely have been part of the ongoing Russian theater-wide attempt to stretch Ukrainian forces across the entire frontline to pressure overall weakened Ukrainian defenses.[24] Russian forces attempted to divert and fix Ukrainian forces by launching an offensive operation into Kharkiv Oblast on May 10 while maintaining the existing tempo of offensive operations in eastern Ukraine, and the Russian military may have assessed that opening a new front in Sumy Oblast would further weaken Ukrainian forces defending throughout the theater.[25] A Russian attack into Sumy Oblast would have allowed Russian forces to maintain the theater-wide initiative, would have forced the Ukrainian military to defend in an additional sector of the frontline, and could have forced the Ukrainian military command to reassess their defensive prioritization. Ukrainian forces instead conducted a spoiling attack into Kursk Oblast and seized the battlefield initiative in this sector of the frontline.[26]

Ukraine and Russia conducted their first prisoner of war (POW) exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. Russian and Ukrainian sources announced on August 24 the 55th official POW exchange between the two countries since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[27] The United Arab Emirates mediated the exchange that reportedly occurred at a border checkpoint in Belarus, which saw Russia and Ukraine return 115 POWs each.[28] The Ukrainian POWs primarily included servicemembers who fought in Mariupol, while Russian milbloggers claimed that all the Russian POWs were conscripts that the Ukrainian forces captured during the recent Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian long-range strikes against Russian military targets within Russia's rear are crucial for degrading Russian military capabilities throughout the theater, and the lifting of restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons would allow Ukrainian forces to strike a wide range of significant targets undergirding Russia's war effort.**

- An unnamed senior Biden administration national security official reportedly stated that Ukrainian strikes with Western-provided weapons against targets within Russia would not be effective because the Russian military has redeployed military aircraft from Russian airbases near Ukraine — but this assessment ignores how Russian forces are leveraging sanctuary space in deep rear areas within Russia for a wide array of infrastructure besides airfields to support military operations against Ukraine.
- The redeployment of Russian air assets from Russian air bases in range of ATACMS does not remove the utility of using ATACMS against other Russian military targets, however.
- Ukrainian forces do not have to strike every single Russian military and paramilitary object in Russia within range of Western-provided weapons to start generating significant operational pressures on the Russian military.
- Recent successful Ukrainian strikes against Russian military targets within ATACMS range with Ukraine's own domestically produced precision weapons demonstrate that Ukraine still has a requirement to conduct strikes that lifting the US restrictions could help fill.
- Some US officials assess that the Russian military will likely need to redeploy significant forces from Ukraine and/or operational reserves to repel Ukrainian forces from Russian territory.
- Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations within their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 24, and neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces made any significant claimed advances.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky commented on some of the objectives of the Ukrainian operation into Kursk Oblast on August 24.
- Ukraine and Russia conducted their first prisoner of war (POW) exchange since the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Kursk Oblast officials announced the creation of the BARS-Kursk volunteer detachment on August 24 and stated that the detachment will fight solely within Kursk Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 23, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Grace Mappes, George Barros

August 23, 2024, 7:05pm ET

Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance near Sudzha amid continued Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast on August 23. Geolocated footage published on August 22 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced further in southern Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha). [1] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced north of Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha) along the Sudzha-Sukhodolovka R-200 highway.[2] Russian sources claimed that there are conflicting reports about fighting east of Sudzha near Samoryadovo and Kozyrevka, but that Ukrainian mobile groups may be operating in the area.[3] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces re-took Spalnoye and Krupets (both southeast of Sudzha), although the situation in the area remains unclear.[4] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled a platoon-sized Ukrainian mechanized assault near Aleksandrovka (northeast of Korenevo).[5] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces re-took positions west of Korenevo on August 23, suggesting that Ukrainian forces were recently operating west of the settlement.[6] Russian sources claimed that fighting continued throughout the line of contact in Kursk Oblast on August 22 and 23.[7]

Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated on August 22 that the US is gaining "a better understanding" of Ukraine's goals in Kursk Oblast and noted that Ukraine wants to create a buffer zone in Kursk Oblast.[8] Singh stated that the US is still working to determine how the buffer zone fits into Ukraine's strategic objectives and that the US continues to provide materiel to support Ukraine's battlefield needs. Singh clarified that current US restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian border areas allows Ukrainian forces to engage in counterfire while defending against Russian attacks across the international border, including in Kursk Oblast.

Ukrainian officials continue to highlight how Ukrainian forces can leverage tactical and technological advantages to offset Russian materiel advantages. Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk stated in an interview with Ukrainian outlet *Ukrinform* published on August 23 that the Ukrainian military has been able to inflict heavy losses against significantly larger quantities of Russian armored vehicles, artillery, and other equipment due to Ukrainian tactics and Ukraine's effective use of available weapons.[9] Havrylyuk stated that Ukrainian forces have destroyed over 8,500 Russian tanks, 17,000 artillery systems, 1,000 air defense systems, about 370 aircraft, and 2,500 cruise missiles since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.[10] ISW cannot confirm these figures, however. Havrylyuk stated that Russian forces have fired roughly 300,000 artillery shells throughout the theater each month on average and aimed to overwhelm Ukrainian forces with Russia's large artillery advantage.

[11] Havrylyuk stated that more precise (and effective) Western artillery systems can offset these advantages as long as Russian forces do not have an artillery advantage greater than three-to-one. [12] Ukrainian forces have leveraged GMLRS rocket artillery and NATO 155mm artillery systems and ammunition capable of striking targets at longer ranges than Russian / Soviet field artillery to conduct superior counterbattery fire throughout the war in Ukraine. [13] Havrylyuk added that Ukrainian artillery units also use tactics that provide greater mobility than Russian artillery units and therefore conduct more effective counterbattery fire. [14] Havrylyuk noted that Ukraine's rapidly growing use of unmanned systems is another example of how Ukrainian forces can reduce costs while inflicting high losses on Russian forces and that increased Ukrainian drone use in 2024 has led to higher Russian artillery and armored vehicle losses. [15] Havrylyuk stated that long-range precision strikes into Russia would allow Ukraine to prevent Russia from transferring larger quantities of ammunition and equipment to the frontline and that strikes against military bases, arsenals, and logistic routes within Russia would heavily degrade Russian artillery advantages. [16] Western self-imposed restrictions on military aid provisions to Ukraine and policies restricting Ukrainian long-range strikes against military targets within Russia are constraining Ukrainian capabilities to degrade Russian materiel advantages. [17]

US President Joe Biden announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine following a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on August 23. [18] The package is valued at \$125 million and includes: Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (c-UAS) equipment and munitions; ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS); 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition and additional ammunition for small arms and demolitions; Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; medical and mine-clearing equipment; and additional materiel and training services.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted another drone strike against the oil depot in Proletarsk, Rostov Oblast on August 23. Russian opposition media reported that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against the oil depot at about 0500 on August 23, following a strike against the depot on August 18 that caused a fire that Russian authorities have been battling since August 18. [19] Satellite imagery captured on August 22 of the Marinovka airbase in Volgograd Oblast shows that the Ukrainian strike on August 22 may have destroyed at least one Russian Su-24 or Su-34 fighter aircraft parked at the base, and additional imagery shows that several Russian fighter jets parked in the hangars also sustained damage. [20] An aviation-focused Russian milblogger claimed on August 22 that the light hangars at the Marinovka base did not protect Russian aircraft and called for Russian authorities to build reinforced concrete hangars wherever possible and only build light hangars when they cannot build stronger structures. [21]

Islamic State (IS)-affiliated inmates took prison employees and other inmates hostage at a penal colony in Surovikino, Volgograd Oblast, Russia, on August 23. Four inmates took eight employees and four other inmates of the IK-19 prison hostage. [22] The hostage-takers displayed an ISIS flag during the attack. [23] The attackers stated that they were taking revenge "for their Muslim brothers" whom Russian authorities detained in connection with the March 2024 terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall. [24] The attackers inflicted stab wounds upon four of the employees, three of whom died, and four other hostages were hospitalized, one of whom later died. [25] Rosgvardia snipers reportedly killed the four hostage-takers. [26] Two of the attackers were citizens of Uzbekistan and two were from Tajikistan. [27] Three of the attackers were imprisoned for drug trafficking and one was convicted for beating a man to death during a fight. Russian sources claimed that one of the attackers wore a suicide vest but disagreed on what happened, with some sources claiming that the vest malfunctioned and others claiming that Russian forces killed the attacker before he could activate the vest. [28] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* stated that locals in the Kalmykia Republic and Volgograd and Rostov oblasts reported problems accessing Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber shortly after the start of the attack and that Russian authorities likely blocked the messenger platforms. [29] Russian President Vladimir Putin convened a meeting of the permanent members of the Security Council on August 23 during the hostage situation and heard reports from Minister of Internal Affairs Vladimir Kolokoltsev, Federal Security Service Head Alexander Bortnikov, and Rosgvardia Head Viktor Zolotov. [30] Mufti of the Volgograd Oblast Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims Bat Kifah stated that Russian authorities should not negotiate with the hostage-takers, but kill them and should punish those who allowed the "negligence" in penal colonies. [31] Acting Chairperson of the Russian Spiritual Directorate of Muslims Mufti Damir Mukhetdinov stated that the organization disagreed with the attackers' actions and that the hostage-takers may have been inspired from abroad in order to discredit Russia's strengthening relations with Muslim states. [32]

Russian milbloggers reacted to the hostage crisis with criticisms of the Russian prison system and migration policy. Russian milbloggers claimed that the IK-19 prison is known for bribes, with some of the prison employees reportedly selling knives to inmates. [33] Russian sources complained that prisoners are becoming radicalized within Russian penal colonies and claimed that this problem has increased since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the mobilization of prisoners to fight in Ukraine, and alleged increased flows of previously convicted Central Asian migrants to Russia. [34] Russian milbloggers called for the Russian government to take action to resolve these issues, including by reforming Russia's prison system. [35] The Volgograd Oblast Prosecutor's Office stated that it organized inspections of the IK-19 prison to ensure its compliance with its personnel's safety, taking measures to prevent inmates from using prohibited items, and other laws and regulations. [36] Six reportedly IS-affiliated inmates at a pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast similarly took two employees of the pretrial detention center hostage in June 2024, evoking similar

criticisms from Russian milbloggers about Russian authorities' failure to crack down on extremist groups and maintain security in penal colonies.[37] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin has attempted to posture that it has been cracking down against domestic extremism since the Crocus City Hall attack, but the prison hostage crises undermine this Kremlin effort.[38]

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's support for peace in Ukraine on the basis of India's participation in Ukraine's July 2024 peace summit and signed several bilateral cooperation agreements during a visit to Ukraine. Modi arrived in Kyiv on August 23 following his visit to Poland on August 21, marking the first time an Indian prime minister has visited Ukraine since the establishment of bilateral relations in 1992.[39] Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a joint statement emphasizing their commitment to ensuring a "just and lasting peace in Ukraine" based on principles of international law such as "respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states." [40] This statement contrasts with Modi's previous and more general calls for peace and diplomacy during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in July 2024.[41] The Ukrainian side emphasized that the Joint Communiqué on the Foundation of Peace established at the June 2024 peace summit can serve as a guiding framework for setting the terms of a peace deal, although India has not signed the document despite its participation in June 2024. [42] Modi and Zelensky also signed four bilateral cooperation agreements in agriculture, economics, development, and culture.[43] Modi and Zelensky agreed to strengthen bilateral defense cooperation, particularly in manufacturing, and to hold a second Joint Ukrainian-Indian Working Group meeting on military-technical cooperation in the near future.[44] Modi's visit to Ukraine marks a significant political inflection in India's foreign policy towards Ukraine and may indicate an Indian effort to take a stronger pro-Ukraine position than New Delhi has before, despite India's historical close and longstanding relationship with Moscow.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance near Sudzha amid continued Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast on August 23.**
- **Ukrainian officials continue to highlight how Ukrainian forces can leverage tactical and technological advantages to offset Russian materiel advantages.**
- **US President Joe Biden announced a new military assistance package for Ukraine following a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on August 23.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted another drone strike against the oil depot in Proletarsk, Rostov Oblast on August 23.**
- **Islamic State (IS)-affiliated inmates took prison employees and other inmates hostage at a penal colony in Surovikino, Volgograd Oblast on August 23.**
- **Russian milbloggers reacted to the hostage crisis with criticisms of the Russian prison system and migration policy.**
- **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's support for peace in Ukraine on the basis of India's participation in Ukraine's July 2024 peace summit and signed several bilateral cooperation agreements during a visit to Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.**
- **Russian authorities continue efforts to leverage conscripts to free up manpower elsewhere for combat operations in Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 22, 2024

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Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Frederick W. Kagan

August 22, 2024, 9:30pm ET

The Russian military command recently redeployed elements of at least one Russian airborne (VDV) regiment from western Zaporizhia Oblast in response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast, possibly in an effort to stabilize the lines and improve command and control (C2) over Russian conscripts. A Crimean occupation official, who had volunteered to fight as part of the Russian 56th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division), claimed on August 19 that his platoon redeployed from the Robotyne and Verbove area in western Zaporizhia Oblast to "defend" Kursk Oblast.[1] A Russian relative also claimed on Telegram that elements of the 1st Assault Company (56th VDV Regiment) began redeploying to unspecified area in Russia on August 15, and a Russian VDV-affiliated Telegram channel announced a crowdfunding effort on August 17 in support of elements of the 56th VDV Regiment that were reportedly already in Kursk Oblast.[2] Elements of the 56th VDV Regiment have been operating in western Zaporizhia Oblast since at least Summer 2023.[3] ISW has also observed proprietary, commercially-available data appearing to support reports of these redeployments. The Crimea-based Telegram channel Crimean Wind posted footage on August 22 of Russian military trucks reportedly transferring a "large amount of military equipment" from occupied Sevastopol and Perevalne, Crimea in the "northern direction." [4] OSINT analysts on X (formerly Twitter) observed tactical insignia on the trucks seen in Crimean Wind's footage that reportedly belongs to the 56th VDV Regiment and analyzed other footage of Russian military equipment and trucks moving through Voronezh Oblast towards Kursk Oblast.[5] A Russian milblogger also claimed on August 22 that elements of the 56th VDV "Brigade" were operating in Russkaya Konopelka (just

east of Sudzha and 12km from the international border) alongside former Wagner Group elements before editing the post to claim that elements of the 11th VDV Brigade were operating in the area. [6] Russian sources recently amplified footage purportedly showing elements of the 11th VDV Brigade allegedly leading conscripts out of an encirclement in an unspecified area in Kursk Oblast, and ISW observed elements of the 11th VDV Brigade operating in the Chasiv Yar direction in early July 2024.[7]

The scale of the redeployment of the 56th VDV Regiment is unclear from available information in the open source, although this reported redeployment is consistent with ISW's observation that Russia has been pulling forces from less critical sectors of the frontline such as western Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts.[8] The Russian military command notably redeployed elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) and elements of two unspecified VDV battalions from the Kherson direction to Kursk Oblast, and ISW has also observed claims that elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade were operating near Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast in June 2024.[9] The Russian military command generally regards VDV and naval infantry elements as "elite" forces (even though many Russian elite units have lost their eliteness over the course of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine) and tends to deploy these forces to prioritized directions.[10] The scale of such redeployments serves as a greater indicator of the Russian military's prioritization, however. ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military will likely continue prioritizing Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine – namely in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions.[11] The Ukrainian General Staff notably observed a decrease in Russian combat operations in western Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts on August 22.[12] The effects of redeploying elements of the 56th VDV Regiment and other elite elements from southern Ukraine will also depend on the scale of the redeployments. The Russian military command may be redeploying limited numbers of elite forces to improve C2 in Kursk Oblast and oversee inexperienced conscripts.

The Russian military command reportedly heavily committed elements initially intended for the Russian offensive effort in northern Kharkiv Oblast to the defense of Kursk Oblast. Russian opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta* reported on August 19 that appeals from relatives on Russian social media, reports about missing soldiers, and OSINT assessments indicate that Russia has committed elements of the following units to fighting in Kursk Oblast: the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment's 17th and 18th battalions (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]), the 252nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (3rd Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, MMD), the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment's 31st Battalion (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, SMD), the 9th Motorized Rifle Regiment (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]), the 143rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]), Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz units, 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 44th AC, Leningrad Military District [LMD]), 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA, LMD), 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th AC, LMD), Nizhnyi Novgorod's "Kulibin" detachment, the DNR "Pyatnashka" Brigade, "Veterany" 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade's "Oleg Mamiev" 3rd reconnaissance and assault detachment and "Otvazhnye" assault squad (Russian Volunteer Corps), unspecified BARS volunteer formations, and the 5th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade (6th Air Defense Army).[13] *Novaya Gazeta* noted that elements of the 22nd Motorized Rifle Regiment, "Veterany" 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade, and the 25th Motorized Rifle Brigade that were committed to Kursk Oblast were either recently deployed or about to deploy to Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City).[14] ISW has observed that significant redeployments of elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces (which is responsible for the Kharkiv direction) to Kursk Oblast suggest that the Russian military command has determined that disruption to the offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast is a necessary sacrifice to appropriately respond to the Ukrainian incursion while avoiding redeployments from higher priority sectors of the frontline.[15] The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast will continue to generate theater-wide operational pressures on Russian forces, and it is unlikely that the Russian military will be able to restrict significant disruptions to just the Northern Grouping of Forces particularly if and when it undertakes to expel Ukrainian forces from Kursk.[16]

The Kremlin may be taking steps to address its border vulnerabilities amid the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and following a series of unsuccessful long-term efforts to improve Russian border security. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the heads of Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts and several Russian officials to discuss the updated socio-economic situation in Russia's oblasts bordering Ukraine on August 22 amid the larger-scale Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and more limited Ukrainian attacks into Belgorod and Bryansk oblasts.[17] Bryansk Oblast Head Alexander Bogomaz reported during the meeting that the Bryansk government formed a territorial defense force during October 2023 on Putin's orders and that an unnamed Russian airborne forces (VDV) major general commands Bryansk Oblast's territorial defense forces. Bogomaz claimed that Rosgvardia recently provided light and heavy weapons for the forces and stated that Rosgvardia and the territorial defense forces are currently jointly patrolling the international border. Bogomaz asked Putin to consider financing regional territorial defense forces from the Russian federal budget in order to alleviate strain on regional budgets and incentivize participation in the territorial defense forces by offering regular wages to participants. Belgorod Oblast Head Vyacheslav Gladkov also expressed his support for this initiative, and a series of Kremlin officials, including Putin, insinuated that the Russian government will work to resolve the issue and provide federal funding for regional territorial defense forces.

The Russian government has previously hesitated to fully allocate federal materiel to territorial defense forces. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) allocated military weapons and equipment to

the Belgorod and Kursk territorial defense forces in August 2023, although a Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian authorities would store the weapons in a centralized, locked location and noted that it is unclear how the territorial defense forces will be able to access the weapons in an emergency.[18] Bogomaz's claim that a VDV commander is leading Bryansk Oblast's territorial defense forces may be indicative of the Kremlin's wider intentions to allocate better-trained, "elite" commanders to lead units comprised of poorer-trained territorial defense forces or conscripts. ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin may have attempted to balance the need for increased border security with a desire to avoid empowering decentralized military formations following the Wagner Group's armed rebellion in June 2023.[19] The Kremlin may be recalculating such assessments in the wake of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, however, and may be more willing to allocate greater materiel and manpower support to territorial defense forces.

Putin may also hope to use this meeting and the promise of improved funding and materiel for territorial defense units to alleviate concerns about the long-term use of Russian conscripts for Russian border security operations. A Ukrainian source in the military-political leadership told Ukrainian newswire *RBC-Ukraine* on August 21 that Putin tasked Russian forces with repelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast by October 1 without re-deploying forces from key frontlines areas. [20] October 1 is notably the first scheduled day of the semi-annual conscription cycle in Russia, and Russian conscripts notably serve for 12 months - suggesting that the 130,000 personnel conscripted in October 2023 should be released from their duties in the coming months.[21] Russian authorities are largely relying on conscripts (in some cases under the leadership of Russian regular and irregular forces) to defend against Ukrainian assaults in Kursk Oblast and are likely considering how to address the upcoming outflow of conscripts from the pool of manpower available to serve in Kursk Oblast. [22] It is unclear if the Russian military will adequately train Russian conscripts to defend Russian border areas, and even the most experienced Russian conscripts will likely continue to be woefully underequipped to push back the highly trained and organized Ukrainian units attacking in Kursk Oblast. The Kremlin may attempt to press outgoing conscripts into signing military service contracts, although ISW previously noted that the Kremlin is highly sensitive to the societal backlash that such an effort could generate.[23]

Ukrainian forces marginally advanced throughout their salient in Kursk Oblast amid continued Russian efforts to stop these advances on August 22. Geolocated footage published on August 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced into eastern Komarovka (south of Korenevo and east of Sudzha), although Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in the area.[24] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces operating northeast of Korenevo seized Semyonovka and advanced into southern Levshinka and that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced within northern Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha).[25] Additional geolocated footage published on August 22 that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced within southern Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha).[26] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian "Dikaya Division of Donbas" including the "Arbat," "Pyatnashka," and "Sarmat" battalions re-took Nechayev (north of Sudzha). [27] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to engage with Russian forces throughout Glushkovo, Korenevo, Sudzha, and Belovo raions in Kursk Oblast.[28] Russian sources also claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a reconnaissance-in-force operation near Zabrama, Bryansk Oblast on the evening of August 21 but that Russian forces — including Russian border guards and Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz personnel - repelled the attack.[29]

Recent Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction appear to have prompted Ukrainian withdrawals from limited positions southeast of Pokrovsk, and Russian forces have likely failed to achieve their apparent objective of tactically encircling Ukrainian forces in the area. Geolocated footage published on August 22 indicates that Russian forces recently seized Ptyche (southeast of Pokrovsk) and advanced further south of the settlement, and ISW assesses that this confirms Russian claims that Russian forces had previously seized the remainder of the east bank of the Karlivske Reservoir in the area.[30] Recent Russian advances south and southwest of the T-0511 (Ocheretyne-Hrodivka) highway have leveled the Russian salient east and southeast of Pokrovsk instead of setting conditions for the tactical encirclement of Ukrainian forces, however. Russian forces likely aimed to advance westward of the Karlivske Reservoir from Yasnobrodivka and Karlivka in order to encircle Ukrainian forces east of the Hrodivka-Novohrodivka-Selydove line but failed to make such gains in concert with their advances in the direction of Novohrodivka and Selydove from the south of the T-0511 highway.[31] Russian forces enveloped Ukrainian forces as they advanced towards the E-50 (Donetsk City-Pokrovsk) highway in recent weeks, however, and the threat of tactical encirclement likely prompted Ukrainian withdrawals. The spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Pokrovsk direction acknowledged on August 22 that Russian advances have encouraged Ukrainian forces to conduct withdrawals to level the front and preserve the lives of Ukrainian personnel. [32] Several Ukrainian commanders operating in the Pokrovsk direction told the *Associated Press* in an article published on August 22 that newly generated Ukrainian recruits in the Pokrovsk direction have retreated from positions in some instances.[33] ISW has not observed widespread reporting of chaotic Ukrainian withdrawals in the Pokrovsk direction, and the lack of rapid Russian tactical gains in the area suggests that Ukrainian forces managed to withdraw from enveloped positions in recent weeks. ISW has also not observed widespread reporting of Russian forces encircling and destroying Ukrainian personnel at positions southeast of Pokrovsk in recent weeks, and previous conversations among Russian milbloggers about an envisioned tactical encirclement in the area have subsided.[34]

The tempo of Russian aviation operations is reportedly decreasing throughout most of the theater, although this decreased tempo may be temporary, and its cause is unclear. Spokespeople for Ukrainian brigades operating in the Pokrovsk and Chasiv Yar directions both reported a general decrease in the number of glide bomb strikes and decreased Russian aviation activity on August 22.[35] The spokesperson for the Ukrainian brigade operating in the Pokrovsk direction suggested that Russian aircraft shortages and Ukrainian air defense capabilities in this sector of the front may be prompting the Russian military to decrease aviation activity.[36] ISW has not yet observed confirmation of decreased Russian aviation operations in the Pokrovsk and Chasiv Yar directions. Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vitaly Sarantsev reported on August 18 that Russian forces conducted 30 to 40 strikes per day in the Kharkiv direction a few weeks ago but have decreased the number of glide bomb strikes to roughly one to four strikes per day in the previous several days.[37] Sarantsev stated that Russian forces may be conducting fewer glide bomb strikes to prioritize aviation operations in the Pokrovsk, Kursk, and Sumy directions or because of the effects of Ukrainian strikes against Russian rear areas (likely referring to Ukrainian strikes against Russian airfields).[38] Data available from NASA FIRMS may partially corroborate Sarantsev's statements about the tempo of Russian aviation operations in the Kharkiv direction.[39] Ukrainian Northern Operational Command Spokesperson Vadym Mysnyk stated on August 15 that Russian forces launched half as many glide bombs against Sumy Oblast as compared to August 14, although it is unclear if the decreased tempo of Russian glide bomb strikes against Sumy Oblast will persist.[40]

Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported that Russian forces launched 10 Shahed-136/131 drones from Kursk Oblast largely against frontline Ukrainian positions in Kharkiv Oblast on the night of August 21 to 22 and that Ukrainian forces shot down two of the drones. [41] Russian forces routinely use Shahed drones for rear area strikes against Ukraine, and the use of Shaheds for frontline strikes may indicate that Russian forces are looking for ways to compensate for decreased glide bomb strikes in certain sectors of the frontline. Ukraine has recently struck several airfields within Russia and has destroyed ammunition warehouses holding glide bombs, and these strikes may have generated temporary disruptions to Russian aviation operations.[42] The Russian military is also committing aviation assets to the defense of Kursk Oblast, although not at a scale that would prevent Russian forces from fielding aviation throughout most of the theater.

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of successful strikes against targets in Volgograd Oblast and Krasnodar Krai on August 22. Sources within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) told Ukrainian media on August 22 that SBU and Special Operations Forces (SSO) personnel successfully struck several warehouses filled with glide bombs and fuel at the Marinovka airfield in Volgograd Oblast. [43] The sources stated that Russian aircraft based at the Marinovka airfield were involved in bombing frontline Ukrainian settlements and populations and noted that there were secondary detonations at the warehouses following the strike. Footage published on August 22 shows smoke plumes and explosions at the airfield, and satellite imagery shows significant damage to hangars at the airfield, although it is unclear if Ukrainian forces damaged any aircraft based on the footage and imagery. [44] The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters claimed on August 22 that a Ukrainian strike sank a railway ferry carrying fuel tanks that was moored in the port of Kavkaz, Krasnodar Krai.[45] The Crimea-based Telegram channel Crimean Wind stated that Ukrainian forces used a missile to strike the ferry and published footage showing the aftermath of the strike.[46] Russian authorities stated that the ferry was carrying 30 fuel tanks, and Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces may have used a Neptune anti-ship missile to strike the ferry.[47] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov told the *War Zone* defense outlet that the GUR conducted drone strikes against a Russian signals intelligence center and the Ostafyevo airport near Moscow City and the Millerovo Airbase in Rostov Oblast on August 21.[48] Budanov stated that Ukrainian forces are clarifying the extent of any damage to these targets. Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian S-300 air defense system near Novoshakhtinsk, Rostov Oblast on the night of August 20 and 21, and Russian sources claimed that Russian forces downed a Ukrainian drone over Murmansk Oblast on August 21.[49]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Russian military command recently redeployed elements of at least one Russian airborne (VDV) regiment from western Zaporizhia Oblast in response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast, possibly in an effort to stabilize the lines and improve command and control (C2) over Russian conscripts.**
- **The Russian military command reportedly heavily committed elements initially intended for the Russian offensive effort in northern Kharkiv Oblast to the defense of Kursk Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin may be taking steps to address its border vulnerabilities amid the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and following a series of unsuccessful long-term efforts to improve Russian border security.**
- **Ukrainian forces marginally advanced throughout their salient in Kursk Oblast amid continued Russian efforts to stop these advances on August 22.**
- **Recent Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction appear to have prompted Ukrainian withdrawals from limited positions southeast of Pokrovsk, and Russian forces have likely failed to achieve their apparent objective of tactically encircling Ukrainian forces in the area.**

- The tempo of Russian aviation operations is reportedly decreasing throughout most of the theater, although this decreased tempo may be temporary, and its cause is unclear.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of successful strikes against targets in Volgograd Oblast and Krasnodar Krai on August 22.
- Russian forces recently advanced north of Siversk, within Chasiv Yar and southeast of Toretsk and Pokrovsk.
- Russian State Duma Committee on Information Policy Head Alexander Khinshtein stated on August 21 that the Russian Union of Journalists and Ministry of Digital Development submitted a bill to the Cabinet of Ministers proposing to grant veteran status to journalists who have worked in Ukraine, the "counter-terrorism operation" zone in Kursk Oblast, and other unspecified combat zones.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 21, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

August 21, 2024, 8:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on August 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin appears to have launched an intricate messaging campaign aimed at justifying to its domestic audience why Russia is prioritizing maintaining the initiative in eastern Ukraine over immediately expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast. Russian government sources close to the Russian Presidential Administration told Russian independent outlet *Meduza* that the Kremlin is actively trying to condition Russian society to accept the limited Ukrainian presence in Kursk Oblast as a "new normal" and downplay the significance of the incursion.[1] The sources noted that the Kremlin will use propaganda to encourage Russians to wait for Russian forces to retake these territories after an "inevitable" Ukrainian defeat in eastern Ukraine. The sources also added that the Kremlin is redirecting Russians' concerns over Kursk Oblast by preoccupying domestic society with humanitarian assistance drives to assist the affected residents of Kursk Oblast and noted that the Kremlin decided against canceling the upcoming Kursk Oblast gubernatorial elections scheduled for September to minimize panic in the region.[2] The Russian Central Election Commission, however, decided to postpone local elections in the seven raions in Kursk Oblast that are impacted by the Ukrainian incursion due to security risks, and the Kremlin may have decided to maintain gubernatorial elections as scheduled to replace the interim Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov, who has overseen much of the local Russian response to the incursion.[3] *Meduza* also highlighted Russian state media's coverage of the incursion, which began increasingly portraying Kursk Oblast and its residents as supporting the Russian war effort in Ukraine, despite encountering some mild wartime disruptions to residents' ordinary lives.[4] The Kremlin may be also attempting to weaponize state media's coverage of its months-long offensive in eastern Ukraine to advance its messaging campaign about the incursion. Russian state TV channels are notably covering Ukraine's incursion in Kursk Oblast as a limited operation, while actively contrasting it with Russian advances in the Pokrovsk direction, which Russian media is painting as major victories.[5]

The Kremlin may be using this messaging campaign to afford itself time and space to respond to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast after achieving its offensive objectives in eastern Ukraine. Russian government sources told *Meduza* that the Kremlin was initially shocked and worried about Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast but calmed down within a week because Ukrainian forces' advances were far from more densely populated regional centers such as Kursk City. [6] *Meduza* reported that all interviewed officials expressed confidence that battles in Kursk Oblast will continue at their current scale for months, indicating that the Kremlin may not be rushing to repel Ukrainian forces from the region and will instead continue to prioritize its offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. A Ukrainian source in the military-political leadership, on the contrary, told Ukrainian news wire *RBC-Ukraine* that Putin tasked Russian forces with repelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast by October 1 without re-deploying forces from key frontlines areas – namely from the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions. ISW previously assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian military command likely view maintaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative to win the war of attrition against Ukraine and are continuing to prioritize the Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.[7] Putin's reported October 1 deadline assumes a long time for Russia's territorial integrity to have been contested given that the incursion began on August 6th. Such a protracted occupation of Russian territory undermines the Kremlin's longstanding narratives about why Russia is at war in the first place; the Kremlin had been justifying its war in Ukraine as a defensive war that aims to protect Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity.[8] The Kremlin's relaxed approach to the temporal aspect implies that the Kremlin has decided to prioritize tactical advances in Ukraine over rapidly restoring Russia's territorial integrity in Kursk, and this apparent decision undermines a series of long-standing narratives about Russian "red lines."

Putin notably appears to be demanding that Russia defeat Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast without sacrificing the stability of his regime, deprioritizing the offensive in eastern Ukraine, or firing his incompetent but loyal lieutenants. The results of such a strategy are too early to forecast. *Meduza's* sources also noted that the Kremlin also considered the need for a new mobilization wave at the start of the incursion, but that the Russian Cabinet of Ministers and Kremlin-affiliated businessmen immediately opposed general mobilization due to ongoing labor shortages in Russia — although it is unclear whether Kremlin even considered this argument.[9] *Meduza's* sources assessed that the Kremlin is much more likely to double down on the use of conscripts in Kursk Oblast, which if true, would mark another example of Putin making unrealistic demands of the Russian military command without providing the command appropriate manpower and resources to achieve its objectives. ISW has repeatedly assessed that Putin has neglected the need to declare general mobilization throughout the course of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine out of concern for his regime's stability on numerous occasions, and his recent decision to announce a counterterrorism operation in Kursk Oblast (as opposed to declaring war or mobilization) may indicate that he is not prepared to respond to the incursion with mobilization at this time.[10] *Meduza's* sources also observed that there are currently no rumors within the Kremlin about the removal of Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov due to his ongoing involvement in the Russian offensive in Donbas or the ongoing crisis in Kursk Oblast. The sources noted that the Kremlin might need to appoint a scapegoat for the incursion in the future but is not currently considering placing Gerasimov in that position. ISW cannot independently verify these reports, but they appear to be consistent with ISW's assessments about the Kremlin's prioritization of the offensive in eastern Ukraine and Putin's, inability to dynamically adjust objectives, and his aversion to taking risks.[11] The Kremlin's reported approach to command changes appears to be consistent with Putin's observed pattern of withholding command changes until he is no longer actively facing a crisis.[12]

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations throughout the Kursk Oblast salient on August 21 and have made additional marginal advances. Ukraine's Special Operations Forces posted footage on August 21 showing Ukrainian strikes on several pontoon bridges and staging areas along the Seim River in Glushkovsky Raion, west of the current Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast.[13] The Ukrainian Special Operations Forces suggested that Ukrainian forces may have used HIMARS in some of the strikes against pontoon bridges, while milbloggers speculated that Ukrainian forces used air-launched small-diameter glide bombs.[14] Geolocated footage published on August 21 shows drone operators of Russia's 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) striking Ukrainian forces in and around Vishnevka (south of Koreveno and 14km from the international border), confirming that Ukrainian forces have likely advanced into and beyond the settlement.[15] A Russian milblogger claimed that a reinforced platoon-sized Ukrainian element unsuccessfully attacked from Vishnevka towards Komarovka (southwest of Koreveno and 12km from the international border), but that Russian drone strikes and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) fire stopped Ukrainian forces from establishing positions within Komarovka.[16] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a platoon-sized mechanized attack towards Korenevo but were unsuccessful.[17] Additional geolocated footage published on August 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces hold positions in forest areas east of Aleksandrovska (northeast of Koreveno and 33km from the international border).[18] Geolocated footage published on August 21 also shows that elements of the Russian 200th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) hold positions along the 38H-564 road east of Zhuravli (east of Koreveno and 21km from the international border), indicating that Russian forces either recently retook these positions or that Ukrainian forces have not yet closed the small salient along the 38H-564 road near Zhuravli.[19] Russian milbloggers continued to claim that Ukrainian forces are advancing north of Sudzha near Malaya Loknya and are encircling Russian forces in Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha and 19km from the international border).[20] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) are reportedly facing encirclement in Martynovka, and Russian milbloggers lauded a soldier from the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade for allegedly leading conscripts out of an encirclement in an unspecified area in Kursk Oblast, potentially in reference to the Martynovka pocket.[21] Geolocated footage published on August 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces have advanced into southern Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha and 12km from the international border).[22] The Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade appears to be deployed particularly sporadically throughout the Kursk Oblast salient — various Russian sources have reported that its elements are operating as far north as the Kauchuk area (30km from the international border) and between Martynovka and Spalnoye (southeast of Sudzha and 45km away from Kauchuk).[23]

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the Republic of Chechnya for the first time in 13 years on August 20, likely in an effort to shift domestic focus away from the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and posture normalcy and stability. Putin met with Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov in Grozny, Chechnya, and praised Kadyrov for his socio-economic development programs. [24] Kadyrov claimed that Chechnya has sent 47,000 military personnel to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion, including 19,000 volunteers who trained at the Spetsnaz University in Gudermes, Chechnya. Kadyrov also claimed that Chechnya has "several tens of thousands" of trained and equipped military personnel in reserve. Putin visited Spetsnaz University, which trains military personnel from across Russia and spoke to a group of military commanders, instructors, and volunteers. Putin claimed that all Russians — no matter their ethnicity or religious affiliations — are united by their morals, ethics, love for the Fatherland, respect for elders, respect for Russia's history, and faith in Russia's future.[25] Putin also ostentatiously kissed a Quran to demonstrate his purported respect for the Islamic faith and the people of Chechnya. Putin consistently attempts to portray Russia

as a harmonious multi-ethnic and multi-religious country despite growing xenophobia against migrants and ethnic and religious minorities[26] Putin additionally emphasized Russian soldiers' alleged heroism for putting themselves at risk to protect Russia by fighting in Ukraine.[27] Putin also may have intended to use his visit to Chechnya to commend Chechen leaders for dedicating forces to the defensive effort in Kursk Oblast and address concerns about the reportedly significant number of Chechen military personnel that Ukrainian forces have taken as prisoners of war in Kursk Oblast.[28]

Recent US intelligence assessments highlight Ukraine's efforts to develop alternative and asymmetric capabilities in the face of Russian manpower and materiel advantages, as well as Ukraine's continued dependence on Western security assistance. The US Department of Defense (DoD) Inspector General's Office published a series of assessments by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in the DoD's quarterly review of US military assistance to Ukraine on August 15.[29] DIA's assessments largely cohere with trends and phenomena observable in the open source, although it is unclear what conclusions policymakers should draw from DIA's assessments given that some of these assessments assume that certain battlefield conditions are totally static, whereas ISW assesses the same conditions to be in flux.

The DIA assesses that recent US military assistance to Ukraine will "almost certainly" be insufficient in helping Ukraine match or overcome Russia's artillery advantage in Ukraine and the estimated Russian daily fire rate of 10,000 artillery rounds.[30] Ukrainian servicemembers have consistently expressed concern about Ukrainian artillery shortages following significant delays in US aid in Winter 2023–2024 and Spring 2024, and Ukrainian officials have previously acknowledged the impact of artillery constraints on Ukraine's defensive and offensive capabilities, particularly in Donetsk Oblast.[31] Destructive Russian shelling and glide bomb strikes appear to be a fundamental aspect of the Kremlin's theory of victory in Ukraine, which posits that Russian forces can continue slow, grinding advances aided by razing Ukrainian settlements to the ground regardless of Russian manpower losses and premised on the assumption that Russian forces can deprive Ukraine of the ability to contest the theater-wide initiative in perpetuity.[32] Ukrainian forces have, on the contrary, demonstrated their commitment and ability to develop and employ alternative and asymmetric capabilities, namely drones and long-range strikes, to partially counter Russia's artillery advantage in Ukraine and to defend against Russian mechanized and infantry assaults, often to outsized effect compared to the smaller-scale systems Ukrainian forces are employing. Ukrainian forces successfully defended against a series of large-scale Russian mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast in late July 2024 with drone strikes and limited artillery support, and Russian milbloggers have previously warned about the threat of targeted Ukrainian first-person view (FPV) drone strikes throughout the frontline in Ukraine.[33] Ukrainian forces have also used long-range strikes against Russian military targets and oil depots supplying military equipment in Russia to complicate Russian logistics, force Russia to reallocate air defense assets, and disrupt Russia's oil and gas industry.[34] The most recent allotment of US aid to Ukraine is undoubtedly insufficient to address the ongoing artillery disparity between Russian and Ukrainian forces and asymmetric means are not a replacement for artillery and other conventional means, but the US and wider Western alliance remain capable of addressing Ukraine's constraints caused by delays in Western security assistance.

The DIA also assesses that Ukraine "probably" remains capable of continuing defensive operations in Ukraine but is not capable of conducting large-scale counteroffensive operations for at least the next six months.[35] ISW recently assessed that both Russian and Ukrainian forces lack the capability to conduct individual decisive war-winning operations and must instead conduct multiple successful operations with limited operational objectives that, in the aggregate, can achieve strategic objectives. [36] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces could use smaller-scale Ukrainian counterattacks and localized counteroffensive operations to liberate territory while avoiding the challenges associated with conducting large-scale counteroffensive operations amid continued Western delays and hesitancy in allocating further military assistance to Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have conducted several localized counterattacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast and towards Kreminna (in the Luhansk-Donetsk Oblast border area) in recent months, suggesting that Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the tactical initiative in select frontline areas.[37] Ukrainian forces have also succeeded in launching a localized offensive operation into Kursk Oblast and seizing the operational initiative in this sector of the frontline, which is drawing Russian forces from other, lower-priority frontline areas in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials have identified drawing Russian forces from lower-priority frontline areas as a key goal of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast, and this effort could force Russia to leave some of these areas vulnerable to further Ukrainian counterattacks.[38] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces can contest the battlefield initiative and eventually set conditions to conduct both limited and eventually large-scale counteroffensive operations provided timely and appropriate Western security assistance.[39] The US and the international coalition supporting Ukraine retain significant influence over Ukrainian warfighting capabilities and Western decisions about Ukraine's resourcing levels and rules of engagement regarding Russian military targets can substantially alter the trajectory of the war.

Ukraine continues efforts to attrit Russia's air defense and aviation capabilities. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that overnight on August 20 to 21, Ukrainian naval forces and other Ukrainian units conducted a coordinated strike with unspecified weapons and hit a Russian S-300 air defense system's position near Novoshakhtinsk, Rostov Oblast.[40] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that it is still clarifying the results of the strike but reported explosions near the S-300 site. Russian Rostov Oblast officials claimed that Russian air defense forces shot down an unspecified type of missile over Rostov Oblast early in the morning on August 21, and social media footage shows a fire at an oil

refinery in Novoshakhtinsk reportedly caused by debris from the downed missile.[41] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces destroyed a Ukrainian ATACMS missile over Novoshakhtinsk, alleging that this is the first ATACMS strike against Russian territory.[42] ISW has not observed any visual evidence or additional reports of the purported use of ATACMS, however.

Russian opposition sources and milbloggers also claimed that Ukraine conducted a long-range drone strike against targets in Russia's far-northern Murmansk Oblast (nearly 2,000 kilometers away from Ukraine) on August 21.[43] Geolocated Russian social media footage shows Russian forces shooting down a small aircraft-type drone flying at low altitude over Vysokiy, Murmansk Oblast, and Russian sources claimed that this is the fourth day in a row that attack drones have been targeting Murmansk Oblast.[44] The Russian Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsya) temporarily restricted the airspace over the Murmansk and Apatity airports on August 21, likely due to the operation of drones in the airspace.[45] Several Russian sources speculated that the drones were targeting Olenya airfield, which is co-located with the village of Vysokiy and from which Russia launches Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 strategic bomber aircraft.[46] Ukrainian sources previously confirmed that Ukrainian long-range drones damaged a Tu-22M3 strategic bomber at Olenya on the night of July 26 to 27.[47] ISW has not observed visual evidence or official Ukrainian or Russian confirmation of drones impacting the Olenya airfield at the time of this publication, however.

Russian authorities may have attempted to block Telegram and other non-Russian internet communications services on August 21. Russian sources stated that Russian internet users reported outages of multiple internet communication, internet streaming, and telecommunication services on August 21.[48] Russian state media censor Roskomnadzor claimed that distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks caused the outages, but that it successfully repelled the attack.[49] Russian activist and Director of the Internet Defense Society Mikhail Klimarev told Russian opposition outlet *Agentstvo Novosti* that such outages usually occur when Russian authorities activate the "anti-messenger mode" and noted that similar outages occurred during the antisemitic pogroms in Dagestan Republic in November 2023, and during protests in the Sakha and Bashkortostan republics in January 2024.[50] Experts from Roskomsvoboda, an independent Russian organization that supports internet freedom and digital rights, told *Agentstvo Novosti* that a centralized impact likely caused the outages and assessed that Roskomnadzor attempted to block Telegram, which inadvertently blocked other internet-based services in Russia. The experts also noted that similar outages occurred in 2018 when Russian authorities tried to block Telegram.[51] Russian authorities have also been attempting to further censor the Russian information space by disconnecting Russia from the global internet, and also temporarily disconnected Russia at least partially from the global internet during a test of its "sovereign internet" system overnight on July 4–5, 2023.[52]

The Russian government is reportedly supporting a bill that would allow Russian authorities to draw up administrative protocols against Russian citizens who violate Russian law while living abroad. Kremlin-affiliated business outlet *Kommersant* reported on August 21 that the bill would allow the Russian government to charge Russian citizens living abroad under vague charges of extremism, abuse of freedom of speech, and discrediting the Russian Armed Forces.[53] Unnamed Russian lawyers told *Kommersant* that Russian courts have previously prosecuted Russian citizens living outside of Russia for social media posts under similar charges.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) Premier Li Qiang discussed deepening bilateral economic and trade relations in Moscow on August 21. Putin stated that Russia and the PRC have jointly developed large-scale economic and humanitarian plans, and Li stated that the PRC is ready to develop a multifaceted mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia.[54] Li also met with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on August 21, and they signed a joint communique that includes a plan for Russian–PRC investment cooperation and 15 other unspecified intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents.[55] Li also noted during his meeting with Mishustin that Russia and the PRC are increasing cooperation in the energy sector.[56]

Key Takeaways:

- The Kremlin appears to have launched an intricate messaging campaign aimed at justifying to its domestic audience why Russia is prioritizing maintaining the initiative in eastern Ukraine over immediately expelling Ukrainian forces from Kursk Oblast.
- Putin notably appears to be demanding that Russia defeat Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast without sacrificing the stability of his regime, deprioritizing the offensive in eastern Ukraine, or firing his incompetent but loyal lieutenants. The results of such a strategy are too early to forecast.
- Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations throughout the Kursk Oblast salient on August 21 and have made additional marginal advances.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the Republic of Chechnya for the first time in 13 years on August 20, likely in an effort to shift domestic focus away from the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and posture normalcy and stability.
- Recent US intelligence assessments highlight Ukraine's efforts to develop alternative and asymmetric capabilities in the face of Russian manpower and materiel advantages, as well as Ukraine's continued dependence on Western security assistance.
- Ukraine continues efforts to attrit Russia's air defense and aviation capabilities.

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- Russian President Vladimir Putin and People's Republic of China (PRC) Premier Li Qiang discussed deepening bilateral economic and trade relations in Moscow on August 21.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Pokrovsk, southwest of Donetsk City, and northeast of Robotyne.
- Russian occupation authorities continue to create Cossack organizations in occupied Ukraine, likely to build out Russia's military reserves and law enforcement bodies in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 20, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

August 20, 2024, 7:45pm ET

Ukrainian forces continued attacking throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on August 20 and recently made additional advances. Ukrainian forces appear to be continuing efforts to strike Russian pontoon bridges and pontoon engineering equipment west of the current Kursk Oblast salient over the Seim River in Glushkovo Raion—geolocated footage published on August 20 shows Ukrainian drones striking Russian equipment bringing pontoons to a staging area near the Seim River about 3km north of Glushkovo. Satellite imagery indicates that Ukrainian forces have destroyed at least one pontoon bridge across the Seim as of August 19 that was visible on August 17. [1] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Vishnevka (southwest of Korenevo and 14km from the international border), consistent with the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) reporting from August 19 that tacitly acknowledged Ukrainian advances in the Vishnevka area. [2] Geolocated footage published on August 19 shows that Ukrainian forces have advanced westward along Sudzhanskiy Shlyakh Street (38K-030 highway) in eastern Korenevo as well as in fields northeast of Korenevo. [3] Russian milbloggers widely claimed on August 20 that Ukrainian forces continued mechanized assaults on the outskirts of Korenevo and that Russian forces were conducting artillery and airstrikes to contain Ukrainian advances. [4] Russian milbloggers indicated that Russian forces regained some lost positions and advanced in fields south of Safonovka (northeast of Korenevo and 30km from the international border). [5] Geolocated footage published on August 20 shows that Ukrainian forces have also advanced in forested areas north of Russkoye Porechnoye (northeast of Sudzha and 20km from the international border), consistent with Russian milblogger maps that depict Ukrainian advances over the entire administrative boundaries of Russkoye Porechnoye. [6] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed on August 20 that Ukrainian forces have also advanced up the western outskirts of Russkaya Konopelka, just east of Sudzha. [7] Geolocated footage published on August 20 showing Ukrainian forces towing a captured Russian T-90M tank along the Snagost-Liubimivka road (southeast of Korenevo and 8km from the international border) indicates that Ukrainian forces continue operating well within the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast. [8]

Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi displayed a map depicting the situation in Kursk Oblast on August 20, and ISW will use the boundaries of this map to update its assessment of maximalist claimed limits of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, consistent with ISW's mapping methodology for the Ukrainian incursion thus far. During a televised meeting of the Ukrainian Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on August 20, Syrskyi shared a map showing the purported current Ukrainian forward line of troops (FLOT) in Kursk Oblast. [9] Syrskyi's map indicates that Ukrainian forces have advanced slightly beyond ISW's assessed FLOT, namely near Viktorovka (southwest of Korenevo); between Snagost and Korenevo; northeast of Korenevo in the areas north of Kremyanoye and northwest of Pogrebki; east of Malaya Loknya (north of Sudzha); and southeast of Sudzha. [10] Heat anomalies from NASA FIRMS/VIIRS are located in very close proximity to the FLOT depicted in Syrskyi's map. ISW will expand its maximalist limit of claimed Ukrainian advances to match Syrskyi's map, but will not recess maximalist claims in areas where they extend beyond Syrskyi's FLOT (the southeasternmost part of the salient, for example), to reflect ISW's methodological commitment to mapping events in Kursk Oblast based off of the *maximal claims made by both Ukrainian and Russian sources in the wider information space*. ISW does not question Syrskyi's presentation of the location of Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast and presents them in alignment with Syrskyi's presentation. ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces do not control all the territory behind the FLOT according to the doctrinal definition of "control" that ISW uses to shape its control of terrain assessments. [11] The expansion of ISW's map in accordance with Syrskyi's, therefore, should be taken as a recognition of maximal Ukrainian and Russian claims, and not an assessment of Ukraine's control of the area behind the FLOT. Syrskyi's map notably depicts Russian units operating behind the FLOT, especially in the northwestern part of the salient, consistent with ISW's assessment that large portions of the salient are likely contested zones. [12]

Ukrainian officials continued to clarify some of the objectives of the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast and reported on the extent of additional Ukrainian advances. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on August 20 that Ukrainian forces advanced between 28 to 35 kilometers deep into Kursk Oblast and that they "control" 93 settlements (1,263 square kilometers).[13] Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast are pressuring Russian forces to redeploy elements of unspecified units from the frontline in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, which may impact the tempo and prospect of Russian offensive efforts in Ukraine.[14] Syrskyi also stated that Ukrainian forces aim to establish a buffer zone in Russian territory to prevent Russian forces from shelling Sumy Oblast and to "outpace" the efforts of the Russian forces at large. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on August 19 that the "preventative defense" of the Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast is the most effective countermeasure against Russian forces and that Ukrainian forces have largely "cleared" the Russian border area close to Sumy Oblast of Russian forces.[15] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 20 that Ukrainian forces are exhausting the combat potential of Russian forces particularly in Kursk Oblast, acknowledging the Kursk operation. [16] Deputy Chair of the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union (EU) Maria Mezentseva-Fedorenko stated on August 19 that Ukraine is preparing a new round of exchange of prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian hostages with Russia and that Ukraine's operations in Kursk Oblast comply with international humanitarian law.[17]

The Russian military command continues to complicate and bureaucratize its thus-far ineffective command and control (C2) structure for the Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov announced on August 20 that he appointed Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov as Deputy Head of the "Coordinating Council" within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for military and security issues in Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod oblasts and stated that Yevkurov is already currently in Kursk Oblast.[18] Belousov's decision to appoint Yevkurov — who heads the Russian MoD's Africa Corps and has been the face of Russian military outreach and cooperation with African countries since the dissolution of the Wagner Group in 2023 — may suggest that the Russian MoD removed Yevkurov from his position in Africa Corps, as a Kremlin-affiliated milblogger previously speculated, and that that the Russian MoD is temporarily deprioritizing defense cooperation efforts in Africa in response to the incursion into Kursk Oblast.[19]

Belousov also tasked five members of the Coordinating Council with addressing specific issues related to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. Belousov announced that Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Andrei Bulyga is responsible for resolving logistics, transport, and assisting civilian authorities in civilian evacuations; that Deputy Defense Minister Alexei Krivoruchko is responsible for solving problems related to military-technical support; that Deputy Defense Minister Pavel Fradkov is responsible for engineering and construction; and that the Russian MoD's Main Military Medical Directorate Head Dmitry Trishkin is responsible for medical support.[20] Belousov also announced the creation of the Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod groupings of forces and stated that their unspecified commanders and an unspecified representative of the Russian General Staff are responsible for protecting civilians from drone strikes and other attacks.[21] The Russian MoD additionally created a special task force at the National Defense Control Center to monitor issues in Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts.[22] The National Defense Control Center's Deputy Head Lieutenant General Yuri Korsachev claimed that the center's task force has already resolved 25 issues voiced by the Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod operational headquarters, of which most requested additional drone supplies, mobile electronic warfare (EW) systems, radios, radio jammers, and all-terrain vehicles.[23] Belousov did not comment on how the Coordination Council officials, the National Defense Control Center's task force, and the newly-created groupings of forces will interact with the existing C2 structure that the Kremlin established when it tasked that Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) with conducting a counterterrorism operation in Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts. The increasing bureaucratization of the Coordination Council and other Russian MoD structures dedicated to defending against the incursion into Kursk Oblast will likely create additional confusion within the Russian MoD and friction among the Russian MoD, FSB, and Rosgvardia, all of which are attempting to operate in Kursk Oblast. ISW continues to assess that complex and overlapping responsibilities and seemingly ever-growing list of actors the Kremlin has tasked with responding to the Ukrainian incursion impedes Russia's ability to establish effective joint C2 structures.[24]

Russian authorities have reportedly re-deployed Russian units from the Chasiv Yar direction to Kursk Oblast amid efforts to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast with Russian forces previously in the area and re-deployments from lower priority sectors of the frontline in Ukraine. A Russian milblogger claimed on August 20 that elements of the Russian 11th Airborne (VDV) Brigade struck a Ukrainian armored vehicle in southern Russkaya Konopelka (east of Sudzha), and elements of the Russian 11th VDV Brigade were reportedly operating near Chasiv Yar as of late July 2024.[25] The Russian military command likely re-deployed elements of the 11th VDV Brigade intended to relieve or reinforce frontline units and not units that have been engaged in combat on the frontline, however. ISW previously noted that such deployments could affect the tempo of Russian offensive operations, but that it would likely take several weeks to observe any possible impacts of such redeployments on Russian operations in Donetsk Oblast.[26] ISW continues to assess that the Russian military command is likely extremely averse to pulling Russian military units engaged in combat from higher priority sectors in Donetsk Oblast due to concerns about further slowing the tempo of Russian operations in these directions.[27]

Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces re-deployed elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment (72nd Motorized Rifle Division, 22nd Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) to Kursk Oblast, and elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Regiment were reportedly operating in northern Kharkiv Oblast as of mid-July 2024.[28] A Ukrainian military observer claimed that an unspecified element of the 4th Tank Division (1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) is also operating in Kursk Oblast, although the military observer insinuated that the element was operating in the area prior to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[29] ISW has previously observed additional indications that Russian authorities are largely relying on an amalgamation of conscripts, irregular Russian forces, and regular Russian forces re-deployed from lower priority frontline areas in Ukraine to counter the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[30]

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the site of the 2004 Beslan school siege on August 20, likely in an effort to link the Russian "counterterrorism" response to the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast to a "successful" Russian counterterrorism operation in the early 2000s. Putin arrived in the North-Ossetia Alania Republic on August 20 and visited the memorial to the 2004 Beslan school siege as well as the site of the siege itself.[31] This was Putin's first visit to the school and his second to the city since August 2008.[32] Terrorists affiliated with the Chechen separatist Riyad-us Saliheen Brigade took over 1,000 adults and children hostage in a Beslan school over three days in September 2004, resulting in the deaths of more than 330 people, including 186 children.[33] The Russian response to the 2004 terrorist attack was documented to be inefficient and dangerous. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2017 that local Russian authorities knew about the 2004 terrorist attack beforehand but did not increase security or warn the public.[34] The European Court also stated that the Russian security services' response lacked formal leadership and rules about how to engage terrorists, resulting in uncoordinated actions that endangered the hostages. Putin alleged on August 20 that Russia is currently fighting terrorists in Kursk Oblast and Ukraine, just as Russia fought terrorists in Beslan in 2004, claiming that Russia will emerge similarly victorious against Ukraine.[35]

Putin met with representatives of the "Mothers of Beslan" Association of Victims of Terrorist Acts organization on August 20, and the Kremlin's reporting on the meeting attempted to portray Putin as sympathetic to mothers' complaints – likely in response to the potential growing threat to Putin's regime posed by family members complaining about the ongoing involvement of Russian conscripts in Kursk Oblast.[36] Russian opposition news outlet *Agentsvo* reported that Aneta Gadieva, one of the "Mothers of Beslan" representatives present at the meeting, stated that most of the conversation focused on why Russian officials had not closed the investigation into the 2004 attack.[37] Gadieva noted that Putin promised the organization during their last meeting in 2005 that he would take control of the investigation. Putin reportedly attempted to shift the blame for this inaction away from himself during the August 20 meeting, claiming that he was unaware of the prolonged investigation and that he would contact Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin about the matter. Gadieva also stated that the women told Putin that unspecified Russian officials are not conveying the whole truth to him about the situation in Kursk Oblast and that Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards, conscripts, and other servicemembers from the North Ossetia-Alania Republic have been captured, calling for Putin to secure their release.[38]

The Kremlin has not publicized the reported discussions about the Beslan investigation or conscripts in Kursk Oblast, instead highlighting Putin's statements that he is aware that the women of the "Mothers of Beslan" organization cannot take advantage of sanatorium programs due to the lack of childcare at the facilities — a relatively extraneous point compared to the women's reported emphasis during the meeting on the shortcomings of the 20-year-long official investigation. Putin also notably incorrectly claimed during the meeting that 136 children died in the 2004 siege, when in fact 186 children died.[39] Mothers' organizations have been able to steer large Russian social movements in the past, as with the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers (later renamed the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers), which rallied around issues with Soviet conscripts in the late 1980s and early 1990s and successfully called for greater transparency in the Soviet military, and Putin showed great concern in 2022 about societal backlash about Russia's use of conscripts in the war in Ukraine following appeals made by conscripts' mothers.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces continued attacking throughout the Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast on August 20 and recently made additional advances.**
- **Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi displayed a map depicting the situation in Kursk Oblast on August 20, and ISW will use the boundaries of this map to update its assessment of maximalist claimed limits of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, consistent with ISW's mapping methodology for the Ukrainian incursion thus far.**
- **Russian authorities have reportedly re-deployed Russian units from the Chasiv Yar direction to Kursk Oblast amid efforts to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast with Russian forces previously in the area and re-deployments from lower priority sectors of the frontline in Ukraine.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the site of the 2004 Beslan school siege on August 20, likely in an effort to link the Russian "counterterrorism" response to the**

Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast to a "successful" Russian counterterrorism operation in the early 2000s.

- Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- Russian federal subjects (regions) continue to increase monetary incentives for signing Russian military contracts in order to bolster Russia's force generation efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 19, 2024

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

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

August 19, 2024, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on August 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance in Kursk Oblast on August 19 amid continued fighting throughout the Ukrainian salient in the area. Geolocated footage published on August 19 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced in Vishnevka (southwest of Koronevo and 14km from the international border).[1] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian aviation and artillery struck Ukrainian forces operating near Vishnevka, potentially tacitly acknowledging that Ukrainian forces advanced in the area.[2] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced within Russkoye Porechnoye (northeast of Sudzha and 17km from the international border), east of Agronom (just east of Sudzha and 15km from the international border), and east of Spalnoye (southeast of Sudzha and 5km from the international border).[3] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance attempts south of Skrylevka and Sheptukhova (both northeast of Korenevo and 22km from the international border), and other Russian sources claimed that fighting continued near Korenevo, Olgovka (just east of Korenevo), western Sudzha, and Martynovka (just northeast of Sudzha).[4] Russian milbloggers also claimed that clashes continued along the international border near Tetkino.[5] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) are reportedly operating near Olgovka; elements of the "Aida" Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz group are reportedly operating in Sudzha; and the "Varangian" Reconnaissance-Strike Company of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) is reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast.[6] Elements of the Russian "Feniks" Mining Battalion, which were reportedly operating in the Chasiv Yar area as of late May 2024, are reportedly operating near Martynovka.[7]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted an airstrike that destroyed a bridge over the Seim River in Karyzh (southwest of Korenevo) — the third and last bridge over the Seim River in Glushkovo Raion, Kursk Oblast.[8] ISW has not yet observed evidence of a strike against a bridge near Karyzh, however. Geolocated footage published on August 16 and 18 showed Ukrainian strikes respectively destroying a bridge across the Seim River in Glushkovo and damaging a bridge across the Seim River in Zvannoye (southwest of Korenevo).[9]

Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov aggravated a situation that the Kremlin has historically treated with extreme caution by calling for conscripts to participate in combat operations in Kursk Oblast and dismissing concerns from relatives of conscripts. Alaudinov responded in a video message on August 19 to the "sobs and outbursts" about Russian conscripts fighting in Kursk Oblast, complaining that parents of conscripts are treating 18-year-olds as children. [10] Alaudinov claimed that Russian conscripts are employees of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and must defend Russia. Alaudinov complained that conscripts are just "eat[ing] the state's bread for free ... and then go home." Alaudinov responded to complaints that conscripts are paid little, calling on conscripts to sign a contract with the MoD if they want to receive higher salaries. Alaudinov called for all Russians young and old to "stand in formation" since "the enemy has come to [Russia], stating that "no one will die who is not destined to die, but if you die defending [Russia] and your faith in God, you will go to heaven." A Telegram channel associated with the Akhmat "Aida" group also claimed on August 19 that the conscripts they have encountered in Sudzha, Kursk Oblast are not 18-year-olds, but 21-to-25-year-olds.[11] The "Aida"-affiliated channel suggested that the fact that Ukrainian forces are on Russian territory is more important than any discussions about casualties among Russian conscripts.

Family members of Russian conscripts have recently complained about the involvement of Russian conscripts in Russian border-defense operations.[12] The Kremlin has shown great concern about societal backlash regarding issues concerning conscripts, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has previously taken action to appease the complaints of conscripts' relatives. The continued presence of Russian conscripts in the border areas during the Ukrainian incursion threatens the Kremlin with a potential political crisis regarding casualties among Russian conscripts. Alaudinov has postured himself as a spokesperson for the Russian defense in Kursk Oblast, and Russian newswire TASS has repeatedly amplified his statements following the Ukrainian incursion.[13] Blatant calls from Alaudinov — a widely promoted Russian authority — for conscripts' relatives to stop complaining, for conscripts

to participate in combat operations in Russia's border area, and for Russian citizens to embrace casualties among conscripts and other servicemembers may exacerbate tensions in Russian society and potentially threaten the stability of Putin's regime. Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov has notably made only limited public statements about the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast, despite Alaudinov's and Akhmat Spetsnaz's pronounced roles in the Russian response.[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Azerbaijan on August 18, likely in an effort to shift focus away from the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and present himself as a continually effective diplomat. Putin arrived in Baku on August 18 with a Russian delegation, including Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, for a two-day visit to meet Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to discuss Russian–Azerbaijani bilateral relations.[15] The delegations reportedly discussed bilateral energy ties, Russian-language initiatives in Azerbaijan, and Russia's willingness to mediate a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[16] The timing of this visit is noteworthy given the ongoing situation in Kursk Oblast and the Kremlin's continued efforts to downplay the Ukrainian incursion's magnitude and impact. Russian state media focused on Putin's trip to Azerbaijan, amplifying minute details, likely in part to divert attention from the uncomfortable situation in Russia by saturating the information space with a showcase of the Kremlin's global diplomatic engagement and alleged successes.

The Kremlin's response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has emphasized how the Kremlin's internal priorities have increasingly oriented towards regime stability, especially over the past year. Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on August 19 that Russian President Vladimir Putin's reaction to the "Kursk situation" has exposed certain shifts within the Kremlin's power vertical, many of which have been underway over the last several months.[17] Putin appointed Presidential Aide Alexei Dyumin to supervise the ongoing "counterterrorism" operation against Ukrainian activities in Kursk Oblast, which *Vazhnye Istorii* noted means that Putin distrusts the Russian General Staff and the Russian Ministry of Defense (which would be the bodies theoretically in charge of defensive military activities) and relies on individuals that he personally trusts. An insider source reportedly told *Vazhnye Istorii* that Dyumin is now in conflict with representatives of the Russian Presidential Administration, further suggesting that Putin continues to align himself with those who have his personal favor at the expense of officials better technically suited for certain positions. *Vazhnye Istorii* also cited sources familiar with the Russian security services as claiming that Federal Security Service (FSB) Head Alexander Bortnikov will "leave his post this year" and theorizing that his potential replacement may be Vladislav Menshchikov, head of the FSB's counterintelligence service, or Sergei Korolev, Bortnikov's first deputy. Russian investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov noted that the FSB has generally shifted its mandate away from controlling Russian oligarchs and towards controlling Russia's military and Russia's military-industrial complex as well as countering "saboteurs and terrorists," and *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that several long-time Russian economic oligarchs are also gradually losing their influence within the Kremlin's wider power vertical.[18]

Vazhnye Istorii's reporting strongly suggests that the Kremlin has increasingly oriented its main priorities towards regime stability. ISW has reported at length on Putin's efforts to maintain a core cadre of loyal *siloviki* (Russian strongmen with political influence) within the Russian power vertical, particularly since the risks to Putin's regime first introduced by the Wagner Group's armed rebellion in June 2023.[19] The Kremlin's general shift towards *siloviki* such as Dyumin, whom Putin personally trusts, and security officials with strong and well-documented reputations in counterterrorism and counterintelligence, suggests that the Kremlin is increasingly looking towards such individuals as regime safeguards. Ukraine's operation into Kursk Oblast has particularly exposed this dynamic, and the Kremlin's continued response to the incursion further emphasizes the ever-increasing reliance on security officials and structures over more politically or economically focused internal structures.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on August 19 further codifying a vague Russian state ideology into Russian law without concretely modifying the Russian Constitution. Putin's decree allows foreigners and stateless persons "who share traditional Russian spiritual and moral values"; have expressed interest in moving to Russia permanently; and disagree with their home state's policies "that impose destructive neoliberal, ideological guidelines" to apply for a temporary Russian residence permit without meeting the Russian language, legal, and cultural knowledge requirements.[20] Putin instructed the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to create a list of countries allegedly "imposing [these] neoliberal values." [21] The Kremlin has recently intensified efforts to codify a state ideology based on vague Russian "traditional values" while bypassing the Russian Constitution, which notably forbids Russia from establishing a state ideology and requires the Russian state to recognize ideological diversity.[22] This new policy favoring increased migration of certain "traditionally and ideologically aligned" individuals to Russia is contrary to recent Russian state efforts to crack down against illegal migration into Russia and coerce migrants into military service, both of which likely undermine any Russian efforts to attract more migrants to settle in Russia.[23]

Putin's effort to codify a specific ideology may be intended to counter the Russian ultranationalist community's own efforts to establish an accepted national ideology. Russian ultranationalist voices have largely criticized Russian migration policy for being too lenient and have fervently called for Russian authorities to tighten immigration requirements, especially for migrants to learn the Russian language, culture, and law to better integrate into Russian society — requirements that Putin's decree allows select migrants to bypass.[24] Many ultranationalist voices have also been hypercritical of the Kremlin and Russian defense officials for perceived wartime and ideological

failures, and some even directly opposed Putin either politically, as was the case with imprisoned ardent nationalist Igor Girkin, or militarily, like deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin. [25] The Kremlin has been cracking down on these milbloggers by creating a cadre of milbloggers loyal to the Kremlin, creating an environment of self-censorship, and directly censoring certain commentators as necessary. [26] Putin's effort to establish himself as the sole arbiter of the accepted Russian national ideology may aim to counter Russian milbloggers who disagree with him and eliminate possible domestic threats to his regime, especially as the Kremlin has sought to portray Russians who oppose the war in Ukraine and Putin himself as "extremist," unpatriotic, and enemies of the state. [27]

Russian officials continued attempts to falsely frame Ukraine as responsible for the lack of negotiations to end the war. Russian Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov responded to a question about possible negotiations with Ukraine on August 19, claiming that Russia will not talk to Ukraine given Ukraine's "adventure" with its incursion into Russia. [28] Ushakov claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposals — which called for Ukraine to surrender territory that Russian forces currently do not occupy — still stand but that it would be "inappropriate" for negotiations to take place at the moment. [29] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated on August 19 Putin's statement from August 12 that there can be no talk of negotiations after the Ukrainian incursion and claimed that Putin said that Russia "will certainly give an assessment of this situation a little later." [30] Lavrov also dismissed a recent *Washington Post* article about Russia's temporary postponement of discussions with Ukraine in Qatar about a moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure as "rumors." [31] ISW continues to assess that Russia is and has been uninterested in meaningful negotiations with Ukraine and that the Kremlin has attempted to portray Ukraine — and not Russia — as preventing negotiations. [32]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance in Kursk Oblast on August 19 amid continued fighting throughout the Ukrainian salient in the area.
- Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov aggravated a situation that the Kremlin has historically treated with extreme caution by calling for conscripts to participate in combat operations in Kursk Oblast and dismissing concerns from relatives of conscripts.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Azerbaijan on August 18, likely in an effort to shift focus away from the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and present himself as a continually effective diplomat.
- The Kremlin's response to Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has emphasized how the Kremlin's internal priorities have increasingly oriented towards regime stability, especially over the past year.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on August 19 further codifying a vague Russian state ideology into Russian law without concretely modifying the Russian Constitution. Putin's effort to codify a specific ideology may be intended to counter the Russian ultranationalist community's own efforts to establish an accepted national ideology.
- Russian officials continued attempts to falsely frame Ukraine as responsible for the lack of negotiations to end the war.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Svatove, Pokrovsk, and Vuhledar.
- Local Sakhalin Oblast media outlet *Sakhalin Media* reported on August 19 that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Service in Sakhalin Oblast and other federal subjects within the Russian Far East, Northwestern, and North Caucasian federal okrugs has resumed conscription for the first time in an unspecified "long" length of time.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 18, 2024

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

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

August 18, 2024, 5:10pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on August 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued assaults throughout their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 18 and marginally advanced southeast of Sudzha. Geolocated footage published on August 17 shows Russian forces striking a Ukrainian armored vehicle in northern Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha), indicating that Ukrainian forces recently advanced into northern Martynovka. [1] A Russian milblogger claimed on August 18 that Ukrainian forces seized Troitskoye (south of Korenevo and roughly two kilometers from the international border) and advanced to Semenovka (north of Sudzha and roughly 24 kilometers from the international border). [2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted assaults on the outskirts of Korenevo, southwest

of Korenevo near Komarovka; east of Korenevo near Olgovka; northeast of Korenevo near Alekseevsky, Safonovka, Kromskiiye Byki, Kauchuk, and Sheptukhovka; north of Sudzha near Cherkasskoye Porechnoye and Russkoye Porechnoye; and southeast of Sudzha near Ozerka, Giri, and Borki.[3] Geolocated footage published on August 17 and 18 indicates that Ukrainian forces continue to operate throughout the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances within Kursk Oblast.[4]

A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces entered Otruba (north of Tetkino and on the west [right] bank of the Seim River), and another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating near Tetkino.[5] Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk posted geolocated footage on August 18 showing Ukrainian forces conducting an airstrike against a bridge across the Seim River in Zvannoye (southeast of Korenevo), creating a large hole along the roadway.[6] Russian milbloggers and opposition media disagreed about the impact of the damage on Russian logistics, with some sources claiming that the strike only partially damaged the bridge, while others claimed that the strike rendered the bridge unpassable and that there is only one other usable bridge left in the area near Karyzh (west of Zvannoye).[7] Ukrainian forces destroyed a bridge across the Seim River in Glushkovo (southeast of Zvannoye) and reportedly struck but did not destroy the Zvannoye bridge on August 16.[8]

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast continues to force Russia to redeploy forces from elsewhere in the theater, and likely subsequent phases of fighting within Russia will require more Russian manpower and materiel commitments to the area. The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on August 17 that a source familiar with the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast stated that Russian forces had redeployed "several" understrength brigades totaling 5,000 personnel from elsewhere in Ukraine to Kursk Oblast by midweek from August 6 to 13.[9] WSJ's source stated that Russian forces redeployed an understrength brigade from Donetsk Oblast, possibly referring to elements of the Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] "Pyatnashka" Brigade, which ISW observed arriving in Kursk Oblast around August 8 alongside other smaller Russian irregular units from Donetsk Oblast.[10] Elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) also arrived in Kursk Oblast as of August 15, and ISW has observed elements of the brigade fighting near Chasiv Yar, Donetsk Oblast in recent months.[11] The WSJ's report of 5,000 Russian personnel partially coheres with a report that Russian forces had redeployed up to 11 battalions to the frontline in Kursk Oblast as of August 11.[12] The Russian "Tigr" Battalion of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) announced on August 17 that elements of the battalion are deploying to Kursk Oblast, and ISW observed elements of the "Tigr" Battalion operating near Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast as of July 31.[13] Russian forces have redeployed additional forces to Kursk Oblast since the first week of the Ukrainian incursion and have likely redeployed more than 5,000 personnel to Kursk Oblast over all.

Russian redeployments have allowed Russian forces to slow initially rapid Ukrainian gains in Kursk Oblast and start containing the extent of the Ukrainian incursion, but containment is only the first and likely least resource-intensive phase of the Russian response in Kursk Oblast.[14] Russian forces will likely launch a concerted counteroffensive effort to retake territory in Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces have seized, although it is too early to assess when Russian forces will stop Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast completely and seize the battlefield initiative to launch such an effort.[15] This likely future Russian counteroffensive effort will very likely require Russia to commit even more manpower, equipment, and materiel to Kursk Oblast.[16] WSJ reported that its source familiar with the Ukrainian operation stated that Ukrainian forces have up to 6,000 personnel within Kursk Oblast and that Russian forces will need substantially more personnel, possibly 20,000, to retake territory in the area.[17] The exact amount of manpower and materiel Russia will need to bring to bear in Kursk Oblast to conduct sustained counteroffensive operations that push Ukrainian forces back across the border will depend on how heavily Ukrainian forces defend occupied positions within Russia.[18]

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Rostov Oblast that supplies oil to the Russian military on the night of August 17 to 18. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Ukrainian military and Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) struck the "Kavkaz" oil depot in Proletarsk, Rostov Oblast, causing at least two explosions at the facility.[19] Geolocated footage published on August 18 shows two large smoke plumes near the "Kavkaz" oil depot.[20] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev claimed that Russian air defenses intercepted a Ukrainian drone and that falling debris caused a fuel storage facility at an industrial warehouse in Proletarsk to catch fire.[21] A Russian milblogger responded to Golubev on August 18 by criticizing all Russian regional officials who claim that "falling debris" causes fires instead of acknowledging successful Ukrainian drone strikes and calling these officials "clowns." [22]

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied that Russia planned to engage in reported negotiations with Ukraine and Qatar on a moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure. Zakharova, responding to a recent *Washington Post* article about Russia's temporary postponement of discussions with Ukraine in Qatar about a moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure, claimed that there was no disruption to talks because "there was nothing to disrupt" and that Ukraine and Russia have not been conducting direct or indirect negotiations regarding a possible moratorium of strikes on energy infrastructure.[23] The *Washington Post* reported on August 17 that the Ukrainian operation into Kursk Oblast prompted Russian authorities to postpone these moratorium discussions that had been scheduled for August 2024 in Doha.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continued assaults throughout their salient in Kursk Oblast on August 18 and marginally advanced southeast of Sudzha.
- The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast continues to force Russia to redeploy forces from elsewhere in the theater, and likely subsequent phases of fighting within Russia will require more Russian manpower and materiel commitments to the area.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Rostov Oblast that supplies oil to the Russian military on the night of August 17 to 18.
- Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied that Russia planned to engage in reported negotiations with Ukraine and Qatar on a moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna and Donetsk City. Ukrainian forces regained previously lost positions near Siversk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 17, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, and
Frederick W. Kagan

August 17, 2024, 10:50pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on August 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine are not in themselves decisive military operations that will win the war. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces lack the capability to conduct individual decisive war-winning operations and must instead conduct multiple successive operations with limited operational objectives that are far short of victory, but that in aggregate can achieve strategic objectives. It is too early to assess the outcomes and operational significance of the Ukrainian incursion into Russia and the ongoing Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine. The significance of these operations will not emerge in isolation, moreover, but they will matter in so far as they relate to a series of subsequent Russian and Ukrainian campaigns over time.

The scale of the war in Ukraine prevents either side from resolving the war in a single decisive campaign. ISW recently published "Ukraine and the Problem of Restoring Maneuver in Contemporary War," wherein Dr. Frederick W. Kagan and Dr. Kimberly Kagan noted that Ukraine and Russia both have the ability to establish deep defensive positions and reserves that will prevent any single campaign from achieving strategic war aims before it culminates.[1] Russia's and Ukraine's ability to generate enough combat power to man continuous defensive positions with no open flanks and establish tactical depth at significant points along the frontline has forced both sides to attempt penetration battles that are so costly that subsequent exploitation is often not feasible.[2] (Ukraine, in fact, took advantage of a flank the Russians had left open in Kursk Oblast, but Russia has enough combat power to cover its frontiers if it so chooses at the cost of pursuing other objectives). Russia and Ukraine can usually establish defensive positions at some distance in the rear and sufficiently stabilize the frontline even in the event of a successful penetration and exploitation.[3] Effective Ukrainian and Russian campaign design therefore requires forethought and planning for multiple successive operations that each set conditions for the subsequent operation.[4] Rarely has either side been able to conduct successive operations without interruption, however, since operational pauses or decreased operational tempo have offered the other belligerent the opportunity to contest and seize the initiative.[5]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command likely view maintaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative to win a war of attrition against Ukraine, and both the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast and the Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine will impact whether Russian forces can retain the initiative in the short-term. Russian forces seized the theater-wide initiative in November 2023 and have since conducted consistent offensive operations throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine as part of a campaign designed to stretch Ukrainian forces and prevent Ukraine from accumulating the resources necessary to contest the initiative.[6] The Russian military has not pursued a new large-scale offensive operation in recent months in order to maintain a consistent offensive tempo in Ukraine, particularly in Donetsk Oblast, and Putin and the Russian military command have accepted that months of fighting will continue to result in marginal tactical gains.[7] Putin has expressed a theory of victory in Ukraine that posits that Russian forces will be able to continue these gradual creeping advances indefinitely, however, while preventing Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations.[8] Putin likely assesses that as long as Russia can retain the initiative and prevent Ukraine from conducting operationally significant counteroffensive operations, Russia can inflict decisive losses on

Ukraine over the long-term while outlasting Western security assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian efforts to mobilize more of Ukraine's economy and population for the war effort.[9]

The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has temporarily allowed Ukrainian forces to seize the battlefield initiative on one sector of the frontline and begin contesting Russia's theater-wide initiative. [10] The Russian military appears to be attempting to maintain its offensive pressure in Donetsk Oblast, especially its offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk, and likely hopes that sustained offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast will draw enough Ukrainian resources to defensive operations in the area to prevent Ukraine from contesting the battlefield initiative elsewhere by exploiting the theater-wide impacts of the incursion into Kursk Oblast.[11] Just because Russian forces are prioritizing the offensive operation on Pokrovsk does not mean that Ukraine must decide to prioritize the defense of Pokrovsk over efforts elsewhere, however.

Putin and the Russian military command appear to measure success in eastern Ukraine in explicitly territorial terms and have likely pursued efforts to create wider operational pressures solely to support efforts to achieve stated territorial objectives. Russian forces currently aim to seize all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and the Russian military likely measures the success of Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine by how much closer they bring Russian forces to this goal. ISW has long assessed that the Russian efforts to seize Chasiv Yar or push Ukrainian forces off the east bank of the Oskil River in Kharkiv Oblast are pursuing operationally significant objectives, but Russian forces have instead increasingly prioritized the efforts to seize Pokrovsk and advance west and southwest of Donetsk City, an objective that is of relatively less operational significance.[12] Russian forces may be focusing on advancing in these areas because these sectors of the front provide opportunities for greater territorial gains and because these areas allow Russian forces to advance closer to the borders of Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces have sought to create theater-wide pressures on Ukrainian forces similar to the ones that Ukraine is now inflicting on Russia with the incursion in Kursk Oblast, but Putin and the Russian military command have only sought to leverage these pressures to pursue limited territorial objectives and have forgone pursuing more operationally significant objectives or wider attempts to generate more significant theater-wide effects.

Ukrainian officials have indicated that Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast does not have long-term territorial objectives but instead aims to generate theater-wide operational and strategic pressures on Russian forces. Ukrainian officials have publicly stated that Ukraine is not interested in holding territory in Kursk Oblast over the long term and aims in part to protect itself from Russian strikes while forcing Russian forces to redeploy forces from elsewhere in the theater and complicating Russian logistics.[13] There are no discernable operationally significant territorial objectives in the area where Ukraine launched the incursion into Kursk Oblast, and Ukraine has not committed the resources to the operation necessary to pursue actual operationally significant territorial objectives further into Kursk Oblast, such as seizing Kursk City. The success of the Ukrainian incursion should thus not be evaluated in terms of Russian territory seized by Ukrainian forces.

The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast has already generated theater-wide operational and strategic pressures on Russian forces, and subsequent phases of fighting within Russia will likely generate even greater pressures on Putin and the Russian military. The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast has prompted the Russian military to redeploy up to 11 battalions from within Kursk Oblast and four Russian force groupings elsewhere in the theater to the frontline in Kursk Oblast so far.[14] US officials reportedly told the *New York Times* in an article published on August 15 that Russia has committed reserves to Kursk Oblast that it otherwise would have committed to grinding offensive operations in eastern Ukraine in the coming months.[15] The redeployment of Russian forces and the commitment of elements of operational reserves has allowed Russian forces to slow initially rapid Ukrainian gains in Kursk Oblast and start containing the extent of the Ukrainian incursion.[16] Containment is only the first and likely least resource-intensive phase of the Russian response in Kursk Oblast, however. Putin and the Kremlin will almost certainly endeavor to retake Russian territory in Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces have seized, as persisting Ukrainian occupation of Russian territory would be a strategic blow to Putin's decades-long effort to cement a legacy of Russian stability, security, and geopolitical resurgence.[17]

A Russian counteroffensive operation to retake territory seized by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast will very likely require even more manpower, equipment, and materiel. Russian sources have claimed that Ukrainian forces are consolidating their positions within Kursk Oblast and building fortifications, although it is too early to assess how hard Ukraine forces will defend occupied positions within Russia against likely Russian counteroffensive operations.[18] It is also too early to assess when Russian forces will stop Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast completely and seize the battlefield initiative to launch a larger counteroffensive operation. Russian forces have expended considerable combat power on the effort to seize Pokrovsk, which they began in mid-February 2024 after seizing Avdiivka, and have since advanced roughly 23 kilometers in the area over six months of the most intense fighting in Ukraine in 2024.[19] The current Ukrainian salient in Kursk Oblast appears to be roughly 56 kilometers wide and up to 28 kilometers deep, although the area where Ukrainian forces are consolidating positions is likely smaller in size. Russian forces will likely have to conduct a prolonged counteroffensive effort to retake all of the territory seized by Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast unless they bring overwhelming force to bear, and the Russian military command will likely have to commit additional operational reserves and newly generated forces to sustain the effort.

The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast has also forced a decision point on Putin about the long-term strategic requirements of defending the thousand-kilometer-long international border with northeastern Ukraine, and it is unlikely that Russia will conduct intensive counteroffensive operations to push Ukrainian forces back across the border only to neglect the international border area once again and leave it vulnerable to future Ukrainian incursions.[20] Putin will likely order the Russian military command to consider the manpower and materiel requirements for defending the international border, although it is unclear how he will weigh these requirements against Russian military requirements in Ukraine. The Russian military will have to consider manpower and materiel requirements for defending the international border as part of its theater-wide campaign design, which will impose long-term operational planning constraints that Russia previously did not face.[21]

Russian forces will not be able to retain the initiative throughout eastern Ukraine indefinitely, and the culmination of Russian offensive operations will present Ukrainian forces with opportunities to contest the initiative further. Russia's possession of the theater-wide initiative has allowed Russia to determine the location, time, intensity, and requirements of fighting in Ukraine, and Russian forces have leveraged these benefits to determine an offensive tempo in Ukraine that has allowed the Russian military to conduct more sustainable offensive efforts and largely avoid culmination.[22] Russian forces pursued a prolonged effort to establish strategic and operational reserves ahead of Summer 2024 to support ongoing offensive efforts, and the Russian military has likely expended and committed many of these reserves to offensive operations throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine in Spring 2024 and over the course of this summer.[23] The Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast and the heightened Russian priority of maintaining the tempo of offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast will likely place greater strain on Russia's remaining operational reserves and likely begin to impact Russia's ability to sustain consistent offensive operations throughout the theater. Further Russian redeployments to Kursk Oblast would also further weaken Russia's ability to sustain offensive operations in northeastern and eastern Ukraine, although Russian forces are more likely to begin decreasing offensive activity on lower-priority sectors of the front than to do so equally throughout the frontline.

The Russian offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk is emblematic of the Russian approach to the war in Ukraine that embraces positional warfare for gradual creeping advances and seeks to win a war of attrition. The Russian military command tasked the Central Grouping of Forces with identifying and exploiting weaknesses in Ukraine's defensive line following the Russian seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February 2024.[24] Mechanized elements of the Central Grouping of Forces achieved a notable tactical breakthrough northwest of Avdiivka in mid-April 2024 by exploiting exhausted and poorly equipped Ukrainian forces, and the Russian military command continued to invest additional manpower from Russia's operational reserves to prevent offensive operations east of Pokrovsk from culminating for several months.[25] Russian forces applied consistently intense offensive pressure all along the front east and southeast of Pokrovsk and opportunistically exploited weaknesses in Ukraine's defenses to advance in this direction, and the Russian military command has tolerated significant manpower losses in exchange for advancing roughly two square kilometers per day (roughly 406 square kilometers in total) in Pokrovsk Raion over the last six months. Russian forces in the Pokrovsk direction have focused on frontal infantry assaults from small village to small village in their gradual advance to Pokrovsk and have spent weeks at times trying to seize small villages in the area without attempting advance by maneuver.

The Russian military command appears to have abandoned its efforts to make rapid tactical gains in the Pokrovsk direction and embraced positional warfare.[26] Putin's calculus that Russia can continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely during a prolonged state of positional warfare is predicated on Russia's manpower and materiel advantage.[27] Russia's ongoing force generation rates have allowed Russian forces to sustain their current tempo of offensive operations throughout the frontline by generating roughly as many new forces as the Russian military loses in a given period.[28] Russia's defense industry is reportedly capable of producing or refurbishing enough armored vehicles to sustain Russia's current rate of armored vehicle losses in Ukraine for at least two or three years.[29] Putin's theory of victory rests on the assumption that Ukrainian forces cannot acquire and sustain the manpower and material required to prevent indefinite, gradual Russian advances or contest the initiative, and Ukrainian forces appear to be actively challenging this assumption in Kursk Oblast.[30]

Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast illustrates how Ukrainian forces can use maneuver warfare to offset Russian manpower and materiel advantages. Russian forces have overall occupied 1,175 square kilometers of territory throughout the entire Ukrainian theater in the seven months from January and July 2024, as ISW recently assessed.[31] In stark contrast, ISW has observed claims that Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast advanced roughly 800 square kilometers over six days from August 6 to 12 and advanced roughly 28 kilometers deep as of August 17.[32] Again, the size of the area seized by Ukrainian forces is not an indicator of the success of that operation—it is offered here to show that restoring maneuver can produce much more rapid advances than positional warfare. The initial Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast attacked largely unprepared, unequipped, and unmanned Russian defensive positions along the border, but Ukraine has continued to leverage maneuver to make rapid advances in Kursk Oblast following the deployment of Russian reinforcements to the area.[33] Ukraine's use of maneuver in Kursk Oblast serves as an example of how Ukrainian maneuver, coupled with operational surprise, can result in comparably sized gains in significantly shorter periods of time with less manpower and materiel. Prolonged positional warfare, in contrast, will only make Ukraine's resource disadvantages more pronounced and protracted war will

increase the costs to Ukraine and its partners.[34] Drs. Frederick and Kimberly Kagan noted that the challenge of restoring operational maneuver to the war remains the central problem for both sides at the operational level of war, and Ukraine's ability to achieve rapid maneuver in Kursk Oblast suggests that Ukrainian forces have internalized lessons from the past months of positional warfare that may help Ukraine leverage maneuver warfare in the future.[35]

It is simply too early to draw dispositive conclusions about the lasting effects that the two very different Russian and Ukrainian efforts will have on the course of the war. ISW will continue to refrain from commenting on Ukrainian operational intent in Kursk Oblast or elsewhere in the theater beyond what Ukrainian officials themselves have said in order to protect Ukrainian operational security, but it is safe to conclude that the operational significance of the incursion in Kursk Oblast will depend on how Ukrainian forces leverage the theater-wide pressures the operation has created in subsequent operations that pursue operationally significant objectives. ISW also considers assessments about the operational significance of the possible Russian seizure of Pokrovsk to be premature given the possibility that Russian offensive operations throughout Donetsk Oblast will culminate in the coming weeks and months at yet-to-be-determined positions. The operational significance of Pokrovsk will likely depend on Russia's ability to leverage the seizure of the city in wider maneuver in Donetsk Oblast, which will be extremely difficult for Russian forces if offensive operations elsewhere in Donetsk Oblast culminate and in the absence of large operational reserves. It also remains unclear if Russian forces will be able to seize Pokrovsk before Russian forces culminate on this sector of the front.

ISW offers these observations about the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast and the months-long Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine to provide a balanced framework for assessing the significance of the current Russian and Ukrainian operations on the course of the entire war, which will remain uncertain for the foreseeable future.

Russia and Ukraine were reportedly planning to meet in Qatar in August 2024 to discuss a possible moratorium on Ukrainian and Russian strikes on energy infrastructure, but Russia temporarily postponed the summit after the start of the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast. The *Washington Post* reported on August 17 that unspecified officials and diplomats familiar with the matter stated that Ukraine and Russia were planning to send delegations to Doha in August 2024 to attend Qatari-mediated discussions about the proposed moratorium.[36] An unspecified diplomat reportedly told the *Washington Post* that Russia postponed the meetings following Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast but did not call off the talks entirely. The *Washington Post* reported that two sources familiar with the talks stated that unspecified senior Ukrainian officials believed that the summit had a 20 percent or less chance of succeeding even if Ukrainian forces had not conducted the operation into Kursk Oblast. Russia and Ukraine have reportedly been discussing such a moratorium since June 2024 following Qatari proposals to both Ukraine and Russia. The *Washington Post's* diplomatic source stated that after Russia postponed its participation in the talks, Ukraine wanted to hold bilateral meetings with Qatar, but that Qatar did not view one-sided meetings as beneficial. The *Washington Post* reported that the Ukrainian presidential office stated that the meetings in Qatar were postponed "due to the situation in the Middle East" and that the discussions would take place via videoconference on August 22. It is unclear if the discussions on August 22 will include the Russian delegation or not.

Russia remains uninterested in any broader, meaningful negotiations regardless of Russia's willingness to entertain or agree to a possible moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes. The *Washington Post* reported that unspecified officials stated that some people involved in the negotiations hoped that discussions in Qatar could lead to a more comprehensive agreement to end the war.[37] A source identified only as a Russian academic with close ties to unspecified senior Russian diplomats reportedly stated that the Kremlin would be less motivated to agree to the moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes since Russia assesses it can more significantly damage Ukraine's energy infrastructure than Ukraine can damage Russian oil refineries. The Russian academic reportedly stated, however, that Russia may be more willing to consider the energy strike moratorium to push Ukraine to engage in negotiations on a broader ceasefire.

ISW has repeatedly assessed that despite the Kremlin's longstanding information operations feigning interest in meaningful negotiations, Russia is not interested in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine to end the war.[38] Putin and the Kremlin have notably intensified their expansionist rhetoric about Ukraine since December 2023 and have increasingly indicated that Russia intends to conquer more territory in Ukraine and is committed to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity.[39] Russia has been preparing for a possible conventional war with NATO in the future, and the Kremlin likely views anything short of Ukrainian capitulation as an unacceptable threat to Russia's ability to fight such a war.[40] Putin outlined uncompromising demands on June 14 for Ukrainian capitulation as prerequisites for any "peace" negotiations, including Ukraine's recognition of Russian control over the entirety of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts – including the areas of these oblasts that Russian forces currently do not occupy.[41] 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.[42] Putin stated that Russia instead favors a "complete" and "final" end to the war. Putin continued to demonstrate his unwillingness to negotiate with Ukraine during a meeting on August 12, during which he portrayed Ukraine as an actor with whom Russia is not interested in negotiating.[43]

Russia would likely continue strikes against deep-rear military objects and industrial enterprises in Ukraine even if it were to agree to a moratorium on strikes against energy infrastructure. The Russian strike campaign targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure is at least in part meant to constrain Ukraine's defense industrial production capacity and degrade Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian aggression.[44] Russia would likely continue to pursue this objective even if it were to agree to the moratorium on strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure and may resort to striking Ukrainian defense industrial enterprises more directly to achieve the same effect. Russia would likely also continue its large-scale strike series to force Ukraine to use a considerable portion of its air defense missile stockpile and fix limited air defense systems away from frontline areas to protect Ukrainian cities in the rear, allowing Russian aviation to more securely strike Ukrainian frontline forces. [45]

Russia is almost certainly only considering a possible moratorium on energy strikes due to Ukraine's months-long strike campaign against Russian oil refineries — demonstrating a secondary effect of Ukraine's strike campaign. The *Washington Post* noted that Ukraine was open to the moratorium discussions because Kyiv viewed such discussions as part of Ukraine's 10-point peace plan, which includes calls for Russia to stop striking Ukrainian civilian and energy infrastructure. [46] The *Washington Post*, however, did not offer an explanation for Russia's interest in the discussions. Ukraine has been conducting a strike campaign against Russian oil refineries since at least late January 2024.[47] Russia's reported temporary postponement — as opposed to complete cancellation — of the discussions in Qatar demonstrates that Russia is likely still interested in the possible moratorium and that the Kremlin views the Ukrainian strikes against Russian oil infrastructure as significant and distressing.

Russia has pulled out of past wartime agreements with Ukraine, and Ukraine is reportedly planning to create conditions to prevent Russia from terminating another Ukrainian-Russian agreement. A Ukrainian official familiar with the potential moratorium agreement reportedly stated that Ukraine would "talk with [its] partners to be sure that the deal will work" and would not only speak "one-to-one with Russia." [48] Ukraine's efforts to include unspecified partners to enforce the deal are likely aimed at preventing Russia from using false justifications to terminate any future agreement - as Russia has done in the past. Russia refused to renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023, but Ukraine has been able to continue exports through its grain corridor due to Ukraine's missile and drone campaign targeting Black Sea Fleet (BSF) assets and vessels and inhibiting Russia's ability to halt maritime activity in the western Black Sea.[49] The *Washington Post* noted that Russia attempted to justify its suspension of the grain deal with claims that only a small percentage of the exported grain went to the states that needed it the most — despite data from the United Nations (UN) to the contrary. [50]

Ukrainian forces continue to marginally advance in Kursk Oblast amid ongoing Russian efforts to stop further Ukrainian advances and begin to push Ukrainian forces back across the international border. Russian milbloggers claimed on August 17 that Russian forces destroyed several bridges across the Seim River in Tetkino and Popovo-Lezhachi (both southwest of Korenevo and along the international border) in order to stop Ukrainian forces advancing from the international border and that Ukrainian forces have consolidated positions in Otruba and up to the west bank of the river.[51] A prominent Kremlin propagandist claimed that Ukrainian forces continued unspecified activity near Tetkino, suggesting that Ukrainian forces may have been operating in the Tetkino area previously, and several Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces maintain positions in Tetkino itself.[52] The propagandist claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting an offensive operation from the international border towards Troitskoye (south of Korenevo and one kilometer from the international border) and that Ukrainian forces advanced west and south of Snagost (south of Korenevo).[53] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are also conducting assaults northeast of Korenevo, including near Kauchuk and Alekseyevsky, but the exact contours of Ukrainian operations in this area remain unclear.[54] Geolocated footage published on August 17 indicates that Ukrainian forces continue to operate in western Russkoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha).[55] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces recently advanced northeast of Sudzha in Mykhailovka and southeast of Sudzha in Ulanok and Nizhnemakhovo and that fighting is ongoing southeast of Sudzha along the Kamyshnoye-Krupets-Giri line.[56] Russian milbloggers suggested that Russian forces operating southeast of Sudzha may have recently retaken Ozerki, Kamyshnoye, and Giri.[57]

The United Kingdom (UK) is reportedly waiting for US approval before greenlighting Ukrainian forces to use UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles for long-range strikes against military targets in Russia. UK outlet *The Times* reported on August 16 that an unnamed source within the UK government stated that the UK submitted a request for US approval over a month ago (roughly mid-July 2024) and is still waiting for a response from the Biden Administration.[58] A second source within the UK government told *The Times* that discussions about Storm Shadows are "ongoing" with the UK's allies, and a third source described the approval process as "routine." *The Times* stated that the UK, US, France, and another unspecified NATO ally must unanimously approve the policy change. The UK's policy on Ukraine's ability to use Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets in Russia has grown increasingly unclear in recent months following several contradictory statements by UK officials. [59]

The Kremlin has revived its absurd information operation claiming that Ukrainian forces are preparing false-flag attacks, potentially with "dirty bombs," against Russia's Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) and the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), likely to undermine broader Western support of Ukraine amid Russian battlefield setbacks in Kursk Oblast. Several prominent Russian authorities, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), nuclear energy operator Rosatom, Russian diplomats, and occupation authorities claimed on August 17 that Ukrainian authorities are preparing a false-flag attack against the KNPP and ZNPP.[60] Russian state news outlet *RIA Novosti* claimed, citing a source in Russian law enforcement, that Ukrainian forces are planning to conduct this attack with warheads containing radioactive material, and several Russian milbloggers and prominent Kremlin mouthpieces broadly amplified this "dirty-bomb" narrative.[61] Russian authorities, most notably then-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, last pushed the dirty bomb narrative at this scale in October 2022 amid Ukraine's ongoing counteroffensive efforts in southern Ukraine and just weeks before those efforts forced Russian forces to withdraw from west (right) bank Kherson Oblast.[62] Shoigu's October 2022 statements also intended to scare Western officials into withholding support from Ukraine amid Russian battlefield setbacks, and this objective remains unchanged.

The Russian false-flag information operation rests on assumptions that contradict or undermine this narrative and ignores the fact that Russia has proven itself an unsafe operator of the ZNPP. Ukrainian forces have consistently demonstrated their ability to conduct rear area strikes within Russia and occupied Ukraine at distances farther than the roughly 60 kilometers between the KNPP and the international border or the roughly 30-40 kilometers from the current limit of claimed Ukrainian advances within Kursk Oblast with their current capabilities.[63] Prominent Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers undermined this information operation, noting that Ukrainian forces have the capability to strike at this distance already and assessing that a dirty bomb would be "too complicated." [64] The Kremlin is also trying to turn legitimate complaints about Russia's militarization of the ZNPP back against Ukraine. Russian forces fired at the ZNPP during their seizure of the plant in March 2022 and since occupying the plant have stored and operated military equipment within the ZNPP.[65] Russian forces reportedly recently set a tire fire at one of the ZNPP's cooling tower in an apparent attempt to intimidate Ukraine following the start of the incursion into Kursk Oblast.[66]

Russian forces continue to commit war crimes against Ukrainian soldiers. Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated on August 16 that he has appealed to the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) concerning a Russian video of a Russian serviceman demonstratively displaying the desecrated body of a Ukrainian servicemember.[67] Lubinets called the desecration of the Ukrainian's body a violation of international humanitarian law and stated that Russian forces often record and spread such videos to intimidate and demoralize Ukrainians. The Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office announced on August 17 that it has opened an investigation into the case and that Ukrainian law enforcement are in the process of authenticating the video and the circumstances surrounding it.[68] A Ukrainian source claimed on August 16 that Russian forces recorded the video at the Kolotilovka border checkpoint in Belgorod Oblast on August 12 and that the video has the logo of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) elements of which have previously operated in Bucha.[69] It is unclear whether this soldier was a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW), and ISW is unable to verify the Ukrainian source's claims.

Russian President Vladimir Putin promoted his "niece" (first cousin once removed) Anna Tsivileva to the position of State Secretary and Deputy Defense Minister.[70] Putin signed the decree on August 17 relieving Tsivileva of her former Deputy Defense Minister post. Tsivileva's new position is likely a promotion. Independent Russian-language outlet *Meduza* noted on August 17 that each Russian federal agency has several deputies but only one State Secretary. Tsivileva will be responsible for the Ministry of Defense's (MoD) communication with parliament, other governmental agencies, and public organizations.[71] Tsivileva's promotion is the latest in Putin's recent efforts to place his relatives and the children of other senior Russian officials in Russian government positions. [72]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine are not in themselves decisive military operations that will win the war. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces lack the capability to conduct individual decisive war-winning operations and must instead conduct multiple successive operations with limited operational objectives that are far short of victory, but that in aggregate can achieve strategic objectives.**
- **It is too early to assess the outcomes and operational significance of the Ukrainian incursion into Russia and the ongoing Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine. The significance of these operations will not emerge in isolation, moreover, but they will matter in so far as they relate to a series of subsequent Russian and Ukrainian campaigns over time.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command likely view maintaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative to win a war of attrition against Ukraine, and both the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast and the Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine will impact whether Russian forces can retain the initiative in the short-term.**

- Ukrainian officials have indicated that Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast does not have long-term territorial objectives but instead aims to generate theater-wide operational and strategic pressures on Russian forces.
- The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast has already generated theater-wide operational and strategic pressures on Russian forces, and subsequent phases of fighting within Russia will likely generate even greater pressures on Putin and the Russian military.
- Russian forces will not be able to retain the initiative throughout eastern Ukraine indefinitely, and the culmination of Russian offensive operations will present Ukrainian forces with opportunities to contest the initiative further.
- The Russian offensive operation to seize Pokrovsk is emblematic of the Russian approach to the war in Ukraine that embraces positional warfare for gradual creeping advances and seeks to win a war of attrition.
- Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast illustrates how Ukrainian forces can use maneuver warfare to offset Russian manpower and materiel advantages.
- It is simply too early to draw dispositive conclusions about the lasting effects that the two very different Russian and Ukrainian efforts will have on the course of the war.
- ISW offers these observations about the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast and the months-long Russian offensive effort in eastern Ukraine to provide a balanced framework for assessing the significance of the current Russian and Ukrainian operations on the course of the entire war, which will remain uncertain for the foreseeable future.
- Russia and Ukraine were reportedly planning to meet in Qatar in August 2024 to discuss a possible moratorium on Ukrainian and Russian strikes on energy infrastructure, but Russia temporarily postponed the summit after the start of the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast.
- Russia remains uninterested in any broader, meaningful negotiations regardless of Russia's willingness to entertain or agree to a possible moratorium on energy infrastructure strikes.
- Russia is almost certainly only considering a possible moratorium on energy strikes due to Ukraine's months-long strike campaign against Russian oil refineries — demonstrating a secondary effect of Ukraine's strike campaign.
- Ukrainian forces advanced within Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kreminna, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- The Russian government continues efforts to use the "Time of Heroes" program to integrate trusted Russian military veterans into Russian government roles.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 16, 2024

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Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 16, 2024, 7:10pm ET

Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance southeast of Sudzha on August 16 amid continued Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced east of Mirny and south of Spalnoye (both southeast of Sudzha), and geolocated imagery published on August 15 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently operated within Borki (southeast of Sudzha).[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continued north of Sudzha near Russkoye Porechnoye, east of Sudzha near Agronom, and southeast of Sudzha along the Girkamyschnoye-Krupets-Spalnoye line.[2] Russian milbloggers noted that small Ukrainian mobile groups continued limited assaults behind the existing line of contact in Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces continued assaults near Korenevo and west of Snagost (south of Korenevo).[3] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian armored assault in the Gordeevka direction (south of Korenevo) and Ukrainian attacks west of Anastasyevka and southeast of Kauchuk (both northeast of Korenevo and roughly 27km from the international border).[4] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces struck Ukrainian forces operating near Otruba (southwest of Korenevo and along the international border).[5] Geolocated footage published on August 15 and 16 indicates that Ukrainian forces continue to operate throughout the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances within Kursk Oblast, including near Sudzha.[6]

Ukrainian strikes reportedly destroyed two bridges in Glushkovo Raion, Kursk Oblast. Russian sources claimed on August 16 that Ukrainian HIMARS strikes destroyed bridges in Glushkovo and Zvannoye (both southeast of Korenevo).[7] Geolocated footage published on August 16 shows that the bridge in Glushkovo collapsed following the strike.[8] Russian milbloggers claimed that the destruction of the bridge will complicate Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in the area.[9]

Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced further into western Belgorod Oblast during recent cross-border assaults than previously reported, but available open-source reporting and

evidence indicates that Ukrainian forces no longer maintain positions within Belgorod Oblast as of August 16. The *Washington Post* reported on August 15 that Ukrainian personnel who participated in cross-border assaults into Belgorod Oblast stated that Ukrainian groups conducted mechanized assaults near the Kolotilovka border checkpoint (on the international border northwest of Belgorod City) on August 11 and advanced up to roughly 10 kilometers in the area.[10] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces repeatedly attacked near Kolotilovka in recent days and temporarily seized the Kolotilovka checkpoint on August 15 but did not claim that Ukrainian forces advanced anywhere close to 10 kilometers beyond the checkpoint.[11] The *Washington Post* reported that Ukrainian forces held positions within Belgorod Oblast while under heavy Russian airstrikes and artillery fire and that Ukrainian armored vehicles crossed into Belgorod Oblast to evacuate remaining Ukrainian personnel from these positions on August 15.[12] ISW has not observed any Russian claims or evidence suggesting that Ukrainian forces remain in Belgorod Oblast as of August 16. Ukrainian soldiers told the *Washington Post* that Russian forces in Belgorod Oblast were more prepared to repel cross-border Ukrainian assaults than Russian forces in Kursk Oblast and that Russian forces had established an extensive array of "dragon's teeth" anti-tank fortifications along the border and heavily mined the area.[13] The Ukrainian soldiers reportedly stated that Russian artillery units, drone operators, and aircraft almost immediately began striking Ukrainian forces as they attempted to cross the border into Belgorod Oblast on August 11.[14] The Ukrainian soldiers' description of the Russian response suggests that the operational surprise, which Ukrainian forces achieved on August 6 when launching the incursion into Kursk Oblast, had largely dissipated by August 11 and that Russian forces in Belgorod Oblast had prepared to repel Ukrainian cross-border assaults.[15] Ukrainian forces have made subsequent rapid advances across other sections of the border with Kursk Oblast since starting the incursion on August 6, however, and it is likely that Russian forces are more heavily defending some sections of the border than others.[16]

Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued to advance in Kursk Oblast and suggested that the incursion has forced Russia to more readily consider prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on August 16 that Ukrainian forces advanced between one and three kilometers in unspecified areas of Kursk Oblast.[17] Syrskyi also stated that Major General Eduard Moskalyov has begun heading the newly created military commandant's office in Kursk Oblast.[18] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated on August 14 that Kremlin-appointed Russian Commissioner for Human Rights Tatiana Moskalikova initiated a conversation about prisoner of war (POW) exchanges and that Ukrainian forces have taken 2,000 Russian personnel prisoners in the last two weeks, including conscripts, border guards from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), and personnel from Chechen "Akhmat" units.[19] This was reportedly the first time Russia has initiated discussions about a possible POW exchange. Ukrainian officials have previously reported that Russian officials have rebuffed Ukrainian overtures for POW exchanges in the past.[20] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate Kyrylo Budanov stated on August 15 that Ukraine will prioritize the return of the seriously wounded and ill, women, and those who have been in Russian captivity the longest.[21] Budanov stated that Ukraine will also try to return civilian prisoners, especially those whom Russian forces have held in captivity since 2014. A Ukrainian officer from the Military Law and Order Service reported on August 15 that 80 percent of the more than 200 Russian POWs located in one Ukrainian POW detention facility are conscripts.[22] The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast threatens Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to maintain support for the war and his regime, and the Kremlin may be highly attuned to the political impacts of large numbers of Russian POWs being captured on Russian territory, particularly conscripts.[23]

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office (UN OHCHR) requested that Russian authorities allow UN representatives to visit Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts as part of a human rights monitoring mission.[24] UN OHCHR Spokesperson Liz Throssell confirmed the request on August 15 and noted that the office previously asked Russian authorities for access to areas in Russia and occupied Ukraine "to no avail."

US officials reiterated that US policy on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to conduct long-range strikes against Russian military targets has not changed amid the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated during a press briefing on August 15 that Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast has not changed the type or volume of weapons that the US will provide to Ukraine and that the parameters of the US policy regarding long-range Ukrainian strikes against military targets in Russia with US-provided weapons have also not changed.[25] The Biden Administration reportedly approved a policy change in May 2024 allowing Ukraine to use US-provided weapons for "counter-fire purposes" against the Russian forces conducting assaults into northern Kharkiv Oblast and preparing to conduct assaults from other Russian oblasts immediately bordering Ukraine.[26] Singh reiterated that the United States supports Ukraine's right to defend itself against Russia's illegal invasion.

The Kremlin reportedly fired former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's advisor on information policy Andrei Ilnitsky possibly as part of an ongoing effort to shift control of Russia's wartime information policy from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to the Russian Presidential Administration. Russian state media outlets observed that Kremlin newswire TASS promptly issued a correction to a report on August 15 stating that Ilnitsky is a former advisor to the MoD.[27] Russian state media outlets reported that Ilnitsky's title change indicates that he was recently fired and observed that Russian President Vladimir Putin fired several of Shoigu's deputies in mid-June,

although the Russian MoD did not officially announce Ilnitsky's dismissal.[28] Ilnitsky's dismissal also appears to be relatively recent since many Russian outlets referred to him by his MoD title at least as of July 2024.[29] One Russian source claimed that Ilnitsky resigned after Shoigu's dismissal, however.[30] Russian media claimed that Ilnitsky may have been the creator of the "Z" symbol that Russian forces have used during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and noted that he had advised the Russian MoD since 2015.[31] A prominent Russian social media propagandist reacted to the news by accusing Ilnitsky of creating a harmful and confusing information policy at the Russian MoD and recalled an instance in which Ilnitsky attempted to teach him how to wage "information war" in April 2022.[32] Some Russian milbloggers implied that Ilnitsky advocated against daily war coverage and blamed Ilnitsky for misleading Russian state coverage of the war in Ukraine.[33]

One critical Russian milblogger condemned Ilnitsky's dismissal, noting that his removal indicates that the Kremlin is advancing its efforts to transfer the control of Russia's wartime information policy from the MoD's Department of Information and Mass Communications to the Russian Presidential Administration.[34] The milblogger noted that members of the Presidential Administration attended the first meeting of newly appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov and Russian milbloggers on June 10 and that this was the first indicator of the expansion of the administration's control over the entire Russian media infrastructure. The milblogger claimed that the Presidential Administration's apparent consolidation of two separate information mechanisms – the domestic propaganda machine aimed at ensuring political stability in Russia and external information warfare mechanisms – is a dangerous undertaking for Putin during a period of information war since simplified media control systems are more susceptible to external influence. ISW has consistently observed reports that First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergei Kiriyenko has been increasingly expanding the administration's control over the Russian information space and policy since at least the Wagner Group mutiny in June 2023.[35] ISW also assessed on August 15 that the Kremlin appears to be trying to hastily create a new information space that predominantly features Kremlin-affiliated sources in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, and the Russian government continued to blacklist select Russian milbloggers, political commentators, and other Russian internet personalities on August 15 and 16.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continued to marginally advance southeast of Sudzha on August 16 amid continued Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian strikes reportedly destroyed two bridges in Glushkovo Raion, Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly advanced further into western Belgorod Oblast during recent cross-border assaults than previously reported, but available open-source reporting and evidence indicate that Ukrainian forces no longer maintain positions within Belgorod Oblast as of August 16.
- Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces continued to advance in Kursk Oblast and suggested that the incursion has forced Russia to more readily consider prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges.
- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office (UN OHCHR) requested that Russian authorities allow UN representatives to visit Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts as part of a human rights monitoring mission.
- US officials reiterated that US policy on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to conduct long-range strikes against Russian military targets has not changed amid the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin reportedly fired former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's advisor on information policy Andrei Ilnitsky possibly as part of an ongoing effort to shift control of Russia's wartime information policy from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to the Russian Presidential Administration.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- Russian milbloggers claimed on August 16 that Russian drone operators are limiting their use of Mavic drones amid claims that Russian commanders are forcing operators to either personally pay to replace drones lost outside of combat or risk being sent to an infantry assault unit as punishment for losing a drone.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 15, 2024

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Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 15, 2024, 7:05pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on August 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian officials are taking steps to consolidate and coordinate the management of ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast while continuing to highlight Ukrainian

advances. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a meeting with the Stavka (Ukrainian high command) on August 15 and heard reports from military leadership on the situation in Kursk Oblast.[1] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi announced to the Stavka that Ukraine has created a military commandant's office in Kursk Oblast under the leadership of Major General Eduard Moskalyov to "maintain law and order and ensure the priority needs of the population." [2] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets also stated on August 14 that Ukraine is prepared to coordinate prisoner of war (POW) exchanges with Russia and that he is communicating with his Russian counterpart about the possibility of exchanging "hundreds" of Russian POWs that Ukraine has reportedly captured since the beginning of the Kursk operation for Ukrainian POWs currently in Russian captivity.[3] Syrskyi also reported that since the beginning of the day on August 15, Ukrainian forces advanced between 500 meters and 1.5 kilometers in unspecified areas of Kursk Oblast and have advanced 35 kilometers deep since the beginning of the Ukrainian operation into Kursk Oblast on August 6.[4] ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces do not doctrinally *control* all the territory within the maximalist extent of claimed Ukrainian advances, but the creation of the commandant's office will likely allow Ukrainian forces to coordinate military actions in the area that falls under maximal Ukrainian claims and safeguard the civilian population.[5]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued advancing in some areas in Kursk Oblast amid a generally slower tempo of Ukrainian operations in the area. A Russian milblogger claimed on August 14 that Ukrainian forces seized Gordeevka (just north of the international border and south of Korenevo).[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continued near Korenevo without any significant changes to the frontline.[7] Geolocated footage published on August 15 showing Ukrainian forces operating in Safonovka (northeast of Korenevo and 28km from the international border) indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the area.[8] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued attacking near Kauchuk (northeast of Korenevo and 27km from the international border).[9] Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov claimed that Russian forces cleared Martynovka (just northeast of Sudzha) of Ukrainian forces, although Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is ongoing near the settlement.[10] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Bondarevka (just east of Sudzha), and geolocated footage published on August 15 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced within the settlement.[11] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced east of Plekhovo (south of Sudzha and 2km from the international border), and another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces control the entire settlement.[12] Russian milbloggers claimed on August 13 and 14 that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian forces from Giri (southeast of Sudzha and 12km from the international border), and geolocated footage published on August 13 showing a Russian journalist reporting from the center of Giri indicates that Ukrainian forces likely withdrew from the settlement.[13] Geolocated footage published on August 14 and 15 showing Ukrainian forces operating well within the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances indicates that Ukrainian forces also continue operating closer to the international border within Kursk Oblast and within Sudzha.[14]

Several Ukrainian outlets reported on August 15 that sources within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that Ukrainian forces took 102 Russian military personnel from the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th Combined Arms Army, Moscow Military District) and unspecified Chechen "Akhmat" units as prisoners of war in Kursk Oblast.[15] Elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and "Grom-Kaskad" Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Brigade, possibly Russia's first-ever specialized drone brigade, are reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast.[16] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces temporarily seized the Kolotilovka border checkpoint in Belgorod Oblast (on the international border southeast of Sudzha and northwest of Belgorod City) on the night of August 14 to 15 but that Russian forces swiftly responded and pushed Ukrainians back across the international border.[17] ISW has not observed visual evidence suggesting that Ukrainian forces have seized the Kolotilovka checkpoint.

