

# ASI August 2024 Horizon Scan



To Venture  
Untroubled

## UKRAINE – RUSSIA MONTHLY HORIZON SCAN

06 September 2024

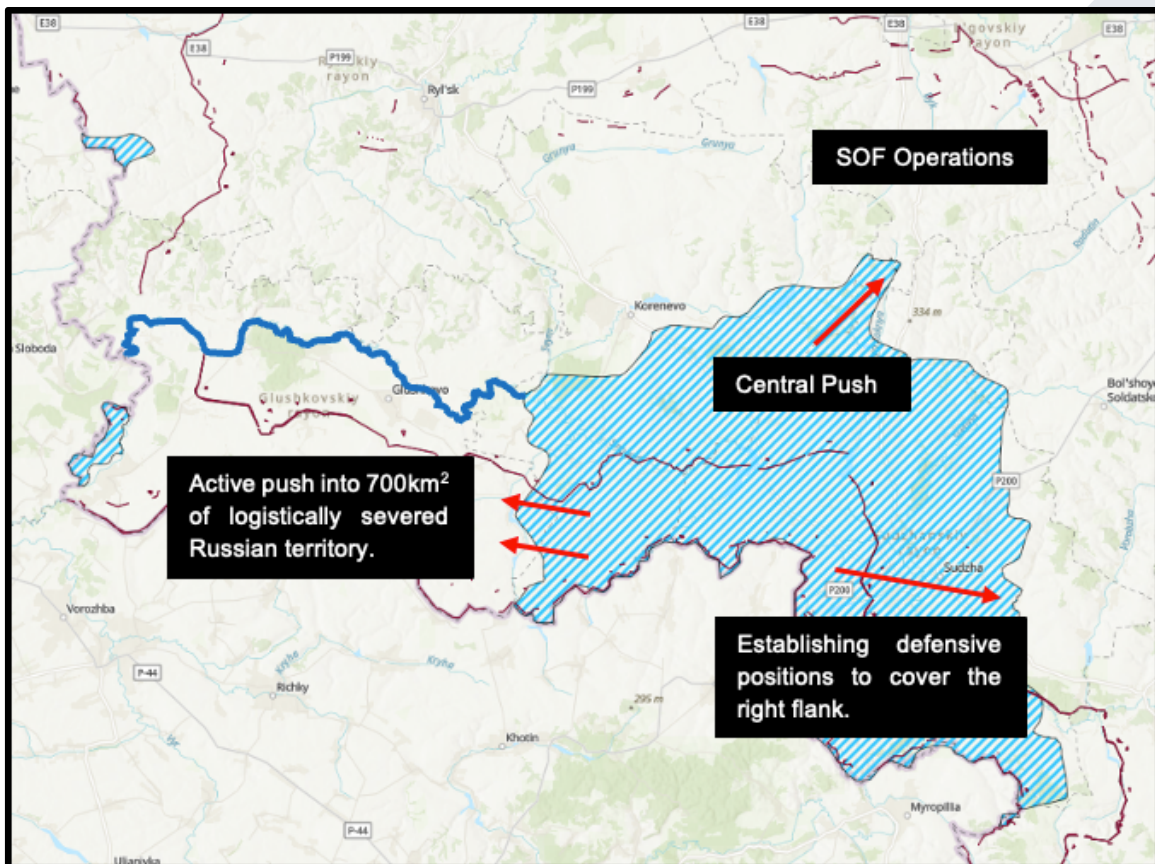
### Overview

- Since the 06 August incursion, Ukrainian forces have continued ground assaults but remain within 1,300 km<sup>2</sup> of seized Russian territory, focusing on locations near Korenevo, Sudzha, and the Seim River. It is likely that Kyiv's incursion aims to disrupt Russia's frontline capabilities, particularly near Pokrovsk. Nevertheless, Russia's restrained response, though hindered by Ukrainian targeting of Seim River bridges, signals a broader strategy to prioritise advances in Central Donetsk while tacitly accepting Ukraine's short-term operations in the captured region, with plans to refocus later. ***Audere Comment: The Ukrainian incursion has not yet escalated into an existential crisis for the Russian regime, either domestically or internationally. Consequently, it is unlikely to trigger a new wave of mobilisation or prompt a sudden policy shift toward negotiating a settlement at this stage.***
- Last month, Russia augmented its strike campaign, targeting Ukraine on 83.8% of days, focusing on civilian, critical, and industrial infrastructure in Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, and Poltava. Despite Ukraine's 62.53% interception rate of 1,452 launched projectiles, Small Diameter Bombs (SDBs), drones, and ballistic missiles caused significant damage, particularly in northeastern Sumy and Kharkiv oblasts, which continue to be classified as high-risk zones. ***Audere Comment: Relying more on human intelligence, Russia is intensifying targeted, yet highly effective strikes on civilian infrastructure, including educational institutions and hotels frequented by military personnel. As such, Audere recommends extra vigilance for those operating in-country. Meanwhile, the Kremlin is expected to continue disrupting Ukraine's energy system, targeting power infrastructure before winter.***
- Russian Forces (RF) are actively engaged across the four frontline axes: in Kharkiv, they maintain offensives north of the city with increased use of armoured vehicles and resumed air strikes, though no confirmed advances have been reported; in Luhansk, operations continue around Kupyansk, Svatove, and Kreminna, with unconfirmed claims of clearing southern Synkivka; and in Donetsk, rapid advances towards Pokrovsk are ongoing, with incremental gains around Siversk and Chasiv Yar. ***Audere Comment: RF are expected to intensify their advances in the Pokrovsk area to consolidate gains and possibly launch further offensives toward the city, which might force additional Ukrainian withdrawals from weaker positions. However, Ukrainian counteroffensive capabilities, strengthened by Western aid and improvements in counterstrike weapon systems, could counterbalance these advances. Therefore, while Russia will likely continue its offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and in Donetsk, significant breakthroughs remain unlikely.***



## Kursk Incursion

1. Following the initial incursion on 06 August, Ukrainian forces are continuing their ground attacks, though have yet to expand their control beyond the 100 settlements and approximately 1,300km<sup>2</sup> of Russian territory. Notable locations of Ukrainian assaults include southwest of Korenevo near Komarovka, and northwest of Sudzha near Malaya Loknya, alongside continued targeting of Russian pontoon crossings over the Seim River in Glushkovo Raion, located west of the Ukrainian salient.
  - 1.1. While initially noting the goals as 1.) securing the border from Russian military actions; and 2.) to address the threat posed by Russian artillery strikes originating from Kursk Oblast, in the past week, President Zelensky stated that Ukraine plans to “indefinitely” hold onto the territory it has seized, reiterating the confiscation as part of a comprehensive “Victory Plan” (see section 5) – a strategy that not only provides independent cover for Kyiv were an elected Trump Administration to demand an immediate cessation of the conflict, but also alleviates domestic hostility towards engaging in the process. However, to effectively use captured land as a bargaining chip, Ukraine needs to secure and hold the territory it gains, a feat that is underway – especially on the salient’s right-flank, though requires excess manpower and resources, both of which are currently limited.



- 1.2. Analysts also note that the incursion is highly likely an effort by Kyiv to distort Russia’s capabilities elsewhere along the frontline – specifically, to mitigate the



concentrated deployment of Moscow's strategic reserve along the Pokrovsk axis. Although Russia has deployed an estimated 30,000 troops from other frontline sectors (this figure is disputed, with President Zelensky claiming a redeployment of 60,000 troops in his latest interview with NBC news), efforts to effectively mobilise a strong reaction force have been disrupted.

- 1.3. Notably, this appears to be a purposeful strategy by the Kremlin: while impeded by Ukraine's targeting of the three bridges along the Seim River (hindering Moscow's ability to transport supplies and reinforcements into the 700 square kilometres of land south of the river), the lack of significant reinforcements indicates a desire – driven by broader political and military goals – to maintain primary focus on advancing in the Pokrovsk (Central Donetsk) direction; this strategy aims to offset losses within Russia by demonstrating continued progress and maintaining political and military momentum. Indeed, tacit acceptance of the AFU's ability to maintain operations in this region in the short-term have subsequently arisen, with the Kremlin acknowledging that this situation is the “*new normal*,” and that a focus will be transferred back to the region “*after achieving offensive objectives in eastern Ukraine*.”