Russian forces are maintaining their relatively high offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast, demonstrating that the Russian military command continues to prioritize advances in eastern Ukraine even as Ukraine is pressuring Russian forces within Kursk Oblast. Russian forces are continuing to pursue a tactical encirclement of Ukrainian forces southeast of Pokrovsk.[18] Geolocated footage published on August 14 and 15 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced east of Pokrovsk within Hrodivka and southeast of Pokrovsk within Mykolaivka, Zhelanne, and Orlivka, and ISW assesses that Russian forces likely seized Orlivka and Zhelanne.[19] Russian forces have also continued mechanized assaults near Donetsk City over the past several weeks. Geolocated footage published on August 13 and 15 shows Ukrainian forces repelling a roughly company-sized Russian mechanized assault near Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City) and a reduced company-sized Russian mechanized assault near Mykilske (southwest of Donetsk City).[20] Geolocated footage published on August 11 shows Russian forces conducting a roughly company-sized mechanized assault southeast of Heorhiivka.[21] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Dmytro Lykhovyi stated on August 15 that there have also been no significant changes to the Russian force grouping in southern Ukraine and that Russian forces are not decreasing their offensive operations in the area.[22]

Russia has begun moving certain elements from Ukraine to respond to the situation in Kursk Oblast, but the types of units that are redeploying, and where they are redeploying from, is a strong indicator that the Russian military command is still prioritizing ongoing offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. *CNN* reported on August 15 that two senior US officials stated that the Russian military

command has redeployed multiple "brigade-sized" elements made up of at least 1,000 personnel each from unspecified areas to Kursk Oblast.[23] Two sources familiar with Western intelligence reportedly stated that the Russian military command is not moving larger and better-trained elements from unspecified areas of Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, with one source stating that the lack of substantial Russian redeployments may be because the Russian military command is just starting this process or because there are not enough forces to conduct redeployments. *CNN* also reported that US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby stated that Russia has not "given up" military operations in northeastern or southern Ukraine, where active fighting is ongoing. ISW has not observed reports in the open source that the Russian military command is redeploying entire brigades from Ukraine to Kursk Oblast but has observed reports of elements of Russian regiments redeploying to the area.[24] ISW continues to assess that the Russian military command is pulling select elements of Russian irregular units from Donetsk Oblast to address the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast but will likely be extremely averse to pulling Russian military units engaged in combat from priority sectors in Donetsk Oblast out of concerns about slowing the tempo of Russian operations in these areas.[25]

The Kremlin and the Russian military command are creating a complicated, overlapping, and so far, ineffective command and control (C2) structure for the Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov announced on August 15 the creation of a "coordination council" within the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for military and security issues in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts.[26] Belousov stated that the coordination council aims to improve support for Russian forces covering the state border and will specifically oversee the effective provision of materiel and equipment to forces in the area, coordination between forces responding to threats along the state border, engineering development in the area, and military medical support.[27] Belousov added that the coordination council will assist civilian authorities with evacuations and take additional measures to protect civilians and infrastructure in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts.[28] Belousov did not comment on how the coordination council will interact with the existing C2 structure that the Kremlin established when it tasked the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) with conducting a counterterrorism operation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts on August 9.[29] The MoD's coordination council and the FSB's counterterrorism operation will likely generate continued confusion about what structures are responsible for what aspects of the Russian defensive operation in Kursk Oblast and will likely lead to friction between the FSB and the Russian military.[30] Russian President Vladimir Putin has provided overlapping tasks to the Russian MoD, FSB, and Rosgvardia in Kursk Oblast, and these entities have not yet taken visible steps to establish a clearer division of responsibilities.[31] Russian forces have reportedly redeployed up to 11 battalions from areas of Kursk Oblast and elsewhere in the theater to respond to the Ukrainian incursion, and this hastily assembled force grouping will likely struggle to coordinate combat operations given the Kremlin's confused approach to C2 so far.[32]

The delayed establishment of a complicated Russian C2 structure in Kursk Oblast continues to highlight the fact that the Kremlin failed to plan for the possibility of a significant Ukrainian incursion into Russia.

The Kremlin and the Russian military command have treated the Russian border with northeastern Ukraine as a dormant sector of the front since Fall 2022 and likely did not sufficiently plan contingencies for defending Russian territory.[33] The Kremlin and the Russian military command would likely have established a more cohesive and clearer C2 structure more quickly if they had had standing plans for defending against a Ukrainian incursion. Putin's continued reluctance to declare martial law and acknowledge that Russia is in a state of war — as opposed to the "special military operation" he declared when he launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and has maintained in the subsequent two and a half years — has likely heavily shaped the contingencies that the Kremlin and the Russian military command assess Russia must plan for and what types of activities in Ukraine and Russia the Kremlin is willing to publicly acknowledge.[34] The Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast will likely expand the Kremlin's consideration for what type of Ukrainian operations are possible along the border and highlight that Putin and the Kremlin have suffered from a strategic failure of imagination.[35]

The Kremlin appears to have a more coordinated approach to securing its control over the Russian information space than to addressing its military and C2 problems in Kursk Oblast.

Russian government officials and propagandists have seemingly begun a concerted campaign to discredit non-Kremlin affiliated milbloggers and social media sources that amplify information about the Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast in the immediate aftermath of the incursion.[36] Russian State Duma Deputy Dinar Gilmudinov publicly accused Russian milbloggers and war correspondents (*voyenkory* in Russian) on August 15 of spreading "fake" information, likely as part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to silence Russian milbloggers that it has not coopted.[37] Gilmudinov called on the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Russian General Prosecutor's Office, and the Federal Security Service (FSB) to harshly censor information appearing on social media, claiming that such information creates panic and is advantageous for Ukrainian forces. Gilmudinov added that fellow State Duma Deputy Yevgeniy Revenko similarly expressed his concern that select Russian milbloggers are responsible for committing "information sabotage." Russian propagandists and local officials have similarly been encouraging Russians not to trust social media reports about the situation in Kursk Oblast and have even accused some Russian milbloggers of deliberately spreading Ukrainian misinformation.[38] Some Russian milbloggers interpreted Gilmudinov's and Russian state media's recent attacks on the broader milblogger community as an attempt to "jail bloggers and *voyenkory*" and censor accurate reporting about the situation in Kursk Oblast so that propagandists can claim that Russia repelled the Ukrainian incursion.[39] Some milbloggers pointed out that Russian milbloggers,

such as imprisoned former Russian officer Igor Girkin, had long warned about the vulnerability of the Russian international border.[40]

The Kremlin is likely trying to hastily create a new information space that predominantly features co-opted Russian milbloggers and established Russian state propagandists. The Head of the United Russia Party's Central Executive Committee, Alexander Sidyakin, called on Gilmudtinov to leave milbloggers alone and argued that some milbloggers routinely meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and senior Russian MoD leadership.[41] Sidyakin claimed that Russian milbloggers also help Russia counter Ukrainian misinformation, although his defense of the Russian milblogger community likely aims to defend the credibility of a few Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers that the Russian government had successfully coopted since at the earliest late 2022. A Kremlin insider source claimed that the Kremlin had been working on co-opting Russian milbloggers and *voyenkory* who had previously disseminated alarmist messages about the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[42] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also claimed that Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov notably met with Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers during the "Army-2024" forum, which took place during the incursion.[43] Putin signed a law on August 8 that obliges all Russian milbloggers and social media users with over 10,000 followers to register with Russian state censor Roskomnadzor, and Russian military and political bloggers referenced the passage of this law in their responses to Gilmudtinov.[44] The Kremlin is likely attempting to expedite its long-term efforts to censor non-Kremlin affiliated milbloggers to prevent any political or social threats against Putin's regime amidst the incursion, instead of focusing on committing necessary military means to address the incursion.

Ukrainian forces are reportedly using Western-provided equipment in Kursk Oblast but remain limited in their ability to strike Russian military targets within Russia with Western-provided weapons. The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) stated on August 15 that Ukraine has the right to defend itself, including by conducting operations inside Russia, and can use British-provided equipment and weapons in line with international law to defend itself, but emphasized that restrictions on Ukraine's use of British-provided Storm Shadow missiles to strike Russian territory remain in place.[45] *Reuters* and *BBC* reported that a British source stated that Ukrainian forces have used UK-provided Challenger 2 tanks during the incursion in Kursk Oblast.[46] *Politico* reported that an official in the Biden administration and two sources familiar with policy discussions stated that the White House is "open" to sending Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM) to Ukraine but has not made a final decision.[47] The White House is reportedly working on the details of the possible transfer of sensitive technology to Ukraine, and the Pentagon is reportedly working with Ukraine to ensure that Ukrainian F-16 aircraft could launch the JASSM.

Ukraine is organizing the creation of a humanitarian corridor through which to evacuate Russian civilians who are impacted by the ongoing Kursk operation, filling an apparent vacuum left by the Kursk Oblast administration and fulfilling international legal requirements for the evacuation of civilian populations. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories Iryna Vereshchuk announced on August 15 that Ukrainian officials are currently working with the Ukrainian military to create a possible humanitarian corridor to evacuate civilians from Kursk Oblast to Sumy Oblast.[48] Vereshchuk also noted that the Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration is running a 24-hour hotline for Kursk Oblast residents who need humanitarian aid or want to evacuate to Ukraine.[49] Vereshchuk also emphasized that Russia has not yet made a request to Ukrainian authorities to open a humanitarian corridor running further into Russia (as opposed to into Ukraine), so Ukraine is currently unable to legally facilitate the creation of such an evacuation route.[50] Kursk Oblast authorities appear to be hesitant to fully respond to the situation, likely out of fear of reacting in a way that is dissonant with the Kremlin's disjointed response to Ukrainian military operations within Russia.[51]

International humanitarian law holds certain legal requirements for the evacuation of civilian populations in specific conflict situations in order to safeguard civilian life, and Ukrainian authorities so far appear committed to fulfilling these requirements.[52] Protocol 4 of the Geneva Convention, which pertains to the protection of civilians during war, requires that the "occupying power" (in this case Ukraine, as Ukraine is exercising some extent of control over territories within Russia) "undertake total or partial evacuation" of an area if necessitated by the military situation in the area.[53] The Geneva Convention also requires that the occupying power does not remove civilians from the occupied territory unless it is "impossible to avoid such displacement." Vereshchuk's statements about the humanitarian corridor strongly suggest that Russian authorities are doing little to nothing to coordinate with Ukraine to enable civilian evacuations further into Russia, which means that some civilians may choose to go to Ukraine for safety in the absence of a viable alternative provided by Russian authorities. Ukrainian authorities also continue to emphasize that whether and where Russian civilians evacuate to is entirely a matter of personal choice — consistent with the international legal prohibition on forced population transfers.[54] ISW has long reported on Russia's apparent violation of this legal stipulation in Ukraine and has detailed Russia's forced population transfers of Ukrainian civilians since 2022.[55]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces successfully conducted drone strikes against Russian air bases in Russia on the night of August 13 to 14.[56] The Ukrainian General Staff stated on August 14 that Ukraine's Special Operations Forces (SSO), Air Force, Security Service (SBU), and Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted drone strikes against four Russian air bases: Khalino in Kursk City, Savasleyka in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, and Borisoglebsk

and Baltimor in Voronezh Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that the Russian military bases Su-34 fighter-bombers and Su-35 fighter aircraft at these airfields and that the strikes damaged fuel storage facilities and unspecified aviation weapons. *Radio Svoboda* published satellite imagery captured on August 14 indicating that Ukrainian strikes damaged a warehouse at the Savasleyka Air Base.[57]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian officials are taking steps to consolidate and coordinate the management of ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast while continuing to highlight Ukrainian advances.
- Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued advancing in some areas in Kursk Oblast amid a generally slower tempo of Ukrainian operations in the area.
- Russian forces are maintaining their relatively high offensive tempo in Donetsk Oblast, demonstrating that the Russian military command continues to prioritize advances in eastern Ukraine even as Ukraine is pressuring Russian forces within Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin and the Russian military command are creating a complicated, overlapping, and so far, ineffective command and control (C2) structure for the Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.
- The delayed establishment of a complicated Russian C2 structure in Kursk Oblast continues to highlight the fact that the Kremlin failed to plan for the possibility of a significant Ukrainian incursion into Russia.
- The Kremlin appears to have a more coordinated approach to securing its control over the Russian information space than to addressing its military and C2 problems in Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin is likely trying to hastily create a new information space that predominantly features coopted Russian milbloggers and established Russian state propagandists.
- Ukrainian forces are reportedly using Western-provided equipment in Kursk Oblast but remain limited in their ability to strike Russian military targets within Russia with Western-provided weapons.
- Ukraine is organizing the creation of a humanitarian corridor through which to evacuate Russian civilians who are impacted by the ongoing Kursk operation, filling an apparent vacuum left by the Kursk Oblast administration and fulfilling international legal requirements for the evacuation of civilian populations.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces successfully conducted drone strikes against Russian air bases in Russia on the night of August 13 to 14.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions.
- The Russian government submitted a bill on August 15 to lower the admission age for the Russian Volunteer Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy of Russia (DOSAAF) from 18 years of age to 14.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 14, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

August 14, 2024, 8pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on August 14. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 15 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. [NOTE: Russian sources are currently shifting much of their reporting to cover the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and as a result are not providing the same level of detail about the situation along the frontline in Ukraine.]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced in Kursk Oblast amid a generally slower tempo of Ukrainian operations as Russian forces continue attempts to stabilize the frontline in the area. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on August 14 that its sources in the Ukrainian military stated that the tempo of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast has slowed due to the increasing Russian resistance in the direction of Kursk City.[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are gradually stabilizing the frontline in Kursk Oblast and that unspecified Russian reinforcements are arriving from unspecified areas and are establishing communications with Russian units already in the area.[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced into Krasnooktyabrskoye (southwest of Korenevo and 15km from the international border).[3] Geolocated footage published on August 13 shows Ukrainian forces operating in eastern Zhuravli (west of Korenevo and 20km from the international border), indicating that Ukrainian forces advanced in the eastern part of the settlement.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Skrylevka, Levshinka, Semenovka, and Alekseevsky (all northeast of Korenevo near Kauchuk, which is 27km from the international border). [5] Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apti Alaudinov claimed that Ukrainian forces do not control Sudzha, although several other Russian sources claimed that fighting is ongoing in and around

Sudzha and that neither side fully controls the settlement.[6] Geolocated footage published on August 14 showing a Ukrainian journalist reporting from central Sudzha indicates that Ukrainian forces control at least part of the settlement and like parts of its surroundings.[7] *Suspilne's* sources in the Ukrainian military stated that Ukrainian forces advanced beyond Martynovka (just northeast of Sudzha), although Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting is still ongoing in the settlement.[8] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Mikhailovka (also northeast of Sudzha) remains under Ukrainian control, implying that Ukrainian forces had seized Mikhailovka at an unspecified previous date.[9] Geolocated footage published on August 14 showing Ukrainian forces operating just northwest of Ulanok (southeast of Sudzha) indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the area.[10] Additional geolocated footage published on August 14 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced in western Kamyshnoye (southeast of Sudzha).[11] Geolocated footage published on August 13 shows a Russian journalist reporting from Giri and Ozerki (both southeast of Sudzha and just east of Kamyshnoye), although Russian sources later claimed on August 14 that Ukrainian forces began operating near Giri and Belitsa (just north of Giri), suggesting that Ukrainian forces may be contesting the area east of Kamyshnoye.[12] Geolocated footage published on August 13 and 14 showing Ukrainian forces operating well within the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances indicates that Ukrainian forces also continue operating closer to the international border within Kursk Oblast.[13] Russian milbloggers claimed on August 14 that Russian forces continued to repel Ukrainian attempts to cross the Kolotilovka border checkpoint in Belgorod Oblast (on the international border southeast of Sudzha and northwest of Belgorod City).[14]

Ukrainian officials continue to discuss ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast and offer their interpretations of the political impact that Ukraine may aim to generate. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a meeting with Ukrainian officials on August 14 to discuss security, humanitarian aid, and military aspects of "the situation in Kursk Oblast." [15] Ukrainian Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets participated in the meeting and stressed that Ukrainian forces formed a "buffer (sanitary) zone" in Kursk Oblast for self-defense purposes.[16] Zelensky similarly stated that that Ukraine is focusing on the Kursk Oblast border area to ensure the safety of Ukraine's borders with Russia, echoing prior statements made by Ukrainian officials highlighting that Ukraine has the right to defend itself from Russian aggression.[17] Advisor to the Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Mykhailo Podolyak emphasized in an interview with independent Russian-language outlet *Meduza* that Ukraine's main political goals of the ongoing Kursk operation are to push Russian artillery away from areas from which Russian forces can target Ukrainian civilians; to interdict Russian logistics lines that allow Russian forces to supply reserves throughout the entire theater; to bring domestic and international attention to Russia's civil and military leadership failures; and to bring the war directly to Russian territory.[18]

Ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast are generating tangible defensive, logistical, and security impacts within Russia. Commercially available satellite imagery collected by Maxar on August 12 shows a newly dug series of field fortifications, including trenches and anti-vehicle ditches southwest of Lgov along the E38 Lgov-Rylsk-Hlukhiv highway (northwest of Sudzha).[19] Additional satellite imagery published on August 13 and collected between August 6 and 11 shows the recent appearance of field fortifications near the 38K-024 highway just south of Lgov.[20] These new fortifications are about 17 kilometers north of the furthest claimed limit of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, which suggests that Russian forces are concerned about potential continued and rapid Ukrainian mechanized northward advances within Kursk Oblast. Russian forces appear particularly concerned about major highways and are likely trying to preemptively safeguard important ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to inhibit Ukrainian maneuver, particularly along the E38 and 38K routes. Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast are also reportedly impacting Russian railway logistics — the Belarusian Railway Workers Community claimed on August 13 that its internal sources are reporting that Russian state-owned railway company Russian Railways informed Belarusian state-owned railway company Belarusian Railways to stop directing trains from all Belarusian Railway stations to stations along the Oryol-Kursk branch of the Moscow Railway starting on August 12 due to a "large-scale operational transfer of troops in the direction of Kursk Oblast" and the movement of freight trains for military logistical purposes.[21] Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov also announced a state of emergency in Belgorod Oblast on August 14, which will allow Belgorod Oblast authorities the power to restrict movement within emergency areas likely either to secure Russian logistical support for Belgorod Oblast border areas or Russian defensive measures within Kursk Oblast.[22]

The Russian government continues recruitment efforts to support operations in Kursk Oblast. Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported on August 14 that Russian forces will send conscripts of the spring draft class from Moscow, Leningrad, Kaliningrad, Sverdlovsk, Murmansk, and Samara Oblasts to aid Russian forces fighting in Kursk Oblast, drawing backlash from human rights activists and relatives who are protesting the use of conscripts in active combat.[23] Russian opposition outlets reported on August 14 that Russian forces are forcing conscripts who survived the initial Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast to sign contracts with the Russian MoD return to the front in Kursk Oblast.[24]

Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov seems to be posturing himself as the spokesperson for the Russian defense in Kursk Oblast, but his claims have consistently been false and largely contradict claims made by relatively reliable Russian milbloggers. Alaudinov has portrayed himself as a spokesperson for Russian forces defending Kursk Oblast since the start of

the Ukrainian incursion on August 6, leveraging his position as a seasoned Chechen commander as well as the position of Chechen forces operating in the area to establish himself as an authority on the defense of Kursk Oblast to Russian state media.[25] Alaudinov has repeatedly claimed that Russian forces have stabilized the situation and achieved various victories in Kursk Oblast, and claimed on August 14 that Ukrainian forces do not control Sudzha and that Russian forces have "blocked" Ukrainian forces within Kursk Oblast – claims that are both demonstrably false given available visual evidence and which contradict the majority of Russian milblogger claims.[26] Many Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces control either significant parts or all of Sudzha as of August 14 and have consistently claimed that Russian forces are struggling to respond to the Ukrainian incursion - very far from Alaudinov's claims that Russian forces have completely stabilized the situation.[27] Alaudinov's claims have focused on portraying Russian forces as a capable defensive force that is defeating inept Ukrainian forces and have therefore leaned on several Kremlin information operations to this effect.[28] Alaudinov's framing of himself, and by extension of the Chechen forces under his command, as a capable defensive body is also dissonant with the widespread perception of the efficacy of Chechen forces within the wider Russian information space. Russian milbloggers have consistently criticized Chechen units operating in Ukraine and near the international border for avoiding combat missions and having poor discipline, and Russian sources made similar complaints about Chechen forces operating in Kursk Oblast following the start of the incursion.[29] Alaudinov may be attempting to rehabilitate the image of Chechen forces by portraying himself as a trustworthy source of information, but at his claims highlight the dissonance between the messaging of prominent Russian military commanders, the Russian information space, and the current battlefield reality in Kursk Oblast.

Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russian air bases in Russia on the night of August 13 to 14, damaging several airfields. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked the Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), and Ukrainian military on August 14 for conducting drone strikes against unspecified Russian air bases.[30] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on August 14 that its sources in the SBU stated that the Ukrainian SBU, GUR, Special Operations Forces (SSO), and Unmanned Systems Forces conducted drone strikes against Russian military air bases in Kursk City, Voronezh City, Borisoglebsk in Voronezh Oblast, and Savasleyka in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, and characterized the strike as the largest Ukrainian attack on Russian air bases since the start of the war.[31] The SBU sources also stated that Ukraine targeted these air bases to prevent Russian forces aircraft from using these bases to conduct glide bomb strikes against Ukrainian frontline forces and civilian areas. Geolocated footage published on August 13 demonstrates the sound of explosions resulting from Ukrainian strikes as heard from somewhere near Voronezh City, roughly 3.5 kilometers north of the Baltimor Air Base in Voronezh City. [32] Satellite imagery captured on August 14 of the Borisoglebsk Air Base indicates that Ukrainian strikes damaged several hangars, likely near the location aircraft repair and maintenance building, and may have damaged an aircraft.[33] Geolocated footage published on August 14 shows a drone striking the Savasleyka Air Base and the subsequent explosion, and a Ukrainian source speculated that the strike damaged a Russian MiG-31 supersonic interceptor aircraft, which can carry Kh-47M2 Kinzhal aeroballistic missiles.[34] ISW cannot independently verify the results of the Ukrainian strikes at this time.

Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party furthered a narrative echoing a Kremlin information operation meant to justify Russia's violence against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states formerly colonized by the Soviet Union and Russian Empire. The Georgian Dream party accused former Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili on August 13 of provoking Russia's war against Georgia in 2008 and the Kremlin's subsequent illegal occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the behest of unspecified "external actors." [35] Georgian Dream's Political Council stated that it must conduct a "legal process" informing the Georgian public of Saakashvili's and his United National Movement Party's reportedly "treasonous actions." Georgian Dream's statements blame Saakashvili, not Russia, for the 2008 war and occupation of Georgian territory and instead justified Russia's actions, which have been condemned by the international community.[36] The narrative of the Georgian Dream party closely echoes the Kremlin's information operations regarding the Russo-Georgian war, wider information operations used to justify Russia's war against Ukraine, and increasing threats against Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[37] Russia has repeatedly accused pro-Western and pro-democratic leaders in neighboring countries of cooperating with "external actors" at the detriment of Russian interests while simultaneously conducting lawfare to in an attempt to justify invasion, occupation, and hybrid operations against sovereign countries. A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger took note Georgian Dream's statements and amplified the Kremlin's previous accusations against Saakashvili and the West at large, suggesting that this narrative may gain traction in the wider information space.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced in Kursk Oblast amid a generally slower tempo of Ukrainian operations as Russian forces continue attempts to stabilize the frontline in the area.
- Ukrainian officials continue to discuss ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast and offer their interpretations of the political impact that Ukraine may aim to generate.
- Ongoing Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast are generating tangible defensive, logistical, and security impacts within Russia.

- The Russian government continues recruitment efforts to support operations in Kursk Oblast.
- Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov seems to be posturing himself as the spokesperson for the Russian defense in Kursk Oblast, but his claims have consistently been false and largely contradict claims made by relatively reliable Russian milbloggers.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russian air bases in Russia on the night of August 13 to 14, damaging several airfields.
- Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party furthered a narrative echoing a Kremlin information operation meant to justify Russia's violence against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states formerly colonized by the Soviet Union and Russian Empire.
- Russian forces advanced north of Kharkiv City and southeast of Pokrovsk.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 13, 2024

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

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

August 13, 2024, 9:30pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other senior Ukrainian officials provided updates about the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and outlined several Ukrainian objectives of the operations in the area. Zelensky stated on August 3 that Ukrainian forces "control" 74 localities in Kursk Oblast.[1] It is unclear if Zelensky meant that Ukrainian forces are operating in 74 settlements or if he was referring to another type of geographic administrative units. ISW has observed claims and geolocated footage indicating that Ukrainian forces are operating in or near roughly 41 settlements in Kursk Oblast as of August 13, although there are many extremely small settlements and localities within this area that ISW has not included in this count. **Discrepancies between Ukrainian official reporting and ISW's observed claims and geolocated footage are not a refutation of Ukrainian official reporting but rather are a result of the inherent limitations of ISW's open-source methodology and commitment to using only publicly available information.** ISW does not assess that Ukrainian forces control all of the territory within the maximalist extent of claimed Ukrainian advances according to the definition of "control" that ISW uses. Zelensky also stated that Ukrainian forces continue to advance in Kursk Oblast and grow Ukraine's "exchange fund," likely referring to Russian military personnel taken as prisoners of war (POWs).[2] Zelensky stated that Russian forces had conducted almost 2,100 artillery strikes from Kursk Oblast against Sumy Oblast since June 1, 2024, and that Ukraine's operations into Kursk Oblast are intended to secure Ukraine's borders from the Russian military.[3] Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Heorhiy Tykhyi stated on August 13 that Ukraine is not interested in seizing territory in Kursk Oblast. [4] Tykhyi stated that Ukraine needs to protect itself from Russian strikes and push Russian forces away from Russian border areas that Russia uses to strike Ukraine. Tykhyi also noted that Ukrainian operations into Kursk Oblast prevent the Russian military from transferring additional military units to Donetsk Oblast and complicate Russian military logistics.

Tykhyi emphasized that Ukraine is not violating international law and is within its rights to defend itself from Russian aggression, and US officials reiterated a similar sentiment on August 12 and 13. US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby and US State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel stated on August 12 and 13 in response to questions about Russia's reactions to Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast that Russia is conducting a war of aggression against Ukraine and that a quick solution to the Ukrainian incursion into Russia would be for Russian forces to leave Ukraine.[5]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to advance in Kursk Oblast amid Russian attempts to stabilize the frontline in the area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces have not completely stabilized the situation in Kursk Oblast despite ongoing efforts to stabilize the frontline and repel Ukrainian attacks.[6] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced in the fields north of Snagost (south of Korenovo), and geolocated footage published on August 13 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced northeast of Korenovo.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Obshchy Kolodez (northeast of Korenevo and 30 kilometers from the international border) and Alekseevsky (northwest of Korenovo and 27km from the international border), and geolocated footage published on August 13 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced northeast of Alekseevsky. [8] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue attacking Koronevo and Tolpino (just north of Koronevo).[9] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Pogrebki (north of Sudzha and 17km from the international border).[10] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to gain a foothold near Bolshoye Soldatskoye (northeast of Sudzha and 27km from the international border).[11] Geolocated footage published on August 12 shows Ukrainian forces operating in eastern Plekhovo (south of Sudzha), and Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting was ongoing in the settlement as of the evening of August 12, although a milblogger later claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian forces from the settlement on August 13.[12] Geolocated footage published on August 12 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced east of Giri (southwest of Sudzha), although ISW cannot confirm a Ukrainian presence in Giri at this time.[13] Russian milbloggers

claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack in Giri, however.[14] Geolocated footage published on August 12 and 13 showing Ukrainian forces operating well within the maximalist claimed limit of Ukrainian advances indicates that Ukrainian forces continue operating closer to the international border in Kursk Oblast and within Sudzha.[15] Russian milbloggers claimed on August 13 that Russian forces continued to repel Ukrainian attempts to cross the Kolotilovka border checkpoint in Belgorod Oblast (on the international border southeast of Sudzha and northwest of Belgorod City).[16]

The Russian military command may be pulling select elements of Russian irregular units from Donetsk Oblast to address the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast. Russian sources claimed as of August 12 and 13 that elements of the Russian "Pyatnashka" Brigade's "Sarmat" Battalion and the Russian Volunteer Corps recently transferred to Kursk Oblast.[17] ISW has recently observed claims that elements of the "Sarmat" Battalion and other elements of the "Pyatnashka" Brigade and Russian Volunteer Corps are operating in the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk directions in Donetsk Oblast. [18] Russian milbloggers previously claimed that elements of the "Dikaya Division of Donbas," the "Pyatnashka" Brigade, the "Arbat" Separate Guards Special Purpose Battalion, and the "Night Wolves" drone detachment responded to the incursion and quickly redeployed to Kursk Oblast, and ISW had previously observed these units purportedly operating throughout Donetsk Oblast.[19] Irregular battalions such as the "Sarmat" Battalion are almost never fully staffed to the doctrinal end strength and even when deployed in full are still largely comprised of relatively small units. Some elements of these irregular units likely remain in the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk directions as these are the Russian military's assessed priority sectors of the frontline in Ukraine and the Kremlin and Russian military command are unlikely to pull entire units actively engaged in combat operations from these priority sectors to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.[20]

The Russian military command could also be redeploying units that were previously intended to relieve or reinforce frontline units from rear areas in Donetsk Oblast to Kursk Oblast, and such a redeployment could affect the tempo of Russian offensive operations in the Russian military's assessed priority sectors over time. ISW would likely not observe confirmation of such re-deployments in the open source and is not prepared to offer assessments about the tempo of Russian operations in those sectors at this time. A prominent Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor claimed on August 9 that the Russian military command is redeploying operational reserves from the Kharkiv direction and other unspecified directions where Russian forces have achieved "limited successes" in recent months.[21] The Russian military command may have redeployed unspecified units that were previously intended to relieve or reinforce frontline Russian units from rear areas of the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, or Pokrovsk directions, which could affect Russia's ability to sustain the tempo of its offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast in the medium-term. It is unlikely that such redeployments would immediately affect the tempo of Russian offensive operations, however, and recent reports that Russian forces are struggling to make further advances in the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk directions are not likely indicative of such redeployments.[22] It is not uncommon for Russian offensive operations to stall in one sector before intensifying in another as Russian forces have historically struggled to conduct simultaneous large-scale offensive operations and are prone to conducting offensive operations in "pulses" along different sectors of the front. [23] Russian forces may be entering a brief lull before renewing offensive operations in one of these three sectors, and it would likely take several weeks to observe any possible impacts of such redeployments on Russian operations in Donetsk Oblast. Russian authorities will likely remain extremely averse to pulling Russian military units engaged in combat from the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, or Pokrovsk directions and will likely continue deploying limited numbers of irregular forces to Kursk Oblast due to concerns about further slowing the tempo of Russian operations in these higher priority directions.

Russian authorities appear to be largely relying on Russian conscripts, and elements of some regular and irregular military units pulled from less critical sectors of the frontline to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion, however. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian Federal Security Service [FSB] border guards, Russian conscripts and reserves, and elements of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz responded to the Ukrainian incursion on August 6 and 7, and Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz forces, including elements of the "Aida" Battalion, have continued to engage Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast.[24] Elements of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz are also reportedly operating throughout the frontline in Ukraine, including in Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk oblasts.[25] Elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and two unspecified airborne (VDV) battalions have also reportedly redeployed from the Kherson direction to Kursk Oblast, and ISW has also observed recent claims that elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade were recently operating near Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast.[26] The Russian MoD confirmed on August 13 that artillery elements of the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces were redeployed from northern Kharkiv Oblast to Kursk Oblast following previous Russian and Ukrainian reporting about such redeployments.[27]

Two Ukrainian military observers recently stated that elements of the Russian 38th and 64th motorized rifle brigades (both of the 35th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) recently re-deployed to Kursk Oblast, and unspecified elements of the 38th and 64th motorized rifle brigade were recently reportedly operating near Hulyaipole (western Zaporizhia Oblast).[28] The Ukrainian military observers also stated that elements of the Russian 272nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (47th Tank Division, 1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) and elements of the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, MMD) recently redeployed from the Kupyansk direction to Kursk Oblast, which is consistent with recent claims about these units'

locations.[29] Russian conscripts, including conscripts of the Russian 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment and the 1428th Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]), have also reportedly engaged Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast.[30] ISW cannot independently verify any of these reports. Redeployments of conscripts, elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces, and select units from less critical frontline areas in Ukraine would suggest that the Russian military command has determined that possible disruptions to the offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and other less-critical frontline areas are an acceptable risk to adequately respond to the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly appointed Russian Presidential Aid Aide Alexei Dyumin to supervise Russia's "counterterrorism operation" in Kursk Oblast on August 12.

[31] Russian State Duma Deputy from Kursk Oblast Nikolai Ivanov claimed that his unnamed sources confirmed that Putin entrusted Dyumin with overseeing the counterterrorist operation in Kursk Oblast after inviting him for an evening meeting on August 12.[32] Dyumin was the only non-cabinet member not connected with the military or security services who was present at Putin's meeting with Russian military, security, and federal and regional government officials about the situation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts on August 12.[33] Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers and Russian insider sources similarly claimed that Dyumin assumed full powers to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, but the Kremlin did not publish an official confirmation of Dyumin's assignment.[34] One insider source claimed that Putin directed Dyumin to coordinate all agencies involved in repelling Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.[35] One Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that he had seen a state media report announcing that Dyumin became the commander of the Russian Sever (northern) direction in Ukraine, but later claimed that he received information to the contrary.[36] Dyumin is a trusted official within Putin's close circle who is Putin's former bodyguard and former Tula Oblast governor and reportedly played a decisive role in negotiations to end the Wagner Group armed rebellion in June 2023.[37] Dyumin's appointment is not inherently noteworthy as it is likely part of Putin's efforts to ensure that his agencies are actively working in a coordinated fashion and under the direct control of his presidential administration to address the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and that he remains apprised of the situation.

Dyumin's alleged appointment sparked widespread speculation among Russian milbloggers and political commentators about Putin's disappointment in Russian security agencies and speculations about an upcoming military-political reshuffling. Several Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers claimed that Dyumin's appointment was a sign that "Putin's team" was taking full control over the situation in Kursk Oblast after Russian security forces failed to resolve the situation without Moscow's direct intervention over the past week.[38] Several milbloggers also suggested that Dyumin's appointment means that Putin seeks to find out why and how he was deceived about the real situation in Kursk Oblast, and many speculated that Dyumin's report will determine the fate of several high-ranking Russian officials and commanders.[39] Some milbloggers and political commentators continued to speculate that Dyumin is preparing to become the next defense minister.[40] This speculation is not new, however, given that some Russian milbloggers have long advocated for Dyumin's to become defense minister. [41]

Russian officials continue to undermine a long-standing Kremlin information operation that falsely portrays Ukraine as unwilling to engage in legitimate, good-faith negotiations and places the onus for peace negotiations on Ukraine. Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Dmitry Polyansky claimed on August 13 that Ukrainian authorities chose "escalation" and further military operations when Ukraine began its incursion into Kursk Oblast.[42] Polyansky claimed that Ukraine deserves nothing but "total defeat and unconditional capitulation" in response to its incursion. ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is only interested in a negotiated settlement that results in complete Ukrainian capitulation and that any Russian statements to the contrary are intended to delude the West into making pre-emptive concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territory integrity.[43]

Russian authorities fined Telegram and WhatsApp four million rubles (\$44,000) each for failing to remove "prohibited" content on August 13.[44] Moscow's Tagansky District Court fined Telegram four million rubles in November 2023 for failing to remove false information about the Russian Armed Forces and information aimed at destabilizing Russia.[45] ISW has previously observed reports that the Russian government is considering stricter measures to directly censor critical voices on Russian social media as part of its efforts to cement control over the Russian information space. This includes requiring applications such as Telegram to develop new rules for user verification and content moderation.[46]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other senior Ukrainian officials provided updates about the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and outlined several Ukrainian objectives of the operations in the area.
- Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to advance in Kursk Oblast amid Russian attempts to stabilize the frontline in the area.
- The Russian military command may be pulling select elements of Russian irregular units from Donetsk Oblast to address the Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast.

- Russian authorities appear to be largely relying on Russian conscripts, and elements of some regular and irregular military units pulled from less critical sectors of the frontline to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion, however.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly appointed Russian Presidential Aid Aide Alexei Dyumin to supervise Russia's "counterterrorism operation" in Kursk Oblast on August 12
- Russian officials continue to undermine a long-standing Kremlin information operation that falsely portrays Ukraine as unwilling to engage in legitimate, good-faith negotiations and places the onus for peace negotiations on Ukraine.
- Russian authorities fined Telegram and WhatsApp four million rubles (\$44,000) each for failing to remove "prohibited" content on August 13.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar and southwest of Donetsk City, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced in the Siversk direction and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to use the Army-2024 International Military-Technical Forum in Moscow to expand its international defense ties.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 12, 2024

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

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

August 12, 2024, 8:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on August 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. [NOTE: Russian sources are currently shifting much of their reporting to cover the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and as a result are not providing the same level of detail about the situation along the frontline in Ukraine.]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to portray himself as an effective and knowledgeable manager of the situation along the Ukrainian-Russian border and to shift responsibility for ongoing challenges in responding to the Ukrainian incursion in the area to other Russian military and government officials. Putin held a meeting on August 12 with Russian military, security, and federal and regional government officials about the situation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts during which he assigned tasks to the Russian military and security structures in Kursk Oblast and offered his assessments of the political situation surrounding Ukraine's incursion into Russia.[1] Putin chastised Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexei Smirnov for speaking about issues that Putin deemed to be solely under the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) purview and instructed Smirnov to only speak about the socio-economic situation in Kursk Oblast. Putin also responded to First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov's claim that "all other issues are under control," noting that Manturov failed to speak about several key social issues. Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov asked Putin directly to implement certain social policies to help civilians in Belgorod Oblast but Gladkov and Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz both avoided Putin's ire by not commenting on military issues. Putin's assertion that each official has only one responsibility contrasts with his attempt to frame himself as capable of overseeing and competently understanding the political, socio-economic, and military situation along the international border. The Kremlin published footage and text of the Bryansk, Belgorod, and Kursk oblasts heads' reports to Putin about the issues Russian regional authorities are currently facing — likely in order to publicly depict the regional heads as responsible for these issues and in need of Putin's help. The Kremlin notably did not publish footage or text from the part of the meeting in which the Russian military and security officials likely reported to Putin.

The Kremlin's decision to publish footage showing Putin chastising senior Russian officials is likely a warning to other Russian officials to refrain from commenting about the Ukrainian incursion into Russia. The Kremlin published a half-hour video of Putin meeting with senior Russian military, security, and government officials showing Putin reprimanding Russian federal and regional officials for their perceived effort to address matters outside of their designated responsibility and for their perceived failure to address civilian issues.[2] The Kremlin's decision to publish a video of the meeting alongside a transcript of Putin's meeting with Russian officials sends a clear message to other government officials to refrain from commenting on the Kremlin's, the Russian military's, and Russian security forces' decision-making and operations to repel Ukrainian forces from Russia and mitigate related civilian issues. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on August 8 that a source close to the Russian Federation Council's defense committee stated that the Russian Presidential Administration recommended that Russian deputies and senators not comment on the events in Kursk Oblast "until further notice" or discuss it as briefly as possible and refer only to official statements. [3] Putin and senior Russian military and security officials are likely attempting to control official narratives about the situation in Kursk Oblast and prevent domestic discontent that could threaten the Kremlin's stability.

Putin delegated overlapping tasks to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), Federal Security Service (FSB), and Rosgvardia in the Ukrainian-Russian border area — further highlighting how the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast is struggling to establish the joint command and control (C2) structures necessary to coordinate operations. Putin stated that the Russian MoD's main task is to push Ukrainian forces out of Russian territory.[4] Putin tasked the Russian MoD and Border Service (subordinated to the FSB) to "ensure reliable coverage of the state border." Putin stated that the FSB and Rosgvardia must "fight against [Ukrainian] sabotage and reconnaissance groups," while Rosgvardia also conducts "its own combat missions." Putin stated that the FSB and Rosgvardia must also ensure the counterterrorism operation regime and that the FSB, with Rosgvardia's support, is standing up a "headquarters" — likely referring to a headquarters to manage the ongoing counterterrorism operation.[5] Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that Colonel General Yevgeny Nikiforov, who is reportedly the Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces, arrived in Kursk Oblast and is coordinating "with all security forces." [6] It is unclear at this time if the Kremlin has designated Nikiforov as an overall commander of Russian military and security forces in Kursk Oblast or if Nikiforov is operating within the FSB-led counterterrorism operation headquarters.

Smirnov claimed that Russian forces are having unspecified issues since there is "no clear front line" and it is unclear where the "military units" are located — likely referring to Ukrainian forces quickly engaging Russian forces near a settlement and then withdrawing from the area, which is reportedly leading to conflicting Russian reporting from the ground about Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast. [7] Putin appears to be tasking the FSB and Rosgvardia with countering Ukrainian "mobile groups" that have been operating deeper into Kursk Oblast, while simultaneously tasking the FSB, Rosgvardia, and Russian MoD with conducting defensive and offensive operations in the region. ISW continues to assess that the disparate Russian force grouping responding to the Ukrainian incursion is complicating Russia's ability to establish the C2 structures necessary to coordinate operations.[8]

Putin offered several assessments about Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast, including one that undermined a long-standing Kremlin information operation falsely portraying Ukraine as unwilling to engage in legitimate, good-faith negotiations and putting the onus for peace negotiations on Ukraine. Putin claimed that Ukraine is "indiscriminately strik[ing] civilians, [striking] civilian infrastructure, and threaten[ing] nuclear power facilities" and implied that Russia cannot conduct good-faith negotiations with an actor who commits such actions.[9] Putin unironically but hypocritically accused Ukraine of striking civilians and endangering the nuclear power plants — actions that ISW has thoroughly documented Russia committing in Ukraine with strikes against civilian targets since the start of the full-scale invasion and the endangerment of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) since the Russian military occupied it in March 2022.[10] Putin also claimed, however, that Ukraine may be conducting operations into Kursk Oblast in order to "improve its negotiating position in the future." [11] Putin's assessment inherently implies that Ukraine is interested in negotiations — undermining the Kremlin's ongoing attempts to portray Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate. Putin also claimed that Ukraine may be conducting operations into Kursk Oblast to prevent Russian advances in eastern Ukraine and to destabilize the Russian domestic political situation. Putin notably did not present one assessment of Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast as more likely than another and did not present them as mutually exclusive. ISW will not offer assessments about the intent of Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast or Putin's claims of Ukrainian intent.

Ukrainian forces appear to be advancing further within Kursk Oblast despite recent milblogger claims that Russian forces were stabilizing the frontline in Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed on August 11 that Ukrainian offensive activity decreased in Kursk Oblast; however, a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger refuted these claims on August 12 and noted that Russian forces are far from stabilizing the situation, in part due to poor C2.[12] Ukrainian forces reportedly launched new incursions into western Kursk Oblast near Slobodka-Ivanovka (northwest of Sumy City and two kilometers from the international border), Tetkino (south of Slobodka-Ivanovka along the international border), Gordeevka, Uspenka, and Viktorovka (all north of Sumy City along the international border and south of Korenevo).[13] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Slobodka-Ivanovka, Uspenivka, and Viktorovka.[14] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continued near Snagost (south of Korenevo) and Kremyanoye (east of Snagost) and that Ukrainian forces are attacking north and south of Korenevo in an attempt to bypass the settlement. [15] Geolocated footage indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced within Kremyanoye and east of Zhuravli (northeast of Korenevo), and a Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced north of Zhuravli towards Obshchy Kolodez (northeast of Korenevo and 30 kilometers from the international border).[16] Additional geolocated footage indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in a forest area north and east of Semenovka (south of Lgov and roughly 24 kilometers from the international border) during a likely battalion-sized mechanized assault in the direction of Kauchuk (south of Lgov and 27 kilometers from the international border), although the exact contours of Ukraine's advance are unclear.[17]

Geolocated footage published on August 12 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating in Sudzha and northern Zaoleshenka (west of Sudzha), and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have seized Sudzha and Spalnoye (southeast of Sudzha).[18] Additional geolocated footage published on August 12 shows Ukrainian vehicles operating in northern Giri (southeast of Sudzha and 13 kilometers from the international border) and Russian forces ambushing Ukrainian forces in central Giri, indicating that Ukrainian forces at least temporarily advanced into the settlement, although it is unclear if Ukrainian forces maintain positions in the area.[19] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)

claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Borki (southeast of Sudzha), suggesting that Ukrainian forces likely advanced into Giri from the west.[20] Geolocated footage published on August 12 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating in Darino (northwest of Sudzha and three kilometers from the international border).[21] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also conducted cross-border incursions with armored vehicle support from Sumy Oblast northwest of Grayvoron, Belgorod Oblast near Kolotilovka and Prelesye and south of Grayvoron near Bezymeno.[22]

Regional Russian officials appear to be offering notably frank assessments of the ongoing Ukrainian incursion. Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov expressed concern on August 12 about "alarming" Ukrainian activity along the border with Belgorod Oblast.[23] Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed on August 12 that Ukrainian forces have seized 28 settlements in Kursk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces have advanced roughly 12 kilometers deep along a 40-kilometer-long front into Kursk Oblast.[24] ISW has observed claims and geolocated footage indicating that Ukrainian forces are operating in or near 29 settlements in Kursk Oblast as of August 11 and 40 settlements as of August 12. ISW has observed geolocated footage indicating that Ukrainian forces have recently operated up to 24 kilometers from the international border, and Smirnov's assessed width of the frontline appears to cohere with the area where the majority of fighting is ongoing between Snagost and Plekhovo.

Senior Ukrainian officials provided updates about the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and warned that Russian forces may stage war crimes in Kursk Oblast in order to discredit Ukraine and Western support for Ukraine. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on August 12 that Ukrainian force "control" roughly 1,000 square kilometers of Russian territory, presumably within Kursk Oblast.[25] ISW has observed claims that Ukrainian forces have advanced roughly 800 square kilometers as of August 12, although ISW does not assess that Ukrainian forces control all of the territory within the maximalist extent of claimed Ukrainian advances. ISW assesses that Russian forces occupied an additional 1,175 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory between January and July 2024, including areas seized both in the face of prepared Ukrainian defenses and during the Russian attack into northern Kharkiv Oblast. Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian forces are continuing offensive operations into Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged the ongoing Ukrainian operation.[26] Zelensky noted that the Ukrainian government is preparing a plan to address humanitarian issues in areas of Kursk Oblast where Ukrainian forces are operating. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reported that Russian special services are seizing on the ongoing Ukrainian incursion in Kursk Oblast to falsely accuse Ukrainian forces of committing war crimes and warned that Russian special services may stage crimes against civilians in Kursk Oblast in order to further accuse Ukrainian forces of committing war crimes.[27]

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian airbase in Moscow Oblast on the night of August 11 to 12. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* amplified footage on August 12 purportedly of Russian air defense systems intercepting Ukrainian drones over Shchyolkovo, Moscow Oblast near Chkalovsky Military Air Base.[28] *Astra* reported that unspecified pro-war Russian Telegram channels claimed that Russian forces successfully repelled a Ukrainian drone strike. No Russian official sources commented on the strike.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to portray himself as an effective and knowledgeable manager of the situation along the Ukrainian-Russian border and to shift responsibility for ongoing challenges in responding to the Ukrainian incursion in the area to other Russian military and government officials.
- The Kremlin's decision to publish footage showing Putin chastising senior Russian officials is likely a warning to other Russian officials to refrain from commenting about the Ukrainian incursion into Russia.
- Putin delegated overlapping tasks to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), Federal Security Service (FSB), and Rosgvardia in the Ukrainian-Russian border area — further highlighting how the Russian force grouping in Kursk Oblast is struggling to establish the joint command and control (C2) structures necessary to coordinate operations.
- Putin offered several assessments about Ukrainian operations in Kursk Oblast, including one that undermined a long-standing Kremlin information operation falsely portraying Ukraine as unwilling to engage in legitimate, good-faith negotiations and putting the onus for peace negotiations on Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces appear to be advancing further within Kursk Oblast despite recent milblogger claims that Russian forces were stabilizing the frontline in Kursk Oblast.
- Regional Russian officials appear to be offering notably frank assessments of the ongoing Ukrainian incursion.
- Senior Ukrainian officials provided updates about the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and warned that Russian forces may stage war crimes in Kursk Oblast in order to discredit Ukraine and Western support for Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a drone strike against a Russian airbase in Moscow Oblast on the night of August 11 to 12.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) emphasized Russia's international defense ties at the Army-2024 International Military-Technical Forum in Moscow, likely in an effort to expand international military-technical cooperation and posture strong defense relations with Russia-friendly states

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 11, 2024

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

August 11, 2024, 9:15pm ET

Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast has allowed Ukrainian forces to at least temporarily seize the battlefield initiative in one area of the frontline and contest Russia's theater-wide initiative. Russia's possession of the theater-wide initiative since November 2023 has allowed Russia to determine the location, time, scale, and requirements of fighting in Ukraine and forced Ukraine to expend materiel and manpower in reactive defensive operations.[1] The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast, however, has forced the Kremlin and Russian military command to react and redeploy forces and means to the sector where Ukrainian forces have launched attacks. Russian forces, however, were notably not conducting active operations in Kursk Oblast. Russia has been leveraging its possession of the theater-wide initiative to pressure Ukraine and attempt to prevent Ukrainian forces from accumulating manpower and materiel for future counteroffensive operations while determining a tempo of fighting that would allow Russian forces to sustain consistent ongoing offensive operations. [2] Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command likely incorrectly assessed that Ukraine lacked the capability to contest the initiative, and Ukraine's ability to achieve operational surprise and contest the theater-wide initiative is challenging the operational and strategic assumptions underpinning current Russian offensive efforts in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast and further possible Ukrainian cross-border incursions force a decision point on the Kremlin and the Russian military command about whether to view the thousand-kilometer-long international border with northeastern Ukraine as a legitimate frontline that Russia must defend instead of a dormant area of the theater as they have treated it since Fall 2022. Moscow's response may require the Russian military command to consider the manpower and materiel requirements for defending the international border as part of its theater-wide campaign design and can therefore impose long-term operational planning constraints that Russia previously did not face. The Russian military command has essentially treated the international border with northeastern Ukraine as the dormant front of the theater following the Russian withdrawal from Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy oblasts in Spring 2022 and the Ukrainian liberation of significant territory in Kharkiv Oblast in Fall 2022. Russian and Ukrainian forces have conducted routine sabotage and reconnaissance activities, indirect fire, and cross-border strikes along the border since Fall 2022, but none of this routine activity has appeared to generate wider Russian operational concerns for defending Russian territory in the area. Russia has sought to use the threat of cross-border incursions to draw and fix Ukrainian forces along the border by concentrating rear elements in the border zone, but Ukrainian concentrations in the area do not appear to have generated such responses among Russian forces.[3] The Russian military activated part of this "dormant frontline" when it launched the offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast in early May 2024 — a Russian effort to extend the frontline further into northeastern Ukraine to draw and fix Ukrainian forces along the border in hopes of weakening the overall Ukrainian frontline in aggregate.[4]

Previous notable incursions into Russia did not change the Kremlin's perception of the international border area, but the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast will force the Kremlin to make a decision. All Russian pro-Ukrainian forces have conducted several cross-border raids into Russia since Fall 2022, but the Kremlin and the Russian military command resisted calls for redeploying forces to protect the border at that time.[5] Russian President Vladimir Putin assessed at that time that those limited raids posed no medium- to long-term threat to Russian territory and that redeployments to the international border would be a less effective allocation of resources that could otherwise support large-scale defensive and offensive operations in Ukraine.[6] The current Ukrainian incursion, however, poses significant threats to Russian military operations in Ukraine and Putin's regime stability and demands a response.[7] The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast will likely expand the Kremlin's consideration for what type of Ukrainian operations are possible along the border. Russia's prolonged treatment of the international border area as a dormant frontline is a strategic failure in imagination.

Russia's treatment of the international border area as a dormant front has given Russia more flexibility to accumulate and commit manpower and material to military operations in Ukraine. Russia has spent considerable resources to build fortifications along the international border area but has not allocated the manpower and materiel to significantly man and defend those fortifications.[8] Sparsely manned and equipped border fortifications proved insufficient at preventing Ukrainian gains at the outset of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast, and the Russian military command will likely conclude that further manpower and equipment commitments to the international border will be required to effectively leverage fortified positions to prevent possible future Ukrainian cross-border incursions and deter larger Ukrainian incursion efforts in the long-term.[9] This conclusion will narrow the flexibility Russia has enjoyed in committing manpower and materiel to its ongoing offensive efforts in Ukraine,

and the Russian military command will have to consider the requirements for border defense when determining what resources it can allocate to future large-scale offensive and defensive efforts in Ukraine.

Geolocated footage and Russian and Ukrainian reporting from August 10 and 11 indicate that Ukrainian forces advanced westward and northwestward in Kursk Oblast, although Russian sources largely claimed that Russian forces have stabilized the situation. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian offensive activity decreased in Kursk Oblast and that there were no significant changes to the frontline.[10] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced in Snagost (south of Korenevo), and Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces advanced up to the settlement.[11] Geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating southeast of Korenevo.[12] Additional geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kremyanoye (east of Korenevo).[13] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Olgovka (east of Korenevo and west of Kremyanoye), whereas other Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces only advanced near Olgovka and Kremyanoye.[14] Geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces recently advanced in southern Cherkasskoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha).[15] Further geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating west of Malaya Loknya (northwest of Sudzha).[16] Russian and Ukrainian sources offered contradictory statements about the status of Martynovka (northeast of Sudzha), with some Russian milbloggers claiming that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to retake the settlement, and other Russian sources and Mashovets stating that Ukrainian forces reentered and seized Martynovka.[17] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are present in western Sudzha and west of Sudzha in Goncharovka and Zaoleshenka, but that central and eastern Sudzha are contested "gray zones." [18] Geolocated footage published on August 10 and 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating near Zaoleshenka, southeast of Goncharovka, and southwest of Gogolevka (southwest of Sudzha).[19] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces are operating near Borki and Spalnoye (both southeast of Sudzha). [20] Additional geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating within Guevo (south of Sudzha).[21]

The hastily assembled and disparate Russian force grouping responding to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast is comprised of Russian units likely below their doctrinal end strength and ill-prepared to establish the joint command and control (C2) structures necessary to coordinate operations. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on August 11 that Russian forces have thus far redeployed roughly 10 to 11 battalions from across the theater to Kursk Oblast but suggested that these battalion units are below their intended end strength, likely further exacerbating the disorganization of the Russian response.[22] Mashovets reported that Russian forces have deployed to defend in Kursk Oblast: a reinforced motorized rifle battalion of the 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and up to three battalions from the 128th Motorized Rifle Brigade and 72nd Motorized Rifle Division (both of the 44th Army Corps [AC], LMD) from the Northern Grouping of Forces in northern Kharkiv Oblast; one motorized rifle battalion of the 272nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (47th Tank Division, 1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) from the Kupyansk direction; up to two airborne (VDV) assault battalions of the 217th VDV Regiment (98th VDV Division) from within Kursk Oblast; units of an unspecified echelon of the 104th VDV Division from Kherson Oblast; one battalion possibly of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) from the Kherson direction that Mashovets assessed is more likely of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (BSF) from northern Kharkiv Oblast; and additional battalions of the 38th and 64th motorized rifle brigades (both of the 35th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]), likely from the Zaporizhia direction.[23] Mashovets' reporting largely coheres with a report from another Ukrainian source on August 9 and contradicts widespread Russian milblogger claims on August 10 and 11 that elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade are fighting near Sudzha and Martynovka.[24]

Russia's redeployment of battalion and lower-level units rather than full brigades and regiments to defend in Kursk Oblast is likely contributing to Russian forces' difficulty in quickly establishing effective C2 in the area. Ukraine-based open-source intelligence organization Frontelligence Insight reported that both Russian and Ukrainian forces will redeploy battalions across the frontline and that these battalions are often at the strength of reinforced companies due to manpower and materiel shortages, including newly-created units that are not fully staffed. [25] Frontelligence Insight noted that drone units often deploy separately from their parent units due to their higher mobility and combat effectiveness, and so observing drone activities in any given area of the theater does not necessarily mean that the drone element's parent unit is operating in the vicinity. [26] The disorganized nature of regular Russian battalions, combined with the Russian decision to assign the defense of Kursk Oblast to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) rather than to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as well as the integration of conscripts, FSB personnel, and Rosgvardia elements in combat, will hinder the Russian effort to establish effective C2. Mashovets assessed that Russian forces are likely attempting to buy time for further, more comprehensive force redeployments to defend in Kursk Oblast and focusing on minimizing the Ukrainian offensive effort rather than establishing a joint C2 structure.[27] A prominent, Kremlin-awarded, Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces in Kursk Oblast are struggling to communicate with each other and often do not know the units operating on their flanks due to rapid redeployments of Russian units from different force groupings, ultimately undermining the integrity of the Russian defensive lines.[28]

Confusion about the status of Russian conscripts fighting in Kursk Oblast is a consequence of ineffective C2 and will likely continue to further strain Russia's C2 structures to respond to the Kursk operation. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported that conscripts serving in the Kursk Oblast border area at the start of the Ukrainian operation received no orders prior to the start of the operation and were unable to carry out an order to retreat due to Ukrainian mortar fire. [29] *Verstka* assessed that Russian forces are likely attempting to gather conscripts in Kursk Oblast to return them to their units and noted that one source stated that there were about 100 conscripts in the oblast on August 6 and that conscripts may be at up to 15 positions near Sudzha.[30] Russian opposition outlet *Agentstvo Novosti* reported, citing a source within a Russian legal aid organization and a mother of two Russian conscripts, that Russian forces are declaring conscripts fighting in Kursk Oblast to be part of combat units in order to keep them fighting rather than allowing them to transfer to rear areas.[31] The poor communication among units indicates that Russian forces will likely struggle to interact with units comprised of conscripts without pressing them into conventional Russian units that deployed to Ukraine and that are now fighting in the Kursk area. Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are withdrawing conscripts from the frontline, however.[32] Should conscripts remain in combat in Kursk Oblast, it may risk a political crisis and the Kremlin may need to explain conscript casualties to Russian society, as ISW has recently assessed.[33]

Russian officials acknowledged that Ukrainian mobile groups advanced upwards of 25 kilometers into Belovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast on the night of August 10 to 11, but there are no indications that these groups remain in the area or that Ukrainian forces are operating beyond the immediate border area in Belovsky Raion. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on August 11 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian "breakthrough attempt" in Belovsky Raion and that Russian aviation destroyed Ukrainian equipment near Ozerki (roughly 8 kilometers from the border with Sumy Oblast and 13 kilometers southwest of Belaya) and Ivanovsky (roughly 25 kilometers from the border with Sumy Oblast and three kilometers east of Belaya).[34] Kursk Oblast Acting Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that Russian forces stabilized the situation after Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups entered Belovsky Raion and that there are no ongoing engagements in the area.[35] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces with a significant number of equipment and armored vehicles crossed the border with Sumy Oblast near Kucherovka and Goptarovka on the evening of August 10 and rapidly advanced to Belaya and the surrounding area. [36] Russian milbloggers described the event as a Ukrainian breakthrough and claimed that Ukrainian forces had rapidly seized tactically significant territory, although subsequent Russian claims suggest that the Ukrainian groups did not attempt to seize ground and that select Russian sources had initially exaggerated the size of the Ukrainian groups.[37] Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting was ongoing near Milyaevka and Goptarovka (within four kilometers of the border with Sumy Oblast) on the evening of August 10 but have yet to report fighting in the area on August 11.[38]

The reported rapid Ukrainian maneuver in Belovsky Raion suggests that Russian forces along the international border remain poorly prepared to respond to further Ukrainian cross-border incursions. Select Ukrainian mobile groups made rapid gains and similarly appeared not to attempt to hold territory in the first days of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast.[39] The Russian military's continued inability to prevent rapid Ukrainian maneuver following the operational surprise that Ukrainian forces achieved at the outset of the operation in Kursk Oblast indicates that there are enduring exploitable Russian vulnerabilities along the international border with Ukraine.[40] The Kremlin and the Russian military command currently appear to be concentrating redeployments to stabilize the immediate frontline near Korenevo and Sudzha, and reinforcing positions in other border areas in Kursk Oblast and elsewhere along the international border appears to be a lower priority. [41] Poorly manned Russian positions along the border in part facilitated Ukraine's initial rapid gains in Kursk Oblast, and significant sectors of the border in Bryansk and Kursk oblasts and parts of Belgorod Oblast are likely sparsely manned.[42] The persisting issues with Russian C2 in Kursk Oblast will also further complicate Russia's ability to prevent rapid Ukrainian maneuver and quickly respond to any other possible Ukrainian cross-border incursions. Poor Russian communication, unclear delineation of responsibilities, and subpar coordination for reconnaissance and fire between Russian units along the border will likely create gaps that highly maneuverable Ukrainian groups can exploit.

Russian sources claimed on August 11 that small Ukrainian groups attempted unsuccessful limited cross-border incursions into western Belgorod Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed that squad-sized Ukrainian mechanized groups unsuccessfully attempted to cross the border near Bezymeno (nine kilometers south of Grayvoron) and posted footage purporting to show Russian forces striking Ukrainian equipment in the area.[43] Select Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted similar unsuccessful cross-border assaults near Kolotilovka (13 kilometers west of Krasnaya Yaruga), although the majority of Russian sources denied these claims.[44] ISW has yet to observe geolocated evidence of Ukrainian forces operating in Belgorod Oblast.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky officially acknowledged the Ukrainian cross-border incursion into Kursk Oblast for the first time on August 10. Zelensky stated that he received reports from Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi about the frontline situation and Ukrainian forces' efforts to push the war onto Russian territory.[45] A Senior Ukrainian official reportedly told Agence-France-Presse (AFP) in an article published on August 11 that "thousands" of Ukrainian soldiers are participating in Ukraine's incursion into Kursk Oblast. [46] Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov previously claimed on August 7 that about 1,000 Ukrainian soldiers attacked in Kursk Oblast.[47]

A top Ukrainian defense official reportedly stated that Russian forces have somewhat reduced the intensity of assaults in eastern Ukraine but that otherwise the situation remains largely unchanged amid the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast, which is consistent with ISW's observations of Russian offensive tempo across the theater.[48] The Ukrainian official told AFP that Russian forces continue to pressure Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine and that the Russian military command has not pulled back troops from eastern Ukraine.[49] Russian forces have maintained their tempo of offensive operations, particularly throughout Donetsk Oblast, since the start of the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast and are maintaining a similar pace of advance in the Pokrovsk direction. Russian forces also continue significant mechanized assaults southwest of Donetsk City.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast has allowed Ukrainian forces to at least temporarily seize the battlefield initiative in one area of the frontline and contest Russia's theater-wide initiative.
- The Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast and further possible Ukrainian cross-border incursions force a decision point on the Kremlin and the Russian military command about whether to view the thousand-kilometer-long international border with northeastern Ukraine as a legitimate frontline that Russia must defend instead of a dormant area of the theater as they have treated it since Fall 2022. Moscow's response may require the Russian military command to consider the manpower and materiel requirements for defending the international border as part of its theater-wide campaign design and can therefore impose long-term operational planning constraints that Russia previously did not face.
- Geolocated footage and Russian and Ukrainian reporting from August 10 and 11 indicate that Ukrainian forces advanced westward and northwestward in Kursk Oblast, although Russian sources largely claimed that Russian forces have stabilized the situation.
- The hastily assembled and disparate Russian force grouping responding to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast is comprised of Russian units likely below their doctrinal end-strength and ill-prepared to establish the joint command and control (C2) structures necessary to coordinate operations.
- Russia's redeployment of battalion and lower-level units rather than full brigades and regiments to defend in Kursk Oblast is likely contributing to Russian forces' difficulty in quickly establishing effective C2 in the area.
- Confusion about the status of Russian conscripts fighting in Kursk Oblast is a consequence of ineffective C2 and will likely continue to further strain Russia's C2 structures to respond to the Kursk operation.
- Russian officials acknowledged that Ukrainian mobile groups advanced upwards of 25 kilometers into Belovsky Raion, Kursk Oblast on the night of August 10 to 11, but there are no indications that these groups remain in the area or that Ukrainian forces are operating beyond the immediate border area in Belovsky Raion.
- The reported rapid Ukrainian maneuver in Belovsky Raion suggests that Russian forces along the international border remain poorly prepared to respond to further Ukrainian cross-border incursions.
- Russian sources claimed on August 11 that small Ukrainian groups attempted unsuccessful limited cross-border incursions into western Belgorod Oblast.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky officially acknowledged the Ukrainian cross-border incursion into Kursk Oblast for the first time on August 10.
- A top Ukrainian defense official reportedly stated that Russian forces have somewhat reduced the intensity of assaults in eastern Ukraine but that otherwise the situation remains largely unchanged amid the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast, which is consistent with ISW's observations of Russian offensive tempo across the theater.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk and Donetsk City.
- Russian propagandists are attempting to use the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast to promote Russian force generation efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 10, 2024

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Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, and George Barros

August 10, 2024, 8:35pm ET

The Russian National Antiterrorism Committee announced a counterterrorism operation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts on August 9 in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. The Federal Security Service (FSB) Head and National Antiterrorism Committee Chairperson Alexander Bortnikov announced counterterrorism operations in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts in response to "sabotage and reconnaissance units" conducting "terrorist acts" in Russia and "units of the Ukrainian armed forces" conducting a "terrorist attack" in Kursk Oblast.[1] The

counterterrorism operation allows Russian authorities to take a number of measures, including suspending or restricting communications services, monitoring telecommunication channels, confiscating vehicles, and entering private property.[2] Russian authorities previously announced a counterterrorism operation in Belgorod Oblast for one day in May 2023 in response to raids by all-Russian pro-Ukrainian elements.[3] The Kremlin notably did not elect to declare a formal state of war against Ukraine or martial law — more serious responses that would marshal greater Russian state resources through wider, and more domestically disruptive, mobilization.

The Kremlin likely decided to declare a counterterrorism operation — as opposed to a state of war or martial law — to downplay the scale of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and prevent domestic panic or backlash — demonstrating the Kremlin's reluctance to take more drastic measures to respond to the situation. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on August 8 that a source close to the Russian Federation Council's defense committee stated that the Russian Presidential Administration recommended that Russian deputies and senators not comment on the events in Kursk Oblast "until further notice" or discuss it as briefly as possible and refer only to official statements.[4] Russian milbloggers have been suggesting that the Kremlin formally declare war against Ukraine and criticized the Kremlin for failing to declare martial law instead of the counterterrorism operation.[5] The declaration of martial law notably would have allowed Russian authorities to take more drastic measures, such as prohibiting rallies and demonstrations, enacting curfews, and organizing the production of defense articles for the military.[6] Russian President Vladimir Putin has refrained from officially declaring a state of war, has repeatedly demonstrated his unwillingness to transfer Russian society fully to a war-time footing, and has forgone declaring general mobilization as part of wider efforts to prevent domestic discontent that could threaten the stability of Putin's regime.[7]

Putin likely appointed Bortnikov as the head of the counterterrorist operation because Bortnikov had previously proven himself to be an effective manager during crises that threatened Russian domestic stability and the Kremlin regime. Article 13 of the Russian federal law "On Countering Terrorism" states that "the person who made the decision to conduct a counterterrorism operation...is the head of the counterterrorism operation and bears personal responsibility for its conduct" — indicating that Bortnikov will head the counterterrorism operation.[8] Bortnikov reportedly secured security guarantees for now-deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin in negotiations to end Wagner's June 24, 2023 rebellion, and Putin publicly praised the FSB for guaranteeing Russian security and sovereignty directly following his reelection in March 2024.[9] The declaration of the counterterrorism operation under Bortnikov suggests that Putin was dissatisfied with the Russian military command's handling or ability to handle the situation in Kursk Oblast. Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov attempted to portray the Northern Grouping of Forces and FSB as effectively controlling the situation and stopping Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast during a meeting with Putin on August 7.[10] Putin led a meeting of the permanent members of the Security Council on August 9 that discussed "combatting terrorism" in Russia.[11] The Kremlin stated that Bortnikov gave a report during the meeting, and the Security Council likely discussed the counterterrorism operation in the border area. Gerasimov is notably not a permanent member of the Security Council and was not present at the meeting, but Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov is.

A complicated command and control (C2) arrangement for the FSB-led counterterrorism operation under Bortnikov may degrade the effectiveness of the Russian response to Ukraine's operation. Article 9 of the law on counterterrorism operations states that "units and formations of the Russian Armed Forces are involved in the conduct of a counterterrorism operation by decision of the head of the counterterrorism operation." [12] Rosgvardia stated on August 10 that elements from Rosgvardia, the FSB, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) are participating in the counterterrorism operation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts.[13] The Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts border areas are within the area of responsibility (AOR) of the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces, and elements under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) are likely the best equipped to push Ukrainian forces back in the area. It is unclear how the FSB and Bortnikov will establish a clear joint C2 organization among these disparate elements, and there will likely be friction and bureaucratic obstacles between the FSB and other structures that will reduce Russian forces' overall combat effectiveness.

The Russian MoD appears to be relying on a combination of Russian conscripts already operating in Kursk Oblast, elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces, and elements redeployed from lower-priority frontline areas in Ukraine to defend against the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast, likely exacerbating the disorganization of Russia's chosen response. Russian milbloggers claimed on August 9 and 10 that Russian forces began laterally redeploying some units from elsewhere on the frontline and transferring reserves to defend in Kursk Oblast, with one milblogger claiming that Russian forces are redeploying up to nine unspecified brigades to Kursk Oblast.[14] A prominent Ukrainian Telegram channel stated on August 9 that Russian forces redeployed elements of the following units from frontline areas to defend in Kursk Oblast: two airborne (VDV) battalions and elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet [BSF]) from the Kherson direction; elements of the 38th and 64th motorized rifle brigades (35th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Eastern Military District [EMD]) from the Zaporizhia direction; several unspecified infantry battalions from the Pokrovsk direction in Donetsk Oblast; "bearded" (*borodatye*) fighters from Luhansk Oblast (likely referring to Chechen Akhmat units); elements of the 1009th

Motorized Rifle Regiment (6th CAA, Leningrad Military District [LMD]), 79th Motorized Rifle Regiment (18th Motorized Rifle Division, 11th Army Corps [AC], LMD), 272nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (47th Tank Division, 1st Guards Tank Army [GTA], Moscow Military District [MMD]), and 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th CAA, LMD) from northern Kharkiv Oblast; an infantry battalion of the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment (144th Motorized Rifle Division, 20th CAA, MMD) from the Kupiansk direction; a company of an unspecified motorized rifle brigade operating in Grayvoron Raion, Belgorod Oblast; and a motorized rifle regiment that was operating near Sotnytskyi Kozachok, Kharkiv Oblast. [15] The Russian military command appears to be avoiding redeploying significant elements of combat effective units from the Pokrovsk and Toretsk sectors — Russia's assessed priority sectors in eastern Ukraine.[16]

The Ukrainian source noted that these redeployments are a combination of frontline units, units with no combat experience, conscripts, and elements of Russia's operational reserve.[17] ISW is unable to confirm the entirety of the Ukrainian source's claims of Russian redeployments but has observed some corroborating reporting. Russian sources largely claimed and posted footage of elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade fighting near Sudzha and Martynovka on August 10. [18] Ukrainian forces reportedly took conscripts of the 488th Motorized Rifle Regiment and the 1428th Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) as prisoners of war (POWs) in Kursk Oblast.[19] ISW has also previously observed elements of the Chechen "Aida" detachment redeploying to Kursk Oblast and elements of the "Pyatnashka" volunteer brigade redeploying from Donetsk Oblast to Kursk Oblast.[20] A Ukrainian military expert assessed that elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (BSF) may also be fighting in Kursk Oblast following recent reporting that the 155th Brigade was operating in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[21]

Russian forces' usage of conscripts and forces already in Kursk Oblast, nearby forces fighting in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and lateral redeployments across the theater to defend against the Ukrainian incursion is consistent with a number of likely Russian courses of action (COAs) that ISW forecasted.[22] ISW forecasted four likely COAs involving the forces the Russian command could choose to defend against the Ukrainian incursion, including: COA 1, forecasting that the Russians could decide to use existing forces and conscripts already defending in the international border area; COA 2, forecasting that the Russian command could pull from the Northern Grouping of Forces within and nearby Kursk Oblast; and COA 3, forecasting that Russia could redeploy operational reserves or frontline units from elsewhere in the theater.[23] Redeployments of conscripts, elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces, and select units from frontline areas in Ukraine suggest that the Russian military command has determined that possible disruptions to the offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and other less-critical frontline areas are an acceptable risk to adequately respond to the Ukrainian incursion. The Kremlin has seemingly chosen to avoid redeployments from higher priority sectors on the frontline in Donetsk Oblast. A prominent Russian milblogger and former Storm-Z instructor assessed that these redeployments are weakening frontline units in other operational directions and demonstrate that Russia largely lacks operational reserves.[24] Should the Russian command choose to keep these redeployed reserves and frontline units in Kursk Oblast in the near- to medium-term, it will likely further exacerbate the C2 struggles in Kursk Oblast that will likely emerge from treating the Russian defense against Ukraine's conventional military operation as a "counterterrorism operation" that is subordinated to the FSB and Bortnikov. These decisions can present vulnerabilities and opportunities that Ukrainian forces can exploit.

The Russian MoD appears to be relying on select, battle-hardened units to conduct offensive and defensive operations in its most critical sectors of the front. The Russian command has previously laterally redeployed elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, 810th Naval Infantry Brigade, the "Pyatnashka" volunteer brigade, and VDV units across multiple sectors of eastern and southern Ukraine to conduct offensive operations during intense Russian offensive efforts. The Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade most notably participated in the failed Russian push for Vuhledar in late 2022 to early 2023, then fought southwest of Donetsk City near Marinka, and deployed to participate in the Russian offensive north of Kharkiv City in May 2024 - largely without significant rest and reconstitution.[25] The Pyatnashka Brigade defended against the Ukrainian 2023 counteroffensive in southern Ukraine and fought for Avdiivka in the Spring of 2024.[26] The 810th Naval Infantry Brigade fought for Volnovakha and Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast, and defended against the Ukrainian effort in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky.[27] Many of these units reportedly have been completely destroyed and reconstituted multiple times due to the Russian command's reliance on them on the battlefield, and their redeployment to Kursk Oblast from elsewhere on the frontline could degrade Russian forces' capabilities within Ukraine.

Russian forces appear to be more adequately defending against Ukrainian assaults following the arrival of additional conscripts and more combat effective personnel from frontline areas in Ukraine. Ukrainian forces' rate of confirmed advances in Kursk Oblast has slowed following the reported introduction of various Russian military units in Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers claimed on August 10 that Russian forces, including elements of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), repelled company-sized Ukrainian mechanized assaults in the directions of Korenevo (north of Sumy City and roughly 23 kilometers north of the international border), Snagost (south of Korenevo), Lgov, and Martynovka (northeast of Suzhda) on the night of August 9 and 10.[28] Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade were previously reported in both the Kharkiv and Kherson directions as of June 2024.[29] A Russian milblogger claimed that an unspecified "newly formed and untested" Russian unit repelled a Ukrainian armored assault near Korenevo on August 9.[30] Russian

milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, particularly elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade and the Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz "Aida" Detachment, seized Martynovka and Zamostye (just south of Sudzha).[31] The "Aida" Detachment was reportedly operating in the vicinity of Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast as of mid-June 2024.[32] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces re-took Makhnovka (south of Sudzha), although geolocated footage published on August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in the settlement, assuming the footage is recent.[33]

Geolocated footage and Russian reporting from August 10 indicate that Ukrainian forces largely maintain previously reported positions in Kursk Oblast and have advanced slightly further than their previously confirmed positions. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating in a forest area north of Lyubimovka (south of Korenevo).[34] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are also maintaining positions northwest of Sudzha near Kazachya Loknya and Yuzhny and west of Sudzha near Zaoleshenka and Goncharovka.[35] Additional geolocated footage published on August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces previously held positions north of Sudzha near Cherkasskoye Porechnoye, though this footage is likely not from the past 24 hours.[36] Geolocated footage published on August 9 indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain positions north of Sverdilkovo (northwest of Sudzha) and within Rubanshchina (just west of Sudzha).[37] Additional geolocated footage published on August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain positions within northern Sudzha, and most Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating on the western outskirts of Sudzha.[38] Geolocated footage published on August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain positions south of Sudzha near Melovoi and Guyevo.[39] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are continuing operations south of Sudzha along the Gornal-Guyevo-Plekhovo line, and one Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Plekhovo.[40] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces also conducted isolated raids into Poroz and Mokraya Orlovka (west of Belgorod City and along the international border), Belgorod Oblast on August 10, but that Ukrainian forces do not maintain positions in these settlements.[41]

Russian sources claimed that they conducted a successful Iskander-M ballistic missile strike against Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast. The Russian MoD claimed on August 10 that Russian forces struck a command post of the Ukrainian forces near the Kursk Oblast border area.[42] Geolocated footage published on August 10 purportedly shows that Russian forces struck a position of the Ukrainian forces east of Sheptukhovka, Kursk Oblast.[43] An OSINT analyst on X reported on August 10 that the footage published by the Russian MoD indicates that the Russian forces missed nearby vehicles of the Ukrainian forces that they were aiming at.[44] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack just north of Sheptukhovka near Kauchuk on the night of August 9 to 10.[45]

Ukraine's cross-border operation into Kursk Oblast threatens the Kremlin with a potential political crisis regarding casualties among Russian conscripts, whom the Kremlin has increasingly relied upon to defend the Russian state border with Ukraine. Russian opposition and social media outlets began disseminating initial complaints from the family members of Russian conscripts on August 10 about the involvement of Russian conscripts in the Russian border defense operations.[46] Although these complaints are limited in number and have not resulted in a unified movement, the Kremlin has previously expressed grave concern over public responses to its illegal use of conscripts in combat operations. The Kremlin previously faced notable societal backlash in the spring of 2022 for illegally committing Russian conscripts to the frontlines in Ukraine and faced criticism for relying on conscripts to repel previous pro-Ukrainian border raids and respond to the Wagner Group mutiny in the summer of 2023.[47] Russian President Vladimir Putin notably attempted to appease Russian conscripts' mothers by emphasizing on March 8, 2022, that Russia would not use conscripts in combat operations.[48] Putin, however, continued to institute contradictory policies that further involved conscripts in the defense of the Russian-Ukrainian international border, likely in an effort to shuffle conventional combat forces previously on border guard duty so they could be deployed for operations in Ukraine. Putin notably signed a bill in December 2023 allowing conscripts to serve in the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) — the primary Russian service responsible for border security.[49] The Kremlin may need to justify its controversial reliance on conscripts in border security operations to appease Russian society, as Putin had done so following controversies in 2022 and 2023. Russian State Duma Deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev recently stated on Russian state television that conscripts' participation in combat operations is normal given that Russia had previously used conscripts in the Soviet Union's Afghan and Russia's Chechen wars.[50] Several Russian conscripts are confirmed to have been taken prisoner in Kursk Oblast since August 6.[51]

Ukrainian forces recently struck a Russian ship and a gas platform in the western Black Sea. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on August 10 that the GUR's "Group 13" unit struck a Russian "Tunets" KS-701 project high-speed patrol boat near occupied Chornomorske, Crimea on the night of August 8 to 9.[52] Geolocated footage published on August 10 shows a Ukrainian naval drone approaching the boat in Vuzka Bay, and the GUR reported that Ukrainian naval drones also damaged three other Russian watercraft, which the GUR is working to identify.[53] Geolocated footage published on August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces conducted a strike on a Russian gas platform in the Black Sea.[54] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on August 10 that Russian forces stationed military personnel and equipment on the platform less than a day before the strike and were using the gas platform for GPS

spoofing to endanger civilian shipping in the Black Sea, particularly to disrupt the Ukraine grain corridor.[55]

Iran will reportedly deliver "hundreds" of ballistic missiles to Russia in the near future. *Reuters*, citing multiple intelligence sources including two European intelligence sources, reported on August 9 that Russian MoD representatives signed a contract with Iran on December 13, 2023, for the delivery of Fath-360 close range ballistic missiles and that Iran will deliver these missiles at an unspecified "soon" time.[56] The Fath-360 missiles have a maximum range of 120 kilometers and a warhead weighing 150 kilograms. Multiple intelligence sources also told *Reuters* that dozens of Russian military personnel are currently training in Iran to operate Fath-360 missile systems. Western and Ukrainian sources have previously warned that Iran may be preparing to provide Russia with short range ballistic systems, including multiple systems with maximum ranges and payloads significantly greater than the limits imposed upon Russia under its Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) obligations.[57] These short-range ballistic missiles will likely allow Russian forces to strike Ukrainian near-rear targets while reserving its own missile stockpiles (such as Iskander missiles) for deep-rear Ukrainian targets.

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian National Antiterrorism Committee announced a counterterrorism operation in Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts on August 9 in response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- The Kremlin likely decided to declare a counterterrorism operation - as opposed to a state of war or martial law - to downplay the scale of the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and prevent domestic panic or backlash - demonstrating the Kremlin's reluctance to take more drastic measures to respond to the situation.
- Putin likely appointed Bortnikov as the head of the counterterrorist operation because Bortnikov has previously proven himself to be an effective manager during crises that threatened Russian domestic stability and the Kremlin regime.
- A complicated command and control (C2) arrangement for the FSB-led counterterrorism operation under Bortnikov may degrade the effectiveness of the Russian response to Ukraine's operation.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appears to be relying on a combination of Russian conscripts already operating in Kursk Oblast, elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces, and elements redeployed from lower-priority frontline areas in Ukraine to defend against the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast, likely exacerbating the disorganization of Russia's chosen response.
- Russian forces' usage of conscripts and forces already in Kursk Oblast, nearby forces fighting in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and lateral redeployments across the theater to defend against the Ukrainian incursion is consistent with a number of likely Russian courses of action (COAs) that ISW forecasted.
- The Russian MoD appears to be relying on select, battle-hardened units to conduct offensive and defensive operations in its most critical sectors of the front.
- Russian forces appear to be more adequately defending against Ukrainian assaults following the arrival of additional conscripts and more combat effective personnel from frontline areas in Ukraine.
- Geolocated footage and Russian reporting from August 10 indicates that Ukrainian forces largely maintain previously reported positions in Kursk Oblast and have advanced slightly further than their previously confirmed positions.
- Ukraine's cross-border operation into Kursk Oblast threatens the Kremlin with a potential political crisis regarding casualties among Russian conscripts, whom the Kremlin has increasingly relied upon to defend the Russian state border with Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently struck a Russian ship and a gas platform in the western Black Sea.
- Iran will reportedly deliver "hundreds" of ballistic missiles to Russia in the near future.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Donetsk City.
- A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has begun to form the "Black Raven" strike drone volunteer unit and asked readers to donate to the 16-million-ruble (about \$184,324) goal to supply the unit with drones and equipment.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 9, 2024

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Russian sources claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced further east in Kursk Oblast but are likely no longer operating as far north or as far west as Russian sources previously claimed on August 8. A Russian milblogger claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces

conducted another cross-border incursion northeast of Sumy City and advanced towards Kucherov (roughly one kilometer from the international border) but have not entered the settlement.[1] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast advanced as far east as Plekhovo (southeast of Sudzha) on the left bank of the Psyol River.[2] ISW is recessing the claimed limit of Ukrainian advances up to Snagost (south of Korenevo), given that a Russian milblogger claimed on August 8 that Russian forces began clearing the settlement.[3] ISW is also recessing the claimed limit of Ukrainian advances to the northern outskirts of Malaya Loknya (northwest of Sudzha and roughly 13 kilometers from the international border) as Russian milbloggers claimed on August 9 that Russian forces counterattacked near the settlement.[4]

Geolocated footage published on August 9 indicates that Ukrainian forces were recently operating west of Sudzha, within the settlement, north of Sudzha near Kazachya Loknya, and northeast of Leonidovo (northwest of Sudzha and roughly 10 kilometers from the international border) and in Dmitriukov.[5] Russian milbloggers continued to issue contradictory statements about Ukrainian positions in Sudzha (northeast of Sumy City and roughly 10 kilometers from the international border), however. A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces are not operating within Sudzha, whereas another source claimed that Ukrainian forces are located in the settlement but cannot operate freely. [6] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces partially control Sudzha and that the town is a contested "gray zone." [7] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are also operating northeast of Sudzha near Martynovka; north of Sudzha near Vtoroy Knyazhiy, Ivnitsa, Zaoleshenka, Russkoye Porechnoye (16 kilometers from the international border); and west of Sudzha near Goncharovka.[8] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces control the area near Korenevo (north of Sumy City and roughly 23 kilometers north of the international border) and denied reports of fighting on the settlement's outskirts.[9] The Russian milblogger claimed on August 8 that Ukrainian forces control Novoivanovka (southeast of Korenevo) and Lyubimovka (southeast of Korenevo). [10] Another Russian source claimed on August 9, however, that Russian forces regained lost positions in Novoivanovka and Leonidovo.[11] A Russian source claimed that there is no confirmation of Ukrainian forces operating in Kromskiy Byki (30 kilometers from the international border and 13 kilometers south of Lgov), and the vast majority of Russian reporting about Kursk Oblast on August 9 is not consistent with previous claims that mobile Ukrainian groups were operating beyond 20 kilometers into Kursk Oblast.[12]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian military convoy east of Rylsk near Oktyabrskoye, Kursk Oblast. Geolocated footage published on August 9 shows the aftermath of the strike and destroyed Russian trucks along the 38K-017 highway.[13] Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that there were 14 Ural and KAMAZ covered trucks carrying Russian reserves intended to reinforce Russian forces in Kursk Oblast and that the strike likely killed several Russian personnel traveling in the trucks.[14] Russian sources suggested that the column may have been transporting personnel from the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces' 44th Army Corps (Leningrad Military District) or the "Pyatnashka" Brigade.[15] Russian milbloggers theorized about which weapons system Ukraine may have used to conduct this strike, although ISW is not prepared to comment on which system Ukraine may have used during the strike.

The Russian military command appears to be relying on existing units deployed to the international border area and readily available forces in the rear, most of which are units staffed with conscripts and irregular forces, to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. These units would likely be the first to respond even if the Russian military command has decided to transfer additional, more experienced units from elsewhere in the theater. The Russian military command may currently be resisting operational pressures to redeploy forces from other operational directions to prevent the Ukrainian incursion from disrupting Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on August 9 that it sent additional multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), artillery, and heavy tracked vehicles to strengthen forces in Sudzha Raion, and Russian milbloggers amplified footage showing additional Russian forces arriving in Kursk Oblast.[16] Russian Minister of Emergency Situations Alexander Kurenkov ordered additional forces and resources from the Tula Oblast rescue center to deploy to Kursk Oblast to assist with de-mining and civilian evacuations. [17] Russian conscripts, FSB border guards, and elements of Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz units operating under the Russian MoD were reportedly operating in Kursk Oblast as of the beginning of the Ukrainian incursion.[18] The Russian military command has reportedly transferred forces from unspecified operational reserves, additional units staffed by conscripts, Spetsnaz (Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]), Special Operations Forces (SSO), additional Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz operating under the Russian MoD, and the 1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps (DNR AC) and former Wagner Group personnel to unspecified areas of Kursk Oblast to defend against further Ukrainian advances and retake territory.[19] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian military command has tasked Russian Spetsnaz and SSO forces with "clearing" the breakthrough zone and pushing Ukrainian forces back across the international border, and several Russian milbloggers expressed confidence that Russian Spetsnaz forces are likely the most capable Russian forces to respond to Ukrainian mechanized maneuver. [20] The Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also claimed that the Russian military command has transferred reserves of the Russian Africa Corps to Kursk Oblast from Krasnodar Krai, though ISW is unable to verify this claim.

Other irregular Russian forces, including those previously deployed to other areas of the frontline, are also reportedly arriving in Kursk Oblast. Elements of the DNR's irregular forces, including the "Dikaya Division of Donbas" and the "Pyatnashka" Brigade, reportedly arrived in Kursk Oblast following offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast.[21] The Wagner Group Commanders' Council issued a statement on August 9 declaring Wagner's willingness to deploy to the Kursk Oblast border area "at the first call," and Russian milbloggers claimed that unspecified former Wagner personnel have begun to arrive in Kursk Oblast.[22] Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz are operating throughout Kursk Oblast, including in Bolshoye Soldatskoye, and elements of the Chechen "Aida" Detachment are operating near Sudzha.[23] Elements of the Russian SSO are reportedly also operating throughout Kursk Oblast's border areas, including near Sudzha.[24] Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz Commander Apti Alaudinov is reportedly in Kursk Oblast to oversee the Chechen forces, and Alaudinov expressed confidence on August 9 that the Russian military has sufficient forces and resources to stop Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, although it is unclear if the Russian military command intends to transfer additional, more combat effective and well-equipped forces to the border area.[25]

The Russian military command may currently be transferring more experienced and better-provisioned frontline units from eastern or southern Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, but it would likely take additional time for such units to arrive in Kursk Oblast. One Russian milblogger claimed on August 9 that elements of the Russian Northern Grouping of Force's 44th Army Corps (Leningrad Military District) are operating near Rylsk, however, suggesting that the Russian military command may be transferring elements that the Northern Grouping of Forces accumulated for its offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast to respond to the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast.[26] This milblogger's claim, if accurate, would suggest that the Russian military command is assessing Ukraine's operation to be more significant. Significant redeployments of elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces to Kursk Oblast would suggest that the Russian military command has determined that disruptions to the offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast is a necessary sacrifice to appropriately respond to the Ukrainian incursion while avoiding redeployments from more priority sectors of the frontline.[27] Larger Russian re-deployments from frontline areas will likely be slower, and more combat-effective frontline units could begin to arrive in Kursk Oblast in the coming days.

Ukrainian forces conducted strikes against a Russian military airfield in Lipetsk Oblast and other Russian military targets in occupied Crimea and Donetsk Oblast on August 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck warehouses storing glide bombs and other facilities at the Lipetsk military airfield near Lipetsk City.[28] Russian sources amplified footage of explosions at the airfield, and satellite imagery collected on August 9 shows that the Ukrainian strikes destroyed several ammunition warehouses at the airfield.[29] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces base Russian Su-34, Su-35, and MiG-31 fixed-wing aircraft at the Lipetsk airfield, and Russian forces debated whether Russian aircraft preemptively took off to avoid the strikes or were present at the time of the Ukrainian strikes.[30] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also targeted Russian anti-aircraft missile units in an unspecified location in occupied Donetsk Oblast and struck two radars for S-350 air defense systems and a radar for an S-300 air defense system.[31] The Ukrainian General Staff clarified that it confirmed the destruction of one radar for a Russian S-350 air defense system but is verifying the results of the strikes on the other two radars.[32] Russian sources, including Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhayev, claimed that the Russian force shot down a Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile and up to five aerial drones and destroyed seven naval drones targeting occupied Crimea, particularly near Sevastopol.[33]

Russian forces are reportedly increasing the use of chemical agents in Ukraine in continued apparent violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which Russia is a signatory. The Ukrainian Support Forces Command reported on August 9 that Russian forces in Ukraine are increasing their use of chemical attacks and are largely using K-51 and RG-VO hand gas grenades with riot control agents (RCAS) that are prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces used chemical agents and possibly weapons 358 times in July 2024 and 3570 times from February 15, 2023, to July 24, 2024.[34]

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a new military assistance package worth \$125 million for Ukraine on August 9. The military assistance package is the 63rd tranche provided from DoD inventories for Ukraine since August 2021 and includes ammunition for HIMARS systems; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; Stinger missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-tank systems; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) anti-tank guided missiles; multi-purpose radars; HMMWV multi-purpose wheeled vehicles; small arms ammunition; explosive munitions; and additional equipment and munitions.[35]

Russian authorities have passed several laws aimed at preventing Russians from using telecommunications services or anonymously operating prominent social media channels amid intensified efforts to coerce Russians away from Western social media platforms. Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a law on August 8 compelling owners of social media channels with over 10,000 followers to register their personal details with Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor starting on November 1.[36] This law also contains a provision limiting the number of registered SIM cards per person to 20 for Russian citizens and 10 for foreigners and stateless persons as well as forbidding people in Russia to pay for communications services in cash or other untraceable methods.

[37] These new laws are part of the Kremlin's ongoing campaign to codify pro-Kremlin behavioral norms in the information space into Russian law and establish a standard for acceptable behavior among populations whose behavior has recently threatened the Kremlin, as ISW has previously reported.[38] Roskomnadzor announced on August 9 that it blocked the Signal encrypted messaging service for violating Russian law, and Russians are already reporting that they cannot access the service.[39] Russians are also increasingly reporting severe speed throttling and an inability to access YouTube following recent acknowledgments that the Russian government is throttling YouTube's speeds, likely to push Russians to use deanonymized, Kremlin-controlled social media sites that the Kremlin can more easily exert influence.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian sources claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced further east in Kursk Oblast but are likely no longer operating as far north or as far west as Russian sources previously claimed on August 8.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian military convoy east of Rylsk near Oktyabrskoye, Kursk Oblast.
- The Russian military command appears to be relying on existing units deployed to the international border area and readily available forces in the rear, most of which are units staffed with conscripts and irregular forces, to address the ongoing Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast.
- These units would likely be the first to respond even if the Russian military command has decided to transfer additional, more experienced units from elsewhere in the theater.
- The Russian military command may currently be resisting operational pressures to redeploy forces from other operational directions to prevent the Ukrainian incursion from disrupting Russian offensive operations in eastern Ukraine.
- The Russian military command may currently be transferring more experienced and better-provisioned frontline units from eastern or southern Ukraine to Kursk Oblast, but it would likely take additional time for such units to arrive in Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces conducted strikes against a Russian military airfield in Lipetsk Oblast and other Russian military targets in occupied Crimea and Donetsk Oblast on August 9.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Pokrovsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to posture itself as providing sufficient medical care to Russian servicemembers.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 8, 2024

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Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 8, 2024, 10pm ET

The data cut-off for this product was 2:45pm ET on August 8. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Note: Russian sources are currently shifting much of their reporting to cover the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and as a result are not providing the same level of detail about the situation along the frontline in Ukraine.

Ukrainian cross-border mechanized offensive operations into Kursk Oblast that began on August 6 are continuing as part of a Ukrainian operational effort within Russian territory. ISW will not offer assessments about the intent of this Ukrainian operation in order to avoid compromising Ukrainian operational security. ISW will not make forecasts about what Ukrainian forces might or might not do or where or when they might do it. ISW will continue to map, track, and evaluate operations as they unfold but will not offer insight into Ukrainian planning, tactics, or techniques. ISW is not prepared to map control of terrain within Russia at this time and will instead map observed events associated with the Ukrainian incursion into Russian territory as well the maximalist extent of claims and unverified reports about Ukrainian advances. Maximalist claims and unverified reports about Ukrainian advances within Russia do not represent territory that ISW assesses that Ukrainian forces have seized or control. **Inferring predictions about Ukrainian operations from ISW maps and assessments that do not explicitly offer such predictions is inappropriate and not in accord with their intended use.**

Geolocated footage and Russian claims indicate that Ukrainian forces continued rapid advances further into Kursk Oblast on August 8, and Ukrainian forces are reportedly present in areas as far as 35 kilometers from the international border with Sumy Oblast. Ukrainian forces most certainly do not control all of the territory within the maximalist extent of Russian claims about Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, however. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced as far as Kromskiy Byki and Molyutino (up to 35 kilometers from the international border and 17 kilometers southeast of Lgov) but noted that these are small groups not immediately

trying to hold territory.[1] Russian milbloggers issued contradictory claims about Ukrainian positions in Sudzha (northeast of Sumy City and roughly 10 kilometers from the international border), with some milbloggers claiming that Ukrainian forces seized the settlement while other milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces only seized part of the settlement.[2] Geolocated footage published on August 8 indicates that Ukrainian forces likely advanced towards Russkoye Porechnoye (north of Sudzha), and Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced further north of Sudzha along the 38K-024 highway near Anastasyevka.[3] Geolocated footage published on August 7 and 8 shows Ukrainian forces operating within Goncharovka (just west of Sudzha) and north of Zaoleshenka (northwest of Sudzha), and a Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Goncharovka. [4] A geolocated photo shows Ukrainian forces operating within Novoivanovka (10km north of the international border and northwest of Sudzha), and Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian forces seized Novoivanovka and Bogdanovka (northwest of Sudzha).[5] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces also advanced northwest of Sudzha into Malaya Loknya and to the outskirts of Cherkasskoye Porechnoye; northeast of Sudzha near Kruglenkoye, Martynovka, and Bolshoye Soldatskoye; and east of Sudzha near Mirny, although two Russian milbloggers denied claims that Ukrainian forces are operating near and within Bolshoye Soldatskoye.[6] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Korenevo (north of Sumy City and roughly 23 kilometers north of the international border) and that Ukrainian forces attacked within Snagost (south of Korenevo) and near Olgovka (east of Korenevo).[7]

Russian milbloggers claimed that small Ukrainian armored groups are advancing further into the Russian rear and bypassing Russian fortifications before engaging Russian forces and then withdrawing from the engagements without attempting to consolidate control over their furthest advances.[8] Russian milbloggers noted that the prevalence of these armored groups is leading to conflicting reporting because Ukrainian forces are able to quickly engage Russian forces near a settlement and then withdraw from the area.[9] Ukrainian forces appear to be able to use these small armored groups to conduct assaults past the engagement line due to the low density of Russian personnel in the border areas of Kursk Oblast. Larger Ukrainian units are reportedly operating in areas of Kursk Oblast closer to the international border and are reportedly consolidating and fortifying some positions.[10]

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are successfully fielding novel and innovative tactics and technological capabilities during operations in Kursk Oblast. Russian milbloggers have provided details on Ukrainian tactics and technological capabilities that they regard as innovative, but ISW will not describe such details at this time or point to specific sources in order to preserve Ukrainian operational security.

The Kremlin will almost certainly endeavor to retake Russian territory in Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces have seized and stop Ukrainian activity further into Russia, as substantial Ukrainian advances within Russia would be a strategic blow to Russian President Vladimir Putin's decades-long effort to cement a legacy of Russian stability, security, and geopolitical resurgence. Putin held a virtual meeting with Kursk Oblast Acting Head Alexey Smirnov on August 8 about Ukraine's operations into the oblast and stated that he "generally know[s] the situation" but still would like to hear Smirnov's assessment of the situation.[11] Smirnov and Putin did not discuss Russian attempts to repel Ukrainian forces and portrayed the Russian government as effectively working to ensure civilian safety and social and monetary compensation. Russian milbloggers have highlighted concerns over the safety of Russian civilians and disorganized civilian evacuations.[12] Putin likely assesses that he must respond to the perceived threat to civilians in order to assure the Russian public that the situation is under control and avoid significant domestic discontent. Smirnov claimed on August 7 that the situation is "under [Putin's] personal control," directly linking Russian success in repelling Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast and mitigating related civilian issues to Putin.[13] The Kremlin previously has portrayed itself as capable of swiftly responding to pro-Ukrainian raids into Russia, and the Kremlin likely assesses that significant Ukrainian territorial gains in Russia would pose a threat to the Kremlin's efforts to frame itself as a stable regime in control of the internal security situation within Russia and an effective manager of the war in Ukraine.[14]

If Russian reporting on the situation in Kursk Oblast is accurate and if the Russian military command perceives the situation to be the same as Russian sources have described, then the Russian military command has an array of likely courses of action (COAs) it could pursue to respond to the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast. ISW is not prepared at this time to assess which of these possible COAs is most likely, and it is possible that the Russian military command may not rely on only one COA to respond to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast. The Russian military command's decision-making will be influenced by its perception of the size and capability of Ukrainian forces in the area, about which ISW makes no assessment. The following COAs are not presented in order of likelihood.

- **COA 1: The Russian military command may decide to use existing conscripts, Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards, Rosgvardia, and other irregular forces already deployed to the international border area to push Ukrainian forces back and defend against the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast.** Russian authorities have repeatedly assured Russians that conscripts will not deploy to combat operations along the frontline in Ukraine, and instead, the Russian military command has relied on conscripts for staffing units in charge of border security functions along the international border with Ukraine.[15] Russian

conscripts, FSB border guards, and elements of Chechen "Akhmat" units operating under the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) are reportedly currently operating in Kursk Oblast.[16] A Russian milblogger claimed on August 8 that Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) irregular forces, including elements of the "Dikaya Division of Donbas," the "Pyatnashka" Brigade, the "Arbat" Separate Guards Special Purpose Battalion, and the "Night Wolves" drone detachment, arrived in Kursk Oblast.[17] Elements of a battalion of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division's 217th VDV Regiment were reportedly defending a section of the border in Kursk Oblast as of late May 2024, suggesting that there may be some relatively more combat effective forces in the area, but the majority of Russian reporting indicates that most Russian forces operating in Kursk Oblast are elements of less combat effective units.[18] The Russian military command may pursue this COA should it assess that lower quality forces that would likely be less well equipped could effectively stop Ukrainian forces that have been reportedly successfully employing innovative tactics and technological capabilities. All of these forces are operating in the area of responsibility (AOR) of Russia's Northern Grouping of Forces, but it is unclear to what degree the Northern Grouping of Forces has authority over these elements' border security functions.

- **COA 2: The Russian military command may decide to use the existing Northern Grouping of Forces deployed along the Russian-Ukrainian border to respond to the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast.** The Russian Northern Grouping of Forces reportedly had roughly 35,000 personnel deployed to the border area in Kursk, Bryansk, and Belgorod oblasts as of early May 2024 and reportedly intended to establish a grouping in the area that is between 50,000 to 75,000 personnel in size.[19] The Northern Grouping of Forces likely launched the offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast before it reached its reported planned end strength and has since suffered heavy casualties that have likely constrained Russian efforts to build out the grouping. The Russian military command reportedly transferred an unspecified number of forces to the international border area near Kharkiv Oblast in late May and early June 2024, but it was unclear if the Russian military command planned to immediately commit these redeployed forces to combat or use them to reinforce the Northern Grouping of Forces to bring it closer to its reported planned end strength.[20] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on August 8 that the Russian military command began to redeploy forces likely from the 18th Motorized Rifle Division (11th Army Corps [AC], Leningrad Military District [LMD]) and the 128th Motorized Rifle Brigade (44th AC, LMD) from the Belgorod group of the Northern Grouping of Forces operating in the Vovchansk direction northeast of Kharkiv City to the group defending the international border in Kursk Oblast.[21] Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov attempted on August 7 to portray the Northern Grouping of Forces (as well as the FSB) as an effective defensive force, claiming that these forces stopped Ukraine's advances in Kursk Oblast and inflicted significant casualties.[22] The Northern Grouping of Forces has failed to achieve even its limited tactical objectives in northern Kharkiv Oblast since early May 2024 and its ability to conduct effective defensive operations and significant counterattacks is unclear. The redeployment of significant elements of the Northern Grouping of Forces to focus on pushing back Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast would likely further stretch these elements and create vulnerabilities in Russian defenses elsewhere along the border. The Russian military command may also seek to pursue this COA should it deem the Northern Grouping of Forces' offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast to be less of a priority than defensive operations in Kursk Oblast.
- **COA 3: The Russian military command may choose to redeploy operational reserves that it accumulated for its planned Summer 2024 offensive effort and/or relatively better provisioned and more combat effective frontline units to Kursk Oblast from elsewhere in the theater.** The Russian military command may assess that it will need to deploy Russian units to Kursk Oblast that have more experience fighting in Ukraine, higher end strengths, more equipment, more effective fire and strike capabilities, and more advanced technology and tactics than the current Russian elements deployed along the border. The Northern Grouping of Forces could theoretically provide these forces, but the Russian military command may determine that the grouping lacks the available manpower and materiel to sustain the current Russian offensive operations north and northeast of Kharkiv City while also engaging in a large-scale defensive effort in Kursk Oblast. Russian forces gradually established operational reserves ahead of its planned Summer 2024 offensive effort and are currently relying on these reserves to maintain a consistent offensive tempo throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine.[23] Russian forces still maintain significant operational reserves and could decide to commit these reserves to a large-scale defensive operation in Kursk Oblast. The Russian military command may determine that these operational reserves are critical for current Russian offensive operations, however, especially reserves intended to support the higher offensive tempo that Russian forces are attempting to maintain along much of the frontline in Donetsk Oblast.[24] The Russian military command may determine that maintaining Russia's current offensive tempo in select sectors of the front is a greater priority than sustaining offensive operations in other sectors and could decide to preserve existing operational reserves intended for prioritized sectors of the front and instead redeploy frontline units from less prioritized sectors to Kursk Oblast. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are already redeploying elements of an operational reserve of the 20th Combined Arms Army (Moscow

Military District), which has several units committed to offensive operations northwest and west of Kreminna, and unspecified Russian Spetsnaz (Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff [GRU]) elements to areas southwest of Kursk City, although ISW has not observed wider reporting or confirmation of this claim.[25]

- **COA 4: The Russian military command may seek to maintain the forces it currently has committed to Kursk Oblast but could redeploy significant aviation and strike elements to the area in an effort to improve Russia's ability to retake territory.** Russian aviation currently conducts routine sorties to strike frontline and rear Ukrainian positions throughout the frontline, and the Russian military command may seek to leverage available aviation assets should it determine that the current forces in Kursk Oblast are ill-fitted to retake territory while aiming to avoid redeployments from elsewhere in the theater. The Russian military command may envision that both rotary- and fixed-wing aviation operations at scale in airspace over Kursk Oblast would allow Russian forces to blunt Ukrainian maneuver and prevent Ukrainian forces from securely consolidating positions and thereby allow the current Russian forces deployed in the area to more effectively conduct counterattacks and defensive operations. It is unclear whether the current Russian forces deployed to Kursk Oblast would be able to exploit the effects of large-scale Russian aviation operations over Kursk Oblast, however. It is also unclear if large-scale aviation operations over Kursk Oblast would disrupt Russia's ability to routinely use tactical aviation for glide bomb strikes throughout the frontline. Russian sources have indicated that Ukrainian forces in Kursk Oblast, including the "mobile groups" operating further into Russian territory, have significant air defense capabilities that would likely make large-scale Russian aviation operations in the area challenging.[26] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are operating rotary-wing aircraft in certain areas of Kursk Oblast, which would suggest that current Russian air defense coverage in the area may be sparse and may facilitate even limited Ukrainian aviation operations that would further complicate the Russian military's ability to field aviation at scale over Kursk Oblast.[27] ISW has not yet observed confirmation of reported Ukrainian air and air defense capabilities in Kursk Oblast. Russian forces could also deploy ground-based strike capabilities at scale to areas in and near Kursk Oblast to constrain Ukrainian advances and disrupt Ukrainian consolidation at positions within Russia, but Russian forces have generally proven incapable of using longer-range strike capabilities to set conditions for the type of ground maneuver needed to quickly retake territory in Kursk Oblast.

The lack of a coherent Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and the reported rate of Ukrainian advance indicates that Ukrainian forces were able to achieve operational surprise along the border with Russia. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have struggled to achieve operational surprise in the past year and a half of fighting due to the partially transparent battlefield in Ukraine. Ukraine's ability to achieve operational surprise highlights that the widespread visual and sensor-based transparency that both sides have established does not translate into a fully transparent battlefield, however, and that the belligerents in Ukraine can leverage ambiguity around operational intent to achieve operational surprise. One Russian milblogger criticized the Russian military command for failing to observe and react to Ukrainian forces allegedly massing on the border near Kursk Oblast.[28] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continually warned the Russian high command about a massing of Ukrainian forces along the border near Kursk Oblast but that the Russian command failed to adequately prepare for potential Ukrainian offensive operations.[29] Ukrainian forces would have successfully concealed their operational intent in order to achieve operational surprise if milblogger claims that Russian forces observed a buildup of Ukrainian forces in border areas are accurate. ISW has previously assessed that Russian forces have failed to internalize lessons learned about the difficulties of mechanized maneuver on an assumed transparent battlefield in Ukraine.[30] Ukraine, however, appears to be learning and adapting to this aspect of the battlefield given its ability to achieve apparent operational surprise in this instance.

Ukrainian officials have yet to comment directly on Ukraine's ongoing operation into Kursk Oblast. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on August 8 that Russia "brought the war to Ukraine" and must "feel what it has done" in response.[31] Advisor to the Head of the Ukrainian President's Office Mykhaylo Podolyak acknowledged the ongoing "events" in Kursk Oblast and noted that Russia is to blame for the situation, and an unnamed advisor to Zelensky also acknowledged the ongoing Ukrainian military operation into Kursk Oblast during an interview with the *Washington Post* on August 8.[32]

US officials noted that Ukraine's ongoing operation into Kursk Oblast is not a violation of US restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia's border areas. Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh stated during a press briefing on August 8 that Ukraine's operation into Kursk Oblast is consistent with US policy and that the US supports Ukraine's right to defend itself against attacks across the international border.[33] White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller also noted the Biden Administration's support for Ukraine's "common sense" and defensive actions on August 7.[34] Unnamed "US and Ukrainian officials" told *CNN* on August 8 that Ukrainian forces hope to disrupt and demoralize Russian forces and partially divert Russian forces from frontline areas in eastern Ukraine.[35]

Russian-backed Abkhazian Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba told Kremlin newswire TASS on August 8 that there are no plans to construct a Russian naval base at the Ochamchire port in Russian-controlled Abkhazia, Georgia.[36] Shamba noted that Russian forces have stationed border patrol boats at the port. Shamba stated in January 2024 that Russia was designing a permanent naval base in Abkhazia, however, and Russian-backed Abkhazian President Aslan Bzhania announced in October 2023 that he signed an agreement with Russian authorities to construct the base near Ochamchire.[37] *Naval News* reported in July 2024 that the Russian Project 22870 support ship, which had been previously docked at its home port in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai, arrived at the Ochamchire port.[38] It is unclear why the Russian government would abandon its plans to construct a permanent naval base in Abkhazia, as Ukrainian strikes against Black Sea Fleet assets have largely rendered naval basing in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea useless and have forced Russia to seek a more permanent basing pattern in the eastern Black Sea.[39]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian cross-border mechanized offensive operations into Kursk Oblast that began on August 6 are continuing as part of a Ukrainian operational effort within Russian territory. ISW will not offer assessments about the intent of this Ukrainian operation in order to avoid compromising Ukrainian operational security.
- Geolocated footage and Russian claims indicate that Ukrainian forces continued rapid advances further into Kursk Oblast on August 8, and Ukrainian forces are reportedly present in areas as far as 35 kilometers from the international border with Sumy Oblast. Ukrainian forces most certainly do not control all of the territory within the maximalist extent of Russian claims about Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast, however.
- The Kremlin will almost certainly endeavor to retake Russian territory in Kursk Oblast that Ukrainian forces have seized and stop Ukrainian activity further into Russia, as substantial Ukrainian advances within Russia would be a strategic blow to Russian President Vladimir Putin's decades-long effort to cement a legacy of Russian stability, security, and geopolitical resurgence.
- COA (Course of Action) 1: The Russian military command may decide to use existing conscripts, Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards, Rosgvardia, and other irregular forces already deployed to the international border area to push Ukrainian forces back and defend against the Ukrainian operation in Kursk Oblast.
- COA 2: The Russian military command may decide to use the existing Northern Grouping of Forces deployed along the Russian-Ukrainian border to respond to the Ukrainian offensive in Kursk Oblast.
- COA 3: The Russian military command may choose to redeploy operational reserves that it accumulated for its planned Summer 2024 offensive effort and/or relatively better provisioned and more combat effective frontline units to Kursk Oblast from elsewhere in the theater.
- COA 4: The Russian military command may seek to maintain the forces it currently has committed to Kursk Oblast but could redeploy significant aviation and strike elements to the area in an effort to improve Russia's ability to retake territory.
- The lack of a coherent Russian response to the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk Oblast and the reported rate of Ukrainian advance indicates that Ukrainian forces were able to achieve operational surprise along the border with Russia.
- Ukrainian officials have yet to comment directly on Ukraine's ongoing operation into Kursk Oblast.
- US officials noted that Ukraine's ongoing operation into Kursk Oblast is not a violation of US restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia's border areas.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 7, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 7, 2024, 7:15pm ET

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

Ukrainian forces have made confirmed advances up to 10 kilometers into Russia's Kursk Oblast amid continued mechanized offensive operations on Russian territory on August 7. Geolocated footage published on August 6 and 7 shows that Ukrainian armored vehicles have advanced to positions along the 38K-030 route about 10 kilometers from the international border. [1] The current confirmed extent and location of Ukrainian advances in Kursk Oblast indicate that Ukrainian forces have penetrated at least two Russian defensive lines and a stronghold.[2] A Russian insider source claimed that Ukrainian forces have seized 45 square kilometers of territory within Kursk Oblast since they launched the operation on August 6, and other Russian sources reported that

Ukrainian forces have captured 11 total settlements, including Nikolaevo-Daryino (1.5 kilometers north of the Sumy Oblast border), Darino (three kilometers north of the Sumy Oblast border), and Sverdlikovo (east of the Nikolaevo-Darino-Darino area), and are operating within Lyubimovka (eight kilometers north of the Sumy Oblast border).[3] Russian sources indicated that Ukrainian forces are trying to advance along the 38K-030 Sudzha-Korenovo highway, and a prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that by 1800 local time on August 7 Ukrainian forces had advanced both northwest and southeast along the highway and are now fighting on the outskirts of Korenovo (in the northwest direction) and Sudzha (in the southeast direction).[4] The Russian insider source and several other Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces fought for and seized the Sudzha checkpoint and the Sudzha gas distribution station (southwest of Sudzha along the 38K-004 highway, 500 meters from the Sumy-Kursk Oblast border).[5] Geolocated imagery posted on August 7 shows that Ukrainian forces captured over 40 Russian prisoners of war (POWs) at the Sudzha checkpoint, and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Russia service posted satellite imagery that shows heavy damage to buildings at the Sudzha checkpoint.[6] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on August 7 that an unspecified unit of the Chechnya-based 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) has deployed directly to the Sudzhenskyi Raion—generally consistent with some reports from Ukrainian and Russian sources that social media footage shows Chechen "Akhmat" units in the Sudzha area since over a week ago.[7] Chechen units reportedly suffered very heavy losses in Ukrainian attacks in the Korenovo Raion on August 7.[8]

The Kremlin's response to Ukrainian offensive activities in Kursk Oblast has so far been contradictory, as Russian officials are attempting to balance presenting the effort as a notable Ukrainian escalation with avoiding overstating its potential implications and risking domestic discontent. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with members of the Russian government on August 7, accusing Ukrainian forces of a "large-scale provocation" in Kursk Oblast and instructing First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov and regional authorities to coordinate assistance in Kursk Oblast.[9] Putin also met with Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Alexander Bortnikov, and Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov on August 7 about the Kursk Oblast attack.[10] Gerasimov portrayed the situation as largely under control, however, claiming that Ukrainian forces attacked with about 1,000 personnel and that Russian FSB and the Northern Grouping of Forces have stopped Ukraine's advance and inflicted significant casualties.[11] Gerasimov claimed that Russian forces will complete their operation when they have defeated Ukrainian forces and reached the Kursk Oblast-Ukraine border. Other Russian officials doubled down on these contradictory points, often seeking to strike a balance between the alarmism of a Ukrainian mechanized assault and penetration into Russian territory and the status quo reassurances that the Kremlin "has the situation under control." The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) notably edited a post on August 6 to remove claims that the attacking Ukrainian forces were just a sabotage and reconnaissance group and that the Ukrainian forces retreated, likely to avoid backlash from making demonstrably false claims about the scale and tactics of the ongoing Ukrainian penetration.[12] Kursk Oblast Acting Head Alexey Smirnov claimed that the situation is "under [Putin's] personal control" and stated that several thousand Kursk Oblast civilians have already evacuated the area.[13] Manturov instructed the Russian Ministry of Finance to allocate a first tranche of 1.8 billion rubles (about \$20.9 million) to assist Kursk Oblast residents in resettling.[14] Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin announced that the Investigative Committee has opened an investigation into the Ukrainian "provocation." [15] The Kremlin likely seeks to balance its messaging against two contradictory objectives to both discredit Ukraine internationally for conducting this attack into Russian territory and avoid inciting domestic panic about the scale, impacts, and potential outcomes of the Ukrainian operation. The Kremlin risks, however, discrediting itself among certain communities by seemingly dismissing the significance of the attack by framing it only as a "provocation."

Select Russian milbloggers heavily criticized the Russian military command for not detecting preparations for or preventing Ukrainian offensive operations into Kursk Oblast. Several Russian milbloggers complained that Russian forces should have prevented the Ukrainian offensive operations into Kursk Oblast as Russian forces knew that Ukrainian forces had been accumulating forces and means in the area for the past several months.[16] Some of the milbloggers complained that the Russian military command's inadequate reaction was due to a lack of concern about the Ukrainian accumulations, unrealistic confidence in Russian defenses in the border area, assumptions about Ukrainian forces' fatigue, or false reports about the situation.[17] A prominent Russian milblogger criticized Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov for not auditing the combat command system to remove ineffective commanders upon assuming his position as Minister of Defense and called for Russian authorities to punish incompetent commanders and liars.[18] The milblogger further claimed that Ukrainian offensive operations in Kursk Oblast prove that the Russian military command made "strategic miscalculations" and that nepotism in the Russian military is protecting ineffective military officials.[19] One Russian milblogger, who is often critical of the Russian military, notably applauded the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for editing its Telegram post to correct statements that were "overly optimistic" and blamed unspecified sources in the information space for spreading "excessively bravura" information about the situation.[20]

Ukrainian forces reportedly used a first-person view (FPV) drone to down a Russian Mi-28 helicopter over Kursk Oblast, indicating that Ukrainian forces continue to successfully adapt their drone capabilities. Sources within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* in an August 6 article that SBU special forces downed a Russian Mi-28 helicopter over

Kursk Oblast "with the help of an FPV drone" for the first time.[21] *Suspilne* published footage from Ukrainian law enforcement agencies showing a Ukrainian FPV drone striking the rear propeller of the Mi-28 helicopter.[22] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger acknowledged the Ukrainian FPV drone strike against the Russian Mi-28 but claimed that the helicopter managed to safely land without injuring its crew.[23] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that Ukrainian forces also downed a Russian Ka-52 helicopter over the Kursk-Sumy Oblast border area on August 6, but did not specify the means that Ukrainian forces used to down it.[24] Russian sources recently debated if Ukraine used an FPV drone to down a Russian helicopter near Donetsk City in late July and published footage purportedly showing Ukrainian FPV drones unsuccessfully attempting to strike rotary wing aircraft mid-flight.[25] Ukrainian drone operators also appear to be improving their capabilities to interdict longer-range strike and reconnaissance Russian drones in mid-air using FPV drones.[26] A widespread Ukrainian capability to use relatively cheap and widely-available drones to interdict expensive Russian helicopters and reconnaissance and strike drones would likely allow Ukrainian forces to hinder the Russian military's short- and medium-range strike capabilities while conserving Ukraine's short- and medium-range air defense interceptors for more rare and significant Russian air targets. ISW has yet to observe Ukrainian forces using FPV drones to successfully strike Russian rotary wing aircraft or conventional reconnaissance drones regularly and throughout the theater, however. Russian and Ukrainian forces are engaged in a technological offense-defense race and Ukraine's ability to field technological innovations at scale ahead of Russian adaptations is crucial for Ukraine's ability to offset Russia's current materiel advantages.[27]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov assessed on August 7 that Russian offensive potential will culminate within one and a half to two months, generally consistent with ISW's assessment on current Russia's offensive capabilities.

[28] Budanov noted that the main Russian offensive "should end" in about two months, because it "has already dragged on." Budanov emphasized that Ukrainian troops will be proactive in the meantime and not simply let the Russian offensive run out of steam without doing anything, suggesting that Ukrainian forces will continue local tactical counterattacks in areas of the front where they deem such attacks to be the most promising. Budanov's statements are consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian forces are currently committing the breadth of their present materiel and manpower capabilities to pursuing offensive operations throughout the theater, particularly in Donetsk Oblast, and that Russian forces are unlikely to launch a new distinct offensive operation this summer due to mounting constraints to their capabilities.[29] Even as Russian forces continue to make tactically significant advances towards Pokrovsk, the rate of their gain is not indefinite, and Russian forces will likely struggle to sustain their offensive efforts as they come up against more built-up urban areas along the line of settlements directly east of Pokrovsk.[30] Russian forces are executing their summer offensive operation with mechanized assaults that often lead to high armored vehicle losses, and the Russian command's apparent willingness to accept these materiel losses on relatively small sectors of the front will eventually burden the Russian military in the long-term, pushing them closer to culmination.[31]

Head of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), Danielle Bell, stated that Russia has tortured 95 percent of Ukrainian prisoners-of-war (POWs) in Russian detention. Bell stated in an interview with Dutch TV channel NOS that Russian authorities torture Ukrainian POWs starting at their first interrogations and characterized the Russian practice of torturing Ukrainian POWs as "widespread and systematic." [32] Bell emphasized that the torture of Ukrainian POWs constitutes a war crime. The torture of a POW is a violation of Article 3 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.[33] The deputy commander of a Ukrainian brigade reported on August 7 that Russian authorities tortured and "brutally" killed a Ukrainian POW who served in his brigade in a pre-trial detention center in Rostov Oblast.[34] Bell's statements and previous HRMMU reports on Russian violations of Ukrainian POWs' rights are consistent with ISW's longstanding assessments about Russia's systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in occupied Ukraine and toward Ukrainian POWs.[35]

The Moldovan Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced on August 7 that it would not register the pro-Kremlin Victory electoral bloc in the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election and referendum. The Moldovan CEC stated on August 7 that it identified problems with the Victory bloc's registration documents on August 3 and requested that the bloc correct the errors by August 6, but that the bloc denied that there were any errors and ignored the CEC's request.[36] The Moldovan CEC announced on August 7 that it refused to register the Victory electoral bloc in the presidential election and referendum.[37] The Moldovan CEC stated that people on the "international restrictive lists" listed in a Moldovan 2016 law, including EU sanctions lists, cannot freely manage the bloc's funds, cannot ensure the rights and obligations of the bloc, and therefore cannot represent the bloc.[38] EU-sanctioned Moldovan opposition politician Ilan Shor heads the Victory bloc.[39] The CEC also cited its July 2023 decision regarding the registration of electoral blocs, which states that the name of an electoral bloc cannot be the same as a political party.[40] The Victory political party is a member of the Victory electoral bloc.[41] Moldovan outlet *NewsMaker* reported that six CEC members voted for the decision, one voted against, and two abstained.[42]

A Russian court sentenced Andrey Kurshin, administrator of the "Moscow Calling" Russian ultranationalist milblogger Telegram channel, to six and a half years in prison on August 7 for publishing "fake" information about the Russian military. [43] Russian authorities arrested Kurshin on August 31, 2023 for allegedly spreading "fake" information about the Russian military.[44] Kurshin's

arrest likely aimed to make an example of a hypercritical milblogger to encourage self-censorship among the wider ultranationalist milblogger community, and Kurshin's August 7 sentencing continues to make an example of him to discourage other information space voices from growing too critical of the Kremlin or Ministry of Defense (MoD).[45]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces have made confirmed advances up to 10 kilometers into Russia's Kursk Oblast amid continued mechanized offensive operations on Russian territory on August 7.
- The Kremlin's response to Ukrainian offensive activities in Kursk Oblast has so far been contradictory, as Russian officials are attempting to balance presenting the effort as a notable Ukrainian escalation with avoiding overstating its potential implications and risking domestic discontent.
- Select Russian milbloggers heavily criticized the Russian military command for not detecting preparations for or preventing Ukrainian offensive operations into Kursk Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly used a first-person view (FPV) drone to down a Russian Mi-28 helicopter over Kursk Oblast, indicating that Ukrainian forces continue to successfully adapt their drone capabilities.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kyrylo Budanov assessed on August 7 that Russian offensive potential will culminate within one and a half to two months, generally consistent with ISW's assessment on current Russia's offensive capabilities.
- Head of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), Danielle Bell, stated that Russia has tortured 95 percent of Ukrainian prisoners-of-war (POWs) in Russian detention.
- The Moldovan Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced on August 7 that it would not register the pro-Kremlin Victory electoral bloc in the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election and referendum.
- A Russian court sentenced Andrey Kurshin, administrator of the "Moscow Calling" Russian ultranationalist milblogger Telegram channel, to six and a half years in prison on August 7 for publishing "fake" information about the Russian military.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions south of Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces advanced northeast of Siversk, southwest of Donetsk City, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- Russian Army Combat Reserve (BARS) units continue recruitment efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 6, 2024

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

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

August 6, 2024, 6:40pm ET

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a series of cross border raids into Kursk Oblast on August 6. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed on August 6 that Russian border troops and FSB personnel repelled several raids by Ukrainian forces equipped with roughly a battalion's worth of tanks and armored vehicles against Russian positions near Nikolayev-Darino and Oleshnya, Kursk Oblast (northwest of Sumy City and along the Russia-Ukraine international border).[1] Geolocated footage published on August 6 shows damaged and abandoned armored vehicles roughly seven kilometers north of the international border west of Lyubimovka, Kursk Oblast; Russian sources claimed that the footage shows Ukrainian vehicles, but ISW cannot confirm whether these armored vehicles are Russian, Ukrainian, or both. [2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked from two directions: from the Sudzha checkpoint (on the border northeast of Sumy City along the H-07/R-200 highways) in the direction of Sudzha and Oleshnya; and from Novehke, Sumy Oblast (northeast of the Sudzha checkpoint and Sumy City) towards Nikolayev-Darino, Kursk Oblast.[3] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian reserve forces also responded to the supposed Ukrainian raids, and a Russian insider source claimed that elements of the Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz also responded to the raids, but ISW cannot verify these claims.[4] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed 16 Ukrainian armored vehicles during the supposed raids and that Russian forces conducted retaliatory strikes against Ukrainian positions in Sumy Oblast.[5] Russian milbloggers posted footage claiming to show the aftermath of the supposed Ukrainian raids, although most of the damage shown in the footage appears to be the result of routine Ukrainian shelling and does not indicate that there was ground activity in the area.[6] Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov and several Russian milbloggers warned that fighting is ongoing in the border areas of Kursk Oblast's Sudzhansky and Korenevsky raions, contrary to the Russian MoD's and FSB's reporting.[7]

Russian milbloggers largely dismissed the supposed Ukrainian raids into Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian officials have largely yet to comment on the raids. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian military personnel and members of the all-Russian pro-Ukrainian Russian Volunteer Corps

(RDK) were involved in the raids, but ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims.[8] Ukrainian outlet *New Voice of Ukraine* reported that a source within Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated that RDK forces were "definitely not involved" in the raids but declined to comment further on the supposed raids.[9] Representatives of the all-Russian pro-Ukrainian Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR) also declined to comment on the raids.[10] Russian milbloggers largely dismissed the supposed raids as "unsuccessful" and a "media stunt." [11] Several Russian milbloggers warned that there could be additional raids in the coming days and that Ukrainian forces may be trying to divert Russian manpower and material from ongoing Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[12]

Russian Security Council Secretary and former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu heavily overexaggerated Russian advances in Ukraine since mid-June 2024. Shoigu stated on August 6 that Russian forces have seized 420 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory since June 14, 2024, when Russian President Vladimir Putin outlined his uncompromising demands for Ukraine's capitulation as a prerequisite for "peace" negotiations in Ukraine.[13] ISW has observed evidence confirming that Russian forces have seized approximately 290 square kilometers since June 14. Russian forces increased the intensity of their assaults in the Toretsk direction on the night of June 18 after being generally inactive in this sector of the front throughout 2024.[14] ISW has not observed large or operationally significant Russian gains in the Toretsk or Avdiivka direction since July 14, although Russian forces have made tactical gains in these directions since July 14. The Russian military command has repeatedly exaggerated Russian territorial advances in Ukraine.[15]

Russian officials continue coordination and military cooperation with Iran ahead of the Iranian retaliatory strike against Israel out of concern for Russian interests in the region. NOTE: a version of this text appears in ISW-CTP's August 6 Iran Update. *Reuters* reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a message via Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu that Iran should act with restraint and avoid targeting civilians when retaliating against Israel.[16] An unspecified Iranian diplomat told *IranWire* that Russia is against Iranian strikes that could lead to the deaths of civilians due to the large number of Russian citizens who live in Israel.[17] The report did not specify how this Iranian diplomat has insight into the calculus behind the Russian decision making.

Russia is also reportedly assisting Iranian efforts to improve its air defenses against Israeli attacks. The *New York Times* (NYT), citing two unspecified Iranian officials including one Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) official, reported on August 5 that Russia began delivering unspecified advanced radars and air defense systems to Iran.[18] The NYT noted that Iranian media has previously reported that Iran sought to acquire Russian air defense systems to improve Iran's air defense network and defend against an Israeli strike. ISW-CTP continues to assess that Russia is increasing its cooperation with Iran, especially leaning into its growing military partnership, to shape Western decision-making into decisions favorable to Russia, particularly into pushing the West to self-deter against providing further military assistance to Ukraine.[19] Russia's reported decision to provide Iran with radar and air defense systems, which could significantly benefit Russian forces on the ground if instead deployed to Ukraine, also underscores Russia's ongoing reliance on Iran for other critical weapons, including high-precision weapons and weapons components.[20]

Armenia continues to abstain from the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Armenian and Russian sources stated on August 6 that Armenia will not participate in the upcoming CSTO exercises in Novosibirsk, Russia in mid-August 2024.[21] Armenia has de-facto frozen its CSTO membership by not participating in high-level meetings, military exercises, and other CSTO activities since mid-to-late March 2023.[22] Armenian authorities have repeatedly cited the CSTO's failure to adequately address Armenia's security needs as the reason that Armenia refuses to participate in the CSTO and have accused CSTO members like Belarus of helping Azerbaijan prepare for the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.[23] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger who routinely criticizes Armenia claimed that Armenia's refusal to participate in the upcoming CSTO military exercises is predictable and that Armenia will soon withdraw from CSTO due to Armenia's intensifying relations with the United States.[24] Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has previously stated that Armenia will decide "when to leave" the CSTO, but Armenian officials have yet to officially confirm Armenia's intended timeline for withdrawing from the CSTO or suggest that enhanced security cooperation with the United States is a reason for Armenia's withdrawal from the Russian-led security bloc.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a series of cross border raids into Kursk Oblast on August 6.
- Russian milbloggers largely dismissed the supposed Ukrainian raids into Kursk Oblast, and Ukrainian officials have largely yet to comment on the raids.
- Russian Security Council Secretary and former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu heavily overexaggerated Russian advances in Ukraine since mid-June 2024.
- Russian officials continue coordination and military cooperation with Iran ahead of the Iranian retaliatory strike against Israel out of concern for Russian interests in the region. NOTE: a version of this text appears in ISW-CTP's August 6 Iran Update.
- Armenia continues to abstain from the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

- Russian forces advanced east of Toretsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly issued a formal reply denying a request from the wives of the mobilized Russian personnel to meet with Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 5, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 5, 2024, 5:40pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12pm ET on August 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian authorities detained the head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Patriot Park, Vyacheslav Akhmedov, and Deputy Head of the Russian MoD's Directorate for Innovative Development Major General Vladimir Shesterov on suspicion of large-scale fraud as of August 5.^[1] Russian law enforcement told Kremlin newswire TASS that they suspect Akhmedov and Shesterov of embezzling over 40 million rubles (roughly \$471,000) during public procurement for the park and warned that there may be additional defendants in the case.^[2] Patriot Park was reportedly the personal project of former Russian Defense Minister and current Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, and recently detained former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov reportedly oversaw construction of the park.^[3] A Russian milblogger who is particularly critical of the Russian military command praised Akhmedov's and Shesterov's arrests and claimed that Akhmedov and Shesterov were part of the "old team" that controlled the Russian MoD under Shoigu's leadership, suggesting that their arrests are "indicative" of Shoigu's diminishing influence.^[4] A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted several command changes within the Russian MoD suggested that recently dismissed former Deputy Defense Minister Army General Pavel Popov, who is reportedly involved with Russia's National Defense Control Center, could be the next high-ranking MoD official to be arrested.^[5] Russian officials have arrested several senior Russian defense officials since April 2024 on similar corruption charges.^[6] Russian milbloggers previously theorized that the arrests of Ivanov and other high-ranking defense officials affiliated with Shoigu could be indicative of Shoigu's declining influence within the Kremlin, as well as the Kremlin's desire to "clean house" of Shoigu's old guard affiliates under the Russian MoD's new leadership.^[7]

A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted several command changes within the Russian MoD claimed on August 5 that the Head of the Russian MoD's Main Armored Directorate, Lieutenant General Alexander Shestakov, will leave his position in the near future.^[8] Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Shestakov as head of the MoD's Main Armored Directorate days before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Shestakov is responsible for the MoD's efforts to plan and mobilize Russia's production of armored vehicles.^[9] ISW cannot confirm this potential command change at this time.

Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu met with various high-ranking Iranian officials in Tehran on August 5, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri, and Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akhbar Ahmadian.^[10] CTP-ISW's August 5 Iran Update will cover Shoigu's meetings and their regional context in greater depth.

Russia is tightening pre-departure standards for Tajik migrants hoping to work in Russia, likely as part of ongoing Russian efforts to address security threats from the Islamic State's Afghan branch IS-Khorasan (IS-K) following the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in March 2024. The Tajik Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Employment reported on August 5 that it jointly launched a Russian passport and visa service representative office in Dushanbe with the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in May 2024.^[11] The representative office will conduct preliminary checks on Tajik citizens who want to work in Russia and will allow Tajik citizens to undergo fingerprinting registration and check bans on entry into Russia while remaining in Tajikistan. The Tajik Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Employment stated that it discussed pre-departure procedures for Tajik migrants heading to Russia and improvements in the "safe, legal, and orderly migration" of Tajik citizens to Russia with Russian authorities. Kremlin newswire TASS reported that new Russian procedures require Russian businesses to interview prospective employees from Tajikistan before they travel to Russia in order to ensure that the individual has all the necessary documents to work in Russia.^[12] The Tajik Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Employment also announced that Tajikistan and Russia agreed to organize Russian language courses and Russian language, history, and law exams for Tajik citizens attempting to work in Russia. Russia intensified its engagement with Tajik authorities following the Crocus City Hall attack to strengthen security and has previously refused entry to migrants from Central Asian countries at airports and land border crossings.^[13] Russia is also likely emphasizing efforts to test potential migrants' knowledge of Russian language, cultural norms, and laws in order to placate the Russian ultranationalist community, which regularly levies xenophobic criticism against

Central Asian migrants and advocates for Russia to issue them an ultimatum of assimilating fully to Russian culture or leaving Russia.[14]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), citing satellite imagery, reported that Ukrainian drone strikes destroyed an Su-34 bomber aircraft and an ammunition warehouse at the Morozovsk Airfield in Rostov Oblast on August 3.[15] The GUR reported on August 5 that the imagery shows that debris from falling Ukrainian drones also damaged two more aircraft, four "technical buildings," and two hangars at the airfield. A Russian milblogger claimed on August 4 that 18 Ukrainian drones struck their targets and destroyed an Su-34 bomber aircraft and a warehouse with aviation weapons and damaged a flight control point and engineering equipment during the August 3 strike.[16] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted a series of successful drone strikes against likely military targets in Rostov, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts, including the Morozovsk Airfield, on August 3.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian authorities detained the head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Patriot Park, Vyacheslav Akhmedov, and Deputy Head of the Russian MoD's Directorate for Innovative Development Major General Vladimir Shestakov on suspicion of large-scale fraud as of August 5.
- A Russian insider source who has previously correctly predicted several command changes within the Russian MoD claimed on August 5 that the Head of the Russian MoD's Main Armored Directorate, Lieutenant General Alexander Shestakov, will leave his position in the near future.
- Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu met with various high-ranking Iranian officials, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri, and Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akhbar Ahmadian in Tehran on August 5.
- Russia is tightening pre-departure standards for Tajik migrants hoping to work in Russia, likely as part of ongoing Russian efforts to address security threats from the Islamic State's Afghan branch IS-Khorasan (IS-K) following the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in March 2024.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), citing satellite imagery, reported that Ukrainian drone strikes destroyed an Su-34 bomber aircraft and an ammunition warehouse at the Morozovsk Airfield in Rostov Oblast on August 3.
- Russian forces advanced east of Toretsk and Pokrovsk and near Donetsk City and Robotyne.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to position Russian veterans who have fought in Ukraine in domestic political roles.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 4, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 4, 2024, 3:30pm 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 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 11:30am ET on August 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against an oil depot in Rostov Oblast and missile strikes against fuel storage warehouses in occupied Luhansk City on August 4. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* published footage and reported on August 4 that Ukrainian drones struck an oil depot in Azov, Rostov Oblast.[1] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev announced on August 4 that fire fighters were extinguishing a large fire at a warehouse in Azov, but specifically noted that Russian authorities would establish the cause after extinguishing the fire.[2] Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed on August 4 that Ukrainian forces launched eight ATACMS missiles and four Storm Shadow missiles at Luhansk City.[3] Pasechnik claimed that Russian air defense shot down four missiles, that some missiles struck warehouses containing fuel storage, and that some falling missile debris caused dry grass to catch fire.[4] Footage published on August 4 purportedly shows two smoke plumes over Luhansk City.[5] Luhansk Oblast Military Administration Head Artem Lysyohor reported fires at the Luhansk machine-building plant in Luhansk City, where Russian forces

reportedly repair and store military equipment.[6] ISW cannot confirm what type of missiles Ukrainian forces used in the Luhansk City strike at this time.

Ukraine confirmed that it has received the first batch of US-made F-16 fighter jets. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on August 4 that Ukraine received an unspecified number of F-16s from unspecified Western countries and specifically thanked Denmark, the Netherlands, and the US.[7] The *Economist* reported on August 4 that Ukraine has so far received 10 of the promised 79 jets and that Ukrainian forces should be able to fly 20 F-16s by the end of 2024.[8] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine will need a substantial number of F-16 jets in order to field them at the scale necessary for Ukraine to succeed in integrating fixed wing aircraft into its wider air defense umbrella. [9] Ukraine will also notably need to continue efforts to target Russian air defense assets within the Russian rear and in occupied Ukraine with Western-provided long-range weapons to enable its use of F-16 jets.

Russian milbloggers responded to the arrival of F-16s by trying to downplay their potential battlefield effects—directly undermining Russian information operations intended to frame the delivery of F-16s and other Western weapons systems as an uncrossable "red line." Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Western and Ukrainian media are "overhyping" the arrival of F-16s in order to distract from battlefield failures, and many milbloggers turned to immediately discussing how Russian forces will begin targeting and destroying the aircraft.[10] Russian information space commentators and officials have frequently claimed that the delivery of Western weaponry to Ukraine constitutes a red line, that if crossed, will force Russia into an escalatory response.[11] Russia has repeatedly proven, however, that the invocation of supposed "red lines" is a reflexive control technique intended to force the West into self-detering against providing Ukraine with additional military aid.[12] Western and Ukrainian policies have crossed Russia's self-defined "red lines" multiple times since the beginning of the war without drawing a significant Russian reaction, which Russian milblogger comments suggest will prove to be the case with Russia's response to F-16s.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against an oil depot in Rostov Oblast and missile strikes against fuel storage warehouses in occupied Luhansk City on August 4.**
- **Ukraine confirmed that it has received the first batch of US-made F-16 fighter jets.**
- **Russian milbloggers responded to the arrival of F-16s by trying to downplay their potential battlefield effects—directly undermining Russian information operations intended to frame the delivery of F-16s and other Western weapons systems as an uncrossable "red line."**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances east of Pokrovsk, west of Donetsk City, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.**
- **The Russian defense industry reportedly continues to produce missiles using Western-sourced components.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 3, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 3, 2024, 4:45pm ET

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck four Russian S-400 air defense missile launchers, an S-500 air defense system, and the Russian Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) *Rostov-on-Don* Kilo-class submarine in occupied Crimea on August 2. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 3 that the strikes significantly damaged four Russian S-400 missile launchers in unspecified areas in occupied Crimea.[1] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on August 3 that Ukrainian forces successfully destroyed a Russian S-400 and S-500 air defense system that the Russian military had deployed to protect the Kerch Strait Bridge.[2] ISW has not yet observed visual evidence of Ukrainian forces striking Russian air defense systems in occupied Crimea on August 2. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Ukrainian strike sank the *Rostov-on-Don* at the Sevastopol port.[3] Ukrainian forces previously struck and significantly damaged the submarine at the Sevastopol port in September 2023, after which it underwent repairs at the port.[4] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian MGM-140 ATACMS strike against occupied Sevastopol on August 2.[5] Satellite imagery captured on August 2 shows some damage to a structure purportedly protecting the *Rostov-on-Don* in the Sevastopol port, but ISW cannot yet independently verify reports that the Ukrainian strike destroyed the submarine.[6]

Ukrainian forces also conducted a series of successful drone strikes against likely military targets in Rostov, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts on August 3. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) struck the Morozovsk Airfield and nearby ammunition and glide bomb storage facilities with an

unspecified number of drones and that Ukrainian forces are conducting a battle damage assessment. [7] Footage published on August 3 shows secondary explosions near the Morozovsk Airfield consistent with strikes against an ammunition depot, and Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces launched roughly 55 drones at targets in Rostov Oblast.[8] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the SBU and GUR also targeted a number of oil depots and fuel and lubricant storage facilities in Rostov, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts.[9] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that sources within Ukrainian special services stated that the GUR struck the Atlas oil refinery in Rostov Oblast with 15 drones and that Russian forces were using the Atlas oil refinery to fuel military equipment in occupied Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.[10] Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov claimed that Ukrainian drones also struck the Gubkinsky oil depot in Belgorod Oblast, which reportedly supplies motor fuels to the Russian military.[11] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed 75 drones over Russia and the Sea of Azov on the night of August 2 to 3.[12]

The Kremlin reportedly planned to transfer unspecified missiles and other military equipment to the Houthis in Yemen but did not transfer the materiel following diplomatic pressure. Russia's reported plan highlights its growing military partnership with Iran and suggests that Russia likely aims to leverage Iranian proxies to indirectly confront the West and shape Western decision making. *CNN* reported on August 2 that US officials and other sources familiar with the matter stated that Russia was preparing to deliver unspecified missiles and other military equipment to the Houthis in late July 2024 but backed down from the plan following US and Saudi diplomatic outreach.[13] US officials reportedly stated that they are unsure if Saudi protests were the determining factor for ending the planned transfer, however.[14] *CNN's* sources stated that at least three Russian military officials traveled to Yemen in late July 2024 to advise the Houthis and possibly assist the Houthis with live fire exercises, which the Houthis later cancelled.[15] US officials reportedly stated that Russia viewed arming and advising the Houthis as a retaliatory measure for lifting some US restrictions on Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons for strikes within Russia.[16] Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed on June 6 that Russia would provide long-range strike capabilities to unspecified actors for strikes against the West as a "symmetrical response" to the lifting of some of these restrictions.[17] Russia's reported plans to support the Houthis in order to indirectly confront the West and threaten further escalation cohere with several Russia information and hybrid operations that aim to encourage the West to self-deter from supporting Ukraine over fears of confrontation with Russia.[18]

Putin's willingness to consider supporting the Houthis as they attack Israel and international shipping is part of deepening Russian-Iranian military cooperation and Russia's increasing reliance on Iran for high-precision weapons and components.[19] Russia's deepening partnership with Iran will likely encourage Russia to consider supporting other Iranian proxies and leveraging these groups in other indirect attempts to threaten the West with escalation. Increased Russian willingness to use Iran and its proxies to indirectly confront the West will disrupt Russian attempts to portray Russian foreign policy in the Middle East as balanced and may further complicate Russian relations with countries concerned about Russian-Iranian cooperation.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck four Russian S-400 air defense missile launchers, an S-500 air defense system, and the Russian Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) Rostov-on-Don Kilo-class submarine in occupied Crimea on August 2.
- Ukrainian forces also conducted a series of successful drone strikes against likely military targets in Rostov, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts on August 3.
- The Kremlin reportedly planned to transfer unspecified missiles and other military equipment to the Houthis in Yemen but did not transfer the materiel following diplomatic pressure. Russia's reported plan highlights its growing military partnership with Iran and suggests that Russia likely aims to leverage Iranian proxies to indirectly confront the West and shape Western decision making.
- Putin's willingness to consider supporting the Houthis as they attack Israel and international shipping is part of deepening Russian-Iranian military cooperation and Russia's increasing reliance on Iran for high-precision weapons and components.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Siversk, and Chasiv Yar.
- Russian authorities continue efforts to financially incentivize Russian military service in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 2, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Karolina Hird, Davit Gasparyan, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 2, 2024, 5:55pm ET

Ukrainian Joint Forces and Khortytsia Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Andriy Hnatov stressed that Russia is pursuing an effort to force Ukraine to commit its available manpower to ongoing defensive operations in order to prevent the accumulation of Ukrainian

resources for future counteroffensive operations. Hnatov stated in an interview with Ukrainian outlet *Glavcom* published on August 2 that the Russian military command launched the offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast in early May 2024 because it was concerned that Ukraine's recent efforts to strengthen its force generation apparatus would allow Ukrainian forces to leverage newly generated manpower to stabilize the frontline and conduct counteroffensive operations.

[1] Hnatov stated that Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast aimed to prevent Ukraine from building out reserves and addressing personnel shortages in already committed combat brigades by drawing Ukrainian forces to Kharkiv Oblast from elsewhere along the front, complicating rotations, and forcing Ukraine to commit newly generated forces to defensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast instead of offensive or defensive operations elsewhere in the theater.[2] Hnatov stated that Russia continues efforts to prevent Ukraine from accumulating the manpower necessary to conduct counteroffensive operations, consistent with ISW's assessment that ongoing Russian offensive operations throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine aim to degrade Ukraine's ability to accumulate the manpower and materiel Ukraine requires to contest the battlefield initiative.[3] The Russian military command likely views retaining the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative and will continue efforts to sustain Russia's current offensive tempo in Ukraine in order to constrain Ukraine's ability to seize the initiative on select sectors of the frontline.[4]

Russian Airborne (VDV) and "Dnepr" Group of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky addressed VDV forces in an article and recorded video on the 94th anniversary of the VDV's formation on August 2, attempting to highlight the VDV's performance in Ukraine as an elite professional force despite the fact that VDV elements are fighting essentially as understrength motorized rifle units in Ukraine.[5] This is Teplinsky's first appearance since Russian milbloggers began speculating that Teplinsky suffered serious injuries (or even may have died) in a Ukrainian strike on a Russian command post in occupied Kherson Oblast in late June. ISW remains unable to confirm whether Teplinsky was affected by the strike or even present when it occurred.[6] Teplinsky published an article in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s official *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper, congratulating VDV forces on their 94th anniversary and for their role in the war in Ukraine, particularly emphasizing the VDV's role in operations on the east (left) bank of the Dniro River in Kherson Oblast.[7] Teplinsky also reported that during the war in Ukraine, 70 VDV personnel have received "Hero of Russia" awards; 71,000 VDV personnel have received state awards; and 32,000 VDV personnel have received departmental insignia. Russian military commanders will typically congratulate combat services on the anniversaries of their formations, but Teplinsky's praise of the VDV is noteworthy after the VDV has suffered consistently high losses in Ukraine—the 83rd VDV Brigade recently sustained high casualties during offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and the 104th VDV Division suffered substantial losses after its elements deployed to Krynyk, Kherson Oblast in late 2023 with little to no training.[8] Over the course of the war, VDV forces have become so degraded that they are conducting the same attritional infantry-heavy frontal assault tactics as understrength motorized rifle units in Ukraine, despite the VDV's prior reputation as an "elite force" before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[9] ISW previously assessed that the Russian military's reliance on such assault tactics has largely eroded the distinctions between various Russian combat services and degraded the efficacy of Russian frontline troops, especially for once "elite" VDV forces. [10] Teplinsky's speech and article emphasize that the Russian military command remains interested in preserving the VDV's reputation as an elite fighting force.

Russian authorities arrested the former deputy rear commander of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) Colonel Dmitry Peshkov on August 2. Russian state newswire TASS reported on August 2 that Russian law enforcement arrested and charged Peshkov for the embezzlement of food rations for Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, to which he pleaded not guilty.[11] Peshkov's arrest is likely part of a concerted Kremlin effort to remove high-ranking Russian officials from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), potentially to indirectly punish commanders for the failures of their troops or to maintain a cadre of loyal and compliant officers within the highest ranks of the Russian military.[12] Elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division have reportedly been conducting offensive operations in the Terny-Nevske area of Luhansk Oblast with limited success and have recently lost some territory to limited Ukrainian counterattacks in this area.[13]

The Russian Federation Council passed an updated version of an amendment that will allow commanders to punish subordinates for "gross disciplinary offenses," including the use of personal electronic devices, in frontline areas following significant backlash from Russian milbloggers. The Russian Federation Council approved updated language on August 2 that clarifies that commanders cannot punish servicemembers for using personal devices to perform combat operations, such as using personal phones or tablets to operate reconnaissance or strike drones. [14] Russian milbloggers widely criticized the original version of the amendment for being out of touch with reality and failing to reflect Russian forces' dependence on personal devices for command and control (C2) and drone operations, which prompted the Russian State Duma to revise the amendment. [15] It remains unclear if the Russian military command will be able or willing to enforce punishment for the use of personal devices for non-combat purposes in Ukraine, and the Russian military would likely find it extremely difficult to eliminate its dependence on insecure personal devices for many frontline tasks.[16]

The Russian Federation Council also passed a series of bills strengthening the Russian government's control over the Russian information space and further restricting the rights of

migrants in Russia. The Federation Council approved a series of bills on August 2, including bills requiring the owners of social media channels with over 10,000 subscribers to provide personally identifying information to Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor; limiting the number of SIM cards that foreigners can purchase; allowing the Russian government to terminate the naturalized citizenship of migrants who do not immediately register for military service; and further restricting migrants' rights to open bank accounts, drive cars, get married, and purchase property in Russia.[17] ISW previously assessed that these proposed bills were intended to further Kremlin efforts to crack down against behavior in the Russian information space and within migrant communities that the Kremlin views as undesirable.[18]

The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc announced its candidate for the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election on August 2. Victory bloc founder and US-sanctioned Moldovan politician Ilan Shor announced that the Victory bloc nominated Vasile Bolea to run in the Moldovan presidential election, and Bolea later announced that Shor-affiliated Moldovan parliament member Marina Tauber will be his Chief of Staff for the campaign.[19] The Victory bloc stated that Bolea's election platform will prioritize restoring Moldova's relations with Russia and the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), ensuring Moldova's accession to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and BRICS, and increasing cooperation with the CIS and European Union (EU).[20] Bolea claimed that Moldova has more viable economic prospects and "a future" in its relationship with BRICS "unlike" its relationship with the EU and emphasized that his platform will promote "traditional values" and Eastern Orthodoxy.[21] Bolea is reportedly the elected chairperson of the Victory bloc's parliamentary group and announced the creation of the bloc's parliamentary group in May 2024.[22] Bolea has been a member of the Moldovan parliament since 2014 and was previously a member of Moldova's Socialist and Revival parties.[23] Bolea appears to be running on a more openly pro-Russian platform than other Moldovan oppositionist presidential candidates, including former pro-Russian Moldovan president and current head of the Moldovan Socialist Party Igor Dodon's candidate, former Moldovan Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo.[24] The Victory bloc's decision to run its own presidential candidate suggests that Moldova's pro-Russian opposition remain divided, which may challenge the Kremlin's efforts to co-opt pro-Russian actors into its wider plans to destabilize Moldova and prevent Moldova's accession to the EU.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian Joint Forces and Khortytsia Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Andriy Hnatov stressed that Russia is pursuing an effort to force Ukraine to commit its available manpower to ongoing defensive operations in order to prevent the accumulation of Ukrainian resources for future counteroffensive operations.**
- **Russian Airborne (VDV) and "Dnestr" Group of Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky addressed VDV forces in an article and recorded video on the 94th anniversary of the VDV's formation on August 2, attempting to highlight the VDV's performance in Ukraine as an elite professional force despite the fact that VDV elements are fighting essentially as understrength motorized rifle units in Ukraine.**
- **Russian authorities arrested the former deputy rear commander of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Moscow Military District [MMD]) Colonel Dmitry Peshkov on August 2.**
- **The Russian Federation Council passed an updated version of an amendment that will allow commanders to punish subordinates for "gross disciplinary offenses," including the use of personal electronic devices, in frontline areas following significant backlash from Russian milbloggers.**
- **The Russian Federation Council also passed a series of bills strengthening the Russian government's control over the Russian information space and further restricting the rights of migrants in Russia.**
- **The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc announced its candidate for the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election on August 2.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.**
- **A Russian government official weighed in on ongoing milblogger criticism of Russia's drone production industry.**
- **A delegation of Kremlin officials visited occupied Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts on August 2 to highlight Russian efforts to integrate occupied Ukraine into the Russian Federation.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 1, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 1, 2024, 6:20pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on August 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces continue to make slow, steady advances in the Pokrovsk direction (west of Avdiivka), largely enabled by Ukrainian manpower shortages and the terrain in the area immediately northwest of Avdiivka. Russian advances will likely slow further as Russian forces advance into a line of larger and more urban settlements. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky identified the Pokrovsk direction as the Russian military's current priority on August 1 and noted that Russian forces are currently able to advance in certain areas of the front because Ukraine is still struggling with manpower shortages and challenges in properly staffing and equipping new brigades.[1] Zelensky observed that some Ukrainian brigades are unable to conduct rotations because their replacement brigades are not yet staffed or equipped, which creates exploitable weaknesses that Russian forces can attack.[2] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets noted that Ukrainian defenders in the Pokrovsk direction have inferior equipment and defensive means and are therefore currently unable to slow Russian advances.[3] Delays in the provision of Western and especially US military assistance have contributed to delays in equipping newly-raised Ukrainian units and re-equipping those that have been fighting.[4]

Russian forces appear to be exploiting such weakness to make gradual tactical gains northwest of Avdiivka, where ISW recently assessed that Russian forces are attempting to achieve a limited tactical encirclement of Ukrainian forces east of the T0511 (O0544) Ocheretyne-Hrodivka-Myrnohrad highway, particularly on the left bank of the Vovcha River.[5] Geolocated footage published on August 1 shows that Russian forces have advanced further within Vesele towards the T0511 road, placing the current furthest confirmed Russian advance about 3.5 kilometers from the outskirts of Hrodivka.[6] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are attacking south of Vesele along the railway line and windbreaks towards Serhiivka and Zhelanne (just south of Vesele), which could further efforts to tactically encircle Ukrainian forces in this area if Russian forces properly exploit it.[7] Ukrainian and Russian sources also reported that Russian forces seized Tymofivka (north of the O0544 road and the Vesele area).[8] Mashovets characterized recent Russian advances in the area southeast of the O0544 road as a tactical penetration of Ukrainian lines and stated that Russian forces have advanced 6.5 kilometers deep and 7.5 kilometers wide from Sokil to Serhiivka, crossing both the Vovcha and Kazennyi Torets rivers (running through Prohres-Vovche and Lozuvatske, respectively) in recent weeks.[9] Mashovets warned that Russian forces are close to achieving an operationally significant breakthrough in the Pokrovsk direction by the end of August.

Russia's current rate of tactical advance towards Pokrovsk will likely not continue indefinitely, however, as Russian forces are approaching a line of larger and more urban settlements. Current Russian efforts in the Pokrovsk direction are concentrated on achieving a tactical breakthrough near Zhelanne and Novohrodivka.[10] The next defensible line between the current forward Russian line of advance and Pokrovsk runs between the towns of Selydove, Novohrodivka, and Hrodivka, with many of the current Russian tactical advances focused specifically on the Novohrodivka-Hrodivka sector of the line (about five kilometers west of Russian positions in the Vesele area). Novohrodivka and Hrodivka had pre-war populations of about 14,000 and 2,000, respectively, and are larger and relatively more urban than many of the smaller settlements that Russian forces have seized since they began moving west of Avdiivka in February 2024.[11] These towns are by no means as large and urban as Mariupol or even Bakhmut, for example, but they pose a very different tactical problem set for advancing Russian forces, who have recently been mostly advancing across open fields, small windbreaks, and settlements that are a few blocks long. Russian forces in Ukraine have historically struggled with completing combat operations rapidly in more urbanized or residential areas—for example Russian forces fought in earnest over five months to seize Avdiivka, which is only a little larger than Novohrodivka. Ukrainian troops are notably more exhausted and attrited now than they were in early 2024 when Russian forces seized Avdiivka, which was also heavily fortified, and Russian troops will likely continue to exploit that reality to enable tactical advances. The rate of Russian advance is likely to slow nevertheless as Russian forces become engaged near and in these larger towns and settlements.

Russia's Central Grouping of Forces appears to be more rapidly redeploying and committing forces between different sectors of its recently expanded area of responsibility (AOR) in Donetsk Oblast than has been the norm in most of the theater recently. The Russian military recently expanded the Central Grouping of Forces AOR to include both the Toretsk and Pokrovsk directions and possibly to support select operations west and southwest of Donetsk City.[12] The Russian Central Grouping of Forces committed operational reserves of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division's 506th and 589th motorized rifle regiments (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) to the start of offensive operations in the Toretsk direction in June 2024 while the majority of the CMD's other elements remained committed in the Pokrovsk direction.[13] Elements of the 41st CAA's 90th Tank Division reportedly conducted a roughly reinforced battalion-size mechanized assault southwest of Donetsk City on July 24, although the majority of the 90th Tank Division's regiments appear committed to operations west of Avdiivka.[14] Mashovets stated on August 1 that the Russian Central Grouping of Forces regrouped ahead of the start of the Toretsk offensive operation in mid-June 2024 and planned to assign responsibility for the Toretsk front to the 41st CAA's three motorized rifle brigades (the 35th, 74th, and 55th motorized rifle brigades) and responsibility for the Pokrovsk effort to the 2nd CAA and the 90th Tank Division.[15] Mashovets stated that the Russian military command was attempting to opportunistically exploit relatively rapid tactical gains by committing elements of two regiments of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division to the Toretsk effort and that the Russian military command is now recommitting these elements to achieve the desired tactical encirclement in the Pokrovsk direction.[16] Mashovets stated that elements of the 35th, 74th, and 55th

motorized rifle brigades are currently conducting offensive operations in the Toretsk area, although ISW has observed widespread reporting of these elements fighting northwest of Avdiivka in recent weeks, and elements of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade operating in the Avdiivka area as recently as July 19.[17]

ISW has yet to observe confirmation that elements of the 41st CAA are operating near Toretsk beyond comments made by Mashovets, although Mashovets' reporting is consistent with what appears to be more rapid deployments between different sectors of the front within the Central Grouping of Forces' AOR. It is possible that the Russian military command is splitting formations and units between different sectors and committing smaller elements of the same units to exploit tactical opportunities in different areas. ISW will continue to track the Russian order of battle (ORBAT) in the Central Grouping's AOR to determine the contours of these apparently more rapid redeployments.

The Central Grouping of Forces may have established a more flexible command and control (C2) structure and may be responding more quickly to potential Ukrainian tactical vulnerabilities than other Russian groupings of forces in Ukraine. Russian forces have rapidly redeployed forces across different operational directions on several occasions to address vulnerabilities and strengthen groupings of forces conducting offensive and defensive operations, but rarely have groupings of forces rapidly redeployed the same elements multiple times in quick succession across different sectors within their AORs.[18] Russian groupings of forces in Ukraine have increasingly tasked smaller sectors of their AORs to the same units and formations in order to create more cohesive C2 and have typically only redeployed elements after regrouping those units in the rear for reconstitution and replenishment.[19] The Central Grouping of Forces' reported redeployment and commitment of elements of the same units in rapid succession suggests that the grouping has established a more flexible C2 structure and is attempting to improve how quickly Russian forces can commit forces to areas where tactical opportunities emerge. The Russian military command established the Central Grouping of Forces as an operational maneuver force following the Russian seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024, and flexible and more rapid force redeployments and commitments to exploit tactical Ukrainian vulnerabilities on separate smaller sectors of a wider front are consistent with that purpose.[20] The Central Grouping of Forces' expanded AOR has lengthened the front along which the grouping is attempting to exploit Ukrainian vulnerabilities, but the Central Grouping of Forces appears to be maintaining the more flexible C2 it likely created while trying to make significant tactical gains northwest of Avdiivka in Spring 2024.[21]

The Russian military command is pursuing consistent offensive operations throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine in an effort to stretch Ukrainian forces and weaken Ukrainian defenses, but the Russian military has largely failed to exploit these effects to achieve significant tactical gains or further meaningful operational objectives.[22] The Central Grouping of Forces may be more capable of achieving this goal than other Russian forces in Ukraine, however, if it can maintain its apparent flexible C2 structure and retain enough combat power to continue operations for a long enough period. The Central Grouping of Forces may be able to intentionally create pressure that generates tactical vulnerabilities along a wider front in Donetsk Oblast and then quickly seize on those tactical opportunities by redeploying forces within its AOR in a manner that other Russian force groupings have not demonstrated a capacity for.

A limited number of F-16 fighter jets have reportedly arrived in Ukraine, but it will likely be several months before Ukraine will be able to field the jets at scale. Western media reported on July 31 that the first batch of F-16s recently arrived in Ukraine and that Ukraine will receive more jets soon at an unspecified time.[23] Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis confirmed that an unspecified number of F-16s were in Ukraine on July 31 and recent footage purportedly shows an F-16 operating over Ukrainian airspace, but Ukrainian officials have declined to comment on the matter.[24] Ukrainian officials have previously discussed their intention to use F-16 and other fixed-wing aircraft as part of Ukraine's broader air defense umbrella in coordination with Ukraine's existing air defense systems but have repeatedly stressed that Ukraine will need to receive a substantial number of jets in order to implement this vision.[25] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Western countries to support Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia during an interview on August 1 and noted that the survival of the Ukrainian state depends on Western support for long-range Ukrainian strikes into Russia.[26] Ukrainian forces will almost certainly not be willing or able to integrate F-16s into routine air defense or long-range strike missions until they receive additional jets.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine will not compromise its sovereignty and territorial integrity in exchange for a diplomatic resolution to Russia's invasion. Zelensky stated during an interview with French media on August 1 that Ukraine is willing to pursue a diplomatic solution with Russia, but that Ukraine will never make territorial concessions to do so.[27] Zelensky emphasized that the Ukrainian government does not have the right to unilaterally renounce Ukrainian territory, stating that this would violate the Ukrainian constitution because this decision must take into account the will of the Ukrainian people. Zelensky noted that the Ukrainian government would have to hold a referendum to formally renounce any territory but did not suggest that the Ukrainian government or population has any interest in or intention to hold such a referendum. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly stated that Ukraine will not violate its sovereignty and territorial integrity by conceding any Ukrainian territory to Russia, and recent polling suggests that most Ukrainian citizens do not support territorial concessions.[28] Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine will have a plan for a second Global Peace Summit by November 2024 and that Ukraine's plan has wide

international support. Kremlin officials, meanwhile, continue to demand complete Ukrainian capitulation and the revocation of Ukraine's NATO aspirations while engaging in information operations intended to portray Ukraine's commitment to its sovereignty and territorial integrity as an outrageous ultimatum.[29]

Russia, Belarus, the US, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Turkey, and Norway conducted a high-profile prisoner exchange involving 26 prisoners from multiple countries on August 1. Turkey mediated the 26-prisoner swap, which took place in Ankara.[30] US officials confirmed the release of three US citizens — retired US Marine Paul Whelan, *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) journalist Evan Gershkovich, and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL) journalist Alsu Kurmasheva — seven Russian political prisoners, including Russian opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza — four German citizens from Russian detention — and one German citizen from Belarusian detention. [31] Russian President Vladimir Putin signed pardons for the 15 individuals released from Russian detention, and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a pardon for the German individual released from Belarusian detention.[32] The US, Germany, Poland, Norway, and Slovenia released eight imprisoned Russian nationals, including Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) contract killer Vadim Krasikov, Russian intelligence agents Artem and Anna Dultsev, Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU) agent Pavel Rubtsov, hacker Roman Seleznev, and businessman Vladislav Klyushin, and also returned two minors (reportedly the children of two of the released Russians). [33] Putin met the returned Russian prisoners on the tarmac at Vnukovo-2 airport in Moscow and stated that he is nominating them for state awards.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces continue to make slow, steady advances in the Pokrovsk direction (west of Avdiivka), largely enabled by Ukrainian manpower shortages and the terrain in the area immediately northwest of Avdiivka. Russian advances will likely slow further as Russian forces advance into a line of larger and more urban settlements.
- Russia's current rate of tactical advance towards Pokrovsk will likely not continue indefinitely, however, as Russian forces are approaching a line of larger and more urban settlements.
- Russia's Central Grouping of Forces appears to be more rapidly redeploying and committing forces between different sectors of its recently expanded area of responsibility (AOR) in Donetsk Oblast than has been the norm in most of the theater recently.
- The Central Grouping of Forces may have established a more flexible command and control (C2) structure and may be responding more quickly to potential Ukrainian tactical vulnerabilities than other Russian groupings of forces in Ukraine.
- A limited number of F-16 fighter jets have reportedly arrived in Ukraine, but it will likely be several months before Ukraine will be able to field the jets at scale.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated that Ukraine will not compromise its sovereignty and territorial integrity in exchange for a diplomatic resolution to Russia's invasion.
- Russia, Belarus, the US, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Turkey, and Norway conducted a high-profile prisoner exchange involving 26 prisoners from multiple countries on August 1.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Chasiv Yar, and Donetsk City.
- Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on August 1 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) may have significantly overstated the number of contract soldiers it claims to have recruited between Fall 2022 and April 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 31, 2024

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

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

July 31, 2024, 6:20pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on July 31. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Israel conducted an airstrike killing Hamas Political Bureau Chairperson Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iran to derail attempts to establish peace in the Middle East.[1] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) also responded to Haniyeh's death, stating that it "strongly condemned" Haniyeh's assassination and emphasized that Haniyeh's assassination occurred during his visit to Tehran for Masoud Pezeshkian's presidential inauguration.[2] The Russian MFA did not explicitly implicate Israel but claimed that the "organizers of this political assassination" were aware of the "dangerous consequences" Haniyeh's death would have on the entire region. Russia's decision to publicly blame Israel for destabilizing peace prospects in the Middle East and indirectly threaten Israel with "dangerous consequences" demonstrates Russia's increasing willingness to publicly align with Iran amid deepening Russian-Iranian military cooperation. [3] Russian President Vladimir Putin has increasingly expressed anti-Israel positions since the start of the Israel–Hamas war in October 2023 and notably amplified information operations designed to justify

Iranian aggression against Israel, including the April 13 large-scale missile and drone strikes against Israel.[4]

The Russian State Duma revised some aspects of a recent bill criminalizing Russian soldiers' use of personal devices on the battlefield following outcry in the Russian ultranationalist community. The Russian State Duma Defense Committee recommended on July 30 that the Duma repeal its prior approval of the bill, and the State Duma adopted a new version of the bill on July 31 clarifying that Russian soldiers will not be subject to disciplinary arrest for using or wearing devices to perform combat operations.[5] Russian milbloggers largely celebrated the revision, with most praising the State Duma for its willingness to listen to the Russian ultranationalist information space.[6] Some milbloggers were still cautious, however, advocating for the State Duma to completely repeal the law and noting that the State Duma should repeal other unspecified laws in line with "common sense." [7] One milblogger continued to criticize the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for this bill, claiming that the MoD has failed to change ineffective structural entities responsible for the MoD's public relations and noting that the MoD should consider how this bill hurts its image.[8] Russian milbloggers largely ignored the fact that the State Duma's revisions do not address many of the milbloggers' initial concerns, including the lack of MoD-provided devices for Russian soldiers to use for their duties, the lack of criteria for distinguishing between a personal device and a service device, using this bill as an excuse to justify harsh punishments against conscripts or disliked subordinates, and depriving Russian soldiers of their ability to contact family members and raise awareness of corruption or incompetence of their commanders.[9] It remains unclear if the Russian military command will be able or willing to enforce punishment for the use of personal devices in Ukraine, and the Russian military will likely find it extremely difficult to eliminate its dependence on insecure personal devices for many frontline tasks. [10]

Russian officials may be taking steps to address domestic security issues following the March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack and June 2024 shootings in the Republic of Dagestan. Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov stated on July 31 that the Crocus City Hall and Dagestan attacks challenged Russian law enforcement and society and showed that the Russian government has made "mistakes" in its counter-terrorism policies.[11] Krasnov stated that the Russian government needs to inspect its policies and respond to terrorist threats in a "fundamentally different way." Actors affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) conducted the Crocus City Hall and likely conducted the Dagestan attacks, and Russian security personnel largely failed to rapidly and sufficiently respond to both events.[12] The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed it prevented a terrorist attack in the Republic of Adygea on July 11, and Russian security forces may be intensifying proactive counter-terrorism operations in response to government pressure, although ISW cannot confirm the veracity of the FSB's reporting.[13] The Russian government, however, has largely chosen to posture that it is adequately combating the threat of domestic terrorism, but it is unclear what change, if any, in Russian counterterrorism policies may come from Krasnov's proposals.[14]

Ukrainian forces struck a weapons and equipment warehouse in Kursk City on the night of July 30 to 31. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a warehouse in Kursk City and that Ukrainian forces are conducting a battle damage assessment.[15] Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that Ukrainian forces struck an unspecified facility in Kursk Oblast and caused the facility to catch fire.[16] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed an unspecified number of Ukrainian drones and missiles, including at least one Neptune anti-ship missile, over Kursk Oblast.[17] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov told *Radio Svoboda* on July 31 that recent "explosion[s]" at the Olenya Airfield in Murmansk Oblast damaged the frames of two Tu-22M3 bombers.[18] Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a successful drone strike against the airfield on the night of July 26 to 27.[19]

Russian border guards withdrew from Armenia's main international airport. Armenian and Russian sources reported on July 31 that Russian border guards left Zvartnots International Airport in Yerevan, Armenia.[20] Armenian authorities requested in March 2024 that Russia remove its border guards from the airport by August 1 because Armenia can conduct its own border control without the help of Russian border guards who had been stationed at the airport since 1992.[21]

Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Israel conducted an airstrike killing Hamas Political Bureau Chairperson Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iran to derail attempts to establish peace in the Middle East.
- The Russian State Duma revised some aspects of a recent bill criminalizing Russian soldiers' use of personal devices on the battlefield following outcry in the Russian ultranationalist community.
- Russian officials may be taking steps to address domestic security issues following the March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack and June 2024 shootings in the Republic of Dagestan.
- Ukrainian forces struck a weapons and equipment warehouse in Kursk City on the night of July 30 to 31.
- Russian border guards withdrew from Armenia's main international airport.

- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Svatove, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Donetsk City and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on July 31 increasing financial incentives for signing a Russian military service contract, likely to support ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 30, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 30, 2024, 7:15pm ET

Russian forces conducted five platoon- to battalion-sized mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast on July 29 and 30. Such localized mechanized pushes are likely the manifestation of Russia's forecasted summer offensive—Russian forces likely lack the wider operational capacity to mount a separate renewed offensive operation in Donetsk Oblast or elsewhere on the front this summer. Geolocated footage published on July 29 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced on the southwestern outskirts of Kostyantynivka (southwest of Donetsk City) during a reinforced-battalion sized mechanized assault.[1] The same Ukrainian brigade that repelled the July 24 reinforced-battalion sized mechanized assault near Kostyantynivka reported that Russian forces committed 10 tanks, 47 armored fighting vehicles, 10 motorcycles, and a "buggy" to the July 29 assault and that Ukrainian forces struck eight tanks, 12 armored fighting vehicles, nine motorcycles, and the buggy.[2] Additional geolocated footage and Ukrainian reporting indicate that Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful reduced-company sized mechanized assault southwest of Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City) on the morning of July 29 and that Russian forces marginally advanced southwest of the settlement during a separate reinforced-platoon sized mechanized assault on July 30.[3] Ukrainian sources published footage and reported on July 29 that Russian forces also conducted an unsuccessful reinforced-company sized mechanized assault in an unspecified area of the Kurakhove direction (west of Marinka) and an unsuccessful reinforced-platoon sized mechanized assault near Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[4] Ukrainian forces previously blunted a reinforced-battalion sized Russian mechanized assault near Kostyantynivka on July 24 and a reinforced-company sized assault near the settlement on July 25.[5] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces are likely attempting to seize Kostyantynivka and cut the Vuhledar-Kostyantynivka T-0524 highway, forcing Ukrainians to retreat from the area.[6]

Periodic and pulsating Russian mechanized assaults likely represent the extent of Russia's current offensive capacity, and Russia is unlikely to mount a distinct new summer offensive operation due to material and manpower constraints. ISW previously noted that Russian forces have struggled to conduct simultaneous large-scale offensive operations throughout the war but are prone to conducting offensive operations in "pulses" along different sectors of the front, with one sector decreasing in intensity as another sector increases.[7] Russian forces have conducted periodic platoon and company-sized mechanized assaults in the Lyman, Chasiv Yar, and Avdiivka directions in Donetsk Oblast throughout the summer, and have more recently intensified assaults west and southwest of Donetsk City.[8] Russian forces also reportedly recommitted elements of the Central Military District's (CMD) 90th Tank Division (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA]) from Avdiivka to southwest of Donetsk City, suggesting that the Russian military command may assess that Russian forces are unlikely to make rapid tactical gains near Avdiivka and are re-prioritizing the Donetsk City area.[9] Russian forces are likely to commit additional mechanized forces to the area in order to exploit weak spots in the Ukrainian line and achieve some territorial advances, however limited, during the summer of 2024.

The Russian military command may assess that these periodic, pulsating mechanized assaults are either sufficient to accomplish the command's revised, more limited objectives for the summer of 2024 or that these assaults are the extent of Russian forces' current capabilities. Western media, citing unspecified Ukrainian sources, reported in December 2023 and January 2024 that Russian forces planned to seize the remaining territory of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts during a large-scale offensive operation in the summer of 2024, but Russian forces likely revised those plans following the passage of US military assistance to Ukraine in April 2024.[10] The Kremlin, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, has also previously tried to oversell the seizure of tiny frontline settlements west of Avdiivka as major battlefield victories for informational purposes.[11] The Russian military command may intend to present limited tactical advances in western Donetsk Oblast (an area of Ukraine whose geography the average Russian has no familiarity with), including cutting the Vuhledar-Kostyantynivka highway, as a major victory to the Russian people. The Russian military command may also be trying to push degraded Russian forces in the area to advance as far as possible before their combat capabilities culminate, regardless of the losses those forces take in the process.

The Russian military command's willingness to accept costly armored vehicle losses without conducting a large-scale, multi-directional offensive operation or making operationally significant advances in western Donetsk Oblast will likely burden the Russian military in the long-term.[12] Russian forces currently appear to have enough armored vehicles to conduct periodic

company-sized and larger mechanized assaults throughout the frontline in the near- to medium-term. It is unclear, however, if Russian forces have the necessary armored vehicle reserves to conduct simultaneous large-scale offensive operations in several sectors of the front and to replace increased armored vehicle losses that would result from intensified mechanized operations. 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 years.[13] The cost of this approach will continue to be high if the Russian military command continues to fail to internalize lessons learned about the difficulties of mechanized maneuver on a nearly transparent battlefield in Ukraine and if the Russian government remains averse to further mobilizing the Russian defense industry.[14]

The ongoing Russian offensive operations are also costly for Ukrainian defenders and are likely meant to degrade Ukrainian capabilities through attrition whether or not they gain much ground. This attritional approach is consistent with Putin's overall strategy for Ukraine that relies on the assumption that Russia will be able to hold any ground Russian forces take and that Russia will win by outlasting Western support for Ukraine.[15]

Russian milbloggers have been uncharacteristically quiet about recent Russian mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast. Many Russian milbloggers who usually flout Russian advances and criticize perceived and actual ineptitudes in Russian offensive operations were notably silent about the reinforced-battalion sized Russian mechanized assault on July 24 and several reinforced-battalion sized and smaller mechanized assaults on July 29 and 30. A Russian milblogger claimed on July 29 that Russian forces are suffering high losses near Donetsk City, suggesting that Russian milbloggers may be purposefully self-censoring commentary about heavily attritional Russian assaults to avoid damaging Russian morale and drawing increased potential censorship measures from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Kremlin.[16] The Russian MoD has been promoting self-censorship among Russian milbloggers since Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's June 2023 rebellion and has been attempting to co-opt Russian milbloggers to create a cadre of loyal military commentators, so the majority of milbloggers' silence could be due to overt state- and self-censorship efforts.[17] A prominent Kremlin-awarded milblogger was one of the first milbloggers to comment on the recent Russian mechanized assaults near Donetsk City on July 30.[18] Other less prominent and well-connected milbloggers may assess that it is safe to discuss the July 29 and 30 Russian mechanized assaults after a more authoritative source indicated the permissibility of discussing the topic.

North Korea may be expanding the volume and variety of weapons it is providing to Russia. A Ukrainian battalion operating in the Ukraine-Belgorod Oblast border area reported on July 30 that Russian forces northwest of Shebekino, Belgorod Oblast are fielding a North Korean provided Bulsae-4 anti-tank guided missile system mounted on a North Korean-M2010 wheeled armored personnel carrier (APC).[19] Several Russian milbloggers cautiously amplified the Ukrainian report but questioned its veracity.[20] ISW cannot independently confirm if Russian forces in Belgorod Oblast are using a North Korean-provided system, but if confirmed, this report would indicate a step up in the types of weapons that North Korea has been providing to Russia. North Korea-focused outlet *NK Pro* reported on July 26 that satellite imagery indicates that North Korea is intensifying its production of anti-tank missiles, likely due to growing Russian interest in procuring North Korean munitions.[21] *NK Pro* found that North Korea started building a large production facility at the Sinuiju Measuring Instrument Factory in May 2024 and began upgrading several production facilities at the Taegwan Glass Factory in June 2024, both of which produce anti-tank missiles. The increase in volume and variety of North Korean weapons provisions to Russia is likely a stipulation of the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement that Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un signed during Putin's visit to Pyongyang in June 2024.[22]

The Kremlin is likely attempting to corral Russian information space actors onto social media sites that the Kremlin can more directly influence to directly control their rhetoric, prompting some backlash from Russian ultranationalist milbloggers and opposition journalists. The Russian State Duma approved a series of bills on July 30, including one that requires administrators of social media accounts with more than 10,000 subscribers to submit their personal identification information to Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor and requires owners of social media sites with more than 500,000 users to provide users' personal data to Roskomnadzor or the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) starting on November 1.[23] Duma Information Policy Committee Head Alexander Khinshtein, who spearheaded the bills, noted that the change about administrators' personal data will create a closed register of approved social media channels, provide approved channels with a visual designator to mark them as approved to social media users, and that Russian channels not registered with Roskomnadzor will be prohibited from publishing advertisements or soliciting donations on their channels.[24] Russian milbloggers largely rely on income from advertisements to sustain their channels documenting the war in Ukraine, and the Kremlin has previously restricted Russian businesses' abilities to advertise on channels owned by those designated as "foreign agents." [25] Some prominent Russian ultranationalist voices criticized this measure, expressing concerns that providing their personal data to Roskomnadzor may compromise their personal safety if malign actors obtain that data.[26] Russian-backed former Ukrainian separatist politician Oleg Tsaryov, who previously accused the Russian MoD of spearheading the milblogger deanonymization bill, expressed concern about how Russian social media networks will implement these measures and collaborate with the Russian government.[27] Russian opposition journalists and

media outlets have also expressed concern that ongoing Russian censorship measures will impact their ability to operate safely within Russia.[28] The Kremlin has also recently been attempting to set conditions to compel Russians to stop using YouTube and pivot to Russian state-controlled alternatives by throttling streaming speeds.[29] A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger similarly criticized these slowdowns, noting that the Russian government has not improved the speed and infrastructure of Kremlin-affiliated Vkontakte (VK), whose video service has been floated as a likely replacement for YouTube in the coming months.[30]

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Vozy, Kursk Oblast on the night of July 29 to 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and other Ukrainian forces struck the oil depot in Vozy causing a fire and noted that the Ukrainian forces are still confirming the damage to the oil depot.[31] Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that a Ukrainian drone strike caused a fire at three fuel tanks at an oil depot in Kursk Oblast.[32] Smirnov also claimed that Russian forces destroyed four Ukrainian missiles over Oktyabrsky and Kurchatovsky raions on the night of July 29 to 30.[33]

The Russian government continues to support educational programs on "information and hybrid warfare" aimed at training Russians to conduct and counter information operations, use open-source research methodology, and to effectively analyze and counter hybrid threats for the Kremlin. An ultranationalist Russian milblogger and journalist advertised on July 30 applications to a six-month professional training program at the Alter Academy of Political Science in Moscow that will teach Russian professionals to defend against and conduct information and hybrid operations.[34] The Russian milblogger who advertised this course on information and hybrid warfare is one of the several Russian military-focused journalists listed as teachers of the program.[35] The Alter Academy of Political Science stated that it created this course and several others on "proxy intelligence and intelligence support for information operations" and "proxy intelligence for non-governmental organizations (NGOs)" in accordance with the February 28, 2024, Russian Presidential Decree to improve Russia's scientific and technological development.[36] These programs feature experts who are current and former employees of Russian state security organs, including the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and Rosgvardia. The Russian government has previously tried to promote similar educational programs on conducting information and hybrid warfare at Moscow State University (MGU), although the university reportedly disbanded its master's program in information and hybrid warfare in December 2023 due to student concerns over job prospects and faculty problems.[37] The Russian government will likely continue attempts to expand its educational programs on information and hybrid warfare to grow the cadre of civilian Russian youth and professionals interested and capable of conducting information, influence, and hybrid operations against Russia's enemies and allies.

Russian officials and Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) representatives are advocating for the Kremlin to codify a state ideology premised on the idea that the sovereign Ukrainian state should not exist, into Russian federal law. The Second All-Russian Forum of the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir) World Russian People's Council occurred in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea, on July 29.[38] The main objective of the forum was to "discuss and develop mechanisms for the political, scientific, and legal recognition and consolidation of the doctrine of the trinity of the Russian people." [39] Russian officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin, have frequently invoked the "trinity doctrine," or the ideological concept suggesting that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians are a "triune" and forcibly separated people, to make the claim that Ukrainians are not a sovereign people, with the implication that Ukraine has no right to be a sovereign state.[40] The Second All-Russian Forum sought to codify this ideology and submitted a resolution and draft regulatory acts entitled "On the Trinity of the Russian People" and "On the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation for the Protection, Preservation, and Strengthening of the Trinity of Russian People" to Russian legislative and executive bodies following the forum. These draft laws seek to make real the fallacy that Ukraine and its people are ideologically inextricable from Russia and privilege the idea of "reunification" of Ukrainians with Russia as the core of the ideology supporting Russia's occupation of Ukraine. If these laws should pass, they may allow Russian authorities an even more extensive legal framework on which to legislate the occupation of Ukraine by codifying the definition of Ukrainians living in occupied Ukraine as "Russians" who must be reunited with their "homeland." Codifying an ideology into Russian law would legally require an amendment to the Russian Constitution, as Article 13 forbids Russia from proclaiming a state ideology and commits the Russian state to recognizing ideological diversity.[41]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces conducted five platoon- to battalion-sized mechanized assaults in western Donetsk Oblast on July 29 and 30. Such localized mechanized pushes are likely the manifestation of Russia's forecasted summer offensive—Russian forces likely lack the wider operational capacity to mount a separate renewed offensive operation in Donetsk Oblast or elsewhere on the front this summer.**
- **The Russian military command's willingness to accept costly armored vehicle losses without conducting a large-scale, multi-directional offensive operation or making operationally significant advances in western Donetsk Oblast will likely burden the Russian military in the long-term. The ongoing Russian offensive operations are also**

- costly for Ukrainian defenders and are likely meant to degrade Ukrainian capabilities through attrition whether or not they gain much ground.
- North Korea may be expanding the volume and variety of weapons it is providing to Russia.
 - The Kremlin is likely attempting to corral Russian information space actors onto social media sites that the Kremlin can more directly influence to directly control their rhetoric, prompting some backlash from Russian ultranationalist milbloggers and opposition journalists.
 - Ukrainian forces struck a Russian oil depot in Vozy, Kursk Oblast on the night of July 29 to 30.
 - The Russian government continues to support educational programs on "information and hybrid warfare" aimed at training Russians to conduct and counter information operations, use open-source research methodology, and to effectively analyze and counter hybrid threats for the Kremlin.
 - Russian officials and Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) representatives are advocating for the Kremlin to codify a state ideology premised on the idea that the sovereign Ukrainian state should not exist, into Russian federal law.
 - Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar and southwest of Donetsk City.
 - Authorities in St. Petersburg have joined other Russian regional authorities in increasing financial incentives for recruits to sign military service contracts.
 - UK newspaper *The Times* published a story on July 29 detailing how Russian authorities are indoctrinating deported Ukrainian children through military-patriotic education programs.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 29, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 29, 2024, 8pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on July 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 29 the provision of security assistance to Ukraine worth \$200 million from the authorization of a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package and an additional package worth \$1.5 billion in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds.[1] The DoD stated that the PDA package will include air defense interceptors, munitions for rocket and artillery systems, and anti-tank weapons. The DoD reported that the USAI package includes munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), short- and medium-range air defense munitions, RIM-7 air defense missiles, ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, 155mm and 105mm shells, 120mm mortar rounds, and other munitions and equipment. The DoD noted that this is the Biden administration's 20th USAI package and 62nd tranche of equipment provided to Ukraine since August 2021.

The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to codify desired behavioral norms within Russia by cracking down against undesirable behavior in the Russian information space and within migrant communities. The Russian State Duma Committee on Information Policy approved amendments to the law "On Communications" on July 29 that would allow the Russian president to impose restrictions on information to protect the "foundations of [Russian] constitutional order, morality, rights and legitimate interests of others" and to "ensure [Russia's] defense and state security." [2] Current Russian legislation allocates this power to federal, and not executive, laws.[3] The approved amendments to "On Communications" would also give Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor the right to manage communications networks and remove "prohibited" information at the request of the Russian Prosecutor General and deputy prosecutors general.[4] If approved by the wider Russian State Duma and then further passed through the Russian legislature, these amendments would establish Russian President Vladimir Putin as the direct arbiter of which behavior and ideals are allowed and prohibited in the Russian information space. These amendments set conditions for the Kremlin to intensify ongoing crackdowns against undesirable rhetoric in the Russian information space under the guise of vague labels intended to classify communities or behaviors that are as undesirable and anti-Russian, as is the current case with Russian legal definitions of extremism. The Duma Information Policy Committee also supported a recently proposed amendment that would require the administrators of channels with more than 10,000 followers on social media sites, including YouTube, to provide their personal information to Roskomnadzor.[5]

Russian authorities are beginning to link their efforts to crack down on the information space to efforts to control migrant behavior, establishing a standard for acceptable behavior that appeals directly to Russian ultranationalists. Russian Liberal Democratic Party Head Leonid Slutsky proposed on July 29 that Russia establish a "Migrant Code" obliging migrants to integrate into Russian cultural, linguistic,

legal, and behavioral norms.[6] State Duma Deputy Speaker Irina Yarovaya stated that a Duma commission has completed its new migration policy proposals that aim to crack down against illegal immigration and false documentation and has submitted these proposals to the Cabinet of Ministers and the Supreme Court.[7] The bill that would require the deanonymization of social media channels with more than 10,000 subscribers also contains a separate provision that would limit migrants' ability to purchase more than 10 SIM cards per person, limiting the ability for migrant communities to obtain mobile phone numbers that help illegal migrants obtain certain jobs in Russia.[8]

The Kremlin is likely attempting to establish prominent standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior among populations within Russia whose behavior has recently threatened the Kremlin.[9] Many facets of the Russian ultranationalist information space supported then-Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's June 2023 rebellion following months of online complaints against the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s conduct of the war in Ukraine, prompting the MoD to crack down against prominent complainants and promote self-censorship among milbloggers.[10] Russian opposition groups voice their opposition to the Kremlin, its wars, and other policies online, and the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) designated 55 of these organizations, including regional organizations advocating for ethnic minorities, as "extremist" organizations on July 29 in an effort to stifle them.[11] Russian ultranationalists have levied widespread complaints against migrants following multiple high-profile terrorist attacks, and the Kremlin is undertaking surface-level measures that largely appease the ultranationalist community and provide further mechanisms through which the MoD can coerce migrants into military service while broadly failing to address the rising threat of Islamic extremism in Russia.[12]

Much of the Russian information space response to the recent Tuareg insurgent ambush of a Wagner Group in northern Mali coalesced around the suggestion that the Russian MoD will seek to benefit from Wagner losses, highlighting the continued distrust between the Russian MoD and both the Wagner Group in the Sahel and pro-Wagner commentators. Several prominent critical milbloggers claimed that the Russian MoD is "gloating" over losses the Wagner Group reportedly suffered during the attack and suggested that Russian military authorities will use this incident as a reason to end the deployment of Wagner personnel to the Sahel and completely supplant them with units of the Russian MoD's Africa Corps.[13] Some Russian milbloggers quoted an unidentified source within the Russian Presidential Administration as saying that Africa Corps personnel will replace Wagner troops in the entire "Sahelian Three" (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger). [14] Other milbloggers blamed the Wagner command for incompetence and attempts to sabotage the arrival of Africa Corps personnel, highlighting the persistent information space divides between Wagner and Africa Corps-affiliated commentators.[15] Another Russian-veteran-community-linked milblogger more broadly called for Russia to learn from the incident, strongly emphasizing that Russian forces operating abroad should not expect to face "safe" adversaries and that Russia needs to commit more heavily to foreign operations to ensure sufficient personnel and equipment levels for Russian contingents abroad.[16]

The Africa Corps, notably, likely lacks the current capacity to properly supplant Wagner operations, particularly in Mali, as Africa Corps elements have recently deployed to Ukraine to aid Russian offensive efforts in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[17] Supplanting Wagner at scale following losses such as those accrued in the recent ambush would likely involve re-deploying some Africa Corps fighters to Mali away from the frontline in Ukraine, and the Russian military command likely does not see completely supplanting Wagner in Mali or elsewhere in the Sahel as a priority effort at this time.

Ukrainian drones struck Russian energy and utility infrastructure in Oryol, Voronezh, and Belgorod oblasts on the night of July 28 to 29. Oryol Oblast Governor Andrei Klychkov claimed that Russian forces shot down two drones in Glazunovsky Raion on the night of July 28 to 29 and that falling debris damaged a power plant.[18] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that Russian forces suppressed a drone and that falling debris landed on a utility infrastructure facility in Gazoprovod.[19] Local Russian sources and Russian opposition media reported that Ukrainian drones struck a power substation in Tomarovka, Belgorod Oblast and started a fire.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed nine drones over Belgorod Oblast and three drones over Voronezh Oblast overnight.[21] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on July 29 that the Ukrainian drone strike against the Olenya Airfield in Murmansk Oblast on the night of July 26 to 27 damaged a Russian strategic bomber. [22] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on July 27 that sources stated that GUR drones damaged a Tu-22M3 strategic bomber at the airfield.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 29 the provision of security assistance to Ukraine worth \$200 million from the authorization of a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package and an additional package worth \$1.5 billion in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds.
- The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to codify desired behavioral norms within Russia by cracking down against undesirable behavior in the Russian information space and within migrant communities.
- The Kremlin is likely attempting to establish prominent standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior among populations within Russia whose behavior has recently

threatened the Kremlin.

- Much of the Russian information space response to the recent Tuareg insurgent ambush of a Wagner Group in northern Mali coalesced around the suggestion that the Russian MoD will seek to benefit from Wagner losses, highlighting the continued distrust between the Russian MoD and both the Wagner Group in the Sahel and pro-Wagner commentators.
- Ukrainian drones struck Russian energy and utility infrastructure in Oryol, Voronezh, and Belgorod oblasts on the night of July 28 to 29.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances northeast of Kharkiv City, in Vovchansk, near Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Russian government continues to take legislative steps to use migrants and newly naturalized citizens to fulfill Russian military personnel needs.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 28, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 28, 2024, 6:15pm 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 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 12:15pm ET on July 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to use nuclear saber-rattling to target Western decision-making and promote Western self-deterrence. Putin spoke at the Main Naval Parade in St. Petersburg on July 28 and claimed that if the US deploys long-range missile systems in Germany in 2026, the flight time to Russian industrial and defense targets will be about 10 minutes.[1] Putin also commented on US deployments of Typhon Mid-Range Capability (MRC) missile systems to Denmark and the Philippines for joint exercises. Putin threatened that if the US implements plans to deploy missile systems to these countries, Russia will no longer be bound by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and will take "mirror measures" to deploy unspecified systems that are currently in the final stages of development to unspecified locations. Putin claimed that Russian strategic missile carriers stopped conducting air patrols after the end of the Cold War but resumed these flights in 2007 in response to increased US strategic and reconnaissance aviation activity in areas of the world that are "sensitive to Russia" and in order to "ensure security in the Asia-Pacific region." The US and Germany announced in June 2024 that the US will begin "episodic deployments" of long-range fire capabilities, including Standard Missile 6 (SM-6) and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles, in Germany starting in 2026 in order to demonstrate US commitment to NATO.[2] The US Army Pacific stated in April 2024 that it deployed the MRC missile system that can fire SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles to the Philippines as part of exercises, and the US Navy announced in May 2024 that it conducted containerized missile launcher rehearsals with the Danish military on Bornholm Island, Denmark.[3] The current location of the MRC systems is unclear, but the US has not announced that it is deploying the systems to Denmark and the Philippines for purposes beyond the previous exercises. Putin officially suspended Russia's participation in the INF Treaty that banned ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, in March 2019, but Russia has already permanently deployed nuclear capable Iskander-M ballistic missiles, with a reported range of up to 500 kilometers, in Kaliningrad Oblast since 2018.[4] Putin is falsely trying to present the Russian deployment of missiles previously banned under the INF Treaty as an inflection, likely as part of his repeated efforts to use nuclear saber-rattling to push the West to self-deter.[5]

Russia used Navy Day celebrations to showcase Russia's relations with a number of non-Western states as part of efforts to create a supposed Russian-led group of states to rally against the West. Ships from the Chinese, Algerian, and Indian navies participated in the Main Naval Parade in St. Petersburg, and representatives from 31 states, including Azerbaijan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Cuba, Libya, Myanmar, Syria, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and South Africa, took part in events in St. Petersburg; the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria; and the Baltic, Caspian, and North seas.[6] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin met with Commander of the PLA Navy Hu Zhongming and discussed cooperation between Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the naval sphere.[7] Fomin also met with Myanmar's Navy Commander Win Htein to discuss further naval cooperation between Myanmar and Russia.[8] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also met with Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan in Kuala Lumpur on July 28 and agreed to increase

Russian–Malaysian diplomatic contacts.[9] Russia has recently increased its cooperation with a number of these states, including Venezuela, Cuba, India, and Vietnam.[10]

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian oil depot in Plevaya, Kursk Oblast on the night of July 27 to 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and other Ukrainian forces struck Plevaya oil depot, causing an explosion and fire.[11] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Plevaya oil depot consists of 11 tanks with a total volume of 7,000 cubic meters and supplied oil to the Russian military. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that an explosion also occurred at an electrical substation in Kursk Oblast but that it is still clarifying details about the damage to the oil depot and substation. Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov claimed that Ukrainian drones struck the oil depot causing three fuel tanks to catch fire.[12] Footage published on July 28 purportedly shows a fire at the Plevaya oil depot.[13] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces downed two Ukrainian drones over Kursk Oblast.[14]

A rebel coalition in Mali reportedly killed and wounded dozens of Russian servicemen and Wagner Group mercenaries as well as a prominent Wagner-affiliated milblogger on the Mali-Algeria border on July 27.[15] The Permanent Strategic Framework for Peace, Security and Development (CSP-PSD) rebel movement claimed that it "routed the entire column of Malian army and Russian mercenaries," and the Critical Threats Project's (CTP) Africa File will cover the situation in northern Mali in its upcoming update.[16] Social media footage reportedly showed numerous killed Wagner and Malian personnel — including the body of the administrator of the "Grey Zone" Telegram channel Nikita Fedyanin, who routinely covered Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and harshly criticized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[17] Sources within Fedyanin's close circle confirmed Fedyanin's death to Russian state newswire TASS on July 28.[18] A Russian insider source claimed that Wagner losses amounted to 33 killed and 18 wounded, and various Russian sources claimed that CSP-PSD captured several prisoners — with some speculating that Wagner commander Anton Yelizarov (known under the alias "Lotos") was captured.[19] Russian sources claimed that the Russian MoD's Africa Corps successfully mediated a prisoner exchange with CSP-PSD.[20] One Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian MoD paid ransoms for every captured Wagner mercenary except for Yelizarov, and several other milbloggers claimed that Yelizarov died in the ambush.[21] ISW cannot independently verify whether Yelizarov is captured or dead. ISW previously reported that Yelizarov overestimated his ability to convince former Wagner personnel to join Rosgvardia during his efforts to maintain a Wagner contingent and avoid joining the Russian MoD.[22]

Primorsky Krai Governor Oleg Kozhemyako recently announced the creation of an independent volunteer unit to police migrants as the Russian government continues efforts to expand its control over migrants in Russia. Kozhemyako announced on July 25 the formation of the "Tiger-Law and Order Squad," consisting of 300 veterans of the Russian war in Ukraine, that will "ensure public safety" and "put [newcomers] in their place" in Vladivostok.[23] Kozhemyako stated that the Tiger-Law and Order Squad will coordinate with Rosgvardia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and intends to expand patrols to other cities in Primorsky Krai after the squad recruits more personnel. Kuzhemyako claimed that the Tiger-Law and Order Squad will eventually be equipped with a patrol bus and a vehicle equipped with both communications and a drone-aerial surveillance system. ISW has previously observed local Russian officials enacting harsher measures against migrants as Russian government officials attempt to enact more restrictive policies at a national level.[24] The formation of a squad dedicated to policing migrants indicates that at least some local Russian government officials have likely caved to Russian ultranationalist demands to heavily restrict migrant activity in Russia despite Russian government efforts to utilize migrants to offset domestic labor shortages. The decision to use veterans of the war in Ukraine to staff these anti-migrant law enforcement units may be part of an effort to capitalize on the combat skillset and nationalist ideology of Russian veterans to integrate them into Russian society, especially as the Kremlin is reportedly concerned about the long-term social and political implications of Russian veterans returning from the war in Ukraine.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to use nuclear saber-rattling to target Western decision-making and promote Western self-deterrence.**
- **Russia used Navy Day celebrations to showcase Russia's relations with a number of non-Western states as part of efforts to create a supposed Russian-led group of states to rally against the West.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian oil depot in Plevaya, Kursk Oblast on the night of July 27 to 28.**
- **A rebel coalition in Mali reportedly killed and wounded dozens of Russian servicemen and Wagner Group mercenaries as well as a prominent Wagner-affiliated milblogger on the Mali-Algeria border on July 27.**
- **Primorsky Krai Governor Oleg Kozhemyako recently announced the creation of an independent volunteer unit to police migrants as the Russian government continues efforts to expand its control over migrants in Russia.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Avdiivka, west of Donetsk City, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in the Siversk direction.**

- Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets assessed that the Russian military may need to accumulate up to 320,000 additional personnel in Ukraine in order to achieve its reported plans to deploy 690,000 troops in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 27, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 27, 2024, 3:00pm ET

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against an oil refinery and Russian military airfields in Saratov, Ryazan, and Murmansk oblasts on the night of July 26 to 27. Sources with Ukrainian special services told Ukrainian media that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) struck Russian military airfields in Engels, Saratov Oblast; the Dyaghilev Airfield and an oil refinery in Ryazan Oblast; and the Olenya Airfield in Murmansk Oblast with drones.[1] *Suspilne's* sources reported that Russian forces base an unspecified number of Tu-95, Tu-22, Tu-134, and Il-78 (tanker) aircraft at the Dyaghilev Airfield and that the GUR drones damaged a TU-22M3 strategic bomber at the Olenya Airfield. Russian officials, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed an unspecified number of drones over Saratov and Ryazan oblasts, although Russian sources published footage of Ukrainian drones operating over Ryazan City.[2] Additional sources told *Suspilne* that GUR "sabotage activities" damaged an Mi-28 and a Ka-226 helicopter at an aircraft construction enterprise in Moscow Oblast on July 21 and destroyed another Mi-8 helicopter at the Kryazh Airfield in Samara Oblast on July 24. [3] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated during an interview with UK outlet *The Guardian* published on July 24 that Ukrainian drones had targeted around 200 critical infrastructure sites connected to military logistics in rear areas of Russia since the start of the full-scale invasion.[4]

Russia continues to deepen bilateral relations with Iran and North Korea in exchange for the provision of lethal aid to the Russian military for use in Ukraine. Iranian state-affiliated media outlet *Mehr News Agency* reported on July 23 that Iran will launch its "Hod Hod" and "Kosar" satellites into low earth orbit from an unspecified Russian station in October 2024.[5] *Bloomberg* reported on July 25 that South Korea's Bank of Korea estimated that North Korea's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 3.1 percent in 2023 compared to 2022 after annual contractions since 2019.[6] The Bank of Korea estimated that North Korea's heavy and chemical industries, particularly the production of iron, steel, copper, nickel, and aluminum, grew the most in 2023 by 8.1 percent. South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik previously stated that Russia's provision of food to North Korea in exchange for weapons helped North Korea stabilize prices and likely boosted North Korean domestic manufacturing.[7] North Korea has reportedly transferred as many as 4.8 million artillery shells to Russia, and Iran has supplied Shahed-136/131 drones and components to Russia.[8]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against an oil refinery and Russian military airfields in Saratov, Ryazan, and Murmansk oblasts on the night of July 26 to 27.
- Russia continues to deepen bilateral relations with Iran and North Korea in exchange for the provision of lethal aid to the Russian military for use in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained positions near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced west and southwest of Donetsk City, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced in Vovchansk.
- The Russian government continues efforts to use the "Time of Heroes" program to integrate Russian veterans into society.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 26, 2024

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

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

July 26, 2024, 6:45pm ET

The Russian military has recently expanded the Russian Central Grouping of Forces' area of responsibility (AOR) in Donetsk Oblast, suggesting that the Russian military command has deprioritized the grouping's previous task to act solely as an operational maneuver force in the Avdiivka direction. The Russian military command may instead be tasking the Central Grouping of Forces with overseeing the bulk of Russia's main offensive efforts in Donetsk Oblast. Russian forces transferred the Central Grouping of Forces from the Kreminna area to the Avdiivka direction ahead of the Russian offensive operation to seize Avdiivka from October 2023 to

February 2024 and proceeded to concentrate almost all Central Military District (CMD) elements deployed to Ukraine in the area during the offensive operation.[1] The Russian military command established the Central Grouping of Forces as an operational maneuver force along a narrow front in the Avdiivka area following the seizure of Avdiivka in February 2024 and tasked CMD elements with exploiting Russian tactical advances and pushing as far west as possible before Ukrainian forces established more cohesive and harder-to-penetrate defensive lines in the area.[2] The Russian Central Grouping of Forces made a notable tactical breakthrough northwest of Avdiivka in mid-April 2024 and achieved significant tactical gains in the area, largely due to Ukrainian materiel constraints caused by delays in Western security assistance.[3] Ukrainian forces have since stabilized the front in the area and slowed the rate of Russian advance, and the Russian Central Grouping of Forces is now advancing at a relatively similar pace as Russian forces elsewhere in Ukraine.

Russian forces began an offensive operation towards Toretsk in mid-June 2024 and also tasked the Central Grouping of Forces with the effort, and the Central Grouping of Forces redeployed the majority of the CMD's 27th Motorized Rifle Division from the Avdiivka area to Niu York (south of Toretsk). [4] Responsibility for the Toretsk effort has roughly doubled the length of the Central Grouping of Forces' AOR and has already drawn notable manpower away from the Avdiivka effort. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on July 26 that elements of the CMD's 90th Tank Division (41st Combined Arms Army [CAA]) conducted the Russian reinforced battalion-size mechanized assault southwest of Donetsk City on July 24, although ISW has yet to observe wider reports attributing the attack to the 90th Tank Division.[5] Elements of the Russian Eastern and Southern groupings of forces have previously conducted offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City, and the commitment of CMD elements to the area in one of the largest mechanized assaults since Fall 2023 is a notable inflection.[6] The Central Grouping of Forces previously used elements of the 90th Tank Division as an operational reserve and committed those elements to intensify the Russian offensive effort near Avdiivka in March 2024, during which elements of the 90th Tank Division conducted the last observed battalion-size mechanized assault in Ukraine.[7] The reported commitment of elements of the 90th Tank Division to the area southwest of Donetsk City suggests that the Central Grouping of Forces' AOR may be expanding southward as well, although the exact contours of the grouping's responsibilities are unclear. The commitment of elements of the 90th Tank Division to the area would also indicate that the Central Grouping of Forces is willing to allocate considerable manpower and equipment to other tactical and operational objectives outside of its existing operational focus on pursuing tactically significant gains in the Avdiivka area.

The expansion of the Central Grouping of Forces' AOR indicates that the Russian military command may assess that rapid tactical gains in the Avdiivka area are unlikely. Whether this possible assessment is based on waning Ukrainian materiel and manpower constraints or specifically based on an assessment of the Central Grouping of Forces' failure to achieve its assigned tasks is unclear. An AOR that stretches from southwest of Donetsk City to Toretsk will draw available Russian manpower and materiel away from the existing effort to make tactically significant advances northwest and west of Avdiivka. The Central Grouping of Forces likely lacks the reserves necessary to intensify operations in the Avdiivka area to the degree that would facilitate relatively rapid gains while maintaining offensive pressure in the Toretsk and Donetsk City directions. The Russian military command is currently attempting to maintain consistent offensive pressure throughout the front to prevent Ukraine from contesting the battlefield initiative, and tasking the Central Grouping of Forces with grinding offensive operations along a longer front is more in line with this effort than tasking the grouping with achieving tactically significant gains through relatively rapid maneuver.[8]

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted an ATACMS strike against Saky Airbase in occupied Crimea on the night of July 25 to 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on July 26 that Ukrainian forces conducted a missile strike against Saky Airbase in occupied Crimea on the night of July 25 to 26.[9] The Ukrainian General Staff noted that it was clarifying the consequences of the strikes but that Russian air defense systems protecting the airbase failed to repel the strike. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on July 26 that unspecified sources stated that Ukrainian forces launched four ATACMS against occupied Crimea and that Russian forces shot down two of the missiles. [10] *Astra* reported that Ukrainian ATACMS struck an ammunition depot at Saky Airbase and destroyed a radar station at an air defense deployment site five kilometers from occupied Shelkovychne (northwest of Saky Airbase). A Crimea-based Telegram channel also reported that Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot at the airbase.[11]

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitri Bulgakov on corruption charges on July 26 – the latest in a concerted Kremlin effort to remove senior Russian defense officials since April 2024.[12] Russian state news agency *RIA Novosti* reported that a source in Russian law enforcement stated that Bulgakov used his position in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to lobby for the Gryazinsky Food Plant, which the source claimed won catering contracts with the MoD and supplied low-quality food at high prices to the Russian military.[13] Russian authorities arrested top managers of the Gryazinsky Food Plant for embezzling funds from MoD contracts in April 2024, and Kremlin newswire TASS stated on July 26 that Bulgakov's case materials indicate that Bulgakov is a suspect in the same case. [14] Bulgakov oversaw Russian military logistics as Deputy Defense Minister from 2008 to 2022, and the Kremlin awarded Bulgakov the Hero of Russia award in 2016.[15] The Russian MoD relieved Bulgakov of his post in September 2022 and stated that he had been transferred to another, unspecified position.[16] A Russian insider source claimed that Russian authorities have been

investigating Bulgakov since 2022 and have previously summoned Bulgakov as a witness in an unspecified number of MoD corruption cases.[17] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that there had been talk "in narrow circles" about investigations into Bulgakov since May 2024.[18] Another Russian insider source claimed that Bulgakov was not closely connected to former Russian Defense Minister and current Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu.[19] Russian milbloggers celebrated Bulgakov's arrest, who they claimed was responsible for systemic logistics issues at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that are still affecting the Russian military today.[20]

The European Union (EU) transferred the first tranche of proceeds from frozen Russian assets to Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen announced on July 26 that the EU transferred 1.5 billion euros (about \$1.6 billion) from frozen Russian assets to Ukraine as a part of its support for Ukraine's defense capabilities and reconstruction.[21] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded on July 26, claiming that Russia will not leave the European Commission's actions unanswered.[22]

The Kremlin continues intensifying efforts to control Russians' internet activities and to create a culture of self-censorship within Russia. Russian authorities are increasingly signaling their intent to eventually block YouTube within Russia and will likely compel Russians to use social media platforms influenced or controlled by the Kremlin. Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor accused YouTube of "numerous violations" of Russian legislation and "disrespect" for Russia and its citizens and warned that these acts are grounds for "taking action" against YouTube.[23] Russian State Duma Committee on Information Policy Head Alexander Khinshtein stated that YouTube will load up to 40 percent slower in the coming days because Russian data centers cooperating with Google under unspecified "gray [area] schemes" intend to stop these schemes, a shift from Russian telecom giant Rostelecom's recent statement that slow YouTube load times within Russia are due to a lack of Russian servers hosting YouTube.[24] Russian internet authorities will likely throttle YouTube within Russia. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on July 26 citing a source within the Russian presidential administration that Russia aims to replace YouTube with *Vkontakte's* (VK) Video service and aims to download all Russian-language videos from YouTube to the VK service by Fall 2024. [25] VK is a Russian social media service currently headed by Vladimir Kiriienko, the son of Russian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Sergei Kiriienko. Sergei Kiriienko oversees multiple information operations targeting Russia's domestic information space, Ukraine, and the West.[26]

The Kremlin appears to be attempting to create a culture of compliance with the Kremlin's censorship requirements, including only using Kremlin-approved programs and self-censoring opposition or other content unfavorable to the Kremlin's aims. The Russian Cabinet of Ministers approved a list of Russian software programs that Russian technology manufacturers must pre-install on smartphones, tablets, computers, smart televisions, and similar devices.[27] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated in reference to Russian censorship laws against "discrediting" Russian civil servants and the military that legislation should apply to both "ordinary life" and the internet and that Russian legislation is "expanding" accordingly, which is odd because Russia has prosecuted or otherwise censored many information space voices based on text or footage published online.[28]

Russian security forces reportedly detained several unknown actors threatening to blow up an apartment building in the Republic of Dagestan on July 25. Dagestan's security forces told Kremlin newswire TASS that security forces evacuated an apartment building in Kaspiysk and detained an unspecified number of people intending to detonate an improvised explosive device (IED) in the building.[29] Dagestan's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Spokesperson Gayana Gariyeva later announced that security forces completed their operation and that there is no remaining threat to the public.[30] The Russian government appears to be struggling with isolated terrorist activity following several significant terrorist attacks in recent months, including the March 2024 Crocus City Hall attack and the June 2024 shootings in Dagestan.[31]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian military has recently expanded the Russian Central Grouping of Forces' area of responsibility (AOR) in Donetsk Oblast, suggesting that the Russian military command has deprioritized the grouping's previous task to act solely as an operational maneuver force in the Avdiivka direction. The Russian military command may instead be tasking the Central Grouping of Forces with overseeing the bulk of Russia's main offensive efforts in Donetsk Oblast.
- The expansion of the Central Grouping of Forces' AOR indicates that the Russian military command may assess that rapid tactical gains in the Avdiivka area are unlikely.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted an ATACMS strike against Saky Airbase in occupied Crimea on the night of July 25 to 26.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitri Bulgakov on corruption charges on July 26 – the latest in a concerted Kremlin effort to remove senior Russian defense officials since April 2024.
- The European Union (EU) transferred the first tranche of proceeds from frozen Russian assets to Ukraine.
- The Kremlin continues intensifying efforts to control Russians' internet activities and to create a culture of self-censorship within Russia.

- Russian security forces reportedly detained several unknown actors threatening to blow up an apartment building in the Republic of Dagestan on July 25.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Svatove, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.
- The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) reported on July 22 that the Russian intelligence services appear to have further integrated Russian forces' cyber and conventional capabilities.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 25, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Davit Gasparyan, Andie Parry, and George Barros

July 25, 2024, 7:30pm ET

Ukrainian forces blunted one of the largest Russian mechanized assaults in Ukraine since October 2023 in western Donetsk Oblast on July 24. Geolocated footage published on July 24 shows that Ukrainian forces stopped a reinforced battalion size Russian mechanized assault near Kostyantynivka (southwest of Donetsk City) after Russian forces advanced up to the southeastern outskirts of the settlement.[1] A Ukrainian brigade operating in the Kurakhove direction reported that Russian forces attacked simultaneously with 11 tanks, 45 armored combat vehicles, a rare "Terminator" armored fighting vehicle (of which Russia has reportedly manufactured only 23 as of December 2023), 12 motorcycles, and roughly 200 personnel from several tactical directions at dawn on July 24.[2] The brigade reported that Ukrainian aerial reconnaissance identified the mechanized columns from a distance and that Ukrainian forces used artillery, drones, and minefields to blunt the Russian assault. The brigade reported that Ukrainian forces damaged or destroyed six Russian tanks, seven armored combat vehicles, and all 12 motorcycles and that Russian forces retreated after Ukrainian forces destroyed the first wave of vehicles. ISW last observed Russian forces conduct a battalion-sized mechanized attack in Donetsk Oblast in March 2024. Russian forces have not conducted larger mechanized assaults in Ukraine since the first days of Russia's four-month long operation to seize Avdiivka in October 2023.[3] Russian forces likely intended to advance further into Kostyantynivka as part of their efforts to seize the settlement and cut the Vuhledar-Kostyantynivka T-0524 highway. Russian sources have long identified interdicting the T-0524 highway and disrupting Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) into Vuhledar as a primary tactical objective in this direction. Russian milblogger recently suggested that Russian forces would intensify operations south of Kostyantynivka in support of this objective and force Ukrainian forces to retreat from positions in and around Vuhledar.[4] Russian forces likely will not make operationally significant advances in this area of the frontline in the near term even if they achieve tactically significant advances and prompt Ukrainian forces to retreat from nearby positions, as the surrounding area has no operationally significant objectives and is largely comprised of fields and isolated, small settlements and no significant nearby tactical heights.

The Russian military command's willingness to expend a large number of armored vehicles on limited tactical objectives reflects poor longer-term operational foresight, and constraints on Russian equipment in the medium- to long-term will make such failed mechanized assaults costlier with time. The Russian military has extensively relied on refurbishing stocks of Soviet-era weapons and military equipment, particularly armored vehicles, to sustain the tempo of its offensive operations in Ukraine.[5] The Russian government will likely have to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry if the Russian military intends to sustain its current tempo of operations in the medium- to long-term as Russia depletes its finite Soviet stockpiles, but it is unclear if the Russian defense industry will be able to produce enough vehicles to sustain a high level of equipment losses even with further economic mobilization.[6] Ukraine-based open-source organization *Frontelligence Insight* stated on July 25 that it observed Russian forces moving hundreds of pieces of equipment, primarily restored old, armored vehicles such as T-62 and T-55 tanks, to the front in June and early July 2024.[7] *Frontelligence Insight* noted that these restored vehicles have yet to appear on the battlefield and assessed that Russia may be preparing to use them in later 2024. *Frontelligence Insight* reported that internal Russia documents show that Russian tanks damaged within the past six months (since about January 2024) are widely waiting for replacement parts and that widespread engine shortages have led to the increasing cannibalization of more modern T-80 tanks to conduct repairs. Russia currently has enough armored vehicles to conduct periodic company-sized and larger mechanized assaults throughout the frontline for the foreseeable future, however. The Russian military command's continued willingness to suffer high armored vehicle losses for minor tactical gains instead of conserving armored vehicles for operations that pursue operationally significant objectives will impose increasingly significant costs on Russian forces as the Russian military's equipment constraints worsen over the coming years. The Russian military may be attempting to restore maneuver to the battlefield and pursue rapid gains through mechanized maneuver, although continued large scale frontal mechanized assaults indicate that the Russian military command has not fully internalized lessons about the difficulties of mechanized maneuver in the nearly transparent battlespace in Ukraine.[8]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) indicated that Lieutenant General Sergey Kobylash has become Deputy Commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS). The Russian MoD updated its list of VKS leadership as of July 24 to include Kobylash as the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces.[9] Kobylash previously served as the Commander of the VKS Long-Range Aviation before his recent appointment.[10] The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against Kobylash in March 2024 for war crimes perpetuated during Russian rear-area strike campaigns in Ukraine from October 2022 to at least March 2023.[11] Major General Sergey Kuvaldin replaced Kobylash as Commander of the VKS Long Range Aviation.[12]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov attempted to frame Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate, while demonstrating the Kremlin's own unwillingness to engage in good faith negotiations by reinvigorating Russian information operations falsely portraying Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as an "illegitimate" leader of Ukraine. Peskov claimed on July 25 that Russia "is open to achieving [its] goals through negotiations" but that there are obstacles to negotiations, including the false assertion that Zelensky is an illegitimate president and that Ukraine imposed a "de facto legislative ban on any contacts and negotiations with the Russian side." [13] Peskov claimed that Russia needs to understand "how ready Ukraine is, the government of the country, the Ukrainian side, and how much permission [Ukraine] has for [negotiations] from its curators" and that Ukraine has been offering "very different statements" on these issues.[14]

Ukraine has clearly presented its plan for a lasting peace based on international law as part of preparations for eventual negotiations with Russia, and Ukrainian officials have openly invited a Russian representative to attend Ukraine's second peace summit later in 2024.[15] The Kremlin, on the other hand, has repeatedly falsely claimed that it is open to negotiations while simultaneously indicating that it is only interested in a negotiated settlement that results in complete Ukrainian capitulation.[16] Peskov's statements, contrary to inaccurate reporting by select Western outlets, did not indicate that Russia is ready to negotiate with Zelensky, but rather that the Kremlin remains committed to its false narrative that Russia cannot negotiate with Zelensky, as Zelensky is supposedly Ukraine's "illegitimate" president.[17] ISW has extensively detailed how the Kremlin has been misrepresenting the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian laws to support these Russian narratives about Zelensky's illegitimacy.[18] Peskov also misrepresented the Ukrainian law concerning negotiations with Russia. Zelensky signed a decree in October 2022 that stated that negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin are "impossible" but did not outright ban "any contacts and negotiations with the Russian side," as Peskov claimed.[19]

The Kremlin continues to strengthen its ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived at the ASEAN summit in Laos on July 25 and held a series of bilateral meetings with delegations from East Timor, Indonesia, Cambodia, Brunei, Laos, and the PRC.[20] Lavrov and PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized the importance of Russia's and China's role in developing ASEAN and defending southeast Asia from "interference" by "extra-regional forces." [21] Russia and China may be posturing themselves as "defenders" of ASEAN member states in order to encourage deeper cooperation and dependence. Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov and PRC Prosecutor General Ying Yong also signed a cooperation agreement at a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting on July 25, which will increase Russian-PRC judicial cooperation.[22] Krasnov characterized the agreement as part of Russia and the PRC's efforts to improve the "fight against transnational crime." Russia recently signed a similar agreement with North Korea, and ISW noted that the Kremlin may be interested in further consolidating control over the Russian information space and implementing measures similar to the North Korean and PRC governments.[23]

The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) and National Police announced that they neutralized a group connected to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) that had been preparing to commit arson against civilian objects in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe.[24] Ukrainian authorities stated on July 25 that law enforcement detained 19 individuals based throughout Ukraine who had been preparing to commit arson against places of mass gatherings — including shopping centers, gas stations, pharmacies, and markets — in Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states. [25] Ukrainian authorities stated that the Russian FSB recruited the group with promises of monetary rewards, coordinated the group's activities remotely, and planned to transport group members to European Union (EU) member states with fake documents.[26] Ukrainian authorities stated that the FSB instructed the group to film the attacks for the FSB to use as propaganda to destabilize the social and political situation within the EU.[27] Russian actors and proxies have been intensifying hybrid military operations against NATO states to deter and disrupt Western military assistance to Ukraine, and these reported plans to commit arson against civilian objects may be in part to discourage Western states from providing Ukraine with further assistance.[28]

Select Russian officials continue to call for measures targeting diaspora groups while the Russian government continues efforts to extend its control over migrants in Russia. Russian State Duma Deputy Mikhail Matveyev submitted a draft bill to the Russian State Duma on July 24 that seeks to limit the "political influence" of minority and diaspora communities in Russia by amending Russia's law on "national-cultural autonomies." [29] The current law provides for "certain ethnic communities" in Russia to organize public organizations that address issues of preserving a community's culture and identity, "harmonizing" the community with Russian society, and helping migrants adapt and integrate into Russian society.[30] Matveyev claimed that Russian "national-

cultural autonomies" have an outsized influence on the Russian government and that the law deprives ethnic Russians of the right to form similar organizations.[31] Matveyev's draft bill proposes a series of amendments that would limit the rights and powers of the cultural organizations, including prohibiting these organizations from "interfere[ing]" in government policy. Alexander Dyukov, a member of the Commission for Monitoring and Resolving Conflict Situations in the Sphere of Interethnic Relations on Russian President Vladimir Putin's Council on Interethnic Relations, declared his support for Matveyev's bill on July 25 and echoed Matveyev's concerns about the outsized influence of "diasporas" on the Russian government.[32] Dyukov blamed deceased Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev for implementing problematic migration policies and for leaving future generations to solve these issues. Matveyev recently placed himself at the center of scandal intended to stir up anti-migrant sentiments among Russian ultranationalists and appears to be now turning his attention to limiting the rights of Russia's minority groups.[33]

The Russian Investigative Committee announced a proposal on July 24 to create a unified interdepartmental database for registering migrants and foreign citizens coming into Russia and a "roadmap" for replacing Russia's dependence on labor migrants with jobs for Russian citizens.[34] The Russian Investigative Committee also proposed requiring migrants to obtain Russian SIM cards upon entering Russia and use the associated phone number to register with the Russian government. Several Russian federal subjects (regions) have recently barred migrants from working in the food service and transportation industries, and these initiatives likely intend to discourage migration into Russia by making daily life more difficult for migrants despite Russia's evidenced dependence on migrant labor to address its labor and force generation shortages.[35]

Syrian President Bashar al Assad met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 24.[36] *[NOTE: A version of this text appears in ISW-CTP's July 25 Iran Update]* Assad and Putin discussed escalating tensions in the Middle East, including in Syria.[37] The leaders also discussed improving bilateral economic relations.[38] Assad last met with Putin in Russia in March 2023 during which they reached over 40 agreements on promoting economic cooperation.[39] It remains unclear if Syria and Russia have advanced the 2023 agreements since then.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces blunted one of the largest Russian mechanized assaults in Ukraine since October 2023 in western Donetsk Oblast on July 24.
- The Russian military command's willingness to expend a large number of armored vehicles on limited tactical objectives reflects poor longer-term operational foresight, and constraints on Russian equipment in the medium- to long-term will make such failed mechanized assaults costlier with time.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) indicated that Lieutenant General Sergey Kobylash has become Deputy Commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS).
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov attempted to frame Ukraine as unwilling to negotiate, while demonstrating the Kremlin's own unwillingness to engage in good faith negotiations by reinvigorating Russian information operations falsely portraying Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as an "illegitimate" leader of Ukraine.
- The Kremlin continues to strengthen its ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states.
- The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) and National Police announced that they neutralized a group connected to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) that had been preparing to commit arson against civilian objects in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe.
- Select Russian officials continue to call for measures targeting diaspora groups while the Russian government continues efforts to extend its control over migrants in Russia.
- Syrian President Bashar al Assad met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 24.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Robotyne, and Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Kharkiv City and near Toretsk, Donetsk City, and Robotyne.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on July 24 granting deferments from military conscription to employees of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office and Investigative Committee who have higher education and special ranks starting in September 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 24, 2024

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

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

July 24, 2024, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on July 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that the Russian military has significantly increased its manpower and materiel commitments to the war in Ukraine over the last two and a half years, but Syrskyi's statement is not indicative of a sudden increase in the Russian military's presence in Ukraine and is instead representative of the manpower and material disadvantage that Ukrainian forces have faced for over two years. Syrskyi told UK outlet *The Guardian* in an interview published on July 24 that Russian forces currently have 520,000 personnel committed to the war in Ukraine and that the Russian military aims to have 690,000 personnel committed to the war by the end of 2024.[1] Syrskyi noted that fighting is ongoing along 977 kilometers of the 3,700-kilometer-long frontline and reiterated that the Russian military command continues to pursue tactical gains regardless of significant manpower losses, while Ukrainian forces are attempting to safeguard the lives of Ukrainian troops. Syrskyi stated that Russian forces currently have a two-to-one or three-to-one equipment advantage over Ukrainian forces and that Russian forces have doubled the number of Russian tanks and armored personnel carriers and tripled the number of artillery systems in Ukraine since 2022. Syrskyi's comparison of the current Russian military contingent committed to Ukraine with the initial invasion force underscores the difference between the military force that Russia has gradually staffed and supplied over two and half years for a long war effort and the initial and ill-prepared invasion force that the Kremlin wrongly assessed could quickly depose the Ukrainian government in February 2022. Syrskyi noted that the Ukrainian military command is focused on addressing supply challenges in order to defend against ongoing Russian offensive operations and highlighted the fact that Ukrainian forces are successfully conducting defensive operations despite the materiel disparity between Russian and Ukrainian forces.

Russia's ability to continue gradually expanding the amount of manpower and materiel it has committed to Ukraine faces significant constraints in the medium to long term. The Russian military has extensively relied on refurbishing stocks of Soviet-era weapons and military equipment to sustain the tempo of its offensive operations in Ukraine in order to avoid fully mobilizing the Russian economy and society to a war-time footing, and Ukrainian authorities have noted that Russia is currently not producing enough to cover its current equipment losses in Ukraine.[2] The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) think tank reported in February 2024 that Russia will likely be able to sustain losing over 3,000 armored fighting vehicles annually for at least two or three more years (until about 2026–2027) by refurbishing Soviet-era vehicles in storage.[3] The Russian government will likely have to further mobilize the Russian economy and defense industry if the Russian military intends to sustain its current tempo of operations in the medium- to long-term as Russia depletes its finite Soviet stockpiles, but it is unclear if the Russian defense industry will be able to produce enough vehicles to sustain a high level of equipment losses even with further economic mobilization. Further economic mobilization will likely be deeply unpopular among Russians who are largely apathetic towards the war so long as it does not impact their daily life, and the policy change could strain domestic support for the war.[4]

Russia's ongoing force-generation efforts have allowed Russian forces to sustain their current tempo of offensive operations and maintain their current personnel replacement rate in Ukraine. Russian force-generation efforts so far have not enabled Russian forces to build up a significantly larger force in Ukraine and the Russian military remains incapable of conducting significantly intensified large-scale Russian offensive operations.[5] Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in December 2023 that there were 617,000 Russian personnel in the "combat zone," likely referring to all Russian military personnel in the zone of the "special military operation," which includes rear areas and staging areas in Russia's border areas neighboring Ukraine.[6] Putin stated in June 2024 that there are almost 700,000 Russian personnel in the "special military operation zone." [7] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk stated that as of May 3 there were roughly between 510,000 and 515,000 Russian personnel deployed to Ukraine.[8] It is unclear how long Russia will be able to sustain its current force generation rates, and Pavlyuk's and Syrskyi's statements further indicate that Russia's force generation efforts are generating roughly enough personnel to maintain Russia's current replacement rate but not significantly increase the number of Russian personnel in Ukraine. Syrskyi's statements highlight that Ukrainian forces have successfully defended and liberated territory in the face of a Russian military with significant manpower and material advantages over the past two and a half years, and ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces can contest the battlefield initiative and eventually set conditions to conduct both limited and large-scale counteroffensive operations with timely and appropriate Western security assistance.[9]

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Guangzhou on July 24 and discussed the war in Ukraine and the PRC's potential role in a future negotiated settlement of the war.[10] Both sides offered slightly divergent interpretations of the talks — Kuleba emphasized that a just peace in Ukraine is in the PRC's strategic interests and that while Ukraine remains ready to negotiate with Russia "at a certain stage," Russia is not yet displaying the readiness to reciprocate.[11] By contrast, Wang emphasized that *both* Ukraine and Russia have signaled their willingness to negotiate "to varying degrees," but that "conditions and timing are not yet ripe." [12] Wang also stressed the PRC's desire to act as a mediator and highlighted the recent Chinese-Brazilian six-point peace plan that calls for a peace conference on the war that includes both Russia and Ukraine.[13] Wang's suggestion that both Russia and Ukraine are ready to consider some sort of negotiations reflects the PRC's general diplomatic and rhetorical alignment with

Russia on the topic of negotiations and helps further the Russian narrative that Ukraine is the party refusing negotiations, whereas ISW has frequently assessed that it is Russia that has no interest in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine on any terms but the Kremlin's demands for Ukrainian capitulation.[14] Western sources have also noted that the PRC has attempted to undermine Ukraine's ability to secure an international coalition of supporters, further emphasizing the rift between desired outcomes for the PRC, Russia, and Ukraine.[15]

The Russian State Duma adopted an amendment on July 24 that will allow Russian commanders to punish subordinates for using personal communication and navigation devices at the frontline, drawing continued backlash from Russian ultranationalists as well as other Duma deputies.[16] Several Russian Duma deputies explicitly opposed the bill and called for Russian officials to allow frontline Russian commanders to inform military policy.[17] Russian ultranationalist milbloggers widely continued to criticize the amendment and expressed concerns that Russian military officials intend to use punishments for personal device usage to settle personal conflicts and censor legitimate complaints from Russian servicemembers, who often use personal devices to record and disseminate complaints.[18] Russian ultranationalists continued to lament the potential impacts of the amendment on the frontline, where Russian forces rely on insecure devices to organize command and control (C2), logistics, and combat operations.[19] Russian-backed former Ukrainian separatist politician Oleg Tsaryov pointedly stated that the amendment will be a serious blow to Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov's image and claimed that the amendment is clearly the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) initiative.[20] Other Russian ultranationalists focused their outrage on Russian Duma deputies, particularly on the State Duma Defense Committee and its head Andrei Kartapolov, accusing the deputies of being out of touch with the realities of the war in Ukraine and expressing an animus towards the State Duma that ultranationalists usually reserve for the Russian MoD.[21] It remains unclear if the Russian military command will be able or willing to enforce punishment for the use of personal devices in Ukraine, and the Russian military will likely find it extremely difficult to eliminate its dependence on insecure personal devices for many frontline tasks. [22]

The Georgian State Security Service (SUS or SSSG) reiterated standard Kremlin information operations targeting former Georgian opposition figures and former Ukrainian law enforcement officials. The SUS announced on July 24 that it is investigating "former senior Georgian government officials" and "former employees of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies" for organizing and financing attempts to overthrow the government by violent means and terrorist acts, including "preparations to murder [Georgian Dream Party founder and former Georgian Prime Minister] Bidzina Ivanishvili." [23] The SUS recently charged several Georgian volunteers who have served alongside Ukrainian forces with "conspiracy to overthrow the government" and "terrorism." [24] Georgian Legion Commander Mamuka Mamulashvili stated that Georgian authorities placed roughly 300 Georgian citizens who served as volunteers in the Georgian Legion on Georgia's wanted list, although did not specify with which alleged crimes the Georgian Legion volunteers were charged.[25] The SUS blamed Georgians living abroad and fighting in Ukraine and other perceived opposition actors for inciting protests against Georgia's Russian-style "foreign agents" bill in May 2024.[26] The SUS also made unsubstantiated claims in September 2023 that former Georgian officials, Ukrainian military intelligence officials of Georgian descent, and Georgians fighting with Ukrainian forces in Ukraine were plotting a violent coup.[27] The Kremlin has routinely used the narrative of a "violent coup" in Ukraine to misrepresent Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity and protests for Ukrainian European Union integration and blames external actors for domestic protests, and the SUS' statements increasingly mirror Kremlin rhetoric.

The SUS' ongoing information operation alleging that Georgian opposition figures and Ukrainian actors are implicated in a conspiracy to violently overthrow the Georgian government not only advances Kremlin information operations but also aims to grant the Georgian Dream Party carte blanche justifications to suppress domestic political opposition within Georgia in the future. The Georgian Dream Party may seek to implicate Russian actors in such allegations in the future in order to justify authoritarian censorship bills that mirror Russian censorship laws while pandering to the Georgian public, which widely distrusts Russia given Russia's occupation of parts of Georgia among other factors. The Georgian Dream Party may be purposefully centering its information operations around a coup attempt since Georgian Dream could plausibly accuse Russian actors of trying to organize such attempts. The degree of coordination between the Kremlin and the Georgian government on their increasingly similar rhetoric is unclear, although Ivanishvili very likely has ties to the Kremlin. [28] Kremlin actors will seize on Georgian Dream's authoritarian impulses to purposefully derail Georgia's long-term efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration and advance Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia regardless of whether Georgian Dream is directly coordinating with the Kremlin.