***Audere Comment: The incursion has, as much as it appears, not yet developed into an existential crisis for the Russian regime on either a domestic or international level. As such, it is both unlikely to invoke an additional wave of mobilisation or a sudden shift in policy towards engaging and accepting a negotiated settlement.***

## Geopolitical developments influencing Ukraine

Last month, Ukraine secured military and economic aid commitments surpassing \$7.087 billion. Vice President Kamala Harris selected Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky laid out the first stems of his “*victory plan*”. Meanwhile, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party won its first state election in Thuringia.

2. **Military Aid & Economic Assistance** | Multilateral institutions have continued to extend military and economic assistance to Ukraine. The European Council approved the first regular disbursement of grants and loans under the EU's Ukraine Facility Fund, with Kyiv set to receive \$4.58 billion. <sup>1</sup> As part of the EU initiative to use \$1.56 billion in profits from frozen Russian assets, the Czech Ministry of Defence announced that part of this money would be used for an artillery ammunition procurement programme. <sup>2</sup> The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is lending \$76.5 million to Nova Post, a major

<sup>1</sup> This fund aims to support Ukraine's macro-financial stability and the functioning of its public administration from 2024-2027, with reforms covering key areas such as public financial management, state-owned enterprises, the business environment, energy, and landmine clearance.

<sup>2</sup> The Czech Ministry of Defence will act as an intermediary in this procurement process, with the programme funded in conjunction with Western partners.



Ukrainian postal and courier operator, to support its 2024 investment programme.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, the EU's Chief Diplomat, Josep Borrell, highlighted that EU defence ministers collectively agreed to increase the number of Ukrainian military personnel trained under the EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine programme, raising the target to 75,000 by training an additional 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers by year's end.

- 2.1. Western and Central European states continued to provide substantial bilateral and multilateral aid to Ukraine. On 04 August, President Zelensky showcased the arrival of the first F-16 fighter jets from Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway.<sup>4</sup> Germany, amidst announcing a decline in bilateral financial support – from \$8.32 billion in 2024 to \$4.44 billion in 2025, confirmed the delivery of an advanced IRIS-T SLS air defence system and announced orders for an additional seventeen, slated for delivery by 2026.<sup>5</sup> The new Dutch Prime Minister, Dick Schoof, pledged an additional \$221 million, allocated towards protecting and repairing Ukraine's energy infrastructure. The Netherlands also committed to bolstering Ukraine's air defence capabilities by purchasing 51 mobile drone detection radars from Robin Radar Systems, set for delivery later in the year. Belgium has allocated \$165 million to restore education, healthcare, and energy infrastructure in Kyiv and Chernihiv oblasts. Meanwhile, Ireland signed a ten-year bilateral cooperation agreement with Ukraine and pledged an additional \$184 million in non-lethal military support and humanitarian assistance.
- 2.2. Such support was echoed by Ukraine's Eastern European and Scandinavian allies. Romania's lower house of the parliament approved legislation enabling the transfer of a patriot air defence system to Ukraine, though the bill requires President Klaus Iohannis's signature before delivery can take place. Lithuania pledged fifteen M113 armoured personnel carriers, alongside short-range air defence systems, and various other military equipment; Vilnius also plans to deliver over 5,000 drones to Ukraine by autumn 2024. Norway committed \$53 million to purchase drones and air defence systems, while allocating \$7.4 million to UNICEF to aid Ukrainian children and their families. Sweden is exploring the deployment of military advisers to Ukraine starting in autumn 2024 to support maintenance and logistics. Additionally, Denmark announced a \$116 million aid package, including \$44.55 million for Ukraine's defence industry and \$16.62 million for procurement through Ukrainian defence enterprises.
- 2.3. Elsewhere, the US unveiled a new \$125 million military aid package for Ukraine, including Stinger missiles, artillery ammunition, and anti-armour systems – equipment notably in large use within the ongoing Kursk incursion.<sup>6</sup> Reuters also

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<sup>3</sup> This funding will facilitate the expansion of Nova Post's parcel locker network, facility upgrades, and the construction of safety shelters. The loan also includes technical support to improve human resources policies and workforce integration for veterans and women.