An assassination attempt injured a reported senior Russian military intelligence officer in Moscow City on July 24. Russian officials claimed on July 24 that Russian citizen Yevgeny Serebryakov attached an improvised explosive device (IED) to car at about 0230 local time on July 24 and that the IED detonated at about 0630 local time when a man and his wife started the car, severely injuring them.[29] Russian sources reported that the attack injured Andrey Torgashev, allegedly a senior officer of the Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU) who previously served with GRU Unit 45807, a psychological operations unit reportedly directly subordinate to the head of the GRU.[30] Russian sources initially misidentified the victim as another Andrey Torgashev, the Deputy

Commander of the 89th Satellite Communications Center (Strategic Missile Forces Central Communications Center), who made a statement to Russian state media that he was not involved or injured in the explosion.[31] Serebryakov fled to Turkey and arrived around 0930 on July 24, upon which Turkish authorities later detained him and are preparing to extradite him to Russia.[32] A Russian court charged Serebryakov with two counts of attempted murder, and Russian media reported that Russian authorities are investigating the involvement of Ukrainian special services in the assassination attempt and that prosecutors may change Serebryakov's charges to terrorism.[33]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that the Russian military has significantly increased its manpower and materiel commitments to the war in Ukraine over the last two and a half years, but Syrskyi's statement is not indicative of a sudden increase in the Russian military's presence in Ukraine and is instead representative of the manpower and material disadvantage that Ukrainian forces have faced for over two years.
- Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Guangzhou on July 24 and discussed the war in Ukraine and the PRC's potential role in a future negotiated settlement of the war.
- The Russian State Duma adopted an amendment on July 24 that will allow Russian commanders to punish subordinates for using personal communication and navigation devices at the frontline, drawing continued backlash from Russian ultranationalists as well as other Duma deputies.
- The Georgian State Security Service (SUS or SSSG) reiterated standard Kremlin information operations targeting former Georgian opposition figures and former Ukrainian law enforcement officials.
- An assassination attempt injured a reported senior Russian military intelligence officer in Moscow City on July 24.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced north of Kharkiv City and near Avdiivka and Donetsk City.
- Russian officials continue efforts to entice Russians into military service with monetary incentives.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 23, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

July 23, 2024, 7pm ET

The Russian State Duma proposed an amendment that would allow commanders to punish subordinates for using personal communications and navigation devices at the frontline, prompting significant milblogger backlash and highlighting how Russian forces continue to struggle with command and control (C2) issues and overreliance on insecure technologies to conduct combat operations in Ukraine. The Russian State Duma Defense Committee announced its support on July 23 for an amendment that will make wearing "gadgets" (personal phones and electronic devices) in the combat zone a "gross disciplinary offense" and will allow Russian commanders to arrest servicemembers in violation of such offenses without a court order and detain violating servicemembers for up to 10 days.[1] Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov claimed that punishments would not be applicable to servicemembers using devices for combat operations and noted that the amendment is based on a previous bill that generally banned the use of private devices in Ukraine.[2] Kartapolov claimed that the main goal of this amendment is to protect Russian servicemembers against security risks associated with improper cell phone usage.[3]

Russian milbloggers widely criticized this amendment and claimed that punishing soldiers for using personal devices will significantly complicate Russian logistics, C2, and operations in general. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian servicemembers significantly rely on their personal devices to transmit target coordinates to call for fire from Russian artillerymen and drone operators, to navigate frontline areas, and to coordinate between units.[4] A prominent Russian milblogger published a formal appeal to Kartapolov and claimed that the amendment would result in the "paralysis" of the Russian military's C2 bodies and called on the Russian Duma Defense Committee to amend the bill to cohere more realistically with how Russian forces use personal devices in Ukraine.[5] Several Russian milbloggers called on the Russian government to provide secure communications and navigation devices to Russian servicemembers before instituting punishment for the ad hoc use of personal devices and criticized Russian Duma deputies for being out of touch with frontline realities.[6] Russian milbloggers also called on Duma deputies to work with the Russian Armed Forces on the proposed amendments and future legislation in order to ensure that laws are in accordance with frontline realities and urged deputies to visit the frontline in Ukraine.[7] One critical Russian milblogger accused Kartapolov and his team of committing treason and pursuing this policy in order to help Ukraine win the war.[8]

It remains unclear if the Russian military command will be able or willing to enforce punishment for the use of personal devices in Ukraine, however, emphasizing the Russian military's high level of dependency on insecure communications systems. Russian milbloggers questioned how Russian officials intend to differentiate between devices that are and are not used for combat operations and sarcastically noted that Russian officials may intend to implement a complicated (and likely ineffective or unenforceable) bureaucratic system to differential between devices.[9] One Russian milblogger claimed that either the Russian military command will attempt to make commanders enforce the unpopular ban or commanders and their subordinates will pretend to follow the ban while continuing to use their personal devices.[10] Another Russian milblogger complained that the amendment would be another arbitrary rule that commanders can use to justify punishing careless conscripts or disliked subordinates.[11] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) previously attempted to restrict the use of personal devices in the combat zone in Ukraine following a Ukrainian strike on Russian barracks in Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast (which Ukrainian forces were able to target by tracking Russian cell phone signals) and was met with similar criticism in January 2023. [12] The Russian MoD is unlikely to be significantly more successful at this time given that the MoD has failed to address Russian forces' dependency on insecure personal devices for communication and navigation and provide secure alternatives. The Russian military will likely find it extremely difficult to remove its dependence on insecure personal devices for a large suite of ordinary frontline tasks.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against a ferry crossing in Kavkaz, Krasnodar Krai on the night of July 22 to 23. Krasnodar Krai officials claimed that Ukrainian drones struck a ferry in the port of Kavkaz, causing a temporary fire.[13] The ferry crossing in Kavkaz is roughly 15 kilometers from occupied Kerch, Crimea across the Kerch Strait, and Russian forces routinely use ferries in the area to relieve pressures on the Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) connecting Krasnodar Krai and occupied Crimea across the Kerch Strait Bridge.[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed a new Deputy Head of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Services on July 22, and there were several personnel changes within the Russian State Duma on July 23. Putin appointed former Moscow Oblast Roszdravnadzor (Federal Healthcare Surveillance Service) Head Roman Kurynin as Deputy Head of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Services, replacing Lieutenant General Alexei Serko, who held the position since 2018.[15] The Russian State Duma dismissed Duma Deputy Speaker Sergei Neverov, Pavel Zavalny, and Dmitri Svishchev as heads of the Duma committees on energy and physical education and sports, respectively, on July 23.[16] Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin stated that the Duma will also consider proposals for the heads of the Duma's culture and nationalities committees. [17] A prominent Russian insider source claimed that Neverov's dismissal suggests that Volodin may be losing some of his control over the State Duma.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Russian State Duma proposed an amendment that would allow commanders to punish subordinates for using personal communications and navigation devices at the frontline, prompting significant milblogger backlash and highlighting how Russian forces continue to struggle with command and control (C2) issues and overreliance on insecure technologies to conduct combat operations in Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted drone strikes against a ferry crossing in Kavkaz, Krasnodar Krai on the night of July 22 to 23.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed a new Deputy Head of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Services on July 22, and there were several personnel changes within the Russian State Duma on July 23.**
- **Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Siversk, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.**
- **Russian regional officials are continuing to increase financial incentives to entice more men to fight in Ukraine.**
- **Russian occupation officials continue to rely on Russian security organs for law enforcement and filtration functions in occupied Ukraine aimed at degrading pro-Ukrainian sentiment.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 22, 2024

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

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

July 22, 2024, 7:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on July 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russia and North Korea are pursuing increased cooperation in the judicial sphere. Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov arrived in Pyongyang, North Korea and met with his North Korean counterpart Kim Chol Won on July 22, marking the first time that a Russian Prosecutor General has visited North Korea.[1] Krasnov and Kim reportedly discussed avenues for continued cooperation and

signed an agreement for joint work between the Russian and North Korean prosecutor generals' offices for 2024–2026.[2] The Russian and North Korean prosecutor general's offices have notably maintained dialogue since 2010 through a separate cooperation agreement, but the new agreement will likely be much more focused in scope, reflecting intensified Russo–North Korean cooperation over the past year.[3] Krasnov emphasized the importance of "establishing a regular exchange of legislative acts" between Russia and North Korea and noted that Russia is ready to share its own experience in developing judicial practice with North Korea while also learning about North Korean judicial practice, particularly in the spheres of communication and information technology.[4] Both countries have pursued increased military, political, diplomatic, and economic cooperation over the past year, as ISW has reported, but the apparent desire to align judicial and prosecutorial agendas is particularly noteworthy.[5] ISW previously noted that the Russian Prosecutor General's Office weaponizes administrative laws to strengthen the judicial system's control over Russian society, and Krasnov's recent foreign engagements (including with Iraqi and Central African Republic officials) likely aim in part to share such judicial control and law enforcement tactics with friendly states in exchange for increasing Russia's own arsenal of domestic control methods.[6] Russia's interest in North Korean judicial expertise in communications and information technologies is likely a reflection of the Kremlin's desire to consolidate control over the Russian information space, including via messaging platforms and virtual private network (VPN) services.[7]

Russia is taking steps to codify terms broadly expanding the Russian official definition of prosecutable extremism as part of its ongoing effort to criminally prosecute and stymie domestic opposition to the Kremlin and its war in Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) published on July 22 the draft of a new Russian counterterrorism strategy, which establishes legal definitions for "Russophobia" and "xenophobia" and modifies the definitions of "radicalism," "countering extremism," and "subjects of countering extremism." [8] These newly modified legal definitions significantly expand the Kremlin's ability to criminally prosecute anyone who opposes the Kremlin by classifying domestic opposition under a number of nebulous and broad definitions that are linked to existing Russian information operations that both aim to discredit international actors and promote self-censorship domestically. The new strategy defines "Russophobia" as the "manifestation of hatred, hostility, or hostile attitude to citizens of Russia, Russian language and culture" through "aggressive attitudes and actions" from "individual representatives and political forces as well as discriminatory actions on the part of authorities of states unfriendly to Russia." [9] The new strategy defines "xenophobia" as a "manifestation of hatred, hostility, or intolerance towards certain social groups and communicates of people;" and defines "radicalism" as "adherence to an ideology of violence characterized by the desire for a decisive and radical change in the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation [and] the violation of the unity and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation." [10] These definitions, particularly the provision defining supporting change to the Russian Constitution as "radicalism," seek to informationally link and even define opposition to the Russian government's current actions and structure as ethnic intolerance against the Russians who do support the Kremlin's policies and war in Ukraine, a hatred of Russian culture and history, and supportive of states "unfriendly" to Russia in the minds of Russians. The Kremlin also likely seeks to use these definitions and subsequent prosecutions to curry favor with Russian ultranationalists, as the Kremlin has recently been cracking down on illegal migration amid ethnic tensions under the guise of counter-extremism while failing to adequately address the threat of Islamic extremism within Russia. [11]

The Kremlin's recent efforts to expand the prosecutable definition of extremism and information space crackdowns have likely aimed to promote self-censorship among dissident Russians, and the new draft counterterrorism strategy likely also seeks to convince Russians that opposition to the Kremlin's policies and war are instead opposition to broader Russian society, culture, and ideals. [12] The explanatory note of the draft counterterrorism strategy states that the "solution" to domestic extremism requires modifications in "all areas of state policy, including national, migration, youth, cultural, and informational [policy]." [13] The note also emphasizes the importance of "strengthening traditional Russian legal and moral values" while countering the spread of "radical nationalism and neo-Nazism in the context of the special military operation [war in Ukraine] and the inclusion of new territories [illegally-occupied Ukrainian lands]." [14] The Kremlin will likely lean into narratives and ideologies promoting domestic nationalism to set informational conditions for its prolonged war effort in Ukraine and its future hostility towards other states the Kremlin deems hostile under the "Russophobic" and other extremist labels.

Kursk Oblast officials appointed a critical Russian milblogger to an advisory role within the regional government, likely as part of wider Kremlin efforts to appease critical commentators by granting them certain reputational concessions in exchange for their increased informational loyalty. Acting Kursk Oblast Governor Alexei Smirnov announced that he appointed Russian milblogger Roman Alekhin as one of his volunteer advisors. [15] Alekhin claimed on July 22 during his announcement of his position that he would now be able to implement "all of his ideas" about security and the development of the area. [16] Alekhin also implied that his appointment demonstrates that he is taking responsibility for and acting upon his previous criticisms of the Kursk Oblast government. Alekhin notably rhetorically attacked Smirnov on July 21 for reportedly accusing a rural official in Kursk Oblast of discrediting the Russian military after the official spoke about Ukrainian strikes in the area. [17] Alekhin was born in Kursk Oblast and claimed in 2022 that Kursk Oblast authorities mobilized him after he criticized the regional authorities, despite the fact that Alekhin is over the age limit for mobilization and has a severe spinal injury. [18] The Kremlin has co-opted Russian

milbloggers who have voiced criticisms before by promoting and rewarding them. Such milbloggers include Alexander "Sasha" Kots, who became a member of the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights in 2022; and Mikhail Zvinchuk, whom Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) awarded in November and December 2023.[19]

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Russian oil infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and a military air base in Rostov Oblast on July 22.

Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on July 22 that sources in Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated that Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against an oil refinery in Tuapse, Krasnodar Krai and damaged refinery infrastructure.[20] Footage published on July 22 reportedly shows a fire at the Tuapse oil refinery.[21] Tuapse Raion Head Sergei Boyko claimed on July 22 that falling drone debris damaged infrastructure at the oil refinery.[22] Russian milbloggers responded to the Tuapse strike and complained about the Russian government's inability to sufficiently protect critical infrastructure facilities from Ukrainian strikes.[23] Geolocated footage published on July 22 shows a drone strike against Morozovsk Air Base in Rostov Oblast.[24] A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces launched at least ten drones targeting the Morozovsk Air Base and damaged infrastructure facilities.[25] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev claimed that falling drone debris caused a fire in northern Rostov Oblast.[26] The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces destroyed 47 drones over Rostov Oblast and eight drones over Krasnodar Krai.[27]

Georgian authorities reportedly placed roughly 300 Georgian citizens who have served as volunteers in the Georgian Legion alongside Ukrainian forces on Georgia's wanted list.

Georgian Legion Commander Mamuka Mamulashvili told Russian-language investigative outlet the *Insider* on July 21 that Georgian authorities placed roughly 300 volunteers affiliated with the Georgian Legion, most of whom are currently in Ukraine, on Georgia's wanted list.[28] Mamulashvili did not state what alleged crimes the Georgian government charged the volunteers with. Mamulashvili noted that he did not know the two Georgian volunteers that Georgia's State Security Service (SUS or SSSG) reportedly recently summoned for questioning on charges of "conspiracy to overthrow the government" and "terrorism." [29] The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) charged over 70 volunteers in the Georgian Legion, including Mamulashvili, *in absentia* with "recruiting and participating military operations of mercenaries on the side of Ukrainian forces" in July 2023 and put Mamulashvili on Russia's wanted list in October 2023.[30] Mamulashvili claimed that the Russian government placed Georgian Legion volunteers on its wanted list so that the Georgian government would have grounds to arrest them and reported that Georgian special services have advised many Georgian Legion volunteers returning to Georgia from Ukraine to leave Georgia.[31] The SUS blamed Georgian volunteers serving alongside Ukrainian forces, among other perceived opposition actors, for plotting a violent coup in October 2023 and for inciting protests against Georgia's Russian-style "foreign agents" bill in May 2024.[32] The Kremlin has routinely used the narrative of a "violent coup" in Ukraine to misrepresent Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity and protests for Ukrainian European Union integration and blames external actors for domestic protests, and the SUS' statements increasingly mirror Kremlin rhetoric. Increasingly overt efforts to censor pro-Western and pro-Ukraine voices in Georgia suggests that the Georgian Dream ruling party intends to purposefully derail long-term Georgian efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration, which plays into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia.

Key Takeaways:

- Russia and North Korea are pursuing increased cooperation in the judicial sphere.
- Russia is taking steps to codify terms broadly expanding the Russian official definition of prosecutable extremism as part of its ongoing effort to criminally prosecute and stymie domestic opposition to the Kremlin and its war in Ukraine.
- Kursk Oblast officials appointed a critical Russian milblogger to an advisory role within the regional government, likely as part of wider Kremlin efforts to appease critical commentators by granting them certain reputational concessions in exchange for their increased informational loyalty.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Russian oil infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai and a military air base in Rostov Oblast on July 22.
- Georgian authorities reportedly placed roughly 300 Georgian citizens who have served as volunteers in the Georgian Legion alongside Ukrainian forces on Georgia's wanted list.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Siversk, Toretsk, and Donetsk City.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 21, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

July 21, 2024, 5:45pm ET

Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin recently visited Nicaragua and Cuba, likely as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to project its influence in the Western hemisphere and rally states against the US and the West. Volodin met with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo in Managua, Nicaragua on July 20 and relayed a message from Russian President Vladimir Putin stating that Russo-Nicaraguan relations are "developing

dynamically" and that the two states' coordination efforts in international affairs are "yielding good results." [1] Ortega condemned Western sanctions against Russia and reiterated Kremlin narratives claiming that NATO support for Ukraine is aggravating the war. Volodin met with Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel in Havana, Cuba on July 21 and relayed a similar message from Putin that Russo-Cuban relations are "developing dynamically." [2] Diaz-Canel thanked Russia for its support to end the US blockade against Cuba. [3] Volodin told journalists on July 21 that the Russian State Duma will send observers to the Venezuelan presidential election on July 28. [4] Russia has increasingly been trying to demonstrate its influence in the Western hemisphere, including by signing a memorandum of understanding with Venezuela aimed at countering "coercive measures" and conducting naval exercises near and port calls to Cuba and Venezuela in June 2024. [5] Cuba and Nicaragua were also notably among the eight Russian "ally" states that voted against a recent United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution demanding that Russia withdraw its forces from the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and return the plant to full Ukrainian control. [6] Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have recently expressed interest in joining BRICS, and Putin has recently identified BRICS as a pillar of his envisioned "Eurasian security architecture" that is aimed at undermining NATO. [7]

Volodin's visits to Nicaragua and Cuba immediately followed Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko's visits to Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, during which Golovchenko signed multiple bilateral economic and trade agreements, possibly as part of Russian schemes that use Belarus to help Russia evade Western sanctions. Golovchenko visited Venezuela from July 14 to 16 and met with Venezuelan officials, including Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. [8] Golovchenko stated that his visit aimed to discuss trade and the economic sphere and expressed Belarus' unwavering support for Maduro. [9] Golovchenko also visited Cuba from July 16 to 17, during which he signed contracts worth "millions of dollars" to supply unspecified Belarusian goods to Cuba in exchange for Cuban exports to Belarus. [10] Golovchenko visited Nicaragua from July 18 to 19 and signed contracts worth \$85 million aimed at bilateral economic cooperation, including the Belarusian Development Bank's agreement to finance the delivery of more than 700 pieces of unspecified equipment to Nicaragua. [11] Belarus may provide goods, equipment, or technology to Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba in exchange for goods that Belarus and/or Russia cannot themselves acquire due to Western sanctions.

The Georgian State Security Service (SUS or SSSG) reportedly recently summoned several Georgian citizens who had served as volunteers alongside Ukrainian forces for questioning on charges of "conspiracy to overthrow the government" and "terrorism." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Georgian service *Ekho Kavkaza* reported on July 20 that the SUS summoned a Georgian activist and former volunteer in Ukraine, Lasha Chigladze, for questioning in the presence of a Tbilisi City Court judge on July 19. [12] Pro-ruling party Georgian Dream media outlet *Imedi TV* reported that Georgian authorities charged Chigladze with conspiracy to overthrow the government and "preparing [acts of] terrorism." [13] Chigladze's lawyer told Georgian opposition outlet *Mtavari TV* that he assessed that Georgian authorities summoned Chigladze because he fought in Ukraine against Russia. [14] Another Georgian citizen who volunteered alongside Ukrainian forces, Nadim Khmaladze, stated on his Facebook page on July 20 that the SUS had summoned him for questioning on charges of planning a "coup d'etat" and "terrorism." [15] Khmaladze told Georgian outlet *Batumelebi* that the SUS summoned a third Georgian citizen who volunteered with Ukrainian forces for questioning. [16] Article 410 of Georgia's criminal code forbids mercenarism, but Georgian authorities notably did not charge these former volunteers under that article, nor hundreds of other Georgian volunteers who have fought in support of Ukraine since 2014. [17]

The SUS previously employed standard Kremlin information operations against Georgians protesting Georgia's Russian-style "foreign agents" bill in May 2024 and particularly blamed Georgians living abroad and fighting in Ukraine, and other perceived opposition actors for provocations and inciting protests. [18] The SUS also claimed in September 2023 that former Georgian officials, Ukrainian military intelligence officials of Georgian descent, and Georgians fighting with Ukrainian forces in Ukraine were plotting a violent coup. [19] The Kremlin routinely uses the narrative of a "violent coup" in Ukraine to misrepresent Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity and protests for Ukrainian European integration, and the SUS' activities increasingly mirror Kremlin rhetoric. Georgian authorities and the SUS' decision to question and charge its citizens who have fought in Ukraine indicate that the Georgian Dream ruling party likely intends to purposefully derail long-term Georgian efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration, which plays into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia. A recent Caucasus Barometer (a network of affiliated research centers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) poll of Georgian citizens, however, indicates that 69 percent of respondents identify Russia as Georgia's "main enemy," and a National Democratic Institute poll of Georgian citizens published in February 2023 found that 81 percent of respondents support Georgia's membership in the European Union (EU) and 73 percent of respondents support Georgia's membership in NATO. [20]

Geolocated imagery confirms that a Ukrainian drone strike damaged infrastructure at the Millerovo Airbase in Rostov Oblast overnight from July 19 to 20. [21] Geolocated satellite imagery collected on July 21 shows that Ukrainian strikes destroyed the Millerovo Airbase's maintenance hangar, damaged a fuel depot, and sparked a fire in a nearby field. [22] It is unclear whether the Ukrainian drone strike damaged Russian aircraft at the Millerovo Airbase.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin recently visited Nicaragua and Cuba, likely as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to project its influence in the Western hemisphere and rally states against the US and the West.
- The Georgian State Security Service (SUS or SSSG) reportedly recently summoned several Georgian citizens, who had served as volunteers alongside Ukrainian forces, for questioning on charges of "conspiracy to overthrow the government" and "terrorism."
- Geolocated imagery confirms that a Ukrainian drone strike damaged infrastructure at the Millerovo Airbase in Rostov Oblast overnight on July 19 to 20.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Avdiivka.
- Russian forces conducted missile and drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on July 20 to 21.
- Russian federal subjects are intensifying non-standard monetary incentives for contract service with the Russian military.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 20, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 20, 2024, 5:50pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke with former US President and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump on July 19 and discussed an end-state to the war in Ukraine. Zelensky stated that he agreed to talk with Trump about steps that will produce a fair and truly lasting peace at a future personal meeting.[1] Trump stated that both Russia and Ukraine will be able to come together and negotiate a deal that ends the war.[2] The Kremlin continues to indicate that it is only interested in a negotiated settlement that results in Ukrainian capitulation and paves the way for Russia to destroy Ukrainian statehood, however.[3] Zelensky has recently stressed that Ukraine must significantly weaken Russia's battlefield position in order to develop a stronger negotiating position for future peace negotiations, and Ukrainian leadership continues to call for the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and long-term security guarantees for Ukraine as part of any lasting peace.[4] Western security assistance that provides Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity required for counteroffensive operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine remains the only likely path for degrading Russia's battlefield position and reducing Russian President Vladimir Putin's current commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity.[5]

Ukrainian drones struck a Russian airfield in Rostov Oblast on the night of July 19 to 20. Russian sources claimed on July 20 that Ukrainian forces launched 30 drones against the Millerovo airfield in Rostov Oblast and that the strike caused damage to infrastructure and a fuel tank. [6] Geolocated footage shows a fire at the Millerovo airfield.[7] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev claimed that Russian forces intercepted and destroyed 26 drones over Rostov Oblast on the night of July 19 to 20.[8] The Russian 31st Fighter Aviation Regiment (1st Composite Aviation Division) is reportedly based at the Millerovo airfield and has SU-30SM aircraft deployed to the airfield.[9]

Russian Minister of Defense Andrei Belousov and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continue to use meetings with Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers to attempt to rehabilitate the MoD's image among pro-war Russian ultranationalists and portray Belousov as an effective manager of the MoD. Belousov met with a select group of Russian milbloggers and military commentators on June 10 and held another meeting with milbloggers on July 19.[10] Russian milbloggers who attended both meetings claimed that Belousov has already started to address many of their concerns and complaints about the conduct of the war in Ukraine and the MoD bureaucracy. [11] Russian milbloggers noted that Belousov acknowledged that the MoD has yet to find solutions to every issue that the milbloggers raised but stressed that Belousov is not ignoring issues.[12] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger expressed hope that Belousov and the MoD will eliminate all the "painful malfunctions" among Russian forces in Ukraine sooner or later.[13] Another prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Belousov specifically promised to build shelters at military airfields to protect against Ukrainian drone strikes, a widespread point of neuralgia within the Russian pro-war ultranationalist community.[14] Both the Kremlin and the Russian MoD have a vested interest in appearing open to dialogue with milbloggers, who represent a major pro-war constituency, and the Kremlin is likely aiming to portray Belousov as more cognizant of this fact than his predecessor, Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu.

Russian authorities are likely trying to strengthen coercive measures aimed at impressing migrants facing deportation into military service. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on July 19 that the Russian State Duma will consider amendments that would allow Russian authorities to detain foreigners and stateless persons who are subject to expulsion from Russia, in "special institutions" for no more than 48 hours before their deportation.[15] The amendments reportedly propose that officials from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) or Federal Security Service (FSB) can request that a judge extend the period of detention from 48 hours to 90 days, however. Russian authorities are currently allowed to detain foreigners and stateless persons subject to deportation for a maximum of 90 days.[16] Russian authorities have increasingly been conducting raids against migrants and impressing migrants into signing military contracts by threatening migrants with deportation.[17] The

amendments significantly shortening the period during which Russian authorities can detain people facing deportation are likely aimed in part at increasing pressure on migrants to join the military in lieu of deportation.

Spanish authorities arrested three individuals accused of conducting cyberattacks as part of a prominent pro-Russian hacking group that consistently targets Ukraine and NATO states supporting Ukraine. The Spanish Civil Guard announced on July 20 that it arrested three unspecified individuals in Manacor, Balearic Islands, and the province of Andalusia for conducting distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks targeting state institutions and the strategic sectors of countries supporting Ukraine following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.[18] The Spanish Civil Guard noted that the hackers belong to the Russian "hactivist" group "NoName057(16)" and that it continues to investigate several leads for identifying participants in the cyberattacks. [19] NoName057(16) is a pro-Russian cyber collective that emerged in March 2022 and initially targeted Ukrainian government and media sites but has since expanded to target Western government, economic, and logistical entities, including in NATO member states.[20] NoName057(16) relies on volunteers to conduct its cyberattacks and previously published its own crowdsourced botnet, "DDoSia," along with Russian and English language instructions for using DDoSia to conduct DDoS attacks.[21] NoName057(16) has repeatedly emphasized its willingness to cooperate with other cyber actors with which it shares "similar values" and has previously cooperated with other prominent Russian cyber actors "Killnet," "XakNet Team," and "CyberArmyofRussia_Reborn." [22] *Mandiant Intelligence* assessed with moderate confidence in an article published in September 2022 and updated in April 2024 that XakNet Team and CyberArmyofRussia_Reborn are coordinating operations with the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU)-sponsored "Sandworm," or Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) 44, and that Killnet also likely has "limited" links to the Russian GRU.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke with former US President and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump on July 19 and discussed an end-state to the war in Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian drones struck a Russian airfield in Rostov Oblast on the night of July 19 to 20.**
- **Russian Minister of Defense Andrei Belousov and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continue to use meetings with Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers to attempt to rehabilitate the MoD's image among pro-war Russian ultranationalists and portray Belousov as an effective manager of the MoD.**
- **Russian authorities are likely trying to strengthen coercive measures aimed at impressing migrants facing deportation into military service.**
- **Spanish authorities arrested three individuals accused of conducting cyberattacks as part of a prominent pro-Russian hacking group that consistently targets Ukraine and NATO states supporting Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Svatove, and Donetsk City.**
- **Kremlin-affiliated business-focused outlet Kommersant reported on July 19 that low quality machine parts grounded five Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Il-76MD-90A transport aircraft.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 19, 2024

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

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

July 19, 2024, 6:35pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated the importance of developing an international consensus for pursuing peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. Zelensky stated during an interview with the BBC published on July 18 that the world needs to develop a united consensus on a possible end state for the war in Ukraine and present this consensus to Russia in order to encourage Russia to come to the negotiating table.[1] Zelensky added that diplomacy will be an important element of restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and that Ukraine does not necessarily need to liberate all of its territory "by force" but must significantly weaken Russia's battlefield position in order to develop a stronger negotiating position for future peace negotiations. Zelensky and other Ukrainian officials have consistently presented their vision for a negotiated settlement for the war in Ukraine, which includes the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and long-term security guarantees for Ukraine's sovereignty and national security against future aggression.[2] Ukrainian officials have not articulated a willingness to concede territory to Russia in exchange for peace, and Zelensky's statements are consistent with this position.[3] Ukrainian officials continue to signal their willingness to participate in good faith peace negotiations with Russian representatives based on Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law, and Kremlin officials continue to frame such negotiations as outlandish and an "ultimatum" and call for a settlement tantamount to Ukrainian surrender.[4]

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban appears to be augmenting several Russian information operations amid continued efforts to present himself as a possible future mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Orban published a report on July 18 detailing his recent "peacekeeping mission" and visits to Ukraine, Russia, China, Turkey, and the United States.[5] Orban notably conceded that Russia, as a belligerent, is uninterested in a ceasefire or peace negotiations with Ukraine, an admission at odds with Kremlin officials' efforts to pose Russia as amenable to peace negotiations. Kremlin officials have also undermined their efforts to sue for peace by repeatedly signaling an unwillingness to participate in negotiations based on anything less than complete Ukrainian capitulation.[6] Orban may have acknowledged Russia's resistance to negotiations in order to appear impartial as he tries to present himself as a possible mediator. Orban simultaneously attempted to place the onus for negotiations on Ukraine and questioned the longevity of US and European support for Ukraine, both of which are consistent with ongoing Russian information operations intended to discourage Western support for Ukraine and absolve Russia of responsibility for an invasion that Russia started.[7] Orban also called for the European Union (EU) to normalize diplomatic relations and reopen lines of communication with Russia. The Kremlin is attempting to use diplomatic meetings, including meetings with Hungary, to create the impression that Russia is normalizing relations with the West and claim that there is limited Western support for Russia, and Orban's recommendation would support this Kremlin effort and undermine several years of EU policy to address Russian war crimes and aggression towards Ukraine.[8] Orban stated on July 19 that his "peace mission" will continue despite recent criticism from EU leadership and efforts to demonstrate the EU's non-alignment with Orban's positions on Ukraine and peace negotiations.[9]

New United Kingdom (UK) Defense Secretary John Healey stated on July 19 that Ukraine can use UK-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia, despite previous reports that the UK had not permitted Ukraine to use UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia. Healey told *BBC* on July 19 that the UK is providing weapons to Ukraine to defend their sovereign country and that "does not preclude [UK-provided weapons] hitting targets in Russia." [10] Healey also stated that Ukrainian forces can strike military targets in Russia with UK-provided weapons "within the parameters and the bounds of international humanitarian law." Healey stated that he would not publicly discuss whether the UK is allowing Ukrainian forces to strike Russian missile launch sites in Russia with UK-provided weapons, however. Healey noted that the UK is "continuing very intense discussions" with Ukraine. Bloomberg reported on July 10 that new UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated that it is Ukraine's decision how to deploy Storm Shadows missiles for defensive purposes.[11] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in a July 19 meeting with the UK government that Ukraine could defend against Russian offensive operations and secure its forward positions and cities from Russian airstrikes if Ukrainian forces can strike "further than just the border, particularly Russian military airfields." [12] Zelensky also asked the UK to show "leadership" and convince other partners to remove limits on Ukraine using Western-provided weapons to strike legitimate military targets in Russia. The *Telegraph* reported on July 11 that unspecified sources in the UK government stated that the UK's policy "had not changed," however, and that the UK had not permitted Ukraine to use UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia. [13] The exact contours of the UK's policy regarding Ukraine's use of Storm Shadow cruise missiles and other UK-provided weapons remain unclear.

The Kremlin is reportedly concerned about the long-term social and political implications of Russian veterans returning from the war in Ukraine. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on July 19 that a source within the Kremlin and two sources who attended a July 2024 meeting stated that First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergey Kiriienko stated during the meeting with Russian officials that Russian war veterans "adapt poorly" to civilian life after returning from Ukraine and that many convict recruits commit violent crimes after returning home. [14] One source who attended the meeting told *Meduza* that Kiriienko made it clear that there will be "quite a lot" of veterans returning from the war in Ukraine and that increased crime committed by veterans could cause discontent, fear, or aggression towards veterans among Russian citizens.

Kiriienko reportedly emphasized that the return of veterans from Ukraine will be very different than the period following the Soviet-Afghan war or the Second World War because the Soviet Union suffered fewer personnel losses in Afghanistan and because Soviet society was more widely mobilized and affected by the Second World War than the war in Ukraine. A source told *Meduza* that Kiriienko characterized modern Russian society as only seeing the war in Ukraine "on TV" and being unprepared to "understand and accept" veterans. *Meduza's* source stated that Russian officials are expressing concern that returning veterans will form criminal gangs if they become disillusioned after returning from the frontline, but *Meduza's* source noted that Kiriienko did not propose any specific solutions to address these issues. Kiriienko claimed that the Kremlin's new "Time of Heroes" program could provide a "buffer" between civilians and returning servicemen, but *Meduza* noted that this program only accepts roughly 100 officers per term and cannot support Russia's wider veteran population.

Meduza's sources suggested that Kremlin officials do not yet fully understand the scale of the risk that returning veterans could pose to Russia's internal stability, which supports ISW's ongoing assessment that the Kremlin likely gave little consideration to the long-term social consequences of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine prior to February 2022.[15] The Kremlin already appears to be struggling to quell ongoing interethnic and interreligious conflict in Russia, and the June 2023 Wagner Group armed

rebellion highlighted how discontent simmering among Russian military personnel can quickly become an immediate threat to regime stability.[16]

The Russian government is reportedly considering stricter measures to directly censor critical voices on Russian social media. Kremlin newswire TASS reported on July 19 that an unspecified source stated that Russian lawmakers are discussing legislation that would force social media account owners with at least 10,000 subscribers to transfer personal identification data to Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor and that would block the channel for noncompliance.[17] Roskomnadzor stated on July 11 that it may require social media account owners with a daily audience of over 1,000 people to provide identifying information and would prohibit Russian companies from advertising on pages whose owners do not provide such information.[18]

ISW previously assessed that Roskomnadzor's proposal was part of wider Kremlin efforts to root out critical voices and consolidate control over the Russian information space. Roskomnadzor may have decided that the previous measures that aimed to push critical voices to self-deter out of fear of losing income from advertisements would not have guaranteed the Russian government's ability to directly control the information space as channel administrators that do not rely on income from advertisements would have been able to continue to operate anonymously. The reported new proposals, however, will allow the Russian government to directly censor all larger critical channels that remain anonymous. Roskomnadzor's proposals may be affecting the decision-making of Telegram's administrators. Telegram founder Pavel Durov stated on July 19 that Telegram would begin displaying the month and country in which a channel registered but noted that this was part of efforts to combat scammers on the application.[19] Durov's announcement, however, is notable as he has regularly advertised Telegram as a privacy-oriented, independent, and censored platform since its founding in 2013.[20]

Russian authorities continue to propose stricter migration legislation as Russia's ultranationalists continue to espouse xenophobic rhetoric and complain about the Russian government's perceived lenient migration policy. The Russian Investigative Committee stated on July 19 that it sent proposals to the Russian State Duma to more strictly regulate migrants in Russia and the methods for depriving naturalized citizens of their Russian citizenship.[21] The Investigative Committee called for Russian authorities to deprive naturalized citizens of their citizenship if they prepare, attempt, or commission any crimes classified as grave or especially grave. The Investigative Committee also called for increased measures to control foreigners in Russia, including biometric procedures, genomic registration, and fingerprinting, and called for newly naturalized Russian citizens to register for military service at the same time as they receive their Russian passports.

Russian State Duma deputy Mikhail Matveyev posted footage on July 18 allegedly showing him intervening in a fight between migrants in Samara and getting hit.[22] Russian authorities charged a citizen of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and a resident of Samara on July 19 for attempting to murder Matveyev.[23] Russian ultranationalist milbloggers responded to the incident on July 19, complaining about the government's insufficient actions to respond to migrant crimes and inadequate restrictions on the distribution of Russian passports to migrants.[24] The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed on July 19 that it prevented a terrorist attack in Essentuki, Stavropol Krai, and that Russian authorities arrested a citizen of Tajikistan for preparing the attack.[25] Russian ultranationalists responded to the alleged attack by calling for the Russian government, and specifically Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin, to greatly restrict entry points into Russia for Central Asian migrants and claimed that Russia does not need migrant workers to supplement its workforce.[26] Bastrykin has notably recently positioned himself as a prominent figure in Russia's ultranationalist community and specifically appeals to ultranationalist animus to migrants.[27]

ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is struggling to reconcile its inconsistent policies that attempt to appease Russian ultranationalists' anti-migration position while leveraging migrants to address domestic labor shortages and the Russian military's force generation needs.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated the importance of developing an international consensus for pursuing peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban appears to be augmenting several Russian information operations amid continued efforts to present himself as a possible future mediator between Russia and Ukraine.
- New United Kingdom (UK) Defense Secretary John Healey stated on July 19 that Ukraine can use UK-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia, despite previous reports that the UK had not permitted Ukraine to use UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia.
- The Kremlin is reportedly concerned about the long-term social and political implications of Russian veterans returning from the war in Ukraine.
- The Russian government is reportedly considering stricter measures to directly censor critical voices on Russian social media.
- Russian authorities continue to propose stricter migration legislation as Russia's ultranationalists continue to espouse xenophobic rhetoric and complain about the Russian government's perceived lenient migration policy.

- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Toretsk, and Avdiivka.
- Disorganization continues to plague Russian efforts to integrate personnel who served in Russian proxy forces in occupied Ukraine into the Russian military bureaucracy.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 18, 2024

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

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

July 18, 2024, 7:15 pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1pm ET on July 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian coast guard base in occupied Crimea on the night of July 17 to 18. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on July 18 that sources in Ukrainian law enforcement stated that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted a naval and aerial drone strike during a Russian military exercise at a Russian coast guard base near occupied Lake Donuzlav, Crimea on the night of July 17 to 18 and damaged and disabled a headquarters with a control point, a warehouse with ammunition and equipment, an electric substation, technical facilities, and Russian firing positions.[1] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 31st Air Force and Air Defense Division (4th Air Force and Air Defense Army) shot down at least 33 aerial drones but that debris from falling drones caused insignificant damage near occupied Yevpatoria.[2] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on July 18 that elements of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) destroyed 10 naval drones in the Black Sea.[3]

European countries continue to display their commitment to Ukraine and unity in the face of Russian aggression. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated during the plenary session of the European Political Community summit in the United Kingdom (UK) on July 18 that Russian President Vladimir Putin has failed to divide Europe and thanked Ukraine's Western partners for easing restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian border areas north of Kharkiv Oblast.[4] Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces have stopped the Russian offensive into northern Kharkiv Oblast and noted that Ukrainian strikes against military targets in Belgorod Oblast play a role in Ukraine's ability to repel this offensive. Zelensky called on Western states to further lift restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russia to help defend Ukrainian civilians from Russian air, drone, and missile strikes. Zelensky will have additional meetings with UK officials and defense company representatives on July 19 and announced an intergovernmental agreement to support Ukraine's defense industry on July 18.[5] Ukraine also signed bilateral agreements with Czechia and Slovenia on July 18.[6] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that NATO will open a command center in Germany to oversee and coordinate NATO's military assistance and training projects that support the Ukrainian Armed Forces and that the command center will be operational in September 2024.[7] Stoltenberg stated that 700 personnel will staff the command center and help coordinate NATO member states' support for Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced on July 18 that she hopes to launch a "European Defense Union" during her second term to help address cross-border threats within the European Union (EU), beginning with new "European Air Shield" and cyber defense programs.[8]

Rosgvardia made an unprecedented proposal on July 17 to grant Russian Central Bank leadership the right to carry automatic weapons and handguns.[9] Rosgvardia — a security agency tasked with protecting Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime from internal threats and safeguarding some critical infrastructure — submitted a draft bill, which explained that Russian Central Bank leadership needs the right to carry weapons, including pistols, assault rifles, and submachine and machine guns, "to strengthen the protection and security of [Russian] infrastructure facilities." [10] The Central Bank's press service added that this proposal will allow the Central Bank to ensure the protection of the Russian Bank's facilities and employees in occupied Ukraine.[11] The draft bill proposed allowing deputy chairpersons, their advisers, and department directors and deputies to carry pistols and submachine guns. The draft bill specified that security guards and employees of the departments involved in cash collection and weapons circulation at Central Bank facilities would receive assault rifles and machine guns if the bill passes. The draft bill did not list the Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina as a potential recipient of weapons, however.[12] ISW previously observed reports that Putin trusts Nabiullina and even granted her the "exclusive right" to voice her true opinions about the real economic situation in Russia. The reason for her exclusion from this proposal is unclear. [13] It is possible that she was excluded from the list because she does not work in high-risk areas, such as Russia's border regions or occupied Ukraine. Russian military and political bloggers expressed frustration that Rosgvardia is considering allocating weapons to Central Bank employees despite the fact that these weapons are needed on the frontlines and Russian officers and contract servicemen are not allowed to carry short-barreled weapons.[14] Rosgvardia may have proposed to arm Central Bank leadership as part of its ongoing efforts to expand Rosgvardia's authority in Russia and occupied Ukraine.[15] Rosgvardia may have also proposed to arm Central Bank employees to establish patronage networks over the banking sector in Russia and occupied Ukraine.

Kremlin officials continue to expand the geographic scope of Russia's proposed alternative "Eurasian security architecture." Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed at a press

conference at the United Nations (UN) on July 17 that Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are advocating within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (an economic union comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) for the creation of a Eurasian security architecture.[16] Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the creation of an alternative Eurasian security system with support from PRC President Xi Jinping on June 14. Putin has recently specifically highlighted that Russia is ready to discuss Eurasian security issues with the SCO and that Russia wants to develop dialogue with ASEAN.[17] Putin has labelled Vietnam — a country not typically included in political conceptions of Eurasia — as part of his proposed Eurasian security system.[18] The Gulf Cooperation Council consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; and Russia appears to consider the Gulf states as potential members of Russia's envisioned "Eurasian" system.

The US continues efforts to build out a partnership with Armenia, sparking critical reactions from Kremlin officials. US Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya traveled to Yerevan, Armenia on July 13 and announced that the US has allocated roughly \$16 million to the formation of a patrol police force in Armenia and is working with Armenia to pursue law enforcement reforms.[19] Zeya also highlighted the joint US–Armenian "Eagle Partner" military exercise, which began on July 16, and confirmed that a US Army resident advisor will soon be attached to the Armenia Ministry of Defense.[20] Zeya noted that Armenia's participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) remains an Armenian choice that the US will respect but that the US has seen no evidence suggesting that "Russia's military presence contributes to a more peaceful and stable South Caucasus region." Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the US of using visits to Armenia to pursue anti-Russian activities in the Caucasus.[21] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger responded to Zeya's visit to Armenia and claimed that the US is trying to "intrude" on Armenia's law enforcement in order to "take control" of Armenia.[22] Armenia's relationship with the West has been particularly neuralgic for Russia as Armenia has taken concrete steps to distance itself from the Kremlin over the past months.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian coast guard base in occupied Crimea on the night of July 17 to 18.
- European countries continue to display their commitment to Ukraine and unity in the face of Russian aggression.
- Rosgvardia made an unprecedented proposal on July 17 to grant Russian Central Bank leadership the right to carry automatic weapons and handguns.
- Kremlin officials continue to expand the geographic scope of Russia's proposed alternative "Eurasian security architecture."
- The US continues efforts to build out a partnership with Armenia, sparking critical reactions from Kremlin officials.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and near Kharkiv City, Toretsk, Avdiivka, and Hulyaipole.
- Russian officials continue efforts to expand the Russian Armed Forces' training capacity and address force generation issues.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 17, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

July 17, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on July 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian state news outlets editorialized comments by Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and claimed that he said that the Ukrainian state will no longer exist by 2034, likely to support the Kremlin's efforts to prepare the Russian public for a long war in Ukraine while promising that Russia will complete its objective to destroy Ukrainian statehood within a decade. Russian media editorialized comments made by Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev in an interview with Russian outlet *Argumenty i Fakty* (AIF) on July 17.[1] Medvedev claimed that "it is not for nothing" that NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg suggested that Ukraine could be able to join the alliance within the next ten years, concluding that Ukraine will "never" join NATO because NATO leadership will have changed by 2034 and because "it is quite possible that the notorious country 404 [a derogative use of the 404 computer 'error' code meant to suggest that Ukraine is not a real state] will not exist either." [2] Medvedev notably did not explicitly say that Ukraine will cease to exist by 2034 — rather it was a tangential implication of his statements — but Russian news outlets, including Kremlin newswire TASS, immediately began publishing stories with headlines such as "Medvedev Admitted that Ukraine Will No Longer Exist in 2034" and, "Medvedev Predicted the Disappearance of Ukraine by 2034." [3]

There are several implications to the way that Russian media is currently editorializing Medvedev's statements. First and foremost, the explicit suggestion that Russia will be able to "destroy Ukraine" by 2034 is a promise to the Russian public that Russia will be able to win the war and achieve its objective to destroy Ukrainian statehood within a decade. This sets careful information conditions and societal expectations for a war that will last another decade, but one that will end with Russia's desired "victory." This Russian narrative also directly and strongly undermines select Kremlin officials' separate attempts to suggest that Russia is willing to "negotiate" for "peace" with Ukraine and further emphasizes that the Kremlin's only desired end-state for the war is the complete destruction of the Ukrainian state and people. Russian President Vladimir Putin has carefully articulated his goals for the war as such and has demanded that Ukrainian forces withdraw from territory that Russian forces do not control as a precondition for any kind of "peace" negotiations, as ISW has previously assessed.[4] Neither Ukraine nor the West can expect to negotiate with Russia on Russia's terms if Russia's terms are premised on the eradication of Ukraine and its people in the next ten years.

Russian officials continue to seize on diplomatic meetings with European states to create the impression that Russia is normalizing its relations with the West and claim that there is limited Western support for Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) on July 16 and reiterated the importance of Russian President Vladimir Putin's and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's July 5 meeting in Moscow.[5] Lavrov and Szijarto amplified standard Kremlin narratives about the war in Ukraine, condemned Ukraine's supposed human rights violations against its "national minorities," and reiterated that Russian–Hungarian relations will continue to develop despite the "difficult international situation." [6] Szijarto continued Orban's efforts to present Hungary as a possible mediator between Russia and Ukraine and claimed following a July 16 meeting with People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister Wang Yi that Hungary is in favor of keeping open channels of communication with Russia in order to "resolve the Ukraine conflict." [7] Putin attempted to portray Orban as a representative of the European Union (EU) empowered to speak on the EU's behalf during Orban's July 5 visit to Moscow, but EU officials have continued to deny that Orban is speaking for the EU as a whole. [8] European Council President Charles Michel denounced Orban's recent trip to Moscow in a letter published on July 16 and reiterated that Hungary's temporary, rotating role as President of the EU Council does not give Orban the mandate to represent the EU or engage with world leaders on behalf of the EU. [9] The European Parliament adopted a resolution on July 17 condemning Orban for visiting Russia. [10]

Russia and India continue to strengthen their bilateral relationship amid reports of ongoing Russian weapons exports to India. Mumbai-based English-language outlet, the *Economic Times*, reported on July 16 that the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) recently summoned the Ukrainian Ambassador to India and "raised an issue" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's criticism of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's July 8–9 visit to Russia. [11] The *Economic Times* stated that the Indian government also postponed a joint cultural working group with Ukraine following Zelensky's statement. Chennai-based Indian outlet the *Hindu* reported on July 15, citing an unspecified defense official, that Russia will deliver two stealth frigates to the Indian Navy by February 2025 as part of a 2016 agreement. [12] The 2016 Russian–Indian agreement requires that India will import two frigates from Russia by 2026 and that Russia will assist with the in-country manufacturing of two frigates by an Indian shipbuilding company. [13] The *Times of India*, citing unspecified defense officials, reported on July 12 that India recently requested Russia expedite the delivery of two Russian S-400 air defense systems in order to meet the Indian Air Force's requirements. [14] The defense officials claimed that the Russian government assured India that it will consider the request, and the *Times of India* reported that Russia has delivered only three of the five promised air defense systems thus far. *Reuters* reported on July 11 that an Indian government source stated that Indian state-run oil refineries are negotiating a long-term oil import deal with Russia following Modi's visit to Russia on July 8 and 9. [15]

Russia and Ukraine exchanged 95 prisoners of war (POWs) each in a one-to-one POW exchange on July 17. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that 95 Ukrainian POWs returned to Ukrainian held-territory in an exchange mediated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported the return of 95 Russian POWs. [16] Ukrainian and international organizations have recorded abuse and torture amongst almost all Ukrainian POWs released from Russian detention, and ISW has extensively reported on footage and reports of Russian servicemen abusing and executing Ukrainian POWs. [17] One serviceman who returned in the July 17 exchange stated that he suffers from chronic stomach issues and breathing problems due to constant beatings and other abuse at the hands of his Russian captors. [18]

Kremlin officials continue attempts to curry favor with Russian ultranationalists by appealing to anti-migrant animus despite such appeals generating tensions with the Russian government's efforts to execute the Kremlin's wider migration policy. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin chaired a review of the Investigative Committee's work for the first six months of 2024 on July 16 and specifically focused on the topic of investigating crimes associated with migrants. [19] The Investigative Committee claimed that specific violent and extremist crimes committed by migrants in Russia increased by five to 55 percent in the first six months of 2024. [20] The Investigative Committee claimed that crimes committed by migrants are closely related to abuses within Russian regulatory and law enforcement agencies as well as among entrepreneurs trying to attract foreign labor, likely attempting to tie claims about crimes committed by migrants to

perceptions that corruption is facilitating illegal migration to Russia.[21] A prominent Russian ultranationalist pointed to the alleged statistics from the Investigative Committee to justify their routine claims about issues associated with migration in Russia.[22] The prominent ultranationalist also claimed that pro-migrant actors within the Russian State Duma are trying to prevent select Kremlin officials from addressing the issue of migration.[23] The ultranationalist's observations likely reflect the contradictory approach the Kremlin has used towards migrants instead of any wide rift on the topic of migration, however. The Kremlin is currently relying on migrants to offset labor shortages and is leveraging migrants as a recruitment pool for the war in Ukraine, but the Kremlin's appeals to ultranationalist xenophobia undermine these efforts.[24] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is struggling to reconcile inconsistent and contradictory policies that attempt to appease the Russian ultranationalist community's anti-migration position while leveraging migrants to address manpower and human capital needs.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian state news outlets editorialized comments by Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and claimed that he said that the Ukrainian state will no longer exist by 2034, likely to support the Kremlin's efforts to prepare the Russian public for a long war in Ukraine while promising that Russia will complete its objective to destroy Ukrainian statehood within a decade.
- Russian officials continue to seize on diplomatic meetings with European states to create the impression that Russia is normalizing its relations with the West and claim that there is limited Western support for Russia.
- Russia and India continue to strengthen their bilateral relationship amid reports of ongoing Russian weapons exports to India.
- Russia and Ukraine exchanged 95 prisoners of war (POWs) each in a one-to-one POW exchange on July 17.
- Kremlin officials continue attempts to curry favor with Russian ultranationalists by appealing to anti-migrant animus despite such appeals generating tensions with the Russian government's efforts to execute the Kremlin's wider migration policy.
- Ukrainian forces regained positions south of Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City and near Kupyansk, Svatove, Avdiivka, and Vuhledar.
- Russia's crypto-mobilization campaign continues to generate increasing financial costs for the Russian government.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 16, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

July 16, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Ukrainian drone strikes deep within Russia continue to pressure Russia's air defense umbrella and force the Russian military command to prioritize allocating limited air defense assets to cover what it deems to be high-value targets. Satellite imagery collected on May 6 indicates that Russian forces have concentrated at least seven Pantsir-1 medium-range air defense systems around Russian President Vladimir Putin's residence in Valdai, Leningrad Oblast.[1] Ruslan Pukhov, the head of the Moscow-based Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies and a member of a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) civilian advisory board, stated on July 16 that such "focal" air defense coverage (static coverage of a singular target) is meaningless at scale because it allows Ukrainian drones to bypass Russian air defense coverage and strike from uncovered directions.[2] The Russian military apparently lacks the required conventional air defense systems to protect all critical facilities within western Russia and has even struggled to cover important potential targets in reportedly well-defended areas within Russia.[3] Pukhov called on the Russian military to introduce an innovative decentralized approach to protect facilities in Russia from Ukrainian drones and warned that Ukrainian drones will likely reach deeper within Russia.[4] The Russian military began forming mobile fire groups — decentralized groups that Ukraine successfully deployed to defend against Russian Shahed-136/131 drone strikes — in March 2024 but have yet to field these groups at the required scale to sufficiently protect critical facilities in western Russia.[5] Continued pressures on Russia's air defense umbrella have led select regional authorities to explicitly state that Russian companies and local authorities cannot rely on federal-level Russian air defenses and need to provide for their own anti-drone capabilities.[6] Pukhov suggested that the Russian military field a fleet of light aircraft to intercept Ukrainian drones but noted that Russia's low level of light aircraft production would complicate such an effort.[7]

Ukrainian forces continue targeting Russian air defense systems in occupied Ukraine and in Russia's border areas to set conditions to field F-16 fighter jets following their anticipated Summer-Fall 2024 arrival to Ukraine. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on July 16 that Ukrainian forces struck an S-300 position in occupied Donetsk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces have destroyed 20 S-300 launchers and 15 radar stations total in an unspecified time period.[8] Syrskyi published geolocated footage showing Ukrainian forces using

cluster munitions to strike Russian air defense systems located east of occupied Manhush, Donetsk Oblast (west of Mariupol).[9] The Council of Deputies of Krasninskoye, Volgograd Oblast also claimed on July 15 that the commander of a Russian S-300 battery originally from the area was killed in a Ukrainian ATACMS strike against a S-300 position in the Kharkiv direction at 1300 local time on July 12.[10] The Russian S-300 commander more likely died in a Ukrainian strike against occupied Mariupol, as the commander's reported time of death is within 15 minutes of a reported strike against a Russian S-300 system near Mariupol on July 12. ISW has not observed indications of a Ukrainian strike against Russian air defense assets in Belgorod Oblast on July 12.[11] ISW is unable to confirm the location of the July 12 strike.

Syrskiy stated on July 16 that Ukrainian forces were systematically destroying Russia's air defense capabilities to set conditions for Ukraine's successful use of strike aircraft and noted that F-16s are arriving "soon." [12] Founder of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) "Kraken" Regiment Kostyantyn Nemichev stated on July 12 that Ukrainian forces destroyed four Russian S-300 systems that Russian forces used to strike Kharkiv City within an unspecified period of time.[13] The Council of Deputies of Krasninskoye, Volgograd Oblast claimed that the Russian S-300 battery commander killed on July 12 had noted in a recent letter that Ukrainian strikes against Russian air defense assets had killed two Russian battery commanders, likely air defense batteries, in the past two weeks (likely referring to some time in June-early July 2024).[14] The F-16 deliveries to Ukraine will likely begin in small numbers, and materiel and training constraints will likely prevent Ukrainian forces from leveraging fixed-wing airpower at scale in 2024, as ISW has previously noted. [15] Ukrainian officials have previously indicated that Ukrainian forces also intend to use F-16s and other fixed-wing aircraft as part of Ukraine's broader air defense umbrella.[16] However, as ISW previously noted, Ukraine will need to attrit Russia's overall air defense capabilities to safeguard F-16s and properly integrate them into Ukraine's combat operations.[17]

The Russian 235th Garrison Military Court released former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Major General Ivan Popov from pre-detention on July 15 and placed him under house arrest until October 11.[18]

The 235th Garrison Military Court previously refused a request to transfer Popov to house arrest in May 2024 due to opposition from the Russian Prosecutor's Office. [19] Russian authorities arrested Popov on fraud charges on May 17, but ISW assessed that the real reason behind Popov's arrest is likely tied to his leaked audio message in which he revealed that former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu dismissed him for expressing persistent grievances about problems in western Zaporizhia Oblast during the Ukrainian Summer 2023 counteroffensive. [20] Russian political bloggers speculated that First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergey Kiriyenko may have influenced the court's decision to transfer Popov to house arrest and that this transfer occurred during Russian Chief of General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov's leave.[21] One political blogger claimed that Gerasimov considers Popov a "personal enemy," which may explain why Kiriyenko made the decision during Gerasimov's absence.[22] The Russian MoD, however, published footage on July 16 of Gerasimov visiting a command post of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces (GoF), where he reportedly heard reports from Eastern GoF Commander Lieutenant General Alexander Sanchik and lauded the claimed Russian seizure of Urozhaine (a settlement on the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border).[23] ISW observed that the Kremlin recently publicly confirmed that Sanchik replaced Colonel General Sergei Kuzmenko as acting Eastern Military District (EMD) commander.[24]

Armenian police detained another Russian citizen in Armenia, likely at the request of Russian authorities, amid deteriorating Armenian-Russian political and security relations. The Armenian Police reported on July 15 that they detained Russian citizen "Ivan Ch" at the Zvartnots Yerevan International Airport after he arrived in Armenia from Kazakhstan and that Russian authorities put "Ivan Ch" on the Russian wanted list in 2023 for unauthorized abandonment of a military unit.[25] The Armenian police reportedly notified Russian law enforcement of Ivan Ch's detention.[26] Russian military authorities in Armenia previously detained Russian citizens in Armenia for desertion in December 2023 and April 2024, reportedly without notifying Armenian officials.[27] Armenian law enforcement, cooperating with Russian authorities, also recently detained a Russian citizen on Russia's wanted list at the Yerevan Airport for spreading false information about the Russian military. [28] Russia's detentions of its citizens and Russia's requests for Armenian authorities to detain Russian citizens in Armenia are likely part of a Kremlin effort to assert and demonstrate power over Armenia and challenge Armenia's sovereignty.

An investigation by Russian opposition outlet *The Bell* found that approximately 650,000 people left Russia following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and have not returned.[29] *The Bell* stated that official Russian estimates on how many people have permanently left the country since 2022 are deliberately misrepresentative of the actual scale and instead analyzed immigration statistics of the countries to which Russian citizens fled. *The Bell* found that the majority of these Russian citizens went to countries that have visa-free regime agreements with Russia, including Armenia (which took 110,000 Russians), Kazakhstan (which took 80,000 Russians), and Georgia (which took 74,000 Russians). Israel and the US took 80,000 and 48,000 Russian citizens, respectively. The actual number of Russian citizens who left Russia is likely greater than 700,000 given that *The Bell* reported that countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Greece, and Cyprus did not provide Russian immigration data and that some countries such as Portugal lack updated Russian immigration statistics beyond 2022. *Forbes* notably reported in October 2022, citing sources in the Russian Presidential Administration, that about 700,000 people fled Russia in the first

two weeks following the September 21, 2022, start of partial mobilization in Russia.[30] Russian officials previously engaged in a concerted effort to claim that a majority of those who fled since February 2022 began returning to Russia in 2023, but *The Bell* investigation undermines those Russian claims.[31] *The Bell* noted that the number of people it confirmed to have permanently left Russia accounts for only 0.5 percent of the whole Russian population, but that this percentage still represents the largest mass Russian emigration in the last two decades (since the period between 1992-2004, when 1.6 million people left Russia in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union). The permanent loss of this population will continue to impact Russia's economy—ISW previously reported that mass emigration on such a scale caused mass skilled labor shortages and "brain-drain" amongst more educated and skilled parts of the labor force, who are more likely to be able to afford to permanently move abroad.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian drone strikes deep within Russia continue to pressure Russia's air defense umbrella and force the Russian military command to prioritize allocating limited air defense assets to cover what it deems to be high-value targets.**
- **Ukrainian forces continue targeting Russian air defense systems in occupied Ukraine and in Russia's border areas to set conditions to field F-16 fighter jets following their anticipated Summer-Fall 2024 arrival to Ukraine.**
- **The Russian 235th Garrison Military Court released former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Major General Ivan Popov from pre-detention on July 15 center and placed him under house arrest until October 11.**
- **Armenian police detained another Russian citizen in Armenia, likely at the request of Russian authorities, amid deteriorating Armenian-Russian political and security relations.**
- **An investigation by Russian opposition outlet *The Bell* found that approximately 650,000 people left Russia following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and have not returned.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Avdiivka.**
- **The Russian government is continuing to improve Russia's bureaucratic mobilization and conscription systems.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 15, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

July 15, 2024, 7pm ET

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

A recent Ukrainian poll indicates that Ukrainians widely reject Russia's demands for total Ukrainian capitulation, emphasizing that the Kremlin's conditions for the end of the war are entirely unreasonable and widely unpopular within Ukraine. Ukrainian outlet *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya* commissioned a poll by the Ukrainian Razumkov Center and published its results on July 15. [1] The poll found that 83 percent of respondents rejected Putin's statement that Ukraine must withdraw from all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts — including territory in these oblasts currently under Ukrainian control.[2] The poll also reported that 58 percent of respondents stated that Ukraine should not agree to enshrine a neutral, non-aligned, and non-nuclear status in its constitution. Putin demanded in June 2024 that Ukraine recognize Russia's territorial claims over eastern and southern Ukraine (including territory that Russia does not currently occupy), "demilitarize," and pledge not to join NATO as preconditions to begin "peace" negotiations.[3] Putin's extreme terms are tantamount to Ukraine's capitulation, indicating that Putin continues to be uninterested in good-faith negotiations on any terms other than Russia's. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov recently accused NATO on July 14 of not respecting "Russia's main concern" when NATO announced Ukraine's prospects of admission into the alliance, claiming that the alliance's behavior suggests that there is no basis for negotiations about the war in Ukraine.[4] Putin's framing of Ukraine's total capitulation as a reasonable precondition for peace negotiations is also part of an attempt to undermine Ukraine's efforts to garner international support for Ukraine's own legitimate negotiating positions, which are based on and backed by international law, by shifting international perceptions of logical negotiating terms in Russia's favor. Continued Russian efforts to claim that Ukraine is refusing "reasonable" demands intend to cast Ukraine as the unreasonable actor, despite the fact that Ukraine's rightful borders have been recognized by international law since 1991.

Ukraine continues to demonstrate its willingness to negotiate with Russia on Ukraine's own terms, and Ukraine's demands for a peace settlement are in accordance with international law — in direct contrast to Russia's unwillingness to engage in negotiations that end in anything short of full Ukrainian surrender. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on July 15 that Ukrainian plans for a second peace summit should be ready by November 2024 and reiterated that a

Russian representative should attend.[5] Zelensky stated that in preparation, Ukraine will hold a meeting in Qatar on energy security in late July or early August 2024, a meeting on freedom of navigation in Turkey in August 2024, and a meeting on prisoner of war (POW) exchanges and the repatriation of deported Ukrainian children in Canada in September 2024 — three issues on which the communique of the first Ukraine-initiated Global Peace Summit in Switzerland in June 2024 focused. [6] Recent Kremlin statements continue to demonstrate that Russia is inflexible on negotiations with Ukraine, however, and Kremlin officials have directly stated that Russia would not participate in a second peace summit because its terms are a non-starter given Russian demands.[7] Ukrainian officials emphasized that the purpose of the first peace summit was to facilitate a peace based on international law, including laws to which the Russian Federation is party.[8] Ukraine's demands that Russia completely withdraw from Ukrainian territory are provided for under international law and are therefore reasonable. Russia's demands for Ukraine's complete capitulation and continued Russian occupation of Ukrainian land are and would be violations of international law, however. ISW also continues to assess that Putin's demands for Ukrainian capitulation would allow Russian forces and occupation administrations to continue their large-scale and deliberate ethnic cleansing campaigns in occupied Ukraine, and the complete reinstatement of Ukraine's territory integrity is necessary to liberate the Ukrainian people from Russian occupation.[9] An acceptance of anything but Ukraine's liberation of its people is an implicit endorsement of Russia's illegal occupation of over five million Ukrainians.

European Union (EU) officials continue to take steps to demonstrate the EU's non-alignment with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's political stances concerning the war in Ukraine.

Balazs Orban, Viktor Orban's Political Director, stated on July 15 that Viktor Orban has additional "trips and negotiations" planned and wrote to the European Council about his previous visits to and discussions about negotiations with Ukraine, Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the US.[10] EU Commission Spokesperson Eric Mamer stated on July 15 that due to Orban's recent actions, EU leaders, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, would not attend informal meetings led by Hungary.[11] *Politico* reported on July 15 that three unspecified EU diplomats stated that EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell will hold a "formal" foreign affairs council meeting at the same time as Hungary's foreign affairs summit in Budapest in late August 2024.[12] A source reportedly stated that other EU foreign ministers want to "send a clear signal that Hungary does not speak for the EU." Swedish Minister for EU Affairs Jessika Roswall told *Reuters* on July 11 that Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland would only send civil servants to government meetings connected with Hungary's EU Council presidency in July 2024 and that other EU states are considering similar measures.[13]

The Russian government proposed to significantly increase the number of conditions on which the Russian government can designate a person as a terrorist or extremist, likely as part of efforts to censor criticisms about Russia's war in Ukraine.

The Russian government submitted a bill to the State Duma on July 15 that would expand the number of articles of the Russian Criminal Code under which the Russian Federal Service for Financial Monitoring (Rosfinmonitoring) could add people to Russia's list of terrorists and extremists.[14] The proposal notably would allow Rosfinmonitoring to add people whom Russian authorities have convicted of spreading "fakes" about the Russian military out of political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred to the list. The proposal would also allow Rosfinmonitoring to add people accused of committing unspecified "other crimes" motivated by political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred to the list — granting the Russian government significant leeway to designate people who have allegedly committed a wide array of crimes as terrorists and extremists. The Kremlin has repeatedly attempted to portray Russia as a harmonious multinational and multireligious society despite recent increases in xenophobic rhetoric from Russia's ultranationalist community.[15] The Russian government is likely looking to change the mechanisms for adding people to the terrorist and extremist list in order to incentivize Russians to engage in self-censorship by tightening the Kremlin's control over criticism in Russian society, especially about Russia's war in Ukraine, while posturing these changes as part of efforts to ensure political and religious freedom and societal harmony in Russia.

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Russian energy infrastructure overnight on July 14 to 15 and reportedly also hit Russian military assets in occupied Crimea.

Lipetsk Oblast Head Igor Artamonov claimed on July 15 that a Ukrainian drone struck the grounds of an electrical substation in Stanovlyansky Raion, Lipetsk Oblast, and the Oryol Oblast administration claimed that a Ukrainian drone damaged an oil storage container after Russian electronic warfare (EW) suppressed the drone over a fuel and energy complex in the Oryolsky Raion.[16] A local Crimean channel claimed that Ukrainian drones struck either a Russian S-300/S-400 air defense system or a Black Sea Fleet (BSF) electronic intelligence unit near occupied Cape Fiolent, but ISW is unable to confirm this strike. [17] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces downed six Ukrainian drones over occupied Crimea and one Ukrainian drone over Lipetsk Oblast overnight on July 14 to 15 and another Ukrainian drone near western Crimea on the afternoon of July 15.[18]

A new Russian migrant assimilation program highlights the apparent struggle the Russian government is facing with reconciling aspects of its policy towards Central Asian migrants as the Russian state desires to present itself as welcoming and multicultural while also emphasizing the primacy of Russian language and historical legacy. Kremlin-affiliated business-focused outlet *Kommersant* reported on July 15 that the Russian Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs (FADN) has developed a 70-minute lecture for Central Asian migrants on how to adapt to life in

Russia.[19] *Kommersant* reportedly reviewed the course, which has four sections: "fundamentals of migration and labor legislation," "fundamentals of informal behavior in Russia," "responsibility for non-compliance with Russian legislation," and "the history of relations between Russian and the countries of Central Asia." The course reportedly emphasizes that migrants may undergo a simplified process for acquiring citizenship if they choose to serve with the Russian military, suggesting that the Russian government continues to use the promise of citizenship as a method of luring Central Asian migrants into the army. The course also stresses that "it is important to remember that Russia is a secular state" so migrants must not perform religious rituals, including daily prayers, in public spaces and that "Russians are a multinational people, but everyone speaks Russian." *Kommersant* found that the course offers a paternalistic and Russia-centric version of Central Asian history, claiming that "big money from the Soviet budget allowed the Central Asian republics to develop successfully."

The purported assimilation lecture distills several of the tensions that currently exist in Russia's relationship with its migrant minority communities, particularly those from various Central Asian states. As ISW has written at length, Russia's reliance on Central Asian migrants to support Russia's labor force and sustain military mobilization efforts, has caused substantial frictions within such communities, particularly as many pro-war ultranationalist voices have espoused increasingly xenophobic rhetoric over the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.[20] Head of the Russian Federal Service for the Supervision of Education and Science (Rosnoblrazd) Anzor Muzaev, for example, advocated that migrants' children must know Russian to study in Russian schools.[21] Several ultranationalist commentators responded and suggested that the Russian government must adopt a harsher response that prohibits migrants from bringing their families to Russia or prohibits migrant children from studying in public schools at all.[22] The FADN's assimilation program is ostensibly meant to soothe these tensions, but emphasizes that Russian language, history, and culture are meant to enjoy special primacy in migrant communities—directly undermining the Kremlin narrative that Russia is an open and accepting multicultural and multireligious society. This program may also increase tensions and feelings of disenfranchisement within Central Asian migrant communities by enforcing their isolation from their languages, customs, and religious practices.

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov is posturing himself and the North Caucasus as key to Russia's outreach to the Arab world. Kadyrov met on July 15 with United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ambassador to Russia Mohammed Akhmed Sultan Essa Al Jaber and Qatari Ambassador to Russia Sheikh Ahmed bin Nasser Al Thani in Grozny, Chechnya at the ongoing Caucasus Investment Forum. [23] Kadyrov emphasized Qatar's and the UAE's "warm relations" with Russia and Qatar, while also highlighting their individual relationships with Chechnya and the wider Caucasus region. The Kremlin likely seeks to use the Caucasus' unique geopolitical, religious, and socio-cultural positioning vis-a-vis the Arab world in order to draw investment to the region and increase political and diplomatic ties with major political players such as Qatar and the UAE. Qatar and the UAE, for example, continue to mediate prisoner of war (POW) exchanges and the repatriation of deported Ukrainian children, so it remains in Russia's interest to maintain firm ties with Gulf states.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- A recent Ukrainian poll indicates that Ukrainians widely reject Russia's demands for total Ukrainian capitulation, emphasizing that the Kremlin's conditions for the end of the war are entirely unreasonable and widely unpopular within Ukraine.
- Ukraine continues to demonstrate its willingness to negotiate with Russia on Ukraine's own terms, and Ukraine's demands for a peace settlement are in accordance with international law — in direct contrast to Russia's unwillingness to engage in negotiations that end in anything short of full Ukrainian surrender.
- European Union (EU) officials continue to take steps to demonstrate the EU's non-alignment with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's political stances concerning the war in Ukraine.
- The Russian government proposed to significantly increase the number of conditions on which the Russian government can designate a person as a terrorist or extremist, likely as part of efforts to censor criticisms about Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against Russian energy infrastructure overnight on July 14 to 15 and reportedly also hit Russian military assets in occupied Crimea.
- A new Russian migrant assimilation program highlights the apparent struggle the Russian government is facing with reconciling aspects of its policy towards Central Asian migrants as the Russian state desires to present itself as welcoming and multicultural while also emphasizing the primacy of Russian language and historical legacy.
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov is posturing himself and the North Caucasus as key to Russia's outreach to the Arab world.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Toretsk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Toretsk and Avdiivka.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized ongoing Russian efforts to integrate the metallurgy industry in occupied Ukraine into Russia's defense industrial base (DIB).

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Russian officials and milbloggers reiterated complaints about poor security around critical infrastructure in rear areas of Russia in response to a July 13 Ukrainian drone strike against an oil depot near Tsimlyansk, Rostov Oblast. Russian sources circulated footage on July 13 and 14 of two security guards armed with anti-drone guns seemingly watching a Ukrainian drone strike the oil depot without attempting to shoot down the drone and criticized the security guards for not defending the depot.[1] Russian sources alleged that Russian authorities have attempted to absolve themselves of responsibility for Ukrainian drone strikes by ordering Russian facilities to hire their own security and questioned why the Russian government has not organized mobile fire groups similar to Ukraine's mobile fire groups that defend against Russian Shahed-136/131 drone strikes.[2] Former Roscosmos (Russian space agency) head and Zaporizhia Oblast occupation senator Dmitry Rogozin responded to milblogger criticism on July 14 and claimed that Rosgvardia - a security agency tasked with protecting Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime from internal threats and some critical infrastructure - does not have the necessary manpower to set up defense posts at every critical facility in Russia. [3] Rogozin suggested that Russia should form, train, and equip specialized BARS (Russian Combat Army Reserve) volunteer units to provide technical and armed protection of critical energy and transport infrastructure facilities and called on the Russian government and Russian President Vladimir Putin to consider his proposal. Rogozin supervises several BARS units including the Russian BARS-10 Battalion of the "Tsarskiye Volki" Brigade, and owners of Russian irregular formations have previously attempted to use threats to Russian territory in order to advocate for their forces to move from frontline areas in Ukraine to defend Russia's rear and border areas.[4] Russian milbloggers have routinely complained about the Russian government's inability to address and repel Ukrainian strikes against Russian infrastructure.[5]

The Russian military command may have committed under-equipped units initially intended to act as an operational reserve to combat operations, possibly due to constraints on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) or efforts to reinforce ongoing Russian grinding assaults in Ukraine. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated on July 13 that the Russian military command intended to form the 27th Motorized Rifle Division (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) as an operational reserve of the Central Grouping of Forces (the command currently overseeing Russian offensive operations in the Avdiivka and Toretsk directions) that could be brought into battle in the event of the development of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Avdiivka direction or a Russian offensive in the Toretsk direction.[6] Mashovets stated that the Russian military command, however, deployed the 27th Motorized Rifle Division's 433rd Motorized Rifle Regiment, which is staffed by degraded remnants of the 21st Motorized Rifle Brigade, to the area northwest of Avdiivka before fully restoring its combat capability. Mashovets added that the Russian military command deployed the 506th and 589th motorized rifle regiments to the Toretsk direction ahead of schedule before the units reached their "planned terms." [7] Mashovets stated in March 2024 that the Russian military command only planned to equip the units of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division with up to 87 percent of its doctrinally required amounts of weapons and equipment and that the Russian military command planned to have the 433rd, 506th, and 598th motorized rifle regiments ready for combat by late spring or early summer 2024.[8] ISW first observed reports of elements of the 27th Motorized Rifle Division operating near Avdiivka in April 2024 and near Toretsk in early July 2024.[9] Mashovets' July 14 observation that these regiments deployed to combat earlier than planned, however, may suggest that the Russian military command fell behind the intended staffing and armament schedule and failed to equip these units up to the target 87 percent mark. ISW previously assessed that Russia's ongoing force generation efforts are creating a marginal number of additional forces not immediately committed to the front as reinforcements that Russia can use to gradually establish operational reserves but that the Russian DIB is unlikely able to fully support Russia's reserve manpower.[10] The Russian military command may also have deployed the units early in order to reinforce Russian forces' ongoing grinding assaults in eastern Ukraine.[11]

Ukraine signed a series of security agreements and received several aid packages amid and following the July 9-11 NATO summit. NATO member states issued a declaration on July 10 announcing a Pledge of Long-Term Security Assistance for Ukraine of at least 40 billion euros (about \$43 billion) within the next year that will purchase military equipment for Ukraine; fund the maintenance, logistics, and transportation of military equipment; fund military training for Ukrainian forces; invest in Ukraine's defense industrial base (DIB); and supply non-lethal aid to Ukraine. [12] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on July 11 that he signed a bilateral security agreement with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and Iohannis announced that Romania will transfer a Patriot air defense system to Ukraine at an unspecified future date.[13] Zelensky and Luxembourgish Prime Minister Luc Frieden signed a ten-year bilateral security agreement on July 10, and Zelensky and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk signed a security agreement requiring Poland to train Ukrainian volunteers and Ukrainian Legion units in Poland and provide Western equipment for the units.[14] Zelensky stated on July 14 that Ukraine is also negotiating agreements with Czechia, Slovenia, and Ireland.[15] The European Commission announced on July 13 that 21 countries and the European Union (EU) formed the Ukraine Compact that declares their support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.[16] The Compact pledges to support Ukraine's defensive needs, accelerate the development of Ukraine's forces, and allow them to respond swiftly to future Russian aggression against Ukraine. Australia committed to contributing to the training of Ukrainian forces and allocated 250 million Australian dollars (about \$170 million) worth of military aid to Ukraine on July 11 which includes air defense missiles, anti-tank weapons, and artillery ammunition. [17]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian officials and milbloggers reiterated complaints about poor security around critical infrastructure in rear areas of Russia in response to a July 13 Ukrainian drone strike against an oil depot near Tsimlyansk, Rostov Oblast.
- The Russian military command may have committed under-equipped units initially intended to act as an operational reserve to combat operations, possibly due to constraints on the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) or efforts to reinforce ongoing Russian grinding assaults in Ukraine.
- Ukraine signed a series of security agreements and received several aid packages amid and following the July 9-11 NATO summit.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Vovchansk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Avdiivka.
- Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairman Andrei Kartapolov reiterated on July 14 that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is not planning to demobilize servicemembers that Russia mobilized in Fall 2022 before the end of the war.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 13, 2024](#)

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Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 13, 2024, 4:35pm ET

Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against an oil depot near Tsimlyansk, Rostov Oblast on the morning of July 13. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that its sources stated that SBU drones struck the oil depot, which stored various grades of gas and diesel fuel.[1] Russian sources amplified footage showing the fire at an oil depot near Tsimlyansk, Rostov Oblast (156km northeast of Rostov-on-Don), and Rostov Oblast Head Vasily Golubev confirmed that a drone strike caused the fire.[2] A Ukrainian military observer told Ukrainian media that Ukrainian forces are targeting Russian military logistics, including oil depots, and that Rostov Oblast is one of Russia's most important military logistics hubs.[3]

Russia and Iran continue to signal their commitment to deepening bilateral relations and multilateral cooperation. Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian published an article in the *Tehran Times* on July 12 in which Pezeshkian praised the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia for standing by Iran during "challenging times." [4] Pezeshkian stated that Russia is a "valued strategic ally and neighbor" to Iran and that his government will remain committed to expanding and prioritizing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Russia, including through BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Pezeshkian claimed that Iran "strives for peace" between Russia and Ukraine and is prepared to support initiatives aimed at peace. Russian Ambassador to Iran Alexei Dedov stated during an interview with Russian state news agency *RIA Novosti* published on July 13 that Russia will pursue the same strategic course with Iran under Pezeshkian as Russia pursued under deceased Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. [5] Dedov claimed that Russia is prepared to consider peace mediation proposals from Iran, although Russian President Vladimir Putin recently rejected the possibility of any third-party mediation efforts between Russia and Ukraine. [6] Dedov stated that Russia and Iran will sign a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in the "foreseeable future," but did not provide a concrete timeline for this agreement.

A detained Russian businessman and a Russian military official who were reportedly connected to detained former Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov recently died on the same day. Russian media reported that Igor Kotelnikov, a businessman accused of bribing senior officials in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), died of heart failure in a detention facility in Moscow on July 8. [7] A Russian insider source claimed that Russian Federal Security (FSB) officers were attempting to pressure Kotelnikov to testify against Ivanov and other unnamed MoD officials when Kotelnikov fell ill in solitary confinement. [8] A Wagner-affiliated milblogger claimed that Kotelnikov had agreed with FSB military counterintelligence to testify against Ivanov. [9] Russian media reported that the head of the MoD's State Examination Department and Ivanov's former subordinate, Magomed Khandayev, also died on July 8 in Moscow of unspecified causes. [10] Russian authorities reportedly questioned Khandayev as a witness in Ivanov's case, but Khandayev was not facing any criminal charges of his own. [11] Russian authorities arrested Ivanov on April 24, 2024, on charges of accepting bribes, and Ivanov's arrest was the first arrest part of an ongoing large-scale removal of Russian defense officials. [12]

Armenian border guards, cooperating with Russian authorities, reportedly detained a Russian citizen in Yerevan, likely as part of a continued Kremlin effort to assert political power over Armenia and challenge Armenia's sovereignty amid deteriorating Russian-Armenian relations. Russian opposition outlet *Agentstvo Novosti* reported on July 13, citing two sources familiar with the matter, that Armenian border guards detained Natalia Taranushenko, whom the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) placed on its wanted list for spreading false information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at the Yerevan airport. [13] *Agentstvo Novosti*'s sources reported that Armenian border guards detained Taranushenko and transferred her to local police officials, who then

released her on the agreement she appear at local law enforcement agencies. The sources also stated that Russian authorities "forced" Armenian security authorities to cooperate and that Armenian police contacted their Russian counterparts. Russian military police of the 102nd Military Base previously detained Russian citizens in Armenia in December 2023 and April 2024 without notifying the Armenian authorities.[14]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) reportedly conducted successful drone strikes against an oil depot near Tsimlyansk, Rostov Oblast on the morning of July 13.**
- **Russia and Iran continue to signal their commitment to deepening bilateral relations and multilateral cooperation.**
- **A detained Russian businessman and a Russian military official who were reportedly connected to detained former Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov recently died on the same day.**
- **Armenian border guards, cooperating with Russian authorities, reportedly detained a Russian citizen in Yerevan, likely as part of a continued Kremlin effort to assert political power over Armenia and challenge Armenia's sovereignty amid deteriorating Russian-Armenian relations.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kupyansk and Svatove, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Toretsk and Avdiivka and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.**
- **The Russian military continues efforts to improve training capacity.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 12, 2024

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Riley Bailey, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 12, 2024, 7:45pm ET

Western and US officials reportedly assess that Ukrainian forces will continue to be on the defensive for the next six months and will not be able to conduct a large-scale counteroffensive operation until 2025. Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the tactical initiative in limited counterattacks in select sectors of the front, however, and Ukrainian forces may be able to conduct limited counteroffensive operations even while largely on the defensive depending on the arrival of Western aid. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on July 11 that a senior NATO official stated that Ukraine would have to wait for more Western security assistance and deploy more of its forces to the frontline before conducting counteroffensive operations and that Ukraine would likely not be able to conduct these operations until 2025.[1] A senior US defense official stated that Ukrainian forces would remain on the defensive for the next six months (until January 2025) and that Russian forces will be unlikely to gain significant ground during this time. [2] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces currently remain unlikely to achieve operationally significant gains in Ukraine, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's articulated theory of victory aims for Russian forces to make consistent gradual creeping advances instead of pursuing rapid operationally significant maneuver.[3]

Ukraine is currently addressing its manpower challenges and forming several new brigades that Ukraine could commit to support contesting the initiative, and the provision of Western security assistance needed for equipping these brigades will determine when and at what scale Ukraine can contest the initiative.[4] The arrival of Western-provided aid to the frontlines has allowed Ukrainian forces to stabilize critical areas of the front, and Ukrainian forces have conducted tactically significant and successful localized counterattacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast and towards Kreminna (in the Donetsk-Luhansk Oblast border area) starting in mid-May 2024.[5] Ukrainian forces will likely be able to intensify both the scale and regularity of counterattacks over the coming months as further Western security assistance arrives at the frontline and as Ukraine continues to build out reserves and new brigades.[6] Russian forces are currently attempting to maintain consistent offensive pressure on Ukraine to force Ukrainian forces to commit manpower and materiel to defensive operations instead of accumulating these resources for counteroffensive operations.[7] Russian forces are attempting to achieve this effect through consistent offensive operations throughout eastern and northeastern Ukraine that stretch Ukrainian forces, but nevertheless, Ukrainian forces are leveraging their capabilities and exploiting Russian vulnerabilities to conduct tactical counterattacks.

Ukrainian forces have so far conducted several large-scale counteroffensive operations that have been operationally successful throughout the full-scale invasion, but this approach to liberating territory is not the only possible approach for Ukrainian forces. Breaking out of the current positional warfare in Ukraine is a challenging task for both Russian and Ukrainian forces, and smaller-scale Ukrainian counteroffensive operations present opportunities for pursuing operationally significant objectives without the challenges associated with conducting larger-scale counteroffensive operations. Smaller-scale counteroffensive operations would likely allow Ukraine to start degrading Russia's ability to leverage the theater-wide initiative sooner and more quickly reduce some of the theater-wide pressures on Ukrainian forces. Western security assistance that provides Ukrainian forces with the

necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity that Ukrainian forces require for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine remains the only likely path for reducing Putin's current commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity regardless of time or cost. These Ukrainian operations do not need to be individual, distinct large-scale endeavors, however, and instead can be a series of compounding counteroffensive operations over the course of late 2024 and throughout 2025.

The Kremlin continues to signal its unwillingness to participate in peace negotiations that do not result in complete Ukrainian and Western capitulation to the Kremlin's demands amid ongoing Ukrainian efforts to form an international consensus for future negotiations. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yuriy Galuzin stated on July 12 that Russia is aware of Ukraine's and the West's intentions to invite Russia to attend a second Global Peace Summit later in 2024 but that Russia does not "accept such ultimatums" and does not "intend to participate in such summits." [8] Galuzin claimed that Ukraine's peace formula (which calls for, among other issues, the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, free and safe passage through the Black Sea, the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, and a binding long-term peace agreement) is an "ultimatum" and an "absolute dead-end." [9]

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a resolution on July 12 demanding that Russia "urgently withdraw" its forces and unauthorized personnel from the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and "immediately return" the plant to full Ukrainian control, which the Russian Permanent Mission to the UN called a "politicized project" with only Western support. [10] Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy claimed that the resolution is an "ultimatum" and an effort to create the appearance that Ukraine has widespread support. [11] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova attempted to frame the UN General Assembly's majority support for the resolution as a failure for Ukraine. [12] Notably, only eight states--all Russian "allies"--Belarus, Burundi, Cuba, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, and Syria--voted against the resolution. [13] Kremlin officials will likely continue to frame legitimate Ukrainian negotiating positions as "ultimatums" in order to justify the Kremlin's disinterest in peace negotiations and its continued war against Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the NATO summit on July 11 and announced that Ukraine will hold a conference dedicated to food security and freedom of navigation in Turkey within the framework of the June 2024 Peace Summit. [14] Zelensky also thanked Erdogan for his support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and Erdogan stated that Turkey has begun work to revitalize the Black Sea Grain Initiative. [15] Erdogan has previously attempted to present Turkey as a possible mediator in future peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, and Kremlin officials have repeatedly denied the possibility of Erdogan serving as a future mediator. [16]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used a phone call with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on July 12, his second in three weeks, to reiterate standard Russian threats intended to coerce the US out of supporting Ukraine as part of an ongoing reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-makers. [17] Austin stressed to Belousov the importance of maintaining lines of communication amid Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, while Belousov discussed "preventing security threats" and reducing the "risk of possible escalation." Austin and Belousov held their first phone call on June 26, and Belousov issued similarly vague threats about the "danger of further escalation" if the United States continues to supply weapons to Ukraine. [18] Russian officials consistently use vague threats of escalation against the United States or other Western countries as part of efforts to discourage Western support for Ukraine. [19]

The United Kingdom (UK) government has reportedly not permitted Ukraine to use UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia, despite previous Western reporting and UK official statements to the contrary. The *Telegraph* reported on July 11 that unspecified sources in the UK government stated that the UK's policy "had not changed" and that the UK had not permitted Ukraine to use UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia. [20] A senior UK defense source reportedly stated that the situation is "more nuanced" and that Ukrainian Storm Shadow strikes into Russia are "not going to happen." The source reportedly stated that Ukraine would require permission from three countries, including the UK and France, to conduct Storm Shadow strikes against Russian territory. The *Telegraph* did not specify the third country. New UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy stated in an interview with *European Pravda* published on July 12 that the UK is "reflecting on" Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's requests for Western states to lift restrictions on the use of Western-provided weapons against Russian territory. [21] Lammy stated that the UK has held discussions with Zelensky over the last few days and has decided to "look at some other things." Lammy stated that the UK supports Ukraine's right to self-defense but declined to detail the UK's "operational decisions" about the matter. Western media interpreted statements by former UK Prime Minister David Cameron about Ukraine's possible use of Storm Shadows on May 3 differently, with Reuters reporting that Cameron stated that the UK had no objection to Ukraine using UK-provided weapons to strike targets within Russia, and BBC stating the Cameron did not directly support Ukraine's use of British weapons in these strikes. [22] *Bloomberg* reported on July 10 that new UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, however, stated that it is Ukraine's decision how to deploy Storm Shadows missiles for defensive purposes. [23] Zelensky stated on July 10 that he learned of the UK's permission for Ukraine to use Storm Shadows against military

targets in Russia and met with Starmer to "discuss the practical implementation of this decision."
[24] The exact contours of the UK's policy regarding Ukraine's use of Storm Shadow cruise missiles remain unclear.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 11 a military aid package for Ukraine worth \$225 million.[25] The package includes one Patriot air defense battery; munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS); Stinger anti-aircraft missiles; High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds; and Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) equipment and missiles.

Indian state-run oil refineries are reportedly negotiating an oil import deal with Russia, likely as a result of the recent meetings between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin and improving Russo-Indian energy relations in recent months. Reuters reported on July 11 that an Indian government source stated that Indian state-run oil refineries are negotiating a long-term oil import deal with Russia but have yet to agree on issues such as the payment currency.[26] The source reportedly stated that private Indian oil refineries may also join the negotiations later. Modi met with Putin in Moscow on July 8 and 9 and issued a joint statement about strengthening mutually beneficial energy cooperation.[27] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak stated on July 9 that India and Russia are considering entering a long-term agreement on oil supplies.[28] Indian private and state-run oil refineries reportedly refused to accept Russian crude oil transported on Russian PJSC Sovcomflot tankers due to US sanctions in early 2024, but *Bloomberg* reported on May 1 that Indian state-owned Indian Oil Corporation resumed buying Russian crude oil delivered on a PJSC Sovcomflot tanker.[29]

The Kremlin continues to intensify efforts to encourage self-censorship among information space voices and consolidate physical control over internet infrastructure. Russian State Duma Information Policy Committee member Anton Nemkin stated on July 11 that Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor will crack down against users registering for anonymous social media accounts by forcing applications, including Telegram and WhatsApp, to require phone numbers to register for an account and to establish communications with telecommunications companies to prevent Russians from registering accounts using gray market SIM cards.[30] Nemkin stated that Roskomnadzor will work with Telegram and WhatsApp specifically but will develop new rules for user verification and content moderation by late 2024 or late 2025. The Russian Ministry of Justice designated two small, anonymous Russian Telegram channels claiming to have insider information about the Russian government, *VChK-OGPU* and *Russkiy Criminal*, as foreign agents on July 12, just one day after announcing that Roskomnadzor may require channels with a daily audience of more than 1,000 people to provide identifying information in the future.[31] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* stated that the Russian Ministry of Justice alleged that the administrators of the two insider source channels are two defendants in an extortion case involving Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov.[32] The Kremlin likely means to punish these channels in order to illustrate to the rest of the Russian ultranationalist information space that Russians cannot hide behind anonymous Telegram accounts to spread criticisms or rumors about the Kremlin without retribution.

Russian authorities are also throttling speeds for users accessing certain Western social media sites likely to discourage the use of these sites ahead of possible domestic bans. Nemkin stated that Roskomnadzor is not currently considering blocking WhatsApp like it has other Western social media sites but noted that Russia is applying "technological measures such as slowdowns" to WhatsApp, particularly in the Republic of Dagestan.[33] Russia's largest telecommunications operator Rostelecom stated on July 12 that Russians may experience slow load times and low video resolution when accessing YouTube regardless of telecom operator due to a lack of servers hosting content within Russia, but a telecom source told Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* that this narrative is false.[34] The Russian telecom source instead claimed that Russian authorities have begun deliberately slowing down speeds for users accessing YouTube within Russia, and *Meduza* cited the University of Michigan's Censored Planet project as saying that Roskomnadzor used its specialized TSPU (technical means of countering threats) system to slow down access to X (formerly Twitter) in 2021. [35] Russian news outlet *Gazeta* reported that Russia is considering blocking YouTube in September 2024, but Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied such reports.[36]

Key Takeaways:

- **Western and US officials reportedly assess that Ukrainian forces will continue to be on the defensive for the next six months and will not be able to conduct a large-scale counteroffensive operation until 2025. Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the tactical initiative in limited counterattacks in select sectors of the front, however, and Ukrainian forces may be able to conduct limited counteroffensive operations even while largely on the defensive depending on the arrival of Western aid.**
- **The Kremlin continues to signal its unwillingness to participate in peace negotiations that do not result in complete Ukrainian and Western capitulation to the Kremlin's demands amid ongoing Ukrainian efforts to form an international consensus for future negotiations.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used a phone call with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on July 12, his second in three weeks, to reiterate standard**

Russian threats intended to coerce the US out of supporting Ukraine as part of an ongoing reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-makers.

- The United Kingdom (UK) government has reportedly not permitted Ukraine to use UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike military targets within Russia, despite previous Western reporting and UK official statements to the contrary.
- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 11 a military aid package for Ukraine worth \$225 million.
- Indian state-run oil refineries are reportedly negotiating an oil import deal with Russia, likely as a result of the recent meetings between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin and improving Russo-Indian energy relations in recent months.
- The Kremlin continues to intensify efforts to encourage self-censorship among information space voices and consolidate physical control over internet infrastructure.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- Russian infantry units are reportedly assaulting Ukrainian trench positions in single-file columns due to pervasive Ukrainian minefields and poor assault training.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration head Yevgeny Balitsky on July 12 and discussed social and infrastructure projects in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 11, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:30pm ET on July 11. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 12 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian authorities reportedly attempted to assassinate leading figures in the European defense industrial base (DIB), likely as part of Russian efforts to disrupt and deter Western aid to Ukraine and Russia's wider efforts to destabilize NATO members. *CNN* reported on July 11 that five US and Western officials stated that US intelligence uncovered a Kremlin plan in early 2024 to assassinate German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall CEO Armin Pappeger.[1] US intelligence reportedly informed the German government, which was able to foil the plot. *CNN* reported that the planned assassination against Pappeger was one of multiple plans to kill European defense industry executives, but that the plot against Pappeger was the "most mature." European authorities have reported that Russian actors and proxies have conducted sabotage and other hybrid warfare operations aimed at deterring and disrupting Western aid to Ukraine, and NATO and its member states have repeatedly warned about intensifying Russian hybrid operations on NATO member territory.[2]

Finnish authorities reported an increase in GPS "malfunctions" in the past week and that most disruptions to aviation and maritime GPS and radar originate from within Russia.[3] Finnish federal transport and communications agency Traficom told Finnish outlet *Ilta-Sanomat* on July 11 that GPS "malfunctions" have increased in the past week in reference to a specific incident in the Gulf of Finland overnight on July 10-11.[4] A Finnish maritime pilot reported on X (formerly Twitter) that he experienced severe GPS and radar malfunctions overnight while guiding other boats near Kotka and Hamina on Finland's southern coast.[5] The pilot published footage of his radar malfunctioning and reported that GPS was unavailable for 90 percent of the route between the Orregrund pilot substation and Hamina harbor.[6] Reports of increased GPS and radar disruptions in the Gulf of Finland cohere with reports of Russian GPS jamming affecting Baltic states and other areas of Europe. Likely Russian jamming from Kaliningrad has previously jammed the GPS of a plane carrying then-UK Defense Minister Grant Shapps and forced Finnish aircraft carrier *Finnair* to ground multiple flights out of Finland.[7] The GPS interference in the Baltics forced *Finnair* to cancel flights to Tartu, Estonia until the Tartu airport implemented an approach solution for planes flying into the airport that does not rely on GPS.[8] Russia's apparent GPS jamming is likely part of Russia's intensifying hybrid campaign directly targeting NATO states likely aimed at undermining support for Ukraine and NATO unity.[9]

Ukraine intends to hold a second meeting of the Global Peace Summit by the end of 2024 and reportedly plans to invite Russia to participate. Deputy Head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office Ihor Zhovkva stated on June 21 that Ukraine wants to hold the second meeting of the summit by the end of 2024, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on July 4 that "Russian representatives must be present" at any subsequent summit that discusses a legitimate plan to end the war.[10] *Bloomberg* reported on July 11 that a Ukrainian official stated that Ukraine wants to convene the second meeting of the summit before November 2024 and invite Russian representatives.[11] The Kremlin pointedly stated that Russian representatives would not have attended the first meeting of the Global Peace Summit in Switzerland in June even if they had been invited.[12] Russian President Vladimir Putin has indicated that he is opposed to any agreement short of Ukrainian surrender, however, despite other Kremlin officials continuing to feign interest in meaningful negotiations.[13] The first meeting of the Ukrainian-initiated Global Peace Summit aimed to

create a global consensus on negotiations about the war in Ukraine so that Ukraine and its international partners can present a joint peace plan to a Russian representative at a subsequent peace summit, and Ukraine has never indicated that it intends to exclude Russia entirely from its peace process.[14]

European Union (EU) leadership is reportedly considering restricting Hungary's power as EU Council president following Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow and his efforts to present himself as a potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine. *POLITICO Europe*, *European Pravda*, and Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on July 8, 9, and 11 that they obtained a copy of a letter from Orban to European Council President Charles Michel detailing Orban's July 5 meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and various claimed Russian positions on negotiations and the frontline situation in Ukraine.[15] Orban reportedly advocated for immediate peace negotiations in the letter and claimed that he did not offer any opinions or policy proposals to Putin on behalf of the EU or EU Council during his visit to Moscow.[16] Orban claimed in the letter that he will continue his efforts to facilitate negotiations and "clarify the possibilities for achieving peace" in the coming weeks. The *Financial Times (FT)* reported on July 10 that, according to three people familiar with the matter, the EU's legal service told member states that Orban's trip to Moscow may have violated a series of EU treaties that forbid any "measure that could jeopardize the attainment of the Union's objectives." [17] Several diplomats told *FT* that many EU member states are considering boycotting ministerial meetings in Hungary and that a sub-group of member states are discussing how to use the EU treaty to restrict Hungary's power and influence as EU Council president. Pro-European political group Renew Europe president Valerie Hayer called on the European Council to prematurely terminate Hungary's EU Council presidency following Orban's visit to Moscow.[18] Orban has previously flouted EU foreign policy and norms, including opposing sanctions against Russia, and will likely continue to use his position as EU Council president to posture himself as a potential mediator for the end of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[19]

The Russian government continued efforts to root out critical voices and consolidate control over the Russian information space. Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor stated on July 11 that the agency may require social media account owners with a daily audience of over 1,000 people to provide identifying information to Roskomnadzor in the future.[20] Roskomnadzor stated that in accordance with a Russian law requiring consumers to have "reliable information" about the owner of an information distributor, the agency could require account owners to provide their full name and contact information to the Russian government. Roskomnadzor noted that it will prohibit Russian companies from advertising on the social media pages of owners who have not provided their information to the agency. The Russian government has likely identified the individuals behind most prominent Russian social media accounts but is likely aiming to identify the owners of smaller social media accounts that claim to have insider information into the inner workings of the Russian government, military, or companies. *BBC* reported in September 2023 that advertisements are a significant money-making method for more prominent Russian milbloggers, and Roskomnadzor likely hopes to force smaller channels whose owners may need the supplemental income to provide their information by restricting their advertisement revenue.[21]

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that it prevented a terrorist attack against an Orthodox church in Maykop, Republic of Adygea on July 11.[22] The FSB claimed that a man from Central Asia, supposedly affiliated with an unspecified international terrorist organization, planned to murder the church's clergy and security guards and burn down the church. The FSB claimed that officers found and seized prohibited materials, the flag of an unspecified terrorist organization, a knife, and components of an incendiary device belonging to the man. The Russian government opened an investigation into the terrorist attack.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian authorities reportedly attempted to assassinate leading figures in the European defense industrial base (DIB), likely as part of Russian efforts to disrupt and deter Western aid to Ukraine and Russia's wider efforts to destabilize NATO members.
- Finnish authorities reported an increase in GPS "malfunctions" in the past week and that most disruptions to aviation and maritime GPS and radar originate from within Russia
- Ukraine intends to hold a second meeting of the Global Peace Summit by the end of 2024 and reportedly plans to invite Russia to participate.
- European Union (EU) leadership is reportedly considering restricting Hungary's power as EU Council president following Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Moscow and his efforts to present himself as a potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine.
- The Russian government continued efforts to root out critical voices and consolidate control over the Russian information space.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that it prevented a terrorist attack against an Orthodox church in Maykop, Republic of Adygea on July 11.
- Ukrainian forces advanced north of Kharkiv City; and Russian forces recently advanced south of Siversk, northwest of Avdiivka, and west of Donetsk City.
- Russian federal subjects (regions) continue to use monetary incentives as part of Russia's crypto-mobilization recruitment efforts.

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

Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird and George Barros

July 10, 2024, 7:30pm ET

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Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk stressed that **robust Western security assistance will be crucial for Ukraine's ability to contest and seize the battlefield initiative. Havrylyuk also challenged the notion that Russian forces will be able to indefinitely sustain the consistent gradual creeping advances that support Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory for winning a war of attrition in Ukraine.** Havrylyuk published an article entitled "What Factors Will Allow Ukraine to Conduct a Counteroffensive" on July 9 wherein he states that Ukraine must contest the initiative and conduct counteroffensive operations in order to neutralize the Kremlin's efforts to protract the war and to increase costs on Russia that will force it towards a just peace aligned with Ukraine's terms.[1] Havrylyuk stated that Ukraine can contest the initiative if Ukraine strengthens combat brigades with personnel, ammunition, and equipment and specifically staffs and equips new brigades.[2] Havrylyuk also noted that it will be critical for Ukraine to create and consistently replenish reserves and sufficiently train new personnel.[3] Havrylyuk emphasized that Western security assistance will be critically important in determining at what scale Ukraine can achieve these tasks and called for more air defense systems, artillery shells, and long-range strike capabilities to strengthen Ukrainian combat effectiveness and operational capabilities.[4] Ukraine is addressing its manpower challenges and is already forming several new brigades, but Ukraine's ability to equip these brigades will be the determining factor for how, when, and at what scale Ukraine can commit new brigades to support potential counteroffensive operations.[5] Current reporting suggests that Ukraine will not be able to fully equip all new planned brigades without the arrival of additional Western security assistance.[6] Western security assistance that provides Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity required for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine remains the only likely path for reducing Putin's current commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity.[7]

Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the battlefield initiative in limited and localized counterattacks at the tactical level — emphasizing that the current state of grinding positional warfare along the frontline is not an indefinitely stable one. The arrival of Western-provided aid to the frontlines has allowed Ukrainian forces to stabilize critical areas of the front, and Ukrainian forces have conducted tactically significant and successful localized counterattacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast and towards Kreminka (in the Donetsk-Luhansk Oblast border area) starting in mid-May 2024.[8] Ukrainian forces are not yet conducting counterattacks at the scale necessary to seize the battlefield initiative, but these tactical Ukrainian counterattacks are increasing the costs imposed on Russian forces for continuing to pursue their slow, grinding theory of advance. For example, Ukrainian counterattacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast have forced Russian troops to redeploy select Russian elements away from where their centralized command formation should hypothetically be — ISW observed that Russia moved elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) and a battalion tactical group of the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic Army Corps) to northern Kharkiv Oblast in mid-June while other elements of the 810th Infantry and 9th Motorized Rifle brigades remained near Krynyky, Kherson Oblast, and Toretsk, Donetsk Oblast respectively, where they had been fighting for some time.[9] ISW also recently assessed that the Russian military command was separating and deploying elements of Russian Airborne (VDV) formations across the frontline — elements of the 106th VDV Division's 137th VDV Regiment are reportedly fighting in Kherson Oblast, while other elements of the regiment are fighting near Siversk, Donetsk Oblast.[10] The disparate deployment of elements of the same wider formation is a strong indicator that Russian forces are beginning to feel the pressure of Ukrainian counterattacks — emphasizing that the frontline is not as static as Putin assesses it to be. Ukraine's ability to launch more powerful and organized counterattacks, however, continues to be contingent on sustained Western military support.

Havrylyuk assessed that Russia will face medium- to long-term economic and equipment challenges that will impede the Russian military's ability to indefinitely retain the theater-wide initiative, sustain consistent offensive pressure that results in gradual creeping advances, and win a war of attrition. Havrylyuk stated that Russian forces still retain a significant artillery, armored vehicle, and manpower advantage over Ukrainian forces and that Ukraine lacks effective countermeasures to degrade the Russian aviation capabilities that are facilitating Russian tactical advances.[11] Havrylyuk stated that Russian forces are leveraging these advantages and the theater-wide initiative to intensify and sustain the tempo of their offensive operations in order to exhaust Ukrainian forces and prevent Ukraine from accumulating the manpower and materiel needed to contest the initiative.[12] Havrylyuk assessed that Russian forces will not make significant advances in the future but that the current positional warfare suits the Kremlin's attempt to protract the war and convince the West that Ukraine's victory is impossible.[13] Havrylyuk's assessment is consistent with ISW's assessment about Putin's strategic calculus, his desire to protract the war, and his attempts to

convince the West to abandon Ukraine.[14] Putin and the Russian military command likely view the retention of the initiative as a strategic priority and assess that Ukraine will be unable to conduct any operationally significant counteroffensive operations as long as Russia maintains consistent offensive pressure against Ukraine.[15]

Havrylyuk challenged Russia's prospects for indefinitely maintaining that offensive pressure, however, suggesting that Russia has reached a limit for mobilizing its defense industrial base (DIB) in support of the war effort.[16] Russia will likely face human capital and supply chain constraints in the medium-term that will prevent the Kremlin from gradually mobilizing Russia's DIB as it has done so far, presenting Putin with more politically fraught economic choices should he deem further economic mobilization necessary.[17] Havrylyuk stated that Russia is not producing enough to cover its current military equipment losses in Ukraine, increasingly relying on dwindling stockpiles of mainly Soviet-era equipment and becoming more dependent on foreign partners for military materiel.[18] Russia has extensively relied on the refurbishment of Soviet-era equipment to expand defense outputs, and growing constraints on available combat-ready equipment will pose challenges for sustaining Russian operations in Ukraine in the medium- to long-term.[19] Ukrainian forces that have accumulated the manpower and materiel needed for operationally significant counteroffensive operations can exploit disruptions that even temporary Russian equipment constraints cause to contest and seize the battlefield initiative.[20] Havrylyuk assessed that Russian forces will face fewer manpower challenges, although even Russia's current ability to generate as many new personnel as battlefield losses leads to culminations - periods of temporary regrouping and reconstitution and lower offensive tempo — which will provide opportunities for sufficiently prepared Ukrainian forces to contest and seize the battlefield initiative.[21]

Putin's articulated theory of a slow, grinding victory in Ukraine is notably premised on accepting continuously high casualty rates, as exemplified by reported Russian losses accrued during two recent offensive efforts. In his July 9 article, Havrylyuk claimed that Russian forces suffered 5,000 casualties for just one district of Chasiv Yar, likely referring to Kanak Microrraion (the only neighborhood of easternmost Chasiv Yar that Russian forces currently control).[22] Kanak Microrraion is around three blocks wide and three blocks long, and the loss of 5,000 personnel for such a small piece of territory is indicative of the highly attritional way in which Russian forces are conducting their offensive operations. Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Chief-of-Staff Viktor Solimchuk similarly reported on July 10 that Russian forces lost (killed, wounded, or captured) 91 percent of the personnel they committed to fighting (reportedly amounting to roughly a division's worth of personnel) in northern Kharkiv Oblast at the start of the Kharkiv Oblast offensive in early May 2024. [23] Solimchuk also noted that Russian offensive efforts in Vovchansk, Kharkiv Oblast, have severely weakened the 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army, Leningrad Military District). [24] Ukrainian and Western sources recently reported that the 83rd Airborne (VDV) Brigade suffered such devastating losses in Kharkiv Oblast that it is no longer combat-effective.[25] ISW cannot independently verify either Ukrainian or Western estimates of Russian casualties, but the recent increase in reports of entire Russian units becoming combat ineffective due to losses highlights the tactics on which Russian forces are relying on to pursue Putin's theory of a slow, gradual, grinding victory in Ukraine.

NATO allies reaffirmed their commitment to supporting Ukraine and announced new security assistance packages for the Ukrainian war effort at the NATO summit in Washington, DC on July 9 and 10. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that he expects NATO allies to agree on a substantial package for Ukraine which includes establishing a NATO command center in Weisbaden, Germany to facilitate the training of Ukrainian personnel and the delivery of security assistance, establishing a new joint training center in Bydgoszcz, Poland, a long-term pledge of continued support for Ukraine, new announcements of provisions of air defense systems and F-16 fighter jets, and bilateral security agreements between NATO allies and Ukraine.[26] Stoltenberg noted that these pledges will constitute a "strong bridge" for possible, future Ukrainian NATO membership. US President Joe Biden, Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a joint statement on July 9 pledging to provide five additional Patriot air defense systems to Ukraine.[27] The joint statement notes that the US and its partners, including Canada, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom, intend to provide Ukraine with "dozens" of tactical air defense systems in the coming months. Biden, Schoof, and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen issued a joint statement on July 10 noting that the Netherlands and Denmark are in the process of transferring F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine and that Ukraine will start operating F-16s in the Summer of 2024.[28] Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store announced on July 10 that Norway will provide Ukraine with six F-16s starting at an unspecified date in 2024.[29] The Dutch Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on July 10 that the Netherlands will allocate an additional 300 million euros (about \$325 million) to purchase ammunition for F-16s.[30] The new United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, reaffirmed on July 9 that he would continue the UK's policy of allowing Ukrainian forces to strike military targets in Russian territory with UK-provided Storm Shadow missiles. [31]

Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev reaffirmed that Russia would not accept or uphold any negotiated peace settlements with Kyiv short of Ukrainian capitulation, the destruction of the entire Ukrainian state, and the full occupation of Ukraine. Medvedev stated on July 10 that even if Kyiv agrees to Russian President Vladimir Putin's

most recent conditions for peace — namely recognizing Russia's territorial claims over eastern and southern Ukraine, including territory that Russia does not currently occupy, and pledging not to join NATO — and signs documents resulting in Ukrainian surrender, these actions will not constitute the “end of the Russian military operation” in Ukraine.[32] Medvedev stated that even if Ukraine surrenders, Russia will eventually still need to destroy the remaining Ukrainian “radicals” and return “remaining [Ukrainian] lands to the bosom of the Russian land.” Medvedev also implied that Russian-Ukrainian negotiations will likely take place only after there is a radical change within the Ukrainian government and that this can only occur after Ukrainian society stages a “third bloody Maidan” revolution in response to a ceasefire agreement and Ukraine's willingness to abandon prospects for NATO accession. Medvedev insinuated that the Kremlin plans to continue its conquest of Ukraine following a negotiated peace agreement. Medvedev's argumentation also indicates that the Kremlin believes that the full conquest of Ukraine will be easier if Kyiv accepts deeply unpopular ceasefire agreements and concessions at the current stage of the war, in anticipation that Ukrainian society would demand a government change that could benefit the Kremlin. The Kremlin has misread domestic Ukrainian sentiment before, however. Ukrainian officials have long warned that the Kremlin launched an elaborate “Maidan 3” information campaign, which aims to undermine the Ukrainian government likely in order to trigger a government change and establish a pro-Kremlin government in Ukraine.[33]

Servicemembers of a Russian motorized rifle regiment that was previously implicated in the execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in late May 2024 reportedly executed two Ukrainian POWs in the same area in western Zaporizhia Oblast in June 2024. Ukrainian social media sources amplified footage on July 10 showing Russian servicemembers shooting two Ukrainian POWs in the Zaporizhia direction and identified the perpetrators as servicemembers of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]).[34] Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin stated on July 10 that the video clearly showed Ukrainian personnel laying down their arms and cooperating with Russian orders and noted that the investigation found that the incident took place near Robotyne in June 2024.[35] The execution of POWs is a violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs.[36] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) previously identified four servicemembers of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment who executed Ukrainian POWs near Robotyne in late May 2024.[37] ISW assessed on June 19 that the Russian military command endorses a culture of permissiveness towards war crimes perpetrated by subordinates throughout the theater in Ukraine, especially in Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts.[38] ISW also assessed that individual tactical-level commanders are likely enabling their subordinates to commit such atrocities given the pervasiveness and recurrence of these war crimes across different operational commands. The fact that the same military unit has continued to commit these crimes also suggests that the Russian high command is failing to properly discipline troops and maintain order.

Select US military bases in Europe have instituted increased alert levels in response to intensified Russian sabotage and hybrid operations against NATO allies over the past several months. CNN reported on July 9, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter, that the US recently implemented additional safety protocols and raised the state of alert at US military bases in Europe after receiving intelligence that Russian-backed actors may be planning sabotage attacks against US facilities and personnel.[39] CNN's sources stated that several US military bases in Europe raised their alert level to “Force Protection Condition Charlie,” which applies “when an incident occurs, or intelligence is received indicating some form of terrorist action or targeting against personnel or facilities is likely.”[40] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed on July 10 that the US has increased its alert levels for some US bases in Europe and noted that Russian sabotage attempts and other malign acts against NATO allies are part of a campaign to intimidate NATO countries that support Ukraine.[41] Stoltenberg stated that NATO is increasing its awareness, intelligence sharing, and cyber defenses to combat increased Russian hybrid threats. The *Washington Post* reported on July 10, citing Kremlin documents obtained by an unspecified European intelligence service, that Russia is identifying individuals and recruiting sympathizers through social media to stage sabotage operations in Europe.[42] The Kremlin documents show that Kremlin political strategists in July 2023 analyzed the Facebook profiles of over 1,200 people who they believed were workers of the two large German plants and highlighted posts demonstrating an anti-government, anti-immigration, and anti-Ukraine position. Unspecified Western officials noted that Russia is increasingly working through proxies, including via internet recruits, which offers some deniability while maximizing the pool of potential recruits. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis noted that individuals recruited online for Russian sabotage operations may not have a Russian handler in a NATO country.[43]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk stressed that robust Western security assistance will be crucial for Ukraine's ability to contest and seize the battlefield initiative. Havrylyuk also challenged the notion that Russian forces will be able to indefinitely sustain the consistent gradual creeping advances that support Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory for winning a war of attrition in Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the battlefield initiative in limited and localized counterattacks at the tactical level — emphasizing that the current state of grinding positional warfare along the frontline is not an indefinitely stable one.**

- Havrylyuk assessed that Russia will face medium- to long-term economic and equipment challenges that will impede the Russian military's ability to indefinitely retain the theater-wide initiative, sustain consistent offensive pressure that results in gradual creeping advances, and win a war of attrition.
- Putin's articulated theory of a slow, grinding victory in Ukraine is notably premised on accepting continuously high casualty rates, as exemplified by reported Russian losses accrued during two recent offensive efforts.
- NATO allies reaffirmed their commitment to supporting Ukraine and announced new security assistance packages for the Ukrainian war effort at the NATO summit in Washington, DC on July 9 and 10.
- Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev reaffirmed that Russia would not accept or uphold any negotiated peace settlements with Kyiv short of Ukrainian capitulation, the destruction of the entire Ukrainian state, and the full occupation of Ukraine.
- Servicemembers of a Russian motorized rifle regiment that was previously implicated in the execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in late May 2024 reportedly executed two Ukrainian POWs in the same area in western Zaporizhia Oblast in June 2024.
- Select US military bases in Europe have instituted increased alert levels in response to intensified Russian sabotage and hybrid operations against NATO allies over the past several months.
- Russian forces recently advanced in Vovchansk, near Kreminna, and near Toretsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on July 10 that the Russian military trained the first batch of Moscow Military District (MMD) counter-drone instructors at the Alabino training ground in Moscow Oblast.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 9, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, and Fredrick W. Kagan

July 9, 2024, 8:45pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a joint statement on July 9 about strengthening mutually beneficial political, economic, energy, and military-technical cooperation between Russia and India. Modi met with Putin in Moscow on July 8 and 9 to discuss furthering Russo-Indian relations, which Putin referred to as a "particularly privileged strategic partnership." [1] The joint statement specifically pledged to increase joint production of spare components and parts for servicing Russian-made military equipment and weapons in India, agreed to establish a working group on technological cooperation, and planned to reorient the existing Russo-Indian Intergovernmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation on joint research, development, and production of advanced defense technologies and systems. [2] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak stated that India and Russia are considering entering a long-term agreement on oil supplies and that Russia is considering allowing Indian companies to participate in Russian gas projects. [3] Head of the Russian state nuclear energy operator Rosatom Alexei Likhachev stated during a tour that Putin and Modi took at a Rosatom exhibition that Russia is offering to assist India in constructing low-power tropical nuclear power plants. [4] Modi credited Russo-Indian energy, economic, and food security cooperation for helping to control Indian inflation and ensure economic stability. [5]

Putin has been intensifying efforts to strengthen Russian relations with non-Western countries through individualized appeals, although he is likely emphasizing Russo-Indian cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS as part of a wider Russian effort to create an alternative "Eurasian security architecture" leveraging existing Eurasian multilateral organizations. [6] Putin stated that Russia and India will continue to closely cooperate in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN), SCO, and BRICS. [7] Putin and Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov have both explicitly identified the SCO and BRICS as the pillars of this "Eurasian security architecture." [8] Putin also recently visited the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Vietnam to strengthen bilateral cooperation with these countries and attempt to build a coalition of support for Russia from non-Western countries. [9]

Modi tacitly supported the Kremlin's false narrative that Russia is interested in a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the war in Ukraine, likely in exchange for deepening economic, energy, and technological cooperation with Russia. Putin thanked Modi for trying to find a "peaceful" way to resolve the war in Ukraine, and Modi stated that dialogue, not war, is necessary for a peaceful solution. [10] Modi also stated that India is ready to assist Russia in establishing peace as soon as possible. Modi notably did not frame India as a potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine, and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated to the press following Russian-Indian negotiations that Modi did not claim to be a mediator in the war. [11] Putin has previously expressed support for non-Western countries' mediation efforts - most notably the People's Republic of China (PRC) and a coalition of African states — as part of Russian information operations falsely portraying Russia as willing to negotiate with Ukraine. [12] Putin previously amplified the false narrative that Russian

authorities are interested in good-faith negotiations but continues to state that his prerequisites for negotiation require Ukraine's full capitulation through "demilitarization" and the surrender of significant territory that Russia does not currently occupy.[13] Putin has more recently rejected any efforts of third-party mediation.[14]

Putin may have pledged to return Indian volunteers fighting in Ukraine during a private dinner with Modi in Novo-Ogaryovo, Moscow Oblast on July 8. Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra stated on July 9 that Modi "strongly" raised the need for Russia to facilitate the early discharge of Indian nationals "who have been misled" into fighting in Ukraine as part of the Russian military. [15] Kwatra stated that Russian officials promised the early discharge of Indian nationals and noted that around 35 to 50 Indian nationals have fought in Ukraine under misleading offers of high-paying "support roles" in the Russian military and that 10 of these Indian nationals already returned to India. [16] Unnamed sources told Indian news media company *New Delhi Television* (NDTV) that Putin personally agreed to discharge all Indian volunteers who had signed military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and pledged to facilitate the return of Indian volunteers. [17] Unnamed sources told the Indian English-language newspaper *The Hindu* that India expects the release of Indian volunteers within the coming weeks after Modi's "direct intervention" in the matter. [18] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that the Kremlin will not comment on these reports, although Russian state news agency *TASS* notably paraphrased Indian reports as stating that Indian citizens were allegedly fighting in Ukraine "by mistake." [19] The official Kremlin read-out of the July 8 meeting also omitted to mention the Putin-Modi discussion of Indian volunteers fighting in Ukraine. [20]

The recruitment of Indian volunteers into the Russian military is certainly not a "mistake" and is part of the Kremlin's deceptive volunteer recruitment campaign aimed at reinforcing the frontlines in Ukraine without declaring unpopular mobilization in Russia. Indian officials announced their efforts in February 2024 to secure early discharge for 20 Indian nationals recruited into the Russian military. [21] The Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) announced in March 2022 that it uncovered "a major human trafficking network" that lured Indian citizens to work in Russia but forced them to join the Russian military. [22] A group of Indian men published a video appeal in March 2024 requesting help from the Indian government to return from Russia, stating that Russian officials coerced them into joining the Russian army upon arrival to Russia on tourist visas and threatened to imprison them for 10 years. [23] Indian nationals told *Reuters* in March 2024 that recruiters offered permanent residency in Russia after six months of combat service. [24] The recruitment of Indian nationals is part of an ongoing Kremlin force generation campaign which began in Spring 2022 as a way for Putin to avoid declaring deeply unpopular mobilization in Russia and has continued following Putin's partial mobilization declaration in September 2022. [25] The Kremlin entrusted a wide range of recruiters including Russian government officials, businessmen, private military companies (PMCs), and foreign nationals with recruiting any available volunteers to fight in Ukraine, often using deceptive practices and incentives. [26] ISW observed Russia commit citizens of Nepal, Cuba, Serbia, and Central Asian and African countries to combat operations in Ukraine under deceptive premises such as offers of Russian citizenship or steep financial compensations. [27]

Some unnamed US government officials appear to believe that Ukraine does not need to liberate its occupied lands and people to win the war, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent clear statements that Russia will not accept a negotiated ceasefire on any terms other than Ukrainian capitulation and will not abandon its goals of the total destruction of the entire Ukrainian state--not just the lands it currently occupies. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on July 9 that anonymous US officials think that "even without formally winning back its land, Ukraine could still emerge a victor in the war by moving closer to NATO and Europe." [28] This US assessment is premised on several faulty assumptions—first and foremost on the assumption that Ukraine's NATO or European Union (EU) membership is guaranteed. Ukraine's NATO and EU membership should not be taken as a given in discussions of the future of Ukrainian security. [29] This assessment also rests on the assumption that losing the lands Russia currently occupies and its civilians under Russian occupation will not severely compromise Ukraine's future economic viability and ability to defend itself against future Russian attacks, which, as ISW has frequently emphasized, is not the case. [30] The lands Russia currently occupies are both economically and strategically necessary for Ukraine, and their continued occupation will deprive Ukraine of economic resources and strategically critical land. Putin himself has stated that Russia will not be content with ending the war on the lines it currently holds and has explicitly called for the Ukrainian withdrawal from the non-occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts as a prerequisite for any sort of "peace" negotiations with Ukraine. [31] The areas Putin is currently demanding include the large cities of Kherson and Zaporizhia, among other things. Putin has, furthermore, continually framed the war as a struggle against NATO and repeated his insistence that Ukraine change its constitution to formally abandon any aspirations of joining the alliance. [32] There is no basis for assessing that Putin would agree to a ceasefire that leaves Ukraine closer to NATO. Finally, this suggestion is contingent on the faulty assumption that Russian aggression will "end" with the conclusion of the war on Russia's terms. ISW, on the contrary, has assessed that a negotiated ceasefire on Russian terms will afford the Russian military time to rest and reconstitute, likely before conducting a future attack on Ukraine from a much more advanced and fortified frontline. [33] Putin has been firm and consistent in his ultimate goal of destroying the Ukrainian state and will not give up that goal until he feels that he has achieved it. [34]

Several independent investigations, including one conducted by the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), concluded that a Russian missile struck the Kyiv City Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital on July 8 amid continued official Russian denials and deflections. The HRMMU assessed on July 9 that the Okhmatdyt strike "was likely caused by a direct hit from a Russian missile."^[35] Open-source investigations conducted by *Mofar*, *Bellingcat*, and a Ukrainian reserve officer for the Ukrainian outlet *Euromaidan Press* concluded that a Russian Kh-101 cruise missile struck the hospital.^[36] The investigations cited visual characteristics of the Kh-101 model that are consistent with clear footage of the missile seconds before its impact. Ukraine called a meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on July 9 to discuss the Okhmatdyt strike, and several international officials condemned Russia for so blatantly striking a civilian object.^[37] Russian officials and commentators, however, continue to deny Russian responsibility for the strike or blame it on an errant Ukrainian air defense missile, despite the growing body of documentation to the contrary.^[38] Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that a Ukrainian NASAMS air defense missile struck the Okhmatdyt hospital and accused Ukraine of using the strike for informational effect to "further escalate" the war.^[39] Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that a Ukrainian missile hit Okhmatdyt and called it a "PR operation in blood."^[40] A former pro-Russian Ukrainian Rada deputy attempted to justify the strike by claiming that Ukrainian forces had an air defense headquarters in the area.^[41] These Russian claims are baseless and refuted by the aforementioned visual evidence and open-source investigations, and as ISW stated on July 8, do not absolve Russian forces of legal or moral responsibility for the impacts of the strike on Okhmatdyt.^[42]

Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian energy and military infrastructure in Belgorod, Kursk, Rostov, Astrakhan, and Volgograd oblasts overnight on July 8 to 9. Sources in Ukrainian intelligence told Ukrainian media that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) and Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted drone strikes against the Akhtubinsk military airfield in Astrakhan Oblast, an electrical substation in Rostov Oblast, and an oil depot in Kalach-on-Don in Volgograd Oblast overnight.^[43] Geolocated footage published on July 9 shows fires at an electrical substation in Yudino, Rostov Oblast and the Kalach-on-Don oil depot.^[44] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian drones also struck electrical substations at an oil refinery, butter factory, and gas stations in Kursk Oblast, as well as the Energomash electrical equipment plant in Belgorod City.^[45] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces launched over 40 drones at areas in Russia overnight, including "several dozen" drones against Rostov Oblast, and that Russian air defenses intercepted most but not all of the drones.^[46]

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed new military prosecutors on July 8, likely in support of ongoing, long-term Russian military reforms. Putin appointed Russian Lieutenant General of Justice Sergey Kazakov as military prosecutor of the Russian Joint Group of Forces for a five-year term, replacing Lieutenant General of Justice Alexey Naida.^[47] Putin appointed Naida as military prosecutor of the Leningrad Military District (LMD), Major General of Justice Konstantin Olkhovatenko as Central Military District (CMD) military prosecutor, Major General of Justice Igor Kupreev as Northern Fleet military prosecutor, and Major General of Justice Oleg Okorokov as Black Sea Fleet (BSF) military prosecutor.^[48] Putin appointed Lieutenant General of Justice Andrey Popov on April 8 as military prosecutor of the Moscow Military District (MMD) after having served in the same position for the CMD.^[49] Putin is likely shifting around and appointing new military prosecutors to support his effort to reform and encourage discipline within the Russian military in the long-term.

Newly-elected Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated Iran's continued willingness to enter a comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia, emphasizing the continuity in Iran's support for Russia even under a new presidential administration. Pezeshkian spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the phone on July 8 and reportedly voiced Iran's willingness to sign a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with Russia at the upcoming October 2024 BRICS summit.^[50] Putin in turn highlighted his satisfaction with close Russo-Iranian relations and expressed his readiness for "joint work" in various areas.^[51] Pezeshkian's apparent willingness to pursue and develop a strategic partnership with Russia is consistent with the efforts of his predecessor, Ebrahim Raisi, to expand bilateral cooperation by having consistent meetings with Putin and other Russian officials.^[52] ISW-CTP previously assessed that Pezeshkian's presidency is unlikely to create meaningful changes in the Iranian regime, as Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei will continue to dictate Iran's foreign policy objectives.^[53]

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) released affidavits on July 9 for several hundred X (formerly Twitter) accounts and domain names used by Russian state media and security services to operate a bot farm aimed at spreading disinformation in the United States and abroad.^[54] The DoJ announced that it seized two domain names and searched 986 X accounts linked to an artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced bot farm developed by Russian state media network RT and operated by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). The DoJ reported that this bot farm used AI to create fictitious social media profiles of individuals falsely posing as US individuals to promote messages in support of Russian government objectives. The DoJ said that RT leadership has sought to develop alternative means to distribute Russian narratives beyond its international TV broadcasts since at least 2022 and began establishing this bot farm in April 2022. The DoJ added that the Kremlin approved and offered financial support in early 2023 to create and lead a private intelligence organization to spread Russian disinformation using this bot farm. US Attorney General Merrick Garland reported that DoJ searches and seizures have disrupted a Russian "AI-enabled

propaganda campaign" intended to sow disinformation among US and international social media outlets. The DoJ report emphasized the prevalence of fictitious social media accounts, particularly on X, that were linked to both the bot farm and the seized domain names. The DoJ reported that X voluntarily suspended the remaining identified bot accounts. These X accounts propagated debunked narratives and Kremlin talking points about the war in Ukraine, such as Kremlin claims that parts of Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania were "gifts" from Russia. The bot farm pushed other narratives in video format such as a video of Russian President Vladimir Putin claiming that the war in Ukraine is not a territorial conflict or a matter of geopolitical balance, but rather about the "principles on which the New World Order will be based."

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a joint statement on July 9 about strengthening mutually beneficial political, economic, energy, and military-technical cooperation between Russia and India.
- Putin has been intensifying efforts to strengthen Russian relations with non-Western countries through individualized appeals, although he is likely emphasizing Russo-Indian cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS as part of a wider Russian effort to create an alternative "Eurasian security architecture" leveraging existing Eurasian multilateral organizations.
- Modi tacitly supported the Kremlin's false narrative that Russia is interested in a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the war in Ukraine, likely in exchange for deepening economic, energy, and technological cooperation with Russia.
- Putin may have pledged to return Indian volunteers fighting in Ukraine during a private dinner with Modi in Novo-Ogaryovo, Moscow Oblast on July 8.
- Some unnamed US government officials appear to believe that Ukraine does not need to liberate its occupied lands and people to win the war, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent clear statements that Russia will not accept a negotiated ceasefire on any terms other than Ukrainian capitulation and will not abandon its goals of the total destruction of the entire Ukrainian state—not just the lands it currently occupies.
- Several independent investigations, including one conducted by the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), concluded that a Russian missile struck the Kyiv City Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital on July 8 amid continued official Russian denials and deflections.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian energy and military infrastructure in Belgorod, Kursk, Rostov, Astrakhan, and Volgograd oblasts overnight on July 8 to 9.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed new military prosecutors on July 8, likely in support of ongoing, long-term Russian military reforms.
- Newly-elected Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated Iran's continued willingness to enter a comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia, emphasizing the continuity in Iran's support for Russia even under a new presidential administration.
- The US Department of Justice (DoJ) released affidavits on July 9 for several hundred X (formerly Twitter) accounts and domain names used by Russian state media and security services to operate a bot farm aimed at spreading disinformation in the US and abroad.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances southeast of Chasiv Yar, near Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed a decree ordering the reestablishment of the Saratov Higher Artillery Command School on July 8, likely as part of ongoing efforts to build out a cadre of Russian officers.
- Russian authorities continue to deploy Rosgvardia contingents to occupied Ukraine to serve law enforcement functions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 8, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 8, 2024, 6pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on July 8 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 9 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

A Russian Kh-101 cruise missile hit the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in central Kyiv during a wider series of missile strikes targeting critical Ukrainian infrastructure throughout the day on July 8. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk stated that Russian forces conducted two rounds of combined missile strikes on July 8—first launching four Kh-101 cruise missiles from Saratov Oblast and two Iskander-M ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea and Kursk Oblast overnight on July 7 to 8, and then launching a second wave of missiles, including one Kh-47

Kinzhal aeroballistic missile, four Iskander-M ballistic missiles, one 3M22 Zircon cruise missile, 13 Kh-101 cruise missiles, 14 Kalibr cruise missiles, two Kh-22 cruise missiles, and three Kh-59/69 guided air missiles around 1000 local time on July 8.[1] Ukrainian air defense shot down two Kh-101s in the first wave, and one Kh-47, three Iskanders, 11 Kh-101s, 12 Kalibrs, and three Kh-59/69s during the second wave.[2] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Russian forces targeted residential and other civilian infrastructure in Kyiv, Dnipro, Kryvyi Rih, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk cities.[3]

Footage taken by a bystander in Kyiv City shows the second before a Russian missile struck the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital—Ukraine's largest pediatric hospital that treats thousands of patients, including cancer cases, daily.[4] The footage clearly shows a single missile flying at a sharp downward trajectory before making contact with the hospital building. Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted a preliminary investigation of the blast site at Okhmatdyt and concluded that Russian forces used a Kh-101 missile to strike the hospital.[5] The Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital published footage showing extensive damage to medical facilities on the premises.[6] Falling debris from Russian missiles also struck the Isida Maternity Hospital in western Kyiv City after the initial strike on the Okhmatdyt hospital, and Russian missile strikes also damaged residential infrastructure elsewhere both in Kyiv and Dnipro cities.[7] The Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs has confirmed 22 deaths and 74 injured in Kyiv City and 11 deaths and 64 injured within Dnipropetrovsk Oblast as of the time of this publication.[8] Zelensky announced that Ukraine is convening an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in response to these Russian strikes.[9] Russia is currently the president of the UNSC.

Russian officials and information space actors are attempting to deflect responsibility for the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital strike by making false claims about the missiles involved and the state of the hospital — all contrary to available evidence. The Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation warned on July 9 that various Russian propaganda sources are amplifying a wide variety of information operations deflecting blame for the strike away from Russia, including false claims that Ukraine was using part or all of the hospital to treat wounded Ukrainian soldiers, that Ukraine was storing missiles at the hospital, and that Ukrainian air defense missiles and not a Russian missile hit the hospital.[10] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that available footage "clearly confirms" that falling Ukrainian air defense missiles damaged civilian objects within Kyiv City, likely referring to the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital and not to another medical facility within the city that Ukrainian officials acknowledged was damaged by falling missile debris.[11] Russian sources widely circulated the footage and image of the missile in the second before it hit the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital, and some milbloggers even published misleading posts falsely claiming that it was a Ukrainian air defense missile and not an attacking Russian Kh-101 missile.[12] The trajectory of the missile in the video and the visible turbojet engine under its hull match the frame of a Russian Kh-101 and do not support claims that it was an air defense interceptor, nor does the missile appear damaged by air defense interceptors.[13] The Ukrainian SBU also reported that the serial numbers of the missile components match those of other Russian Kh-101s launched at Ukraine.[14] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces were attempting to strike the Artem machine building plant roughly 1.6 kilometers north of the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital, but other Russian missiles actually hit the Artem Plant during the strike.[15]

Many of these false Russian information operations would not absolve Russian forces of legal or moral responsibility for the impacts of their strikes against Ukraine even if true. Russian information operations falsely portraying the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital as partially or completely a military hospital falsely suggest that such a hospital is inherently a legitimate military target. The Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital is notably not a military hospital—it is the largest multidisciplinary children's hospital in Ukraine and treats up to 18,000 children per year.[16] Article 19 of the Geneva Convention, to which Russia is a signatory, relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War states that the international legal protection to civilian hospitals does not end unless the hospital undertakes "acts harmful to the enemy," and Article 19 explicitly excludes the presence of sick or wounded military personnel as an act "harmful to the enemy." [17] Article 19 also states that the "enemy" must give a warning prior to attacking a hospital allegedly containing a "harmful" military target, and no Russian sources are claiming that Russian authorities issued such a warning, nor have any offered proof that a hospital full of sick children was posing an imminent threat to Russian forces. [18] The Russian MoD's claim that a Ukrainian air defense interceptor hit civilian objects and Russian milblogger claims that a Russian missile accidentally hit the hospital also do not absolve Russian forces of responsibility for these consequences, as Russia is the aggressor state in this war and Ukraine would not have to defend against Russian strikes if Russia had not launched its full-scale invasion of and routine missile strike series against Ukraine.

The July 8 Russian missile strikes likely employed a new and noteworthy tactic to maximize the damage from such strike series. Former Ukrainian Air Forces Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat stated following the strikes on July 8 that Russian forces are constantly improving their reconnaissance and strike drone capabilities and the efficacy of both cruise and ballistic missiles, noting that during the July 8 strike Russian cruise missiles flew at "extremely low" altitudes.[19] Ihnat noted that in some cases, Ukrainian air defense forces had to attempt to intercept cruise missiles flying as low as 50 meters above the ground. Ukrainian air defenses have historically had high shoot-down rates for certain types of cruise missiles, particularly the older Kh-101 variety, but Ihnat's suggestion of Russian forces launching cruise missile strikes at such low altitudes indicates that Russian forces may have innovated their tactics and/or technology somewhat to inflict maximum

damage on Ukrainian infrastructure by giving Ukrainian air defense practically no time to respond until the missile is already within close range of the ground.[20] Ihnat noted that Russian forces are reducing the electromagnetic signatures of the drones until the last possible moment to prevent their detection by Ukrainian forces, which Ihnat noted means that by the time Ukrainian forces detect the drone, the missile the drone was guiding could already be close to the target point.[21] Russia has consistently adapted the strike packages it uses against Ukraine to take advantage of Ukraine's air defense shortages, and the July 8 strikes represent a new and adapted strike package that Ukraine will need to learn to respond to with requisite levels of Western-provided air defense systems.[22]

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping continued to posture themselves as potential mediators to an end to the war in Ukraine during a July 8 meeting in Beijing, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's rejection of serious negotiations or any third-party mediation. Orban called the PRC a "key power" in creating conditions for peace and stated that Hungary highly appreciates the PRC's peace initiative.[23] Xi stated that the international community should support direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and that other unspecified major world powers should employ "positive energy rather than negative energy" to support a ceasefire as soon as possible.[24] Xi also claimed that the PRC and Hungary share the same basic proposals to end the war. Orban and Xi are likely trying to mutually reinforce each other's efforts to portray Hungary and the PRC as neutral mediators despite Orban's consistent efforts to oppose and undermine the European Union's (EU) support for Ukraine and increasing evidence that the PRC is supporting Russia's war effort by providing Russia with dual-use goods and unconfirmed reports of joint PRC–Russian production of loitering munitions.[25] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky responded to a question at a July 8 press conference about whether Hungary could serve as a mediator to an end to the war and stated that only serious and strong alliances could stop the war and that a foreign country's representative holding bilateral discussions with Putin does not indicate Putin's interest in ending the war.[26] Zelensky also noted that countries with strong economies that influence Russia's economy and countries with militaries that threaten Russia's military - such as the US, the PRC, and the entire EU — could lead international mediation efforts and pressure Russia. Putin rejected Russian participation in possible ceasefire negotiations processes, denied interest in a ceasefire altogether, and demanded Ukrainian capitulation through "demilitarization" and the surrender of significant territory that Russia does not currently occupy on July 4 and 5.[27]

Russian Vice Admiral Sergei Lipilin replaced Vice Admiral Vladimir Vorobyov as Russian Baltic Fleet Commander. The Russian military officially introduced Lipilin as Baltic Fleet Commander at a Russian Navy ceremony in Kronstadt in St. Petersburg on July 8.[28] Lipilin previously served as the Baltic Fleet's Chief of Staff and First Deputy Commander since 2021, and Vorobyov is now Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy.[29]

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed on July 8 that a May 2024 op-ed by an ISW Russia analyst published in the *Telegraph* was unsubstantiated.[30] The op-ed was a brief presentation of in-depth and well-documented research that ISW has published regarding Russia's occupation of Ukraine and project to destroy Ukrainian statehood via genocidal means.[31] ISW stands by its assessments, including those presented in the *Telegraph* op-ed.

Key Takeaways:

- **A Russian Kh-101 cruise missile hit the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in central Kyiv during a wider series of missile strikes targeting critical Ukrainian infrastructure throughout the day on July 8.**
- **Russian officials and information space actors are attempting to deflect responsibility for the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital strike by making false claims about the missiles involved and the state of the hospital — all contrary to available evidence.**
- **The July 8 Russian missile strikes likely employed a new and noteworthy tactic to maximize the damage from such strike series**
- **Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping continued to posture themselves as potential mediators to an end to the war in Ukraine during a July 8 meeting in Beijing, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's rejection of serious negotiations or any third-party mediation.**
- **Russian Vice Admiral Sergei Lipilin replaced Vice Admiral Vladimir Vorobyov as Russian Baltic Fleet Commander.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in Chasiv Yar, and Russian forces recently advanced near Donetsk City and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin called on July 8 for Russia to increase its domestic production of drones fivefold by 2030.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 7, 2024

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Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian ammunition depot in Sergeevka, Voronezh Oblast on the night of July 6 to 7. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported that its sources stated that the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) conducted the strike and reported that the ammunition depot contained surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles, ammunition for tanks and artillery, and small arms rounds.[1] Geolocated footage published on July 7 taken near Morozovka, Voronezh Oblast (just northeast of Sergeevka along the M2 highway) shows a smoke plume and explosions with visible secondary detonations in the distance.[2] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed on July 7 that Russian air defense systems destroyed several Ukrainian drones over Voronezh Oblast and that drone debris fell on a warehouse in Podgorensky Raion, causing a fire and secondary explosions.[3] NASA Fire Information for Resource Management (FIRMS) data from July 7 detected anomalous heat signatures near Sergeevka.[4]

Satellite imagery confirms that the Ukrainian Air Force conducted a successful strike against a reported Russian regimental command post in Belgorod Oblast in late June 2024, likely with Western-provided weapons – further demonstrating how Ukraine could disrupt Russian offensive operations should the West continue to lift restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 23 that the Ukrainian Air Force struck the command post of an unspecified Russian motorized rifle regiment in Nekhoteevka, Belgorod Oblast on an unspecified date.[5] Geolocated footage of the strike shows that the command post was less than one kilometer from the Russian-Ukrainian border. [6] Satellite imagery collected on April 1 and June 28 shows significant damage to the building that reportedly housed the command post in Nekhoteevka.[7] Ukrainian forces likely used a French-made Armement Air-Sol Modulaire Hammer precision-guided bomb.[8] The command post's location close to the frontline in northern Kharkiv Oblast suggests that it was involved with ongoing Russian offensive operations north of Kharkiv City.[9] The Nekhoteevka strike demonstrates Ukraine's ability to conduct successful strikes on Russian military targets within Russia using Western-provided weapons to degrade Russian forces' ability to conduct offensive operations in Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that Ukraine should be able to use Western-provided weapons, including ATACMS missiles, to strike Russian military targets within Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale.[10]

Ukrainian drone operators appear to be improving their capabilities to interdict longer-range Russian drones in mid-air, and these technological innovations may allow Ukrainian forces to ease pressures on short-range and medium-range air defense assets if successfully fielded at scale. Footage posted on June 1 shows Ukrainian forces using first-person view (FPV) drones to strike a Russian tactical Zala reconnaissance drone and a medium-range Orlan-10 reconnaissance drone in mid-flight in the Velyka Novosilka area.[11] The Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces posted footage on June 29 showing a Ukrainian FPV drone intercepting a Russian Lancet loitering munition in mid-air in the Kharkiv direction.[12] Both Ukrainian and Russian forces appear to be improving their capability to use FPV drones to intercept other FPV drones at the tactical level, but ISW has yet to observe confirmation of Russian forces using FPV drones to strike Ukrainian loitering munitions or longer-range reconnaissance drones in mid-air.[13] Russian forces leveraged constraints on Ukrainian air defense assets in recent months to more freely operate fixed-wing reconnaissance drones in Ukraine, including in deep Ukrainian rear areas, which likely allowed Russian forces to improve their reconnaissance fire and reconnaissance strike complexes (RFC/RSC).[14] A robust Ukrainian capability to use cheap and widely-available drones to interdict more expensive Russian reconnaissance drones at scale would likely allow Ukrainian forces to degrade Russia's RFC/RSC while conserving expensive and scarce short- and medium-range air defense interceptors for more expensive and significant Russian air targets. ISW has yet to observe Ukrainian forces using FPV drones to strike conventional Russian reconnaissance drones at scale, however. Russian and Ukrainian forces are currently engaged in a technological offense-defense race, and Ukraine's capability to field technological innovations at scale ahead of Russian adaptations is crucial for Ukraine's ability to offset Russia's current materiel advantages.[15]

Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz forces likely coerced a Russian milblogger to issue a public apology after he criticized "Akhmat" forces – an illustrative example of unprofessionalism in the Russian military. An often-critical Russian milblogger claimed on June 5 that "TikTokers" are "standing behind" conscripts in Belgorod Oblast, insinuating that Chechen "Akhmat" forces are not contributing to ongoing Russian offensive operations in the Kharkiv direction.[16] The milblogger later published an apology video on July 7 in which the milblogger is sitting with a soldier from the "Akhmat" Spetsnaz "Aida" Detachment and acknowledged that he was referring to "Akhmat" forces as "TikTokers.[17] The milblogger claimed on July 7 that he met with "Akhmat" Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov and that Akhmat forces are actually fighting on the frontline in the Kharkiv direction. The milblogger notably pointedly criticized the Russian military command for Russia's lack of progress and significant losses in the Vovchansk direction in the July 5 video but only focused his July 7 apology on his comments about "Akhmat" forces.[18] Russian milbloggers have previously criticized "Akhmat" forces for not contributing to Russian military operations and only visiting frontline areas for propaganda purposes, and Chechen officials have tried to publicly restore "Akhmat's" reputation. [19] The Kremlin has recently undertaken measures that have successfully limited criticisms of the Russian military in the Russian information space, and Alaudinov's immediate involvement in the issue after the milblogger's July 5 video demonstrates the extreme measures that select members of the

Russian military command are able to take to suppress critical voices.[20] The "Akhmat" forces' response to the milblogger's video also demonstrates the widespread unprofessionalism that is pervasive throughout the Russian military, since it appears that the "Akhmat" forces took matters affecting their reputations into their own hands.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian ammunition depot in Sergeevka, Voronezh Oblast on the night of July 6 to 7.
- Satellite imagery confirms that the Ukrainian Air Force conducted a successful strike against a reported Russian regimental command post in Belgorod Oblast in late June 2024, likely with Western-provided weapons – further demonstrating how Ukraine could disrupt Russian offensive operations should the West continue to lift restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.
- Ukrainian drone operators appear to be improving their capabilities to interdict longer-range Russian drones in mid-air, and these technological innovations may allow Ukrainian forces to ease pressures on short-range and medium-range air defense assets if successfully fielded at scale.
- Chechen "Akhmat" Spetsnaz forces likely coerced a Russian milblogger to issue a public apology after he criticized "Akhmat" forces – an illustrative example of unprofessionalism in the Russian military.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Chasiv Yar and Toretsk, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City.
- Open-source researchers analyzed satellite imagery and assessed that Russia has removed roughly 42 percent of Russian tanks from pre-war open-air storage since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 6, 2024

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Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 6, 2024, 4:20pm ET

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban continues to posture himself as a potential mediator to end the war in Ukraine despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's rejection of mediation or serious negotiations. Orban is likely aiming to shift Western focus towards possible peace negotiations as part of his overarching effort to undermine European support for Ukraine. Orban published an op-ed in *Newsweek* on July 5 in which Orban accused NATO of choosing conflict over peace and stated that NATO was established to maintain peace.[1] Orban's op-ed follows his visits to Kyiv on July 2 and Moscow on July 5 to advocate for Russia and Ukraine to start negotiations.[2] Orban's efforts to push for negotiations are likely part of his ongoing effort to shift European focus to discussions about peace negotiations and away from discussions about military support for Ukraine. Orban has consistently opposed and undermined the European Union (EU)'s efforts to provide military assistance to Ukraine, and shifting Europe's focus away from military assistance supports this broader aim now that Hungary has assumed the EU Council presidency. [3] Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev offered on July 5 for Bulgaria to mediate peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia and emphasized that negotiations must comply with the UN charter and international law.[4] Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan similarly pushed for Ukraine to widen and accelerate Ukraine's ongoing peace process on July 6 to prevent "deepening polarization" and "prioritize diplomacy." [5]

Orban's and others' calls for negotiations and Ukraine's peace formula are distinct efforts with different aims, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has demonstrated that he is not interested in any negotiated agreements short of Ukraine's capitulation. Putin rejected Russian participation in possible ceasefire negotiations processes and denied interest in a ceasefire altogether on July 4 and 5.[6] Putin instead demanded Ukrainian capitulation through "demilitarization" and the surrender of significant territory that Russia does not currently occupy — all following months of attempts to portray Russia as willing to negotiate but falsely painting Ukrainian officials as either unwilling or unable to negotiate.[7] Ukraine recently concluded the first of multiple summits with its partners to establish conditions for possible future negotiations that would result in an enduring peace on terms acceptable to Ukraine and its supporters, and dozens of partner states and international organizations, including Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria, signed a Joint Peace Communique affirming their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity on June 16.[8] Ukraine's ability to pursue its own peace process is contingent on its ability to liberate operationally-significant territory. Ukraine cannot undertake successful counteroffensive efforts in support of this aim without Western military support in the near- and medium-terms.

Ukrainian forces struck energy infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai with drones on the night of July 5 to 6. The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters stated that Russian forces shot down Ukrainian drones near Leningradskaya, Yeysk and Pavlovskaya, Krasnodar Krai on the night of July 5 to 6 and that falling drone debris damaged a cell phone tower in Yeysk and caused a fire at an oil

depot in Pavlovskaya.[9] The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters also stated that Ukrainian drones struck a fuel tank in Leningradskaya, Krasnodar Krai. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* posted footage on July 6 of fires at fuel tanks in Leningradskaya and the Lukoil oil depot in Pavlovskaya.[10]

Iran announced on July 6 that Iran and Russia signed a bank agreement on July 4 enabling Russia and Iran to trade in the Russian ruble and Iranian rial.[11] Iranian Central Bank Head Mohammadreza Farzin announced that he and Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina also signed a memorandum of understanding on unspecified joint measures for both banks.

The Russian government continues efforts to isolate the Russian people from material it considers antithetical to state interests and ideology. Russian federal censor Rozkomnadzor announced on July 4 that it recently blocked Russians from accessing 25 mobile virtual private network (VPN) services.[12] Russian outlet *RBK* reported on July 4 that it obtained a letter from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) demanding that Russian telecom operators prohibit clients from using foreign- and domestic-based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) accounts, which allow clients to make phone calls via an Internet connection instead of a traditional phone line and are more difficult to trace.[13] The FSB alleged that the VoIP prohibition will help reduce fraud. [14] Rozkomnadzor announced in April 2024 that it began blocking 150 popular VPN services and restricting access to websites and social media posts that advertise VPNs as of March 1, 2024. [15] Russian State Duma Committee on Information Policy, Information Technology, and Communication Deputy Chairperson Oleg Matveychev stated in October 2023 that Rozkomnadzor is maintaining a list of VPNs that "comply" with existing Russian legislation and will continue to operate in Russia while Rozkomnadzor will block VPNs that "violate Russian laws." [16] Kremlin-sponsored outlet *Izvestia* clarified in March 2024 that Rozkomnadzor considers any VPN services that allow Russians to access prohibited content and resources as violating Russian law and eligible to be blocked.[17]

The Russian Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Science, and Culture have approved a plan to develop criteria for an annual review of works of literature, art, media, or other materials to determine if a work uses an "excessive" amount of foreign vocabulary.[18] The order claims that developing the criteria is part of the Russian government's efforts to protect Russia against "external destructive information, psychological influence, ... and activities aimed at destroying [Russia's] traditional values." The Kremlin's efforts to ban VPNs and identify works that employ "excessive use of foreign vocabulary" are part of ongoing efforts to consolidate control over the Russian information space and promote further Russian nationalist values domestically.

Key Takeaways:

- **Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban continues to posture himself as a potential mediator to end the war in Ukraine despite Putin's rejection of mediation or serious negotiations. Orban is likely aiming to shift Western focus towards possible peace negotiations as part of his overarching effort to undermine European support for Ukraine.**
- **Orban's and others' calls for negotiations and Ukraine's peace formula, are distinct efforts with different aims, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has demonstrated he is not interested in any negotiated agreements short of Ukraine's capitulation.**
- **Ukrainian forces struck energy infrastructure in Krasnodar Krai with drones on the night of July 5 to 6.**
- **Iran announced on July 6 that Iran and Russia signed a bank agreement on July 4 enabling Russia and Iran to trade in the Russian ruble and Iranian rial.**
- **The Russian government continues efforts to isolate the Russian people from material it considers antithetical to state interests and ideology.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Siversk, and Avdiivka.**
- **Russian federal subjects (regions) continue to increase monetary incentives to recruit contract soldiers (*kontraktniki*).**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 5, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 5, 2024, 7:20pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin used a meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on July 5 to oppose a negotiated ceasefire altogether and expressed his commitment to pursuing a "final" end to the war that would achieve his goal of destroying Ukrainian statehood. Putin met with Orban in Moscow and reportedly discussed Ukraine and the possibility of a negotiated ceasefire agreement.[1] Putin explicitly rejected Russian participation in any meaningful negotiations on a ceasefire agreement on July 4 in a departure from his usual feigned interest in negotiations, and Putin notably outright rejected any negotiated ceasefire in a press conference with Orban on July 5.[2] Putin stated that an agreement between Russia and Ukraine should not result in a

temporary ceasefire since this would allow Ukraine to regroup and rearm and that Russia instead favors a "complete" and "final" end to the conflict.[3] Putin is currently unwilling to accept anything short of the destruction of Ukrainian statehood and identity, however, as his remarks and demands have consistently illustrated.[4]

Putin is demanding both the surrender of a significant portion of Ukraine's territory and people to Russian occupation and Ukrainian military capitulation in advance of any negotiations on an end-state to the war. Putin called for the complete Ukrainian withdrawal from "Donbas and Novorossiia" as a prerequisite for ending the war during his press conference with Orban — a reference to Putin's June 14 demand for Ukraine to recognize the Russian occupation of occupied Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts and for Ukraine to surrender all territory that Russia does not currently hold in the four oblasts.[5] The imagined borders of "Novorossiia" are disputed among Russian ultranationalists, however, and Putin and the Kremlin have routinely indicated that they hold aims of territorial conquest beyond the administrative boundaries of the four oblasts that Russia has illegally annexed.[6] Putin also invoked concerns on July 4 about Ukrainian military reconstitution and expansion during a potential ceasefire to call for Ukraine's "irreversible" "demilitarization" as a prerequisite to negotiations.[7] Putin has long called for Ukraine's "demilitarization" — a demand that Ukraine abandon its ability to resist Russian aggression so that Putin can freely impose his will upon Ukraine.[8] Putin would almost certainly use Ukraine's capitulation to achieve his other goal of deposing Ukraine's democratically elected government and replacing it with a pro-Russian government and a political system to his liking.

Ukrainian counteroffensive operations that liberate operationally significant territory remain the soundest course of action for degrading Putin's confidence in and commitment to his desired end state for his war of aggression against Ukraine. Putin's rejection of any ceasefire indicates that he is increasingly confident in his assessment that Russia can pursue victory by continuing creeping advances in Ukraine, outlasting Western support for Ukraine, and winning a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces.[9] Putin's demands, achieved through either Ukraine's capitulation or the protracted war he assesses Russian forces can successfully wage, are not consistent with the survival of an independent Ukrainian state or the Ukrainian people, nor are they compatible with NATO's vital security interests. Putin's confidence in Russia's ability to encourage capitulation or win a protracted war of attrition is based on the assessment that Ukraine will not be able to conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations.[10] The West must hasten to provide Ukraine the support it needs to conduct counteroffensive operations to invalidate Putin's calculus and avoid protracting the war more than necessary to secure a peace acceptable to Ukraine and its partners.[11]

Putin's rejection of any ceasefire agreement contradicts the Kremlin's previous effort to place the onus for negotiations on the West and Ukraine. Putin blamed the West and Ukraine for the lack of negotiations while explicitly rejecting future Russian participation in any meaningful ceasefire negotiations during his July 4 press conference at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a stark contradiction in his rhetoric.[12] Putin also dismissed the possibility that any international body or head of state could mediate a ceasefire agreement between Russia and Ukraine, despite previously presenting China and various Western leaders as possible actors that Russia could negotiate with. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported on July 5 that it obtained a Kremlin manual ordering pro-Kremlin and Russian state media to highlight Putin's July 4 statements blaming the West and Ukraine for impeding peace negotiations with "ultimatums" and framing Russia as a willing, good-faith negotiator.[13] The manual recommends that Russian state media should present Putin's demands for Ukrainian capitulation as logical and realistic and Ukraine and the West as untrustworthy and deceptive. Putin's statements during his July 4 press conference and July 5 meetings will likely complicate the apparent ongoing Kremlin effort to convince select audiences that Russia remains interested in negotiations.[14]

Putin attempted to portray Orban as an EU representative who can speak on the EU's behalf — a claim that EU officials explicitly denied. Putin stated before his talks with Orban that he understands that Orban visited Russia "not only as [Russia's] long-standing partner, but also as the presiding officer of the EU Council." [15] Putin stated that he hoped Orban would speak to the position of Orban's "European partners" during their discussion. Orban stated that he would like to discuss Russia's position on issues that are "important to Europe" and claimed that Hungary will likely soon become the only state in Europe that can speak to all parties of the war in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated that Orban visited Russia without agreeing or coordinating with Ukraine and emphasized that there can be no agreements on Ukraine without Ukraine.[16] EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell and European Council President Charles Michel both explicitly stated that the EU Council presidency does not give Orban a mandate to visit Russia and that Orban is not acting on behalf of the EU.[17] Borrell stated that Orban's visit to Russia is "exclusively" within the framework of Hungarian-Russian bilateral relations and noted that the EU excludes official contacts between the EU and Putin.[18] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also stated that Orban is representing Hungary, not NATO.[19] Putin has repeatedly portrayed the West as his envisioned negotiating partner in a ceasefire agreement but notably dismissed all intermediary parties as possible mediators for an agreement between Ukraine and Russia on July 4.[20] Putin's attempts to portray Orban as a legitimate representative of the EU who possesses the authority to speak about possible negotiations on July 5 directly contradicts Putin's July 4 claims that intermediaries lack the competency and authority to mediate an end to the war.[21]

Recent Russian domestic polls suggest that Kremlin information operations are influencing domestic Russian support of the war in Ukraine. Independent Russian polling organization Levada Center published the results of a June 2024 poll on July 4 indicating that 58 percent of respondents believe that Russia should either definitely start peace negotiations with Ukraine in the near term or should start negotiations sooner rather than later, an all-time high since the start of the war but only a marginal increase since Levada's most recent polling in May 2024.[22] Levada Center noted that Russian support for negotiations previously peaked at 57 percent each in October 2022 and November 2023 and that support for negotiations had hovered between 48 and 53 percent since January 2024. Senior Kremlin officials have largely perpetuated information operations aimed at portraying Russia as willing to negotiate with Ukraine but only on Russian terms that amount to Ukraine's complete capitulation and destruction.[23] Levada noted that 41 percent of Russians believe that Russia is more interested in negotiations than Ukraine; that this number has been relatively consistent since 2023; and that these respondents largely believe that Russia is "going in the right direction," approve of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and trust information about the war from television media (as opposed to information from the internet).

Prominent Kremlin information operations justifying the war in Ukraine have impacted domestic support for the war. Levada reported that two-thirds of respondents blame the US and NATO for the war in Ukraine and the resulting casualties, that this number has increased from around 53 percent since June 2023, and that half of these respondents believe that the war in Ukraine could escalate into a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO.[24] Levada noted that Russians remain concerned about the war; 95 percent of respondents expressed at least some concern about Ukrainian shelling of border areas and strikes against rear areas and about 86 percent of respondents are concerned about the "use of nuclear weapons" (actor unspecified) and the Western supply of weapons to Ukraine. Levada noted that 34 percent of Russians believe that the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine "could be justified" but that over half of respondents remain directly opposed.

These Russian polls indicate that Russians who criticize the conduct of the war in Ukraine still support the war due to patriotism and disenfranchisement. Russian sociological organization Public Sociological Laboratory (PS Lab) told opposition outlet *Verstka* in an article published on July 5 that "non-opponents" to the war are increasingly criticizing the war in Ukraine but still believe that Russia should continue the war and will not say that the war is a mistake.[25] PS Lab defines "non-opponents" as those supporting, justifying, or distancing themselves from the war and that most justify the war but are not "convinced supporters." PS Lab stated that most "non-opponents" share three attributes: they are apolitical and have a "detachment" from power, they possess serious and specific complaints about the government, and they cite patriotism for both their war justifications and their war criticisms. PS Lab noted that these "non-opponents" believe that they cannot influence the Russian government yet also feel more connected to the Russian government and identity than before the war, indicating that Kremlin propaganda is successfully establishing a degree of domestic unity that "non-opponents" value more than protesting against the Kremlin over their discontent about the war's conduct. Levada reported that the percentage of Russians who are proud of Russia's military actions in Ukraine rose to 48 percent, up from 45 percent in November 2023 and 38 percent from September 2023 – but still below the 51 percent peak following the onset of the war in February and March 2022. [26] Russian propaganda has created a layer of patriotism that likely acts as a buffer between complaints about the conduct of the war and the government that the Kremlin can endure and meaningful opposition that the Kremlin is unwilling or unable to tolerate.

PL Lab told *Verstka* that the percentage of actual "non-opponents" within Russia is difficult to estimate, but *Verstka* suggested several indicators that this percentage could range between 30 and 50 percent. *Verstka* noted that about 49 percent of respondents in a March 2024 Levada poll named human casualties as a possible reason for stopping the war in Ukraine and an increase in the number of respondents who avoid assessing the war.[27] Levada's June 2024 poll reported that 31 percent of respondents follow the war but do not pay close attention whereas 19 percent closely follow the war. [28]

Many of Russia's "non-opponents" of the war have criticisms that parallel those of Russian ultranationalist milbloggers, yet they lack the ultranationalists' close attention to the war and desire for political change in support of Russian war aims. PS Labs told *Verstka* that surveyed "non-opponents" spoke about conversations with family members fighting in Ukraine who complained that Russian television lies about the real situation on the frontlines – echoing a longstanding Russian milblogger criticism that Russian state media frequently portrays the situation on the front as better than it is.[29] The "non-opponent" belief that they cannot influence the government and their inattention to the details of the war is a stark departure from the Russian ultranationalist voices, many of whom believe they can influence policy and have advocated for the better treatment of Russian military personnel, better conduct of the war in Ukraine, and even attempted political campaigns aimed at prompting change to these ends.[30]

Ukrainian forces conducted successful drone and missile strikes against targets in Tambov and Rostov oblasts and Krasnodar Krai on July 4 and 5. Ukrainian media reported that sources within Ukrainian intelligence stated that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a successful drone strike against a gunpowder plant in Kotovsk, Tambov Oblast on July 4 and that the GUR is clarifying the consequences of the strike.[31] Russian opposition media outlet *SOTA* posted footage claiming to show the Ukrainian drone strike against the Tambov

gunpowder plant.[32] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov declined to comment on the reported strike on July 5 but stated that this gunpowder plant is a key Russian military enterprise and suggested that Russia will struggle to restart operations at the plant.[33]

Footage published on July 4 and 5 shows that a Ukrainian drone struck the Novoshakhtinsky oil refinery's (NZNP) "Rostovskiy" oil depot in Rostov-on-Don and caused a subsequent explosion and fire at the depot on the night of July 4 to 5.[34] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev stated that Russian air defenses destroyed 10 drones over Rostov Oblast and that debris from Ukrainian drones caused fires in Rostov Oblast.[35] NZNP is reportedly the largest supplier of petroleum products in southern Russia, and it is highly likely that the Russian Southern Military District (SMD) (which is based in Rostov-on-Don) uses products from the Rostovskiy oil depot.[36]

Sources within Krasnodar Krai emergency services told Russian opposition outlet *Astra* that several Ukrainian drones and at least two unspecified missiles struck Russia's Primorsko-Akhtarsk air base in Krasnodar Krai on the night of July 4 to 5 and damaged a nearby substation, disrupting power to nearby residential areas.[37] *Astra* stated that the strike wounded a Russian servicemember and noted that the Russian 960th Guards Attack Aviation Regiment (1st Guards Mixed Aviation Division, 4th Guards Air Force and Air Defense Army) is stationed at the airbase and is typically armed with Su-25, Su-25UB, and Su-25SM3 attack aircraft. Ukrainian officials have not commented on the Krasnodar Krai strike as of this report, and the damage to the airfield is currently unclear. The Russian Investigative Committee has reportedly opened a criminal investigation into the Krasnodar Krai strike on charges of terrorism.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin used a meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on July 5 to oppose a negotiated ceasefire altogether and expressed his commitment to pursuing a "final" end to the war that would achieve his goal of destroying Ukrainian statehood.
- Putin is demanding both the surrender of a significant portion of Ukraine's territory and people to Russian occupation and Ukrainian military capitulation in advance of any negotiations on an end-state to the war.
- Ukrainian counteroffensive operations that liberate operationally significant territory remain the soundest course of action for degrading Putin's confidence in and commitment to his desired end state for his war of aggression against Ukraine.
- Putin's rejection of any ceasefire agreement contradicts the Kremlin's previous effort to place the onus for negotiations on the West and Ukraine.
- Putin attempted to portray Orban as an EU representative who can speak on the EU's behalf – a claim that EU officials explicitly denied.
- Recent Russian domestic polls suggest that Kremlin information operations are influencing domestic Russian support of the war in Ukraine.
- These Russian polls indicate that Russians who criticize the conduct of the war in Ukraine still support the war due to patriotism and disenfranchisement.
- Many of Russia's "non-opponents" to the war have criticisms that parallel those of Russian ultranationalist milbloggers, yet they lack the ultranationalists' close attention to the war and desire for political change in support of Russian war aims.
- Ukrainian forces conducted successful drone and missile strikes against targets in Tambov and Rostov oblasts and Krasnodar Krai on July 4 and 5.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Toretsk, and Donetsk City.
- Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials continue to portray themselves as providing adequate medical care and other support for Russian soldiers who fought in Ukraine amid ongoing criticisms that the Russian military command sends injured soldiers to fight on the frontline.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 4, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 4, 2024, 5:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on July 4. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly rejected Russian participation in any meaningful negotiations on a ceasefire agreement, instead demanding Ukraine's "irreversible" "demilitarization" as a precondition for any ceasefire agreement. Putin is thus demanding that Ukraine effectively surrender in advance of any ceasefire. Putin commented on the prospects of a negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, on July 4, but instead of offering his typical feigned interest in such negotiations he outright rejected any ceasefire negotiation process.[1] Putin has repeatedly portrayed the West as his

envisioned negotiating partner in a ceasefire agreement in order to prompt Western concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty, but Putin notably dismissed all intermediary parties as possible mediators for an agreement between Ukraine and Russia.[2] Putin also dismissed the Verkhovna Rada as a possible point of contact for negotiations despite previously claiming that the body was the only legitimate Ukrainian entity that Russia could negotiate with.[3] Putin has now labeled all Ukrainian governing institutions illegitimate or unsuitable for negotiations and has dismissed the idea of third parties participating in negotiations — de facto rejecting any realistic process for meaningfully negotiating a ceasefire agreement.[4]

Putin instead highlighted his demand for Ukraine's "demilitarization" as a primary prerequisite for any ceasefire agreement, demanding that Ukraine agree to "demilitarization" measures that would be irreversible.[5] Putin argued that Russia cannot allow the Ukrainian military to take advantage of a ceasefire to reconstitute its forces.[6] Putin notably did not address the near-certainty that Russian forces would take advantage of a potential ceasefire in exactly such a way, and ISW continues to assess that Russia would use the respite of a ceasefire to reconstitute and expand its forces and to further mobilize its defense industrial base (DIB) for future aggression aiming to destroy the Ukrainian state.[7] Putin's rejection of any ceasefire agreement short of Ukrainian capitulation further illustrates that he is confident in his assessment that Russia can pursue victory by continuing creeping advances in Ukraine, outlasting Western support for Ukraine, and winning a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces.[8]

Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers reportedly detained the commander of the Russian 83rd Guards Airborne Assault (VDV) Brigade, Colonel Artyom Gorodilov, on fraud charges on July 3 following reports of the brigade suffering heavy losses in the Kharkiv direction in June 2024.[9] Kremlin-affiliated business outlet *Kommersant* stated that FSB military counterintelligence officers detained Gorodilov in Ryazan Oblast on a charge of especially large-scale fraud and transported Gorodilov to the Russian Investigative Committee's headquarters in Moscow. [10] Russian media reported that Gorodilov denied the charge and stated that he will seek acquittal in the future, and that the Russian 235th Garrison Military Court sent Gorodilov to a pre-trial detention center.[11] Gorodilov reportedly served as commander of the Russian 234th Guards VDV Regiment (76th VDV Division) from 2019 until an unspecified recent date, and Russian media first introduced Gorodilov as commander of the 83rd VDV Brigade in May 2024.[12] The *New York Times* reported in December 2022 that elements of the 234th VDV Regiment under Gorodilov's leadership committed massacres of Ukrainian civilians in Bucha, Kyiv Oblast in March 2022.[13] If Gorodilov was indeed the commander of the 83rd VDV Brigade at the time of his arrest, then the Russian high command gave him increased responsibilities as commander of a separate brigade rather than of a regiment subordinated to a division between Russian atrocities in Bucha and the Russian Kharkiv Oblast offensive. Ukrainian officials recently reported that the Russian military command attempted to withdraw elements of the 83rd VDV Brigade from the Kharkiv direction after suffering significant losses that rendered the elements[14]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian military command may be punishing Gorodilov for what Putin perceives as gross incompetence that failed to achieve its military objectives while causing the deaths of a significant number of "elite" Russian servicemembers in the Kharkiv direction, as Russian VDV troops were widely considered elite prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Russian military command may still consider them to be elite.[15] Russian authorities have recently arrested a series of Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials and high-ranking military officers on criminal charges seemingly unrelated to their positions, including recently announcing charges of forgery and high treason against former 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Commander Major General Ivan Popov.[16] Putin appears to be willing to accept low levels of incompetence in exchange for loyalty but continues to levy seemingly unrelated criminal charges against Russian officials who transgress beyond acceptable levels of incompetence and insubordination.

Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) efforts to expand its presence in Central Asia and will likely use an increased SCO presence as one of its levers to expand Russian influence in the region. Putin commended on July 4 the SCO's development of its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the official establishment of the SCO Anti-Drug Center in Dushanbe — an initiative that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon had proposed in 2019.[17] SCO General Secretary Zhang Ming stated that Central Asia is the "core" of the SCO and that peace and prosperity in Central Asia is closely linked to the SCO's stability and development. [18] Putin also stated his support for reviving the SCO-Afghanistan contact group and noted that Russia has received signals from the Taliban that it may be ready to help Russia combat terrorism.[19]

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced the purchase of \$2.2 billion worth of US-produced air defense interceptors and an aid package worth \$150 million for Ukraine on July 3. [20] The DoD stated that it will purchase \$2.2 billion worth of recently produced PATRIOT and NASAMS air defense missiles for Ukraine to help protect the Ukrainian people and Ukraine's critical infrastructure from Russian drone and missile strikes. The DoD has yet to announce that it is sending these air defense missiles to Ukraine. The DoD stated that it is also provided an aid package worth \$150 million from the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), which includes: HAWK air defense missiles; HIMARS ammunition; 155mm and 105mm artillery shells; 81mm mortar rounds; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; small arms ammunition and grenades; demolition equipment and munitions; tactical vehicles and air

navigation systems; and space parts, maintenance, and other equipment. The DoD noted that the PDA package is the Biden Administration's 60th tranche of equipment provided to Ukraine since August 2021.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly rejected Russian participation in any meaningful negotiations on a ceasefire agreement, instead demanding Ukraine's "irreversible" "demilitarization" as a precondition for any ceasefire agreement. Putin is thus demanding that Ukraine effectively surrender in advance of any ceasefire.
- Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers reportedly detained the commander of the Russian 83rd Guards Airborne Assault (VDV) Brigade, Colonel Artyom Gorodilov, on fraud charges on July 3 following reports of the brigade suffering heavy losses in the Kharkiv direction in June 2024.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin supported the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) efforts to expand its presence in Central Asia and will likely use an increased SCO presence as one of its levers to expand Russian influence in the region.
- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced the purchase of \$2.2 billion worth of US-produced air defense interceptors and an aid package worth \$150 million for Ukraine on July 3.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.
- Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on July 4 that around 190,000 Russians signed military service contracts during the first six months of 2024 during a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) meeting about staffing the Russian military with contract soldiers.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 3, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, and George Barros

July 3, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Ukraine is addressing its manpower challenges and is forming several new brigades, but delayed and insufficient Western weapons deliveries will likely prevent Ukraine from equipping all these new brigades. Timely and appropriate Western security assistance continues to be a crucial determinant of when and at what scale Ukrainian forces can contest the battlefield initiative and conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations in the future. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with *Bloomberg* published on July 3 that Ukrainian forces are better positioned in terms of manpower than they were a few months ago and that Ukraine's ability to conduct a future counteroffensive operation depends on equipping brigades with heavy equipment, such as mechanized fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, tanks, and heavy artillery (likely referencing at least 10 planned new Ukrainian brigades).[1] The commander of a Ukrainian brigade operating near Chasiv Yar provided a similar assessment at the tactical level on July 3, stating that Ukrainian forces in his area of operations are more in need of ammunition than manpower.[2] Zelensky stated that military equipment is taking too long to arrive at the front, however, echoing his comments from early June 2024 about how the slow arrival of US security assistance was complicating Ukrainian efforts to equip reserve brigades sufficiently to commit them to defensive operations.[3] Ukrainian media has routinely highlighted in recent months the lack of sufficient materiel for equipping all the new Ukrainian brigades currently being formed, and current reporting suggests that Ukraine will not be able to fully equip all their upcoming brigades without the arrival of additional Western security assistance.[4] The months-long delay of Western security assistance exacerbated challenges with Ukraine's force mobilization efforts.[5]

Ukraine's ability to conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations at the time of its choosing is crucial to avoid protracting the war. Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory that Russia will be able to make creeping advances in Ukraine indefinitely is likely incentivizing Putin to protract the war and hardening his commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood, and Putin is unlikely to change his calculus without Ukraine inflicting further significant defeats on Russian forces. [6] Ukraine does not have the time and flexibility to wait for Western security assistance to equip new units. Russian forces are likely currently attempting to leverage the theater-wide initiative to try to force Ukraine to commit manpower and materiel to current defensive operations and to prevent Ukraine from accumulating the decisive personnel and resources it needs to contest the initiative.[7] The longer Ukraine must wait to equip and deploy new brigades the more opportunities Russian forces will have to disrupt Ukrainian efforts to concentrate new uncommitted combat power for future counteroffensive operations. Western security assistance that allows Ukrainian forces to equip new units will ease these pressures, and more certainty in what forces will be available will permit Ukraine to start concretely planning future counteroffensive operations. Western security assistance that provides Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and

regularity required for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine remains the only likely path for reducing Putin's current commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity.[8]

Russian President Vladimir Putin is leveraging existing Eurasian-focused and Russian-led international organizations as the cornerstone for his new proposed alternative "Eurasian security architecture." Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov stated during the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Defense Ministers' meeting on July 3 that Putin's recently-announced "Eurasian security structure" will cover "all spheres of activity" and is "open to all Eurasian countries without exception." [9] Belousov emphasized the importance of the Russian-Belarusian Union State, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), CIS, and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the creation of this new Eurasian security architecture. [10] Putin previously emphasized on June 21 that Russia wants to discuss Eurasian security issues with these international organizations and BRICS.[11]

Putin held bilateral meetings with the heads of various SCO member states, observers, and dialogue partners on the sidelines of the SCO summit on July 3, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.[12] The Kremlin readouts for each meeting were largely boilerplate and emphasized a long history of friendly relations, strong trade, and growing energy cooperation — all portraying Russia as part of a network of friendly economic partners within Eurasia despite Western sanctions. Putin has been attempting to create a coalition of states friendly to act as an alternative to the West and undermine NATO and has recently pursued the PRC, North Korea, Vietnam, and Venezuela in support of this coalition, and is especially seeking to persuade and portray the PRC as invested in this Eurasian security architecture.[13] Senior Russian officials including Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov celebrated the July 3 Putin-Xi meeting as having gone "excellently" and with "complete mutual understanding," while Xi reiterated ongoing Kremlin information operations aimed at undermining the Ukrainian peace formula.[14] Putin and Khurelsukh discussed further developing rail infrastructure between Russia and Mongolia, and the Kremlin's readout of the meeting emphasized that these rail lines would increase logistics between Russia and the PRC through Mongolia and enable trilateral trade, while the official Mongolian readout did not include this emphasis.[15]

Ukraine conducted a naval drone strike against Russian naval infrastructure in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night July 3 and reportedly damaged energy infrastructure during an aerial drone strike on Belgorod Oblast on the night of July 1. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) forces destroyed three Ukrainian naval drones *en route* to Novorossiysk, and the Russian MoD and Russian milbloggers later amplified footage reportedly showing BSF elements repelling naval drones that were reportedly targeting the Russian naval base in Novorossiysk.[16] Novorossiysk Mayor Andrey Kravchenko confirmed the attack and announced the closure of beaches.[17] Ukrainian Naval Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk noted on July 3 that the Ukrainian Navy is not yet ready to confirm details of the attack, however. ISW has not yet observed visual evidence of the attack damaging Russian naval targets.[18]

Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne*, citing sources within the Ukrainian special forces, reported on June 3 that a June 1 Ukrainian drone strike "seriously damaged" the Oskol Electrometallurgical Plant (OEMK) in Belgorod Oblast.[19] *Suspilne* stated that Ukrainian loitering munitions targeted two OEMK electrical substations—the Sary Oskol Substation near Neznamovo and the Metalurgiyna Substation near Volokonovka—causing the entire OEMK to lose power.[20] *Suspilne* noted that the OEMK is the only full-cycle metallurgical enterprise in Russia, so an outage could severely impact metallurgical outputs. [21] Russian sources noted electricity outages near Sary Oskol on July 1, apparently as a result of the Ukrainian strike.[22]

Unspecified People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russian companies are reportedly working together to develop a drone similar to the Iranian-designed Shahed loitering munition for Russia to use in Ukraine. Two unspecified European officials told *Bloomberg* in a July 2 article that unspecified Russian and PRC companies held talks in 2023 about collaborating to "replicate" Shahed drones and started developing and testing a prototype in 2024.[23] The officials stated the companies are preparing to ship the drones to Russia but that Russian forces have yet to use the drones against Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported that, according to another official familiar with the matter, the United States assesses that the PRC is not currently providing lethal aid to Russia but is sending kits to Russia that Russia can convert into attack drones, while continuing to consider whether to send fully built drones to Russia. ISW cannot independently verify any of these reported officials' statements. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with *Bloomberg* published on July 3 that Ukraine does not have evidence that the PRC is providing Russia with weapons but noted that Russia has acquired dual-use goods from the PRC. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on May 1 that the PRC's export of dual-use goods to Russia have helped Russia significantly increase its defense production and that Russia is acquiring 70 percent of its machine tools and 90 percent of its microelectronics from the PRC.[24] The provision of jointly PRC- and Russian-made loitering munitions to Russia to use in Ukraine would be a significant inflection in PRC-Russian relations and would suggest that Russian President Vladimir Putin had secured a notable concession from PRC President Xi Jinping given that ISW continues to assess that the PRC is attempting to portray itself as a neutral mediator and retains the upper hand in PRC-Russian relations.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine is addressing its manpower challenges and is forming several new brigades, but delayed and insufficient Western weapons deliveries will likely prevent Ukraine from equipping all these new brigades. Timely and appropriate Western security assistance continues to be crucial determinant of when and at what scale Ukrainian forces can contest the battlefield initiative and conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations in the future.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin is leveraging existing Eurasian-focused and Russian-led international organizations as the cornerstone for his new proposed alternative "Eurasian security architecture."
- Ukraine conducted a naval drone strike against Russian naval infrastructure in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night July 3 and reportedly damaged energy infrastructure during an aerial drone strike on Belgorod Oblast on the night of July 1.
- Unspecified People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russian companies are reportedly working together to develop a drone similar to the Iranian-designed Shahed loitering munition for Russia to use in Ukraine.
- Russian forces recently advanced within easternmost Chasiv Yar, in the Toretsk direction, and near Avdiivka, and Ukrainian forces recently advanced within Vovchansk, near Kreminna, and southeast of Chasiv Yar.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to position Russian veterans that have fought in Ukraine in official roles in Russian domestic politics.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 2, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

July 2, 2024, 7:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on July 2. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 3 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The interplay between ongoing Russian offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Avdiivka directions indicates that the Russian military command may intend to leverage the ongoing Toretsk push to create operational opportunities for advances in either the Chasiv Yar or Avdiivka areas. Russian preparations that can support multiple future branch plans suggest a more developed level of operational planning and foresight than the Russian command has proven capable of executing thus far in the war since early 2022. The ability of this operational planning to come to fruition, however, will be bounded by the overall poor tactical-level capabilities of Russian forces currently fighting in these areas. Ukrainian Khortytzia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated in an interview with Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne Donbas* on July 2 that Russian forces are beginning to storm Chasiv Yar from the Toretsk direction (south of Chasiv Yar) and have been attacking in the direction of Toretsk-Chasiv Yar using mainly small infantry groups and occasional mechanized assaults.[1] Voloshyn's suggestion that Russian forces are trying to attack towards the southern flank of Chasiv Yar from the Toretsk area is noteworthy. If Russian forces are able to develop a larger salient in the general Shumy-Pivdenne-Pivniche-Toretsk area, then they may be able to more credibly threaten Chasiv Yar from the south, complementing ongoing offensive Russian efforts north of Chasiv Yar near Kalynivka. Russian forces have continued attacks in the area south and southeast of Chasiv Yar, particularly near Klishchiivka, Andriivka, and Kurdyumivka, suggesting that the Russian command remains interested, at least in principle, in maintaining access to the southern flank of the Chasiv Yar area. Recent Russian advances in Mayorske (east of Toretsk) affords Russian forces positions on the east (left) bank of the Siverskyi Donets-Donbas Canal, allowing them to advance towards Chasiv Yar from the south along one bank of the canal as opposed to trying to cross the canalizing terrain in northern and eastern Chasiv Yar.

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets, however, linked Russian efforts in the Toretsk direction with efforts to break through to the Pokrovsk direction (also referred to as the Avdiivka direction or the area west/southwest of Toretsk).[2] Mashovets noted on July 2 that Russian forces have intensified attacks on Toretsk in the past 24 hours and that the Russian Central Grouping of Forces (the command of which is also notably responsible for Russian troops attacking west of Avdiivka) has deployed additional battalions and assault companies near Toretsk to support ongoing offensive operations.[3] Mashovets noted that operational factors in the Toretsk direction "are directly related" to the Avdiivka direction and assessed that Russian troops of the Central Grouping of Forces are trying to interdict Ukrainian positions along the H-32 Pokrovsk-Kostyantynivka road (a major Ukrainian ground line of communication [GLOC] that supplies Ukrainian forces in Toretsk).[4]

Mashovets' and Voloshyn's separate observations on the prospects of Russian offensive operations near Toretsk reflect a noteworthy battlefield dynamic — the Russian command may have chosen to escalate offensive operations near Toretsk in mid-June exactly because this area offers Russian forces

a flexible point of departure from which they can either attack north towards Chasiv Yar or west/southwest in the Avdiivka direction, depending on whatever route of attack the Russian command deems the most immediately promising. The apparent decision to attack near Toretsk emphasizes that the Russian command may be planning operations with more foresight and understanding of the operational situation than previously, when the Russian command pushed for incoherent offensive operations on unrelated parts of the front. The ability of the Russian command to actually bring these operational plans to bear, however, is contingent on the tactical-level performance of the troops in the Toretsk area and their ability to exploit tactical successes into operationally-significant breakthroughs. [5] As ISW previously noted, the main Russian forces concentration in the Toretsk area is formed of lower-quality forces of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Territorial Troops, which will likely struggle to properly execute attacks, especially as Ukraine receives additional military aid over the coming weeks and months.[6]

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban likely used his unannounced visit to Kyiv on July 2 to posture himself as a peacemaker following Hungary's accession to the European Union (EU) Council presidency on July 1, but Orban's efforts are very unlikely to bring about any robust peace in Ukraine. Orban met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv, and the Hungarian government readout emphasized that Orban met with Zelensky specifically to ask him to "consider a time-bound ceasefire" and "speed up the peace negotiations" given that "the rules of international diplomacy are slow and complicated." [7] The Hungarian readout suggested that Orban specifically made this request to coincide with Hungary's EU Council presidency. Zelensky stated that he and Orban discussed bilateral issues, infrastructure, energy issues, and "how to bring a just and lasting peace closer." [8] Ukrainian Presidential Administration Deputy Head Ihor Zhovka stated that Zelensky listened to Orban's proposal before emphasizing that Ukraine is working to draft a peace plan and hold another peace summit, which Zhovka stated Russia can attend "in one way or another." [9] Zhovka noted that Hungary is not the first country to discuss a possible ceasefire but emphasized that "such [peace and negotiations] processes cannot be perceived in isolation." [10] **ISW continues to assess that a ceasefire in Ukraine on the current lines is unlikely to deter further Russian aggression and only allow Russia critical time to rebuild its forces and prepare for future aggression against Ukraine.**

The Kremlin is waging an intensified information campaign aimed at pushing Ukraine to negotiate with Russia on Russian terms, and any Russian, Western, or other efforts to cajole Ukraine to prematurely negotiate with Russia would only weaken Ukraine and embolden further Russian aggression inside and beyond Ukraine. [11] Orban's recent messaging about a ceasefire could support the Kremlin's larger strategic messaging that seeks to establish a Russian-preferable operational pause or convince Ukraine's international partners to abandon Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently articulated a theory of victory that posits that gradual and indefinite Russian advances within Ukraine will eventually enable Russian victory. [12] Putin likely assesses that Russia can protract the war indefinitely and win a war of attrition so long as he can deny decisive international support to Ukraine. [13] Russia's slow but steady battlefield gains since late 2023 likely reinforce Putin's assessment and incentivize Putin to avoid any kind of true ceasefire that would end the war. Putin and other senior Russian officials have consistently reiterated that Russia is uninterested in any negotiations that do not result in further Ukrainian territorial concessions of areas that Russia does not already occupy. [14] Freezing the current lines in Ukraine would provide Russia with operationally and strategically significant Ukrainian territory from which Russia can launch renewed aggression with an experienced military and revitalized defense industrial base.

Several Russian State Duma deputies proposed a bill that would exclude a significant number of ethnicities from Russia's "compatriots" resettlement program, undermining the Kremlin's efforts to leverage its "compatriots abroad" to offset Russian labor shortages and set informational conditions to justify potential hybrid operations against other countries with Russian and Russian-speaking populations. Just Russia Party Duma Deputy Dmitry Kuznetsov and Communist Party Duma Deputy Mikhail Matveyev authored a bill that would exclude citizens of countries formerly within the Soviet Union from using the "compatriots" program to resettle in Russia and that would limit the definition of "compatriots" eligible for resettlement as ethnicities historically living in the territory of Russia and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). [15] Kuznetsov and Matveyev claimed that 50 to 70 percent of applicants for the "compatriots" resettlement program in recent years are citizens of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Armenia and claimed that "several generations of citizens" of post-Soviet countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union have grown up with their own countries' "traditional, cultural, and moral values" and do not have any "blood, historical, cultural, spiritual, or any other connection" with Russia or its people. The Russian government notably eased the requirements for "compatriots" living abroad to apply to resettle in Russia in February 2024 by no longer requiring an applicant to prove their Russian-language proficiency if they previously renounced Russian citizenship; were born or permanently resided in the Soviet Union and had Soviet citizenship; or have relatives who were born or permanently resided on territory formerly part of the Soviet Union or Russian Empire. [16] Russian ultranationalist milbloggers have been increasingly critical of the Russian government's decision to provide migrants with Russian citizenship, while others have supported this practice on the condition that migrants with acquired Russian citizenship serve in the Russian military in Ukraine. [17] Russian ultranationalists' increasing animosity toward migrants may have influenced Kuznetsov and Matveyev to propose implementing restrictions against many citizens that would be eligible for resettlement in Russia and by extension, greatly limiting the number of people the Russian government can include in its "compatriots abroad" narrative. Setting strict

definitions on Russia's classification of its "compatriots" directly undermines ongoing Kremlin efforts to set informational conditions to justify potential hybrid operations against other countries with Russian and Russian-speaking populations and to use "compatriot" resettlement to offset labor shortages and long-term population decline.[18]

Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot at a Russian military base in occupied Crimea on July 1 that reportedly housed Shahed drones. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk stated on July 2 that Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot in occupied Crimea on July 1.[19] A Russian source posted a photo on July 2 purportedly of the aftermath of a Ukrainian cruise missile strike against a Shahed drone warehouse near occupied Sevastopol on the evening of July 1, and the geolocated photograph indicates that Ukrainian forces struck the base of Russian military unit 99375 near occupied Flotske (south of Sevastopol).[20] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on July 2 that Ukrainian forces launched at least six Storm Shadow missiles at Sevastopol on the evening of July 1 and that one missile struck the Russian Black Sea Fleet's 758th Logistics Center in occupied Sevastopol.[21] A Crimea-based Telegram channel stated on July 1 that Russian air defense systems activated near occupied Flotske and Sevastopol and that there were explosions near an unspecified Russian military unit near Flotske.[22] Sevastopol occupation head Mikhail Razvozhaev claimed that Russian forces shot down five unspecified air targets over the water and near Balaklava and that small fires started.[23]

Russia may be intensifying its efforts to conduct reconnaissance and disrupt communications in the underwater and air space near NATO states. *Bloomberg* reported on July 1, citing three unspecified sources, that Russian Kilo-class submarines operated in unspecified areas near the Irish Sea once 18 months ago (in December 2022 or January 2023) and once at an unspecified "more recent" date.[24] *Bloomberg* reported that the sources stated that these submarine movements "went beyond what UK officials had previously seen," but did not offer specifics on how the new events were anomalous. *Bloomberg* noted that Cork, Ireland is a landing point for the EXA Atlantic submarine cable that connects the UK and Canada and that a spokesperson for the Irish Department of Defense stated that government agencies are working to protect Ireland's data cables. Sources reportedly stated that Russian submarine deployments to the Irish Sea area could be part of efforts to identify potential weaknesses in Irish and British maritime defenses or to intimidate the UK due to British support for Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported that a source noted that the varying depths of the Irish Sea would make it difficult for a Russian submarine to traverse the entire Irish Sea submerged. It is unclear why the Russian submarines were operating near the Irish Sea, but the submarines may have been conducting reconnaissance on the defense and communications of NATO members Canada and the UK.

The United Nations' International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reviewed concerns from Luxembourg, Sweden, France, and the Netherlands about recent interference to their satellite networks that jammed GPS signals, endangered air traffic control, and interrupted children's TV shows to display footage of the war in Ukraine.[25] The ITU reported that two satellite operators both geolocated the source of the interference against French and Swedish satellite networks to near Moscow, Kaliningrad, and Pavlovka (there are numerous Pavlovkas in Russia and it is unclear to which Pavlovka, Russia the ITU is referring). ISW has also observed high levels of GPS jamming over Poland and the Baltic region since late 2023, which some analysts and experts have attributed to Russian electronic warfare (EW) activity near Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg.[26] ISW has also observed increased reports of disruptions in air communications near the UK and Ireland.[27] The *Telegraph*, citing flight tracker data, also reported on June 30 that roughly 28 percent of the UK's Royal Air Force transport and surveillance flights over Eastern Europe and 16 percent of flights over northwestern Europe between January and April 2024 experienced GPS interference.[28] Air traffic control communications reportedly from the Shanwick Oceanic Control (overseeing the international airspace zone covering the northeastern Atlantic Ocean between the west coast of Scotland and Ireland to the southwestern coast of Iceland) indicated that a June 2024 flight between Madrid, Spain, and Toronto, Canada, was unable to ascend to a higher altitude due to apparent GPS jamming affecting other aircraft at the higher altitude.[29] The Resilient Navigation and Timing Foundation, a nonprofit advocating for improved GPS security, noted, however, that a GPS jammer is not always able to recover after experiencing jamming and assessed that the aircraft that experienced the jamming over the Atlantic was likely flying from the Baltic region or Middle East and that one of its GPS receivers had not recovered by the time it entered the Shanwick Oceanic Control Zone. Anomalous Russian submarine activity in the Irish Sea and apparent Russian GPS manipulations in a nearby area and across much of NATO airspace may not be directly related, but both represent Russian efforts to interfere with the water and air space of NATO members.

Russian authorities appear to be publicly fixating on crackdowns against fight clubs and restricting the niqab to signal that Russian authorities are adequately combatting terrorist threats in the North Caucasus instead of addressing systemic issues of Islamist extremism in the region. Russian outlets reported on June 28 that security forces searched a mixed martial arts (MMA) sports club with links to former Russian MMA fighter Khabib Nurmagomedov in Dagestan Republic since an attacker involved in the June 23 terrorist attacks in Dagestan reportedly trained at the sports club.[30] Russian outlet *RBK* reported on July 1 that the Russian Federal Tax Service (FNS) seized Nurmagomedov's bank accounts due to a debt of 297 million rubles (about \$3.4 million).[31] Russian media reported on July 2 that Russian law enforcement also detained a former coach of the Russian national youth wrestling team in Moscow in a terrorism case.[32] Russian milbloggers have

criticized the purported widespread participation of Dagestani youth in MMA fight clubs, which milbloggers claim encourage Islamist extremist ideology.[33] Along with MMA clubs, Russian authorities are also cracking down against niqabs (a garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their entire body and face, excluding their eyes), which they have framed as symbolic of Islamic extremism. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin voiced indirect support for banning niqabs, but Dagestan Head Sergei Melikov stated that he is personally against the practice.[34] The Muftiate of Dagestan, which was expected to issue a fatwa (a legal ruling issued by an Islamic jurist on the grounds of Islamic law) against wearing the niqab, stated on July 2 that it could not find sufficient grounds for a general ban on niqab but that local and temporary bans are permitted for security reasons.[35] Russian ultranationalists also claimed that Dagestani officials know the identities of extremist thought leaders but have allowed radical Salafi-Jihadists to control entire spheres of public life within the republic.[36] Residents of Sergokala, Dagestan who reportedly knew some of the assailants in the June 23 terrorist attacks told *RBK* in a July 1 article that all the attackers attended a "Wahhabi" mosque whose imam had not been approved by the Muftiate of Dagestan.[37] Russian authorities' fixation on cracking down on fight clubs and regulations on niqabs while ignoring systemic issues of Islamist extremism and rising ethnic and religious tension in Russia may actually fuel radicalization in the region and ethnic and religious friction.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on July 2 assigning the Russian 999th Air Base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan the "guards" honorific for "mass heroism and bravery."[38] The 999th Air Base is part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) Collective Rapid Deployment Forces. Russian milblogger and Kremlin Human Rights Committee member Alexander "Sasha" Kots claimed that Putin's decree suggests that the 999th Airbase may be supporting combat missions in or near Ukraine.[39]

Key Takeaways:

- The interplay between ongoing Russian offensive operations in the Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Avdiivka directions indicates that the Russian military command may intend to leverage the ongoing Toretsk push to create operational opportunities for advances in either the Chasiv Yar or Avdiivka areas. Russian preparations that can support multiple future branch plans in Donetsk Oblast suggest a more developed level of operational planning and foresight than the Russian command has proven capable of executing thus far in the war since early 2022. The ability of this operational planning to come to fruition, however, will be bounded by the overall poor tactical-level capabilities of Russian forces currently fighting in these areas.
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban likely used his unannounced visit to Kyiv on July 2 to posture himself as a peacemaker following Hungary's accession to the European Union (EU) Council presidency on July 1, but Orban's efforts are very unlikely to bring about any robust peace in Ukraine.
- The Kremlin is waging an intensified information campaign aimed at pushing Ukraine to negotiate with Russia on Russian terms, and any Russian, Western, or other efforts to cajole Ukraine to prematurely negotiate with Russia would only weaken Ukraine and embolden further Russian aggression inside and beyond Ukraine.
- Several Russian State Duma deputies proposed a bill that would exclude a significant number of ethnicities from Russia's "compatriots" resettlement program, undermining the Kremlin's efforts to leverage its "compatriots abroad" to offset Russian labor shortages and set informational conditions to justify potential hybrid operations against other countries with Russian and Russian-speaking populations.
- Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot at a Russian military base in occupied Crimea on July 1 that reportedly housed Shahed drones.
- Russia may be intensifying its efforts to conduct reconnaissance and disrupt communications in the underwater and air space near NATO states.
- Russian authorities appear to be publicly fixating on crackdowns against fight clubs and restricting the niqab to signal that Russian authorities are adequately combatting terrorist threats in the North Caucasus instead of addressing systemic issues of Islamist extremism in the region.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on July 2 assigning the Russian 999th Air Base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan the "guards" honorific for "mass heroism and bravery."
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- Russia is reportedly recruiting women from Russian penal colonies to fight in Ukraine, and some of these recruits are reportedly fighting on the frontline.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 1, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 1, 2024, 5pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on July 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Head Vladimir Kolokoltsev boasted that Russian authorities have increased detentions and prosecutions related to illegal migration into Russia while calling for intensified Russian government crackdowns against illegal migration. Kolokoltsev claimed on July 1 at a Russian government meeting on crime prevention that the MVD has detected over double the number of crimes related to organizing illegal migration and have prosecuted roughly a quarter more individuals who were illegally in Russia, presumably in comparison with 2023.[1] Kolokoltsev also claimed that the number of "serious" and "especially serious" crimes committed by foreigners in Russia decreased by 7.6 percent in 2024 in comparison to 2023. Kolokoltsev also noted that select crimes that foreigners have committed in Russia have increased interethnic tension in Russia. Kolokoltsev characterized Russia's fight against illegal migration as "strategically important" and called for joint efforts to resolve migration issues, likely referring to coordinated efforts between multiple Russian state security organs.

Russian milbloggers criticized Kolokoltsev's statistics and claimed that the reported reduction in crimes committed by foreign citizens in Russia is a result of Russian authorities' decision to grant Russian citizenship to migrants — not actual decreases in migrant crime.[2] One milblogger insinuated that Kolokoltsev was directly attempting to defy Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin, who claimed on July 27 that migrant crime is spreading across Russia and that migrants committed an increased percentage of "especially serious" and "extremist" crimes in Russia in 2023. [3] Russian ultranationalists have routinely criticized the Russian government's policy of giving migrants Russian citizenship, although some Russian milbloggers and some State Duma members have previously justified Russia's ongoing coercive crypto-mobilization efforts, which disproportionately target migrants, by claiming that migrants who receive Russian citizenship must fight in Ukraine to "earn" their Russian citizenship and that migrants who fight in Ukraine will receive Russian citizenship. [4] Significant Russian ultranationalist efforts to stop the Russian government from giving Russian citizenship to migrants and other "compatriots abroad" (which Russia loosely defines as ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers living outside of Russia) may hinder Russia's ongoing weaponization of passportization to generate military manpower, offset domestic labor shortages, and set informational conditions to justify potential hybrid operations against other countries with Russian and Russian-speaking populations.[5]

Russia assumed its one-month-long rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on July 1 for the first time since April 2023 and will likely use this position as a power projection base within the international system as it historically has.[6] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will chair UNSC debates on July 16 and 17.[7] ISW assessed during Russia's April 2023 presidency that Russia exploited its UNSC presidency to further several narratives regarding Russia's desired sway in the international system and has previously noted that Russia uses its UNSC veto power as a base of power projection.[8] Several high-ranking Russian officials have recently launched several information operations meant to deflect responsibility for well-documented Russian violations of international law committed in Ukraine, likely to set conditions for the upcoming UNSC presidency. [9]

South Korea's Ministry of Unification announced on July 1 that North Korean state TV channel *Korean Central TV* switched to transmitting broadcasts via Russian satellites instead of Chinese satellites, reportedly affecting South Korea's ability to monitor North Korean state TV.[10] South Korean media and North Korean monitoring organizations reported on July 1 that they suddenly stopped receiving *Korean Central TV* broadcasts, and South Korea's Ministry of Unification later announced that North Korea stopped transmitting broadcasts through Chinese satellites and that the reception from the Russian satellites is restricted in some areas of South Korea.[11] South Korean state broadcaster *KBS* reported that signals from the Russian satellites overlap with certain domestic frequency banks, making the signals difficult to receive in South Korea.[12] North Korea monitoring organization North Korea Tech stated on July 1 that North Korea is using Russia's Express-103 satellite, which transmits to a significantly smaller area of the world (reportedly excluding most of Asia, Europe, and Africa) compared to the Chinese *Chinasat-12* satellite that North Korea previously used for its broadcasts.[13] It is unclear if North Korea is temporarily switching its broadcasts to Russian satellites or if the change is more permanent; however, it is notable that the Kremlin may be aiding North Korean efforts to conceal information from South Korea and other Western allies.

Hungary assumed the six-month rotating presidency of the European Union (EU) Council on July 1.[14] The EU Council presidencies work in "trios" every 18 months that set long-term goals and prepare a common agenda for the EU Council.[15] Hungary is currently a part of the "trio" that includes Spain, which held the presidency from July 2023 to December 2023, and Belgium, which held the presidency from January 2024 to June 2024. The Spanish–Belgian–Hungarian trio set its 18-month program in July 2023, which expressed commitment to "helping the rest of the world cope with the consequences of Russia's war and contributing to the coordination of long-term financial support for the reconstruction of Ukraine." [16] Each presidency also sets its own six-month priorities, and Hungary's seven focus areas include reinforcing the EU's defense policy, making the EU enlargement policy consistent and merit-based, stemming illegal migration, promoting farmer-oriented EU agricultural policy, and addressing the EU's demographic challenges.[17]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Head Vladimir Kolokoltsev boasted that Russian authorities have increased detentions and prosecutions related to illegal migration into Russia while calling for intensified Russian government crackdowns against illegal migration.
- Russia assumed its one-month-long rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on July 1 for the first time since April 2023 and will likely use this position as a power projection base within the international system as it historically has.
- South Korea's Ministry of Unification announced on July 1 that North Korean state TV channel *Korean Central TV* switched to transmitting broadcasts via Russian satellites instead of Chinese satellites, reportedly affecting South Korea's ability to monitor North Korean state TV.
- Hungary assumed the six-month rotating presidency of the European Union (EU) Council on July 1.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Kreminna, and Russian forces recently advanced near Avdiivka.
- The Russian information space continues to discuss the mistreatment of wounded and disabled Russian servicemembers in Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 30, 2024

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory that Russia will be able to make creeping advances in Ukraine indefinitely will incentivize Putin to protract the war and harden Putin's commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood. The West must hasten to provide Ukraine the support it needs to conduct counteroffensive operations to invalidate Putin's theory of victory and avoid protracting the war more than necessary to secure a peace acceptable to Ukraine and its partners. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated in an interview with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published on June 30 that he fears that the West is afraid of pushing for full Ukrainian victory due to Western concerns about Russian stability and that this fear has allowed Putin to pursue the seizure of as much Ukrainian territory as possible.[1] Zelensky warned that every Russian advance strengthens Russia's bargaining power and that Putin can choose to try to leverage this bargaining power at opportune moments to pursue a ceasefire that would allow Russia to prepare for future aggression against Ukraine.[2]

Putin has articulated a theory of victory that assumes that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations, and win a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces.[3] The Russian military command is currently prioritizing consistent offensive operations that achieve gradual tactical gains over conducting a large-scale discrete offensive operation that aims to make operationally significant gains through rapid maneuver.[4] Putin and the Russian military command likely view creeping offensive operations as a more guaranteed approach to making gains in Ukraine than larger mobile offensives and appear to be accepting the reality that Russian forces may have to pursue individual operationally significant objectives over the course of many months if not years. [5] Putin has recently demanded that Ukraine cede all of occupied Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts as well as the parts of those four oblasts that Ukraine currently controls.[6] A protracted war favors Putin's calculus since he likely assesses that Russia will be able to hold any ground it takes and that Russian forces will be more likely to achieve his current stated territorial objectives the longer the war progresses. Putin and the Kremlin have intentionally set no limits to their objectives of conquest in Ukraine and have suggested repeatedly that areas outside of Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts are part of Russia.[7] Protracted war will likely incentivize Putin to explicitly set new territorial objectives as long as he assesses that Ukrainian forces can neither stop his advances nor conduct meaningful counteroffensives.

Putin retains his objective of entirely destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity, and all his objectives for territorial conquest in Ukraine are a means to this end.[8] Putin likely hopes that creeping Russian advances in Ukraine will convince the West that Ukrainian victory is unattainable and that concessions on Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty are preferable to Ukrainian defeat.[9] Putin is currently unwilling to accept anything short of full Ukrainian capitulation, however, as his remarks and demands consistently show, and he will see any negotiated ceasefire agreement as a mechanism for Russia to prepare for renewed offensive operations in the future to achieve his overall aims. A negotiated ceasefire that further establishes a precedent for violating Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty beyond the precedent already established by the Minsk Accords following Russia's seizure of Crimea and parts of Luhansk and Donetsk in 2014 will strengthen Russia's position to pursue the full eradication of Ukrainian statehood at a later date. This ceasefire would provide Russia a respite in the war to reconstitute and expand its forces and to further mobilize its defense industrial base (DIB) for future aggression.[10] Putin and the Russian military command likely hope that a ceasefire will allow Russia to launch a future stage of the war with a military more capable of pursuing operationally significant advances. Putin is not yet interested in a ceasefire, however, as he appears to continue to assess that he can achieve his aims by force. He might become more open to a ceasefire if that condition changes, but a negotiated ceasefire on Putin's terms would amount to

Ukrainian and Western capitulation. Neither of these courses of action are consistent with the survival of an independent Ukrainian state or the Ukrainian people, nor are they compatible with NATO's vital security interests.

Ukraine's partners can help Ukraine reduce Putin's willingness to continue to wage endless war in pursuit of Ukraine's destruction by helping Ukraine conduct significant counteroffensive operations that liberate Ukrainian territory and invalidate Putin's assumptions about what Russia can achieve in Ukraine by force. Putin's current theory of victory rests on Russia's ability to outlast and overcome pledged Western security assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian efforts to mobilize more of its economy and population for the war effort.[11] Putin and the Russian military command are increasingly viewing the retention of the theater-wide initiative as a strategic imperative and will continue to leverage the initiative to try to force Ukraine to commit manpower and materiel to current defensive operations and to prevent Ukraine from accumulating the personnel and resources Ukraine needs to contest the initiative.[12] Putin's theory of victory rests on the assessment that Ukraine lacks the capability to liberate operationally significant territory — Russia's creeping advances hold no operational significance if Ukraine can undo those gains more rapidly when Ukraine regains the battlefield- or theater-wide initiative. Western security assistance and Ukrainian force generation efforts that allow Ukraine to contest the initiative are thus crucial to changing Putin's calculus, and it is unlikely that Putin will change his assessment regarding the feasibility of destroying Ukraine without further significant Russian defeats. Western security assistance that provides Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity that Ukrainian forces require for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine remains the only likely path for reducing Putin's current commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity regardless of time or cost.

Ukraine is also pursuing diplomatic conditions to support an end-state to the war that would prevent Russia from inflicting a defeat that could set conditions for future aggression. Switzerland hosted the Ukrainian-initiated Global Peace Summit on June 15, which aimed to create a global consensus on negotiations about the war in Ukraine so that Ukraine and its international partners can give a joint peace plan to a Russian representative at a subsequent peace summit once Putin is willing to negotiate on terms other than total Ukrainian capitulation.[13] Ukraine aims to establish a basis for negotiations that will prevent Russia from convincing other countries to support concessions that would allow Russia to pursue Ukraine's destruction at a later date.

The Russian military command appears to be separating some limited elements of airborne (VDV) units and formations into smaller components across different sectors of the front, and the Russian military command may still view VDV units as relatively elite, at least compared with other Russian units and formations. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on June 30 that elements of the 106th Airborne (VDV) Division's 137th VDV Regiment are operating in the Kherson direction, while ISW has observed widespread reports as recently as June 29 claiming that elements of the 137th VDV Regiment are operating in the Siversk direction.[14] A Russian source claimed in late May 2024 that elements of the 98th VDV Division's 217th VDV Regiment were operating in a border area of Kursk Oblast.[15] ISW observed reports that elements of the 217th VDV Regiment were also operating near Chasiv Yar in late May 2024, and elements of the 217th VDV Regiment reportedly continue to operate near Chasiv Yar as of June 28.[16] Elements of the 83rd VDV Brigade have reportedly been operating within Vovchansk since at least the beginning of June 2024, and ISW most recently observed reports on June 11 that elements of the 83rd Brigade were also operating near Chasiv Yar.[17] A Russian milblogger claimed on May 1 that the Russian command decided to transfer elements of the 76th VDV Division to Krynyky, Kherson Oblast, and ISW observed reports that squad-sized elements of the 76th VDV Division were operating in the Kherson direction in late May 2024 and mid-June 2024.[18] ISW has yet to observe confirmation of a more significant redeployment of the 76th VDV Division. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets also stated on May 5 that a battalion of the 76th VDV Division's 104th VDV Regiment was operating in Kursk Oblast.[19]

This deployment of limited elements of the same VDV units and formations across diverging axes and distances is at odds with standard military practice. Elements of individual Russian VDV brigades and regiments have been deployed to the areas of responsibility of more than one grouping of forces, decisions that only Russian theater commander Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov or possibly VDV Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky could likely have made. ISW has previously assessed that Russian forces have heavily degraded the once-elite VDV units and are employing them in attritional ground assaults and counterattacks regardless of their designated functions and elite capabilities — essentially transforming the VDV into motorized rifle units. [20] The Russian military command, however, may still assess VDV units to be of higher quality, particularly if these VDV units have retained some of the generally higher quality officer cadre with which they started the war. The decision to break up VDV regiments and brigades suggests that the Russian military command is willing to forego using VDV units and formations to pursue their own coherent offensive operations in select sectors of the front. The Russian military command may instead hope that the presence of supposedly more elite VDV units in various sectors will improve the relative combat effectiveness of other nearby lower-quality units and therefore marginally improve combat effectiveness throughout the frontline. It remains unclear why Russian forces are deploying VDV elements in this way, however, and ISW offers these possible explanations with low confidence. ISW will continue to closely track how Russian forces employ these limited redeployed VDV elements in ongoing offensive operations.

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant (NLMK) in Lipetsk Oblast on June 30. Russian media outlet *Baza* reported on June 30 that seven Ukrainian drones and their debris struck the plant and damaged an oxygen separation unit and caused a fire in a garage on the plant's territory on the morning of June 30.[21] Lipetsk Oblast Governor Igor Artamonov stated that Russian air defenses downed nine drones over Lipetsk's industrial zone and that debris from one drone struck the roof of a residential building.[22] NLMK representatives claimed that Ukrainian drones targeted the plant but downplayed the impact of the strike, calling the strike "meaningless." [23] The June 30 strike appears to be the fifth strike against NLMK following strikes against the plant on June 17 and in February, April, and May 2024.[24] NLMK claims to be Russia's largest producer of steel and high value-added steel products.[25]

Dagestan Republic Head Sergei Melikov publicly sided with Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov in a recent debate between Kadyrov and Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin about responses to religious extremism in Russia amid growing ethnic and religious tension in Russia. Bastrykin claimed on June 29, referencing the June 23 terrorist attacks in Dagestan, that "Islamist terrorists" were "able to carry their banner of Islamic terror" into Russia and called on the State Duma to respond to this threat.[26] Kadyrov swiftly responded to Bastrykin on June 29 and urged him and other Russian officials to avoid characterizing all Muslims as terrorists as such statements could jeopardize Russia's unity and stability.[27] ISW assessed that it is significant that Kadyrov, who often presents himself as a representative of Russia's Muslim minority, was willing to openly criticize Bastrykin, a senior Kremlin official who has positioned himself as a prominent figure in Russia's ultranationalist movement.[28] Melikov expressed "absolute solidarity" with Kadyrov on June 30 and claimed that unspecified "outside observers" continue to accuse Dagestanis of radicalism and equate all Muslims with criminals.[29] Melikov called such statements dangerous and noted that some high-ranking individuals appear to be deliberately attempting to escalate the situation, likely referencing Bastrykin's statement. Melikov's decision to publicly side with Kadyrov in a debate with Bastrykin emphasizes the increasing divide between Russian officials attempting to maintain a veneer of multiethnic and multi-religious stability and unity in Russia and other Russian officials who support Russia's ultranationalist movement. Russian President Vladimir Putin may weigh in on Kadyrov's and Bastrykin's debate in hopes of quelling concerns among Russians about potential Islamist terrorist threats and stopping a potential conflict between Bastrykin and Kadyrov before it expands to other senior Russian officials.

Russian law enforcement reportedly detained Gadzhimurad Atayev (also known as Khanov), the man whom Russian ultranationalists recently accused of harassing a Russian doctor in Dagestan who refused to see a patient who would not remove her niqab (a long garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their entire body and face, excluding their eyes).[30] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL) reported in October 2015 that German authorities arrested a Dagestani imam known as "Gadzhimurad K." and "Murad Atajev" in Berlin on suspicion of recruiting Islamic State (IS) militants.[31] RFE/RL reported that Atayev ran pro-IS social media accounts and characterized him as a "well-known figure in the Russian-language pro-jihadi world." Russian outlets claimed that Atayev works as an assistant to a Buynaksk City official and promotes "[Muslim] religious-traditional values" on social media.[32] Atayev's detention only occurred after Russian ultranationalists expressed public outrage against him to the point where Bastrykin commented on the issue, suggesting that Russian authorities detained Atayev in response to ultranationalist outrage - not his alleged IS affiliations - despite likely knowing about his Islamist extremist tendencies beforehand.

Military and civilian flights continue to experience GPS interference over Europe and the Middle East, highlighting the role of long-term GPS jamming in ongoing and future conflicts. *The Telegraph*, citing flight tracker data, reported on June 30 that hundreds of the United Kingdom (UK) Royal Air Force's (RAF) 1,467 total transport and surveillance flights between January and April 2024 experienced GPS interference.[33] *The Telegraph* reported that roughly 28 percent (142 of 504) of RAF transport and surveillance flights over Eastern Europe, 16 percent of flights over northwestern Europe, and 45 percent of flights over the Middle East experienced GPS jamming in the first four months of 2024. UK Defense Secretary Grant Shapps and an unnamed defense source attributed the GPS jamming to Russian actors, but *The Telegraph* noted that some of the GPS jamming signals in the Middle East may be originating in Israel in addition to Russian military installations in Syria. ISW has observed high levels of GPS jamming over Poland and the Baltic region since late 2023, which some analysts and experts have attributed to Russian electronic warfare (EW) activity near Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg.[34] The Resilient Navigation and Timing Foundation (RNTF), a nonprofit advocating for improved GPS security, responded on June 19 to recent reports of the first confirmed instance of GPS jamming on a commercial trans-Atlantic flight route and stated that an aircraft's GPS receiver cannot always recover on its own after experiencing jamming and may operate in "degraded mode" until a pilot or technician fixes the receiver.[35] RNTF assessed that an aircraft flying the commercial trans-Atlantic route during the reported jamming instance may have previously flown from the Baltic Region or Middle East where jamming is more prevalent and been experiencing ongoing issues with its GPS receiver due to previous exposure. ISW has observed no reports that Russian actors are attempting to jam GPS over western Europe or the Atlantic Ocean. GPS-guided systems will likely become increasingly unreliable over war zones as long-range jamming against prominent GPS-guided weapons and systems becomes more normal.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin's theory of victory that Russia will be able to make creeping advances in Ukraine indefinitely will incentivize Putin to protract the war and harden Putin's commitment to destroying Ukrainian statehood. The West must hasten to provide Ukraine the support it needs to conduct counteroffensive operations to invalidate Putin's theory of victory and avoid protracting the war more than necessary to secure a peace acceptable to Ukraine and its partners.
- Putin retains his objective of entirely destroying Ukrainian statehood and identity, and all his objectives for territorial conquest in Ukraine are a means to this end.
- The Russian military command appears to be separating some limited elements of airborne (VDV) units and formations into smaller components across different sectors of the front, and the Russian military command may still view VDV units as relatively elite, at least compared with other Russian units and formations.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant (NLMK) in Lipetsk Oblast on June 30.
- Dagestan Republic Head Sergei Melikov publicly sided with Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov in a recent debate between Kadyrov and Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin about responses to religious extremism in Russia amid growing ethnic and religious tension in Russia.
- Military and civilian flights continue to experience GPS interference over Europe and the Middle East, highlighting the role of long-term GPS jamming in ongoing and future conflicts.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kreminna, and Russian forces recently advanced near Lyptsi, Vovchansk, Kupiansk, and Avdiivka.
- A Russian milblogger claimed on June 29 that Russian military commanders sent about 50 wounded soldiers of the 26th Tank Regiment (47th Tank Division, 1st Guards Tank Army, Moscow Military District [MMD]), who are on leave awaiting medical treatments, to the front against doctors' instructions.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 29, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 29, 2024, 6pm ET

Two prominent Russian officials appear to be spearheading divergent paths for addressing religious extremism in Russia as ethnic and religious tension in Russia continues to rise. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin commented on the June 23 terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan and claimed on June 29 that Islamic terrorists were "able to carry their banner of Islamic terror" into Russia and that the State Duma must respond to the threat of Islamic terrorists in Russia.[1] Bastrykin's indictment of Islamists prompted backlash from Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov, who urged Bastrykin and other Russian officials to choose their words carefully and avoid characterizing all Muslims as terrorists.[2] Kadyrov warned that such statements threaten the unity and stability of Russia's socio-political situation. Russian milbloggers and lower-level Russian officials have previously participated in similar debates, and it is significant that Kadyrov was willing to openly criticize another high-level Kremlin official on this issue.[3] Bastrykin has previously positioned himself as a prominent figure in Russia's ultranationalist movement and is placing himself at odds with Kadyrov, who often presents himself as a representative of Russia's Muslim minority.[4] Putin previously attempted to quell concerns within the Russian information space about the threat posed by migrant and Muslim communities following the Crocus City Hall attack on March 22 by simultaneously calling for unspecified changes to Russia's migration policy and denouncing Islamophobia and xenophobia.[5] Putin may weigh in on Bastrykin's and Kadyrov's debate in the coming days in hopes of similarly quelling concern among Russians and a possible future conflict between Bastrykin and Kadyrov.

Russian ultranationalists continue to express growing doubt in Russian authorities' ability to prevent another terrorist attack and to address ethnic and religious tensions within Russia following the June 23 terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan. Russian ultranationalists widely circulated a story alleging that extremists harassed a Russian doctor in Dagestan who refused to see a patient who would not remove her niqab (a long garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their entire body and face, excluding their eyes) and claimed that extremist actors orchestrated the event to incite further ethnic and religious tensions within Dagestan.[6] Russian ultranationalists also claimed that Dagestani officials know the identities of extremist thought leaders but have allowed radical Salafi-Jihadists to control entire spheres of public life within the republic.[7] These claims led to renewed discussions about banning niqab in Russia, which prompted Bastrykin to voice indirect support for banning the style of dress.[8] Select Western and Muslim-majority countries have imposed various statutes banning religious dress and garments that cover one's face, although the Russian ultranationalist discussion focusing on niqab is strange given the scarcity of Muslims wearing niqab in Russia. The Russian ultranationalist preoccupation with the niqab appears to be a talking point for ultranationalists to express their perception of an extremist threat emanating from Russia's Muslim-minority communities and to criticize Russian authorities for not doing enough to prevent what ultranationalists consider to be inevitable future terrorist attacks.[9] Russian ultranationalists will likely continue to express their fears about further terrorist attacks in ways that further inflame ethnic and religious tension, and ISW continues to assess that Russian ultranationalist rhetoric is partially

alienating minority and Muslim-majority communities and generating animosities that Salafi-Jihadi groups can exploit in recruitment efforts.[10]

Ten Ukrainian civilians whom Russian and Belarusian authorities arrested and held in captivity or prison, including individuals detained before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, returned to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on June 29 that 10 Ukrainian civilians returned to Ukraine from Russian and Belarusian captivity as part of the 53rd prisoner-of-war (POW) exchange that Ukrainian officials initially announced on June 25.[11] Ukrainian officials stated that among the returned civilians were First Deputy Head of the Crimean Tatar Majlis Nariman Dzhelyal, whom Russian authorities arrested in 2021; two Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church priests, whom Russian authorities arrested in occupied Berdyansk in 2022; five Ukrainian citizens, whom Belarusian authorities arrested in Belarus; and two Ukrainian civilians, whom Russian authorities detained in occupied Donetsk Oblast in 2017.[12] Zelensky stated that the Vatican mediated the return of the 10 Ukrainian civilians.[13] Ukrainian and Russian officials have not commented on whether Russia received civilians or POWs in exchange for these 10 Ukrainian civilians.

Key Takeaways:

- **Two prominent Russian officials appear to be spearheading divergent paths for addressing religious extremism in Russia as ethnic and religious tension in Russia continues to rise.**
- **Russian ultranationalists continue to express growing doubt in Russian authorities' ability to prevent another terrorist attack and to address ethnic and religious tensions within Russia following the June 23 terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan.**
- **Ten Ukrainian civilians whom Russian and Belarusian authorities arrested and held in captivity or prison, including individuals detained before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, returned to Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Kreminka, and Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Donetsk City.**
- **Some new Russian military personnel are reportedly receiving insufficient training before deploying to Ukraine.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 28, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Nicole Wolkov, and Frederick W. Kagan
June 28, 2024, 8pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin directed on June 28 the production and deployment of nuclear-capable short- and intermediate-range missiles following the American withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 2019, likely as part of the Kremlin's ongoing reflexive control campaign to influence Western decision making in Russia's favor.

[1] Putin attended a Russian Security Council meeting in which he claimed that Russia had vowed to uphold the INF's provisions against producing or deploying intermediate-range ground-based missiles until the United States violated these provisions and that Russia must now also produce and deploy such systems.[2] The United States suspended participation in the INF on February 1, 2019, and withdrew from the treaty on August 2, 2019, due to Russian violations of the treaty with its development, testing, and deployment of intermediate-range 9M729 (SSC-8) missiles, and Russia suspended its participation in the INF in response on February 2, 2019.[3] Putin specifically cited two 2024 US bilateral military exercises; one with the Philippines in Northern Luzon, Philippines on April 11 and a second with Denmark near Bornholm Island, Denmark on May 3-5. Both of these bilateral US exercises involved a Typhon Medium Range Capability (MRC) launcher, which US readouts specified can launch SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles.[4] The SM-6 missiles have a maximum range of 370 kilometers, while the Tomahawks have a maximum range of about 2,500 kilometers.[5] US officials did not specify which missiles, if any, may have been involved in either exercise.

Putin is more likely using these exercises as a scapegoat for his broader reflexive control campaign aimed at discouraging Western military assistance to Ukraine. These US and partner exercises involved launchers capable of launching missiles that could pose variable threats to Russia from the exercise locations. Bornholm Island is roughly 300 kilometers from the westernmost shore of Kaliningrad Oblast and roughly 1,400 kilometers from Moscow. The US Sixth Fleet specified that the Bornholm Island exercise involved transporting the Typhon launcher from land to shore as part of convoy protection rehearsals, suggesting that these exercises likely involved shorter-range weapons. [6] The Russian border area closest to the Philippines – the area southwest of Vladivostok – is roughly 2,800 kilometers from Northern Luzon, out of range of the Tomahawk missiles. Putin's June 27 condemnation follows the People's Republic of China (PRC) delayed condemnation of the US exercise in Northern Luzon on May 30. Putin likely invoked the Philippines exercise in part to posture favorably to the PRC, North Korea, and Vietnam as he attempts to create a coalition of states in support of a new "Eurasian security architecture." [7] The Kremlin has invoked the fear of a nuclear confrontation between Russia and the West throughout its full-scale invasion to push the West to self-deter from providing Ukraine the weapons it needs to sustain its defense against Russian forces, and the Kremlin notably employs this effort during key moments in Western political discussions about further military assistance to Ukraine.[8]

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an oil depot in Russia on June 28 and reportedly struck a microelectronics plant and a military unit on the night of June 27 to 28. Tambov Oblast Governor Maksim Yegorov claimed that a drone struck an oil depot in Michurinsky Raion and started a fire on the morning of June 28.[9] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* stated that the drone hit the Transnefteprodukt "Nikolskoe" linear production and dispatch station in Novonikolskoe.[10] *Astra* also reported that Ukrainian forces struck an unspecified military unit in Karachev, Bryansk Oblast and the "Kremniy EI" microelectronics plant in Bryansk City - one of the largest microelectronics manufacturers in Russia that makes components for military equipment - on the night of June 27 to 28.[11] Bryansk Oblast Governor Alexander Bogomaz claimed that Russian forces suppressed a Ukrainian drone with electronic warfare (EW) over Bryansk City and that drone debris damaged an administrative building.[12] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed 12 drones over Bryansk Oblast but did not mention any drone strikes against Tambov Oblast.[13]

The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) reported on June 28 that Ukrainian forces have damaged or destroyed more than 30 Russian military aircraft in the first six months of 2024, although ISW cannot confirm this report fully. Ukrainian StratCom stated that Ukrainian forces destroyed or damaged nine Su-25 aircraft, one Su-57 aircraft, two MiG-31 aircraft, roughly 13 Su-34 aircraft, two Su-35 aircraft, two A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft, one Il-22M11 airborne command post aircraft, and one Tu-22M3 strategic bomber in the first six months of 2024.[14] Ukrainian StratCom stated that most of the strikes against the Russian aircraft occurred in occupied Ukraine except for a handful of strikes over the Sea of Azov and within Russia.[15] Ukrainian StratCom did not specify what portion of these Ukrainian strikes were air defense interceptions of Russian aircraft in flight and what percentage were strikes against Russian aircraft at airfields. Russian officials acknowledged that Ukrainian forces downed an A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft in February 2024 after Ukrainian forces reportedly shot down another A-50 aircraft and Il-22M11 airborne command post aircraft in January 2024.[16] Satellite imagery indicates that Ukrainian strikes damaged at least one Russian Su-57 in June 2024, and footage indicates that Ukrainian forces downed a Russian Tu-22M3 strategic bomber in mid-April.[17] Satellite imagery indicates that Ukrainian forces destroyed two MiG-31 aircraft in occupied Crimea in an ATACMS strike in May 2024.[18] Ukrainian officials reported the downing of numerous Su-34 aircraft in February and March 2024, although ISW cannot verify these reports or Ukrainian StratCom's figures concerning Su-34, Su-35, and Su-25 aircraft.[19] The downing of Russian aircraft, especially critical aircraft like the A-50 and Il-22, has previously temporarily constrained Russian aviation activities over occupied Ukraine, but Ukrainian forces have yet to be able to significantly attempt to contest the air domain.[20] Ukrainian officials have routinely highlighted a need for additional air defense assets and advanced fighter aircraft in order to significantly contest the air domain and pursue air parity with Russian forces.[21] Russian forces have exploited continued constraints on Ukraine's air defense umbrella to field Russian tactical aircraft regularly along the frontline that conduct widespread glide bomb strikes against Ukrainian positions in support of ongoing Russian offensive operations.[22]

Many Russian elites have reportedly shifted from criticizing Russia's war effort in Ukraine to supporting it because they assess that Russia is prevailing. Russian opposition journalist and founder of Russian opposition television channel *TV Rain* Mikhail Zygar reported in a June 28 *Foreign Affairs* article that many Russian elites who were opposed to the war in 2022 started to support the war in 2023 because they "believe Russia is prevailing [in the war]" given Russia's slow but steady battlefield gains, a persisting Ukrainian munitions disadvantage, and perceived "waning" Western security assistance to Ukraine.[23] One unspecified Russian oligarch who previously criticized the war reportedly told Zygar that Russia must win the war otherwise "they won't allow us to live... and Russia would collapse." Zygar reported that Russian elites have even started speculating about war outcomes that would constitute a Russian victory. ISW cannot independently verify any of Zygar's reports. Zygar's statements are consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian elites came to heel behind Russian President Vladimir Putin in support of the war following intensified crackdowns against the Russian elite after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Zygar's report that Russian elites are now assessing that Russia can prevail on the battlefield and are even discussing a Russian victory indicates that elites may also be supporting Putin's stated theory of victory, which posits that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent operationally significant Ukrainian counteroffensive operations, and eventually win a war of attrition.[24]

Russian officials called for harsher punishments in Russia's criminal system, likely in response to the recent terrorist attacks in Dagestan. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin stated at the International Youth Legal Forum in St. Petersburg on June 28 that Russia should consider lifting the moratorium on the death penalty for certain, unspecified cases.[25] Head of the Russian Constitutional Court Valery Zorkin stated on June 26 that the Constitutional Court considers the return of the death penalty to be inadmissible within the framework of the current constitution, but Bastrykin suggested on June 28 that a presidential decree may be able to lift the moratorium without changing the constitution.[26] Bastrykin claimed that the March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack demonstrates the need for the return to the death penalty and complained that a defendant could receive the death penalty for the murder of at least two to three people during the Soviet Union, but the terrorists that conducted the Crocus City Hall attack that killed over 100 people will receive a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.[27] Russian Justice Minister Konstantin Chuychenko stated on June 28 that the Ministry of Justice recently prepared a bill that would designate forced labor as the main punishment for more than 65 crimes.[28] Chuychenko claimed that forced labor is a "more humane" form of punishment than imprisonment and reduces recidivism.

[29] Bastrykin claimed on June 27 that migrant crime is spreading in Russia and called for stricter migration policies, prompting widescale xenophobic support for Bastrykin's statements from Russia's ultranationalist milbloggers.[30] Other Russian officials called for the return of the death penalty in the days following the March 2024 Crocus City Hall attack, and Bastrykin is likely renewing these appeals in response to the June 23 terrorist attacks in Dagestan.

Russia may be creating a shadow fleet to transport Russian liquified natural gas (LNG) and circumvent Western sanctions. *Bloomberg* reported on June 27 that there is evidence that Russia is creating a shadow fleet to transport Russian LNG in similar ways to how Russia created a shadow fleet to avoid the G7 price cap on Russian crude oil.[31] *Bloomberg* reported that a little-known company in Dubai has acquired at least eight vessels in the past three months and that Russia has reportedly already granted four of these vessels permission to traverse Russian Arctic waters in Summer 2024. At least three of the eight vessels reportedly list their insurers as "unknown," a common tactic tankers carrying Russian crude oil have used to skirt the G7 price cap. *Bloomberg* noted that it cannot independently connect these vessels to major Russian entities directly. The latest EU sanctions package from June 24 forbids EU entities from providing reloading services of Russian LNG in EU territory for transshipment operations to third countries.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin directed on June 28 the production and deployment of nuclear-capable short- and intermediate-range missiles following the American withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 2019, likely as part of the Kremlin's ongoing reflexive control campaign to influence Western decision making in Russia's favor.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly struck an oil depot in Russia on June 28 and reportedly struck a microelectronics plant and a military unit on the night of June 27 to 28.
- The Ukrainian Armed Forces Center for Strategic Communications (StratCom) reported on June 28 that Ukrainian forces have damaged or destroyed more than 30 Russian military aircraft in the first six months of 2024, although ISW cannot confirm this report fully.
- Many Russian elites have reportedly shifted from criticizing Russia's war effort in Ukraine to supporting it because they assess that Russia is prevailing.
- Russian officials called for harsher punishments in Russia's criminal system, likely in response to the recent terrorist attacks in Dagestan.
- Russia may be creating a shadow fleet to transport Russian liquified natural gas (LNG) and circumvent Western sanctions.
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Vovchansk and Kreminna, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar.
- Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* used Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) data to estimate that over 71,000 Russian men died in the war in Ukraine in 2022 and 2023.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 27, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 27, 2024, 8:25pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:45pm ET on June 27. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 28 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces have sustained the tempo of their offensive operations in the Toretsk direction since activating in the area on June 18 and likely aim to reduce a Ukrainian salient in the area, but there is little current likelihood of rapid Russian gains near Toretsk. Russian forces have committed only limited forces to this operation so far, which suggests that Russian forces continue to prioritize gradual advances through consistent grinding assaults over operationally significant gains through rapid maneuver. Russian forces increased the intensity of their assaults in the Toretsk direction (southwest of Chasiv Yar and northeast of Avdiivka) on the night of June 18 after being generally inactive on this sector of the front so far in 2024.[1] Russian forces have so far conducted mainly frontal infantry-heavy assaults on small settlements south and east of Toretsk and have yet to conduct any significant mechanized assaults in the area.[2] Russian forces have yet to make any notable tactical gains in the area. Russian forces have sought to exploit how renewed Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast have drawn and fixed Ukrainian forces from other sectors of the frontline to pursue gains in critical frontline areas, particularly in Donetsk Oblast.[3] It is noteworthy, however, that Russian forces have recently intensified operations in a previously inactive sector of the front instead of their efforts to advance in the Pokrovsk direction (west of Avdiivka) or to seize the operationally significant town of Chasiv Yar.[4] The further Russian forces advance in the Chasiv Yar area and northwest of Avdiivka without making similar gains in the Toretsk direction, the deeper the Ukrainian salient in the Toretsk direction would become, offering Ukrainian forces an area from which to conduct routine fire against immediate rear areas of the

Russian advance in the Chasiv Yar and Avdiivka directions. A deeper salient in the Toretsk area would also leave Russian forces more vulnerable to significant Ukrainian counterattacks on the southern front of the Chasiv Yar direction and the northern front of the Avdiivka salient. Russian offensive operations near Toretsk likely aim to reduce the threat posed by this Ukrainian salient while Russian forces continue to pursue gains in the Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar directions.

Russian offensive operations in the Toretsk direction suggest that the Russian military command does not consider a large-scale operation to advance towards Kostyantynivka from multiple operational directions feasible. Kostyantynivka is the southern edge of a belt of four major Ukrainian cities that forms the backbone of Ukraine's defense of Donetsk Oblast, and Russian forces have long sought to seize cities within this Ukrainian fortress belt.[5] Russian forces made relatively rapid tactical gains northwest of Avdiivka in April 2024, and ISW assessed at that time that Russian forces may have intended to advance northward along the H-20 (Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka) highway towards Kostyantynivka from the south to support future offensive operations from Chasiv Yar towards Kostyantynivka from the east. [6] Russian forces have not succeeded in seizing Chasiv Yar or making further significant tactical gains into the town in recent months, however, and the rate of Russian advance northwest of Avdiivka has since slowed significantly.[7] A Russian operation to advance north along the H-20 highway and westward from Chasiv Yar would also have pursued the operational envelopment and encirclement of the Ukrainian grouping in the Toretsk area, a considerable undertaking that Russian forces have routinely failed to achieve against other Ukrainian force groupings throughout the full-scale invasion.[8] Continued Russian offensive operations west and southwest of Avdiivka and the continued Russian focus on advancing northwest of Avdiivka towards the T0504 (Kostyantynivka-Pokrovsk) highway instead of further north of the Avdiivka salient suggests that Russian forces currently aim to advance westward towards Pokrovsk instead of pursuing operations that could support a wider operation to seize Kostyantynivka from the south and east. The Russian military command may intend for operations in the Toretsk direction to support an envisioned push from Chasiv Yar towards Kostyantynivka in a narrower offensive operation to seize the city. Russian forces may alternatively have no intention of making significant tactical gains in the Toretsk direction and may hope that offensive operations in the area will apply pressure on Ukrainian forces along a wider front in Donetsk Oblast and facilitate gains in the Chasiv Yar and Avdiivka directions.

Russian forces have so far committed limited combat power to their offensive operations in the Toretsk direction and will struggle to make significant tactical gains in the area without significant reinforcement. Elements of the Russian 132nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) and 1436th and 1st motorized rifle regiments of Russia's Territorial Troops are operating in the Toretsk direction — significantly less combat power than what the Russian military has committed to the Chasiv Yar and Avdiivka directions.[9] DNR and Russian Territorial Troops also tend to be less combat effective than more conventional or formerly elite Russian units and formations, although it is unclear to what extent this differential remains given the overall degradation of the quality of all Russian units and formations.[10] It is possible that other Russian elements are fighting in the Toretsk direction but have not been identified yet, but DNR and Russian Territorial Troop elements appear to be the main forces currently fighting in the area. Toretsk is roughly the same size as Chasiv Yar, and elements of a brigade and two regiments are very likely insufficient for an operation to seize the town. The arrival or commitment of Russian reinforcements in the area would be an indicator that Russian forces intend for operations in the Toretsk direction to be more tactically significant than diversionary. Even if Russian forces were able to succeed in seizing Toretsk, however, advances beyond the settlement would be equally if not more difficult given the open terrain and large water features to the north and northwest. ISW currently assesses rapid Russian tactical gains in the Toretsk direction to be unlikely. Russian forces may nonetheless intend to conduct consistent offensive operations in the area to pursue creeping tactical gains as they are throughout the theater.