<sup>4</sup> These fourth-generation aircraft, which are set to be fully delivered by mid-2025, will enhance Ukraine's air defence with their larger payload capacity and advanced electronic warfare systems, including the Link 16 system for improved tactical data exchange and targeting.

<sup>5</sup> Last month, Germany also delivered 14,000 rounds of 155mm ammunition, 26 VECTOR reconnaissance drones, 10 unmanned surface vessels, 700 MK 556 assault rifles, 10 HLR 338 precision rifles, 50 CR 308 rifles, six engineering excavators, one armoured recovery vehicle, and 55,000 first aid kits.

<sup>6</sup> The US Department of Defence Inspector General's Office published a series of assessments by the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) in a quarterly review of US military assistance to Ukraine. In which, the DIA's assessments calculated that the



reports that the Pentagon is considering exporting long-range Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles, which – depending on the variety – can range between 230-500 miles (370-800km), though delivery would take several months as the US “works through technical issues”.

*Note: On 06 September, the Ukraine Defence Contact Group will meet for the 24<sup>th</sup> summit at the Ramstein airbase in Germany. President Zelensky is attending in person, lobbying for expedited military assistance – particularly in the air defence and long-range counter-strikes domain.*

**3. US Presidential Race** | Last month, the US presidential race saw significant developments, beginning with Vice President Kamala Harris selecting Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate. Walz, a former Army National Guardsman and teacher, is known for his progressive policies and strong support for Ukraine; as Governor, he implemented measures including banning Minnesota state agencies from dealing with Russian and Belarusian companies and forged a partnership between Minnesota and Ukraine’s Chernihiv Oblast. His selection led to a fundraising surge, with the Harris campaign raising \$36 million within the first 24 hours of his selection.

3.1. Following this confirmation, the Democratic National Convention (DNC) began on 19 August in Chicago, officially marking Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party’s nominee. The convention introduced the 2024 Democratic Platform, a comprehensive document which emphasises supporting Ukraine’s defence, strengthening alliances (including with NATO), whilst avoiding direct conflict with Russia. Moreover, it contrasts the Biden administration’s approach with former President Donald Trump’s, accusing the Republican presidential candidate of undermining Ukrainian sovereignty for personal gain.<sup>7</sup>

***Audere Comment: Some commentators are concerned that the Democratic party platform’s emphasis on Europe, especially regarding long-term commitments to Ukraine, could lead to diminished US attention towards Asia. Drawing parallels to the Obama administration’s failure to contain China’s global influence, this perspective could be leveraged by the Republican Party as part of their campaign strategy.***

3.2. Also last month, it was confirmed that Vice President Harris and former President Trump would face off in a highly anticipated televised debate on 10 September. The debate will mark their first direct confrontation in the 2024 campaign, and follows the June debate between Trump and President Joe Biden, where Biden’s performance contributed to his decision to withdraw from the race.

*Note: While Kamala Harris holds a 3.3-point lead, recent US polling data from FiveThirtyEight highlights that the race remains fiercely competitive, especially in*

current level of donations for artillery systems will not meet the UAF reconstruction and force generation requirements. Additionally, projected ammunition donations are sufficient for near-term objectives but may not support mid-term offensive goals.<sup>7</sup> The platform also highlights the importance of US alliances in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region, positioning these relationships as central to US global strategy.



*swing states, where many undecided voters are expected to view the debate – which is set to address key issues such as women’s rights, the economy, and migration – as a decisive factor in shaping their final voting decisions.*

**4. Elections in Europe** | In a notable shift that is likely to be indicative of further gains within Germany’s upcoming parliamentary elections in 2025, on 02 August, the far-right AfD party won its first state election, securing 33% of the vote in Thuringia, and finished second with 31% of the vote – just behind the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – in Saxony.