Slow grinding Russian offensive operations in the Toretsk direction are in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's articulated theory of victory that posits that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations, and win a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces.[11] The current rate of Russian advance suggests that Russian forces may pursue individual operationally significant objectives over the course of many months if not years, and Russian forces may accept the prospect of conducting offensive operations for months to seize Toretsk and advance northwestward towards Kostyantynivka.[12] The Russian military command likely hopes that offensive pressure in the Toretsk direction will aid its efforts to prevent Ukraine from accumulating the personnel and resources Ukraine needs to contest the theater-wide initiative, and this objective may supersede any specific territorial operational objective that Russian forces have in the Toretsk area.[13] **The West must proactively provide Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity that Ukrainian forces require for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine and challenge Putin's belief that he can gradually subsume Ukraine should rapid total victory appear unreachable.**

Ukraine signed long-term security agreements with the European Union (EU), Lithuania, and Estonia on June 27. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and European Council President Charles Michel signed a security agreement that pledges that the EU will provide 50 billion euros (\$53.5 billion) worth of support to Ukraine through

the Ukraine Facility program from 2024–2028, long-term defense cooperation, and urgent consultations within 24 hours of any future aggression against Ukraine.[14] The Ukrainian-Estonian agreement pledges that Estonia will allocate at least 0.25 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to military support for Ukraine from 2024–2027 and long-term Estonian assistance to Ukraine in the form of artillery, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), missiles, mines, grenade launchers, drones, and electronic warfare (EW) systems.[15] The Ukrainian-Lithuanian agreement pledges that Lithuania will allocate 0.25 percent of its GDP to military support for Ukraine annually.[16]

Russian officials and information space actors continue to frame migrants as a threat to Russian society amid ongoing efforts to utilize migrant communities to address Russia's force generation needs. Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin claimed during the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum on June 27 that migrant crime is spreading across Russia and intensifying in various Russian federal subjects, including Moscow and St. Petersburg.[17] Bastrykin claimed that migrants committed 38,936 crimes in Russia in 2023 and that an increased percentage of crimes committed by migrants were "especially serious" and "extremist" crimes.[18] Bastrykin advocated for a change in Russia's migration policy and suggested that Russia should strictly regulate migration and hold employers responsible for the actions of their employees who are migrants. Bastrykin claimed that Russian officials have identified and registered 30,000 recently naturalized migrants for military service since October 2023 and sent 10,000 of these recently naturalized migrants to the "special military operation zone" in Ukraine.[19] Bastrykin claimed that the migrants are digging trenches, building fortifications, and replenishing rear Russian units. Bastrykin claimed that the Russian Constitution requires naturalized Russian citizens to register for military service and participate in the war in Ukraine if necessary. The legal mechanism that the Russian government is using to recruit and deploy recently naturalized migrants to Ukraine is unclear and is unlikely to be part of Russia's existing conscription system or reserve mobilization system. The Russian government may be offering naturalized migrants the opportunity to sign a contract for military service or volunteer units in order to avoid deportation or jail time.

Russian milbloggers seized on Bastrykin's speech to levy increasingly xenophobic criticisms against migrants. Several Russian milbloggers praised and defended Bastrykin's recommendation to restrict Russia's migration policy and criticized other Russian officials for not taking steps to address Russia's ongoing migration issues.[20] One milblogger insinuated that labor migrants are stealing job opportunities from ethnic Russians.[21] Another milblogger called on Russian authorities to increase penalties for migration violations, while another Russian source claimed that Russian authorities should confiscate Russian passports from any recently naturalized migrants who refuse to fight in Ukraine.[22] A Russian milblogger blamed Russia's migration policy for the perceived recent growth in terrorism and extremism in Russia and amplified a statement that Russian authorities should bury Islamic terrorists with a pig's head in order to defile their bodies.[23] ISW previously assessed that the recent likely Islamic State (IS) affiliated Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan on June 23 have increased fears within the Russian information space about further terrorist attacks and instability in the North Caucasus.[24] The IS also claimed responsibility for a mass shooting and bombing at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow in March 2024.[25] The terrorist attacks coupled with Bastrykin's speech appear to have encouraged increased xenophobic rhetoric within the ultranationalist Russian information space, which, alongside exploitative force generation efforts, may be exacerbating the radicalization of migrants. A Russian insider source recently claimed that Dagestan's force generation efforts caused practitioners at a government-friendly mosque to move to a more radical mosque with alleged Wahhabi connections, where the June 23 attackers were supposedly radicalized.[26] ISW continues to assess that Russian force generation efforts and ultranationalist rhetoric are alienating minority and Muslim-majority communities in Russia and generating animosities that Salafi-Jihadi groups can exploit in recruitment efforts.[27]

The Kremlin may be using indirect means to bypass Russian law and codify a state ideology that emphasizes Russia's "traditional" social values while attempting to increase Russia's birth rate. Russian Deputy Minister of Justice Vsevolod Vukolov stated on June 27 that Russian State Duma deputies are preparing a bill to ban the so-called "child-free" "ideology," which Vukolov claimed promotes the "extremist" idea that women "do not need to give birth" and "can do without children." [28] Vukolov claimed that the ban is necessary to encourage higher birth rates - echoing Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent emphasis on Russia's demographic crisis.[29] Vukolov also stated that the Ministry of Justice is preparing a draft presidential decree that will include the concept of "traditional values" in the official "normative dictionary" of the Russian language, which the Russian government publishes every five years and describes the norms of the Russian language.[30] Vukolov claimed that officially defining "traditional values" will allow Russia to avoid having to "defend itself against Western manuals." [31] Russian authorities have previously designated non-existent organizations meant to encompass broad "social movements" as "extremist," most notably with the ban of the "LGBT Movement" and the "Anti-Russian Separatist Movement" in November 2023 and June 2024, respectively.[32] Russian President Vladimir Putin also declared 2024 the "Year of the Family" and used his annual New Year's address in December 2023 to emphasize the Russian family as the "backbone" of Russia.[33] The Russian Constitution forbids Russia from proclaiming a state ideology and commits the Russian state to recognize ideological diversity, yet select Russian officials have called for Russia to codify a state ideology.[34] The Kremlin may be attempting to circumvent the official ban on a state ideology and signal its envisioned, desired ideology by instead identifying the concepts that do not comply with this ideology and defining core concepts of this ideology in official platforms outside of the constitution. ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin is highly aware of the

potential for ethnic, religious, and national tensions to prompt discontent in Russia and is therefore unlikely to codify an explicit state ideology in the short term.[35]

There is currently no evidence supporting recent reports that North Korea may be sending engineering forces to rear areas of occupied Ukraine, and ISW has been unable to locate the North Korean confirmation that some Western amplifications allege has been made. Western news outlets circulated reports that North Korea is planning to send engineering forces to occupied Ukraine, largely citing a June 25 statement from Pentagon Spokesperson Major General Pat Ryder. [36] Ryder stated that he questions a hypothetical North Korean decision to send "forces to be cannon fodder" in Russia's war in Ukraine, and the reports implied that Ryder's statement confirms that North Korea is sending engineering forces to Ukraine.[37] Ryder did not confirm these reports, however; Ryder was responding to a question claiming that the North Korean Central Military Commission "confirmed" the report, and Ryder himself hedged his answer by stating that "that's something to keep an eye on." [38] ISW has been unable to find any such statement by the North Korean Central Military Commission. The most recent press release from the North Korean Central Military Commission is from its Vice Chairperson Pak Jong Chon on June 24, in which Pak expresses support for Russia in its war in Ukraine but does not confirm any force deployments to Ukraine.[39] Similar statements from North Korean officials mentioning Russia or Ukraine since June 21 also do not mention any force deployments.[40] As ISW has recently reported, the original report regarding North Korean engineering troops deploying to Ukraine came from South Korean television network *TV Chouson*, which reported on June 21 that an unspecified South Korean government official stated that South Korea expects North Korea to dispatch engineering forces for reconstruction efforts in occupied Donetsk Oblast.[41]

At this time, all actors involved have either explicitly denied or refused to confirm reports that North Korea may be sending engineering forces to support Russia in occupied Ukraine. Claims that such reports are "confirmed" by US officials are inaccurate. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on June 27 that the Kremlin is unfamiliar with recent reports that North Korea may send engineering units to occupied Ukraine.[42] US Department of State Spokesperson Matthew Miller was also asked on June 26 about the alleged North Korean troop deployments, which the question described as having been officially "announced," but Miller responded that he does not "have any specific comment" and that he "had not seen that report." [43] ISW will continue to monitor North Korea's evolving relations with and military assistance to Russia, including continued provision of weapons for use in Ukraine and speculation of force deployments to Ukraine.

Western media reported that the US, Israel, and Ukraine are discussing the transfer of up to eight Israeli Patriot air defense systems set to retire to Ukraine according to unnamed sources, some of which also caution that the transfer may not occur.[44] The *Financial Times* (FT) and the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on June 27, citing multiple people briefed on the negotiations, that the US, Israel, and Ukraine are actively negotiating a deal to send the eight Patriots first from Israel to the US then from the US to Ukraine and that senior officials and ministers have engaged in the negotiations process.[45] FT and the WSJ noted that Israel previously said it would retire these Patriots but has not yet done so due to fears that the Israel-Hamas war may escalate. Four sources told FT that even though Israel is negotiating the transfer of all eight Patriots, Ukraine may not receive all eight Patriots.[46] FT and its sources did not provide further information about this deviation.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces have sustained the tempo of their offensive operations in the Toretzk direction since activating in the area on June 18 and likely aim to reduce a Ukrainian salient in the area, but there is little current likelihood of rapid Russian gains near Toretzk. Russian forces have committed only limited forces to this operation so far, which suggests that Russian forces continue to prioritize gradual advances through consistent grinding assaults over operationally significant gains through rapid maneuver.
- Slow grinding Russian offensive operations in the Toretzk direction are in line with Russian President Vladimir Putin's articulated theory of victory that posits that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations, and win a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces
- Ukraine signed long-term security agreements with the European Union (EU), Lithuania, and Estonia on June 27.
- Russian officials and information space actors continue to frame migrants as a threat to Russian society amid ongoing efforts to utilize migrant communities to address Russia's force generation needs.
- The Kremlin may be using indirect means to bypass Russian law and codify a state ideology that emphasizes Russia's "traditional" social values while attempting to increase Russia's birth rate.
- There is currently no evidence supporting recent reports that North Korea may be sending engineering forces to rear areas of occupied Ukraine, and ISW has been unable to locate the North Korean confirmation that some Western amplifications allege has been made.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Siversk, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.

- Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting on the long-term future of the Russian Navy and Russian shipbuilding on June 26 and noted that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) plans to introduce more than 40 new ships and vessels to the Russian Navy in 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 26, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 26, 2024, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on June 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The likely Islamic State (IS) affiliate Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan on June 23 have increased fears within the Russian information space about further attacks and instability in the North Caucasus. Russian sources, including prominent Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers and Russian opposition media, amplified reports of two armed men firing on police in Makhachkala on the evening of June 25 and amplified footage of the alleged gunmen and gunfire in the area.[1] Kremlin newswire TASS reported that police deployed to central Makhachkala and cordoned off select areas, but Dagestan's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) stated that it did not introduce an "interception" plan to apprehend the alleged gunmen.[2] Dagestan's MVD reported on June 25 that police received reports about an armed man in central Makhachkala but that the reports were false and that there were no violations of public order in the city.[3] Many Russian sources amended their earlier reports to label the shooting as fake and claimed that the footage was from the June 23 terrorist attacks and not the evening of June 25.[4] The apparent widespread misreporting of the shooting and the relatively heavy police response to the false reports suggests heightened fear and expectations in the Russian information space that there will be further terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus.

The Kremlin is attempting to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy in response to the Dagestan terror attack and posture Russia's alleged multiethnic and multi-religious unity but is likely so far failing to reassure the public that there will not be further attacks.[5] The March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in Moscow and increasingly frequent Russian counterterrorism operations in the North Caucasus have previously prompted tensions within the Russian information space, exacerbated by calls for increased controls on migration to Russia, appeals to Russia's multiethnic and multi-religious makeup, and outright xenophobia and racism.[6] The Kremlin has struggled to balance its appeals to anti-migrant Russian ultranationalists, its reliance on recruiting migrants for its war effort in Ukraine, and its need for migration to address labor shortages within Russia.[7] Heightened fears about religious extremism will further complicate the Kremlin's efforts to balance between these competing priorities. A Russian insider source directly commented on this nexus in response to the Dagestan attacks and claimed that Dagestan's force generation efforts caused practitioners at a government-friendly mosque to turn to a more radical mosque with alleged Wahhabi connections.[8] ISW has previously assessed that Russian force generation efforts and Russian ultranationalist rhetoric are alienating minority and Muslim-majority communities and generating animosities that Salafi-Jihadi groups can exploit in recruitment efforts.[9]

The June 23 terrorist attacks in Dagestan also prompted Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov to double down on his image as a ruthless autocratic strongman capable of protecting the North Caucasus from religious extremism. Kadyrov held a meeting with Chechen law enforcement agencies on June 25 in connection with the Dagestan attacks and called on Chechens to be especially vigilant and prevent their relatives from succumbing to religious extremism.[10] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* North Caucasus service *Kavkaz Realii* reported that Kadyrov stated in Chechen that Chechen authorities would kill the relatives of those suspected of Wahhabism in a "blood feud." [11] Kadyrov has routinely threatened the family members of those he deems a threat to his control over Chechnya.[12] Kadyrov appears to be attuned to heightened Russian fears about further attacks and is posturing himself as an attentive and ruthless strongman who can prevent instability in the North Caucasus. Kadyrov invoked the memory of the Chechen wars of the 1990s and 2000s and claimed that his father, Akhmad, and Russian President Vladimir Putin prevented "international" efforts to use Chechnya to destroy Russia.[13] Akhmad Kadyrov supported Russian forces in the Second Chechen War (1999–2002), in which the Russian military brought Chechen separatism to heel through excessive force including the almost complete destruction of Chechnya's capital, Grozny.[14] Kadyrov has long modeled himself in the image of his father, a strongman loyal to the Kremlin and whom the Kremlin can rely on to ensure stability in the region.[15] Kadyrov consistently appeals to Putin's favor and is likely aware that further terrorist activity in the North Caucasus may threaten his standing with the Kremlin.[16] Kadyrov also claimed that religious extremism is emanating from Europe and suggested that outside actors aided the Dagestan attackers, supporting Kremlin efforts to tie the attacks to the war in Ukraine while also downplaying the threat of an endogenous religious extremism threat in the North Caucasus.[17]

North Korea will reportedly send military construction and engineering forces to participate in "reconstruction work" in occupied Donetsk Oblast as early as July 2024.^[18] South Korean TV network *TV Chosun*, citing a South Korean government official, reported on June 21 that South Korea expects North Korea to dispatch a large-scale engineering force to occupied Donetsk Oblast as early as July 2024 and that the force will help rebuild infrastructure in occupied Donetsk City.^[19] The North Korean military reportedly operates 10 engineering brigades, and *TV Chosun* estimated that North Korea could earn up to \$115 million in unspecified foreign currency each year from Russia if it dispatches three or four engineering brigades to occupied Ukraine.^[20] Pentagon Press Secretary Major General Pat Ryder stated on June 25 that the US will "keep an eye" on this development and suggested that North Korea should "question" its decision to send its forces to be "cannon fodder" in Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.^[21] Russia and North Korea signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on June 19, but Russian President Vladimir Putin later attempted to downplay the importance of the agreement and the possibility of North Korean troops serving in Ukraine.^[22] ISW noted that Russia appears to be pursuing a coalition of friendly states with historically warm ties to the Soviet Union, including North Korea and Vietnam, to form the basis of an alternative world order.^[23] ISW has yet to observe reporting that suggests that North Korean military personnel intend to participate in combat operations in Ukraine, but direct North Korean engineering support can free up Russian combat power for operations along the frontline and aid Russian efforts to expand military infrastructure and defensive fortifications in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated that Russia is not interested in any negotiations that do not result in Ukrainian territorial concessions beyond the parts of Ukraine Russian forces already occupy. Lavrov gave a speech at the "Primakov Readings" international political and economic forum on June 26 and claimed that Russia is open to dialogue with Europe only "based on the recognition of territorial realities enshrined in the [Russian Constitution]," while also dismissing Western calls for the war to end with the restoration of all of Ukraine's legal sovereign territory.^[24] Lavrov is referring to Russian constitutional provisions that consider the administrative boundaries of Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts as Russian territory, and Lavrov's comments emphasize that the Kremlin sees any negotiations on Ukraine's terms as both unconstitutional and irreconcilable with Russian law. This all-or-nothing approach echoes Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 14 demands for Ukraine to "completely withdraw" from the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts before Russia considers any sort of "peace negotiations" — notably including areas of each oblast that Russia does not currently occupy.^[25] Both Lavrov and Putin have clearly articulated that the only end-state of the war that the Kremlin envisions is Ukraine's territorial capitulation, strongly emphasizing the fact that Russia remains uninterested in engaging in negotiations with Ukraine in good faith, and only invokes the concept of "peace plans" and "negotiations" to convince Ukraine's partners to encourage Ukraine to make preemptive concessions about its people and its internationally-recognized territory even before negotiations begin. Lavrov's explicit mention of negotiations with "Europe" rather than Ukraine also forwards the Kremlin's ongoing false narrative that there are no legitimate Ukrainian authorities with whom Russia can negotiate, further undermining Ukraine's status as a sovereign country with its own borders in the context of territorial concessions.

New Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used his first phone call with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on June 26 to reiterate standard Russian threats meant to coerce the US out of supporting Ukraine as part of the wider Russian reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making.^[26] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Belousov stressed to Austin the "danger of further escalation" should the US continue to supply weapons to Ukraine, while the US Department of Defense (DoD) noted that Austin emphasized to Belousov the importance of maintaining open communication between the US and Russia.^[27] Russian officials have consistently attempted to use vague threats of escalation against the US and Ukraine's other partners to discourage continued Western military support for Ukraine, and Belousov's statements to Austin fall in the same category as countless other Russian efforts at informational and diplomatic coercion.^[28] Belousov's predecessor, former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, similarly threatened French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu during a phone call on April 4, warning that the potential deployment of French troops to Ukraine would "create problems for France itself."^[29] Shoigu notably called several NATO defense ministers in October 2022 to threaten nuclear disaster if NATO members sustained support for Ukraine.^[30] Belousov will continue using pseudo-diplomatic engagements with his Western counterparts to further the same narrative in an attempt to influence Western decision-making via the Kremlin's reflexive control campaign. Russia has notably yet to escalate militarily in response to any US or Western provision of weapons to Ukraine.^[31]

Russia and Ukraine exchanged 90 prisoners of war (POWs) each in a one-to-one POW exchange on June 25 amid United Nations (UN) reports of Russia's continued abuse of POWs. Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets stated on June 25 that 90 Ukrainian POWs returned to Ukraine in the 53rd POW exchange thus far during the war.^[32] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also reported that 90 Russian POWs returned to Russia, and the MoD claimed that the Russian POWs were in "mortal danger" while in Ukrainian custody.^[33] The United Arab Emirates (UAE) mediated the exchange. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Spokesperson Krzysztof Janowski stated on June 26 that the UN OHCHR has interviewed over 600 released Ukrainian civilians and POWs since 2022, all of whom reported experiencing or observing torture, severe beatings, and prolonged exposure to stressful positions, and being mauled by dogs.^[34] POWs also reported that Russian guards psychologically tortured them and

forced them to sing patriotic Russian songs daily and reported experiencing constant hunger and poor medical care for long periods of time. OHCHR reported also hearing accounts of torture in "transitory" POW camps in occupied Ukraine, but POWs reported that Russian guards did not torture them in "official" internment camps. ISW has extensively reported on footage and reports of Russian servicemen abusing and executing Ukrainian POWs and noted that the Russian military command appears to be permitting these war crimes in Ukraine.[35]

Russia and Iran signed a memorandum on June 26 regarding the supply of Russian gas to Iran, following reported disagreements between Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Russian supply of gas to the PRC. Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom Head Alexey Miller signed the memorandum with the National Iranian Gas Company in Iran at a ceremony attended by Acting Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber.[36] Miller also met with Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji about implementing the new memorandum and other areas of energy cooperation. Neither Russia nor Iran provided details about the new memorandum, but Gazprom and the National Iranian Gas Company were negotiating unspecified deals worth about \$40 billion as of October 2023.[37] Miller's visit to Iran and agreement with the National Iranian Gas Company follows a recent *Financial Times* (FT) report that Russia and the PRC are reportedly in disagreement about economic issues including the Power of Siberia 2 (PS-2) gas pipeline, resulting in Miller not travelling with Russian President Vladimir Putin to Beijing in May 2024 — likely aimed at extracting concessions from Russia given Gazprom's recent economic struggles and the PRC's upper hand in the energy sphere.[38] Iran may benefit from this new deal with Russia to reduce its reliance on existing gas swap deals it has with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to mitigate summer electricity shortages that could fuel domestic unrest.[39]

Ukraine's pervasive shortage of critical air defense missiles is inhibiting Ukraine's ability to protect its critical infrastructure against Russian strikes. Private Ukrainian energy enterprise DTEK Executive Director Dmytro Sakharuk told the *Kyiv Post* on June 26 that for every one interceptor missile that Ukraine possesses to defend against Russian strikes on the energy grid, Russia has five to six missiles to launch at Ukraine.[40] Sakharuk noted that if Russia were to launch 10 missiles at any target in Ukraine, Ukrainian forces would need to respond with at least 12 air defense missiles to adequately protect against the attack. Sakharuk emphasized that the stark difference in Ukraine's necessary and actual ratios of Ukrainian air defense to attacking Russian missiles means that the shortage in interceptor missiles is making it impossible to cover energy grid units that Ukraine has repaired or is repairing. Russia's air strike campaign against the Ukrainian energy grid has already imposed serious constraints on Ukraine's power generation capacity, and Russian forces have been able to exploit air defense shortages caused by a lack of Western-provided air defense systems to maximize the damage to Ukraine's energy capacity over the course of 2024.[41]

Key Takeaways:

- The likely Islamic State (IS) affiliate Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attacks in the Republic of Dagestan on June 23 have increased fears within the Russian information space about further attacks and instability in the North Caucasus.
- The June 23 terrorist attacks in Dagestan also prompted Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov to double down on his image as a ruthless autocratic strongman capable of protecting the North Caucasus from religious extremism.
- North Korea will reportedly send military construction and engineering forces to participate in "reconstruction work" in occupied Donetsk Oblast as early as July 2024
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated that Russia is not interested in any negotiations that do not result in Ukrainian territorial concessions beyond the parts of Ukraine Russian forces already occupy.
- New Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used his first phone call with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on June 26 to reiterate standard Russian threats meant to coerce the US out of supporting Ukraine as part of the wider Russian reflexive control campaign targeting Western decision-making
- Russia and Ukraine exchanged 90 prisoners of war (POWs) each in a one-to-one POW exchange on June 25 amid United Nations (UN) reports of Russia's continued abuse of POWs.
- Russia and Iran signed a memorandum on June 26 regarding the supply of Russian gas to Iran, following reported disagreements between Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Russian supply of gas to the PRC.
- Ukraine's pervasive shortage of critical air defense missiles is inhibiting Ukraine's ability to protect its critical infrastructure against Russian strikes.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kupyansk.
- Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) published a report on June 26 detailing a significant increase in Russia's military equipment and weapons production in 2023.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 25, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

Two major international bodies—the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) — announced decisions on June 25 confirming Russia's long-term perpetration of war crimes and human rights violations in Ukraine. The ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber II (the chamber in charge of the ICC's Ukraine-related investigations and prosecutions) announced on June 25 that it had issued arrest warrants for former Russian Defense Minister and current Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov for "the war crime of directing attacks at civilian objects" in Ukraine.[1] The ICC noted that there is reasonable evidence to believe that both Shoigu and Gerasimov bear individual responsibility for the war crimes of causing incidental harm to civilians and damage to civilian objects and the crime of inhumane acts, both of which are violations of the Rome Statute. The ICC also emphasized that even in the case of Russian forces targeting "installations that may have qualified as military objectives at the relevant time," the incidental civilian harm was excessively weighed against the expected military advantage—contrary to the international legal principle of proportionality.[2] The ICC concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Shoigu's and Gerasimov's military decision-making intentionally inflicted serious bodily harm and suffering on Ukraine's civilian population.

The ECHR's Grand Chamber also ruled on June 25 that Russia has committed various human rights violations in Crimea since the beginning of its illegal occupation of the peninsula in February 2014. [3] The ECHR found that Russian officials and forces in Crimea committed numerous violations of the European Convention of Human Rights, including violations of the right to life, prohibition of inhumane or degrading treatment, right to liberty and security, right to no punishment without law, right to respect for private and family life, right to freedom of religion, right to freedom of expression, right to freedom of assembly, right to property, right to education, and right to freedom of movement, among other human rights violations. The ECHR's ruling emphasized that the evidence that the Ukrainian government has provided to the court amounts to "a pattern or system of violations" perpetrated by Russia in Crimea. The decision is the first in which any international legal body has recognized Russia's widescale and systemic violation of human rights spanning over a decade in occupied Crimea.[4]

Russia and Venezuela signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) aimed at countering "coercive measures," likely to demonstrate to the West that the Kremlin holds influence in the Western hemisphere. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil met on June 11 during the BRICS summit and signed the MOU, which the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) described as an intent to develop a joint strategy combating "unilateral coercive measures" through informational channels and diplomatic means. Both Venezuela and Russia offered oddly limited details regarding the specifics of the MOU.[5] The Venezuelan MFA announced the MOU on its social media accounts on June 11 but deleted the announcement from its official website, and the Russian MFA reported on the original Lavrov-Gil meeting on June 11 but did not announce the MOU until June 25.[6] The MOU itself is also vague; the Russian MFA's readout of the MOU does not define "unilateral coercive measures." [7] This Russian-Venezuelan MOU and Russian posturing in South America follows a Russian naval port call to and military exercises near Havana, Cuba on June 12-17, after which the Russian navy was rumored to stop in Venezuela.[8] The Kremlin has recently indicated its interest in expanding cooperation with Venezuela, and the Kremlin likely intends for this new MOU to forward Russian narratives about a new multipolar world in a country that does not identify with the Russian World (*Russkiy Mir*) or alternative "Eurasian security architecture" rhetorical lines.[9]

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike on a Russian ammunition depot in Voronezh Oblast on June 25 and recently conducted strikes on Pantsir-S1 air defense systems in Belgorod Oblast with unspecified weapons. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on June 25 that it struck a field ammunition depot in Olkovatka, Voronezh Oblast, and geolocated footage published on June 25 shows a smoke plume near Olkovatka.[10] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that an unspecified source stated that GUR conducted the strike with two drones and that the drones struck two ammunition warehouses that held over 3,000 shells.[11] *Radio Liberty* published satellite imagery from June 25 showing at least two fires at the Olkhovatka ammunition depot.[12] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that unspecified explosives detonated far from civilian buildings in Olkhovatsky Raion after Ukrainian forces conducted strikes on two unspecified cities.[13]

The Ukrainian National Guard reported on June 25 that Ukrainian forces struck two Pantsir-S1 anti-aircraft systems in the Kharkiv direction on unspecified dates.[14] The Ukrainian National Guard posted photos of the aftermath of the strikes, which were geolocated to near Dubovoe (just south of Belgorod City) and Borisovka (west of Belgorod City).[15] Ukrainian forces reportedly struck the Pantsir system in Dubovoe on June 22.[16] It is unclear what munitions Ukrainian forces used to strike the Pantsir systems, however. A Ukrainian OSINT Telegram account geolocated the position of the Pantsir system near Dubovoe in January 2024 after footage appeared of the air defense system repelling a Ukrainian missile strike — suggesting that Russian forces have not moved the Pantsir system in the past six months.[17]

Russia imposed countersanctions against 81 European Union (EU)-based news outlets on June 25 following EU sanctions against four Russian state-affiliated news outlets on June 24.

[18] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced that it had blocked access to EU-based media outlets, including: Germany's *Der Spiegel* and *Die Welt*; Denmark's *Berlingske*; Spain's *El Mundo*, *El Pais*, and *EFE*; Italy's *La Repubblica*; Poland's *Belsat*; France's *Le Monde*, *Radio France*, and *Agence France-Presse* (AFP); Estonia's *EER* and *Delfi*; and more general sites including *Politico*'s European service, *Svoboda Satellite Package*, and *EU Observer*. [19] The Russian MFA noted that these sanctions are specifically in response to the EU blocking Kremlin-affiliated news sites *RIA Novosti*, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, and *Izvestia*, but did not mention the new EU sanctions against the *Voice of Europe* — the joint venture of Kremlin-affiliate Artem Marchevsky and former pro-Russian Ukrainian MP Viktor Medvedchuk. [20]

Dagestan Republic Head Sergei Melikov ordered investigations into the personal records of senior Dagestani officials following the June 23 likely Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attacks in Dagestan, indicating that the Kremlin may be intensifying efforts to address Islamist extremist threats in the North Caucasus as it attempts to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy.

Melikov stated in a June 25 address to the People's Assembly of Dagestan that he ordered an audit of the personal files of "everyone who holds leadership positions in Dagestan, including deputies of the People's Assembly." [21] Melikov dismissed Dagestan's Sergokalinsky district head Magomed Omarov on June 24 after Russian sources reported that two of his sons were identified as two of the Makhachkala attackers whom Russian law enforcement killed during the attack. [22] Russian security services reported on June 25 that they detained Omarov and Russian law enforcement reported that Omarov may face charges of aiding terrorists. [23] A Russian insider source claimed that the Kremlin is "reconsidering its approach" to preventing extremism in the North Caucasus and "raising more questions" about Melikov who has yet to curb the "growing radical sentiment among [Dagestan's] youth" following the June 23 Dagestan terrorist attacks. [24] ISW assessed that the Kremlin is attempting to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy in response to the Dagestan terror attack and posture Russia's alleged multiethnic and multi-religious unity. [25] Russian milbloggers widely criticized local officials who they claimed are aware of rising extremism and also criticized Dagestani youth policy for its alleged endorsement of youth mixed martial arts fight clubs, which they claim breeds extremist ideology. [26] Russian milbloggers' outrage at Dagestani authorities is a tacit admission that they are not interested in amplifying the Kremlin's efforts to link the June 23 Dagestan terrorist attacks to external actors such as Ukraine or the West.

The European Union (EU) officially started accession negotiations for Ukraine and Moldova on June 25. [27] Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib also noted that the EU Council has approved the draft for a joint EU-Ukraine security agreement in addition to opening accession negotiations. [28]

Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Lithuania-based Belarusian opposition leader Svitlana Tsikhanouskaya on June 20 in Vilnius amid deteriorating Armenian-Belarusian relations. [29] Armenian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ani Badalyan published images of the meeting on X (formerly Twitter) on June 20. [30] Tsikhanouskaya's press service reported that she and Mirzoyan discussed cooperation between "Belarus' democratic forces" and Armenia's government, parliament and civil society. [31] Tsikhanouskaya also stated that the people of Armenia and Belarus "deserve a free, democratic, and European future." [32] The Armenian MFA's decision to publicize Mirzoyan's meeting with Tsikhanouskaya is a public indication of Armenian outrage at Belarusian actions. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan directly accused Belarus of helping Azerbaijan prepare for the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War on May 22 after Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated during his May 2024 state visit to Azerbaijan that he and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev conversed before the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and concluded that Azerbaijan could be victorious. [33] *Politico* reported on June 13, citing leaked documents, that Belarus provided Azerbaijan with artillery equipment, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and drones between 2018 and 2022, which Azerbaijan reportedly used in recent conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and against Armenia. [34]

Key Takeaways:

- Two major international bodies—the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) — announced decisions on June 25 confirming Russia's long-term perpetration of war crimes and human rights violations in Ukraine.
- Russia and Venezuela signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) aimed at countering "coercive measures," likely to demonstrate to the West that the Kremlin holds influence in the Western hemisphere.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike on a Russian ammunition depot in Voronezh Oblast on June 25 and recently conducted strikes on Pantsir-S1 air defense systems in Belgorod Oblast with unspecified weapons.
- Russia imposed countersanctions against 81 European Union (EU)-based news outlets on June 25 following EU sanctions against four Russian state-affiliated news outlets on June 24.
- Dagestan Republic Head Sergei Melikov ordered investigations into the personal records of senior Dagestani officials following the June 23 likely Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attacks in Dagestan, indicating that the Kremlin may be intensifying efforts to address Islamist

extremist threats in the North Caucasus as it attempts to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy.

- Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Lithuania-based Belarusian opposition leader Svitlana Tsikhanouskaya on June 20 in Vilnius amid deteriorating Armenian-Belarusian relations
- Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions in Vovchansk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk and Avdiivka.
- A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian Volunteer Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy of Russia (DOSAAF) will begin training unspecified Russian military personnel on October 1, 2024.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 24, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 24, 2024, 10:30pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:30pm ET on June 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated that Western military assistance is arriving in Ukraine, but that it will likely not arrive at a scale that will significantly impact the frontline situation until at least mid to late July 2024. Budanov stated in an interview with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* conducted on June 12 or 13 and published on June 23 that US and European weapons deliveries, including artillery ammunition, are arriving in Ukraine at a faster pace than several months ago but noted that Ukrainian forces need a high volume of weapons and "there is a question of volume." [1] Budanov stated that "no Armageddon will emerge [on the frontline]" but that the frontline situation will remain difficult for at least one month. Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk also recently stated on June 15 that Ukrainian forces are still waiting for most of the military assistance that the US passed in late April 2024 to arrive in Ukraine, but that limited amounts of US security assistance arrivals have reduced Russia's artillery shell advantage from seven-to-one to five-to-one. [2] ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are attempting to make tactically and operationally significant gains before US military assistance arrives to Ukrainian forces at the frontline at scale, and that the initial arrival of Western-provided weaponry will take some time to have tactical to operational effect on the frontline. [3]

Budanov stated that a sufficient quantity of US-provided long-range ATACMS missiles could allow Ukrainian forces to strike the Russian-built Kerch Strait Bridge in occupied Crimea and sever an important Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) between occupied Crimea and Russia. [4] Budanov stated that Ukraine could isolate occupied Crimea, which the Russian military uses as a rear staging area, by conducting long-range ATACMS missile strikes against the Kerch Strait Bridge. The Russian military continues to use Crimea's GLOCs to transport military personnel, weapons, materiel, and fuel from Russia to the frontlines in Ukraine and reinforced its air defense umbrella to cover occupied southern Ukraine from Crimea. [5] Ukrainian officials have recently stated that Russian forces have reduced their military logistics transport across the Kerch Strait Bridge, presumably due to efforts to establish logistics lines connecting mainland Russia and occupied Crimea through occupied southern Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, but the Kerch Strait Bridge likely remains essential to maintaining Russia's occupation of Crimea. [6] Ukrainian long-range strikes against the Kerch Strait Bridge would sever an important GLOC for Russian forces based in occupied Crimea and likely complicate their ability to maintain their occupation of and basing within the peninsula. The destruction of the bridge would force Russian military to rely on the long route along northern coast of the Sea of Azov and exacerbate vulnerabilities for Ukrainian forces to exploit along the Russian main GLOC.

Current US policy regarding Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons allows Ukraine to strike anywhere within Russian-occupied Ukraine, which presumably includes using long-range ATACMS to strike the portion of the Kerch Strait Bridge within Ukraine's internationally recognized land and maritime borders. [7] ISW assesses that 13 kilometers of the Kerch Strait Bridge — which Russian authorities built without Ukraine's approval following Russia's illegal occupation of the peninsula in 2014 — are within Ukraine's internationally recognized territorial waters. The US policy on the Ukrainian ATACMS use, therefore, technically should allow Ukrainian forces to strike at least a section of the bridge if not the entire bridge. Pentagon Spokesperson Major Charlie Dietz also notably stated on June 24 that "Ukraine makes its own targeting decisions and conducts its own military operations." [8] Then-US State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert stated on May 15, 2018, that the US condemns Russia's construction and partial opening of the Kerch Strait Bridge, that the bridge "serves as a reminder of Russia's ongoing willingness to flout international law," and represents Russia's attempt to "solidify its unlawful seizure and its occupation of Crimea." [9]

Kremlin officials absurdly attempted to link the June 23 Ukrainian strikes on legitimate military targets in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea and the likely Islamic State (IS) affiliate Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attack in the Republic of Dagestan. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on June 24 that Russian President Vladimir Putin sympathizes with those who lost loved ones from both the Ukrainian missile strike on Sevastopol and the terrorist attack in Dagestan.[10] Peskov also stated that the Russian investigative bodies will determine whether the strike on Crimea and the terrorist attack in Dagestan were one series of incidents or separate incidents.[11] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Head Leonid Slutsky labeled both events as "terrorist attacks." [12] Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that it is possible that the "customers" (or entities that ordered these attacks) of both the Crimea strikes and the Dagestan terrorist attack "will be the same." [13] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on June 24 that pro-Kremlin bots left over 1,400 comments on Russian social media platform VKontakte claiming that the US and Ukraine organized the terrorist attack in Dagestan — echoing the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) claim that the US was responsible for the Ukrainian strike on occupied Sevastopol.[14]

The Kremlin information operation linking these two events is nonsensical if only because the civilian casualties in Crimea resulted from Russia's interception of an incoming ATACMS missile rather than a deliberate Ukrainian targeting decision. The Russian MoD acknowledged that a Russian air defense interceptor caused the Ukrainian missile to deviate from its flight path and detonate in Sevastopol. [15] An unspecified US official also told *Reuters* in a June 24 article that Russian forces were able to intercept the ATACMS missile targeting a Russian missile launcher causing the ATACMS missile to explode and rain down shrapnel on the Sevastopol beach.[16] Russian officials have also offered no evidence for their claims of Ukrainian or American involvement in the Dagestan terrorist attack.

The Kremlin is attempting to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy in response to the Dagestan terror attack. Peskov stated that Putin does not plan to make a special address concerning the strikes in Sevastopol or the attack in Dagestan — in contrast to Putin's March 25 lengthy speech following the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall in Moscow.[17] Peskov responded to a journalist asking if the Kremlin fears the return of the situation of the early 2000s (presumably referencing a series of terrorist attacks in Russia, including the 2002 Nord-Ost siege, 2004 Moscow Metro bombing, and 2004 Beslan school siege), stating that the Kremlin does not fear a return to this situation as Russia is different now and Russian society is "absolutely consolidated" in its lack of support for terrorist attacks in Dagestan or Russia in general.[18] Dagestan Head Sergei Melikov stated that the terrorist attack against Dagestan's "brotherhood, multinational unity, and confessional indivisibility" is an attempt to divide Dagestan but "this [division] will not happen." [19] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed that the terrorists in Dagestan were attempting to create interreligious discord but that Russia will continue its fight against terrorism.[20] Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov similarly claimed that the attack aimed to cause interreligious conflict but that other Russian regions, such as Chechnya, have already proven that Russia can effectively resist such conflicts.[21] The Kremlin has repeatedly promoted the idea that Russia is a harmonious multinational and multireligious state, despite increasing xenophobic rhetoric from Russia's vocal ultranationalist community and growing societal tensions.[22] This Kremlin facade of normalcy and stability also ignores the October 2023 antisemitic riots in Dagestan (including in Makhachkala, one of the locations of the June 23 attack), the March 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in Moscow, and the increasingly frequent counterterrorism operations in the North Caucasus.[23]

The European Union (EU) adopted its 14th package of sanctions against Russia on June 24, including new restrictions against Russian funding to political parties and other "opinion-forming" organizations and Russian state media broadcasts within the EU. The new EU sanctions package prohibits EU actors that "form part of the public opinion forming process," including political parties, foundations, alliances, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and media service providers within the EU from accepting donations, financing, or other economic benefits or support "from Russia, either directly or indirectly." [24] The EU cites Russia's continued propaganda and disinformation campaigns to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and independence, justify its war in Ukraine, and influence democratic processes within the EU as reasoning for this specific restriction. The EU sanctions regulation defines these Russian "direct and indirect" entities vaguely as "Russia and its proxies." [25] The EU also implemented a decision on June 24 that it adopted on May 17 to "suspend broadcasting activities of additional media outlets in the Union, or directed at the Union," explicitly including Kremlin news outlets and wires *RIA Novosti*, *Izvestia*, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, and *Voice of Europe*, until "the Russian aggression in Ukraine is brought to an end" and until Russia "and its associated media outlets cease to conduct propaganda actions" in the EU.[26] The EU defines targeted outlets as "media outlets under the permanent direct or indirect control of the [Russian] leadership" and whose propaganda actions are "supporting Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine" and "destabiliz[ing]" Ukraine's neighboring countries. The EU decision noted that these regulations only apply towards affected organizations' "broadcasting activities" and do not impede journalists' abilities to conduct interviews and research within EU member states. The EU has suspended the "broadcasting activities and licenses" of 18 Kremlin-backed disinformation outlets since 2022.[27] The EU does not define what constitutes "broadcasting activities" within the EU, but Western media has consistently reported that the EU has blocked access to websites of affected media outlets and that search engines and social media sites have also blocked access to sanctioned media organizations under the EU broadcasting bans.[28]

The new EU sanctions package also sanctions 116 new individuals and entities and introduces other sanctions enforcement measures.[29] The new sanctions package targets specific Russian naval vessels and forbids EU entities from providing reloading services of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) in EU territory for transshipment operations to third countries. The new sanctions package also introduces restrictions on exporting dual-use goods and requires EU parent companies to undertake "due diligence mechanisms" to assess and identify the risk of exported goods being re-exported to Russia and mitigating these risks.

The EU approved a first tranche of up to 1.4 billion euros (about \$1.5 billion) in military assistance for Ukraine from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets.[30] The EU reported that 90 percent of the first payment is dedicated to Ukraine's defense needs and that the remaining 10 percent is dedicated to the EU's support of the Ukraine Facility program, which supports rehabilitation, recovery, and reconstruction in Ukraine. The EU stated that it will begin distributing resources to Ukraine in July 2024 with biannual payments and will review this prioritization annually starting on January 1, 2025. EU High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated that the EU approved this tranche of assistance from frozen Russian assets through a so-called "legal loophole" bypassing Hungary's veto because Hungary abstained from voting on an earlier agreement voting on setting aside the proceeds from Russia's frozen assets and therefore "should not be part of the decision to use this money." [31]

The Kremlin continued efforts to co-opt former Wagner Group personnel by introducing a new bill that would exempt much of the Wagner force from criminal responsibility for their participation in the Wagner armed rebellion on June 23 and 24, 2023. A source told Kremlin newswire TASS on the first anniversary of the Wagner armed rebellion on June 24 that the Russian Government's Commission on Legislative Activities approved a bill that allows for exempting a participant of an armed rebellion from criminal liability if the participant "helped to prevent further damage" in Russian state interests.[32] The bill proposes changing a footnote to the "High Treason" article in the Russian Criminal Code to offer a possible exemption from criminal liability of armed rebellion if the participant voluntarily cooperated with Russian authorities and did not commit any other crimes. The bill's explanatory note added that this exemption will motivate participants of armed rebellions to refuse to continue their "illegal actions," presumably referring to crimes in addition to armed rebellion. The bill also proposed to add a new "Armed Rebellion" article in the Russian Criminal Code, which will differentiate between the level of involvement and severity of the consequences for organizing, leading, or participating in a rebellion. The TASS source claimed that the Russian Government's Commission on Legislative Activities simultaneously approved a bill on toughening criminal penalties up to life imprisonment for organizing or participating in an armed rebellion if the rebellion resulted in the death of a person or unspecified "other grave consequences." [33]

The bill clearly demonstrates three Kremlin objectives: appeasing and possibly blackmailing remaining Wagner personnel into remaining loyal to the Kremlin; erecting a facade that the Kremlin is addressing societal backlash over casualties among defending Russian military personnel during the Wagner armed rebellion; and establishing safeguards to prevent future armed rebellions. A prominent Russian milblogger observed that this bill is clearly related to the anniversary of the Wagner armed rebellion and noted that Russian authorities did not charge any of the Wagner commanders or participants for their involvement in the rebellion.[34] The milblogger noted that this bill will lead to stricter legislation regarding armed rebellions and that the Kremlin had clearly learned a painful lesson from June 2023. The Kremlin notably dropped criminal charges against Wagner commanders and personnel on June 27, 2023, despite the fact that Wagner personnel shot down several Russian military aircraft during the rebellion, killing 13 Russian pilots.[35] Several Russian milbloggers marked the anniversary of the Wagner armed rebellion by celebrating the Wagner Group's accomplishments and noting that the rebellion revealed serious problems in the Russian military — some of which the milbloggers claimed persist a year after the rebellion.[36]

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Joint Forces Commander Lieutenant General Yuriy Sodal with Brigadier General Andriy Hnatov on June 24.[37] Zelensky did not offer a reason for Sodal's dismissal. Hnatov served as deputy commander of the Ukrainian southern theatre since 2022, played an important role in liberating west (right) bank Kherson Oblast, and commanded the defense of Bakhmut in spring 2023.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov stated that Western military assistance is arriving in Ukraine, but that it will likely not arrive at a scale that will significantly impact the frontline situation until at least mid to late July 2024.**
- **Budanov stated that a sufficient quantity of US-provided long-range ATACMS missiles could allow Ukrainian forces to strike the Russian-built Kerch Strait Bridge in occupied Crimea and sever an important Russian ground line of communication (GLOC) between occupied Crimea and Russia.**
- **Current US policy regarding Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons allows Ukraine to strike anywhere within Russian-occupied Ukraine, which presumably includes using long-range ATACMS to strike the portion of the Kerch Strait Bridge within Ukraine's internationally recognized land and maritime borders.**

- Kremlin officials absurdly attempted to link the June 23 Ukrainian strikes on legitimate military targets in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea and the likely Islamic State (IS) affiliate Wilayat Kavkaz terrorist attack in the Republic of Dagestan.
- The Kremlin is attempting to maintain a veneer of stability and normalcy in response to the Dagestan terror attack.
- The European Union (EU) adopted its 14th package of sanctions against Russia on June 24, including new restrictions against Russian funding to political parties and other "opinion-forming" organizations and Russian state media broadcasts within the EU.
- The EU approved a first tranche of up to 1.4 billion euros (about \$1.5 billion) in military assistance for Ukraine from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets.
- The Kremlin continued efforts to coopt former Wagner Group personnel by introducing a new bill that would exempt much of the Wagner force from criminal responsibility for their participation in the Wagner armed rebellion on June 23 and 24, 2023.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced Joint Forces Commander Lieutenant General Yuriy Sodal with Brigadier General Andriy Hnatov on June 24. Ukrainian forces recently regained lost positions near Vovchansk and Starysta, and Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk and Toretsk.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed depriving all Russian military districts of their status as joint headquarters.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 23, 2024

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

Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

June 23, 2024, 8:30pm ET

The Islamic State (IS)'s Northern Caucasus branch, Wilayat Kavkaz, likely conducted a complex and coordinated attack against churches, synagogues, and law enforcement structures in the Republic of Dagestan on June 23.[1] Dagestan's Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that unknown actors opened fire on a Russian Orthodox church and a synagogue in Derbent at approximately 1800 local time and then reported within the same hour that another group of unknown actors opened fire on a traffic police post in Makhachkala (120 kilometers north of Derbent).[2] There are also reports of a fire at a synagogue in Makhachkala, although Russian official sources have not confirmed a second synagogue attack.[3] Dagestan announced a counter-terrorism regime following the start of the attacks, and Russian law enforcement killed five of the assailants and wounded six.[4] Social media footage shows Russian law enforcement detaining two suspects on a public beach in Makhachkala after they seemingly fled the scene of the shooting.[5] Russian media reported that seven law enforcement officials, a priest, and a church guard died in the attacks and 25 more individuals have been injured.[6] The Russian National Anti-Terrorism Committee announced the end of the counterterrorism operation in Derbent after the deaths of two suspects but small arms fire exchanges continued in Makhachkala as of 2300 local time on June 23.[7] The *Baza* Telegram channel claimed that two of the Makhachkala attackers identified as Osman and Adil Omarov, both of whom Russian law enforcement killed, were the sons of Sergokalinsky district head Magomed Omarov.[8] Russian Telegram channels are circulating footage reportedly filmed by Osman Omarov of the Makhachkala synagogue attack.[9] *Baza* reported that Russian law enforcement has also detained Magomed Omarov and are searching his home. Russian news agency *Interfax* claimed that Omarov's nephew also took part in the attack and Russian law enforcement killed him.[10]

The Russian branch of IS-K's Al-Azaim Media posted a statement on June 23 following the attack praising "their brothers from the Caucasus" for demonstrating what they were capable of.[11] Al-Azaim did not claim credit for the attack itself, notably, and the reference to the Caucasus strongly suggests that Wilayat Kavkaz is responsible for the attack. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure specifically warned that Wilayat Kavkaz became more active following the March 22 IS-K Crocus City Hall attack and has escalated recruitment appeals in the Northern Caucasus since April 2024.[12] Russian authorities have attempted a lackluster counterterrorism operation in the North Caucasus since March 2024 in order to combat growing IS and Wilayat Kavkaz influence but have largely focused their post-Crocus Hall response on baselessly blaming Ukraine and NATO for the attack.[13] Some Russian officials are already baselessly claiming that Ukraine and NATO are involved in the June 23 attack, emphasizing that Russia's current counterterrorism approach is likely to remain tied up in rhetorical posturing against Ukraine and the West as opposed to identifying and neutralizing IS threats within Russia itself.[14] Russia's increasingly tense relationship with its Muslim minority population, especially in the Caucasus, will likely continue to provide Wilayat Kazkaz and other extremist groups with a valuable recruitment base.[15]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused Ukrainian forces of conducting a short-range ATACMS strike against occupied Sevastopol on June 23. The Russian MoD claimed on June 23 that Ukrainian forces launched five ATACMS missiles armed with cluster munitions against Sevastopol and that Russian forces intercepted four missiles.[16] The Russian MoD claimed that the impact from a Russian air defense interceptor caused one missile to deviate from its flight path and detonate.

[17] The Russian MoD later blamed the United States for civilian casualties in Sevastopol given that the ATACMS are a US-provided system, despite acknowledging that a Russian air defense interceptor caused the missile to deviate from its flight path and detonate. A Crimea-focused Russian milblogger posted footage on the night of June 23 purportedly showing explosions near Yevpatoria and Vityne and claimed that there were explosions near Chornomorske and Mizhvodne.[18] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne Krym* reported that its sources also reported explosions in Yevpatoria.[19] Footage published on June 23 purportedly shows civilians on a beach in Sevastopol during and after the missile strike deviated.[20] Russian sources claimed that cluster munitions landed on civilians near a beach in Uchuyevka Park in northern Sevastopol.[21] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev claimed that the strike killed four people and injured 151 people.[22] Ukrainian military officials did not confirm or deny launching strikes against Sevastopol. Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated that Ukraine needs to obtain special permission to use ATACMS with cluster munitions from Western partners and claimed that the Russian occupation government is at fault for civilian casualties because it had failed to warn civilians before Russian air defense systems shot down unspecified missiles over their heads.[23] ISW cannot independently verify if Ukrainian forces used ATACMS missiles armed with cluster munitions. The Russian MoD's blaming of the United States for civilian casualties is an attempt to deter the United States from providing further security assistance to Ukraine.

Russian milbloggers widely criticized the Russian MoD and Russia's occupation authorities in Crimea for failing to prevent the strike and sufficiently protect Russian civilians. Russian sources criticized Russian authorities for not using air raid sirens to alert civilians to seek shelter.[24] Several Russian milbloggers criticized Russian authorities for failing to detect and destroy all the missiles before they approached Sevastopol and for failing to build reinforced shelters within walking distance of the beach, specifically comparing the lack of shelters near this beach in contrast to Russia's efforts to build shelters in Belgorod Oblast near the international border with Ukraine.[25] Footage and imagery indicate that Russian forces have been stationing military equipment in civilian areas in Crimea since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian authorities have irresponsibly encouraged Russian tourism to occupied Crimea during wartime while the Russian military continues to leverage the occupied peninsula as a rear staging area.[26] The Russian military likely purposefully stations legitimate military targets nearby civilian areas in Crimea in an effort to deter Ukrainian strikes. Russian forces have been recorded leveraging the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and schools in occupied mainland Ukraine to shield Russian military equipment.[27] Russia is likely violating its own regulations on the application of International Humanitarian Law, which states that "the military command shall avoid deploying military objectives in densely populated areas or in their vicinity." [28]

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian motorized rifle regiment command post in Nekhoteevka, Belgorod Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 23 that Ukrainian Air Force elements and other Ukrainian units conducted the strike on an unspecified date (likely recently) and caused secondary explosions at the target site.[29] Ukrainian military correspondents shared footage of the strike on June 23.[30] Nekhoteevka is notably directly on the Russia-Ukraine border about 15 kilometers away from the current front line of troops in northern Kharkiv Oblast, so this command post was likely involved in overseeing ongoing Russian offensive operations north of Kharkiv City in some capacity.

Recent drone footage showing a Russian soldier executing a wounded fellow servicemember exemplifies the brutal culture that is pervasive within the Russian Armed Forces.[31] The footage shows one Russian soldier wounded by a first-person view (FPV) drone strike, and the other soldier executing the wounded soldier at point blank range instead of attempting to check the soldier's injury, attempting treatment, taking his identification tags, or attempting a casualty evacuation. The attempted or deliberate killing of a fellow soldier is unprofessional, and ISW has observed instances of Russian fragging (the deliberate killing of supervisors) and other anecdotes demonstrative of a callous disregard for the lives of Russia's own soldiers throughout the war thus far, both within Russia and amongst Russian troops on the battlefield.[32] Fraggings are generally indicative of extremely poor discipline amongst troops, a disconnect between tactical level commanders and their subordinates, as well as a blatant disregard for human life. A Russian milblogger similarly reported on June 22 that commanders of various Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) units are severely mistreating their wounded subordinates and alleged that the 1st DNR Slavic Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) is holding its own wounded personnel in prison-like conditions in Donetsk City, instead of providing them with the treatment that they require.[33] Both the fragging incident and the milblogger claims against the DNR command are indicative of a very poor culture within the Russian military, particularly the command's disregard for their subordinates and a generally low level of discipline.

South Korea has adopted a firm approach against Russia in the wake of recently intensified Russo-North Korean cooperation, suggesting that Russian efforts to threaten Seoul into withholding aid from Ukraine have failed. South Korean National Security Director Chang Ho-jin reiterated on June 23 that the type of military support that South Korea will provide to Ukraine is contingent on the depth and evolution of Russian military cooperation with North Korea.[34] Chang previously stated on June 20 that the June 19 Russia-North Korea strategic partnership agreement had encouraged South Korea to change its long-standing policy prohibiting the transfer of arms to Ukraine, and South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported on June 21 that South Korea is now considering sending 155mm artillery shells and unspecified air defense systems to Ukraine.

[35] Russian President Vladimir Putin notably attempted to threaten South Korea on June 20, stating that Seoul would be making "a very big mistake" if it decided to supply arms to Ukraine.[36] Russian diplomatic officials have tried to retaliate against Seoul's statement about providing aid to Ukraine and claimed that it is "blackmail" against Russia.[37] The *Washington Post* reported on June 22, citing data obtained by US think tank Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), that North Korea delivered over 74,000 metric tons of explosives to Russia — equivalent to about 1.6 million artillery shells — between August 2023 and January 2024.[38] The *Washington Post* reported that these North Korean shipments arrived at 16 sites in Russia, 12 of which were close to known ammunition storage facilities.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) detained two former senior employees of the Wagner Group-affiliated Patriot media holding on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the Wagner mutiny. Russian media outlets and insider sources reported that the FSB detained former manager of the Patriot media holding Ilya Gorbunov on June 21 and 22, and editor-in-chief of the St. Petersburg-based online publication *Konkretno.ru* Kirill Metelev on June 19.[39] Russian insider sources claimed that Gorbunov previously headed the "Troll Factory" belonging to deceased Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and was responsible for promoting the Wagner mutiny online on June 23 and 24, 2023.[40] Metelev was reportedly a contractor of the Patriot media holding and was responsible for posting defamatory statements online, specifically attacking Prigozhin's stated enemy St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov.[41] Russian state media attempted to portray these arrests as unrelated to the anniversary of the Wagner mutiny, and Kremlin-run media outlet *Izvestia* cited an unnamed source in the Russian security structure as saying that these arrests "had nothing to do with Prigozhin." [42] St. Petersburg local outlet *Fontanka* reported that Gorbunov and Metelev were detained on the charges of extortion and blackmail for demanding money from a former St. Petersburg TV channel general director Alexander Malkevich.[43] Prigozhin reportedly dissolved Patriot media holding on June 30, 2023.[44]

Key Takeaways:

- The Islamic State (IS)'s Northern Caucasus branch Wilayat Kavkaz likely conducted a complex and coordinated attack against churches, synagogues, and law enforcement structures in the Republic of Dagestan on June 23.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) accused Ukrainian forces of conducting a short-range ATACMS strike against occupied Sevastopol on June 23. Russian milbloggers widely criticized the Russian MoD and Russia's occupation authorities in Crimea for failing to prevent the strike and sufficiently protect Russian civilians.
- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian motorized rifle regiment command post in Nekhoteevka, Belgorod Oblast.
- Recent drone footage showing a Russian soldier executing a wounded fellow servicemember exemplifies the brutal culture that is pervasive within the Russian Armed Forces.
- South Korea has adopted a firm approach against Russia in the wake of recently intensified Russo-North Korean cooperation, suggesting that Russian efforts to threaten Seoul into withholding aid from Ukraine have failed.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) detained two former senior employees of the Wagner Group-affiliated Patriot media holding on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the Wagner mutiny.
- Russian forces recently seized Shumy and advanced near Donetsk City and Robotyne.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on June 22 officially transferring the Cossack Cadet Corps and the Russian Naval Cadet Corps to the jurisdiction of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 22, 2024

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

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

June 22, 2024, 7pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:30pm ET on June 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces appear to be intensifying the tempo of their offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast while decreasing the rate of attacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast — consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian offensive operations in Kharkiv Oblast are primarily intended to fix and distract Ukrainian forces in order to allow Russian forces to intensify elsewhere in theater. Russian forces increased the intensity of assaults in the Toretsk-Horlivka direction (southwest of Chasiv Yar and northeast of Avdiivka) on the night of June 18 and maintained a relatively high rate of attacks in this area between June 19 to June 22, reportedly making several tactical gains in the area.[1] Russian forces have been generally inactive on this sector of the front throughout the course of 2024, so their activation and intensification are noteworthy. By contrast, the tempo of Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast has drastically decreased in recent days, particularly in comparison with the start of Russian offensive operations north and northeast of Kharkiv City in mid-

May 2024.[2] ISW has long assessed that the Russian command intended its offensive operation in Kharkiv Oblast to fix Ukrainian manpower and scarce materiel along the northern border to grant Russian forces opportunities to re-intensify offensive operations in other more critical areas of the theater, particularly in Donetsk Oblast.[3] Ukrainian sources have confirmed that some Ukrainian forces have redeployed units to the Kharkiv direction from Donetsk Oblast, so Russian forces may be exploiting this perceived weakness of Ukrainian lines to intensify attacks, particularly in the Toretsk-Horlivka direction.[4] Russian forces have additionally maintained a high rate of attacks in the Chasiv Yar direction and around Avdiivka since decreasing the tempo in Kharkiv Oblast, and may soon intensify attacks in this area if the Russian command identifies the coming weeks as an advantageous time to push in these areas before Ukrainian forces re-allocate reserves back to Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian sources have warned that Russia will conduct a summer offensive that will likely focus on Ukraine's east after pursuing offensive operations in the north intended to stretch Ukraine's scarce resources, and recent intensifications in Donetsk Oblast may indicate preparations for such a summer offensive, assuming it has not already begun.[5]

US policy continues to prohibit Ukrainian forces from striking legitimate military targets in Russian territory in range of Ukrainian HIMARS.

Recent reporting from the *Associated Press* and *Washington Post* indicates that US policy still prohibits Ukraine from striking Russian military targets that are not actively attacking or preparing to attack Ukraine.[6] Pentagon spokesperson Major Charlie Dietz told the *Washington Post* in a report published on June 21 that the US allows Ukraine to fire US-provided HIMARS equipped with GMLRS into Russia where Russian forces are attacking into Ukraine and that the rules of engagement for US-provided weapons in Russian territory are "not about geography or a certain radius." [7] US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan similarly stated on June 17 that "this is not about geography... If Russia is attacking or about to attack from its territory into Ukraine, it only makes sense to allow Ukraine to hit back against the forces that are hitting it from across the border." [8] These statements indicate that the US will only allow Ukrainian forces to strike Russian military targets if Russian targets first demonstrate that they are engaged in active combat operations or preparations for imminent combat operations. US restrictions likely force Ukrainian leadership to carefully determine whether or not a given target meets the aforementioned requirements before authorizing tactical fire missions. US policy still perseveres the majority of Russian sanctuary space by prohibiting Ukrainian forces from launching ATACMS missiles at any military targets in Russia.[9] No major Russian military airbases are in range of GMLRS, but many are within range of ATACMS.

Russian forces are exploiting the sanctuary that US policy still protects to support Russian combat operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and elsewhere in Ukraine.

The Russian Northern Grouping of Forces is leveraging the sanctuary to protect Russian brigade command posts and other assets outside of the range of HIMARS equipped with GLMRS north of Kharkiv Oblast. The *Associated Press* quoted a Ukrainian artillery commander on June 22 who stated that Ukrainian forces could target Russian brigade command points and the entire Russian Northern Grouping of Forces if the US approved Ukraine's use of ATACMS to strike Russian territory but currently cannot because Russia has deployed such command and control elements in an area 100 to 150 kilometers away from the front line.[10] US policy still prohibits Ukraine from using ATACMS anywhere in Russia. [11]

Russian air defenses will reduce the effectiveness of Ukrainian F-16s if the US does not allow Ukrainian forces to use ATACMS to destroy Russian air defense systems in Russian territory.

Ukrainian F-16 pilots will have to operate in a dangerous air space if US policy continues to provide a sanctuary in Russia that protects Russian forces from ATACMS. Russian air defenses will be able to cover up to 48 percent of Ukraine's air space if Russia deploys S-400 air defense launchers within Russia outside of the range of HIMARS armed with GMLRS rockets. Such Russian air defense deployments would complicate Ukraine's ability to use manned fixed-wing airpower closer to frontline areas or against areas from which Russian aircraft, drone, and missile threats emanate. ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces may be able to combine fixed-wing airpower in support of ground operations if the Ukrainian military receives a sufficient number of fighter jets, if Western partners train enough skilled pilots, and if Ukraine succeeds in degrading Russian air defense capabilities.[12]

The partial removal of the sanctuary has already had a net positive effect, underscoring the powerful latent potential a larger policy change could achieve.

The *Washington Post* reported that the Biden Administration's policy change allowing Ukrainian forces to strike into limited parts of Russia in late May 2024 — despite being quite limited — has allowed Ukraine to strike "areas where [Russian] equipment is concentrated and locations from where missile strikes are launched [against Ukraine]." The *Washington Post* quoted a commander of a reconnaissance battalion of Ukraine's 57th Brigade who stated that Russia has not conducted a single S-300 missile strike against Kharkiv (it is unclear whether the speaker meant Kharkiv City or Kharkiv Oblast) since the Biden Administration partially removed the sanctuary in late May 2024.[13] The *Associated Press* reported on June 22 that Ukrainian forces have struck Russian troops and air defense systems within 20 kilometers inside of Russian territory and quoted a Ukrainian artillery commander who stated that Ukrainian forces used HIMARS to destroy Russian columns along the international border that were awaiting orders to enter Ukraine.[14] Kharkiv City Mayor Ihor Terekhov told the *Washington Post* that the situation in Kharkiv City "massively changed" after the US partially removed restrictions.[15] The *Washington Post* report noted that Russian glide bomb strikes against Kharkiv Oblast have not decreased, highlighting the

need to allow Ukraine to strike Russian air bases and to augment Ukraine's air defense capabilities. **The West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.**

Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren announced on June 21 that the Netherlands and another unspecified country will supply Ukraine with a Patriot air defense system.[16] Ollongren stated that the Netherlands and the other unspecified country have been working for "some time" to collect the components to form a complete Patriot system. US President Joe Biden recently indicated that the US has secured commitments from five unspecified countries to provide Ukraine with additional Patriots and other air defense systems, and so far, Romania and now the Netherlands have confirmed their participation in this effort.[17]

Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on a series of leadership changes within the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) Fifth Service, which reportedly specializes in collecting intelligence within Russia and the former Soviet Union.[18] *Vazhnye Istorii* stated on June 22 that a former Russian special services employee and an acquaintance of the FSB's Fifth Service Head Colonel General Sergei Beseda stated that Alexei Komkov replaced Beseda as the head of the FSB's Fifth Service. *Vazhnye Istorii* stated that Beseda formally retired from his position of Fifth Service Head due to his age and became a personal advisor to Russian FSB Head Alexander Bortnikov. *Vazhnye Istorii*'s sources claimed that Komkov previously worked as Deputy Head of the FSB's counterintelligence service and that Komkov is affiliated with FSB First Deputy Director Sergei Korolev. Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly relied on intelligence from the Fifth Service when launching his invasion of Ukraine.[19]

Western countries have reportedly provided Ukraine with roughly 800 million euros (\$855.4 million) worth of Serbian-produced ammunition despite Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić's ongoing efforts to balance favor between Russia and the West. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 22 that it obtained estimates from an unspecified source that said that third-party countries have sent roughly 800 million euros worth of Serbian-produced ammunition to Ukraine since February 2022 and that Vučić confirmed that this number is "in the right ballpark" during an interview with FT. [20] Vučić clarified that Serbia does not export ammunition to Ukraine or Russia and that Serbia's clients in the US, Spain, and Czechia can allocate the ammunition as they see fit. Unnamed diplomats and analysts told FT that official Serbian government data purposely veils the flow of ammunition to Ukraine via third-party countries.

Satellite imagery confirmed that Ukrainian forces struck at least one Russian air defense training center in Krasnodar Krai during recent strikes on June 20 to 21.[21] Geolocated satellite imagery collected on June 22 shows a destroyed building and scorched fields at an air defense training center west of Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai, and footage shows fires and secondary explosions following the strike.[22] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported on June 21 that Ukrainian strikes damaged barracks and injured nine personnel at the 726th Air Defense Training Center in Vorontsovka, Krasnodar Krai (south of Rostov-on-Don).[23]

Select Russian milbloggers claimed that unnamed actors, implied to be Ukrainians, conducted a strike using ATACMS against Rostov Oblast, although ISW cannot independently confirm these reports.[24] All available media reporting and senior US government officials' statements strongly suggest that US policy still forbids Ukrainian forces from using US-provided ATACMS missiles to strike military targets anywhere in Russia.[25] ISW continues to assess that the US should allow Ukraine to strike all military targets in Russia's operational and deep rear areas with US-provided weapons.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces appear to be intensifying the tempo of their offensive operations in Donetsk Oblast while decreasing the rate of attacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast — consistent with ISW's assessment that Russian offensive operations in Kharkiv Oblast are primarily intended to fix and distract Ukrainian forces in order to allow Russian forces to intensify elsewhere in theater.
- US policy continues to prohibit Ukrainian forces from striking legitimate military targets in Russian territory in range of Ukrainian HIMARS.
- Russian forces are exploiting the sanctuary that US policy still protects to support Russian combat operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and elsewhere in Ukraine.
- Russian air defenses will reduce the effectiveness of Ukrainian F-16s if the US does not allow Ukrainian forces to use ATACMS to destroy Russian air defense systems in Russian territory.
- The partial removal of the Russian sanctuary has already had a net positive effect, underscoring the powerful latent potential a larger policy change could achieve.
- Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren announced on June 21 that the Netherlands and another unspecified country will supply Ukraine with a Patriot air defense system.
- Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on a series of leadership changes within the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) Fifth Service, which reportedly specializes in collecting intelligence within Russia and the former Soviet Union.

- Western countries have reportedly provided Ukraine with roughly 800 million euros (\$855.4 million) worth of Serbian-produced ammunition despite Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić's ongoing efforts to balance favor between Russia and the West.
- Satellite imagery confirmed that Ukrainian forces struck at least one Russian air defense training center in Krasnodar Krai during recent strikes on June 20 to 21.
- Select Russian milbloggers claimed that unnamed actors, implied to be Ukrainians, conducted a strike using ATACMS against Rostov Oblast, although ISW cannot independently confirm these reports.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, Chasiv Yar, and Avdiivka.
- Russian law enforcement and security agencies continue working with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to recruit those accused of criminal offenses into the Russian military, likely as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 21, 2024

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Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

June 21, 2024, 6:30pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to invoke nuclear threats as part of his ongoing information campaign to discourage further Western support for Ukraine and undermine the international community's efforts to cohere its strategic vision for defeating Russia's war of conquest against Ukraine. Putin claimed during a speech to graduating Russian officers on June 21 that Russia plans to further develop its nuclear triad as a "guarantee of strategic deterrence" and to maintain the balance of power in the world.[1] Putin noted that Russia is also working to increase its conventional combat capabilities and defense industrial production. Putin claimed during a press conference in Vietnam on June 20 that Russia is considering "lowering the threshold" for nuclear use in Russia's nuclear doctrine and that a possible future strategic defeat of Russian forces on the battlefield in Ukraine would result in the "end of [Russia's] statehood." [2] ISW noted that Putin may have falsely equated a Russian defeat in Ukraine with an existential threat to the Russian state in order to invoke an "exceptional case" in which existing Russian nuclear doctrine would allow for the use of nuclear weapons.[3] Putin's June 21 statement appears to be the continuation of his recent information operation intended to sabotage the West's efforts to develop a common strategic objective of decisively defeating Russia's invasion as the West's envisioned end state for the war in Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that the threat of nuclear escalation is a core aspect of Russia's ability to manipulate foreign decision-makers and is highly unlikely to result in actual nuclear escalation due to nuclear and conventional deterrence.[4]

Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov continued to emphasize Russia's initiative to create an alternative "Eurasian security architecture," likely as part of ongoing efforts to establish a coalition of friendly states to act as an alternative to the West and undermine NATO. Putin reiterated on June 21 his intention to create "equal and indivisible security in Eurasia." [5] Putin claimed that Russia is ready to discuss Eurasian security issues with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and BRICS and claimed that Russia is ready to have discussions with European and NATO countries "when they are ready." Lavrov similarly emphasized Russia's effort to form a "Eurasian security architecture to replace... the Euro-Atlantic [security system]" at a June 21 Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) foreign ministers meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan.[6] Lavrov further promoted the need for joint efforts to create a new Eurasian security architecture and coordination with other unspecified multilateral organizations on the Eurasian continent.[7] Lavrov is likely referencing Russian efforts to increase cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as Putin signaled his interest in developing relations with ASEAN during his state visit to Vietnam on June 20.[8] Putin notably included Vietnam - a country not typically included in political conceptions of Eurasia - in addition to North Korea in his proposed formation of a new Eurasian security system, suggesting that Putin seeks to include Southeast Asia into this alternative Eurasian security structure by leveraging select Southeast Asian countries' historically friendly ties with the Soviet Union. Putin first laid the informational groundwork for this Eurasian security structure during his visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in May 2024 before proposing it in a speech on June 14, in which he claimed that the "Euro-Atlantic security system" is collapsing and that Western "schemes for security and prosperity in Europe do not work." [9] ISW continues to assess that Putin and other senior Russian officials will likely continue to amplify Russia's efforts to create a coalition of countries that Putin could use to posture as an alternative to NATO while also supporting ongoing Kremlin information operations to falsely portray Western countries as Ukraine's only supporters.[10]

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) criticized South Korean and Japanese objections to the Russian-North Korean strategic partnership agreement and directly tied the agreement to Russian President Vladimir Putin's "Eurasian security architecture" initiative. South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported on June 21 that South Korean government sources stated that South Korea may send 155mm artillery shells and unspecified air defense systems to Ukraine, after South Korean National Security Director Chang Ho-jin stated on June 20 that South Korea would respond to

the Russian-North Korean agreement by reconsidering its policy preventing it from sending aid to Ukraine.[11] The South Korean MFA summoned Russian Ambassador to South Korea Georgiy Zinovyev on June 21 to urge Russia to stop its military cooperation with North Korea.[12] Zinovyev accused South Korea of trying to "threaten and blackmail" Russia and that Russia's cooperation with North Korea is not directed against any other country and claimed that Russian-North Korean cooperation helps strengthen stability on the Korean peninsula.[13] Director of the Russian MFA's Third Department for Asia Lyudmila Vorobyova met on June 21 with Director of the Japanese MFA's Europe Department Masashi Nakagome following the introduction of a new round of Japanese sanctions targeting Russia.[14] The Russian MFA claimed that the Japanese sanctions are the "next step towards the complete destruction" of Russian-Japanese relations, which the Russian MFA claimed are at an all-time low.[15] The Russian MFA claimed that Russia would respond to the sanctions with "tough and painful countermeasures." The Russian MFA responded to Nakagome's protests about the Russian-North Korean strategic partnership by outlining Putin's June 14 initiative for the creation of "a new continent-wide security architecture" in Eurasia.

Ukrainian forces struck oil refineries and military targets in Bryansk and Astrakhan oblasts, Krasnodar Krai, and occupied Crimea on the night of June 20 to 21. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 21 that Ukrainian drones targeted the Afipsky, Ilsky, and Krasnodar oil refineries in Krasnodar Krai and the Astrakhan oil refinery in Astrakhan Oblast and conducted strikes on unspecified Russian radar and electronic warfare (EW) stations in Bryansk Oblast and occupied Crimea on the night of June 20 to 21 and that Ukrainian forces are still conducting a battlefield damage assessment.[16] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces also struck a Shahed-136/131 storage facility, military training facilities, and several drone communication and control posts in Krasnodar Krai. The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters reported that Ukrainian drones struck unspecified targets in Temryuk and Yeysk Raions and the Ilsky oil refinery in Seversk Raion and that debris from a Ukrainian drone fell near Volna.[17] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defenses destroyed six Ukrainian naval drones in the Black Sea, 70 drones over Crimea, and 43 drones over Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 20 to 21.[18] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces launched the drones in several waves of drone strikes beginning on the evening of June 20 and warned that Ukrainian forces may conduct more large-scale drone strikes in the near future.[19] The Ukrainian General Staff also confirmed that Ukrainian forces and Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted successful drone strikes against the Tambovnefteprodukt fuel and lubricant warehouse in Tambov Oblast and the Lukoil-Yugnefteprodukt "Enemaska" oil depot in Adygea Republic on the night of June 19 to 20, as ISW reported.[20]

Russian milbloggers reported that Ukrainian forces simultaneously used naval and aerial drones during the Krasnodar Krai strike and overwhelmed Russian defenses, causing a Russian air defense system to accidentally shoot down a Russian helicopter in a friendly fire incident. Several Russian milbloggers claimed on June 21 that Russian friendly fire destroyed a Russian Ka-29 helicopter and the helicopter's crew while defending against Ukrainian drone strikes near Krasnodar Krai.[21] The milbloggers claimed that Russian forces were using helicopters to search for Ukrainian naval drones while Russian air defense systems were simultaneously attempting to shoot down Ukrainian aerial drones and that a Russian Pantsir air defense system accidentally downed a Russian helicopter, reportedly due to a malfunction in the system's Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) system.[22] The milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have previously used missiles to similarly overload Russian air defenses and criticized the Russian military for not improving its IFF systems to prevent these incidents.

Moscow State University (MGU) announced on June 21 that it has opened enrollment for a master's program on "strategic communications, information, and hybrid wars" under the guidance of Russian ultranationalist and former State Duma Deputy Zakhar Prilepin and other select Duma deputies.[23] MGU stated that the master's program has been part of the political science faculty since 2022, but that it is now being offered in an improved and "modernized form," and that Prilepin's team and other Duma deputies will participate in developing and presumably teaching the course. Graduates of the two-year program will receive a master's in "Conflictology" and learn about "national information sovereignty and countering the operations of hybrid, cognitive, and intellectual wars." [24] MGU admitted its first cohort of students to this program in 2022, but later reportedly ended the program in December 2023 due to financial concerns.[25] MGU's June 21 announcement, however, suggests that the university has been able to restart the program under the supervision of prominent ultranationalist voices such as Prilepin. ISW previously noted that the MGU master's program was likely intended to teach and promote Russian objectives for the war in Ukraine, setting multi-generational conditions to strengthen the ideology underpinning Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to invoke nuclear threats as part of his ongoing information campaign to discourage further Western support for Ukraine and undermine the international community's efforts to cohere its strategic vision for defeating Russia's war of conquest against Ukraine.**
- **Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov continued to emphasize Russia's initiative to create an alternative "Eurasian security architecture," likely as part of**

ongoing efforts to establish a coalition of friendly states to act as an alternative to the West and undermine NATO.

- The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) criticized South Korean and Japanese objections to the Russian-North Korean strategic partnership agreement and directly tied the agreement to Russian President Vladimir Putin's "Eurasian security architecture" initiative.
- Ukrainian forces struck oil refineries and military targets in Bryansk and Astrakhan oblasts, Krasnodar Krai, and occupied Crimea on the night of June 20 to 21.
- Moscow State University (MGU) announced on June 21 that it has opened enrollment for a master's program on "strategic communications, information, and hybrid wars" under the guidance of Russian ultranationalist and former State Duma Deputy Zakhar Prilepin and other select Duma deputies.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupyansk, southwest of Svatove, and west and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) appears to be taking steps to address known bureaucratic issues as part of its efforts to formalize irregular Russian formations.
- An investigation by Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* highlights how Russia is importing Russian judges to serve in courts in occupied Ukraine, supporting Russian efforts to control the judiciary while also providing a convenient cover for the resettlement of Russian citizens into occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 20, 2024

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

June 20, 2024, 8:30pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a major information operation during his recent visit to North Korea and Vietnam on June 18 and 19 aimed at sabotaging efforts by Ukraine's partners to clearly define a common strategic objective and strategy to decisively defeat Russia's illegal war of conquest in Ukraine. Ukraine's partners undertook several important steps in mid-June to cohere a common strategy and define the desired strategic outcome of the war. Over 80 Western and international officials recently established a principled position on supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity as the foundation of lasting peace in Ukraine in a communique adopted during the Ukraine-led Global Peace Summit on June 16.[1] Ukraine also signed security agreements with the United States and Japan for 10 years on June 13, and numerous partner states reaffirmed their long-term support for Ukraine within the Group of 7 (G7) and the Ramstein formats. [2] US President Joe Biden stated that the United States will continue supporting Ukraine so that Ukraine "has victory and that Russia does not prevail" when discussing the US-Ukraine security agreement.[3] Putin's strategy for winning the war relies on the Kremlin's ability to mislead the United States, the European Union, and Ukraine's international allies into ceasing support for Ukraine and abandoning key principles of international law – respect for state sovereignty and the inviolability of territorial integrity.[4] Allied strategic clarity and commitment to enabling Ukraine to decisively defeat Russia on the battlefield in Ukraine greatly undermines Putin's center of gravity – and his ability to shape the will and decisions of allied decision makers.

Putin implicitly threatened to use nuclear weapons if the West enables Ukraine to decisively defeat Russia in order to undermine the international community's cohering strategic vision of support for Ukraine. Putin stated in a press conference on June 20 following his trip to North Korea and Vietnam that Russia is considering making changes to its nuclear doctrine, claiming that Russia is aware that an unnamed "potential adversary" is working on new elements "related to lowering the threshold nuclear weapon use." [5] Putin's statement was likely partly in response to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's June 17 remarks that NATO members are discussing increased nuclear readiness in the face of growing threats from Russia and China, even though Stoltenberg did not discuss lowering the threshold for nuclear weapon use.[6] The Russian nuclear doctrine calls for Russia to only use nuclear weapons in the event of "exceptional cases" of threats to Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Putin notably defined Russia's possible strategic defeat in Ukraine as the "end of [Russia's] statehood" following his mention of lowering thresholds for nuclear weapon usage.[7] Putin added that a defeat on the battlefield would signify the end of the "thousand-year history" of the Russian state and that Russia is better off fighting until the end. Putin's rhetoric deliberately aims to present Russia's aggression in Ukraine as an existential war for Russia's sovereignty, and Putin likely invoked the possibility of lowering the threshold for nuclear weapon use to imply that he reserves the right to use nuclear weapons if his forces are decisively defeated on the frontlines in order to deter Ukraine's allies from reaching a common strategic objective of decisively defeating Russia's invasion of Ukraine — an outcome which is in the West's interests.[8]

Putin's nuclear threat is part of an ongoing Kremlin nuclear blackmail campaign aimed at dissuading Ukraine's allies from decisively committing to defeating Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and is therefore highly unlikely to result in actual nuclear escalation. A Russian strategic defeat in Ukraine does not threaten Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity (but it can threaten the stability of Putin's regime). The Kremlin did not engage in nuclear escalation following Russia's

devastating defeats around Kyiv, Kharkiv, or Kherson oblasts in 2022, and these defeats certainly did not threaten Russian sovereignty or territorial integrity. Putin's own nuclear threats have been riddled with contradictions since 2022. Putin claimed that Ukraine was not aggressive towards Russia but was threatening the occupied "Donbas republics" before Putin illegally annexed them.[9] Putin also noted in his discussion of the potential changes to the Russian nuclear doctrine that Russia does not need the ability to launch a preventative nuclear strike. Both of these statements are incompatible with the notion that Russia is fighting an existential war. Putin indicated that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with Western-provided weapons do not cross a supposed Russian "red line" that would result in Russian nuclear escalation after Ukrainian forces struck Belgorod Oblast with HIMARS armed with GMLRS.[10] ISW has also routinely assessed that the threat of a nuclear escalation will continue to be the core asset of Russia's ability to manipulate the perceptions of foreign decision makers via its reflexive control campaign.[11] ISW continues to assess that Russia cannot defeat Ukraine or the West — and will likely lose — if the West mobilizes its resources to resist the Kremlin.[12]

South Korea responded to the Russian-North Korean comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on June 20 and stated that it would reconsider its previous ban on sending lethal military assistance to Ukraine. South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency* reported that South Korean National Security Director Chang Ho-jin stated that South Korea will reconsider its stance on sending aid to Ukraine following the Russian-North Korean agreement and that South Korea is "gravely" concerned" and condemns the agreement.[13] South Korea has notably had a long-standing policy that prevents it from directly transferring arms into active conflict zones—a policy that has forced South Korea to send artillery shells to Ukraine via indirect transfers using third party intermediary states.[14] Chang also noted that any Russian military-technical cooperation with North Korea violates a series of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and will result in unspecified corresponding retaliatory measures from South Korea. Chang stated that South Korea will also sanction four ships, five organizations, and eight individuals involved in the transfer of weapons and oil between Russia and North Korea in response to the agreement. North Korean state outlet *Korean Central News Agency* published the full text of the agreement on June 20, which includes provisions for "immediate military and other assistance... in the event of an armed attack by any state of several states" and "joint activities to strengthen [each country's] defense capabilities... to prevent war." [15] Several Russian and South Korean sources noted that the agreement is almost identical to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance that the Soviet Union and North Korea signed in 1961.[16]

Russian President Vladimir Putin simultaneously attempted to downplay aspects of the Russia-North Korea agreement potentially in response to South Korea's concerns during a June 20 press conference in Vietnam. Putin reiterated several times during the press conference that the Russian-North Korean agreement mirrors the language of a previous security agreement that both countries signed in 1961 and that the agreement is only a "reproduction" of the terms of the 1961 agreement.[17] Putin stated that South Korea has "nothing to worry about" regarding the new agreement as long as South Korea does not perpetrate acts of aggression against North Korea. Putin threatened, however, that it would be a "very big mistake" for South Korea to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine and that Russia would take unspecified actions in response to such a policy. Putin claimed that the new agreement's clause on providing mutual security assistance does not apply to the war in Ukraine because Ukraine committed acts of aggression towards the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR/LNR) before Russia illegally annexed the territories and that Russia hopes that this agreement will be a "restraining factor" that prevents the situation on the Korean peninsula from intensifying. Putin also claimed that Russia has not asked anyone to "use [their] capabilities" in Ukraine and no one has offered to help Russia in this way, insinuating that there is no threat of third parties getting militarily involved in Ukraine. Putin may have tempered his rhetoric about Russia's June 19 agreement with North Korea in order to quell South Korean concern about the agreement and lull South Korea into reassurance and away from reconsidering its policy on aiding Ukraine. ISW has previously observed that Russia at times seems to be trying to mend its relationship with South Korea to mitigate the impacts of a growing relationship with North Korea, and Putin may have followed up his visit to North Korea with such statements in an effort to appease Seoul.[18]

Putin also used the press conference to reiterate a series of known information operations feigning Russia's interest in good faith negotiations with Ukraine, including by characterizing Russia's offensive operation into Kharkiv Oblast as solely defensive. Putin claimed that he expected the West to reject his June 14 demands for Ukraine's capitulation as a prerequisite for his envisioned peace negotiations and suggested that Russia has previously unsuccessfully presented these demands during "behind-the-scenes negotiations." [19] Putin claimed that "sensible politicians" will realize that Putin's demands for Ukraine to "completely withdraw" its forces from the administrative borders of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts and officially abandon its intention to join NATO are "realistic" and acceptable conditions for peace. Putin's terms for Ukraine's capitulation violate the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and other cornerstones of international law. Putin stated that any peace negotiations predicated on Russia withdrawing its forces from occupied Ukraine will "never happen." Russian officials made similar claims about how Kherson City would "forever" remain in Russian occupation before Russian forces abandoned Kherson City in November 2022.[20] Putin reiterated his claims that Russia remains open to peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, placing the onus on Ukraine and the West for the lack of progress toward peace negotiations despite the fact that Russian officials, including Putin, continue to publicly signal that they are unwilling to participate in good faith peace negotiations with Ukraine.[21] Putin also reiterated claims that Russian forces are conducting

offensive operations in the Kharkiv direction to defend Belgorod Oblast from Ukrainian shelling and that Russian forces have "no goals of approaching Kharkiv [City]."

Putin also met with Vietnamese President Tô Lâm, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính, and General Secretary of the Central Committee of Vietnam's Community Party Nguyễn Phú Trọng during his visit and discussed bilateral relations and the Soviet Union's and Russia's support of Vietnam during the 20th and 21st centuries.[22] ISW noted on June 19 that Putin appears to be pursuing a coalition of friendly states with historically warm ties to the Soviet Union that could form the basis of an alternative to the West and the current world order.[23]

Russian forces used the new FAB-3000 M-54 bomb with a unified planning and correction module (UMPC) to strike Ukrainian positions in Kharkiv Oblast for the first time, representing a new Russian capability with a high potential for destruction if Russian forces continue to be able to use such weapons uninhibited. Russian sources widely amplified footage of the first-ever FAB-3000 M-54 strike against a reported Ukrainian deployment point in Lyptsi, Kharkiv Oblast, on June 20, noting that the bomb caused substantial destruction even though it landed 10 meters away from its intended target.[24] Former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu first announced the serial production of FAB-3000 M-54s, dumb-bomb variants weighing over 3,000 kilograms that can be converted into guided glide bombs with the addition of the UMPC modification, during a visit to Nizhny Novgorod Oblast in March 2024.[25] Russian sources previously praised the production of FAB-3000s but noted that their weight and general dimensions would make them very difficult for most Russian tactical aircraft to deliver.[26] The fact that Russian forces have figured out how to launch FAB-3000s is a significant development and will increase the destructive potential of Russia's ongoing glide bomb attacks against Ukrainian forces and infrastructure. Russian forces have already increased guided and unguided glide bomb use against Ukraine, particularly in Kharkiv Oblast, to devastating effect, and should Russian forces be able to launch massive barrages of FAB-3000s (or even heavier guided glide bombs) they will be able to cause even more widespread damage to Ukrainian frontline positions and critical infrastructure.[27] Russian milbloggers noted that the June 20 strike was not particularly accurate, but the destruction radius of the FAB-3000 will compensate for its lack of accuracy, especially if Russian forces are able to use them at scale uncontested as the Russian Air Forces has with 500-kilogram glide bombs.[28]

The United States made a policy change to prioritize delivering Patriot air defense interceptors to Ukraine against the backdrop of the increasing threat of Russian guided glide bomb use in Ukraine. US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby stated on June 20 that the US is going to "reprioritize" the export of Patriot missiles so that the missiles "rolling off the production line" will go straight to Ukraine.[29] Kirby characterized the decision as "difficult but necessary" to ensure that hundreds of Patriot and NASAM munitions produced for the next 16 months would go to Ukraine, regardless of which country ordered them. Kirby stated that Ukraine will receive the first shipments of Patriot missiles by the end of Summer 2024 and that other countries that ordered Patriot missiles will receive them on a "delayed timeline." Kirby stated that other countries impacted by the delay were "broadly supportive" of the decision to prioritize Ukraine's air defense needs.[30] The Romanian Supreme National Defense Council announced on June 20 that Romania will donate one Patriot system to Ukraine due to Russia's large-scale strikes on Ukrainian energy and civil infrastructure.[31] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba have recently emphasized Ukraine's need for more Patriot systems.[32] ISW continues to assess that Ukraine's ability to defend itself against devastating Russian glide bomb strikes is heavily contingent on Ukraine's ability to target Russian aircraft within Russian airspace using US-provided air defense systems before Russian aircraft can launch strikes at Ukrainian cities, critical infrastructure, and frontline positions.[33]

US policy still prohibits Ukrainian forces from striking military targets with US-provided weapons in the operational and deep rear of Russian territory. *Politico* reported on June 20 that anonymous US government officials reiterated that the United States permits Ukrainian forces to strike Russian forces where Russian forces attack into Ukraine across the international border, likely meaning the international border near Ukraine's Sumy, Chernihiv, and Kharkiv oblasts.[34] This report does not signify a change in US policy. The report makes clearer the contours of current US policy: **Ukrainian forces may use HIMARS armed with GMLRS to strike Russian forces preparing to or actively attacking Ukraine, but likely may not strike all legitimate Russian military targets in range of Ukrainian HIMARS using GMLRS in Belgorod, Kursk, and Bryansk oblasts.** The *Politico* report acknowledged that Ukrainian and European officials have urged the Biden Administration to further loosen its restrictions and allow Ukraine to strike all legitimate military targets in Russia.[35] US policy still protects the vast majority of Russia's operational rear and deep rear, and US policy still forbids Ukrainian forces from using ATACMS anywhere in Russia.[36] The Biden Administration's partial removal of Russian sanctuary is a step in the right direction but is by itself inadequate and unable to disrupt Russian operations at scale. ISW assesses that the West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[37]

The Russian military's increased over-reliance on infantry-heavy frontal assault tactics has greatly degraded the distinctions between various Russian combat services on the battlefield in Ukraine, minimizing the operational efficacy of frontline troops. Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets reported on June 20 that he gained access to a 2024 training manual for

Russian airborne (VDV) troops, entitled "Combat use of an assault company (group) in an offensive." [38] Mashovets stated that the training manual is meant to integrate battlefield experiences from the war in Ukraine into VDV training doctrine and noted that the tactical solution to contemporary frontline challenges that the manual offers is the creation of dedicated VDV assault detachments, usually at the company level, pulled from units at the brigade-, regiment-, and battalion-level.[39] According to the manual, the assault groups should seize Ukrainian strong points and individual firing points, as well as fortified terrain features, and ideally operate within a larger "assault detachment" or "assault battalion." [40] Mashovets emphasized that Russian high command expects for these company-sized assault groups have a standard service life of two days maximum, as this is the timeframe in which the Russian high command has calculated that the assault group will completely expend its combat capabilities during attritional combat operations.

The concept of dedicated assault companies pulled from existing regiments, brigades, and battalions is not a novelty for Russian forces in Ukraine, and indeed has become the prevalent tactic of attack along most of the frontline for over a year, apart from occasional (mostly unsuccessful) mechanized assaults. ISW first began reporting on the creation of such specialized assault detachments within non-VDV Russian forces in February 2023 and observed the use of such assault-focused detachments in infantry-heavy frontal assaults leading to high levels of attrition throughout the course of 2023.[41] The fact that VDV forces are now relying on the same frontal assault tactic as ordinary Russian infantry and mechanized forces is notable, and further suggests that the VDV and other formations that were previously considered "elite" within the Russian military prior to 2022 have lost those distinctions due to the way that the Russian command writ large is prosecuting the war.[42] The codification of the assault group into VDV training doctrine further supports ISW's long-standing assessment that the way that Russia is fighting in Ukraine has blurred previously relevant distinctions among various services, largely reducing all frontline troops to understrength and low-quality motorized rifle units.[43] A prominent Russian commentator, who previously served as an instructor for a "Storm-Z" assault unit (which notably used similar tactics to those outlined in the VDV training manual), criticized Russia's reliance on attritional infantry-led frontal assaults on June 20, noting that this practice maintains constant pressure on Ukrainian defenders but does not achieve operationally significant results.[44] The current style of Russian assaults in Ukraine, however, corresponds with Russian President Vladimir Putin's recently articulated theory of Russian victory in Ukraine, which suggests that all Russian forces need to do is gradually achieve creeping advances while keeping tension on Ukraine and its partners in order to win a war of attrition against Ukraine.[45]

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used a working visit to the Eastern Military District in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai to create the appearance of a strict but engaged defense minister.

Belousov visited the military camp of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade, residential buildings for military personnel, the Okeansky military sanatorium, and a branch of the Nakhimov Naval School in Vladivostok on June 20.[46] Belousov issued instructions concerning multiple construction projects at these facilities and stated that the rehabilitation of Russian servicemembers and the allotment of housing to Russian servicemembers' families are priorities of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). Belousov repeatedly emphasized the need to complete these construction projects before the set deadlines and even threatened the director of a construction company that was touring the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade's military camp with Belousov with criminal liability should the construction company not complete the project on time.[47] Belousov also notably spoke about Russian servicemembers' possible return home from the war in Ukraine for the first time, stating twice on his tour that unspecified Russian soldiers will start to return home and that Russian authorities need to make sure that everything is "worthy" and "ready" for the soldiers.[48] The Russian decree on partial mobilization does not allow for the termination of mobilized Russian servicemembers' contracts before the end of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine, however, and it is unclear if Belousov was speaking about the return of soldiers in near or longer term, or purely theoretically.[49] The Kremlin has repeatedly publicly congratulated and awarded the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade over the course of the war in Ukraine, despite the fact that the unit has suffered significant losses and has had to reconstitute multiple times.[50] The Russian MoD may be paying special attention to the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade's military and social facilities in Vladivostok in order to appease the soldiers and their families who may be angered by the unit's heavy losses. Belousov's strict orders about the timely fulfillment of military construction projects may also be part of efforts to create the appearance that Belousov is spearheading an anti-corruption campaign in the Russian MoD.[51]

Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against at least two oil facilities in Russia on the night of June 19 to 20.

Ukrainian outlet *RBK-Ukraine* reported on June 20 that sources stated that Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted drone strikes against the Tambovnefteprodukt fuel and lubricants warehouse in Tambov Oblast and the Lukoil-Yugnefteprodukt "Enemskaya" oil depot in the Adygea Republic.[52] Geolocated footage shows fires at the oil depot in Platonovka, Tambov Oblast and the oil refinery in Enem, Adygea Republic.[53] Tambov Oblast Head Maskim Egorov acknowledged that a Ukrainian drone caused an oil tank at the Platonovka oil depot to catch fire. [54] Adygea Republic Head Murat Kumpilov stated that a Ukrainian drone strike started a fire at the Enem oil depot.[55] The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters claimed that a drone fell on a house in Slavyansk-on-Kuban, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces may have been targeting the Slavyansk Eko oil refinery in Slavyansk-on-Kuban.[56] Other Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces struck the Afipsky oil refinery near Neftekachka, Krasnodar Krai.[57] The Krasnodar Krai Operational Headquarters claimed that information about a fire at the Afipsky refinery is not reliable.[58] ISW cannot independently verify that the Ukrainian strike on the Afipsky refinery,

and the Afipsky and Enem oil refineries are notably fewer than 10 kilometers apart from each other. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed six drones over the Adygea Republic and three drones over Krasnodar Krai but did not mention activity over Tambov Oblast.[59]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a major information operation during his recent visit to North Korea and Vietnam on June 18 and 19 aimed at sabotaging efforts by Ukraine's partners to clearly define a common strategic objective and strategy to decisively defeat Russia's illegal war of conquest in Ukraine.
- Putin implicitly threatened to use nuclear weapons if the West enables Ukraine to decisively defeat Russia in order to undermine the international community's cohering strategic vision of support for Ukraine.
- Putin's nuclear threat is part of an ongoing Kremlin nuclear blackmail campaign aimed at dissuading Ukraine's allies from decisively committing to defeating Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and is therefore highly unlikely to result in actual nuclear escalation.
- South Korea responded to the Russian-North Korean comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on June 20 and stated that it will reconsider its previous ban on sending lethal military assistance to Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin simultaneously attempted to downplay aspects of the Russia-North Korea agreement potentially in response to South Korea's concerns during a June 20 press conference in Vietnam.
- Putin also met with Vietnamese President Tô Lâm, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính, and General Secretary of the Central Committee of Vietnam's Community Party Nguyễn Phú Trọng during his visit and discussed bilateral relations and the Soviet Union's and Russia's support of Vietnam during the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Russian forces used the new FAB-3000 M-54 bomb with a unified planning and correction module (UMPC) to strike Ukrainian positions in Kharkiv Oblast for the first time, representing a new Russian capability with a high potential for destruction if Russian forces continue to be able to use such weapons uninhibited.
- The United States made a policy change to prioritize delivering Patriot air defense interceptors to Ukraine against the backdrop of the increasing threat of Russian guided glide bomb use in Ukraine.
- US policy still prohibits Ukrainian forces from striking military targets with US-provided weapons in the operational and deep rear of Russian territory.
- The Russian military's increased over-reliance on infantry-heavy frontal assault tactics has greatly degraded the distinctions between various Russian combat services on the battlefield in Ukraine, minimizing the operational efficacy of frontline troops.
- Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov used a working visit to the Eastern Military District in Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai to create the appearance of a strict but engaged defense minister.
- Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against at least two oil facilities in Russia on the night of June 19 to 20.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.
- Russian milbloggers complained that the Russian military command is failing to properly incentivize Russian servicemen to fight and explain the purpose of the Russian full-scale invasion to its troops.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 19, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Angelica Evans, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

June 19, 2024, 9:15pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2:45pm ET on June 19. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 20 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in Pyongyang on June 19, likely aimed in part to use military-technical cooperation with North Korea as a threat against the West to discourage further support for Ukraine.[1] Putin arrived with a delegation of Russian ministers in Pyongyang on June 19 and signed the agreement with Kim, but neither Russian nor North Korean officials have published the official text of this agreement as of the time of this publication. Putin and Kim each spoke about the agreement, claiming that it broadly covers goals and guidelines for deepening Russian–North Korean long-term relations in the political, economic, trade, cultural, humanitarian, and security fields.[2] Putin specified that the strategic partnership agreement also provides for "mutual assistance in the event of aggression" against either Russia or North Korea, then immediately criticized conversations in the West about allowing Ukraine to strike areas in Russia with Western-provided long-range weapons and F-16 jets. Putin then concluded that "in this regard,"

Russia does "not rule out the development of military-technical cooperation" with North Korea. Putin likely intended to signal that should the US lift its restrictions against Ukrainian using US-provided ATACMS to strike Russian territory or other restrictions against using F-16s for the same purposes, Russia will likely deepen cooperation with North Korea in the sphere of military technologies such as missiles, other arms, and satellites through the legal framework provided in this new agreement. Putin and other Kremlin officials will likely continue to leverage this threat as debates about permitting Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian territory continue and may also expand this threat to other issues that the Kremlin has historically framed as "escalatory" or "provocations" against Russia. Russia will likely continue to deepen its cooperation with North Korea, regardless of Western self-imposed restrictions on military aid provisions to Ukraine and policies restricting Ukrainian long-range strikes against Russian sanctuary, as Russia had been doing throughout its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian and North Korean governments largely framed the agreement as evidence of their mutual support as part of a common struggle against the West and signaled that Russia and North Korea share a goal to challenge the West and the current world order.[3] Putin claimed that Russia and North Korea both aim to create "a more just and democratic multipolar world order" and that both countries pursue "independent foreign policy" — setting them apart from Western states. [4] Putin also credited Kim with holding an "objective and balanced view" about the war in Ukraine. Kim and Putin also emphasized the "traditionally friendly and good" relations between Russia and North Korea "based on the glorious traditions of common history" — continuing to invoke the historical memory of the Soviet Union's support of North Korea to appeal to the propaganda of the Kim regime and the North Korean people. North Korean state media published readouts similarly emphasizing Russia's and North Korea's common cause, emphasizing that North Korea stands in solidarity with "the sacred cause of the Russian army and people who are proudly advancing towards justice and truth." [5] The Kremlin published extensive images of Putin's visit to Pyongyang, including a lavish military-patriotic parade, North Korean civilians holding flowers and celebrating Putin's arrival, and Kim personally escorting Putin to and from his plane on the tarmac — all underscoring the two regimes' emphasis on friendship and their determination to support each other. [6] Putin's visit and the Russian–North Korean strategic cooperation agreement help legitimize Kim's regime domestically and abroad, as ISW has previously noted, and Putin also discussed increasing trade between Russia and North Korea, posturing that improving trade and infrastructure also benefits their shared partner, the People's Republic of China (PRC). [7]

Putin is pursuing a coalition of friendly states with historically warm ties to the Soviet Union to act as an alternative to the West and the current world order. Putin published an article in the Vietnamese state newspaper *Nhân Dân* on June 19 ahead of his state visit to Vietnam largely reusing the same informational lines as his June 18 article in the North Korean state newspaper *Rodong Sinmun*. [8] Putin invoked the historical memory of the Soviet Union's support for Vietnam during the Vietnam War, which Putin described as a "heroic struggle against foreign invaders," and noted that it is the 30th anniversary of the Treaty of Basic Principles of Friendly Relations between Russia and Vietnam. [9] Putin praised Vietnam for pursuing an "independent foreign policy" and supporting a world order based on "principles of equality between nations and non-interference in domestic affairs," echoing his praises for North Korea on June 18 and 19. Putin also claimed that, like North Korea, Vietnam shares Russia's views on the formation of a new system of "equal and indivisible Eurasian security" — though Vietnam, like much of Southeast Asia, is not typically included in political conceptions of Eurasia. [10] Putin laid the informational groundwork for this Eurasian security structure during his visit to the PRC in May 2024 before proposing it in a speech on June 14, in which he claimed that the "Euro-Atlantic security system" is collapsing and that Western "schemes for security and prosperity in Europe do not work." [11] Putin likely aims to use the historical memory of positive relations with the Soviet Union and previous assistance to other states to form a coalition of countries that Putin could attempt to posture as a feasible alternative to NATO and bolster the Kremlin's ongoing information operations attempting to falsely portray Western countries as Ukraine's only supporters whereas the rest of the world stands behind Russia.

Russian government officials announced their intention on June 19 to suspend Russia's participation in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs First Deputy Head Vladimir Dzhaharov announced that the committee is proposing to suspend Russia's participation in the OSCE PA and the payment of Russia's membership fees. [12] Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko announced her support for the initiative and ordered the committee to prepare a draft decision for the upcoming July 3 plenary session. [13] Matviyenko cited Romanian authorities' recent decision to not issue visas to the Russian OSCE PA delegation as the "latest example" of the OSCE PA's anti-Russian activities. Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin instructed the Duma's International Affairs Committee to prepare a corresponding resolution for consideration in the near future and accused the OSCE PA of being a "coven... that dances to the tune of the US." [14] Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Head Leonid Slutsky noted that the Russian State Duma will support the suspension of Russia's participation in the OSCE PA. [15] The OSCE PA is an institution of the OSCE where members can debate issues and offer policy recommendations in support of the OSCE's mandate. [16] Volodin announced Russia's intention to leave the OSCE PA in February 2024, and Russia has used OSCE PA meetings to either further its information operations or has abstained from attending meetings since it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. [17]

The Russian military command continues to endorse a culture of permissiveness towards war crimes perpetrated by subordinates on the battlefield in Ukraine. Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin reported on June 18 that his office has received confirmation that Russian forces beheaded a Ukrainian soldier in Volnovakha Raion, Donetsk Oblast and displayed the severed head on a damaged Ukrainian vehicle.[18] Kostin stated that Ukrainian intelligence revealed that the Russian battalion- and company-level commanders in charge of this sector of the front ordered their subordinates not to capture Ukrainian soldiers and take them captive as prisoners of war (POWs) as required by international law, but to kill them by beheading them.[19] ISW cannot independently confirm which Russian commanders issued the order to behead the Ukrainian POW, but Kostin's report is consistent with a larger observed trend of prolific Russian abuses against Ukrainian POWs that is apparently enabled, if not explicitly endorsed, by individual Russian commanders and upheld by Russian field commanders. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on June 19 that it has identified four servicemembers of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) who executed Ukrainian POWs near Robotyne, Zaporizhia Oblast in late May 2024.[20] ISW has also previously observed that the 76th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Division was implicated in the execution of Ukrainian POWs and the use of Ukrainian POWs as human shields (both blatant violations of the Geneva Convention on POWs) near Robotyne in late 2023, as well as in massacres of Ukrainian civilians in Bucha, Kyiv Oblast in 2022.[21] Russian forces operating in Donetsk Oblast are under a different operational command (the Southern Grouping of Forces) than Russian forces operating in Zaporizhia Oblast (the Dnepr Grouping of Forces), but various individual units operating under these respective operational commands have well-documented lists of abuses against Ukrainian POWs in their sectors of the front.[22] The consistent perpetration of war crimes by various Russian formations that fall under different operational groupings of forces command suggests that individual tactical-level commanders are enabling their subordinates to commit such atrocities throughout the theater and that the Russian high command is doing little to maintain discipline and order amongst its troops.

The Russian government is attempting to deflect responsibility for well-documented Russian violations of international law regarding Russia's treatment of Ukrainian children by accusing the Ukrainian Armed Forces and other security structures of committing "crimes" against children. Russian State Duma Deputy Chairperson and former Russian Commissioner on Children's Rights Anna Kuznetsova presented a report developed by the Russian parliamentary investigative commission on "Kyiv's crimes against children" during the plenary State Duma meeting on June 19, which made unfounded and absurd accusations against the Ukrainian government and military officials of crimes against children in occupied Ukraine.[23] Kuznetsova claimed that the parliamentary investigative commission developed this report in accordance with the Russian Constitution and the UN Security Council resolution of August 25, 1999, but blatantly overlooked the fact that Russia's illegal invasion and occupation of eastern and southern Ukraine violates the UN Charter and that these territories are not subject to the Russian Constitution under international law. The report accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of wounding and killing children with artillery fire and in mining incidents since 2014 and accused the Ukrainian government of "kidnapping" children from Ukrainian-controlled territories in Donbas between 2014 and 2022 that Russia since illegally annexed in their entirety despite not occupying the entire region.[24] The report misrepresented the Ukrainian government's evacuations of children from frontline or occupied settlements as the "kidnapping" of "about 65,000 children from the territories of Donbas and Novorossiia" since the beginning of 2022, in a blatant misrepresentation of international law. Ukraine, as the legal sovereign of the Ukrainian territories that Russia illegally occupies, has full rights to move its people away from frontline territories further to safety. Russia, as the occupying power, does not have the right to move a population it occupies away from their homes and into Russia, however. Ukraine's evacuation of its citizens is a legitimate humanitarian endeavor, while Russia's forced removal of Ukrainian citizens to Russia is illegal deportation.[25] The report also accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Western "private military companies," and the Ukrainian government of medical experimentation on children in occupied Ukraine, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and "the deliberate creation of a threat to the lives of children" among other unfounded accusations. The report recommended that the Russian Prosecutor General's Office and the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) initiate the process of recognizing the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU), and the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) as "terrorist organizations." [26]

This report is likely part of an ongoing Kremlin effort to deflect domestic and international attention away from Russian violations of international law perpetrated against Ukrainian children, including mass forced deportations from occupied territories to Russia. The Russian State Duma unanimously supported the report on June 19, and Chairperson of the Russian Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko tasked the Russian government with translating this report into different languages and disseminating it across different international organizations and countries — including countries that are unfriendly to Russia.[27] Matviyenko made a revealing remark that Kyiv's "attempt to accuse Russia of allegedly removing children looks especially cynical," inadvertently revealing that the purpose of this unsubstantiated and false report is to confuse the international community about Russia's violations against Ukrainian children and people.[28] The Russian State Duma notably created the Russian parliamentary investigative commission in June 2023 shortly after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kremlin-appointed Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova on March 17, 2023, for illegal deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia.[29]

Air traffic control (ATC) communications from international airspace over the northeastern Atlantic Ocean appear to show the first confirmed instance of GPS jamming on commercial trans-Atlantic routes.^[30] An X (formerly Twitter) account specializing in open-source and signals intelligence (OSINT and SIGINT) analysis posted on June 19 ATC communications reportedly from Shanwick Oceanic Control (overseeing the international airspace zone covering the northeastern Atlantic Ocean between the west coast of Scotland and Ireland to the southwestern coast of Iceland) stating that a flight between Madrid, Spain, and Toronto, Canada, was unable to ascend to a higher altitude due to apparent GPS jamming affecting other aircraft at the higher altitude.^[31] The ATC communications noted that GPS jamming forced air traffic operating at higher altitudes along the Madrid-Toronto route to operate in a "degraded mode," to which the ATC dispatcher responded that this is the first instance of GPS jamming along Atlantic routes of which the dispatcher is aware.^[32] The Resilient Navigation and Timing Foundation, a nonprofit advocating for improved GPS security, responded to the incident on June 19 and noted that if GPS jamming becomes a regular occurrence over the Atlantic Ocean, then "thousands of flights a day could be impacted with delays and cancellations."^[33] The Resilient Navigation and Timing Foundation noted that a GPS jammer is not always able to recover after experiencing jamming and assessed that the aircraft that experienced the jamming over the Atlantic was likely flying from the Baltic region or Middle East and that one of its GPS receivers had not recovered by the time it entered the Shanwick Oceanic Control Zone. The cause of the GPS disturbances has not yet been identified as of the time of this publication. ISW has previously observed high levels of GPS jamming over Poland and the Baltic region since late 2023, however, which some analysts and experts have attributed to Russian electronic warfare (EW) activity from the Kaliningrad area and near St. Petersburg.^[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in Pyongyang on June 19, likely aimed in part to use military-technical cooperation with North Korea as a threat against the West to discourage further support for Ukraine. Russian and North Korea largely framed the agreement as evidence of their mutual support as part of a common struggle against the West and signaled that they share a goal to challenge the West and current world order.
- Putin is pursuing a coalition of friendly states with historically warm ties to the Soviet Union to act as an alternative to the West and current world order.
- Russian government officials announced their intention on June 19 to suspend Russia's participation in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA).
- The Russian military command continues to endorse a culture of permissiveness towards war crimes perpetrated by subordinates on the battlefield in Ukraine.
- The Russian government is attempting to deflect responsibility for well-documented Russian violations of international law regarding Russia's treatment of Ukrainian children by accusing the Ukrainian Armed Forces and other security structures of committing "crimes" against children.
- Air traffic control (ATC) communications from international airspace over the northeastern Atlantic Ocean appear to show the first confirmed instance of GPS jamming on commercial trans-Atlantic routes.
- Ukrainian forces recaptured positions near Strytsya and Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar and Donetsk City and in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast.
- Finnish outlet Yle, citing satellite imagery and Finnish intelligence sources, reported on June 19 that the Russian military has deployed roughly 80 percent of its equipment and personnel based near the Russian-Finnish border to support its invasion of Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 18, 2024

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

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

June 18, 2024, 9:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on June 18. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 19 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin published an article in North Korean state-owned newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* praising Russian–North Korean cooperation on the eve of his visit to North Korea, likely to frame any future support that North Korea will lend to Russia as part of a common struggle against the West.^[1] Putin invoked the history of the Soviet Union's support for North Korea during and following the Korean War in his June 18 article and noted that the Soviet Union was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. Putin claimed that the Soviet Union's support helped North Korea strengthen its economy and establish a peaceful society following the Korean War and thanked North Korea for its support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Putin praised Kim Jong-Un's dedication to his father's and grandfather's legacies and praised Pyongyang as a "staunch like-minded" nation who is standing with Russia in opposition to the

collective West. Putin reaffirmed Russia's support for North Korea's struggle against its enemy — the United States. Putin also implied that Western states are common adversaries of Russia and North Korea. Putin noted that Russia, like North Korea, maintains its strong economy and independence despite Western sanctions and praised North Korea's long-term struggle against the West. Putin claimed that the West has refused peace offers from both leaders, although both leaders appear averse to serious, good-faith peace negotiations.[2] Putin stated that Russia and North Korea will cooperate to develop a security architecture for Eurasia and expressed hope that their bilateral relations will continue to deepen. Putin's intentional appeal to known propaganda narratives about the legacies of the Kim regime, the Korean War, and North Korea's historical struggle against the US and the West is likely setting conditions for Putin to justify his future requests or demands of the North Korean people in support of Russia's war effort in Ukraine. Putin's visit to North Korea is also a significant goodwill gesture towards Kim Jong-Un as the visit helps legitimize Kim's pariah regime both domestically and abroad. Foreign heads of state rarely visit North Korea, and Putin last visited North Korea in 2000. Putin may be using this visit as flattery to assist in extracting additional aid from North Korea in the future, which may range from additional requests for weapon supplies or even manpower; for example, reports in 2022 suggested that North Korea was considering sending North Korean workers to Russian-occupied Ukraine to help with reconstruction efforts.[3]

Select Western officials warned about the dangers of greater cooperation between global authoritarian regimes on June 17 in response to Putin's visit to North Korea. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated on June 17 that Russia's growing alignment with its "authoritarian friends" is making it "even more important" for NATO countries to work with their partners in the Indo-Pacific region and condemned the People's Republic of China's (PRC) and North Korea's support for Russia's war effort.[4] US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby stated during a press conference that the US is alarmed by deepening Russian–North Korean relations due to both the consequences in Ukraine and the security of the Korean peninsula.[5] Kirby stated that the US is carefully monitoring the development of Russian–North Korea relations.

Ukrainian forces struck Russian oil depots in Rostov Oblast and Krasnodar Krai overnight on June 17 to 18, using domestically produced Neptune missiles against a ground target in Russia for the second time.[6] Sources in the Ukrainian Navy told Ukrainian media outlet *Suspilne* on June 18 that Ukrainian forces used Neptune anti-ship missiles, presumably modified to strike ground targets, to strike an oil terminal of the Yugneftekhimtransit LLC in the port town of Chushka, Krasnodar Krai overnight.[7] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported locals witnessed explosions near Chushka overnight and that a fire damaged the pipeline and areas with engineering or technical equipment. [8] Russian authorities did not confirm the strike, but the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on June 18 that Russian forces intercepted a Ukrainian Neptune missile in an unspecified area on June 17.[9] Sources in the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) told Ukrainian media outlets that Ukrainian forces conducted drone strikes against the Azovskaya and Azovnaftoprodukt oil terminals in Azov, Rostov Oblast, and geolocated footage shows that the resulting fire burned overnight on June 17 to 18 and well into the day on June 18.[10] Rostov Oblast authorities reported that the strikes set the oil tanks on fire.[11] The SBU sources stated that these depots combined have 22 fuel tanks, and *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* (RFE/RL) Crimean service reported that up to 60 tons of petroleum products pass through these depots per month and that the storage tanks can hold up to 30 thousand cubic meters of petroleum products simultaneously.[12]

Ukrainian forces have now conducted two strikes with its own Neptune missiles against areas in Russian territory that are within range of US-provided ATACMS but that are also protected by US policy that has established a vast sanctuary in Russian territory. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on May 31 that Ukrainian forces used Neptune missiles to strike an oil depot near the port of Kavkaz, Krasnodar Krai, and former Ukrainian Naval Deputy Chief of Staff Andriy Ryzenko stated that the May 31 strike was the first Ukrainian strike using Neptunes against ground targets. [13] Chushka and Kavkaz are port towns near the Kerch Strait and are roughly 250 kilometers from the current frontlines and within the 300-kilometer range of the US-provided long-range ATACMS. [14] The US has not allowed Ukrainian forces to use existing US-provided weapons to strike legitimate targets in Russian territory for much of the full-scale invasion thus far and still prohibits Ukraine from using ATACMS anywhere in Russia.[15] Ukraine first debuted Neptune anti-ship missiles against Russian naval targets in April 2022 and has had to further develop and modify these missiles to conduct deep strikes against Russian territory — a process that took over two years during which Russian forces in Russia enjoyed protection against Western-provided weapons.[16] ISW continues to assess that the US should allow Ukraine to strike legitimate military targets within Russia's rear with US-provided weapons, especially given that standing US prohibitions on how Ukrainian forces may use US-provided weapons will not prevent Ukraine or other Western weapons from striking Russia.

The Russian government is charging Ukrainian servicemen and military officials with crimes in absentia as part of its efforts to enforce Russian federal law outside of its jurisdiction and insinuate that Ukraine should not exist as an independent state. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) placed former Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Pyotr Mekhed and former Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff Viktor Boki on Russia's wanted list on June 18 and charged the men with unspecified war crimes in absentia.[17] The Russian Investigative Committee ruled on June 17 to detain a Ukrainian commander in absentia on charges that the commander helped down a Russian A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft in February 2024 — a legitimate act of war and a normal event for two warring states.[18] The Russian MVD previously absurdly placed multiple officials

from most NATO member countries on its western flank on Russia's wanted list for violating various Russian laws while the officials were in their respective countries where Russian law has no jurisdiction.[19] Russian officials similarly temporarily placed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk, and former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on its wanted list for allegedly violating Russian law while those officials were not in Russia.[20] ISW continues to assess that Russia's decision to place Western officials on its wanted list for violating Russian federal laws outside of Russia is part of its effort to violate the sovereignty of NATO member states and justify possible future Russian aggression against NATO. [21] The Kremlin's prosecution of Ukrainian military personnel and political leadership who are engaged in a fully lawful, defensive war against an invasion by a foreign power in a manner akin to domestic terrorists highlights Russia's enduring belief that the Ukrainian state does not and should not exist as a political entity separate from Russia.

Founder of the Kremlin-linked Rybar Telegram Channel, Mikhail Zvinchuk, gave his second uncharacteristically public interview within a month in which he criticized the state of Russia's war effort in Ukraine and acknowledged that Western sanctions are negatively affecting Russia's industry and economy. Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) media portal *BanjaLuka.net* published an interview with Zvinchuk on June 18 to promote his recently established "Rybar media school" in the Balkans.[22] Zvinchuk gave an unusually frank and critical view of the Russian military when asked to discuss the current state of Russia's war in Ukraine. Zvinchuk stated that the war has not proceeded as the Russian military had planned, in part, because of Russia's poor planning. Zvinchuk also claimed that Russian forces have learned to fight at the platoon, company, and battalion levels but still lack the capability to fight at any higher echelons. Zvinchuk noted that Russian forces have "learned" to seize the battlefield initiative but have only done so in select unspecified locations and that Russian forces are only able to make slow tactical gains. Zvinchuk claimed that if Russia could seize the strategic initiative that Russian forces would seize "a city per week, not a house or village per week." Zvinchuk also assessed that Russia does not have enough materiel to take the strategic initiative but acknowledged that Russia is attempting to accelerate its defense industrial base (DIB) output. Zvinchuk acknowledged that international sanctions against Russia have hindered Russia's ability to maintain its technological capabilities, noting that some Russian oil refineries are not working, which has resulted in a 10 percent increase in fuel prices. Zvinchuk gave an interview to Russian-language diaspora-focused outlet *RTVi* on May 18 — shortly after Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced Sergei Shoigu with Andrei Belousov as Russian Defense Minister - in which Zvinchuk criticized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and speculated on possible changes within the MoD.[23] ISW assessed that Zvinchuk may be trying to use his public interviews to gauge the Kremlin's response to critical voices or that the Kremlin may have tasked Zvinchuk with criticizing the Russian MoD publicly while dictating the content and severity of his statements. Zvinchuk's decision to give his second public interview within a month to a Republika Srpska media portal indicates Zvinchuk's interest in publicizing his efforts to spread pro-Russian informational influence in Europe and support long-term Russian efforts to destabilize the Western-brokered Dayton Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin published an article in North Korean state-owned newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* praising Russian–North Korean cooperation on the eve of his visit to North Korea, likely to frame any future support that North Korea will lend to Russia as part of a common struggle against the West.
- Ukrainian forces struck Russian oil depots in Rostov Oblast and Krasnodar Krai overnight on June 17 to 18, using domestically produced Neptune missiles against a ground target in Russia for the second time.
- Ukrainian forces have now conducted two strikes with its own Neptune missiles against areas in Russian territory that are within range of US-provided ATACMS but that are also protected by US policy that has established a vast sanctuary in Russian territory.
- The Russian government is charging Ukrainian servicemen and military officials with crimes in absentia as part of its efforts to enforce Russian federal law outside of its jurisdiction and insinuate that Ukraine should not exist as an independent state.
- Founder of the Kremlin-linked Rybar Telegram Channel, Mikhail Zvinchuk, gave his second uncharacteristically public interview within a month in which he criticized the state of Russia's war effort in Ukraine and acknowledged that Western sanctions are negatively affecting Russia's industry and economy.
- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Vovchansk, Svatove, and Avdiivka
- Russian President Vladimir Putin continues efforts to groom Russian military personnel for positions in the Russian government through the Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" program.
- Russian occupation officials continue their efforts to militarize Ukrainian youth in occupied Ukraine.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 17, 2024

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

Kateryna Stepanenko, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO may take steps to enhance NATO's nuclear deterrence, eliciting varying responses from senior Kremlin officials.

The *Telegraph* reported on June 16 that Stoltenberg stated that NATO states are discussing removing an unspecified number of nuclear missiles from storage and placing them on heightened readiness levels due to the growing threat from Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).[1] Stoltenberg stated that "transparency helps to communicate the direct message that... [NATO] is a nuclear alliance." Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergei Naryshkin reacted in a level-headed manner and characterized Stoltenberg's statements about taking nuclear missiles out of storage as "exercises," stating that he understands that Stoltenberg's statement aims to scare Russia but "on the other hand, exercises are conducted regularly and should be conducted regularly." [2] Naryshkin stated that there is no "special significance" to Stoltenberg's statement and that Russia "must take it calmly." Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, on the other hand, claimed that Stoltenberg's statement is "nothing more than another escalation of tension." [3] Naryshkin's characterization of NATO's efforts to increase its nuclear transparency as insignificant "exercises" is notably different than Peskov's claims that this is part of NATO's alleged ongoing escalation. Naryshkin has expressed opinions that strayed from the Kremlin narratives previously, most notably when Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly chastised Naryshkin to firmly support Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on February 21, 2022, three days before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.[4]

Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed four deputy defense ministers and replaced them with a "close relative," the son of a former Russian prime minister, and an economist on June 17 in an ongoing purge of officials in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[5] Putin dismissed deputy defense ministers Nikolai Pankov, Ruslan Tsalikov, Tatiana Shevtsova, and Army General Pavel Popov, replacing them with deputy defense ministers Anna Tsvileva and Pavel Fradkov and First Deputy Defense Minister Leonid Gornin.[6] Tsvileva is Putin's first cousin once removed ("niece"), wife of the recently appointed Energy Minister Sergei Tsvilev, and the Chairperson of the Kremlin-initiated "Defenders of the Fatherland" Foundation.[7] Tsvileva was also previously part of the Council on Issues of Trusteeship in the Social Sphere under the Russian Government in 2019.[8] The Russian MoD specified that Tsvileva will oversee social and housing support for the Russian Armed Forces as deputy defense minister.[9] Fradkov is the son of former Russian Prime Minister and longest serving Director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Mikhail Fradkov.[10] Pavel Fradkov served as the First Deputy Administrator of the Presidential Administration since 2021, Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimushchestvo) from 2012 to 2015, and at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) Department of Pan-European Cooperation from 2005 to 2012.[11] Fradkov's brother Pyotr Fradkov is the Chairperson of the Russian state-owned Promsvyazbank and recently met with Kremlin-affiliated governor of the pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region of Gagauzia, Yevgenia Gutsul, on April 9, possibly as part of Kremlin's efforts to destabilize Moldova.[12] The Russian MoD reported that Fradkov will oversee property management issues, land resources, construction of MoD facilities, and the national economy.[13] Gornin served as the First Deputy Minister of Finance since May 2018, Deputy Minister of Finance from 2012 to 2018, and Minister of Finance and Tax Policy of Novosibirsk Oblast from 2010 to 2011.[14] The Russian MoD specified that Gornin will be responsible for the MoD's budget policy and will oversee financial support for the Russian Armed Forces.[15] Gornin will also work on increasing the transparency of financial flows and ensuring the effective spending of budget funds. Putin also signed a bill on June 17 that increased the number of Russian deputy defense minister positions from 11 to 12.[16]

Tsvileva's, Fradkov's, and Gornin's appointments support Putin's recent efforts to introduce his relatives and the children of other senior Russian officials to the Russian public and to install economic advisors to the MoD to improve the wartime economy. Both Tsvileva and Fradkov reportedly participated in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) alongside Putin's daughters and the children of other senior officials on June 6 and 7.[17] ISW assessed on June 7 that Putin attempted to introduce his children and the children of officials in his close circle to the public, likely to set conditions for them to eventually assume high-profile and powerful roles in the Russian government.[18] Tsvileva also notably met with Putin on June 1 to discuss state financial support for combatants who had fought in Ukraine as part of private military companies (PMCs).[19] Putin also has been increasingly appointing economists to take senior positions at the Russian MoD and notably replaced Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on May 12 with former First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov who is an economist by trade.[20] Putin also replaced former Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Yuri Sadovenko with former Deputy Economic Minister and Federation Council Accounts Chamber Auditor Oleg Savelyev on May 20.[21] These appointments suggest that Putin is prioritizing the appointment of officials whom he deems to be loyal to the regime and economists to improve Russia's defense industrial base (DIB). Putin also may be attempting to groom possible successors to his regime from the pool of his children and relatives and children of other senior officials.

Russian milbloggers largely focused on celebrating the dismissal of Pankov, Tsalikov, Shevtsova, and Popov and largely overlooked the apparent nepotism that benefited two of the new deputy defense ministers.[22] Russian milbloggers welcomed new MoD appointments, stating that Putin finally removed officials that thought of themselves as untouchable.[23] Russian milbloggers also claimed that these dismissals are a step in the right direction to resolve corruption in the Russian

MoD and improve the defense industrial base (DIB).[24] Russian milbloggers specifically focused on the news of Tsalikov's dismissal, citing his poor management of the Russian MoD's information policies and official coverage of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[25] Some milbloggers implied that Tsalikov had conflicts with Russian milbloggers who criticized the Russian MoD.[26] A Wagner Group-affiliated milblogger claimed that the Kremlin stopped considering Tsalikov as Shoigu's replacement in 2022 after Putin received a memo from unnamed state security agencies about Tsalikov's corruption.[27] The Wagner-affiliated milblogger added that Shevtsova was the subject of numerous independent investigations, including one into how former Deputy Minister of Finance Tatyana Nesterenko and former Head of the Federal Treasury Roman Artyukhin sang songs that mocked the Russian army and soldiers at Shevtsova's birthday celebration. The Wagner-affiliated milblogger concluded that he was disappointed that Putin did not dismiss Deputy Defense Minister Alexey Krivoruchko, who is a leading figure in many independent anti-corruption investigations, over his corruption schemes involving the Russian joint-stock arms manufacturing company Kalashnikov Concern. Some Russian political bloggers drew parallels between the appointments of deputy defense ministers under Belousov and former Russian Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, who also had an economic background as the Minister of the Russian Tax Service from 2004 to 2007.[28] Russian political bloggers noted that Serdyukov appointed officials from the Russian Federal Tax Service, whereas Belousov is appointing officials from the Russian ministries of finance and economic development and from among Putin's friends and family.[29]

A Russian state media outlet manipulated an interview with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to blame Ukraine for strikes against the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in an attempt to legitimize Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine. Grossi stated on June 15 that he would not attend the June 16–17 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland so as to not "mix political considerations with [the IAEA's] technical job," but gave an interview to Kremlin outlet *Izvestia* which was published on June 17.[30] Grossi told *Izvestia* that unspecified actors have attacked IAEA inspectors and experts at the ZNPP and have violated or compromised the IAEA's pillars for ensuring the plant's safe operation.[31] Grossi stated that there have been unattributed drone strikes against the ZNPP and that the IAEA is unable to identify the perpetrators as it is difficult to identify the drones' departure points or deduce the origins of drones based on debris. Grossi spoke about strikes on the ZNPP on April 7 but notably did not specify if the IAEA assessed that these were Ukrainian or Russian strikes. *Izvestia*, however, inserted an editorial note claiming that Ukrainian forces conducted the "unprecedented" strikes on the ZNPP on April 7 to directly claim that Grossi was discussing Ukrainian strikes against the ZNPP. The IAEA notably refrained from attributing responsibility for the April 7 strikes at the time. [32] *Izvestia*'s exploitation of Grossi's interview, throughout which Grossi explicitly highlighted that the IAEA cannot identify the origin of strikes on the ZNPP, is part of ongoing Russian efforts to use Russia's physical control over the ZNPP to force the IAEA to meet with Russian officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the ZNPP, and by extension, Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory.[33]

Ukraine's Western partners continue efforts to train more Ukrainian pilots on Western-provided F-16 fighter jets. French outlet *Le Monde* reported on June 17 that the French Air and Space Force committed to training 26 Ukrainian military pilots from 2024 to 2026.[34] *Le Monde* stated that the French Air and Space Force is currently training 10 Ukrainian pilots on Alpha Jet trainers using avionics similar to F-16s. *Agence-France-Presse* (AFP) reported on June 17 that the Ukrainian pilots are participating in an accelerated six-month training program.[35] *Politico* reported on June 6 that US Air Force Spokesperson Laurel Falls stated that the US National Guard plans to train 12 Ukrainian pilots on F-16s by the end of September 2024.[36] Denmark reported in August 2023 that Denmark had started training eight Ukrainian pilots on F-16s.[37]

The Kremlin confirmed on June 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit North Korea on an official state visit on June 18 and 19.[38] Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexander Matsegora recently stated that Putin will visit North Korea, and another Russian diplomatic source stated that Putin would visit in the coming weeks around his visit to Vietnam.[39] Putin has not visited North Korea since 2000.[40] The Kremlin reported that Putin will also visit Hanoi, Vietnam on June 19 and 20 and will discuss the prospects for developing a strategic partnership in trade, economic, scientific, technological, and humanitarian relations.[41]

Key Takeaways:

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO may take steps to enhance NATO's nuclear deterrence, eliciting varying responses from senior Kremlin officials.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed four deputy defense ministers and replaced them with a "close relative," the son of a former Russian prime minister, and an economist on June 17 in an ongoing purge of officials in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).
- Tsivileva's, Fradkov's, and Gornin's appointments support Putin's recent efforts to introduce his relatives and the children of other senior Russian officials to the Russian public and to install economic advisors to the MoD to improve the wartime economy.
- Russian milbloggers largely focused on celebrating the dismissal of Pankov, Tsalikov, Shevtsova, and Popov and largely overlooked the apparent nepotism that benefited two of the new deputy defense ministers.

- A Russian state media outlet manipulated an interview with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to blame Ukraine for strikes against the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in an attempt to legitimize Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine.
- Ukraine's Western partners continue efforts to train more Ukrainian pilots on Western-provided F-16 fighter jets.
- The Kremlin confirmed on June 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit North Korea on an official state visit on June 18 and 19.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Siversk, Chasiv Yar, and Avdiivka.
- Russia is reportedly experiencing issues with producing artillery shells and select artillery systems.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 16, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

June 16, 2024, 5:20pm ET

The vast majority of the countries and international organizations that participated in the Ukraine-initiated Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15-16 signed a joint communique on June 16 reaffirming support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

[1] The communique also reaffirmed support for Ukrainian operation and control over the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) to ensure the safety of nuclear energy and installations, "free full, and safe" commercial navigation in the Black Sea to ensure global food security, the exchange of all prisoners of war (POWs), and the return of all "deported and unlawfully displaced Ukrainian children" and other unlawfully detained Ukrainian civilians. Over 80 countries and international organizations signed the communique, although Saudi Arabia, India, South Africa, Armenia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Brazil (which attended the summit as an "observer") were among the countries that did not endorse the communique.[2] The Ukrainian President's Office emphasized that the purpose of the summit was to facilitate "fair peace ... based on the United Nations (UN) Charter and international law," highlighting Ukraine's effort to garner support from the international community in ending the war on terms that do not violate international law by compromising Ukraine's territory integrity or sovereignty.[3] Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated on June 16 at the summit that "Russia should not be at the [negotiating] table now" and that there will only be peace in Ukraine "when Russia agrees to international principles and the UN Charter." ISW continues to assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in good-faith negotiations and only feigns interest in negotiations in specific instances as part of a wider informational effort to seduce the West to preemptively make concessions that would violate Ukraine's sovereignty.[4] Putin is unlikely to be interested in good faith negotiations for the foreseeable future given that he recently outlined a theory of Russian victory in Ukraine based on the assumption that Russian forces are capable of indefinite creeping advances on the battlefield to outlast Western support for Ukraine.[5]

A limited prison break and hostage situation at a Russian pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast, prompted Russian ultranationalist complaints highlighting Russia's failure to crack down against domestic Islamic extremism following the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.

Russian state media reported on June 16 that around six prisoners at Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Rostov-on-Don broke out of their cells and took two employees of the pretrial detention center hostage in the central courtyard.[6] Rosgvardia and Russian Federal Penitentiary Service forces later stormed the pretrial detention center and reportedly killed the detainees, freeing the hostages.[7] Russian state media claimed that the prisoners had links to the Islamic State (IS) or had been convicted of terrorism-related charges prior to the June 16 incident. [8] ISW is unable to verify the identities or affiliations of these prisoners or the extent of IS involvement in the prison break at the time of this publication.

Russian ultranationalist milbloggers largely fixated on the hostage situation in Rostov-on-Don to complain about the perceived prevalence of Islamic extremism in Russia and the Russian penal system. Russian milbloggers largely circulated the alleged identities, affiliations, and charges of each of the prisoners, as well as footage showing the prisoners with an IS flag, IS paraphernalia, and knives at the pretrial detention center.[9] The milbloggers complained that Russian authorities failed to crack down against extremist groups and used racist and xenophobic rhetoric to emphasize this point; the milbloggers complained that the pretrial detention center allowed the prisoners to have well-kept facial hair in accordance with their religious beliefs and that the prisoners had planned this attack on a Muslim holy day to coincide with the Eid al-Adha holiday on June 16.[10] The milbloggers also complained that the Russian penal system has failed to maintain security given that the prisoners managed to obtain an IS flag, weapons, and communication devices and break from their cells, and that some of the prisoners had been convicted of terrorism but had yet not been transported to penal colonies because their sentences had not yet begun.[11] Some milbloggers complained more widely that the Russian penal system has fallen apart, blaming reforms under then-President Dmitry Medvedev in the mid-2000s and Russia's failure to adequately compensate Federal Penitentiary Service employees for creating the situation.[12]

The Kremlin has attempted to posture that it has been cracking down against domestic extremism since the Crocus City Hall attack, but the June 16 attack and subsequent discussions undermine this Kremlin effort.[13] Russian opposition outlet *Baza* claimed that the prisoners had planned this attack for several months and that actors with alleged IS ties smuggled the weapons, IS flag, and communication devices to the prisoners inside the pretrial detention center.[14] Opposition outlet *Verstka* reported that the Rostov Oblast prosecutor's office has conducted monthly inspections of the detention conditions of Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 after reports that the center was overcrowded, while the Rostov Oblast Public Monitoring Group conducted three inspections in October 2022, February 2023, and November 2023 and did not find any violations.[15] Some Russian officials seem content to minimize this situation in the near-term; Rostov residents criticized Rostov Oblast Head Vasily Golubev for not responding to the hostage situation until two hours after the situation concluded, and Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that Golubev's social media accounts deleted comments on his page before turning off the ability to comment altogether. [16] Russian Investigative Committee Head Alexander Bastrykin demanded a report on the initial investigation into the hostage situation on June 16.[17] The Kremlin will likely use the June 16 incident to continue posturing the need for domestic crackdowns against all definitions of extremism beyond the domestic terror threat to Russia while masking or deflecting its actual security failures to prevent the March 22 and June 16 attacks.

The Kremlin and Kremlin affiliates continue efforts to use Russia's relationship with Republika Srpska (the Serbian political entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) to destabilize the Balkans. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed at the opening of the Russian embassy in Banja Luka on June 11 that ties between Russia and Republika Srpska are at an all-time high. [18] Lavrov claimed that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) will prioritize the construction of religious and cultural institutions in Banja Luka that are critical for the strengthening of the "ties of brotherhood" between the people of Russia and Republika Srpska. A prominent, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed on June 16 in an interview with a Republika Srpska TV channel that Russia will support Republika Srpska's independence and that the opening of the Russian embassy in Banja Luka demonstrates the friendship and cooperation between Russia and Republika Srpska. [19] The milblogger claimed that Russia may open a Russian cultural center (Russia house – *Russkii dom*) in Republika Srpska. Moldovan and Ukrainian officials have previously warned that Russian officials use *Russkii dom* to promote Russian propaganda and conduct "subversive work" abroad. [20] The same milblogger's channel claimed in April 2024 that it opened a "media school" in the Balkans and that the channel's team spent a week in Serbia and Republika Srpska giving lectures on how to operate Telegram channels and fight "misinformation." [21] Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik stated on June 7 that Republika Srpska intended to hold a referendum on its independence from Bosnia and Herzegovina on an unspecified date. [22] The Kremlin has previously leveraged its relationship with Republika Srpska to further influence the Balkans, sow divisions in the West, and undermine the Dayton Accords to throw the Balkans into turmoil. [23]

The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 16 that Russia overtook the United States as Europe's main gas supplier in May 2024, highlighting Europe's continued reliance on Russian energy. [24] *FT* reported that the US became Europe's largest gas supplier following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but that in May 2024 Russian gas and liquified natural gas (LNG) shipments to Europe rose to 15 percent of total supply, while the United States provided 14 percent. *FT* did note, however, that the shift in gas and LNG imports in May was partially a result of "one-time factors," such as an outage at an American LNG export factory and a planned increase in Russian gas exports to compensate for shortcomings due to maintenance on a line sometime in June. *FT* concluded that Russia is unlikely to maintain the upper hand in the coming months, as it will be able to increase shipments of LNG to Asia via the Northern Sea Route, reducing exports to Europe, while US LNG production has stabilized after the recent one-time outage. *FT* previously reported on June 5 that Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom commissioned a report that found that Gazprom is unlikely to recover the vast majority of gas sales to Europe that it lost since 2022, highlighting that Gazprom's business with Europe has significantly decreased overall, notwithstanding this short-term decrease in US gas exports to Europe in May 2024. [25] Russia remains reliant on oil and gas revenues to support its wartime economy and increased its energy exports to China significantly over the course of 2023, likely in part to offset impacts from the loss of the European market in 2022. [26]

Key Takeaways:

- The vast majority of the countries and international organizations that participated in the Ukraine-initiated Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15-16 signed a joint communique on June 16 reaffirming support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- A limited prison break and hostage situation at a Russian pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast, prompted Russian ultranationalist complaints highlighting Russia's failure to crack down against domestic Islamic extremism following the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.
- The Kremlin and Kremlin affiliates continue efforts to use Russia's relationship with Republika Srpska (the Serbian political entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) to destabilize the Balkans.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk and Donetsk City.

- The Russian military reportedly continues to coerce Russian conscripts into signing military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), likely as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 15, 2024

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

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

June 15, 2024, 9pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on June 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 14 information operation about Russia's supposed "willingness to negotiate" on extreme terms tantamount to Ukraine's capitulation is succeeding in confusing the purpose of the Ukrainian-initiated Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15.^[1] The purpose of the summit, according to the Ukrainian President's Office, was to facilitate a multilateral dialogue to achieve "fair peace ... based on the United Nations (UN) Charter and international law."^[2] Putin's information operation on June 14 sought to and partially succeeded in sabotaging the summit by refocusing the international conversation to Russia's absence at the summit, instead of allowing the summit's participants to proceed with the intended purpose of garnering international support for Ukraine and Ukraine's efforts to involve the broader international community in ending the war. Ukrainian Presidential Office Head Andriy Yermak stated before the summit opened on June 15 that Ukraine and its international partners can give a joint peace plan to a Russian representative at a second peace summit if a Russian representative attends.^[3]

Putin specifically outlined his demands for "peace" negotiations in Ukraine a day before the start of the Global Peace Summit to undermine Western support for legitimate Ukrainian demands from Russia and divert attention away from the task of building an international consensus around how to ensure that Russia's illegal war of aggression does not result in an unjust Russian victory. Putin's restated prerequisites for "peace" negotiations included the recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of occupied and Ukrainian-controlled territory and Ukraine's agreement to demilitarization, "denazification" (the toppling of the current Ukrainian government and its replacement with pro-Russian proxies), and Ukraine's agreement to abandon efforts to join any external security blocs — the same demands he made prior to the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022 and has consistently reiterated throughout the war.^[4] Putin's overture that he is open to any kind of "negotiations" not predicated on what is effectively Ukraine's unconditional surrender is therefore inherently misleading. Putin's duplicitous statements about his supposed "willingness to negotiate" thus reoriented international discourse to highlight how Putin — who is not interested in upholding the principles of the UN Charter in his war of conquest in Ukraine — was not invited to the conference, and how Putin's absence at the summit presented some kind of intrinsic paradox. It did not.

Several Western officials recognized that Russia attempted to derail the purpose of the summit and focus its conversations on Russia's absence. US Vice President Kamala Harris stated that Putin's June 14 "peace" proposal was not a call for negotiations but a call "for [Ukraine's] surrender."^[5] Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated that Russia should be involved in the peace process at "some stage," although acknowledged that Putin is not interested in negotiations "at the moment" and likely released a "ridiculous peace proposal" on June 14.^[6] German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that "peace in Ukraine cannot be achieved without involving Russia" but noted that Russia has refused all collective calls for peace.^[7] US Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs in the United Nations (UN) Robert Wood stated during a UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting on June 14 that Russia's decision to convene the UNSC a day before the summit was an effort to divert the international community's attention away from the summit and distract the world from Russia's war in Ukraine.^[8]

Kremlin mouthpieces amplified ongoing Russian information operations intended to further discredit and disrupt the Global Peace Summit on June 15. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov criticized the West's "unconstructive" responses to Putin's June 14 ultimatums and claimed that the Kremlin hopes someone will hold a "more constructive" peace summit at a later, unspecified date.^[9] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the West must discuss Putin's June 14 ultimatums if they want peace in Ukraine and to "save the world."^[10] Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that the peace summit is meaningless following Putin's ultimatums and reiterated ongoing Russian narratives intended to discredit Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the legitimate president of Ukraine and legitimate participant in the negotiations process.^[11] ISW continues to assess and observe that Russian officials typically feign interest in negotiations during critical moments of the war in order to influence Western decision-making and as part of their efforts to extract pre-emptive concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity from the West.^[12] Any Western efforts to force Ukraine into negotiations with Russia before Russia abandons its genocidal and imperialist ambitions in Ukraine

will almost certainly not result in a lasting solution to the conflict and only provide Putin with additional time to further optimize and prepare the Russian war machine for a future invasion.

Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk reported that Western military assistance has begun to arrive in Ukraine, but that Western military assistance will likely not arrive at scale and significantly impact the frontline situation for several more weeks to months. Havrylyuk told the *Associated Press (AP)* in an article published on June 15 that Ukrainian forces are still waiting on most of the US military assistance announced in late April 2024 to arrive in Ukraine, but that the limited amount of aid that has arrived is already reducing Ukraine's artillery shortages.[13] Havrylyuk stated that Russian forces' artillery advantage has recently decreased from seven-to-one to five-to-one as a result of US aid arrivals. Havrylyuk expressed hope that Ukraine will be able to better defend its airspace in the future following the arrival of F-16 fighter jets and other Western-provided air defense assets. *AP* also interviewed several frontline Ukrainian commanders and servicemen who confirmed that Ukrainian forces began receiving limited amounts of Western-provided shells but noted that the shells have not arrived at the scale that Ukrainian forces need to fully defend against Russian attacks. Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský announced on June 14 that the first round of ammunition from the Czech artillery initiative has begun to arrive in Ukraine and that the Czech initiative will continue to purchase and supply ammunition for Ukraine throughout 2024.[14] Lipavský noted that five countries have already contributed funds to the initiative and that 15 additional countries have pledged to support the initiative.

Chairperson of the ruling United Russia Party Dmitry Medvedev officially replaced United Russia Secretary Andrey Turchak with acting Russian Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Ural Federal District Vladimir Yakushev on June 15.[15] Medvedev also announced that Turchak formally resigned on June 15.[16] Russian President Vladimir Putin named Turchak as the acting governor of the Altai Republic on June 4 in an apparent demotion likely tied to Turchak's prior affiliation with the Wagner Group, efforts to increase his political power, and failure to execute Putin's vision for involving veterans in the Russian government.[17] Yakushev received a degree in Law, Finance, and Credit and Economic Sciences; and served as the head of Tyumen City and Tyumen Oblast and Minister of Construction, Housing, and Communal Services before becoming the Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Ural Federal District.[18] The Russian Plenipotentiary Office announced that Yakushev will retain his position as the Russian presidential plenipotentiary envoy to the Ural Federal District in addition to his new role as the Secretary of the United Russia Party.[19] Russian political commentators observed that Yakushev's two roles are contradictory since they require him to both engage with Ural regional affairs while also playing an important federal United Russia party role in Moscow.[20] One Russian political commentator presented multiple hypotheses for Yakushev's dual appointment, including that the Kremlin lacks an administrative strategy so is making "chaotic" government appointments or that Yanushev is a "non-negotiable candidate" for these roles.[21]

Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing a group of trusted and Kremlin-affiliated "veterans" to assume government roles likely in an attempt to appease Russian servicemen and domestic supporters of the war in Ukraine. Putin had a likely staged interaction with Russian military volunteer and former Krasnodar City Mayor Yevgeny Pervyshov during a meeting with the participants of the Russian presidential initiative "Time of Heroes" on June 14.[22] Pervyshov told Putin that he joined the war effort as a volunteer despite previously holding a government position and argued that participants of the "Time of Heroes" initiative would make great government officials. Putin then asked Pervyshov about his government role before mobilization, to which Pervyshov responded that he is a Russian State Duma Deputy and former mayor of Krasnodar. Putin expressed (likely fake) surprise at Pervyshov's political career and concluded the engagement by telling Pervyshov that he has an unspecified "proposal" for Pervyshov.[23] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Pervyshov fought in the "Grom-Kaskad" Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Brigade, formerly known as the BARS "Kaskad" Battalion originally formed in 2017 as part of the Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) Internal Affairs Ministry.[24] Russian political commentators also recalled that Pervyshov was a defendant in a major fraud case and implied that his decision to fight in Ukraine is not coincidental.[25]

The "Time of Heroes" initiative reportedly began training veterans of the Russian war in Ukraine in April 2024 to assume roles in the Russian government, and Pervyshov's cameo is likely part of the ongoing Kremlin effort to appease the ever-growing Russian veteran population by appointing and prominently featuring government officials who served in Ukraine.[26] The Kremlin may attempt to incentivize Russians to fight in Ukraine by portraying military service in Ukraine as a pathway for launching a public service career in the Russian government. Former United Russia Party Secretary Andrey Turchak and Russia State Duma Deputy Dmitry Sablin reportedly created and directly curated that BARS "Kaskad" Battalion in 2017 and recruited Russian officials and United Russia party members in Fall 2022 to fight as part of the battalion in occupied Luhansk Oblast.[27] (Turchak reportedly only managed to recruit seven Russian officials to fight with Kaskad).[28] Russian insider sources previously claimed that Putin entrusted Turchak with having veterans run in the Russian presidential primaries and assume positions in the Russian State Duma, but Turchak reportedly failed to accomplish this goal because local businessmen reportedly did not give up their positions in local government that Turchak needed to give to the Russian veterans.[29] Putin is likely continuing to pursue this objective through the "Time of Heroes" initiative and following his demotion of Turchak.

The Swedish military announced on June 15 that a Russian Su-24 tactical fighter-bomber plane temporarily violated Swedish airspace east of the southern tip of Gotland on June 14, likely as

part of an effort to discourage European states from participating in NATO and other international institutions supporting Ukraine. The Swedish Armed Forces stated that a Russian Su-24 fighter-bomber failed to heed a verbal warning from the Swedish air combat command before Swedish JAS-39 Gripen aircraft forced the Russian Su-24 out of Swedish airspace.[30] This is the first Russian violation of Swedish airspace since 2022.[31] Russian aircraft also violated Finnish airspace on June 10 for the first time since 2022, and the Finnish Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on June 14 that it believes that four Russian military aircraft violated Finnish airspace instead of the one aircraft the MoD previously reported.[32] Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson and Finnish Defense Minister Antti Häkkinen participated in a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels on June 13 and 14 in preparation for the July 2024 Washington Summit, an annual summit which will cover NATO defense, deterrence, and coordinating assistance for Ukraine.[33] The Washington 2024 summit will be the first NATO summit at the level of heads of state for Sweden since its accession in March 2024.[34] Finland is the second newest NATO member, having only joined the alliance in April 2023.[35] The Kremlin likely seeks to punish Sweden for its accession to NATO and to deter NATO states, particularly its newer members, from supporting Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin's June 14 information operation about Russia's supposed "willingness to negotiate" on extreme terms tantamount to Ukraine's capitulation is succeeding in confusing the purpose of the Ukrainian-initiated Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15.**
- **Several Western officials recognized that Russia attempted to derail the purpose of the summit and focus its conversations on Russia's absence.**
- **Kremlin mouthpieces amplified ongoing Russian information operations intended to discredit and disrupt the Global Peace Summit.**
- **Ukrainian First Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk reported that Western military assistance has begun to arrive in Ukraine, but that Western military assistance will likely not arrive at scale and significantly impact the frontline situation for several more weeks to months.**
- **Chairperson of the ruling United Russia Party Dmitry Medvedev officially replaced United Russia Secretary Andrey Turchak with acting Russian Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Ural Federal District Vladimir Yakushev.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing a group of trusted and Kremlin-affiliated "veterans" to assume government roles likely in an attempt to appease Russian servicemen and domestic supporters of the war in Ukraine.**
- **The Swedish military announced on June 15 that a Russian Su-24 tactical fighter-bomber plane temporarily violated Swedish airspace east of the southern tip of Gotland on June 14, likely as part of an effort to discourage European states from participating in NATO and other international institutions supporting Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kupyansk and Avdiivka.**
- **Elements of the Russian Baltic and Pacific fleets are participating separate naval exercises.**
- **A *Financial Times* (FT) investigation published on June 12 found that Russian officials have put Ukrainian children up for adoption whom Russia had forcibly deported from occupied Ukraine to Russia in 2022.**

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 14, 2024

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

Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Kateryna Stepanenko, Nicole Wolkov, and George Barros

June 14, 2024, 10pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin outlined his uncompromising demands for Ukraine's capitulation as a prerequisite for "peace" negotiations in Ukraine, including the recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of occupied and Ukrainian-controlled territory in eastern and southern Ukraine, in an attempt to undermine the June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland. Putin stated during a speech at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on June 14 that Ukrainian forces must begin to "completely withdraw" from Ukrainian-controlled territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts (which the Kremlin illegally declared as annexed in September 2022) and that Ukraine officially abandons its goal to join NATO before Russia can agree to a ceasefire and peace negotiations.[1] Putin stated that Russia is prepared to begin negotiations with Ukraine as soon as Ukraine agrees to withdraw from the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts (which is in total 18 percent of Ukraine's territory). Russian forces currently occupy 75 percent of the total area of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts, and Putin is effectively demanding that Ukraine cede 40 percent of Donetsk Oblast, 25 percent of Kherson Oblast, 25 percent of Zaporizhia oblasts, and one percent of Luhansk Oblast that Russian forces do not control, including the provincial capitals Zaporizhia City and Kherson City. Putin's demands require Ukraine to surrender the strategic provincial capitals of Zaporizhia City and Kherson City for no good reason. Russian forces fled Kherson City in November 2022. Putin unconvincingly claimed that Russian forces will "immediately" enforce the ceasefire and will guarantee

the "unhindered and safe" withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the four oblasts, a promise that rings particularly hollow following months of Russian war crimes against Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war (POWs), and numerous Russian violations of the Minsk Accords ceasefire between 2015 and 2022.[2] Putin demanded that the international community recognize the four illegally annexed and occupied oblasts as part of Russia and lift all Western sanctions against Russia in the event of a peaceful resolution to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a demand which will irrevocably damage the principle of state sovereignty and the inviolability of international borders.

Putin also reiterated his previous conditions for "peace," namely that Ukraine must agree to full demilitarization and "denazification" (the toppling of the current Ukrainian government and its replacement with pro-Russian proxies) and abandon its aspirations to join any external security blocs. [3] Putin claimed that Ukraine must come to these decisions independently and not on the orders of its "Western masters" and reiterated a series of claims insinuating that the West controls Ukraine and that Ukraine is not a sovereign country. Putin claimed that it would be "impossible" for any peace format without Russian participation to resolve the war in Ukraine and that the Western and Ukrainian policies against negotiating with Russia are "idiotic."

Putin's demands continue to reflect his long-demanded ultimatums that are based on presuppositions that deny the existence of an independent and sovereign Ukraine and that seek to seduce the West to preemptively compromise on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[4] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on June 14 that Putin has put forth similar ultimatums and that Putin has no intention to stop attacking Ukraine.[5] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Russia, not Ukraine, must withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory and that Putin's ultimatums are a signal that Russia has not abandoned its military objectives in Ukraine.[6] Several prominent Russian milbloggers also stated that Putin's demands are unachievable and resemble an ultimatum to the West, and this speech rings similar to the absurd ultimatums Putin delivered to the US and NATO in December 2021 as part of a diplomatic ruse to buy time as Putin prepared to invade Ukraine and seize Kyiv.[7] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied interpretations that Putin's June 14 speech was another ultimatum.[8] ISW continues to assess that the Kremlin is not interested in good faith negotiations with Ukraine and only feigns its interest in negotiations as part of a wider informational effort intended to convince the West to preemptively make concessions that violate Ukraine's sovereignty.[9]

Russia is also attempting to sabotage the peace summit in Switzerland via cyberattacks. Swiss news agencies, citing the Swiss National Cyber Security Center's data, reported an increase in cyberattacks on June 13 against several Swiss government websites and organizations that will participate in the peace summit.[10] The Swiss National Cyber Security Center did not rule out the possibility of similar attacks during the peace summit. Swiss media reported on June 14 that a Russian hacker group claimed responsibility for distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyberattacks on Swiss internet infrastructure and threatened that there would be additional cyberattacks.[11]

Putin proposed to establish an alternative Eurasian and world security system with support from People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping, likely to undermine NATO. Putin claimed that the world is witnessing the "collapse of the Euro-Atlantic security system" and claimed that Western "schemes for security and prosperity in Europe" do not work. Putin outlined a five-step proposal on instituting a new "system of bilateral and multilateral guarantees of collective security in Eurasia" and claimed that he had already tasked the Russian MFA with establishing a dialogue with all of Russia's potential participants of this new security order. Putin claimed that Xi had reportedly stated that the Russian proposal to create a Eurasian security system complements the basic principles of the PRC's "initiative in the field of global security" during Putin's recent visit to the PRC in May 2024. Putin stated that Russia will invite European and NATO countries to participate in this Eurasian security system and argued that Europe must move away from the "military presence of external powers" - implying that Europe needs to abandon NATO and the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty. Putin's explanation of the Eurasian security system appeared to be rather vague but consistent with his long-term strategic goal of disbanding Western unity, disbanding NATO from within, and destroying the current world order. Putin continues attempts to attack and undermine NATO members despite his overtures designed to attract NATO members to join the Russian alternative for "collective Eurasian security." Stoltenberg stated on June 14 that Russia increased its sabotage operations, cyberattacks, and other hostile actions against NATO in recent weeks.[12]

The Kremlin has frequently timed the intensification of its information operations, including negotiations, to coincide with major policy debates in the West in order to influence Western decision-making.[13] Putin's June 14 speech is aimed at misleading the international community and undermining foreign participation in the upcoming peace summit, and several Russian milbloggers noted that Putin's speech coincided with the eve of the Ukrainian-led peace summit. The purposeful intensification of Kremlin rhetoric is part of Russia's reflexive control campaign that aims to push the West to self-deter and adopt policies that are in Russia's interests.[14] Putin's June 14 statements are the latest in Kremlin efforts to manipulate the West, and Putin likely timed his speech to coincide with several key events and discussions in the West. Putin likely aims to weaken Western unity in supporting Ukraine on the eve of the June 15-16 Global Peace Summit and following the June 13 Group of Seven (G7) and Ukraine Defense Contract Group meetings.[15] Putin may also be attempting to influence ongoing Western policy discussions about seizing Russian frozen assets, deploying Western training partners to Ukraine, and/or permissions for Ukraine to use Western-

provided weapons to strike Russian military targets further into Russian territory.[16] Putin may also be attempting to prevent further Western sanctions against Russia following the imposition of new American and British sanctions against Russia on June 13.[17]

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev continued to rail against Western colonialism while ignoring Russia's imperial history and contemporary Russian imperialist aspirations to dominate Russia's neighbors in eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Putin claimed during his speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) on June 14 that the US is working to spread American ideology and "maintain its imperial status" by any means necessary.[18] Medvedev claimed in an op-ed published in the official Russian government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on June 14 that Russia's ruling United Russia party founded the "For the Freedom of Nations" anti-neocolonial movement to help rid the world of Western neocolonialism.[19] Medvedev claimed that the United States, France, United Kingdom (UK), and Italy are actively perpetuating the legacies of colonialism, including in countries along Russia's borders, and that the United Nations (UN) should create a database of colonial and neocolonial crimes to prosecute colonial powers. Medvedev claimed that only "fully sovereign countries" with independence in their external and internal affairs will be able to counter Western neocolonialism and that the "For the Freedom of Nations" movement is ready to work with the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to counter neocolonialism. Medvedev claimed that the "For the Freedom of Nations" movement aims to establish political, economic, and cultural ties between the supposed Russian-led "world majority" (a group of countries including post-Soviet and non-Western states that Russia intends to rally against the West as the basis for its future world order) and establish joint opposition against neocolonialism and neo-Nazism. Medvedev noted that the "For the Freedom of Nations" movement will meet in Vladivostok later in June to discuss "practical ways" to implement its vision. Putin and Medvedev notably ignored the Russian Empire's and Soviet Union's legacies of colonizing and Russifying their neighboring nations and Russia's modern campaigns to assert Russian dominance over Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Central Asia.

Medvedev also promoted Kremlin information operations that aim to exploit Moldovan identity politics to disrupt Moldova's European Union (EU) accession by destabilizing Moldovan society. Medvedev claimed that Moldovan President Maia Sandu's efforts to move Moldova towards EU accession are leading Moldova into "neocolonial slavery," insinuating that EU accession would have a negative impact on Moldovans and is unpopular among Moldovans.[20] Recent polls notably indicate, however, that a majority of around 56 to 64 percent of Moldovans support Moldova's EU integration.[21] Medvedev also promoted Kremlin narratives that target Moldovan-Romanian relations, claiming that Moldova will likely turn into the "northeastern outskirts of Romania" if it joins the EU and that Romanian authorities would repress and forcibly Romanianize the Moldovan population in the future.[22] Medvedev claimed that Romania "occupied" Bessarabia (a historical region in Moldova and southwestern Ukraine) from 1918-1940 and 1941-1944 but failed to mention how the Soviet Union laid claims to Bessarabia under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany and coerced Romania to cede Bessarabian territory to the Soviet Union in 1940.[23] Russian MFA Spokesperson Maria Zakharova similarly claimed on May 9 that the Moldovan government is replacing the Moldovan language with the Romanian language to invoke historical animus that some Moldavians harbor towards Romania with the goal of destabilizing Moldovan society.[24] Kremlin rhetoric about a unique Moldovan identity notably differs from Kremlin information operations alleging that Ukraine lacks a unique language, culture, identity, and history from Russia.[25] Kremlin narratives about Moldovan identity aim to target members of the Moldovan population who identify as Moldovan and may fear that Moldova's Western integration would lead to unification with Romania.

Putin and Medvedev's Russian information operations are the latest in the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to destabilize Moldovan society and prevent Moldova's accession to the EU.[26] Moldovan General Police Inspectorate Head Viorel Cernauteanu stated on June 13 that Moldovan authorities estimate that Russia is spending at least two million dollars per month to fund affiliates of US-sanctioned, Kremlin-affiliated Moldovan opposition politician Ilian Shor who aim to destabilize Moldova.[27] Cernauteanu stated that the Kremlin is spending part of this money to pay off the debts that Shor affiliates accrued during the Fall 2023 elections and protests. Cernauteanu also stated that the Kremlin funnels money into Moldova using "carriers" (likely referring to smugglers) who receive about \$150-\$200 for carrying large amounts of money. Cernauteanu noted that some of the smugglers are cooperating with Moldovan investigators.[28] Shor and his affiliates reportedly paid demonstrators to protest against Sandu and engaged in voter bribery during Moldova's regional elections in 2022 and 2023.[29] Moldovan authorities confiscated over one million dollars from Kremlin-linked Moldovan opposition politicians at the Chisinau airport on the night of April 22 to 23.[30]

Medvedev also threatened Armenia on the eve of Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan's attendance at the June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland. Grigoryan announced on June 14 that he would participate in the peace summit but did not state whether other senior Armenian officials would attend.[31] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Armenian service *Radio Azatutyun* reported that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) previously condemned Grigoryan's participation in a Ukrainian-initiated multilateral peace forum in Malta in October 2023.[32] Medvedev accused the US, European Union (EU), and NATO of attempting to sever the "centuries-old friendship" between Armenia and Russia and called agreements with such Western institutions "neocolonial mousetraps" in an article published on June 14 in official Russian government outlet *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. [33] Medvedev insinuated that Armenian efforts to join the EU will fail and

result in a similar outcome as the current situation in Ukraine. Armenia's decision to send a senior representative to a Ukrainian-initiated peace summit follows Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's announcement that Armenia "will decide when to leave" the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and accusation that Russia indirectly and Belarus directly helped Azerbaijan to prepare for the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War further highlights the deteriorating Russian-Armenian relations.[34] Russian officials have since responded to Pashinyan's statements with increasingly hostile statements.[35] *Politico* reported on June 13, citing leaked documents, that Belarus provided Azerbaijan with artillery equipment, electronic warfare (EW) systems, and drones between 2018 and 2022 that Azerbaijan reportedly used in recent conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and against Armenia.[36]

An unnamed senior US Department of Defense official reportedly said that the Biden Administration has no imminent plans to lift restrictions prohibiting Ukrainian forces from striking military targets in Russia's operational and deep rear areas in Russian territory with US-provided weapons.[37] *Politico* reported on June 13 that the senior official said that there is a "constant conversation and reassessment" of US policy restricting deeper Ukrainian strikes into Russian territory and that no decision is final, but that there is no "impending" policy change. ISW assesses that the Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum.[38] ISW assesses that the West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[39]

Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russia on the night of June 13 to 14. Geolocated imagery collected on June 14 shows damage from a Ukrainian drone strike against the Morozovsk Airbase in Rostov Oblast and indicates that Ukrainian forces struck an electrical substation and an aircraft hangar at the base.[40] Additional footage and photos show an explosion and smoke plume over the Morozovsk Airbase and Rostov-on-Don, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Russian air defenses destroyed 70 drones over Rostov Oblast and several drones over Voronezh and Kursk oblasts.[41] Voronezh Oblast Governor Aleksandr Gusev stated that debris from downed Ukrainian drones damaged fuel tanks at an oil depot in the oblast.[42]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin outlined his uncompromising demands for Ukraine's capitulation as a prerequisite for "peace" negotiations in Ukraine, including the recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of occupied and Ukrainian-controlled territory in eastern and southern Ukraine, in an attempt to undermine the June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland.
- Putin proposed to establish an alternative Eurasian and world security system with support from People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping, likely to undermine NATO.
- The Kremlin has frequently timed the intensification of its information operations, including negotiations, to coincide with major policy debates in the West in order to influence Western decision-making.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev continued to rail against Western colonialism while ignoring Russia's imperial history and contemporary Russian imperialist aspirations to dominate Russia's neighbors in eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.
- Medvedev also promoted Kremlin information operations that aim to exploit Moldovan identity politics in order to disrupt Moldova's European Union (EU) accession by destabilizing Moldovan society.
- Medvedev also threatened Armenia on the eve of Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan's attendance at the June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland.
- An unnamed senior US Department of Defense official reportedly said that the Biden Administration has no imminent plans to lift restrictions prohibiting Ukrainian forces from striking military targets in Russia's operational and deep rear areas in Russian territory with US-provided weapons.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a large series of drone strikes against Russia on the night of June 13 to 14.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and Donetsk City.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on June 14 that there are currently almost 700,000 Russian personnel in the "special military operation zone," which includes both occupied Ukraine and areas within Russia bordering Ukraine, during the meeting with participants of the "Time of Heroes" program.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 13, 2024

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June 13, 2024, 6:45pm ET

Ukraine signed bilateral ten-year security agreements with the United States and Japan on June 13 as other partner states reaffirmed their long-term support for Ukraine within the Group of 7 (G7) and Ramstein formats. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on June 13 that he signed bilateral ten-year security agreements with US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on the sidelines of the ongoing G7 Summit.[1] The US-Ukraine agreement provides for long-term cooperation in defense and security, economic recovery and reform, and the advancement of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.[2] The Japan-Ukraine agreement provides for Japan's \$4.5 billion contribution to Ukraine in 2024 and continued ten-year long support in security and defense, humanitarian aid, technical and financial cooperation, reconstruction efforts, and sanction measures against Russia.[3] Zelensky lauded both agreements as historic breakthroughs for Ukraine's bilateral relations with both the United States and Japan.[4] The United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister's Office reported on June 12 that UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will announce up to £242 million (about \$208 million) in bilateral assistance for Ukraine's humanitarian, energy, and economic and social recovery needs while at the G7 Summit.[5] French outlet *France24* reported that G7 leaders are also finalizing details on the transfer of up to \$50 billion in frozen Russian assets to Ukraine by the end of 2024.[6] G7 countries collectively possess \$235 billion in frozen Russian assets, and G7 leaders are reportedly brokering a deal that would rely on a US-led \$50 billion loan that would reach Ukraine by the end of 2024 and be "topped up" with contributions by other allies.[7] NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also announced during a Ukraine Defense Contract Group at the Ramstein Airbase in Germany on June 12 that NATO partners will agree on a comprehensive military and financial aid package for Ukraine during the upcoming NATO summit in July 2024 and emphasized that NATO will lead efforts to provide security assistance and training for Ukraine.[8] Stoltenberg also stated that the supply of weapons to Ukraine may become mandatory for NATO members in order to ensure that NATO's security assistance for Ukraine remains "reliable and large-scale." [9]

The United States finally sanctioned the Moscow Exchange, other significant Russian financial institutions, and Russian defense manufacturers 839 days into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The US Department of the Treasury announced on June 12 sanctions against more than 300 individuals and entities supporting Russia's wartime economy, including the Moscow Exchange and its subsidiaries; major banks VTB Bank, Sberbank, and Tochka Bank; and leading Russian defense industrial base (DIB) entities including state owned defense conglomerate Rostec, the state owned aerospace and defense company United Aircraft Corporation, vehicle and vehicle components manufacturer Kamaz, main Russian tank manufacturer Uralvagonzavod, and helicopter design and manufacturing company Russian Helicopters.[10] The UK also announced similar sanctions targeting Russian financial institutions, entities supporting the Russian DIB, and Russia's shadow fleet of oil tankers.[11]

The Russian government appears confident that these new sanctions will minimally impact the Russian financial system, and the delay in US and other Western countries sanctioning these entities has given the Russian financial system time to prepare and mitigate such sanctions. The Moscow Exchange immediately suspended trading in US dollars (USD), euros, and Hong Kong dollars (HKD) in several markets on June 12 following the US sanctions announcement, and the Russian Central Bank instituted a fixed exchange rate for over-the-counter trading using the USD and euro on June 13.[12] Western and some Russian media widely circulated reports of some Russian banks appearing to sell USD to Russians at 100-200 rubles per dollar on June 12 and 13, but prominent Russian banks Sberbank and VTB quickly announced on June 12 that the new US sanctions would not impact their operations.[13] The Russian Central Bank has prepared for these sanctions and developed a procedure in October 2022 for setting currency exchange rates when it cannot obtain such data from the Moscow Exchange (data the Moscow Exchange can presumably no longer provide for USD).[14] The Russian Central Bank began publishing information on over-the-counter foreign exchange trade in April 2024.[15] The Russian Central Bank set its rubles per USD exchange rate for June 14 to 88.2080, only 88 kopecks lower than the previous rate, and the ruble-to-euro exchange rate only decreased by 91 kopecks to 94.8342 rubles per euro. [16] *Bloomberg* reported that multiple Russian metals producers and a fertilizer maker are not worried about the end of USD-ruble exchange trading and that Russian state-owned gas monopoly Gazprom has not used the Moscow Exchange for settlements "in a long time." [17] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev complained about the new US sanctions, claiming that Russia is stable enough that it does not need to react to these sanctions out of economic need but that Russia should inflict "maximum harm" on the West in reaction to these sanctions because the United States and its allies "declared war on us [Russia] without rules." [18] Medvedev's choice to publish this only on his Russian language Telegram account indicates he likely means to posture strength and stability to a domestic Russian audience rather than address international audiences.

Bloomberg assessed on June 13 that the new US sanctions would make it more difficult for Russian businesses to trade on the international market due to the increased costs of over-the-counter trading and reduced foreign willingness to do business with Russian entities due to the fear of secondary sanctions.[19] A source close to the Russian Central Bank told *Bloomberg* that Chinese banks will gradually reduce their cooperation with the Moscow Exchange given these issues but that these banks will still provide yuan liquidity to support imports. The source also stated that there is uncertainty

whether the Russian Central Bank's new exchange rates will work and how much costs of foreign trading and business will rise.

US President Joe Biden reiterated his opposition to allowing Ukrainian forces to strike military targets in Russia's operational or deep rear areas in Russian territory with US-provided weapons. Biden acknowledged that it "makes a lot of sense" to allow Ukrainian forces to strike Russian forces on the immediate side of the international border in Russian territory but that the United States has not changed its restrictions prohibiting Ukraine from striking Russia's operational or deep rear in Russian territory.[20] ISW assesses that the Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum.[21] ISW assesses that the West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[22]

Sustained Ukrainian strikes against Russian military targets in occupied Crimea appear to be forcing the Russian military to commit additional air defense assets to Crimea in order to defend existing bases and logistics infrastructure, and further Ukrainian strikes against such air defense assets may render the peninsula untenable as a staging ground for the Russian military. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Lieutenant General Kyrylo Budanov reported on June 12 that Russian forces placed an S-500 air defense system (essentially a modernized version of the S-300) in Crimea as part of their efforts to strengthen Russia's air defense umbrella over Crimea.[23] Budanov stated that Russian forces have not previously used an S-500 air defense system in combat and characterized the system as "experimental." *Forbes* reported on June 12 that the Belbek Airfield in occupied Crimea is becoming an "attrition trap" for Russian air defenses following several successful Ukrainian strikes on air defenses near the airfield.[24] *Forbes* stated that it is possible that Ukrainian forces have destroyed elements of four or five S-400 batteries during recent strikes but noted that the Russian military has over 50 S-400 batteries. An X (formerly known as Twitter) user, citing satellite imagery, noted on June 11 that Russian forces have placed 17 barges near the Kerch Strait Bridge that connects occupied Crimea to Krasnodar Krai.[25] Russian forces likely intend for the barges to serve as defenses against Ukrainian naval drone strikes against the bridge, and Russian forces previously installed eight barges on the southern side of the bridge for similar reasons.[26] Ukraine's current efforts to attrit the Russian air defense umbrella in Crimea notably may have the exploitable effect of drawing more Russian air defense assets to Crimea, making them vulnerable to further Ukrainian strikes. ISW previously assessed that Ukrainian forces may be conducting an organized effort to degrade Russian air defenses, which could enable Ukraine to more effectively leverage manned fixed-wing airpower (namely using F-16 fighter jets) in the long term.[27] The West has long supported Ukraine's right to strike Russian military targets in occupied Crimea, and Ukrainian forces could in principle be able to replicate their successful strikes against military targets in Russia if the West approved such strikes in Russia's rear.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is reportedly using diplomatic channels to convince other countries to not support the upcoming June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland. *Reuters* reported on June 13 that 10 Beijing-based diplomats from unspecified countries stated that the PRC is using meetings with visiting foreign officials, phone calls, and messages on the WeChat platform to lobby other countries to support the PRC's and Brazil's suggested six-point peace plan, which called for a peace conference that includes both Ukraine and Russia.[28] *Reuters* reported that diplomatic sources stated that the PRC has not overtly criticized the upcoming peace summit in Switzerland when speaking with developing states and is instead trying to subtly bring about certain outcomes. One diplomatic source stated that the PRC has told developing states that the Swiss peace summit will prolong the war in Ukraine, and two diplomatic sources reportedly stated that the PRC has also been telling unspecified Western states that many developing states agree with the PRC's views about the Swiss peace summit. Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly asked PRC President Xi Jinping in May 2024 to "snub" the peace conference in Switzerland.[29] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated on June 2 that Russia is using Chinese influence and diplomats to disrupt the Global Peace Summit.[30] The Kremlin is likely trying to exploit the PRC's greater diplomatic connections and influence in the world to forward Russian interests.

The United States, United Kingdom (UK), and Canada released a joint statement on July 13 acknowledging and condemning Russian subversive activity and electoral interference efforts in Moldova, which is consistent with ISW's long-standing assessment of the Kremlin's ongoing hybrid campaign to destabilize Moldovan democracy.[31] The statement noted that the United States, UK, and Canada share Moldovan President Maia Sandu's concerns that the Kremlin is seeking to undermine Moldovan democratic institutions and practices in the lead-up to Moldova's October 2024 presidential election and European Union (EU) membership referendum. The statement noted that the Kremlin is leveraging criminal groups to finance political activities that undermine Moldovan democracy and is supporting candidates for the presidency that are "exacerbating social tensions." The statement heavily emphasizes the role of Russian disinformation campaigns targeting Moldovan democracy. ISW has written at length about recent Kremlin efforts to destabilize Moldova internally, including by supporting pro-Kremlin Moldovan political parties and conducting targeted disinformation campaigns.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine signed bilateral ten-year security agreements with the US and Japan on June 13 as other partner states reaffirmed their long-term support for Ukraine within the Group of 7 (G7) and Ramstein formats.
- The US finally sanctioned the Moscow Exchange, other significant Russian financial institutions, and Russian defense manufacturers 839 days into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- The Russian government appears confident that these new sanctions will minimally impact the Russian financial system, and the delay in US and other Western countries sanctioning these entities has given the Russian financial system time to prepare and mitigate such sanctions.
- US President Joe Biden reiterated his opposition to allowing Ukrainian forces to strike military targets in Russia's operational or deep rear areas in Russian territory with US-provided weapons.
- Sustained Ukrainian strikes against Russian military targets in occupied Crimea appear to be forcing the Russian military to commit additional air defense assets to Crimea in order to defend existing bases and logistics infrastructure, and further Ukrainian strikes against such air defense assets may render the peninsula untenable as a staging ground for the Russian military.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) is reportedly using diplomatic channels to convince other countries to not support the upcoming June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland.
- The US, United Kingdom (UK), and Canada released a joint statement on July 13 acknowledging and condemning Russian subversive activity and electoral interference efforts in Moldova, which is consistent with ISW's long-standing assessment of the Kremlin's ongoing hybrid campaign to destabilize Moldovan democracy.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City and Russian forces marginally advanced near Siversk and Avdiivka.
- Russian federal subjects (regions) continue to increase monetary incentives to recruit military personnel.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 12, 2024

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Ukrainian forces may be conducting an effort aimed at degrading Russian air defenses, which, if successful, could enable Ukraine to more effectively leverage manned fixed-wing airpower in the long run. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 12 that Ukrainian forces targeted one S-300 air defense battery and two S-400 air defense batteries near occupied Belbek and Sevastopol, Crimea overnight on June 11 to 12.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the strikes destroyed at least two S-300/S-400 Russian air defense radar systems and caused secondary ammunition detonations, and that the Ukrainian military is clarifying battle damage. Geolocated imagery published on June 12 shows damaged and destroyed Russian S-300 assets north of occupied Yevpatoria and a destroyed Russian S-400 radar system south of occupied Dzhankoy, supporting the Ukrainian General Staff's June 10 report about strikes against Russian air defense assets in these areas.[2] Some Russian sources speculated that Ukrainian forces used ATACMS in the June 11 to 12 strike, although ISW is unable to confirm which systems Ukrainian forces used.[3] Founder of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) "Kraken" Regiment Kostyantyn Nemichev confirmed on June 12 that Ukrainian forces used HIMARS to destroy four Russian S-300 systems in Belgorod Oblast on an unspecified date, and Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* referred to Nemichev's statements as the first official Ukrainian confirmation of strikes against a Russian S-300 battery in Belgorod Oblast on June 1 or 2.[4] Ukrainian forces' destruction of the Russian air defense systems in Belgorod Oblast reportedly prompted the Russian command to deploy air defense assets from Crimea to Belgorod Oblast in early June 2024, reportedly degrading Russian air defense coverage around Crimea.[5] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov also clarified on June 12 that Ukrainian drone strikes against the Akhtubinsk Airfield in Astrakhan Oblast between June 7 and 8 damaged two Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft instead of just one aircraft as previously reported.[6] S-300/S-400 air defense systems and Su-57 fighters are significant Russian air defense and aviation assets that deny Ukraine the ability to fly aircraft near the front and support Russian offensive operations in Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces may seek to actively degrade Russian air defenses *before* Ukraine receives a significant number of aircraft in order to set conditions for Ukraine's future use of manned fixed-wing airpower closer to frontline areas. Ukrainian forces may be attempting to degrade Russian air defenses ahead of anticipated F-16 fighter jet deliveries to Ukraine, which reportedly will begin in small quantities in summer and fall 2024. Ukrainian forces may be able to eventually work towards a concept of operations that combines fixed-wing airpower to support ground operations if the Ukrainian military receives a sufficient number of fighter jets, Western partners train enough trained pilots, and if Ukraine succeeds in degrading Russian air defense capabilities.

Western officials have indicated that Ukraine will continue to face material and training constraints, which will likely prevent Ukraine from leveraging fixed-wing airpower at scale in 2024. Ukrainian and Western officials have previously indicated that it will take significant time to adequately train enough Ukrainian pilots and equip Ukrainian forces with the roughly at least 150 F-16s necessary to gain the air superiority necessary to support ground operations.[7] Ukrainian officials have also identified their

envisioned use of F-16s and other fixed-wing aircraft to constrain Russian aviation operations, and Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Ilya Yevlash noted that only two F-16 squadrons, roughly 18 aircraft, would be enough to significantly impact the situation in the Ukrainian airspace.[8] These restraints should not fundamentally constrain Ukraine's ability to leverage airpower at scale in the long run, however, should Ukraine's Western partners lean into supporting Ukraine's air domain and deep strike capabilities.

Russian Northern Fleet naval vessels arrived at Havana Harbor, Cuba, on June 12 for their planned five-day-long port call. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that the Northern Fleet detachment — including the *Admiral Flota Sovetskogo Soyuza Gorshkov* Admiral Gorshkov-class frigate, *Kazan* nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine, the *Academic Pashin* replenishment oiler, and the *Nikolai Chiker* rescue tug — arrived in Havana after the *Kazan* and *Admiral Gorshkov* completed planned high-precision missile exercises.[9] Kremlin newswire TASS reported that the *Admiral Gorshkov* will be open for public viewing until June 15, and the port call will end on June 17.[10] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also notably met with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla in Moscow on June 12 against the backdrop of the port call to discuss Russian-Cuban relations and foreign policy alignment.[11] ISW previously assessed that the Russian port call in Havana is likely part of a larger Russian effort to invoke the historical memory of the Cuban Missile Crisis to encourage US self-deterrence.[12] The presence of the nuclear-capable *Kazan* submarine so close to US territorial waters in a port that holds fraught historical memory for the US is likely specifically intended to instill fear in the US and the West in order to force self-deterrence and weaken the West's resistance to Russia. Both US and Cuban officials have emphasized that this port call does not pose a tangible threat to the US.[13]

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenia "will leave" and "will decide when to leave" the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in a question-and-answer session with the Armenian National Assembly on June 12 amid Armenia's continued efforts to distance itself from security and political relations with Russia. [14] Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan clarified that Pashinyan did not state that Armenia is leaving the CSTO but that Armenia "will decide when [Armenia] will leave the CSTO, and [Armenia] will not go back." [15] Western and Russian media outlets largely portrayed Pashinyan's statement as confirmation that Armenia will leave the CSTO.[16] Pashinyan also reiterated at the National Assembly's question-and-answer session that the CSTO failed to fulfill its obligations to Armenia and that CSTO member states "are planning" a war against Armenia with Azerbaijan. Pashinyan indirectly accused Russia and directly accused Belarus in May 2024 of helping Azerbaijan to prepare for the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.[17] Pashinyan acknowledged in February 2024 that Armenia had "essentially" frozen its participation in the CSTO because the CSTO "failed to fulfill its obligations in the field of security" to Armenia, particularly in 2021 and 2022.[18] Armenia has also appeared to be attempting to reduce its bilateral security relations with Russia, and Pashinyan stated in March 2024 that Russian border guards will leave the Yerevan International Airport by August 1, 2024. [19] Armenia's withdrawal from the CSTO would largely formalize a de facto status quo given that that Armenia has effectively abstained from participation in the CSTO since Pashinyan and Armenian representatives failed to attend several consecutive CSTO events starting mid-to-late 2023. [20] Armenia's formal withdrawal from the CSTO would be a more significant blow to Russia, as Russia has leveraged the CSTO to undermine former Soviet states' sovereignty and project power across the former Soviet Union.[21]

Georgian opposition-leaning outlet *Mtavari* reported that the Georgian government is planning to resume diplomatic relations with Russia. There has been no official confirmation of *Mtavari*'s report as of this publication. *Mtavari* reported on June 11 that unspecified sources stated that the ruling Georgian Dream party is preparing to restore diplomatic relations with Russia and that the Georgian and Russian governments are currently selecting employees for the Georgian embassy in Moscow.[22] *Mtavari* stated that the Georgian Dream party denied this information and called it "groundless." The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) also claimed to Kremlin newswire TASS on June 12 that Georgian opposition sources are spreading false information about the matter.[23] ISW continues to assess that Georgian Dream actors likely intend to purposefully derail long-term Georgian efforts for Euro-Atlantic integration, which plays into continued Russian hybrid operations to divide, destabilize, and weaken Georgia.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces may be conducting an effort aimed at degrading Russian air defenses, which, if successful, could enable Ukraine to more effectively leverage manned fixed-wing airpower in the long run.
- Russian Northern Fleet naval vessels arrived at Havana Harbor, Cuba, on June 12 for their planned five-day long port call.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenia "will leave" and "will decide when to leave" the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in a question-and-answer session with the Armenian National Assembly on June 12 amid Armenia's continued efforts to distance itself from security and political relations with Russia.
- Georgian opposition-leaning outlet *Mtavari* reported that the Georgian government is planning to resume diplomatic relations with Russia.

- Russian forces made confirmed advances near Vovchansk, Siversk, and Avdiivka and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin highlighted Russian defense company officials in a list of recent recipients of labor awards during a "Russia Day" speech on June 11, indicating Putin's continued emphasis on strengthening the Russian defense industrial base (DIB).

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 11, 2024

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

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

Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide monetary and military assistance to Ukraine, including air defense systems. The Estonian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on June 11 that Estonia will provide an undisclosed number of Mistral man-portable short-range air defense systems and missiles to Ukraine as part of a new military assistance package.[1] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced during the Ukrainian Recovery Conference in Berlin on June 11 that the European Union (EU) will transfer roughly 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) worth of profits from frozen Russian assets to Ukraine in July, of which Ukraine will allocate 90 percent to defense spending and 10 percent to reconstruction.[2] Von der Leyen stated that the EU will also transfer an additional 1.9 billion euros (\$2 billion) to Ukraine from the EU's Ukraine Facility mechanism, which is a separate fund that provides for the EU to transfer up to 50 billion euros (\$53.7 billion) to Ukraine between 2024 and 2027.[3] German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reiterated during the Ukrainian Recovery Conference that Germany will deliver a Patriot air defense system to Ukraine in the coming weeks and announced that Germany will also deliver an IRIS-T air defense system, an unspecified number of Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, and an unspecified number and type of missiles and ammunition to Ukraine in the coming weeks and months.[4] The German MoD initially announced the transfer of this third Patriot system in April 2024.[5] *The New York Times*, citing senior US administration and military officials, reported on June 11 that US President Joe Biden recently approved the transfer of another Patriot system to Ukraine following a series of high-level meetings and internal debates regarding the best ways to meet Ukraine's need for additional air defenses. [6] Unnamed US officials stated that the new system could be deployed to the frontline within several days depending on any maintenance or modifications that the system may need, as the system is currently stationed in Poland.

The Kremlin continues efforts to codify legal instruments and repressive measures intended to broadly censor foreigners and foreign organizations in Russia. The Russian State Duma adopted a bill in its first reading on June 11 that seeks to codify the Russian government's ability to recognize "any" foreign organization as "undesirable." [7] The Duma first approved the draft version of this bill on May 27. [8] The Duma also adopted an additional bill in its first reading that introduces criminal penalties including fines and imprisonment for someone's participation in "any" organization classified as "undesirable." [9] Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin noted that this new bill will fill a gap in the existing legislation, which only has provisions to class foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as "undesirable." [10] The new bill will extend the undesirable classification to any foreign and international organizations, thereby broadening the Kremlin's discretion to target and censor a wide range of foreign organizations operating within Russia. The Kremlin has previously used the "undesirable" designation to block opposition media outlets, civil society organizations, and human rights-focused organizations from entering or operating within Russia, as ISW has previously reported. [11] Kremlin-appointed Russian Commissioner for Human Rights Tatiana Moskalkova also notably called on June 11 for the establishment of a legal mechanism that would allow the Russian government to prosecute foreigners for "Russophobia as a manifestation of extremism." [12] Russian authorities widely use accusations of "Russophobia" in an attempt to undermine any undesirable policy or rhetoric they deem to be "anti-Russian," and have similarly used charges of extremism with broad discretion to suppress and discourage domestic opposition. [13]

A prominent Kremlin-awarded Russian milblogger channel announced that it opened a second "media school" in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, likely to support Kremlin efforts to expand its influence in the international information space, particularly in Central Asia. The *Rybar* Telegram channel claimed on June 11 that it is opening the "Rybar Media School" in Bishkek because Kyrgyzstan lacks military-political and industry expertise as well as a "blogosphere" and opinion journalism. [14] *Rybar* framed its establishment of a "media school" in Bishkek as an effort to coordinate and assert Russia's position in Central Asia and warned that Russia could be "expelled" from Central Asia in three to five years if Russia fails to assert itself and manage its informational influence in the region. *Rybar's* founder and manager Mikhail Zvinchuk gave a lecture to students at the Kyrgyz National University about the benefits of using Telegram to "solve problems" in the current information environment. *Rybar* claimed that Zvinchuk's lecture was only the first in a series of lectures and trainings for Kyrgyz media workers, students, public relations professionals, and press services to learn how to use multimedia to develop local Kyrgyz journalism. *Rybar* claimed that journalists from the Kyrgyz-branch of the official Russian government outlet *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, "complained" about the lack of Russian journalistic work in Central Asia and claimed that the West outbalances Russia in its support for Kyrgyz journalism. Zvinchuk gave a masterclass in December 2023 on the importance

of Telegram and other social media to press heads at Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec likely in an effort to normalize the war without directly involving the Kremlin or other official state bodies. *Rybar* announced that it opened a media school in an unspecified location in the Balkans in April 2024.[15] *Rybar* claimed that multiple Serbian and Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) outlets highlighted *Rybar's* "debut" in the Balkans, while notably no Kyrgyz Russian- or Kyrgyz-language news outlets reported on the new "media school" in Bishkek as of this publication.[16] *Rybar* will likely attempt to expand its media influence in other foreign countries, and the Kremlin will likely seek to use coopted milbloggers like *Rybar* to expand Russian influence in international media.

Danish authorities arrested a Danish-Russian dual citizen accused of having connections to Russian intelligence services, which is likely part of the Kremlin's continued efforts to re-intensify its hybrid campaign against Western countries. The *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* (DR) reported on June 11 that Danish authorities arrested an unidentified woman with dual Danish-Russian citizenship related to a recent investigation into the woman's connections to Russian foreign intelligence.[17] *DR* reported on June 3, citing leaked documents from Western intelligence services, that the women's legal aid clinic for Russian speakers received at least 338,000 Danish kroner (about \$49,000) from the Russian Fund for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad (Pravfond), which *DR* describes as closely linked to the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).[18] The *Guardian*, which saw the same leaked documents, reported that Pravfond's leadership has multiple Russian intelligence agents, including longtime SVR officers Vladimir Pozdorovkin and Anatoly Sorokin.[19] The *Guardian* reported that Pravfond operates throughout Europe and that Pozdorovkin specifically oversees Pravfond's operations in Nordic and Baltic countries while Sorokin oversees operations in the Middle East, Moldova, and Transnistria. [20] *DR* reported and that the woman is a "central figure" in Denmark's Russian-speaking community and noted she has traveled to Russia and elsewhere for conferences with Pravfond participation or sponsorship.[21] The Kremlin has recently intensified its hybrid campaigns in Europe, and the Kremlin has been leaning into a narrative about protecting Russians and Russian-speakers outside of Russia — often called "compatriots abroad" — as part of its wider toolkit of hybrid manipulations.[22] The "compatriots abroad" narrative sets informational conditions for the Kremlin to justify hybrid operations or even direct interference against countries it claims do not adequately protect so-called Russian "compatriots" should these countries take actions unfavorable to the Kremlin. *DR* noted that several European intelligence sources stated that the Kremlin aims to use counseling and assistance centers — of which Pravfond funds at least 34 in 21 countries — to justify direct interference in other countries. [23]

Kremlin newswire TASS reported on June 11 that the former Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Military Academy, Grigory Molchanov, was appointed Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council.[24] Russian outlet *RBK* stated that Molchanov has served in the Russian military since 1973 and noted that the Security Council's first new appointment since former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu became Security Council Secretary on May 13.[25] Russian outlet *RTVI* noted that there are currently eight deputy secretaries and one first deputy secretary in addition to Shoigu.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukraine's Western allies continue to provide monetary and military assistance to Ukraine, including air defense systems.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to codify legal instruments and repressive measures intended to broadly censor foreigners and foreign organizations in Russia.
- A prominent Kremlin-awarded Russian milblogger channel announced that it opened a second "media school" in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, likely to support Kremlin efforts to expand its influence in the international information space, particularly in Central Asia.
- Danish authorities arrested a Danish-Russian dual citizen accused of having connections to Russian intelligence services, which is likely part of the Kremlin's continued efforts to re-intensify its hybrid campaign against Western countries.
- Kremlin newswire TASS reported on June 11 that the former Head of the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) Military Academy, Grigory Molchanov, was appointed Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council.
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupyansk and northwest of Avdiivka.
- Russia may have suffered a damaged or destroyed military naval vessel in the Barents Sea.
- Belarusian officials continue to implicate themselves in the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarus and their re-education in Belarusian programs.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 10, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Karolina Hird, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

June 10, 2024, 8:10pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:45pm ET on June 10. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 11 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against Russian air defense assets in occupied Crimea overnight on June 9 to 10, likely with ATACMS. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 10 that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-400 air defense battery near occupied Dzhankoi and two S-300 batteries near occupied Chornomorske and Yevpatoria.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian strikes hit the radar stations of each battery and caused secondary ammunition detonations and that Russian air defenses did not intercept any of the Ukrainian missiles. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that Ukrainian forces launched at least 10 ATACMS missiles and that each targeted air defense installation was an element of the Russian 31st Air Defense Division (4th Guards Air Force and Air Defense Army, Southern Military District [SMD] and Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS]).[2] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian air defenses intercepted multiple Ukrainian ATACMS missiles overnight but largely did not report that any of the missiles hit their targets, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has not commented on the strikes as of the time of this publication.[3] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of the extent of damages from the Ukrainian strikes. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Schemes* project published satellite imagery of burn marks at a Russian military object near a railway junction in Dzhankoi but noted that the imagery's resolution is too low to determine specific damage.[4] A Russian milblogger who focuses on Russian air and air defense and has been largely critical of the Russian MoD criticized the Russian MoD in response to the strikes, claiming that Russian officers are falsely reporting no losses to their superiors despite actually suffering heavy losses.[5]

Ukrainian strikes against Russian military and logistics assets in connection to the United States' partial removal of Russian sanctuary in Belgorod Oblast may have compelled Russian forces to change their deployment and transport patterns. The Crimea-based Atesh Ukrainian partisan movement reported on June 10 that Russian forces recently redeployed air defense systems from occupied Crimea to Belgorod Oblast and that Russian air defenses are not completely covering Crimea as a result.[6] Footage dated June 8 shows that Russia has begun transporting fuel across the Kerch Strait across the railway bridge.[7] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on April 29 that Russian authorities have not transported fuel across the Kerch Strait railway bridge since March 2024 due to the threat of a Ukrainian strike against the bridge as a fuel transport crossed, which could ignite and possibly destroy the bridge.[8] Ukrainian military-focused news outlet *Militarnyi* assessed on June 10 that Ukrainian strikes against railway barges across the Kerch Strait on May 30 prompted Russian authorities to begin transporting fuel across the railway bridge again.[9] It is unclear whether Russian authorities will continue to use the Kerch Strait railway bridge for fuel and logistics transport to occupied Crimea in the near to medium term. Doing so would likely alleviate some logistics constraints as Russia struggles to compensate for lost ferries across the strait but would leave the Kerch Strait bridge increasingly vulnerable to Ukrainian strikes, particularly if Russian air defense coverage of Crimea is degraded as Atesh reported.

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk denied on June 10 a Sky News report that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Ropucha-class landing ship in the Sea of Azov on the night of June 8 to 9.[10] Pletenchuk also stated that there are three large Russian amphibious assault ships and three Buyan-M-class corvettes in the Sea of Azov as of May 10.[11] *Sky News* reported on June 9, citing a Ukrainian military source, that Ukrainian forces sunk or damaged a Russian Ropucha-class landing ship that Russian forces had recently moved from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, which ISW amplified.[12]

New Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with a select group of Russian milbloggers and military commentators on June 10, suggesting that the Kremlin seeks to partially use Belousov's replacement of widely unpopular former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to build bridges and cultivate ties with a broader milblogger community via a cadre of coopted and loyal military commentators. Russian state news agencies TASS and RIA Novosti reported on June 10 that Belousov met with several military correspondents (also known as *voyenkory* or milbloggers) covering the war in Ukraine and claimed that the conversation was "frank and constructive." [13] TASS and RIA noted that Belousov hopes to hold such meetings regularly. Russian insider sources and milbloggers claimed in late May and early June that Belousov was planning to meet with select milbloggers, and some of the more critical milbloggers criticized Belousov for reportedly not inviting them to the meeting.[14] Russian media confirmed on June 10 that several prominent and generally Kremlin-aligned milbloggers attended Belousov's meeting, including head of the *WarGonzo* social media military project Semyon Pegov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* military correspondent and Kremlin-appointed member of the Human Rights Council Alexander Kots; *Zvezda* military correspondent Anatoly Brodtkin; *Russia Today* (RT) military correspondent Murad Gazdiev, *Readovka* correspondent Maxim Dolgov, and others.[15] Gazdiev claimed on his personal Telegram channel on June 10 that the milbloggers delivered good and bad news from the front to Belousov and promised unspecified "huge changes." [16]

The Kremlin likely attempted to falsely portray Belousov as more attentive to milbloggers' criticisms than his predecessor in an effort to co-opt a larger non-Kremlin affiliated milblogger community. The Kremlin and Shoigu previously appeared at odds over milblogger reproachment—Russian President Vladimir Putin met with select milbloggers in July 2022 and June 2023 to discuss the situation on the

frontline in Ukraine, while the Russian MoD continuously tried to crack down against critical milbloggers, who often used Shoigu as an informational scapegoat for Russian operational failures in Ukraine.[17] The Kremlin has long endeavored to coopt milbloggers, especially those critical of the Russian military leadership, in an effort to control the information space, as ISW previously assessed. [18] Belousov's meeting represents MoD outreach to several milbloggers who have had the Kremlin's favor for some time now and likely intended to court this group of commentators and ensure their continued loyalty to a new MoD under Belousov. Belousov's milblogger outreach is more likely to be a performative attempt to secure their loyalty than introduce systemic changes within the Russian MoD, as several Russian milbloggers who were not invited to the meeting previously noted.[19] Both the Kremlin and the Russian MoD have a vested interest in appearing open to dialogue with milbloggers, who represent a major pro-war constituency, and the Kremlin is likely aiming to portray Belousov as more cognizant of this fact than his predecessor.

Officials from Russia, Iran, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) held bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the BRICS foreign ministers meeting in Nizhny Novgorod on June 10. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke at the BRICS meeting and highlighted the organization's recent expansion.[20] Lavrov reiterated standard Kremlin narratives about how the Western rules-based order is detrimental to other states and about the supposed merits of the creation of a multipolar world. Lavrov claimed that the "winds of change" are driving BRICS forward. Lavrov met with officials from Brazil, South Africa, Ethiopia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt during the BRICS event as well.[21]

Lavrov met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the BRICS meeting on June 10. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Chinese MFA both stated that Lavrov and Wang discussed diplomatic coordination in international organizations such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).[22] The Chinese MFA stated that developing Russo-Chinese relations are a "strategic choice" by both parties and that Lavrov and Wang "exchanged views" on the war in Ukrainian war.[23] The Russian MFA labeled the Russo-Chinese relationship as a "strategic partnership" and stated that Lavrov thanked Wang for the PRC's "balanced" line on the war in Ukraine and for not sending a representative to the June 15-16 Ukrainian peace summit in Switzerland. [24] The Russian MFA also stated that Lavrov and Wang discussed stability in the Asia-Pacific region, where they accused the US of allegedly creating anti-Russian and anti-Chinese military-political structures.[25] Lavrov also met with acting Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani on June 10 and discussed efforts to form a Russo-Iranian "strategic partnership" and create a new comprehensive intergovernmental agreement.[26] Kremlin newswire TASS reported that Kani stated that Iran "sees enormous potential for expanding and strengthening [Russo-Iranian] interaction." [27] Kani and Wang also met on June 10 and reportedly discussed increasing cooperation.[28] Russian outlet *Vedomosti* reported on June 9 that Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexander Matsegora stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit North Korea, and an unspecified diplomatic source reportedly stated that the visit will occur in the coming weeks after Putin visits Vietnam. [29] ISW continues to assess that Russia, the PRC, Iran, North Korea, and Belarus are deepening their multilateral partnerships in order to confront the West.[30]

The Armenian National Assembly will likely hold an emergency session by June 17 during which the Armenian opposition parties will demand Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's and his cabinet's resignation. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Armenian Service *Radio Azatutyun* reported on June 10 that 33 members of the Armenian opposition factions "Armenian Alliance" and "I Have Honor" supported convening an emergency session of the National Assembly to discuss passing a resolution calling for Pashinyan's and his cabinet's resignation and the formation of a new government.[31] The opposition factions blame Pashinyan for what they see as failures to defend and secure the territorial integrity and borders of Armenia.[32] *Radio Azatutyun* noted that Armenian law stipulates that the National Assembly needs the support of 27 members of the 107-seat National Assembly to call an emergency session.[33] Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party's National Assembly leader Hayk Konjoryan stated that Civil Contract National Assembly members will not participate in the June 17 emergency session.[34]

The US Department of State announced on June 10 that the US and Poland jointly launched the Ukraine Communications Group (UCG) in Warsaw to counter Russian disinformation by offering fact-based reporting about the war in Ukraine.[35] Representatives of unspecified countries will reportedly collaborate with the UCG. The US Department of State emphasized that Russia often uses false narratives to obfuscate its war aims and try to fracture worldwide solidarity with Ukraine.

Finnish authorities reported that a Russian military aircraft temporarily violated Finnish airspace on June 10 amid continued Russian efforts to undermine Finnish sovereignty. The Finnish Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that it is investigating an incident in which an unspecified Russian military aircraft flew roughly 2.5 kilometers deep into Finnish airspace over the Gulf of Finland for two minutes on the morning of June 10.[36] The Russian MoD has not responded to the Finnish report as of this publication but claimed on June 10 that Russian Tu-95MS missile carriers and Tu-22M3 bombers conducted flights over neutral waters of the Baltic, Barents, and Norwegian seas. [37] This reported incursion likely forwards the ongoing Kremlin effort to undermine Finnish sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Russian MoD proposed on May 21 that the Russian government should reassess Russia's maritime borders in the Gulf of Finland, which some Western

officials have warned may be part of an effort to revise maritime zones in the Baltic Sea.[38] The Kremlin has also been running a number of information operations aimed at portraying Finland as an enemy to Russia and Russians, ultimately setting information conditions to justify potential future aggression against Finland.[39]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces conducted a strike against Russian air defense assets in occupied Crimea overnight on June 9 to 10, likely with ATACMS.
- Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk denied on June 10 a *Sky News* report that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Ropucha-class landing ship in the Sea of Azov on the night of June 8 to 9.
- New Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with a select group of Russian milbloggers and military commentators on June 10, suggesting that the Kremlin seeks to partially use Belousov's replacement of widely unpopular former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to build bridges and cultivate ties with a broader milblogger community via a cadre of coopted and loyal military commentators.
- Officials from Russia, Iran, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) held bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the BRICS foreign ministers meeting in Nizhny Novgorod on June 10.
- The Armenian National Assembly will likely hold an emergency session by June 17 during which the Armenian opposition parties will demand Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's and his cabinet's resignation.
- The US Department of State announced on June 10 that the US and Poland jointly launched the Ukraine Communications Group (UCG) in Warsaw to counter Russian disinformation by offering fact-based reporting about the war in Ukraine.
- Finnish authorities reported that a Russian military aircraft temporarily violated Finnish airspace on June 10 amid continued Russian efforts to undermine Finnish sovereignty.
- Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.
- Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov appears to be focusing on healthcare programs for Russian servicemembers in his new role.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 9, 2024

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

George Barros, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, and Kateryna Stepanenko

June 9, 2024, 6:45pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:15pm ET on June 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum. US policy still preserves at least 84 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – territory within range of Ukrainian ATACMS. US policy restricting Ukraine's usage of US-provided weapons has effectively created a vast sanctuary – territory in range of US-provided weapons but that Ukrainian forces are not allowed strike with US-provided weapons – which Russia exploits to shield its combat forces, command and control, logistics, and rear area support services that the Russian military uses to conduct its military operations in Ukraine.[1] US policy still protects the vast majority of Russia's operational rear and deep rear, and US policy forbids Ukraine from using ATACMS anywhere in Russia.[2] US President Joe Biden's limited policy change in late May 2024 regarding the use of US-provided weapons against military targets in Russia removed at maximum 16 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary, assuming that Ukrainian forces can strike all legitimate Russian military targets in range of Ukrainian HIMARS using GMLRS in Belgorod, Kursk, and Bryansk oblasts. It is far from clear that Ukrainian forces have permission to do so, however. Senior US officials have described Ukraine's ability to strike into Russia with GMLRS as being for counterbattery fire and geographically bounded to the Kharkiv area, and have stated that Ukrainian forces may strike Russian military objects "deployed just across the [Ukrainian] border," suggesting that Ukraine may be prohibited from striking Russian military targets further in the rear or in other areas in Kursk and Bryansk oblasts that are still in range of GMLRS. [3] US officials' statements also indicate that Ukrainian forces may be constrained from striking Russian military targets that are not actively involved in ground attacks and strikes against Ukraine. [4] The reduction of the sanctuary space's area may be less than 16 percent, therefore.

The Biden Administration's limited policy reversal permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike Russian military targets within Russian territory has removed at maximum only 16 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – a small area along the Russian-Ukrainian international border. The US policy change, while a step in the right direction, is by itself inadequate and unable to disrupt Russian operations at scale. ISW assesses that the West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian

operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[5]

Likely Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft at the Akhtubinsk Airfield in Astrakhan Oblast between June 7 and 8. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published satellite imagery on June 9 reportedly showing the Su-57 aircraft at the airfield on June 7 and damaged Su-57 following the strike on June 8 but did not explicitly claim responsibility for the attack.[6] The June 8 satellite image shows burn marks from an explosion, but the scale of the damage to the Su-57 is unclear from the provided footage. The GUR reported that Russian forces use the Su-57 aircraft to launch Kh-59/69 cruise missiles and that the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) have very few Su-57 aircraft in service. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that the GUR struck one of the six operational Su-57 aircraft and that Russian forces are constructing another six aircraft.[7] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that there may have been two Su-57 aircraft at the airfield during the June 8 strike and that the GUR is assessing battle damage.[8] Russian milbloggers seized on the June 8 strike to criticize the Russian military command for not constructing hangars to hide Russian aircraft from Ukrainian strikes and claimed that Russian forces could construct hangars at every military airfield in Russia for the cost of one Su-57 aircraft.[9] Su-57s cost an estimated \$35 million.[10]

Ukrainian forces may have struck a Russian large landing ship or patrol boat in Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9. *Sky News* reported on June 9 that a Ukrainian military source stated that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Ropucha-class landing ship in an unspecified location on the evening of June 8.[11] The source reportedly stated that Russian forces recently moved the ship from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov and that the ship is the fifth Ropucha-class ship that Ukrainian strikes have sunk or "rendered unserviceable." *Sky News* reported that the source stated that the strike shows that Russian forces "cannot operate with freedom" in the Black Sea and that the strike "thwart[ed] Russian shipments of ammunition and key military supplies" to unspecified locations. Ukrainian channel *Crimean Wind* and Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko reported on June 9 that a Ukrainian drone struck a Russian ship near the port of Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9.[12] *Crimean Wind* reported that satellite imagery from the morning of June 9 suggests that Ukrainian forces may not have hit a large landing ship but may have struck a Vasily Bykov-class patrol ship.[13] *Crimean Wind* reported that satellite imagery also shows an oil slick in the area that was not present in satellite imagery collected earlier. Ukrainian officials have not commented on the reported strike as of the time of this publication, and ISW cannot independently confirm the strike. Satellite imagery collected on June 5 indicated that Russia moved at least 18 naval vessels, including two Vasily Bukov-class patrol ships and an unspecified number of Ropucha-class landing ships, from the port in Novorossiysk, and some of the ships were reportedly sailing towards Crimea as of June 6.[14] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on June 7 the Russian Navy likely transferred a large grouping of vessels to the Black Sea and Sea of Azov in order to reduce their vulnerability to Ukrainian drone strikes.[15]

The Kremlin's concerted effort to remove and arrest senior Russian defense officials may be extending to civilian regional administration officials. Russian authorities arrested Tyumen Oblast Deputy Governor Vyacheslav Vakhnin on June 9, Republic of Karelia Legislative Assembly Head of the Committee on Budget and Taxes Vitaly Krasulin on May 29, Oryol Oblast Gubernatorial Advisor Sergei Lezhnev on May 27, and Krasnodar Krai Deputy Governor Sergei Vlasov on May 24 for various fraud and bribery charges.[16] Russian authorities have detained at least five senior Russian MoD officials and former military commanders since late April 2024, and *The Moscow Times* reported on May 24 that these are the first of dozens or hundreds of anticipated arrests.[17] An unnamed acting Russian government official told *The Moscow Times* that the arrests could spiral into the largest effort to remove Russian military officials in modern Russian history.[18] Russian authorities may intend to use the guise of anti-corruption campaigns to conduct a large-scale removal of Russian defense officials and could easily replicate such efforts against civilian officials in Russian federal subjects. [19] Kaliningrad Oblast deputies proposed on June 9 to dismiss any Kaliningrad Oblast governors recognized as foreign agents, possibly another mechanism or informational justification that Russian authorities may try to use to remove officials from regional administrations.[20] The removal and arrest of regional officials comes amid an apparent effort by Russian President Vladimir Putin to remove from power the political and military figures that lost his trust in 2022 and 2023.[21] Putin may also seek to disempower regional officials who have lost his trust and rebalance which regional officials have his favor. Putin notably recently platformed St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), suggesting that Beglov may currently have Putin's favor despite his past controversies.[22]

The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc held its second congress in Moscow on June 9 following a series of meetings between pro-Kremlin Moldovan opposition politicians and Russian officials from June 6 to 9. Russian state news agency *RIA Novosti* reported that politicians of the Victory electoral bloc discussed the October 20, 2024 Moldovan presidential election and referendum on Moldova's accession to the European Union (EU).[23] US-sanctioned Moldovan politician and Victory bloc founder Ilan Shor stated that he is confident that the Victory bloc can defeat Moldovan President Maia Sandu in Moldova's October 2024 presidential election and will "use whatever methods are necessary" to accomplish this goal and free Moldova from the "pro-European bandits" who are currently leading Moldova.[24] Shor stated that the only way to

"revive Moldova" is for Moldova to join the Kremlin-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and that the Victory bloc is working towards this. Chairperson of the Victory bloc's parliamentary group Vasile Bolea claimed that Moldova is becoming the second country to turn away from Russia - referring to Ukraine as the first - and that Moldova's pro-Russian opposition will resist this.[25] Kremlin-affiliated governor of Moldova's pro-Russian autonomous region of Gagauzia Yevgenia Gutsul stated that the Victory bloc held its congress in Russia because the Moldovan government is threatening Moldovan oppositionists and claimed that Moldova will be drawn into the conflict in Ukraine if Moldovans vote to join the EU.[26]

Gutsul also met with a series of Kremlin officials and Russian governors during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), further solidifying her connections to the Kremlin. Gutsul briefly met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of SPIEF on June 9 and emphasized Gagauzia's desire for greater cooperation with Russia.[27] Gutsul also met with United Russia State Duma Deputy Nikolay Valuev; Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossostrudnichestvo*) General Director Yevgeny Primakov; Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov; St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov; and several other regional officials on June 6, 7, and 8.[28] Gutsul also attended a panel on "traditional values" with veteran Russian propagandist and RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan on June 8.[29] Gutsul also claimed that she will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin again in the future despite pressure from the Moldovan government but did not specify a time frame for this meeting.[30]

Former pro-Russian Moldovan president and current head of the Moldovan Socialist Party Igor Dodon gave interviews to Russian state news agencies TASS and RIA Novosti on June 9 in which he promoted several known Kremlin narratives targeting the current Moldovan government – many of which Moldovan opposition politicians also promoted at the Victory bloc congress.[31] Dodon claimed that the Moldovan government is militarizing Moldova and preparing Moldova for the "Ukrainian scenario" by increasing Moldova's defense spending and cooperation with NATO. Dodon claimed that the upcoming Moldovan presidential election in October 2024 will be illegitimate and unconstitutional. Dodon called on Moldova to participate in Russia-led organizations such as the EAEU and the CIS. Dodon claimed that the Moldovan government is persecuting oppositionists like Gutsul and himself. Dodon claimed that Moldovan authorities may allow Ukraine to "destabilize" the Moldovan breakaway republic of Transnistria or may conduct "provocations" against Gagauzia in the future.

The Kremlin will likely try to exploit its ties to Dodon as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldovan democracy and influence the Moldovan government. Dodon claimed that Moldovan opposition parties must work together to defeat Sandu in the presidential election and noted that if Moldovan opposition parties do not unite behind a single candidate, there will be competition between them.[32] Dodon stated that the opposition's candidate should be a well-known person who is apolitical and not the leader of a political party but added that he may run for president if the opposition cannot agree on a candidate. Dodon stated that his relationship with Shor is "complicated" and that they have not communicated. Dodon stated, however, that they will need to cooperate as the "enemy of my enemy is my potential partner and friend." The Kremlin is likely aware that the Victory bloc's yet-to-be-announced presidential candidate has a lower chance of beating Sandu in the election if other major opposition parties, such as the Socialist Party that has a coalition with the Communist Party, also run candidates. Dodon's June 9 interviews demonstrate that Dodon understands that he will need to cooperate with Shor and the Victory electoral bloc but is currently reluctant to do so. Dodon reportedly has close ties to the Kremlin dating back to his time as president, and the Kremlin is highly likely exploiting its ties to Dodon in its overall efforts to influence the Moldovan election.[33] The parallels between the information operations that both the Victory bloc congress and Dodon promoted suggest a coordinated anti-Sandu effort. Dodon's public statements about his "complicated" relationship with Shor and his lack of cooperation with the Victory bloc so far suggest that the Kremlin, Dodon, and Shor have not yet agreed on a presidential candidate or electoral strategy, however.

Key Takeaways:

- The Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum. US policy still preserves at least 84 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – territory within range of Ukrainian ATACMS.
- Likely Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft at the Akhtubinsk Airfield in Astrakhan Oblast between June 7 and 8.
- Ukrainian forces may have struck a Russian large landing ship or patrol boat in Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9.
- The Kremlin's concerted effort to remove and arrest senior Russian defense officials may be extending to civilian regional administration officials.
- The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc held its second congress in Moscow on June 9 following a series of meetings between pro-Kremlin Moldovan opposition politicians and Russian officials from June 6 to 9.
- Former pro-Russian Moldovan president and current head of the Moldovan Socialist Party Igor Dodon gave interviews to Russian state news agencies TASS and RIA

Novosti on June 9 in which he promoted several known Kremlin narratives targeting the current Moldovan government – many of which Moldovan opposition politicians also promoted at the Victory bloc congress.

- The Kremlin will likely try to exploit its ties to Dodon as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldovan democracy and influence the Moldovan government.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupyansk, Siversk, Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.
- Russian officials continue efforts to coerce migrants into military service.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 8, 2024

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Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Kateryna Stepanenko, and George Barros

June 8, 2024, 7:30pm ET

The Russian military command is reportedly transferring an unspecified number of forces to the Ukrainian-Russian border area near Kharkiv Oblast, but it is unclear if the Russian military command plans to immediately commit these redeployed forces to combat or use them to reinforce the Northern Grouping of Forces to bring it closer to its reported planned end strength. Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz Commander Apty Alaudinov claimed in an interview with Russian state media outlet *RT* on June 8 that Russian authorities decided to transfer elements of the Akhmat Spetsnaz to the Kharkiv direction from unspecified areas at the end of May 2024.[1] Alaudinov claimed that the "Kashtan" detachment, formerly known as Akhmat "Kamerton" detachment and renamed after its new commander, is operating in the Kharkiv direction. Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on June 8 that Akhmat forces are serving as blocking units – specialized disciplinary units that fire upon friendly forces if they engage in an unauthorized retreat – in the international border area, and it is possible that the Russian military command transferred Akhmat forces to the area solely for this purpose and not to conduct offensive operations.[2] Voloshyn also stated that the Russian military command is increasing the Russian force grouping near the border area by transferring elements of unspecified regiments and brigades from other sectors of the front, including from occupied Kherson Oblast. Voloshyn stated that the Russian military command intends to commit unspecified airborne (VDV) elements and additional elements of the 11th and 44th Army Corps (both of the Leningrad Military District [LMD]) to offensive operations in unspecified areas of the border area. Elements of the 11th and 44th Army Corps have been conducting offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and a battalion of the 98th VDV Division is reportedly operating in a border area in Kursk Oblast.[3] The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated on June 8 that the Russian military command is redeploying unspecified units and drone operators from the Kherson direction to the Kharkiv direction.[4] Russian forces reportedly had roughly 35,000 personnel in the international border area as a part of the Northern Grouping of Forces when they started offensive operations on May 10, whereas Ukrainian sources have indicated that the Russian military initially sought to concentrate at least 50,000 to 70,000 personnel in the international border area as of early May.[5] It is unclear whether Russian forces have altered the planned end strength of the Northern Grouping of Forces since launching the offensive operation into northern Kharkiv Oblast on May 10. A Russian milblogger claimed on June 6 that the Russian military command has only committed about 15,000 personnel to the offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[6]

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets noted on June 8 that a fraction of the reported 30,000 personnel that Russia generates each month arrives at the front as combat force replacements and reinforcements and that Russian force generation efforts have allowed Russian forces to establish only limited operational and strategic reserves. Mashovets stated that on average each Russian operational grouping of forces receives between 1,000 to 1,500 combat personnel as replacements or reinforcements every month and may receive 2,000 if the grouping is responsible for intensified offensive operations.[7] There are six operational Russian groupings of forces operating within and near Ukraine, meaning that Mashovets is suggesting that Russian forces receive a total of 6,000 to 12,000 new combat personnel each month.[8] This figure is not incongruent with Ukrainian and Russian reports from January and April 2024 that Russia recruits 30,000 new personnel per month since a large number of these new personnel will fulfill combat support and combat service support roles or later assume combat arms roles following training.[9] Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on June 7 that Russia has recruited 160,000 new personnel so far in 2024, a figure fairly consistent with reports that the Russian military recruits about 30,000 personnel a month.[10] Russian forces have leveraged their possession of the theater-wide initiative to determine a tempo of fighting in Ukraine in recent months that appears to generate casualties roughly equal to or slightly less than the rate of newly generated forces.[11] This careful balance between Russian casualties and newly generated forces requires that Russian forces not significantly intensify offensive operations for a prolonged period of time, however. This balance becomes even more narrow when considering losses and new force generation for just Russian combat personnel.[12] ISW has observed a "pulsing" of Russian offensive operations along the front in recent months, wherein Russian forces alternate between intensified assaults and a lower operational tempo to replenish losses.[13] The availability of new combat personnel is likely one of several determining factors for when Russian forces decide to alternate between intensified offensive operations.

Mashovets stated that Russian forces have accumulated at most 60,000 personnel in operational and strategic reserves over the past six to eight months (roughly from October 2023 to June 2024). [14] Russian forces have likely not properly trained or equipped these reserves, which they have previously used largely as manpower pools for restaffing and reinforcing committed units conducting grinding, infantry-heavy assaults with occasional limited mechanized assaults.[15] ISW continues to assess that planned Russian operational- and strategic-level reserves are unlikely to be ready to act as a first-echelon penetration force or as a second-echelon exploitation force capable of conducting effective large-scale combined arms assaults.[16] These reported limited operational- and strategic-level Russian reserves likely will be insufficient to support simultaneous large-scale offensive efforts in several directions. The Russian military command will likely have to choose one main effort during its expected summer offensive effort, if it intends for these reserves to sustain a large-scale offensive operation.

Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian military airfield in the North Ossetia-Alania Republic on the night of June 7 to 8. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on June 8 that its sources in the Ukrainian special services stated that Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) conducted a drone strike against an airfield in North Ossetia on the night of June 7 to 8.[17] Geolocated footage published on June 8 shows a drone targeting the Mozdok Airbase followed by a rising smoke plume.[18] North Ossetia-Alania Republic Head Sergei Menyaylo claimed that Russian forces shot down three drones targeting a military airfield in Mozdok and that unspecified objects sustained minor damage and caught fire.[19] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed a drone over the North Ossetia-Alania Republic on the morning of June 8.[20] A Russian milblogger amplified footage of Russian forces reportedly shooting down a drone near oil infrastructure in Nogai Raion, Republic of Dagestan, but ISW has not observed further evidence of Ukrainian drone strikes in the area.[21] One Russian milblogger, however, claimed that a number of sources "erroneously" reported the strike near the Mozdok airfield as a strike against the oil field in Nogai Raion.[22]

Russian strikes have caused widespread damage to Ukraine's energy grid, and Ukraine will continue to face serious constraints on power generation capacity. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal stated on June 7 that only 27 percent of large Ukrainian thermal power plants (TPPs) are operational and that Russian missile and drone strikes damaged or destroyed the other 73 percent.[23] Shmyhal stated that recent Russian strikes have knocked out 9.2 gigawatts of Ukrainian generation capacity and stated that this is half of the generation capacity that Ukraine used in Winter 2023-2024.[24] The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 5 that Russia has knocked out or captured over half of Ukraine's generation capacity, bringing Ukrainian energy production to below 20 gigawatts from 55 gigawatts before the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022.[25] Shmyhal stated that Russian forces have destroyed 42 power generators and damaged 20 hydropower generators at Ukrainian energy generation facilities.[26] Shmyhal emphasized that Ukraine is taking steps to relieve pressure on Ukraine's energy grid and plans to restore as much energy generation capacity as possible before Winter 2024-2025.[27] Ukraine's nuclear operator Energoatom stated on June 7 that it connected an additional reactor at an unspecified nuclear power plant to the energy grid.[28] The head of Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo, Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, stated that this will relieve Ukrainian power constraints for the next two weeks before increased summer consumption begins.[29] Shmyhal stated that Ukraine is currently importing 1.7 gigawatts from the European Union (EU) but that the EU is able to export a maximum of 2.2 gigawatts to Ukraine.[30]

US President Joe Biden met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris on June 7. Biden and Zelensky discussed the battlefield situation, Ukraine's defensive capabilities, preparations to finalize a US-Ukraine bilateral security agreement, and the upcoming Ukraine peace conference in Switzerland.[31] Biden apologized for the delay in US security assistance to Ukraine and reiterated US support for Ukraine against Russian aggression.[32] Zelensky emphasized that Ukraine needs more security assistance to strengthen its defense of Kharkiv Oblast and that Ukraine needs more opportunities to strike military targets in Russia to protect against Russian aggression from across the international border.[33] ISW continues to assess that the delays in US security assistance to Ukraine have severely constrained Ukrainian defensive capabilities in recent months and emboldened Russian forces to launch and make tactically significant gains in their new offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast and double down on operations elsewhere in the theater.[34]

Longtime Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina is reportedly a balancing force among Russian President Vladimir Putin's economic advisors despite pressure for Russian officials to unequivocally support the long-term war effort in Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported on June 7 that former Russian Service for Financial Markets Head and former Central Bank Deputy Head Oleg Vyugin stated that Nabiullina has known Putin for years and has the "exclusive right" to tell Putin "what he doesn't like" because Putin views her as straightforward and uninfluenced by corruption.[35] *Bloomberg* reported that Nabiullina balances against Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, who advocates for Russia to shape its budget to ensure a victorious Russian war effort, and former economic aid and new Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Maxim Oreshkin, who portrays the Russian war as a global conflict against the West. *Bloomberg* cited a senior government official who stated that Nabiullina is raising concerns about the impacts of Russian labor shortages caused by the war and a "swollen" budget amid high defense spending. A leaked video published on March 2, 2022, showed Nabiullina speaking about her hyperfocus on the Russian economy after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and concern over greater domestic sacrifices.[36] *Bloomberg* reported that Putin

has begun overruling Nabiullina in some cases but assessed that Putin is unlikely to remove her for the foreseeable future.[37] *Bloomberg* cited anonymous sources as saying that Putin wants to avoid dismissing personnel in a way that could be viewed as destabilizing or as being done under pressure.

Nabiullina is especially notable because she has previously mitigated the economic fallout of Putin's geopolitical ambitions and reportedly tried to resign from her position in May 2022 in opposition to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[38] The *Economist* reported on May 31 that Nabiullina ensured the stability of the ruble after Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and that in 2022 she feared that her resignation would lead to the arrests of her deputies at the Central Bank.[39] The *Economist* reported that Nabiullina has largely favored regulatory market reforms but that she learned early in her career in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the Russian economy can only take so much change. The *Economist* noted that she has navigated accordingly as she gained power under Putin, implementing some regulatory changes within the existing Russian economic system, and has shifted her focus to minimize the economic impact of the war in Ukraine on the Russian public since February 2022. Nabiullina's reported ability to speak candidly to Putin about the impact of the war on the Russian economy is especially significant given Putin's recent efforts to oust any officials who have lost Putin's favor or otherwise perceived as disloyal to Putin and his war effort.[40] Putin has recently been preoccupied with assuaging domestic concerns about Russia's economy and has attempted to portray Russia's economic issues positively, and he may be more willing to tolerate Nabiullina's candor or even appreciate her honesty given her track record for stability.[41]

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Russian opposition outlets reported that unspecified actors attempted to assassinate the former Russian occupation mayor of Kupyansk, Kharkiv Oblast, Hennadiy Matsehora in Stry Oskol, Belgorod Oblast on June 7. [42] The GUR stated that Matsehora is in critical condition at a hospital in Moscow.[43] The Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported on May 20 that Matsehora, who was originally lawfully elected as Mayor of Kupyansk in 2020, defected and helped Russian forces in February 2022 and that Ukrainian authorities will try Matsehora in absentia for treason.[44]

Key Takeaways:

- The Russian military command is reportedly transferring an unspecified number of forces to the Ukrainian-Russian border area near Kharkiv Oblast, but it is unclear if the Russian military command plans to immediately commit these redeployed forces to combat or use them to reinforce the Northern Grouping of Forces to bring it closer to its reported planned end strength.
- Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets noted on June 8 that a fraction of the reported 30,000 personnel that Russia generates each month arrives at the front as combat force replacements and reinforcements and that Russian force generation efforts have allowed Russian forces to establish only limited operational and strategic reserves.
- Ukrainian forces conducted a drone strike against a Russian military airfield in the North Ossetia-Alania Republic on the night of June 7 to 8.
- Russian strikes have caused widespread damage to Ukraine's energy grid, and Ukraine will continue to face serious constraints on power generation capacity.
- US President Joe Biden met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris on June 7.
- Longtime Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina is reportedly a balancing force among Russian President Vladimir Putin's economic advisors despite pressure for Russian officials to unequivocally support the long-term war effort in Ukraine.
- Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) and Russian opposition outlets reported that unspecified actors attempted to assassinate the former Russian occupation mayor of Kupyansk, Kharkiv Oblast, Hennadiy Matsehora in Stry Oskol, Belgorod Oblast on June 7.
- Russian forces recently advanced north of Kharkiv City, southeast of Kupyansk, within easternmost Chasiv Yar, northwest of Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Russian actors are using video appeals from Russian servicemen to refute reports of high Russian losses in northern Kharkiv Oblast.

[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 7, 2024](#)

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Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

June 7, 2024, 10:00pm ET

Russian President Vladimir Putin articulated a theory of victory in Ukraine on June 7 that assumes that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations, and win a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces. Putin stated following his speech

at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) that Russia does not need to conduct another call-up of reservists similar to Russia's September 2022 partial mobilization because Russia is not trying to rapidly achieve its military objectives in Ukraine.[1] Putin acknowledged that the current Russian military contingent committed to the war in Ukraine (reportedly the Russian military's entire combat-capable ground force as of January 2024) would be insufficient for a rapid victory but suggested that Russian forces are instead pursuing a more gradual approach.[2] Putin stated that Russian forces aim to "squeeze" Ukrainian forces out "of those territories that should be under Russian control" and therefore Russia does not need to conduct another mobilization wave.[3] Putin asserted that Russian crypto-mobilization efforts are sufficient for this approach and that Russia has recruited 160,000 new personnel so far in 2024 (a figure consistent with reports that the Russian military recruits between 20,000-30,000 recruits per month).[4]

Putin's assessment that gradual Russian gains will allow Russia to achieve his goals in Ukraine is predicated on the assumption that Ukrainian forces will be unable to liberate any significant territory that Russian forces seize and that the Russian military will be able to sustain offensive operations that achieve gradual tactical gains regardless of heavy losses. Western intelligence has previously assessed that Putin assesses that US and Western support to Ukraine is "finite" and that Russian forces have blunted Ukrainian efforts to retake significant territory.[5] Putin's assessment has been reinforced by the recent months of delayed Western security assistance and corresponding Ukrainian materiel constraints, which allowed Russian forces to seize and maintain the theater-wide initiative and conduct consistent offensive operations throughout eastern Ukraine that achieved gradual tactical gains.[6] Putin's June 7 comments support ISW's previous assessment that Putin's assessment of Ukrainian capabilities and how Putin's perceived limits to Western support would incentivize Putin to pursue creeping offensive operations indefinitely if more rapid operations that lead to rapid decisive results seem unattainable.[7]

Putin's theory of victory rests on Russia's ability to outlast and overcome pledged Western security assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian efforts to mobilize more of its economy and population for the war effort, indicating that Putin likely assesses that Russian forces will be able to leverage their advantages in manpower and materiel to overwhelm on Ukrainian forces. Putin's apparent assessment that Russia can "squeeze" Ukrainian forces out of all the lands it desires to occupy assumes that Ukraine will not acquire and sustain the manpower and materiel required to prevent indefinite Russian attempts to gradually advance along the front or needed to contest the initiative and conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations. Ukrainian forces have previously shown that when they are well provisioned, they can prevent Russian forces from making even marginal tactical gains, force Russian offensive operations to culminate, and launch counteroffensive operations that liberate operationally significant territory.[8] Russian forces are currently leveraging the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine to dictate a tempo of fighting that generates casualties roughly equal to or slightly less than the rate of newly generated forces, which has allowed Russian forces to sustain their overall offensive tempo in Ukraine.[9] Russia is also further mobilizing its defense industrial base (DIB) and is generally far ahead of Ukraine and the West in this regard.[10] Putin and the Russian military command likely assess that Russian numerical manpower and materiel advantages will allow Russia to sustain this force generation replacement rate and field the required materiel needed to sustain indefinite creeping advances.

This strategy largely relies on Russia's ability to retain the theater-wide initiative, which Ukrainian forces can contest if Ukraine addresses its ongoing manpower challenges and receives sufficient, timely, and consistent Western security assistance.[11] Western security assistance pledges and Ukrainian force generation efforts will eventually allow Ukraine to accumulate the forces and materiel it needs to contest the initiative if ongoing Russian offensive operations are not successful in forcing Ukraine to divert manpower and materiel to defensive operations.[12]

Russian efforts to prevent Ukraine from accumulating the personnel and resources Ukraine needs to contest the initiative therefore are a part of an attritional war approach, in which the Russian military command believes that ongoing Russian offensive operations will inflict relatively more significant losses on Ukrainian forces and force Ukraine to divert manpower and materiel to stabilize the front instead of preparing for future counteroffensive efforts. This approach also requires that Russian forces avoid suffering outsized losses that would prevent Russia from sustaining offensive operations. There are limits to Russian force generation, as Putin himself admits with his continued aversion to another partial mobilization wave, and Russia's ability to expand its DIB has extensively relied on the refurbishment of extensive Soviet-era stocks, which are a finite resource.[13] Putin and the Russian military command likely calculate that these limits will not begin constraining Russia's ability to sustain its offensive tempo in Ukraine in the near-to-medium term, however. This approach requires that Ukraine is not able to inflict losses on Russian forces that decrease this offensive tempo or force Russian offensive efforts to culminate. ISW continues to assess that Ukraine should contest the initiative as soon as possible because Russian forces are reaping a variety of benefits from holding the initiative, including their ability to pursue a strategy of attritional warfare.[14]

Putin's theory of victory hinges on a critical assumption that the West will abandon Ukraine to Russian victory, either on its own accord or in response to Russian efforts to persuade the West to do so, and it is far from clear that the West will do so. Putin notably did not identify what specific goals he assesses gradual tactical Russian gains will achieve, although the Russian military command has likely previously believed that such gains would encourage Western debates about

continued support for Ukraine and cause weakened Western support that exacerbates Ukrainian material constraints.[15] Putin also did not specify which territory "should" be under Russian control, part of continued Kremlin rhetoric that purposefully leaves open room for further territorial conquest in Ukraine.[16] The current rate of Russian advance suggests that Russian forces may pursue individual operationally significant objectives over the course of many months if not years, and efforts to not bound the Kremlin's territorial objectives likely intend to justify indefinite creeping offensive operations as long as it takes to achieve Western and Ukrainian capitulation.[17] Putin may believe that as long as Russia can prevent Ukraine from contesting the initiative he can lock in limited territorial conquests while encouraging Western debates about continued aid to Ukraine once current pledges of security assistance are expended.

The end of Western security assistance would eventually lead to the collapse of the frontline and total Russian victory in Ukraine, a reality that recent months of delayed Western security assistance has further highlighted.[18] The West must proactively provide Ukrainian forces with the necessary equipment and weapons at the scale, timing, and regularity that Ukrainian forces require for operations that liberate significant swaths of occupied Ukraine and challenge Putin's belief that he can gradually subsume Ukraine should rapid total victory appear unreachable. The West also maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[19] The West must not surrender to Russia's strategic effort to destroy Western commitment to Ukrainian survival and must remember that Ukrainian victory has always been possible as long as the West remains committed to that goal.[20]

Putin indirectly indicated that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with Western-provided weapons do not cross a supposed Russian "red line" that would result in Russian nuclear escalation. Putin stated that Russia's nuclear doctrine calls for Russia to only use nuclear weapons in the event of "exceptional cases" of threats to Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[21] Putin stated that he does not think such an "exceptional" case has arisen so "there is no such need" for Russia to use nuclear weapons. Ukrainian forces have struck military targets in Belgorod Oblast with US-provided HIMARS systems using GMLRS since early June 2024.[22] Putin's June 7 statement is a significant rhetorical reversal given that Putin and other Kremlin officials have previously threatened Russian nuclear weapon use should Western states allow Ukraine to strike into Russian territory with Western-provided weapons.[23] Western and Ukrainian policies and actions have crossed Russia's supposed "red lines" several times throughout the war without drawing a significant Russian reaction, indicating that many of Russia's "red lines" are most likely information operations designed to push the West to self-deter.[24]

Putin heavily focused on proposals to solve Russia's labor shortage issues during his speech at SPIEF on June 7. Putin outlined a 10-point plan to grow the Russian economy and acknowledged that Russia is suffering from demographic challenges and labor shortages.[25] Putin called on the Russian government to enact multiple reforms to increase the labor supply and productivity, such as improving education and training, automating and digitalizing Russian industry, increasing the use of artificial intelligence (AI), and increasing spending on research and development. Putin highlighted the necessity of migrant labor to increase Russia's economic growth but stated that Russia has not yet developed a "meaningful" migration policy. Putin specified that Russia only needs skilled and educated migrant laborers with a knowledge of Russian language and culture and who will "not create any problems for local citizens in the workplace and in life." Putin ended his SPIEF appearance by stating that Russia "will treat the culture and traditions of [non-ethnically Russian] peoples of the Russian Federation" with respect as "unity is [Russia's] strength." Putin has touted Russia as a unified multiethnic and multinational state, but his June 7 statements demonstrate the differing policies and perceptions towards the indigenous, federally recognized peoples of Russia and migrants.[26] Putin's migration policy proposals demonstrate how the Kremlin continues to struggle to balance Russia's need for migrants to compensate for labor shortages and wide-scale anti-migrant sentiments in Russia, particularly as the Kremlin tries to further mobilize the Russian defense industrial base (DIB).

Putin attempted to frame Russia's economic issues in a positive light, likely to prepare Russian citizens to make more personal sacrifices as Russia sustains a protracted war in Ukraine at the expense of Russian citizens' standards of living. Putin framed Russia's labor shortages as resulting from Russia's alleged "record low" unemployment, not a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[27] Putin stated that people who have reached retirement age have experience and knowledge that is useful to the Russian economy and that many pensioners have "aspirations" to continue working. Putin proposed that the Russian government annually increase pensions starting in February 2025 for pensioners who continue to work even after they reach retirement age. Putin met with St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov before his speech at SPIEF, during which Beglov presented the idea of increasing pensions as a direct request from working pensioners.[28] Large-scale protests erupted in Russia in 2018 when the Kremlin announced a raise in the retirement age, and Putin is likely trying to use monetary incentives to push pensioners to choose to work beyond the retirement age to help ease Russia's labor shortages.[29] Putin also highlighted the strength of Russia's DIB, claiming that Russia has increased its production of ammunition by more than 20 times in an unspecified time frame and that Russia has superior aviation and armored vehicle technology than the West.[30] Putin claimed that the Russian DIB has increased its production of civilian products by about five percent over the past two years, likely to justify Russia's increased defense spending and recent efforts to mobilize the DIB to civilians. Sberbank CEO Herman Gref, however, stated on June 7

at SPIEF that the alleged "unprecedented" growth of wages in Russia will last at most another year.
[31]

Putin continued efforts to portray Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as an illegitimate president and identified the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament) as a legitimate actor with which the Kremlin can negotiate instead of Zelensky. Putin's recent statements are the latest in a series designed to obfuscate the legality of Zelensky's extended term by misrepresenting the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian laws.[32] Putin continued to claim that Zelensky is an illegitimate actor who has "usurped" power in Ukraine as the Ukrainian Constitution does not allow for a Ukrainian president to extend his term beyond the five-year fixed term.[33] Putin cherry-picked specific articles of the Ukrainian Constitution to make his argument, including articles he also recently grossly mischaracterized or took out of their legal context during a speech on May 28.[34] Putin claimed on June 7 that the Verkhovna Rada's power is extended under a period of martial law and that presidential powers should be "transferred to the speaker of the Rada" under articles 109, 110, and 111 of the Ukrainian Constitution now that Zelensky has "usurped" power.[35] Article 109 states that "the resignation of the President of Ukraine enters into force from the moment he or she personally announces the statement of resignation at a meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine." [36] Article 110 states that "the inability of the President of Ukraine to exercise his or her powers for reasons of health shall be determined at a meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and confirmed by a decision adopted by the majority of its constitutional composition." [37] Article 111 states that "the President of Ukraine may be removed from office by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by the procedure of impeachment, in the event that he or she commits state treason or other crime." Putin is invoking these articles to suggest that Zelensky's extended term is "illegal" and that the Verkhovna Rada is the single authority to assume power should Zelensky resign, be impeached, or otherwise leave office before the natural end of his term. Putin also invoked Article 83, which states that in the event of martial law, the Verkhovna Rada's powers are extended, and Article 103, which states that a Ukrainian president's term is five years - again claiming that presidential terms cannot be extended under martial law while the Verkhovna Rada's term can be extended.[38]

Putin claimed that the Ukrainian Constitution does not mention extending the Ukrainian presidential term, but this statement ignores the Ukrainian legal framework about martial law. Article 19 of the Ukrainian law "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law" states that presidential and Verkhovna Rada elections are prohibited under martial law and forbids the Ukrainian president from abolishing martial law as long as there exists a "threat of attack or danger to the state independence of Ukraine and its territorial integrity." [39] Article 64 of the Ukrainian constitution states that "under conditions of war or a state of emergency, specific restrictions on rights and freedoms may be established with the indication of the period of validity of these restrictions" except for the rights and freedoms stipulated by certain articles, none of which are mentioned above.[40]

Putin's recent focus on legitimizing the Verkhovna Rada and its speaker in lieu of Zelensky highlights a target for Russian destabilization operations.[41] ISW has repeatedly assessed that recent Russian information operations aim to sow multiple divisions between the Ukrainian people, military, military leadership, and political leadership to undermine domestic and international support for Zelensky and Ukraine's decision to defend against the Russian invasion.[42] Ukrainian intelligence has identified a Russian information campaign called "Maidan-3" that specifically aims to spread doubt about Zelensky's legitimacy and has projected that these information operations will peak from late May to July 2024.[43] These information operations may intend to set informational conditions to eventually declare a Kremlin-backed actor as Ukrainian president, Verkhovna Rada speaker, or another title with whom the Kremlin claims it can "legally" negotiate with instead of Zelensky.[44] Two figures previously floated as possible replacements for Zelensky have since emerged in the wake of these information operations.[45] Former pro-Russia Ukrainian MP Viktor Medvedchuk recently participated in the information operation to discredit Zelensky.[46] Former pro-Russia Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich traveled to Minsk on May 24 for an unspecified reason, and Ukrainian intelligence described Yanukovich's last trip to Minsk in 2022 as a Kremlin effort to prepare Yanukovich for a "special operation" to be reinstated as president of Ukraine.[47]

Putin attempted to introduce his children and the children of other senior Russian officials to the public sphere at SPIEF, likely to set conditions for them to eventually assume high-profile and powerful roles in the Russian government. Independent Belarusian outlet *Vot Tak* reported that Putin's youngest daughter Katerina Tikhonova spoke virtually on a June 6 panel about the role of defense industrial organizations and discussed Russian technological development and import substitution.[48] *Vot Tak* also reported that Putin's eldest daughter Maria Vorontsova spoke on a panel about biotechnology on June 7.[49] *Vot Tak* reported that Tikhonova spoke at SPIEF in 2021 in a panel about BRICS and that Vorontsova has only previously attended SPIEF as a guest where she did two interviews on the sidelines.[50] Kremlin newswire TASS characterized Tikhonova as Innopraktika Company General Director and notably went out of its way to promote Vorontsova's professional titles and accolades by highlighting her position as Deputy Head of the Russian Faculty of Fundamental Medicine at Moscow State University and a member of the Russian Association for the Promotion of Science, and a Candidate of Medical Science (equivalent to a PhD of Medical Science).[51] TASS did not mention their familial connection to Putin. TASS is likely attempting to portray Tikhonova and Vorontsova as authoritative figures and to introduce them as trustworthy and knowledgeable individuals to the Russian public.

A Russian insider source claimed that the children of other senior Russian officials participated in SPIEF including: both sons of former Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Head and current Russian Institute for Strategic Studies Director Mikhail Fradkov - First Deputy Administrator of the Presidential Administration Pavel Fradkov and CEO and Chairperson of Russian state-owned bank Promsvyazbank Pyotr Fradkov; Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's daughter Yelizaveta Peskova; Presidential Aide Nikolai Patrushev's son Russian Agriculture Minister Dmitry Patrushev; Presidential Administration Head Anton Vaino's son the Kremlin's Agency for Strategic Initiatives' youth work head Alexander Vaino; Russian oligarch Boris Rotenberg's son Vice President of Gazprombank Roman Rotenberg; Presidential Administration First Deputy Head Sergei Kiriyenko's son Alexander Kiriyenko; Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu's daughter Ksenia Shoigu; and Putin's first cousin once removed ("niece") and Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation Chairperson Anna Tsivileva.[52]

US National Security Council Senior Director for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation Pranay Vaddi stated that the US has prepared a new nuclear weapons policy specifically to deter Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran.

[53] Vaddi stated at the 2024 Arms Control Association meeting that the US may have to deploy more strategic nuclear weapons in the coming years and that the US should be prepared if the US president makes such a decision.[54] Vaddi stated that the US remains committed to international arms control and non-proliferation values and agreements. Vaddi stated that Russia has repeatedly rejected talks with the US to negotiate a successor to the New START strategic arms limitation pact, which expires in 2026, and that the PRC has refused to discuss expanding its nuclear arsenal with the US.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a \$225 million security assistance package for Ukraine on June 7.[55] The package includes missiles for HAWK air defense systems; Stinger anti-aircraft missiles; ammunition for HIMARS; 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds; M113 armored personnel carriers; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems; and other materiel.[56]

French President Emmanuel Macron announced on June 6 that France will provide Ukraine with an unspecified number of Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets and equip and train a brigade of 4,500 Ukrainian soldiers.[57] Macron stated that Ukrainian pilots will likely train between five and six months on Mirage-2000-5 aircraft in France and stated that Ukraine will have Mirage-2000-5 pilots by the end of 2024.[58]

The Russian Supreme Court declared an organization that does not exist as "extremist" on June 7, consistent with previous ISW assessments that Russia seeks to expand the legal definition of "extremism" to increasingly prosecute domestic anti-war sentiment. The Russian Supreme Court declared the "Anti-Russian Separatist Movement" and its "structural divisions" as extremist in accordance with a Russian Ministry of Justice request to this effect submitted on April 26. [59] Russian opposition media has noted that no such organization exists, and Russian authorities have previously designated other non-existent organizations meant to encompass broader "social movements" as "extremist." [60] Russian authorities likely intend to use this new extremist designation to further prosecute anti-war sentiment among Russians and within occupied Ukraine, particularly movements opposing Russia's occupation of Ukraine and movements within ethnic minority communities advocating for better treatment of Russian military personnel and mobilized personnel from these communities.[61]

The Kremlin continues efforts to destabilize the Balkans and dismantle the 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the 1992-1995 Bosnian War, likely as part of a larger strategic effort that seeks to divide and distract Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of Republika Srpska (the Serbian political entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) Milorad Dodik met on June 6 in St. Petersburg, and Dodik attended the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF).[62] Dodik announced in a June 7 interview with Kremlin newswire TASS that Republika Srpska will adopt a Russia-style "foreign agents" bill, which would restrict the activities of non-profit organizations that receive foreign funding, that the government had previously withdrawn.[63] Dodik also stated Republika Srpska's intention to hold a referendum on its independence from Bosnia and Herzegovina at an unspecified date.[64] The Kremlin has previously leveraged its relationship with Republika Srpska to further influence the Balkans, sow divisions in the West, and undermine the Dayton Accords to throw the Balkans into turmoil.[65]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin articulated a theory of victory in Ukraine on June 7 that assumes that Russian forces will be able to continue gradual creeping advances indefinitely, prevent Ukraine from conducting successful operationally significant counteroffensive operations, and win a war of attrition against Ukrainian forces.**
- **Putin's theory of victory rests on Russia's ability to outlast and overcome pledged Western security assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian efforts to mobilize more of its economy and population for the war effort, indicating that Putin likely assesses that Russian forces will be able to leverage their advantages in manpower and materiel to overwhelm on Ukrainian forces.**
- **Putin's theory of victory hinges on a critical assumption that the West will abandon Ukraine to Russian victory, either on its own accord or in response to Russian efforts to**

- persuade the West to do so, and it is far from clear that the West will do so.
- Putin indirectly indicated that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with Western-provided weapons do not cross a supposed Russian "red line" that would result in Russian nuclear escalation.
 - Putin heavily focused on proposals to solve Russia's labor shortage issues during his speech at SPIEF on June 7.
 - Putin attempted to frame Russia's economic issues in a positive light, likely to prepare Russian citizens to make more personal sacrifices as Russia sustains a protracted war in Ukraine at the expense of Russian citizens' standards of living.
 - Putin continued efforts to portray Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as an illegitimate president and identified the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament) as a legitimate actor with which the Kremlin can negotiate instead of Zelensky. Putin's recent statements are the latest in a series designed to obfuscate the legality of Zelensky's extended term by misrepresenting the Ukrainian Constitution and Ukrainian laws.
 - Putin attempted to introduce his children and the children of other senior Russian officials to the public sphere at SPIEF, likely to set conditions for them to eventually assume high-profile and powerful roles in the Russian government.
 - US National Security Council Senior Director for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation Pranay Vaddi stated that the US has prepared a new nuclear weapons policy specifically to deter Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), North Korea, and Iran.
 - The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced a \$225 million security assistance package for Ukraine on June 7.
 - French President Emmanuel Macron announced on June 6 that France will provide Ukraine with an unspecified number of Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets and equip and train a brigade of 4,500 Ukrainian soldiers.
 - The Russian Supreme Court declared an organization that does not exist as "extremist" on June 7, consistent with previous ISW assessments that Russia seeks to expand the legal definition of "extremism" to increasingly prosecute domestic anti-war sentiment.
 - The Kremlin continues efforts to destabilize the Balkans and dismantle the 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the 1992-1995 Bosnian War, likely as part of a larger strategic effort that seeks to divide and distract Europe.
 - Russian forces recently advanced near Svatove, near Chasiv Yar, and northwest of Avdiivka.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 6, 2024

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

Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, Grace Mappes, and George Barros

June 6, 2024, 8:35pm ET

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:10pm ET on June 6. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 7 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sought to repackaging long-standing, tired threats about direct confrontation with the West by claiming that Russia will provide long-range strike capabilities to unspecified actors for strikes against the West. Putin's threat aims to influence Western decision-making about Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia using Western-provided weapons but notably does not threaten escalation in Ukraine or through direct confrontation, suggesting that the Kremlin may be adjusting to select Western perceptions about the credibility of such Russian threats. Putin stated during a meeting with the heads of foreign press organizations on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) on June 5 that Russia could begin supplying long-range weapons to unspecified adversaries of the West as a "symmetrical response" to the lifting of some Western restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets within Russia.[1] Putin rhetorically asked why Russia should not have the right to supply weapons of a similar class (compared to those the West has allowed Ukraine to use for strikes on Russian territory) to unspecified actors that will conduct strikes on Western "sensitive targets." [2] Kremlin actors routinely threaten to directly strike Western targets in an effort to use Western fears of escalation with Russia to encourage the West to self-deter its support for Ukraine, and Putin's June 5 threat is not a notable inflection in this regard.[3]

Putin may assess that select Western actors will be more concerned about Russia providing long-range strike capabilities to actors willing to attack the West than the Kremlin's tired rhetoric about direct confrontation between the West and Russia. Russia is very unlikely to directly provide scarce high-end long-range strike capabilities to other actors, however, since it uses many of these systems for large-scale strikes against Ukraine. It is also unclear what systems Putin means by weapons of a "similar class." The United Kingdom lifted restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use Storm Shadow cruise missiles with a range of over 250 kilometers for strikes against military targets within Russia, which is the Western system with the longest range that Ukrainian forces are currently permitted to use for such strikes.[4] The kinds of long-range strike systems Russia could ostensibly give other actors would be limited if Putin's "proportional" threat is credible. Russia's likely unwillingness to provide long-range

systems does not preclude Russian efforts to help the West's adversaries acquire long-range strike capabilities, however. Russia is reportedly providing North Korea with ballistic missile technology in return for North Korea's provision of artillery munition to Russia, for example.[5] Putin and the Kremlin have threatened escalation at every critical juncture in Western debates about support for Ukraine, and this latest threat aims to constrain the easing of remaining Western restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia using Western weapons.[6] Lifting remaining restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western weapons can allow Ukrainian forces to substantially degrade Russian operations by eliminating Russia's ability to use Russian territory as a sanctuary space to optimize its rear areas to support Russia's campaign to destroy Ukrainian statehood.[7]

Russian naval vessels will make a port call in Cuba on June 12–17, likely as part of a larger effort to invoke the historical memory of the Cuban Missile Crisis as part of Russia's reflexive control campaign to encourage US self-deterrence. The Cuban Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces announced on June 6 that four Russian vessels from the Northern Fleet – the *Admiral Gorshkov* frigate, the *Kazan* nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine, the *Academic Pashin* replenishment oiler, and the *Nikolai Chiker* rescue tug – will make an official visit to the port of Havana from June 12 to 17.[8] *Reuters* reported that a senior US official stated that the Russian vessels may also stop in Venezuela on an unspecified date in Summer 2024.[9] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that Russia's objective is to ensure a Russian naval presence in "operationally important areas of the far ocean zone." [10] Russian media noted that the *Admiral Gorshkov* is carrying Zircon hypersonic missiles, which the Kremlin has touted as capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.[11] The Cuban Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces specifically claimed, however, that none of the vessels are carrying nuclear weapons, so the Russian port call "does not represent a threat to the region." [12] ISW is unable to verify this Cuban assertion. The Russian Navy's port calls in states in the Western hemisphere that have historically strained relationships with the US aim to highlight Russia's strong relations with these states and are likely part of Russia's reflexive control campaign to force the US to self-deter and not enact policies that offer further support to Ukraine. Putin has repeatedly used nuclear saber-rattling to push the West to self-deter during times when the West has faced key moments on critical policy decisions in how to best support Ukraine. [13] The Kremlin likely hopes that the clear allusion to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the inclusion of a reportedly nuclear weapons-capable ship will force the West to engage in self-deterrence. The Kremlin likely coordinated the announcement of the Russian navy's port calls in Cuba with Putin's threats to provide long-range strike capabilities to unspecified actors for strikes against the West, as both activities can instill fear in the West. Putin notably did not threaten escalation in Ukraine or direct confrontation between Russia and the West.

Putin inadvertently indicated on June 5 that Russian forces may be suffering roughly 20,000 monthly casualties in Ukraine, which, if accurate, would be roughly equal to or just below the number of new personnel that Russia reportedly generates per month. Putin inadvertently suggested that roughly 5,000 Russian personnel are killed in action in Ukraine each month, which further suggests that roughly 15,000 Russian personnel are wounded in action, assuming a standard three-to-one wounded-to-killed casualty ratio.[14] ISW cannot confirm Putin's suggested casualty rate and his apparent inadvertent admission does not serve as a clear claim about Russian casualties in Ukraine. Putin's suggested figure does align somewhat with the lower end of Ukrainian reporting about Russian casualty rates, however. Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk stated on May 2 that Russian forces suffer about 25,000 to 30,000 killed and wounded personnel per month.[15] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi reported on January 15, 2024, that Russia recruits around 30,000 personnel per month.[16] Ruslan Pukhov, the head of the Moscow-based Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies and a member of a Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) civilian advisory board, similarly claimed in mid-April 2024 that current Russian crypto-mobilization efforts are generating roughly 30,000 new personnel each month.[17] Russian officials are reportedly concerned about decreasing recruitment rates ahead of the expected Russian Summer 2024 offensive effort, and it is unclear if the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has maintained the roughly 30,000 recruitment rate it reportedly had in January and April of 2024.[18]

Russian forces have notably established a more sustainable force generation apparatus in recent months for ongoing offensive operations and have intensified efforts to establish operational- and strategic-level reserves.[19] Russian forces have leveraged their possession of the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine to dictate a tempo of fighting in recent months that would generate casualties roughly equal to or slightly less than the rate of newly generated forces.[20] This has allowed Russian forces to immediately replenish losses along the frontline and sustain their overall offensive tempo in Ukraine but has set limits on the extent to which Russian forces can intensify offensive operations in any given direction.[21] The marginal amount of additional newly generated forces not immediately committed to the front as reinforcements has allowed Russian forces to gradually establish operational reserves.[22] Pavlyuk stated in early May 2024 that Russian forces intended to generate about 100,000 more personnel for use in offensive operations this June and July and 300,000 more personnel by the end of 2024.[23] Russia will likely fall far short of this immediate and near-term goal, even at the lower limit of reported or suggested monthly Russian casualties and the upper limit of reported monthly Russian force generation. ISW continues to assess that likely poorly trained and equipped Russian operational- and strategic-level reserves are unlikely to be ready to act as a first-echelon penetration force or as a second-echelon exploitation force capable of conducting large-scale assaults in 2024 if Ukrainian forces have the wherewithal to resist them.[24]

Limitations on Western capabilities to train partner pilots on F-16 fighter jets are reportedly creating bottlenecks that will affect Ukraine's ability to effectively field F-16s in the future. *Politico* reported that Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium plan to send over 60 F-16 aircraft to Ukraine in Summer 2024.[25] *Politico* reported on June 5 that US, European, and Ukrainian officials and lawmakers stated that US, Danish, and Romanian F-16 pilot training facilities can only train a limited number of Ukrainian pilots, however. *Politico* reported that US Air Force Spokesperson Laurel Falls stated that the US National Guard is planning to train 12 Ukrainian pilots by the end of September 2024. The Danish training facility is reportedly training eight Ukrainian pilots, but this facility will reportedly close in November 2024, and the Romanian training facility is reportedly not yet operational. A full squadron of 20 aircraft requires 40 pilots. A former DoD official reportedly stated that if the current training constraints continue, Ukraine will only have enough pilots for a full squadron at the end of 2025. Ukraine will not be able to use all the Western-provided aircraft as effectively as possible until the necessary number of Ukrainian pilots complete training.

Select Western countries have indicated that Ukraine will be permitted to use F-16s for strikes within Russia but Ukraine's ability to operate F-16s near the international border is contingent on Ukraine's ability to destroy air defense assets in Russia.[26] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on May 18 that Ukraine needs about 120–130 advanced fighter aircraft to achieve air parity with Russia but that Russia's biggest advantage is Western-imposed restrictions prohibiting Ukraine from using Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russia.[27] Ukraine may be able to set conditions to have Ukrainian aviation operate in the air domain to support Ukrainian ground operations if Ukraine is able to sufficiently destroy Russian air defense assets within Russia using Western long-range strike capabilities, obtain a sufficient cadre of pilots capable of flying F-16s, and receive a timely delivery and a sufficient number of F-16 airframes.

French authorities are investigating multiple recent pro-Russian sabotage and societal influence operations in France amid continued Russian hybrid war measures against NATO states and France aimed at weakening support for Ukraine. French media reported on June 5 and 6 that French authorities detained a man with pro-Russian beliefs and dual Ukrainian-Russian citizenship at a hotel on the outskirts of Paris after the man sustained injuries from making explosives in his hotel room.[28] French media reported that French authorities assess that the man sought to attack French security assistance allocated to Ukraine and that authorities found additional explosives, materials to make explosives, small arms, money, and passports in the man's hotel room. The man reportedly fought with the Russian military for two years in an unspecified location (presumably in Ukraine) prior to this incident.[29] *NBC* reported that a source within the French National Anti-Terrorist Prosecutor's Office stated that it is "too early for us to say" whether the incident is connected to a Russian sabotage campaign, though French and other European intelligence agencies have recently warned about a projected increase in Russian sabotage operations in the coming weeks.[30] Macron plans to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on June 7 in Paris and *Reuters* reported that French officials may use the visit to announce the transfer of French military trainers to Ukraine.[31] Russian actors may be attempting to use sabotage attacks to degrade French support for Ukraine or disrupt French efforts to prepare materiel and military trainers for deployment to Ukraine. French authorities are also investigating potential Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) involvement in recent incidents likely aimed at fomenting domestic unrest and distrust of Macron.[32]

The Russian Investigative Committee announced the arrest of a French citizen on June 6 following the early June arrest in France. The Russian Investigative Committee announced and published footage of Russian authorities detaining an unspecified French citizen under charges of failing to provide proper documentation required by law for legally designated "foreign agents." The Russian Investigative Committee claimed in its report that the French citizen also spent "several years" on multiple trips to Russia collecting information about the Russian military that "can be used against the security of the [Russian] state" if "foreign sources" obtain this information, essentially accusing the man of espionage but not yet formally charging him with espionage-related offenses.[33] *Reuters* reported that Swiss-based nonprofit Center for Humanitarian Dialogue stated that Russian authorities arrested Laurent Vinatier, who worked as a Russia and Eurasia advisor for the center, and that French President Emmanuel Macron also confirmed Vinatier's arrest.[34]

Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery in Rostov Oblast and reportedly struck an oil depot in Belgorod Oblast on the night of June 5 to 6.[35] Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubov acknowledged that a fire started at the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery after a drone strike.[36] Geolocated footage published on June 6 shows a fire at the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery in Rostov Oblast.[37] *Radio Svoboda* published satellite imagery on June 6 showing that the Ukrainian strike hit a liquified hydrocarbon gas production site.[38] *Radio Svoboda* reported that the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery has a capacity of five million tons per year, and a prominent Russian milblogger claimed that the facility is mostly export oriented.[39] Ukrainian forces previously struck the Novoshakhtinsk oil refinery in June 2022 and March 2023.[40] Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov claimed on June 6 that a Ukrainian drone strike caused a fire at an oil depot in Starooskolsky Gorodskoy Okrug.[41] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of the reported Ukrainian strike on the oil depot in Starooskolsky Raion.

Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation, and Reintegration Deputy Chairperson Ruslan Horbenko estimated that the Ukrainian military will recruit roughly 120,000 personnel in 2024, although the apparent slow arrival of Western security assistance

will likely limit Ukraine's ability to sufficiently provision and equip these forces at scale in the near-term.[42] Horbenko stated in an interview with Ukrainian outlet *Ukrinform* published on June 6 that the Ukrainian military command and frontline commanders stated that the Ukrainian military needs 100,000 to 110,000 recruits in 2024. Western military aid to Ukraine is unlikely to provision and equip these forces with sufficient materiel given the current rate and limited scale at which Western military aid is arriving in Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky recently acknowledged that the slow arrival of US security assistance is complicating Ukrainian efforts to commit reserves to ongoing Ukrainian defensive operations since the Ukrainian military is unable to sufficiently equip reserve brigades to conduct rotations for frontline units.[43] The arrival of US and Western military assistance to Ukrainian forces on the frontline at scale will likely aid Ukrainian efforts to bring reserves closer to their intended end strength and sufficiently provision new planned brigades.

Russian and Taliban officials expressed interest in bilateral cooperation, indicating that Russia will likely soon delist the Taliban as a prohibited organization in Russia. Taliban acting Minister of Labor and Social Relations Abdul Umari gave an interview to Kremlin newswire TASS at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum (SPIEF) on June 6 in which he expressed interest in expanding economic and energy ties with Russia and stated that the Taliban is "looking forward to Russia's decision to exclude [the Taliban] from the list of banned organizations [in Russia]."[44] Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed support for delisting the Taliban on May 28, ahead of the Taliban delegation's visit to Russia.[45] Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu stated at a meeting with the security council secretaries of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states that Russia is concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and claimed that there are unspecified "new militant training camps" in Afghanistan and unspecified terrorists are moving from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan.[46] Shoigu's statement indicates that Russia is likely interested in cooperating with the Taliban to degrade the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP), an adversary of the Taliban and the perpetrators of the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow.[47]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin sought to repackage longstanding, tired threats about direct confrontation with the West by claiming that Russian will provide long-range strike capabilities to unspecified actors for strikes against the West. Putin's threat aims to influence Western decision-making about Ukraine's ability to strike military targets within Russia using Western-provided weapons but notably does not threaten escalation in Ukraine or through direct confrontation, suggesting that the Kremlin may be adjusting to select Western perceptions about the credibility of such Russian threats.
- Russian naval vessels will make a port call in Cuba on June 12–17, likely as part of a larger effort to invoke the historical memory of the Cuban Missile Crisis as part of Russia's reflexive control campaign to encourage US self-deterrence.
- Putin inadvertently indicated on June 5 that Russian forces may be suffering roughly 20,000 monthly casualties in Ukraine, which, if accurate, would be roughly equal to or just below the number of new personnel that Russia reportedly generates per month.
- Limitations on Western capabilities to train partner pilots on F-16 fighter jets are reportedly creating bottlenecks that will affect Ukraine's ability to effectively field F-16s in the future.
- French authorities are investigating multiple recent pro-Russian sabotage and societal influence operations in France amid continued Russian hybrid war measures against NATO states and France aimed at weakening support for Ukraine.
- The Russian Investigative Committee announced the arrest of a French citizen on June 6 following the early June arrest in France.
- Ukrainian forces struck an oil refinery in Rostov Oblast and reportedly struck an oil depot in Belgorod Oblast on the night of June 5 to 6.
- Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation, and Reintegration Deputy Chairperson Ruslan Horbenko estimated that the Ukrainian military will recruit roughly 120,000 personnel in 2024, although the apparent slow arrival of Western security assistance will likely limit Ukraine's ability to sufficiently provision and equip these forces at scale in the near-term.
- Russian and Taliban officials expressed interest in bilateral cooperation, indicating that Russia will likely soon delist the Taliban as a prohibited organization in Russia.
- Russian forces recently advanced within Vovchansk, southeast of Kupyansk, northeast of Siversk, northwest of Avdiivka, south of Velyka Novosilka, and near Krynky.
- Russia's continued demographic crisis will present long-term constraints on human capital within Russia.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 5, 2024

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

Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, and George Barros

June 5, 2024, 9:45pm 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 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 2:15pm ET on June 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US officials continue to attempt to clarify US policy regarding Ukraine's ability to strike a limited subset of Russian military targets within Russia with US-provided weapons, but public communications about US policy remain unclear. US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby stated during a press conference on June 4 that "there's never been a restriction on the Ukrainians shooting down hostile aircraft, even if those aircraft are not necessarily in Ukrainian airspace." [1] Kirby made this statement in response to a question about whether America's recent partial lifting of restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike targets within Russia with US-provided weapons pertains to strikes against Russian aircraft operating in Russian airspace. Kirby suggested that Ukrainian forces can shoot down Russian aircraft within Russian airspace if they "pose an impending threat" to Ukraine and stated that Ukrainian forces already have done so since the beginning of the war. It remains unclear what the official US policy on what Russian aircraft constitute "an impending threat" to Ukraine, and Kirby's statements did not elucidate how the US administration views this issue. ISW continues to assess that Ukraine's ability to defend itself against devastating Russian glide bomb strikes is heavily contingent on Ukraine's ability to target Russian aircraft within Russian airspace using US-provided air defense systems before Russian aircraft can launch strikes at Ukrainian cities, critical infrastructure, and frontline positions. [2] The current lack of clarity in US restrictions on Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons to strike Russian military assets within Russia has routinely missed the opportunity to force Russia to self-deter against conducting such strikes on Ukrainian territory from Russian airspace. [3] Russian forces continued to conduct intense glide bomb attacks against Ukraine on June 5, likely largely from Russian airspace. [4]

Kirby also stated during the press conference that the US cannot confirm if Ukraine has already used US-provided weapons in strikes on Russia since the US partially loosened its restrictions on May 30, but the Associated Press (AP) reported on June 5, citing an unnamed US senator and Western official, that Ukraine has used US-provided weapons to strike Russia "in recent days." [5] ISW has observed geolocated footage from June 1 or 2 that shows a likely Ukrainian HIMARS strike on a Russian S-300/400 air defense system in Belgorod Oblast. [6]

Western-provided artillery ammunition has reportedly started arriving to Ukrainian forces on the frontline, although not at a scale that would allow Ukrainian forces to fully challenge the Russian military's current artillery shell advantage. Ukrainian soldiers operating near Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City) told the *Telegraph* in an article published on June 5 that Western-provided ammunition started to reach their sector of the frontline, but that Russian forces in the area still maintain a munitions advantage. [7] One Ukrainian soldier told the *Telegraph* that Russian forces still maintain a five-to-one artillery advantage. A Ukrainian soldier operating in an unspecified area of the frontline told Estonian outlet *ERR* that Western-provided ammunition began to "trickle" to the frontline but has not arrived at scale. [8] The Ukrainian soldier stated that Russian forces continue to have a "significant advantage" in munitions. ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are attempting to make tactically and operationally significant gains before US military assistance arrives to Ukrainian forces at the frontline at scale, and that the initial arrival of Western-provided weaponry will take some time to have tactical to operational effect on the frontline. [9]

Russian missile and drone strikes have caused significant long-term damage to Ukraine's energy grid, and Ukraine will reportedly face even greater energy constraints in summer 2024. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 5 that Russia has knocked out or captured over half of Ukraine's power generation capacity, bringing Ukrainian energy production to below 20 gigawatts (likely meaning per year) from 55 gigawatts per year before the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. [10] European Union (EU) Ambassador to Ukraine Katarina Matherovna told FT that Russia has destroyed 9.2 gigawatts of annual Ukrainian generation capacity since resuming large scale missile and drone strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in late March 2024. [11] A Ukrainian official told FT that Russian forces damaged 1.2 gigawatts of annual Ukrainian generation capacity alone during strikes against energy infrastructure on the night of May 31 to June 1. [12] Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo stated on June 5 that it expects the Ukrainian energy system to face its most difficult period in the middle of summer 2024 as energy consumption increases due to the heat. [13] The Russian military has attempted to exploit degraded Ukrainian air defense capabilities in spring 2024 to collapse Ukraine's energy grid and constrain Ukraine's defense industrial capacity. [14] Russia will likely continue periodic large-scale strikes against energy infrastructure to cause significant long-term damage that degrades Ukrainian war fighting capabilities while setting conditions for pronounced humanitarian pressures in winter 2024–2025.

Ukrainian outlet *Liga* reported on June 4 that a source in Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated that there are roughly 550,000 Russian military and paramilitary personnel concentrated in occupied Ukraine and near the international border.[15] The GUR source reportedly stated that there are about 32,000 Rosgvardia, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), and other law enforcement personnel operating in occupied Ukraine, in addition to about 520,000 Russian military personnel in and around Ukraine. ISW cannot independently confirm these figures, and the numbers likely encompass combat and other non-combat military personnel who perform support functions and do not represent Russia's immediate combat power. Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk stated that as of May 3 there were roughly 510,000 to 515,000 Russian personnel deployed in Ukraine.[16] Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed in December 2023 that there were 617,000 Russian personnel in the "combat zone," likely referring to all Russian military personnel in the zone of the "special military operation," which includes staging areas in border areas within Russia.[17] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov reported in January 2024 that there are 35,000 Rosgvardia personnel in occupied Ukraine and that Russian authorities are considering deploying more Rosgvardia personnel to occupied areas.[18]

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on June 4 that former Russian Defense Minister and Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu will coordinate efforts to increase Russian defense industrial capacity alongside former Tula Oblast Governor and Presidential Aide Alexei Dyumin and Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev.[19] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov stated that Shoigu, Dyumin, and Medvedev will each oversee an unspecified aspect of the effort to increase Russian defense industrial capacity.[20] Shoigu's roughly equivalent position with Dyumin and Medvedev further indicates that the Kremlin has demoted Shoigu following his removal from defense minister and suggests that he is a secondary figure in newly appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov's task to significantly mobilize the Russian economy and DIB for a protracted war in Ukraine.[21] Putin routinely rotates Kremlin officials in and out of his personal favor with the aim of incentivizing them to strive to regain his support, and Putin may have tasked Dyumin and Shoigu with DIB efforts in order to maintain their devotion following Shoigu's demotion from his prior long-term role as defense minister and rebukes against Dyumin's possible effort to become defense minister in the aftermath of the Wagner Group's rebellion in June 2023.[22] Shoigu is currently working with the Presidential Administration's Military-Industrial Complex Commission and the Federal Service for Cooperation with Foreign Countries, suggesting that Shoigu is likely involved in the Kremlin's efforts to leverage relationships with Iran, North Korea, Belarus, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to help Russia procure the components and materiel it needs for increasing military industrial capacity. [23] Putin recently appointed Dyumin to the board of state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec and specifically tasked Dyumin with assisting Russian efforts to provide the Russian military with necessary weapons and equipment.[24] It remains to be seen how involved Shoigu, Dyumin, and Medvedev will be in efforts to expand Russia's DIB, however, and their roles may be at most nominal.

The apparent demotion of former First Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council and United Russia Secretary Andrei Turchak on June 4 is likely part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's ongoing effort to remove from power the political and military figures that violated his trust in 2023. The Russian Federal Council terminated Turchak's powers on June 5 after Putin appointed Turchak to become the governor of Altai Republic on June 4.[25] Chairperson of the Russian Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko wryly stated in a farewell message that Turchak will turn Altai Republic into a "tourist Mecca." [26] Russian insider sources and political bloggers widely claimed that Putin most likely removed Turchak from his position in Moscow for his allegedly close relationship with deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and conflict with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) over the control of occupied Ukrainian territories.[27] Some Russian insider sources and political bloggers also claimed that Putin may have also been dissatisfied with Turchak's execution of a Kremlin effort to have Russian veterans participate in the Russian primaries in his role as the Chairperson of the Russian State Duma "Special Military Operation" Working Group, although some Russian sources pointed out that this failure was unlikely to have warranted Turchak's exile to one of the most economically depressed regions in Russia over 4,000 kilometers from the Kremlin.[28] Some Russian sources also speculated that Turchak was demoted for his excessive involvement in local St. Petersburg political drama, and many sources cited Turchak's tendency to intervene in Kremlin intrigues in an effort to improve his own political standing including by partnering up with former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.[29]

Putin had likely exiled Turchak from the Kremlin because he perceived Turchak to be disloyal to the regime. ISW previously observed Russian insider reports that Prigozhin used Turchak to directly deliver Wagner Group complaints about the Russian military failures in winter 2023 to Putin in hopes that this information would prompt Putin to reappoint Wagner-affiliated commanders.[30] Turchak reportedly delivered a blunt briefing about Russian military failures in February 2023 but did not convince Putin to initiate military command changes, likely because Putin perceived Turchak's briefing as an act of disloyalty. ISW continues to assess that Putin values loyalty over competence and had previously interpreted Prigozhin's complaints about supply shortages and military failures as acts of disloyalty.[31] A former Russian intelligence source notably revealed that Putin began to distance himself from Wagner after Prigozhin scolded him in October 2022.[32] One Russian political commentator connected Turchak's demotion to the recent arrest of the former commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Major General Ivan Popov.[33] Popov published an audio recording in July 2023 in which he stated that he was fired after raising concerns over the need for troop rotations among Russian forces receiving the summer 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive.[34] Russian State

Duma Deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev leaked Popov's audio message, and Turchak notably implied that Popov was not involved in the leak.[35] ISW assessed that Popov likely deliberately recorded this message to appeal to the Kremlin to trigger a military command change within the Russian General Staff.[36] Popov also equated himself with a rebellion leader less than a month after the Wagner mutiny, and Turchak's expressed support for Popov may have further convinced Putin of Turchak's disloyalty.[37]

A recent meeting of the Kremlin-appointed Russian Human Rights Council (HRC) on Russia's migration policy reflects Russia's competing imperatives of attracting migrants to offset Russian labor shortages while also catering to its ultranationalist anti-migrant constituency.

The HRC held a meeting on June 4 on "ensuring the rights of Russian citizens in the implementation of migration policy" and discussed several initiatives to strengthen Russian federal control over migrant communities living within Russia.[38] The HRC discussed making Russian language tests mandatory for all children of migrants hoping to enroll in schools and kindergartens; creating "social adaptation centers" for migrants to learn the Russian language; and recognizing children who do not speak Russian at the legally mandated level as having "special educational needs," all of which would require federal oversight and funding in order to ease the integration of migrants into the Russian social sphere.[39] Some participants of the HRC meeting proposed much harsher policy changes. For example, Kaluga Oblast Minister of Internal Policy Oleg Kalugin called for a rule prohibiting labor migrants from bringing their families to Russia in the first place, suggesting that the cost of helping integrate the families of migrants into Russian society is not worth the social burden on Russian society.[40] Russian business-focused outlet *Kommersant* noted that these policies are mainly targeted at migrant communities from Armenia and Central Asia, predominantly Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.[41] The meeting's focus on migrant policy as a means to protect Russian citizens (mostly insinuated to be ethnic Russians or naturalized foreign citizens) rhetorically sets a strong wedge between "Russians" and "migrants" as opposing camps, and specifically identifies Central Asian migrants as potentially threatening the rights of Russian citizens. Russian domestic policy is increasingly trying to balance a heavy reliance on migrant labor, particularly from Central Asia, to maintain its domestic economy as it continues to compensate for economic shortfalls resulting from its war in Ukraine, while also disenfranchising migrant communities to cater to its vocal and influential ultranationalist constituency.[42] The HRC will similarly have to balance fostering a policy that encourages and attracts migrants to move to Russia in the hopes of obtaining economic benefit while also appeasing the cadre of commentators that espouse anti-migrant and xenophobic views that hold that migration policy is a threat to ethnic Russians.

Chechen Republic Rosgvardia Head and Russian State Duma Deputy Adam Delimkhanov accused State Duma Deputy Chairman and New People Party Head Vladislav Davankov of contradicting the Russian Constitution and attempting to divide Russian society, exposing continued tension between Chechen efforts to operate autonomously and the Russian state's efforts to regulate perceived Islamic extremist threats from migrant and indigenous Muslim communities.

Davankov submitted a bill to the State Duma on May 28 that would allow educational institutions and regional authorities to ban religious clothing that "partially or completely hides the face" from municipal and public spaces.[43] Delimkhanov responded to Davankov's proposal by claiming that the Russian Constitution guarantees religious freedom and noting that the hijab, which he claims is a religious obligation for Muslim women, does not cover the face.[44] Delimkhanov claimed that Chechens are against niqab, which covers the face, however. Delimkhanov further asserted that Davankov's bill could cause a rift in Russian society since he raised "one of the most sensitive topics" without "proper consideration of the subject." Delimkhanov also observed that Russian Orthodox Christianity expects women to wear headscarves for piety and humility. Davankov defended himself against Delimkhanov's criticisms citing Russia's secular education system and claimed that parents demanded the ban in schools given that migrant children "have difficulty speaking Russian, let alone wearing religious clothing." [45] Davankov also noted that the Russian Supreme Court upheld a ban against wearing religious garments in schools in the Mordovia Republic in 2015.[46] Delimkhanov's immediate criticism of Davankov highlights continued tension between the Chechen Republic and the Russian government's long-term efforts to subjugate Chechnya, likely exacerbated by intensified Kremlin crackdowns against indigenous and migrant Muslim communities following the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack.[47] The renewed debate on restrictions against Islamic religious clothing will likely continue to foster division along ethnic and religious lines, despite the Kremlin's efforts to portray Russia as a harmonious and united multiethnic and multi-confessional country.[48]

Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom reportedly assesses that it is unlikely to recover gas sales it lost following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, illustrating how Western sanctions are achieving some long-term impacts against Russian revenue streams supporting Russia's war effort.

The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 5 that Gazprom's leadership commissioned a report at the end of 2023 on the long-term prospects for gas sales, which found that Gazprom's annual exports to Europe by 2035 will average 50 billion to 75 billion cubic meters — roughly a third of its annual exports to Europe before the full-scale invasion.[49] Gazprom reportedly noted that a new pipeline to the People's Republic of China (PRC) aims to offset lost export volume to Europe but will only have the capacity to transport 50 billion cubic meters of gas per year. [50] Russia has relied on oil revenues to buoy federal budgets amid increased spending on its war in Ukraine, and long-term constraints on other energy exports will likely limit additional significant sources of funding for the Kremlin.[51] Russia has managed to rely on oil revenues to support a record level of defense spending in 2024 by engaging in a concerted effort to circumvent the G7's price cap

on Russian oil and petroleum products.[52] The West is expanding sanctions to curtail Russian efforts to skirt the G7 price cap, and significant constraints on Russian oil exports could also achieve substantial impacts on Russian state revenue.[53]

Russian investigative outlet the *Insider* and Moldovan outlet *Little Country* published an investigation on June 5 detailing how former Moldovan Chief of the General Staff Igor Gorgan operated as an agent on behalf of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU). The *Insider* and *Little Country* reported that they obtained access to Telegram correspondence between Gorgan and his GRU handler Colonel Alexei Makarov which shows that Gorgan regularly reported on internal Moldovan matters and the visits of Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) representatives to Moldova since 2019.[54] The *Insider* reported that an unspecified military intelligence source stated that GRU's active contact with Gorgan began when Gorgan served on a NATO mission in 2004.[55] Gorgan served as Moldovan Chief of the General Staff in 2013 and from 2019 to 2021 and reportedly offered GRU information on Moldovan military capabilities and activities, requests from the Ukrainian MoD, and information about internal Moldovan politics.[56] Gorgan reportedly assured the GRU that he still has contacts in the Moldovan MoD who can continue to supply him with information.[57] Gorgan also reportedly routinely told Makarov that Moldova was ready for the arrival of Russian forces and that he would keep "the whole situation in the army under control" and help Russia "deal with [Moldovan] politicians." [58] The GRU's response to Gorgan's offers is currently unclear. The Kremlin is engaged in efforts to destabilize Moldova and prevent Moldova's European Union accession, and Gorgan's relationship with the GRU illustrates how Russia is leveraging pro-Russian Moldovan actors in these efforts and how Russia could rely on such actors to conduct future hybrid operations or support conventional military aggression against Moldova.[59]

Key Takeaways:

- US officials continue to attempt to clarify US policy regarding Ukraine's ability to strike a limited subset of Russian military targets within Russia with US-provided weapons, but public communications about US policy remain unclear.
- Western-provided artillery ammunition has reportedly started arriving to Ukrainian forces on the frontline, although not at a scale that would allow Ukrainian forces to fully challenge the Russian military's current artillery shell advantage.
- Russian missile and drone strikes have caused significant long-term damage to Ukraine's energy grid, and Ukraine will reportedly face even greater energy constraints in summer 2024.
- Ukrainian outlet *Liga* reported on June 4 that a source in Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated that there are roughly 550,000 Russian military and paramilitary personnel concentrated in occupied Ukraine and near the international border.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on June 4 that former Russian Defense Minister and Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu will coordinate efforts to increase Russian defense industrial capacity alongside former Tula Oblast Governor and Presidential Aide Alexei Dyumin and Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev.
- The apparent demotion of former First Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council and United Russia Secretary Andrei Turchak on June 4 is likely part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's ongoing effort to remove from power the political and military figures that violated his trust in 2023.
- A recent meeting of the Kremlin-appointed Russian Human Rights Council (HRC) on Russia's migration policy reflects Russia's competing imperatives of attracting migrants to offset Russian labor shortages while also catering to its ultranationalist anti-migrant constituency.
- Chechen Republic Rosgvardia Head and Russian State Duma Deputy Adam Delimkhanov accused State Duma Deputy Chairman and New People Party Head Vladislav Davankov of contradicting the Russian Constitution and attempting to divide Russian society, exposing continued tension between Chechen efforts to operate autonomously and the Russian state's efforts to regulate perceived Islamic extremist threats from migrant and indigenous Muslim communities.
- Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom reportedly assesses that it is unlikely to recover gas sales it lost following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, illustrating how Western sanctions are achieving some long-term impacts against Russian revenue streams supporting Russia's war effort.
- Russian investigative outlet the *Insider* and Moldovan outlet *Little Country* published an investigation on June 5 detailing how former Moldovan Chief of the General Staff Igor Gorgan operated as an agent on behalf of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU).
- Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Kupyansk, near Chasiv Yar, west of Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Kremlin likely authorized the Crimean branch of the Kremlin-created "Defenders of Fatherland" state fund to help grant combatants in Russian private military companies (PMCs) legal veteran statuses, possibly as part of an ongoing state effort to centralize control over irregular formations operating in Ukraine.

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

Riley Bailey, Karolina Hird, Christina Harward, Nicole Wolkov, and George Barros

June 4, 2024, 6:35pm ET

Select Russian military commentators continue to complain about superior Ukrainian drone and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities on the battlefield, continuing to highlight the rapid and constant tactical and technological innovation cycles that are shaping the battlespace in Ukraine. A Russian milblogger who formerly served as a "Storm-Z" unit instructor posted a list of complaints on June 4 detailing the challenges that Russian forces face in repelling Ukrainian drones and claimed that effective and pervasive Ukrainian drone use is now the "leading factor" in Ukraine's ability to repel Russian offensive actions.[1] The milblogger made six points about the Russian-Ukrainian drone disparity, claiming first and foremost that Ukrainian troops have a large numerical advantage in first person view (FPV) drones and FPV drone operators. The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian assault groups have a 3-4:1 FPV drone advantage over Russian assault units, while Ukrainian mechanized groups have a 6-10:1 FPV drone advantage over comparable Russian units. The milblogger noted that Ukraine also has specialized and centralized drone units within existing Ukrainian ground units, which allows Ukrainian forces to better integrate reconnaissance and attack drone capabilities into basic tactical maneuvers. Russian forces, by contrast, lack the centralized and organized drone-unit system and adequate EW and electronic reconnaissance (ER) capabilities to counter Ukrainian drones.[2] Another milblogger, whose initial post from May 31 spurred the former Storm-Z instructor to weigh in on the issue, noted that specialized Ukrainian drone units have heavily targeted and destroyed unprotected Russian armored equipment in the Avdiivka direction, inhibiting Russian offensive prospects in the area.[3] The milblogger emphasized that the provision of FPV drones and required EW and ER systems to Russian forces is done on an *ad hoc* volunteer basis, as there is no centralized supply mechanism from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). These remarks on Russia's need to centralize its drone warfare capabilities echo recent calls made by a cadre of Russian commentators, including former Russian Space Agency (Roscosmos) head Dmitry Rogozin. [4] As Ukrainian forces adapt and better integrate new technologies into their force, Russian forces will likely feel pressured to do the same in order to retain technological and tactical parity on the battlefield. This offense-defense and capability scaling race is central to the development of combat means in a contemporary war.

Ukraine and its partners have reportedly drafted a document for the Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15 that calls for future engagement with Russia on a limited number of issues connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, although the Kremlin remains unlikely to engage in meaningful negotiations on the proposal or any wider settlement to the war in Ukraine. *Bloomberg* reported on June 4 that the draft document aims to generate consensus among summit participants on nuclear safety, food security, and the return of abducted Ukrainian civilians and children.[5] The document reportedly states that this consensus will serve as a "confidence building measure" for future engagement with Russian officials on these issues.[6] The reported document specifically deems nuclear threats as "inadmissible" and calls for the return of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) to Ukrainian control, and freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov so that Ukrainian agricultural products can reach third parties and the return of all deported and unlawfully displaced Ukrainian children and civilians to Ukraine.[7]

Russian officials have routinely been explicitly hostile to engagement with Ukraine on many of these issues, however. The Kremlin frequently threatens Ukraine and the West with nuclear weapons in order to promote Western self-deterrence. The Kremlin also uses nuclear rhetoric as a common tool of its reflexive control campaign aimed at influencing Western decision-making.[8] Russian officials have repeatedly attempted to use Russia's physical control over the ZNPP to try to force international organizations to legitimize Russia's occupation of the ZNPP and by extension Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory.[9] Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which facilitated limited agricultural exports from Ukrainian ports, in July 2023 and has since routinely targeted Ukrainian ports and agricultural infrastructure in southern Ukraine in an effort to constrain Ukraine's ability to provide grain and other agricultural products to its partners.[10] Russian officials have shown very limited openness to the return of Ukrainian children from Russia and occupied Ukraine to Ukraine through mediation with third parties.[11] The Kremlin and Russian occupation officials continue to deport Ukrainian civilians and children from occupied Ukraine, however, and there is no indication that Russia is willing to stop this campaign or return deported and unlawfully displaced Ukrainians back to Ukraine at scale.[12] The Kremlin continues to feign interest in meaningful negotiations with Ukraine in an effort to push the West to make concessions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the Kremlin may use engagement on these more limited issues to pursue similar concessions.[13]

Russia is conducting a wide-scale hybrid warfare campaign targeting NATO states in tandem with Russian efforts to augment its conventional military capabilities in preparation for a potential conflict with NATO. *Bloomberg* reported on June 3 that Norwegian Chief of Defense Eirik Kristoffersen stated that NATO has a window of two to three years to rebuild its forces and stocks

before Russia has rebuilt its own ability to conduct a conventional attack, presumably against NATO. [14] Kristoffersen stated that this expedited time frame is due to Russia's current elevated defense industrial base (DIB) output. Western officials also continue to highlight Russia's current engagement in hybrid warfare activities across Europe. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 4 that Western governments are trying to formulate a response to the growing series of Russian-backed sabotage attempts on military bases and civilian infrastructure in Europe. [15] FT reported that an unspecified Western defense advisor stated that Russia has a "highly developed lexicon" for hybrid warfare, including information and psychological operations and sabotage. The defense advisor noted that Russia is learning from and adapting its hybrid warfare operations, stating that Russia is "constantly observing" the West's reactions to these hybrid warfare operations and "testing to see which of [Russia's] actions work." FT reported that Russia has resorted to using proxies, such as operatives from criminal gangs, to conduct the sabotage attacks after European governments expelled hundreds of Russian diplomats and spies. NATO and its member states have repeatedly warned about intensifying Russian hybrid operations on NATO member territory. [16]

A joint investigation by Russian opposition student journal DOXA and open-source outlet *Kidnapping* highlights the role of the Kremlin-backed Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Russifying Ukrainian children whom Russian authorities have deported to Russia.

[17] DOXA found that from the early days of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian officials deported children from orphanages and boarding schools in occupied Donetsk Oblast to Russia's Rostov Oblast, where they were visited by Metropolitan Mercury (Igor Ivanov) of Rostov and Novocherkassk, who spoke to them about the ROC and seemingly enticed them to consider baptism into the ROC. [18] ROC clergy have also called for the baptism of deported Ukrainian children into the ROC and reportedly encouraged them to join various "military-patriotic" youth organizations in Russia. [19] DOXA and *Kidnapping* also found that deported children from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts stayed at shelters run by the ROC in Voronezh Oblast, where ROC clergy and affiliated officials hold "military-patriotic" events for the deported children in order to encourage pro-Russian and pro-ROC sentiment and cut the children off from their Ukrainian identities. [20] ISW has previously assessed that the ROC is instrumental in enacting the Kremlin's occupation plan for Ukraine, and this appears to extend to Russian efforts to Russify deported Ukrainian children living in Russia. [21] Kremlin-appointed Commissioner on Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, against whom the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant due to her role in facilitating the deportation of Ukrainian children, is notably married to an ROC priest. [22] Lvova-Belova and her husband have themselves adopted a deported Ukrainian child from Mariupol, highlighting the personal involvement of the ROC and other Kremlin officials in the deportation of Ukrainian children. [23] ISW continues to assess that the deportation of Ukrainian children, with the intent to destroy their Ukrainian identities via such Russification projects, amounts to a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which prohibits "forcibly transferring children of a group to another group" on grounds that it is an act of genocide. [24]

Russian President Vladimir Putin named First Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council and United Russia Secretary Andrei Turchak the acting governor of the Altai Republic on June 4.

[25] Turchak chaired the Russian State Duma "Special Military Operation" Working Group dedicated to resolving issues with Russia's war effort in Ukraine and reported on the working group's efforts directly to Putin. [26] Former Altai Republic Head Oleg Khorokhordin resigned on June 4 reportedly to transition to a new, unspecified position. [27] Putin met with Turchak via videoconference to discuss Turchak's new position and stated that the Altai Republic is a "promising but difficult" multinational republic where the Russian government wants to develop the tourism industry. [28] Russian outlet *Vedomosti* reported on June 3 that three sources close to the Russian presidential administration stated that the Presidential Plenipotentiary Representative in the Ural Federal District Vladimir Yakushev may replace Turchak as United Russia Secretary. [29]

Russian sources speculated on the meaning behind Turchak's appointment. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* stated that sources close to the presidential administration noted that Putin offered Turchak the position during a videoconference, not during a personal meeting as Putin usually does. [30] *Meduza's* sources reportedly stated that Turchak's new position is a demotion, comparing it to an "execution" and "deportation to a colony settlement." A source reportedly stated that Turchak lost his position in the "power vertical" and that Turchak must have "seriously screwed up." *Meduza* reported that a source close to the St. Petersburg government claimed that Putin moved Turchak because Turchak was "too active" in St. Petersburg and St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov complained to Putin — a version with which other *Meduza* sources reportedly disagreed. A Russian milblogger refuted claims that Turchak's appointment is "political exile" and claimed that the Altai Republic is geographically important given its position near Central Asia and Xinjiang, China. [31] The milblogger claimed that the West is active in Central Asia and that Russia will need logistics hubs and a strong executive power in the area if there are "serious showdowns" in Central Asia between the West and Russia. A Russian insider source claimed that the Russian government may launch a new association of federal subjects that Turchak will supervise. [32] The insider source claimed that the Russian government may hold a referendum, which Turchak will also oversee, to unify the Altai Republic and neighboring Altai Krai. There are multiple defense industrial enterprises in Altai Krai, and if the insider source's claim about plans to unify Altai Republic and Altai Krai are true, the Kremlin may have appointed Turchak to oversee Russian defense industrial efforts in the region as part of a wider Kremlin effort to increase Russia's defense industrial production. [33] Putin may have also moved Turchak in an effort to sideline and demote him without having to make a public show of the demotion,

especially if Putin was displeased with Turchak's advocacy for Russian servicemembers fighting in Ukraine.

Newly appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov reportedly invited select Russian war correspondents and milbloggers to meet with him to coopt several Russian information space actors, prompting limited criticism from a prominent Russian milblogger. A Russian insider source claimed on May 26 that Belousov planned to meet with milbloggers and military correspondents to demonstrate that he has "nothing in common with his predecessor [now Russian Security Council Secretary] Sergei Shoigu."^[34] The Russian information space largely celebrated Belousov's appointment as Defense Minister and expressed hope that his appointment would foster positive changes to the endemic problems that persisted under Shoigu's MoD, such as the Shoigu MoD's tendency to lie about Russia's military performance in Ukraine and failures to adequately supply frontline forces.^[35] ISW has previously observed that the Kremlin began efforts to coopt Russian milbloggers critical of the Russian military's poor performance in the war in Ukraine by offering them state awards and government positions starting in November 2022 in an effort to regain control over the Russian information space.^[36] A prominent Russian milblogger, who has previously criticized the Russian MoD and routinely posts complaints on his Telegram channel from Russian servicemen on the frontlines, claimed that Belousov invited a limited number of already-respected military correspondents, whom the Kremlin has coopted and likely deemed to be "safe," and milbloggers to meet with him.^[37] The milblogger further claimed that he would not be surprised if Russian MoD employees from the "old team," likely referring to Shoigu's affiliates at the Russian MoD, organized the meeting and expressed doubt that the Russian MoD would listen to milblogger suggestions. Russian milbloggers appear to be experimenting with different ways to express critical opinions of the Russian MoD following Belousov's appointment, and Belousov may be meeting with military correspondents to constrain this criticism.^[38]

Key Takeaways:

- Select Russian military commentators continue to complain about superior Ukrainian drone and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities on the battlefield, continuing to highlight the rapid and constant tactical and technological innovation cycles that are shaping the battlespace in Ukraine.
- Ukraine and its partners have reportedly drafted a document for the Global Peace Summit in Switzerland on June 15 that calls for future engagement with Russia on a limited number of issues connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, although the Kremlin remains unlikely to engage in meaningful negotiations on the proposal or any wider settlement to the war in Ukraine.
- Russia is conducting a wide-scale hybrid warfare campaign targeting NATO states in tandem with Russian efforts to augment its conventional military capabilities in preparation for a potential conflict with NATO
- A joint investigation by Russian opposition student journal *DOXA* and open-source outlet *Kidmapping* highlights the role of the Kremlin-backed Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Russifying Ukrainian children whom Russian authorities have deported to Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin named First Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council and United Russia Secretary Andrei Turchak the acting governor of the Altai Republic on June 4.
- Newly appointed Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov reportedly invited select Russian war correspondents and milbloggers to meet with him to coopt several Russian information space actors, prompting limited criticism from a prominent Russian milblogger.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Siversk, and Donetsk City.
- The Russian military reportedly continues to forcibly send Russian military personnel, including those with serious medical issues, to fight in Ukraine.
- Russia continues efforts to militarize deported Ukrainian youth and prepare them for future service in the Russian armed forces.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 3, 2024

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

Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Liam Karr, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 3, 2024, 7:25pm ET

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

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-300/400 air defense battery in Belgorod Oblast likely with HIMARS on June 1 or 2. Geolocated imagery published on June 3 shows two destroyed launchers and a damaged command post of a Russian S-300/400 air defense system in a field east of Kiselyovo (just north of Belgorod City).^[1] Russian sources widely speculated that Ukrainian forces used US-

provided HIMARS, but Ukrainian officials have yet to comment on the strike.[2] The S-300/400 air defense system was located roughly 60 kilometers from the current frontline in northern Kharkiv Oblast and over 80 kilometers from Kharkiv City, which is within the range of HIMARS but exceeds the range of other MLRS systems that Ukrainian forces reportedly use to conduct strikes into Belgorod Oblast. [3] Russian sources have increasingly claimed that Ukrainian forces are using HIMARS to strike Belgorod Oblast since the US partially lifted its restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian border areas with Kharkiv Oblast.[4] Russian sources will likely continue to characterize any successful strike in Belgorod Oblast as a HIMARS strike regardless of the system used.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are reportedly in disagreement about economic issues such as the proposed Power of Siberia 2 (PS-2) pipeline despite publicly portraying themselves as diplomatically aligned. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported on June 2 that three unspecified sources familiar with the matter stated that the PRC and Russia disagree about the details of the PS-2 gas pipeline, with the PRC wanting to pay prices near Russia's subsidized domestic gas prices and to only commit to buying a small part of the pipeline's planned capacity. [5] Gazprom Head Alexei Miller reportedly did not accompany Russian President Vladimir Putin on his recent visit to the PRC due to these disagreements over the pipeline. FT reported that Putin asked PRC President Xi Jinping during their May 2024 meetings to come to an agreement on the pipeline, but FT reported that sources said that a pipeline agreement "remains distant." FT noted that Russia needs the pipeline to launch as expected more than the PRC. FT reported that it gained access to an unreleased report by an unspecified major Russian bank that stated that if the PS-2 pipeline does not launch in 2029, Gazprom's profits are forecasted to drop by almost 15 percent, which is especially significant following Gazprom's \$6.9 billion loss in 2023, its largest loss in more than 25 years. FT, citing a recent report by Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, also stated that the PRC will mostly or entirely be able to meet its projected increased demand for imported gas with existing supply contracts until 2030, but that the PRC's demand for imported gas will exceed the capacity of its existing contracts by about 150 billion cubic meters by 2040.[6] The PRC is likely aware of Russia's more immediate need for the pipeline and is using Beijing's upper hand in the energy sphere to extract concessions from Russia on the issue.

Putin also reportedly asked Xi in May 2024 to "snub" the upcoming Ukrainian peace conference in Switzerland amid continued Russian efforts to discredit and otherwise undermine the peace conference.[7] Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated on June 3 that Russia is trying to discredit the upcoming Ukrainian peace summit by convincing other states that the summit is insignificant, that they should not participate, and that if they do they should participate at the lowest possible level.[8] Other Ukrainian officials have recently emphasized that it is imperative for both the United States and the PRC to attend the June 2024 peace summit as their participation is "decisive" in compelling Russia to participate in the process of restoring peace and security.[9] The PRC announced on May 31 that it would not be joining the peace summit, and Saudi Arabia has reportedly decided not to attend.[10]

Russian forces continue to abuse Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs. Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubynets amplified footage on June 2 showing a group of three Russian servicemen beating, threatening, and harassing a group of four Ukrainian POWs.[11] The footage shows one Russian serviceman shooting the ground immediately next to a POW's head and the Russian servicemen forcing the POWs to sing the Russian national anthem. Lyubynets stated the preliminary information suggests that the incident was filmed in the Kharkiv direction, where Russian forces recently began offensive operations. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported on June 3 that it opened an investigation into the incident.[12] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* identified the Russian serviceman who filmed the video as Alexei Kirpin, a former soldier in the far-right "Rusich" assault formation.[13] Ukraine-based ZMINA Human Rights Center reported that Russian authorities are also mistreating and beating Ukrainian POWs in pre-trial detention centers in Russia.[14] ISW has observed evidence of widespread violations of the Geneva Convention on POWs committed by the Russian military in recent months, including Russian forces executing Ukrainian POWs and using POWs as human shields on the battlefield.[15]

Russian military and political leadership continues to pursue increased military, political, and economic cooperation with several African states. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov traveled to Benghazi, Libya on May 31 and met with Libyan National Army (LNA) Commander-in-Chief Khalifa Haftar at the Ar Rajma military base in eastern Libya.[16] Yevkurov promised to enhance LNA capabilities in eastern Libya.[17] Russia has recently reinforced its military presence in eastern Libya and increased deployments of Russian military personnel and supplies to the area since at least March 2024.[18] The American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project (CTP) previously assessed that the intensified Russian military efforts in Libya are likely partially contributing to the wider Kremlin effort to secure a naval base in Tobruk, Libya, and that Yevkurov has been particularly involved in negotiations with LNA officials over Russian naval basing in Libya since August 2023.[19] Yevkurov also traveled to Niger on June 3 to meet with Nigerien junta head Abdurahmane Tiani, Nigerien junta defense minister Salifou Modi, and Nigerian junta interior minister Mohamed Toubma, reportedly signing a "multi-sectoral cooperation" memorandum of understanding. [20] Russia has recently increased its military presence in Niger—the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s Africa Corps deployed to Niger in April 2023 and stated its intentions to replace US forces in

northern Niger, then entered a base housing US military personnel in the country in May 2024.[21] The US notably intends to remove all American troops from Niger by September 15, 2024.[22] Alongside increased Russian military presence in Niger and efforts to supplant US forces, Russia is also reportedly seeking to take over uranium assets in Niger currently held by French state-controlled company Orano SA, and the "multi-sectoral cooperation" agreement signed by Yevkurov and his Nigerien counterparts may support this Russian effort.[23]

While Yevkurov primarily pursues military cooperation with African states, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is also visiting Africa to discuss Russian political and economic engagement with various African partners. Lavrov met with Guinean junta officials in Conakry, Guinea, on June 3 to discuss Russian-Guinean relations.[24] The Guinean junta's relationship with Russia is complicated, but the Kremlin maintains substantial economic and resource-based interests in Guinea. Russia depends on Guinea for a significant share of its bauxite, a refined-mineral-based material that is used in the production of spark plug insulators and other circuit and furnace related industrial goods. [25] The Kremlin may desire to maintain access to bauxite to support the Russian defense industrial base (DIB). Lavrov also met Congolese officials in Ollombo, Congo on the evening of June 3, to discuss the situation in Libya, as Congolese President Denis Sassou-Nguesso's is the head of the African Union High-Level Committee on the Crisis in Libya.[26] Russian officials have attempted to maintain firm relations with Congo over the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, with Lavrov visiting Congo in 2022 and Russian President Vladimir Putin calling Nguesso in March 2024.[27] Lavrov is also expected to travel to Chad on June 5 and Burkina Faso sometime in the coming days as well. [28] Lavrov's visit to Chad in particular continues Russian efforts to grow ties with the Chadian regime since Putin met with Chadian President Mahamat Déby in Moscow in January 2024, and Russia likely aims to establish itself as the primary security partner across the Sahel to advance Russia's economic and military interests in the region.[29] CTP previously forecast that aligning with Russia and the Russia-backed Sahelian juntas could pave the way for the Chadian junta to expand its defense and economic ties with Russia to address its own regime security needs and internal pressure to distance itself from the West.[30]

The Russian military is reportedly forcibly sending Russian servicemembers who refused to fight to the front in Ukraine from Russia instead of standing trial for their refusal to participate in combat. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on June 3 that Russian military authorities began forcibly sending hundreds of Russian servicemembers who refused to take part in Russian combat operations to the front in Ukraine, including to northern Kharkiv Oblast and Donetsk Oblast, in May 2024.[31] *Verstka* stated that the Russian military holds the servicemembers at military unit basepoints in Russia as they await trial for crimes related to their refusal to fight before suddenly cancelling their trials and immediately sending them to Ukraine. *Verstka* reported that Russian authorities used physical abuse to coerce some soldiers into volunteering to go to Ukraine before forcing others from their holding cells at gunpoint and transporting them to the frontlines. *Verstka* reported that Sverdlovsk Oblast Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Merzlyankova claimed on May 6 that she visited a collection point for servicemembers who refused to fight but that management stated that there were no violations of the servicemembers' civil rights. *Verstka* reported that Russian authorities cancelled the trials of at least 170 servicemembers who refused to fight and deployed them to Ukraine and that investigators, prosecutors, and lawyers were all unaware of this. *Verstka* reported that several sources, including one source from the Russian presidential administration, stated that the Russian military sends conscripts and "incompetent" reservists, who have signed contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), to noncombat roles in Russia's border forces to free up experienced military personnel for the Russian offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast, but that the Russian military is also sending deserters to fight. A Russian lawyer, who specializes in cases related to servicemembers refusing to fight, reportedly stated that the Russian MoD may be stopping criminal cases to send such servicemembers to the front due to a shortage of forces needed to fight in northern Kharkiv Oblast. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces likely launched the offensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast when the Northern Grouping of Forces was understrength, and the Russian MoD may be sending servicemembers awaiting their trials to the front in Kharkiv Oblast to strengthen the limited forces in the area.[32]

Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili signed the Russian-style "foreign agents" bill into law on June 3 amid continued protests.[33] The Georgian Parliament overwhelmingly overrode Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili's veto of the law on May 28, and Georgian Dream Secretary General Kakha Kaladze stated on June 3 that Georgian officials will fine and seize the property of any organizations that refuse to register under the law.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck a Russian S-300/400 air defense battery in Belgorod Oblast likely with HIMARS on June 1 or 2.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are reportedly in disagreement about economic issues such as the proposed Power of Siberia 2 (PS-2) pipeline despite publicly portraying themselves as diplomatically aligned.
- Putin also reportedly asked Xi in May 2024 to "snub" the upcoming Ukrainian peace conference in Switzerland amid continued Russian efforts to discredit and otherwise

undermine the peace conference.

- Russian forces continue to abuse Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) in violation of the Geneva Convention on POWs.
- Russian military and political leadership continues to pursue increased military, political, and economic cooperation with several African states.
- The Russian military is reportedly forcibly sending Russian servicemembers who refused to fight to the front in Ukraine from Russia instead of standing trial for their refusal to participate in combat.
- Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili signed the Russian-style "foreign agents" bill into law on June 3 amid continued protests.
- Ukrainian forces recently advanced within Vovchansk and Russian forces recently advanced near Lyptsi, Avdiivka, and Velyka Novoslika and in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast.
- The family members of mobilized Russian personnel continue to protest for the demobilization of their relatives.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 2, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Nicole Wolkov, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 2, 2024, 8pm ET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with US and Singaporean officials and highlighted the upcoming Global Peace Summit during the International Institute for Strategic Studies' (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 2. Zelensky met with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to discuss the battlefield situation, Ukraine's need for additional air defense systems, and the importance of Ukraine's ability to strike Russian military targets near Kharkiv Oblast.[1] Zelensky also met with Singaporean President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, and Singaporean businessmen and emphasized Ukraine's interest in increasing its cooperation with Singapore and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).[2] Zelensky announced during the conference that 106 countries have confirmed their participation in the upcoming June 15-16 Global Peace Summit in Switzerland and noted that Ukraine invited every country to the upcoming summit except for Russia, which is the aggressor in this conflict.[3] Zelensky warned that Russian officials are attempting to disrupt the peace summit and discourage countries from attending the summit by threatening to "block" the import and export of food, agricultural, and chemical products. Zelensky also noted that the summit is an important step towards the resolution of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[4] Ukrainian and Western media reported on June 2 that diplomatic sources in Saudi Arabia stated that Saudi Arabia will not participate in the Global Peace Summit following the May 31 announcement that the People's Republic of China (PRC) will not send a representative to the summit.[5]

The provision of Western air defense systems and the lifting of Western restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets in Russian territory with Western-provided weapons remain crucial for Ukraine to repel Russian glide bomb and missile strikes against Kharkiv City. A dozen Western countries have recently partially or completely lifted restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian territory.[6] These policy changes will allow Ukrainian forces to use Western-provided systems to strike Russian firing and staging areas in Russia's border areas and airspace. Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces downed a number of Russian military aircraft in February 2024, many of which were conducting glide bomb strikes in the Avdiivka direction.[7] Ukrainian forces' ability to down Russian military aircraft in a frontline area indicates that Ukrainian forces will likely be able to replicate the same effects with both Ukrainian and Western-provided systems to protect northern Kharkiv Oblast and Kharkiv City from Russian glide bomb strikes launched from Russian airspace. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has previously stated that Russian forces would not be able to seize Kharkiv City if Ukrainian forces received two Patriot air defense systems to deploy to the region.[8] Russian forces have targeted Kharkiv City with glide bombs and various missile strikes in the past several weeks, although two Patriot batteries in northern Kharkiv Oblast would have limited effectiveness in defending against Russian airstrikes without the ability to fire on Russian aircraft in Russian airspace.[9]

Ukrainian field commanders are reportedly compensating for training difficulties that mobilization has exacerbated by training new personnel on the frontline. Ukrainian field commanders told the *Washington Post* that they have devoted significant time to teaching basic skills to newly-redeployed personnel because they do not learn these skills at training centers. [10] The *Washington Post* reported on June 2 that Ukrainian soldiers who had served in the rear also lack adequate skills upon arrival at the front even though many had been serving in the military prior to the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. The problems the *Washington Post* identified are not surprising in these circumstances. Most of the Ukrainian forces on the frontline have been fighting for more than two years and are exhausted, so Ukraine is under pressure to speedily rotate them with fresh forces and replace losses to maintain its defense.[11] There is a difficult tradeoff to make between pulling experienced soldiers from the frontline to train new personnel or accepting bottlenecks in training the new personnel. One Ukrainian officer reportedly told the *Washington Post* that Ukraine needs NATO instructors to train new personnel and to halve training times to one month.[12] Russian

rear-area strike campaigns against even the westernmost regions of Ukraine have ensured that Ukraine has effectively no safe rear area in which it can safely train personnel, and sending personnel to train in NATO states – such as the ongoing UK-led Operation Interflex training program – both removes Ukrainian field commanders from the training process and increases the delay in deploying soldiers as Ukraine must transport these personnel to and from NATO states. Ukraine will not resolve these issues quickly, and the average overall quality of Ukrainian forces on the frontline will likely decrease as experienced personnel rotate out and newly-deployed personnel reach the frontline even as the number of available soldiers increases. New soldiers will likely learn rapidly as they fight alongside experienced veterans, however.

Ukrainian field commanders' decisions to train newly-deployed personnel on the front before committing them to combat indicates that the overall quality of Ukrainian forces will likely remain higher than that of Russian forces in the near- to mid-term. Russian forces have consistently used newly-deployed mobilized personnel, penal convicts, and fresh contract and volunteer soldiers without adequate training to conduct mass, infantry-led "meat assaults" to make marginal gains in Ukraine and have proven willing to continue suffering extensive casualties for these gains.[13] The Russian force generation mechanism has largely met the replacement rate of casualties in Ukraine, however, incentivizing fast redeployments of new personnel for additional "meat" assaults over effective training. Russian milbloggers have consistently complained about ineffective Russian training since partial mobilization in September 2022, and a former Russian Storm-Z instructor recently claimed that Russian "strategic" reserves are "doing nothing for months" due to training bottlenecks resulting from an inadequate number of instructors.[14] Further Ukrainian cooperation with NATO instructors, particularly if those NATO instructors assist training in rear areas in Ukraine, provides further opportunities for Ukraine to improve its basic training mechanisms and improve the quality of newly deployed personnel.

The New York Times (NYT) published an investigation on June 2 into the forced relocation and deportation of 46 Ukrainian children from a foster home in occupied Kherson Oblast during 2022.[15] The NYT analyzed photos, social media posts, and official government documents and concluded that Russian government officials participated in the forced relocation of these children and that occupation officials are withholding the children from their parents and relatives as part of a wider effort to strip Ukrainian children of their identities. The NYT reported that a Russian federal adoption site listed 22 of these Ukrainian children for adoption in Russia and placed at least two children with Russian families. The NYT consulted legal experts who determined that the Russian intent to strip children of their Ukrainian identity is a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and may amount to a war crime. ISW analysts assisted with the preparation of this report by reviewing some of its findings and sources.

The Telegraph reported on June 1 in a since-removed article that British officials ordered the United Kingdom's (UK) Security Service (MI5) to refocus its counterintelligence efforts towards Russian, People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iranian agents operating in the UK.

[16] Unnamed government sources told *The Telegraph* that the growing number of PRC agents and Iranian organized criminal groups in the UK have shifted MI5's recruiting targets and that the UK's support for Ukraine had led to increased Russian spying in the UK. ISW is refraining from publishing additional details from the article until *The Telegraph* provides further details about the article's removal.

Russian war commentator Alexander Artamonov drew backlash from Kremlin-affiliated Russian propagandists for claiming that Ukrainians are "second-class citizens," contradicting the Kremlin's false efforts to portray Ukrainian and Russian people as one nation. Artamonov reportedly stated on a live broadcast on a Russian state television channel on June 1 that he "does not have a very high opinion of Ukrainians" and that he "insists Ukrainians are second-class citizens." [17] Russian State Duma Deputy and convicted unregistered Russian foreign agent Maria Butina, Russian ultranationalist and former State Duma Deputy Zakhar Prilepin, Kremlin-affiliated Russian milbloggers, and other pro-war Russian commentators heavily criticized Artamonov and reiterated the false narrative that Russians and Ukrainians are actually the same.[18] Artamonov notably received backlash for contradicting the Kremlin's established false narrative that claims that Ukrainians are Russians in an attempt to delegitimize and erase Ukrainian identity and justify Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian occupation officials and Russian forces in occupied Ukraine have subjugated Ukrainian civilians in occupied territory to violence, property theft, religious persecution, forced deportation, and impressment into the Russian military — all as part of an ongoing campaign to eradicate an independent Ukrainian national and cultural identity.[19]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with US and Singaporean officials and highlighted the upcoming Global Peace Summit during the International Institute for Strategic Studies' (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 2.**
- **The provision of Western air defense systems and the lifting of Western restrictions on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets Russian territory with Western-provided weapons remain crucial for Ukraine to repel Russian glide bomb and missile strikes against Kharkiv City.**

- Ukrainian field commanders are reportedly compensating for training difficulties that mobilization has exacerbated by training new personnel on the frontline.
- Ukrainian field commanders' decisions to train newly-deployed personnel on the front before committing them to combat indicates that the overall quality of Ukrainian forces will likely remain higher than that of Russian forces in the near- to mid-term.
- The *New York Times* (NYT) published an investigation on June 2 into the forced relocation and deportation of 46 Ukrainian children from a foster home in occupied Kherson Oblast during 2022.
- The *Telegraph* reported on June 1 in a since-removed article that British officials ordered the United Kingdom's (UK) Security Service (MI5) to refocus its counterintelligence efforts towards Russian, People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iranian agents operating in the UK.
- Russian war commentator Alexander Artamonov drew backlash from Kremlin-affiliated Russian propagandists for claiming that Ukrainians are "second-class citizens," contradicting the Kremlin's false efforts to portray Ukrainian and Russian people as one nation.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Vovchansk, Avdiivka, Donetsk City, and Krynyky.
- Russia continues to indoctrinate Russian minors into military-political thinking to set conditions for long-term force generation.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 1, 2024

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

Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

June 1, 2024, 6:00pm 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 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 1:00pm ET on June 1. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the June 2 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted a large-scale drone and missile strike mainly targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of May 31 to June 1. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported on June 1 that Russian forces launched 47 Shahed-136/131 drones and 53 missiles, including 35 Kh-101/555 cruise missiles from aircraft over the Caspian Sea, four Iskander-M ballistic missiles from occupied Crimea, an Iskander-K cruise missile from occupied Crimea, 10 Kalibr cruise missiles from the northeastern Black Sea, and three Kh-59/69 cruise missiles from aircraft over occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[1] Oleshchuk reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed 46 Shahed drones, 30 Kh-101/555 cruise missiles, the Iskander-K cruise missile, and four Kalibr cruise missiles, and noted that Russian forces have not abandoned their intentions of destroying Ukrainian fuel and energy infrastructure. Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Major Ilya Yevlash noted that Russian forces have recently intensified their combined drone and missile strikes against Ukraine and continue efforts to exhaust Ukraine's scarce air defense assets.[2] Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko stated that Russian missiles struck energy facilities in Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kirovohrad, and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts.[3] Ukrainian state-owned hydroelectric power plant (HPP) regulator Ukrhydroenergo reported that Russian strikes critically damaged equipment at two unspecified HPPs, and Ukraine's largest private energy operator DTEK reported that Russian strikes seriously damaged two unspecified thermal power plants (TTP).[4] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces struck the Kremenchuk HPP in Kirovohrad Oblast, the Dnipro HPP in Zaporizhia Oblast, the Burshtyn TPP in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, and the Ladyzhyn TPP in Vinnytsia Oblast.[5] Ukrainian officials also reported damage to civilian areas, critical infrastructure, and energy facilities in Kharkiv, Lviv, Vinnytsia, Odesa, and Kherson oblasts, and Zaporizhzhia City.[6]

The current lack of clarity about US restrictions on Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian territory misses an opportunity to deter further Russian offensive efforts across the border into northern Ukraine. US National Security Council Director for Europe Michael Carpenter told the *Voice of America* in an interview published on May 31 that the US policy allowing Ukrainian forces to strike certain Russian military targets in Russia "applies to counter-fire capabilities that are deployed just across the [Ukrainian] border [into Russia]" and "is meant to enable Ukrainians to defend themselves against what would otherwise be a Russian sanctuary across the border." [7] Responding to a question about whether this policy permits Ukrainian strikes with US-provided weapons across the border from Sumy Oblast, Carpenter responded vaguely

"yes, across the border for Russian attacks that are coming across, where otherwise Russians would enjoy a relative sanctuary." *Politico* reported on May 31 citing two people close to the Ukrainian presidential administration that Ukrainian officials are frustrated that Ukrainian forces are "restricted to the border area in Kharkiv [Oblast]" when using US-provided weapons to strike Russian territory, however.[8] Carpenter's comments and the *Politico* report together suggest there is ambiguity on what the US has explicitly authorized regarding these strikes amid signaling that the US is open to expanding these authorizations to other areas in Ukraine should Russian forces launch offensive operations elsewhere along the international border area.

This US ambiguity misses an opportunity to deter Russian preparations for offensive operations elsewhere across the border into northern Ukraine. Ukrainian officials have recently warned that Russian forces are also concentrating forces in Kursk and Bryansk oblasts across the border from Sumy Oblast, and ISW has previously assessed that even a limited grouping would achieve its desired effect of drawing and fixing Ukrainian forces to this area.[9] The Kremlin may decide to launch offensive operations in different Ukrainian border oblasts outside of Kharkiv Oblast if it believes it can continue to mass forces across the border without risk of Ukrainian strikes. Ukrainian forces would be forced to defend against such offensive operations before the US grants explicit authorization necessary for cross-border strikes outside of areas bordering Kharkiv Oblast. The increased likelihood of other Russian offensive operations in northern Ukraine would require Ukrainian forces to reallocate existing resources to deter or defend against the offensive operations, creating opportunities for Russian forces elsewhere in the theater to exploit. US clarity that Ukraine can use US-provided weapons against Russian ground forces concentrations in Russia that appear to be preparing for imminent cross-border operations would likely change Russian commanders' calculations about the wisdom of making such ostentatious preparations. ISW continues to assess that the US should allow Ukraine to strike all legitimate military targets in Russia's operational and deep rear with US-provided weapons.

Individual Western governments are stipulating disparate policies about Ukraine's future use of Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo stated on May 28 that Ukraine will only be able to use Belgian-supplied F-16s on the territory of Ukraine.[10] It is unclear from De Croo's statement, however, if Belgium will allow Ukraine to use Belgian-supplied F-16s to conduct strikes on Russian territory from Ukrainian airspace. Dutch Defense Minister Kaja Ollongren stated on May 31 that the Netherlands has stipulated no restrictions on Ukraine's use of Dutch-supplied F-16s and that Ukraine can use these F-16s "above or on Russian territory" as long as Ukraine follows Article 51 of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law.[11] Article 51 of the UN Charter notably stipulates that "nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against" a UN member state — a reminder that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory in the context of the Russian invasion are part of Ukraine's inherent right of self-defense.[12] Continued variations in Western governments' F-16 policies will require Ukraine to track which aircraft Ukrainian forces can and cannot use to conduct certain strikes, complicating Ukraine's ability to plan and conduct aviation operations using F-16s.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged that some Ukrainian reserve brigades remain understrength and stated that the slow arrival of US security assistance is complicating Ukrainian efforts to effectively commit reserves to ongoing defensive operations.[13] Zelensky published excerpts from an interview with the *Guardian* on June 1 wherein he stated that the arrival of US security assistance to Ukraine has so far been slow and insufficient to equip reserve brigades sufficiently in order to conduct rotations for frontline units.[14] Zelensky stated that Russian forces understand that Ukrainian forces have understrength reserves and cannot commit reserves without appropriate materiel and that this fact has incentivized Russian efforts to stretch Ukrainian forces along a wider front in eastern and northeastern Ukraine.[15] Zelensky stated that sufficient security assistance will allow Ukraine to bring reserve brigades to their intended end strength and prevent Ukrainian forces from having to draw forces from eastern Ukraine to defend in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[16] Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi recently reported that Russian forces aim to force Ukrainian forces to commit available reserves to the defensive operation in northern Kharkiv Oblast, and the Russian military command may assess that Ukrainian forces lack the combat ready reserves required to respond to all ongoing Russian offensive operations in eastern and northeastern Ukraine.[17] The arrival of resumed US security assistance at scale to the frontline, reportedly expected in June or July 2024, will aid Ukrainian efforts to bring reserves closer to their intended end strength and stand up planned new brigades.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian forces conducted a large-scale drone and missile strike mainly targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of May 31 to June 1.
- The current lack of clarity about US restrictions on Ukraine's use of US-provided weapons to strike military targets in Russian territory misses an opportunity to deter further Russian offensive efforts across the border into northern Ukraine.
- Individual Western governments are stipulating disparate policies about Ukraine's future use of Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky acknowledged that some Ukrainian reserve brigades remain understrength and stated that the slow arrival of US security assistance

is complicating Ukrainian efforts to effectively commit reserves to ongoing defensive operations.

- Russian forces recently marginally advanced near Kupiansk, Chasiv Yar, and Avdiivka.
- The Russian Ministry of Justice designated the "Way Home" social movement, a movement of relatives of mobilized Russian servicemembers that has been calling for their relatives' demobilization, as a "foreign agent" on June 1.

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, June 9, 2024

George Barros, Angelica Evans, Christina Harward, Riley Bailey, and Kateryna Stepanenko

June 9, 2024, 6:45pm ET

The Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum. US policy still preserves at least 84 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – territory within range of Ukrainian ATACMS. US policy restricting Ukraine's usage of US-provided weapons has effectively created a vast sanctuary – territory in range of US-provided weapons but that Ukrainian forces are not allowed strike with US-provided weapons – which Russia exploits to shield its combat forces, command and control, logistics, and rear area support services that the Russian military uses to conduct its military operations in Ukraine.[1] US policy still protects the vast majority of Russia's operational rear and deep rear, and US policy forbids Ukraine from using ATACMS anywhere in Russia.[2] US President Joe Biden's limited policy change in late May 2024 regarding the use of US-provided weapons against military targets in Russia removed at maximum 16 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary, assuming that Ukrainian forces can strike all legitimate Russian military targets in range of Ukrainian HIMARS using GMLRS in Belgorod, Kursk, and Bryansk oblasts. It is far from clear that Ukrainian forces have permissions to do so, however. Senior US officials have described Ukraine's ability to strike into Russia with GMLRS as being for counterbattery fire and geographically bounded to the Kharkiv area, and have stated that Ukrainian forces may strike Russian military objects "deployed just across the [Ukrainian] border," suggesting that Ukraine may be prohibited from striking Russian military targets further in the rear or in other areas in Kursk and Bryansk oblasts that are still in range of GMLRS. [3] US officials' statements also indicate that Ukrainian forces may be constrained from striking Russian military targets that are not actively involved in ground attacks and strikes against Ukraine. [4] The reduction of the sanctuary space's area may be less than 16 percent, therefore.

The Biden Administration's limited policy reversal permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike Russian military targets within Russian territory has removed at maximum only 16 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – a small area along the Russian-Ukrainian international border.

The US policy change, while a step in the right direction, is by itself inadequate and unable to disrupt Russian operations at scale. ISW assesses that the West maintains the ability to substantially disrupt Russian operations at scale by allowing Ukraine to use Western-provided weapons to strike Russia's operational rear and deep rear areas in Russian territory.[5]

Likely Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft at the Akhtubinsk Airfield in Astrakhan Oblast between June 7 and 8. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published satellite imagery on June 9 reportedly showing the Su-57 aircraft at the airfield on June 7 and damaged Su-57 following the strike on June 8 but did not explicitly claim responsibility for the attack.[6] The June 8 satellite image shows burn marks from an explosion, but the scale of the damage to the Su-57 is unclear from the provided footage. The GUR reported that Russian forces use the Su-57 aircraft to launch Kh-59/69 cruise missiles and that the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) have very few Su-57 aircraft in service. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that the GUR struck one of the six operational Su-57 aircraft and that Russian forces are constructing another six aircraft.[7] GUR Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that there may have been two Su-57 aircraft at the airfield during the June 8 strike and that the GUR is assessing battle damage.[8] Russian milbloggers seized on the June 8 strike to criticize the Russian military command for not constructing hangars to hide Russian aircraft from Ukrainian strikes and claimed that Russian forces could construct hangars at every military airfield in Russia for the cost of one Su-57 aircraft.[9] Su-57s cost an estimated \$35 million.[10]

Ukrainian forces may have struck a Russian large landing ship or patrol boat in Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9. *Sky News* reported on June 9 that a Ukrainian military source stated that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Ropucha-class landing ship in an unspecified location on the evening of June 8.[11] The source reportedly stated that Russian forces recently moved the ship from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov and that the ship is the fifth Ropucha-class ship that Ukrainian strikes have sunk or "rendered unserviceable." *Sky News* reported that the source stated that the strike shows that Russian forces "cannot operate with freedom" in the Black Sea and that the strike "thwart[ed] Russian shipments of ammunition and key military supplies" to unspecified locations. Ukrainian channel *Crimean Wind* and Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko reported on June 9 that a Ukrainian drone struck a Russian ship near the port of Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9.[12] *Crimean Wind* reported that satellite imagery

from the morning of June 9 suggests that Ukrainian forces may not have hit a large landing ship but may have struck a Vasily Bykov-class patrol ship.[13] *Crimean Wind* reported that satellite imagery also shows an oil slick in the area that was not present in satellite imagery collected earlier. Ukrainian officials have not commented on the reported strike as of the time of this publication, and ISW cannot independently confirm the strike. Satellite imagery collected on June 5 indicated that Russia moved at least 18 naval vessels, including two Vasily Bukov-class patrol ships and an unspecified number of Ropucha-class landing ships, from the port in Novorossiysk, and some of the ships were reportedly sailing towards Crimea as of June 6.[14] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on June 7 the Russian Navy likely transferred a large grouping of vessels to the Black Sea and Sea of Azov in order to reduce their vulnerability to Ukrainian drone strikes.[15]

The Kremlin's concerted effort to remove and arrest senior Russian defense officials may be extending to civilian regional administration officials. Russian authorities arrested Tyumen Oblast Deputy Governor Vyacheslav Vakhnin on June 9, Republic of Karelia Legislative Assembly Head of the Committee on Budget and Taxes Vitaly Krasulin on May 29, Oryol Oblast Gubernatorial Advisor Sergei Lezhnev on May 27, and Krasnodar Krai Deputy Governor Sergei Vlasov on May 24 for various fraud and bribery charges.[16] Russian authorities have detained at least five senior Russian MoD officials and former military commanders since late April 2024, and *The Moscow Times* reported on May 24 that these are the first of dozens or hundreds of anticipated arrests.[17] An unnamed acting Russian government official told *The Moscow Times* that the arrests could spiral into the largest effort to remove Russian military officials in modern Russian history.[18] Russian authorities may intend to use the guise of anti-corruption campaigns to conduct a large-scale removal of Russian defense officials and could easily replicate such efforts against civilian officials in Russian federal subjects. [19] Kaliningrad Oblast deputies proposed on June 9 to dismiss any Kaliningrad Oblast governors recognized as foreign agents, possibly another mechanism or informational justification that Russian authorities may try to use to remove officials from regional administrations.[20] The removal and arrest of regional officials comes amid an apparent effort by Russian President Vladimir Putin to remove from power the political and military figures that lost his trust in 2022 and 2023.[21] Putin may also seek to disempower regional officials who have lost his trust and rebalance which regional officials have his favor. Putin notably recently platformed St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), suggesting that Beglov may currently have Putin's favor despite his past controversies.[22]

The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc held its second congress in Moscow on June 9 following a series of meetings between pro-Kremlin Moldovan opposition politicians and Russian officials from June 6 to 9. Russian state news agency *RIA Novosti* reported that politicians of the Victory electoral bloc discussed the October 20, 2024 Moldovan presidential election and referendum on Moldova's accession to the European Union (EU).[23] US-sanctioned Moldovan politician and Victory bloc founder Ilan Shor stated that he is confident that the Victory bloc can defeat Moldovan President Maia Sandu in Moldova's October 2024 presidential election and will "use whatever methods are necessary" to accomplish this goal and free Moldova from the "pro-European bandits" who are currently leading Moldova.[24] Shor stated that the only way to "revive Moldova" is for Moldova to join the Kremlin-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and that the Victory bloc is working towards this. Chairperson of the Victory bloc's parliamentary group Vasile Bolea claimed that Moldova is becoming the second country to turn away from Russia - referring to Ukraine as the first - and that Moldova's pro-Russian opposition will resist this.[25] Kremlin-affiliated governor of Moldova's pro-Russian autonomous region of Gagauzia Yevgenia Gutsul stated that the Victory bloc held its congress in Russia because the Moldovan government is threatening Moldovan oppositionists and claimed that Moldova will be drawn into the conflict in Ukraine if Moldovans vote to join the EU.[26]

Gutsul also met with a series of Kremlin officials and Russian governors during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), further solidifying her connections to the Kremlin. Gutsul briefly met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of SPIEF on June 9 and emphasized Gagauzia's desire for greater cooperation with Russia.[27] Gutsul also met with United Russia State Duma Deputy Nikolay Valuev; Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*) General Director Yevgeny Primakov; Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov; St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov; and several other regional officials on June 6, 7, and 8.[28] Gutsul also attended a panel on "traditional values" with veteran Russian propagandist and *RT* editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan on June 8.[29] Gutsul also claimed that she will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin again in the future despite pressure from the Moldovan government but did not specify a time frame for this meeting.[30]

Former pro-Russian Moldovan president and current head of the Moldovan Socialist Party Igor Dodon gave interviews to Russian state news agencies *TASS* and *RIA Novosti* on June 9 in which he promoted several known Kremlin narratives targeting the current Moldovan government – many of which Moldovan opposition politicians also promoted at the Victory bloc congress.[31] Dodon claimed that the Moldovan government is militarizing Moldova and preparing Moldova for the "Ukrainian scenario" by increasing Moldova's defense spending and cooperation with NATO. Dodon claimed that the upcoming Moldovan presidential election in October 2024 will be illegitimate and unconstitutional. Dodon called on Moldova to participate in Russia-led

organizations such as the EAEU and the CIS. Dodon claimed that the Moldovan government is persecuting oppositionists like Gutsul and himself. Dodon claimed that Moldovan authorities may allow Ukraine to "destabilize" the Moldovan breakaway republic of Transnistria or may conduct "provocations" against Gagauzia in the future.

The Kremlin will likely try to exploit its ties to Dodon as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldovan democracy and influence the Moldovan government. Dodon claimed that Moldovan opposition parties must work together to defeat Sandu in the presidential election and noted that if Moldovan opposition parties do not unite behind a single candidate, there will be competition between them.[32] Dodon stated that the opposition's candidate should be a well-known person who is apolitical and not the leader of a political party but added that he may run for president if the opposition cannot agree on a candidate. Dodon stated that his relationship with Shor is "complicated" and that they have not communicated. Dodon stated, however, that they will need to cooperate as the "enemy of my enemy is my potential partner and friend." The Kremlin is likely aware that the Victory bloc's yet-to-be-announced presidential candidate has a lower chance of beating Sandu in the election if other major opposition parties, such as the Socialist Party that has a coalition with the Communist Party, also run candidates. Dodon's June 9 interviews demonstrate that Dodon understands that he will need to cooperate with Shor and the Victory electoral bloc but is currently reluctant to do so. Dodon reportedly has close ties to the Kremlin dating back to his time as president, and the Kremlin is highly likely exploiting its ties to Dodon in its overall efforts to influence the Moldovan election.[33] The parallels between the information operations that both the Victory bloc congress and Dodon promoted suggest a coordinated anti-Sandu effort. Dodon's public statements about his "complicated" relationship with Shor and his lack of cooperation with the Victory bloc so far suggest that the Kremlin, Dodon, and Shor have not yet agreed on a presidential candidate or electoral strategy, however.

Key Takeaways:

- The Biden Administration's limited policy change permitting Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike some Russian military targets in a small area within Russian territory has reduced the size of Russia's ground sanctuary by only 16 percent at maximum. US policy still preserves at least 84 percent of Russia's ground sanctuary – territory within range of Ukrainian ATACMS.
- Likely Ukrainian forces struck a Russian Su-57 fighter aircraft at the Akhtubinsk Airfield in Astrakhan Oblast between June 7 and 8.
- Ukrainian forces may have struck a Russian large landing ship or patrol boat in Yeysk, Krasnodar Krai on the night of June 8 to 9.
- The Kremlin's concerted effort to remove and arrest senior Russian defense officials may be extending to civilian regional administration officials.
- The pro-Kremlin Moldovan Victory opposition electoral bloc held its second congress in Moscow on June 9 following a series of meetings between pro-Kremlin Moldovan opposition politicians and Russian officials from June 6 to 9.
- Former pro-Russian Moldovan president and current head of the Moldovan Socialist Party Igor Dodon gave interviews to Russian state news agencies *TASS* and *RIA Novosti* on June 9 in which he promoted several known Kremlin narratives targeting the current Moldovan government – many of which Moldovan opposition politicians also promoted at the Victory bloc congress.
- The Kremlin will likely try to exploit its ties to Dodon as part of its wider efforts to destabilize Moldovan democracy and influence the Moldovan government.
- Russian forces recently advanced near Kupiansk, Siversk, Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City.
- Russian officials continue efforts to coerce migrants into military service.

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of three subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Kharkiv Oblast (Russian objective: Push Ukrainian forces back from the international border with Belgorod Oblast and approach to within tube artillery range of Kharkiv City)

A Ukrainian aircraft reportedly struck a Russian military target in Belgorod Oblast on June 9. *Sky News* reported that an unnamed Ukrainian military source stated that a Ukrainian fixed-wing manned aircraft struck a Russian command post in Belgorod Oblast with an unspecified weapon and that Ukrainian authorities are still clarifying the damage from the strike.[34] *Sky News* noted that this would be the first instance of a Ukrainian fixed-wing manned aircraft to strike a military target in Russia. Geolocated footage published on June 9 shows a fire at an unspecified building near Tsentralnoye, Rakityansky Raion, Belgorod Oblast, although the cause of the fire is unclear from the footage. [35] Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov acknowledged that there was a fire at a non-residential building in Rakityansky Raion, but claimed that Russian air defenses downed several air targets over Belgorod Oblast.[36] Russian opposition outlet *Astra* stated that Ukrainian forces struck an ammunition depot in Rakityansky Raion.[37]

Ukrainian forces reportedly counterattacked north and northeast of Kharkiv City on June 9 amid continued Russian offensive operations in the area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked near Hylboke (north of Lyptsi and Kharkiv City) and were preparing to counterattack in Vovchansk (northeast of Kharkiv City) on June 8 and 9.[38] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized several Ukrainian positions and advanced near Lyptsi (north of Kharkiv City) and launched an assault on the aggregate plant within Vovchansk.[39] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on June 8 that Russian forces have "failed" to successfully conduct their offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast and that Ukrainian forces are continuing to strengthen their positions in this area.[40] US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan noted on June 9 that Russian forces have not made significant progress in northern Kharkiv Oblast in recent days. [41]

Ukraine-based open-source organization *Frontelligence Insight* stated on June 9 that it observed a small number of Russian units arriving near Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts and assessed that these troops are presently unable to achieve significant results if these units launched a ground attack into Ukraine.[42] *Frontelligence Insight* stated that the small Russian grouping would likely be able to achieve even fewer territorial advances on the battlefield than what Russian forces have already achieved in northern Kharkiv Oblast.

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces likely recently seized Ivanivka (southeast of Kupyansk) amid continued Russian offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on June 9. Geolocated footage published on June 9 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced north of Ivanivka, and Russian forces likely seized the settlement within the past week.[43] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced south of Vilshana (northeast of Kupyansk), southwest of Ploshchanka (northwest of Kreminna), and 200 meters near Novoselivske (northwest of Svatove).[44] A Russian source claimed that elements of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Moscow Military District) advanced west of Holykove (north of Kreminna).[45] ISW has not observed confirmation of these claims, however. A Russian milblogger claimed on June 8 that Russian forces destroyed a river crossing over the Oskil River west of Kupyansk-Vuzlovyi (south of Kupyansk). [46] Russian forces continued offensive operations northeast of Kupyansk near Petropavlivka, Synkiivka, and Kyslivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Pishchane, Berestove, Andriivka, and Tabaivka; northwest of Kreminna near Nevske, Hrekiivka, and Makiivka; west of Kreminna near Torske and Terny; and southwest of Kreminna near the Serebrianske forest area and Dibrova on June 8 and 9. [47]

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #3 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces recently advanced south of Siversk amidst reportedly costly offensive operations in the area. Geolocated footage published on June 8 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced in fields southeast of Rozdolivka (south of Siversk), and a Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces advanced south of Rozdolivka.[48] Russian milbloggers claimed on June 9 that Russian forces suffered casualties after conducting frontal assaults against Ukrainian positions near Bilohorivka

(northeast of Siversk) without accounting for Ukrainian artillery and drone operations in the area.
[49] Russian forces also continued assaults southeast of Siversk near Vyimka on June 8 and 9.
[50] Elements of the Russian 106th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly operating south or southwest of Siversk in the Svyato-Pokrovske (west of Siversk) direction.[51]

Russian forces recently advanced in Kanal Microraion in easternmost Chasiv Yar and continued offensive operations in the area on June 8 and 9. Geolocated footage published on June 9 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced westward to an industrial area of Kanal Microraion, and Russian sources claimed that Russian forces seized the industrial area.[52] Russian sources also amplified footage purportedly showing elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division raising a flag over Kanal Microraion and claimed that Russian forces have seized most of the microraion.
[53] ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming that Russian forces seized the industrial area, however. One Russian milblogger complained that many Russian milbloggers are portraying Russian advances in the Kanal Microraion as a sudden breakthrough, whereas these advances were a result of more than two months of systemic Russian offensive operations since April 2024 and more than two weeks of persistent Russian strikes using glide bombs and army-level TOS thermobaric artillery systems.[54] Russian forces also continued offensive operations in eastern Chasiv Yar near Novyi Microraion; north of Chasiv Yar near Kalynivka; and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske, Andriivka, and Klishchiivka on June 8 and 9.[55] A spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade stated that Russian forces are continuing to attack in the Bakhmut direction using small assault groups and occasionally use armored vehicles.[56] The spokesperson added that Ukrainian forces recently repelled a roughly company-sized Russian mechanized assault in the Bakhmut direction. ISW observed footage published on June 5 of Russian forces conducting mechanized assaults in the Chasiv Yar area that were at least platoon-sized and may have even been larger.[57] Elements of the Russian 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Chasiv Yar; and elements of the Russian 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] AC) are reportedly operating near Klishchiivka.[58]

Russian forces recently advanced west of Avdiivka and continued assaults in the area. Geolocated footage published on June 9 indicates that Russian forces advanced in the fields north and northeast of Umanske (west of Avdiivka).[59] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces continued to seize new positions west of Umanske and advanced more than one kilometer in the Skuchne (west of Avdiivka) direction.[60] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced to the northern outskirts of Novopokrovske (northwest of Avdiivka) and into central Novooleksandrivka (north of Novopokrovske and northwest of Avdiivka).[61] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims. Russian forces launched assaults northwest of Avdiivka near Novooleksandrivka, Novoselivka Persha, Yevhenivka, Sokil, Ocheretyne, and Novopokrovske; west of Avdiivka near Karlivka and Yasnobrodivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske on June 8 and 9.[62] A spokesperson of a Ukrainian brigade reported that Russian forces are mainly conducting infantry assaults in the Pokrovske (northwest of Avdiivka) direction instead of the up-to-company-sized mechanized assaults they used to conduct during previous offensive operations in the area.[63] The spokesperson added that Ukrainian forces are restraining at least three Russian brigades in the Pokrovske direction and that Russian forces have manpower and artillery advantages. The spokesperson observed that Russian forces fire 400 to 500 artillery shells per night and use aviation before launching infantry attacks. Elements of the Russian "Atlant" Battalion of the Central Grouping of Forces (GoF) reportedly previously operated near Ocheretyne.[64]

Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City and continued offensive operations west and southwest of the city on June 8 and 9. Geolocated footage published on June 9 shows Ukrainian forces repelling a platoon-sized Russian mechanized assault in southern Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City), and additional geolocated footage posted on June 9 indicates that Russian forces seized some buildings in western Krasnohorivka.[65] Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that fighting continued in Krasnohorivka; west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka; and southwest of Donetsk City near Paraskoviivka and Kostyantynivka on June 8 and 9.[66] Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces on motorcycles advanced 1.5 kilometers in the Vuhledar (southwest of Donetsk City) direction and seized a section of the Vuhledar-Kostyantynivka (O0532) highway.[67] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces advanced west of Solodke (southwest of Donetsk City). [68] Elements of the Russian "Grachi" Spetsnaz Detachment and 238th Artillery Brigade (8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka; and elements of the Russian "Karia" detachment of the 68th Army Corps (Eastern Military District [EMD]) are operating in the south Donetsk direction (southwest of Donetsk City).[69]

Russian forces reportedly continued offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area near Staromayorske, Urozhaine, and Zavitne Bazhannya (all south of Velyka Novosilka) on June 8 and 9.[70]

Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on June 9, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne, Verbove (east of Robotyne), and Mala Tokmachka (northeast of Robotyne).[71] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are struggling to gain a foothold in northern Robotyne due to continued Ukrainian artillery and drone strikes.[72] Elements of the Russian 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[73]

Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast near Krynky and on the islands in the Dnipro River Delta on June 9.[74] Select Russian milbloggers claimed that there are unconfirmed reports that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from Krynky, but other Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain a presence in the settlement.[75]

Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

Ukrainian Kharkiv City and Oblast officials stated on June 9 that Russian forces conducted a KAB guided glide bomb strike on Kharkiv City and damaged residential buildings.[76] Kharkiv City Council Deputy Bohdan Tkachuk stated that the Russian KAB strike was the first glide bomb strike against Kharkiv City since June 1.[77]

Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

Russian officials continue efforts to coerce migrants into military service. *Bloomberg* reported on June 9 that Ukrainian and European officials assess that the Kremlin has forced thousands of migrants and foreign students to fight with Russian forces in Ukraine, specifically in recent offensive operations in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[78] *Bloomberg* reported that a European official stated that Russian officials are increasingly threatening to not extend visas for African students and workers living in Russia unless they agree to fight with the Russian military.[79] The European official reportedly stated that these migrants and students suffer high losses in Ukraine because Russian forces use them in risky operations to conserve more highly trained units.[80] A Ukrainian official told *Bloomberg* that there has been an uptick in the number of foreigners among Russian military prisoners of war (POW) in Ukraine, with the majority being from Nepal or African countries.[81] *Bloomberg* noted that Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) General Director Yevgeny Primakov recently stated that there are 35,000 to 37,000 African students currently residing within Russia.[82]

Russian Deputy Head of the Ministry of Industry and Trade Viktor Yevtukhov claimed on June 9 that the Russian Navy will receive 50 new ships of various types throughout 2024.[83] Yevtukhov claimed that the incoming ships include small missile ships and support vessels and that the Ministry of Trade and Industry will pay great attention to producing frigates and corvettes since these ships can operate in the Far Sea Zone (naval areas not bordering Russia).[84] Ukrainian forces have conducted a successful strike campaign against Russia's Black Sea Fleet (BSF) since Summer 2023, and Russia may try to restore some of the Russian Navy's lost capabilities.[85] The BSF has lost a significant number of vessels, including large amphibious landing ships, cruise missile carriers, and a Kilo-class submarine however, and Russia appears unlikely to replace these higher-end capability losses any time soon.[86]

Russian regional administrations continue to shoulder the Kremlin's crypto-mobilization efforts and involve other private entities to supply and train Russian young men. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Tatar-Bashkort service *Idel Realii* reported on June 9 that Perm Krai's "Avangard" Military-Patriotic Education Center is offering 12 million rubles (\$134,184) split into four contracts for providing food, accommodations, and basic military training grounds for recruits in Perm Krai in 2025.[87] The contracts reportedly state that Perm Krai seeks private entities to help young men (presumably Russian active reservists or students of Russian military-patriotic programs) "acquire the practical skills necessary... to quickly adapt to military service." [88] *Idel Realii* reported that 90 to 120 recruits will attend five-day courses at the planned training camps and receive training instruction from four to five employees.[89] The quality of training at such ad hoc regionally funded and organized training facilities likely widely varies between different private entities tasked with training and supplying these men.

Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* amplified a video appeal from the relatives of mobilized Russian personnel from Republic of Bashkortostan on June 9 in which the relatives claimed that Russian commanders order wounded and untreated mobilized personnel to conduct assaults.[90] The relatives claimed that Russian authorities are currently detaining mobilized personnel from military unit

29601 for unspecified offenses and transfer the detained personnel to different operational directions in Ukraine for assaults.[91]

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Nothing significant to report.

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Voice of America's Bosnian Service and Bosnian investigative organization *Detektor* reported on June 8 that over 65 pro-Russian Telegram channels are spreading Russian propaganda justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the Western Balkans and attempting to recruit Serbian, Bosnian, and Herzegovinian citizens into Russian volunteer units.[92] *Detektor* journalists reported that these channels appear to be pushing a clearly formed and orchestrated pro-Russian and anti-Western narrative. *Voice of America's Bosnian Service* noted that some of the most popular Telegram channels have between 50 and 100,000 subscribers and that these channels have connections with popular Russian milbloggers and media outlets, including the Kremlin-affiliated *Rybar* channel. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently met with the President of Republika Srpska (the Serbian political entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina) Milorad Dodik in St. Petersburg, and the pro-Russian Telegram channels operating in the Western Balkans are likely part of the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to destabilize the region.[93]

The Kremlin continued its reflexive control campaign aimed at influencing Western decision-making and undermining Western support for Ukraine on June 9. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed during an interview on Russian state television that the West is escalating the situation by allowing Ukraine to strike military targets in Russia with Western-provided weapons.[94] Lavrov claimed that the West is slowly escalating its war against Russia "step by step" and that Russia will decide how to respond to these hostile actions.

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova continued to criticize Russia's neighbors for perceived anti-Russian actions. Zakharova claimed during an interview with Kremlin newswire TASS on June 9 that Poland, Finland, and the Baltic countries are persecuting Russian citizens and Russian-speaking people by confiscating their documents and interrogating them.[95] Zakharova criticized Armenian Ambassador to Ukraine Vladimir Karapetyan for recently visiting Bucha and claimed that this was an "unfriendly step." [96] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger previously criticized Karapetyan for his recent visit to Bucha.[97]

Kremlin officials criticized Germany and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for supporting Ukraine and for warning about a future conflict between the West and NATO. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on June 8 that Germany has "lack[ed] sovereignty" since the Second World War and is trying to balance pleasing the US, NATO, and the European Union (EU).[98] Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev criticized Scholtz for supporting Ukraine.[99]

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

Nothing significant to report.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 29, 2024

Grace Mappes, Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Davit Gasparyan, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 29, 2024, 8pm 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 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 1pm ET on July 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 29 the provision of security assistance to Ukraine worth \$200 million from the authorization of a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package and an additional package worth \$1.5 billion in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds.[1] The DoD stated that the PDA package will include air defense interceptors, munitions for rocket and artillery systems, and anti-tank weapons. The DoD reported that the USAI package includes munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), short- and medium-range air defense munitions, RIM-7 air defense missiles, ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, 155mm and 105mm shells, 120mm mortar rounds, and other munitions and equipment. The DoD noted that this is the Biden administration's 20th USAI package and 62nd tranche of equipment provided to Ukraine since August 2021.

The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to codify desired behavioral norms within Russia by cracking down against undesirable behavior in the Russian information space and within migrant communities. The Russian State Duma Committee on Information Policy approved amendments to the law "On Communications" on July 29 that would allow the Russian president to impose restrictions on information to protect the "foundations of [Russian] constitutional order, morality, rights and legitimate interests of others" and to "ensure [Russia's] defense and state security." [2] Current Russian legislation allocates this power to federal, and not executive, laws.[3] The approved amendments to "On Communications" would also give Russian federal censor Roskomnadzor the right to manage communications networks and remove "prohibited" information at the request of the Russian Prosecutor General and deputy prosecutors general.[4] If approved by the wider Russian State Duma and then further passed through the Russian legislature, these amendments would establish Russian President Vladimir Putin as the direct arbiter of which behavior and ideals are allowed and prohibited in the Russian information space. These amendments set conditions for the Kremlin to intensify ongoing crackdowns against undesirable rhetoric in the Russian information space under the guise of vague labels intended to classify communities or behaviors that are as undesirable and anti-Russian, as is the current case with Russian legal definitions of extremism. The Duma Information Policy Committee also supported a recently proposed amendment that would require the administrators of channels with more than 10,000 followers on social media sites, including YouTube, to provide their personal information to Roskomnadzor.[5]

Russian authorities are beginning to link their efforts to crack down on the information space to efforts to control migrant behavior, establishing a standard for acceptable behavior that appeals directly to Russian ultranationalists. Russian Liberal Democratic Party Head Leonid Slutsky proposed on July 29 that Russia establish a "Migrant Code" obliging migrants to integrate into Russian cultural, linguistic, legal, and behavioral norms.[6] State Duma Deputy Speaker Irina Yarovaya stated that a Duma commission has completed its new migration policy proposals that aim to crack down against illegal immigration and false documentation and has submitted these proposals to the Cabinet of Ministers and the Supreme Court.[7] The bill that would require the deanonymization of social media channels with more than 10,000 subscribers also contains a separate provision that would limit migrants' ability to purchase more than 10 SIM cards per person, limiting the ability for migrant communities to obtain mobile phone numbers that help illegal migrants obtain certain jobs in Russia.[8]

The Kremlin is likely attempting to establish prominent standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior among populations within Russia whose behavior has recently threatened the Kremlin.[9] Many facets of the Russian ultranationalist information space supported then-Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's June 2023 rebellion following months of online complaints against the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)'s conduct of the war in Ukraine, prompting the MoD to crack down against prominent complainants and promote self-censorship among milbloggers.[10] Russian opposition groups voice their opposition to the Kremlin, its wars, and other policies online, and the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) designated 55 of these organizations, including regional organizations advocating for ethnic minorities, as "extremist" on July 29 in an effort to stifle them.[11] Russian ultranationalists have levied widespread complaints against migrants following multiple high-profile terrorist attacks, and the Kremlin is undertaking surface-level measures that largely appease the ultranationalist community and provide further mechanisms through which the MoD can coerce migrants into military service while broadly failing to address the rising threat of Islamic extremism in Russia.[12]

Much of the Russian information space response to the recent Tuareg insurgent ambush of a Wagner Group in northern Mali coalesced around the suggestion that the Russian MoD will seek to benefit from Wagner losses, highlighting the continued distrust between the Russian MoD and both the Wagner Group in the Sahel and pro-Wagner commentators. Several prominent critical milbloggers claimed that the Russian MoD is "gloating" over losses the Wagner Group reportedly suffered during the attack and suggested that Russian military authorities will use this incident as a reason to end the deployment of Wagner personnel to the Sahel and completely supplant them with units of the Russian MoD's Africa Corps.[13] Some Russian milbloggers quoted an unidentified source within the Russian Presidential Administration as saying that Africa Corps personnel will replace Wagner troops in the entire "Sahelian Three" (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger). [14] Other milbloggers blamed the Wagner command for incompetence and attempts to sabotage the arrival of Africa Corps personnel, highlighting the persistent information space divides between Wagner and Africa Corps-affiliated commentators.[15] Another Russian-veteran-community-linked milblogger more broadly called for Russia to learn from the incident, strongly emphasizing that Russian forces operating abroad should not expect to face "safe" adversaries and that Russia needs to commit more heavily to foreign operations to ensure sufficient personnel and equipment levels for Russian contingents abroad.[16]

The Africa Corps, notably, likely lacks the current capacity to properly supplant Wagner operations, particularly in Mali, as Africa Corps elements have recently deployed to Ukraine to aid Russian offensive efforts in northern Kharkiv Oblast.[17] Supplanting Wagner at scale following losses such as those accrued in the recent ambush would likely involve re-deploying some Africa Corps fighters to Mali away from the frontline in Ukraine, and the Russian military command likely does not see completely supplanting Wagner in Mali or elsewhere in the Sahel as a priority effort at this time.

Ukrainian drones struck Russian energy and utility infrastructure in Oryol, Voronezh, and Belgorod oblasts on the night of July 28 to 29. Oryol Oblast Governor Andrei Klychkov claimed that Russian forces shot down two drones in Glazunovsky Raion on the night of July 28 to 29 and that falling debris damaged a power plant.[18] Voronezh Oblast Governor Alexander Gusev claimed that Russian forces suppressed a drone and that falling debris landed on a utility infrastructure facility in Gazoprovod.[19] Local Russian sources and Russian opposition media reported that Ukrainian drones struck a power substation in Tomarovka, Belgorod Oblast and started a fire.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces destroyed nine drones over Belgorod Oblast and three drones over Voronezh Oblast overnight.[21] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated on July 29 that the Ukrainian drone strike against the Olenya Airfield in Murmansk Oblast on the night of July 26 to 27 damaged a Russian strategic bomber. [22] Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* reported on July 27 that sources stated that GUR drones damaged a Tu-22M3 strategic bomber at the airfield.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- The US Department of Defense (DoD) announced on July 29 the provision of security assistance to Ukraine worth \$200 million from the authorization of a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package and an additional package worth \$1.5 billion in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds.
- The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to codify desired behavioral norms within Russia by cracking down against undesirable behavior in the Russian information space and within migrant communities.
- The Kremlin is likely attempting to establish prominent standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior among populations within Russia whose behavior has recently threatened the Kremlin.
- Much of the Russian information space response to the recent Tuareg insurgent ambush of a Wagner Group in northern Mali coalesced around the suggestion that the Russian MoD will seek to benefit from Wagner losses, highlighting the continued distrust between the Russian MoD and both the Wagner Group in the Sahel and pro-Wagner commentators.
- Ukrainian drones struck Russian energy and utility infrastructure in Oryol, Voronezh, and Belgorod oblasts on the night of July 28 to 29.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances northeast of Kharkiv City, in Vovchansk, near Avdiivka, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- The Russian government continues to take legislative steps to use migrants and newly naturalized citizens to fulfill Russian military personnel needs.



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