- 4.1. Following the AfD’s performance within the European Parliamentary elections earlier this year, it is important to note that these results primarily reflect a strong dissatisfaction with the current coalition government – composed of the Social Democratic Party, the Free Democratic Party, and the Greens – who performed poorly. In particular, it appears that anger was primarily directed towards three key wedge issues: domestic economic prospects, migration (with which primarily derives from Chancellor Merkel’s pro-refugee stance in 2015), and the transition to a Green economy.
- 4.2. Nevertheless, within the rhetoric espoused by the likes of Bjorn Höcke, the AfD’s leader in Thuringia, who openly advocates for dialogue with Moscow, opposes additional military support for Ukraine, and blames the economic issues on the ‘NATO-caused conflict’, concerns of a rise in anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian support amongst the general population has risen and thus marks a significant moment within one of Ukraine’s largest financial and military backers.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.3. Such an understanding has only been augmented by another noteworthy electoral victory for the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW), a far-left party that similarly opposes military aid to Ukraine and advocates for peace negotiations with Russia; the BSW secured third place in both Thuringia and Saxony, garnering 16% and 12% of the votes, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

*Note: On 22 September, Brandenburg will hold their state elections, with a similar result anticipated to Thuringia.*

***Audere Comment: In conjunction with the soft stance held by Austria, Slovakia, and Hungary, the growing influence of anti-Ukraine factions across the German political spectrum points further to our assessment of disunity in Europe that increasingly appears to be unable to supplement any lost financial and military support withheld by a potential Trump Presidency.***

<sup>8</sup> The party’s ties to Russia are well-documented, with key leaders maintaining relationships with Russian officials and participating in events such as Russia’s “Victory Day” celebrations. Höcke has made statements indicating that if he were to become German Chancellor, his first official trip abroad would be to Moscow, rather than Washington, D.C. Additionally, the AfD’s campaign in Thuringia revolved around the slogan “diplomacy instead of weapons.”

<sup>9</sup> As noted by Politico, “one of BSW’s post-election demands: that Berlin halt a plan, announced in July, for the US to deploy long-range missiles in Germany starting in 2026.” Indeed, members of the BSW note that they will not form coalitions with any party that support the plans, claiming “this is a measure that directly increase the risk of war for Germany.”



- 5. Zelensky's Victory Plan** | At a news conference in Kyiv on 27 August, President Zelensky announced that he will soon present a comprehensive "*victory plan*" to President Biden and the 2024 presidential candidates – Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump – during the 79<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in New York, on 10 September. Zelensky outlined the "*four-stage plan*" as an integrated approach combining military, economic, and diplomatic strategies aimed at pressuring Russia to "*end the war.*"<sup>10</sup>
- 5.1. Notably, specific details of President Zelensky's "*Victory Plan*" remains undisclosed, though Kyiv continues to emphasise that Ukraine's success hinges on strong US support and implementation. Although developing plans with multilateral institutions – including NATO, the World Bank, the IMF, and the EU – to standardise weapons deliveries and sustain macro-financial stability into and beyond 2025 (via the creation of capability coalitions, and utilising frozen Russian assets to manage a projected \$15 billion deficit), ongoing disunity amongst European allies (see Section 4) has highlighted the bloc's anticipated inability to supplement any potential reduction in support from Washington.
- 5.2. Meanwhile, President Zelensky also affirmed that he envisions a second international summit for peace, which would include Russian representatives – a departure from the first summit held in Switzerland in June that excluded Russia, and consequently China. Zelensky has been in discussions with several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Switzerland, and India, about the possibility of hosting this next summit. However, he has specified that any potential host nation must have signed the initial peace summit communiqué, presenting a challenge for some prospective hosts. Nevertheless, Kyiv's strategy to onboard the Global South may create a perspective of alienation that could distort the overarching peace process.
- 6. Russian Sabotage Campaign** | On 23 August, NATO's airbase in Geilenkirchen, Germany, elevated its security alert to the second-highest level due to credible intelligence about potential sabotage threats linked to Russia.<sup>11</sup> German prosecutors in Flensburg are investigating these threats, though no specific suspects have been identified. Additionally, recent reports of drones over a chemical plant in Brunsbüttel have further intensified security concerns, though the origins of these drones remain unconfirmed.
- 6.1. Concurrently, the UK Defence Ministry raised concerns about Russian spies potentially using drones to monitor British military bases involved in training Ukrainian soldiers under Operation Interflex. Although there is "*little evidence*" of drones specifically targeting Interflex exercises, there has been increased Russian intelligence activity, including Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) and physical reconnaissance. Similar espionage activities have been reported in Germany, where drones have frequently observed Ukrainian training sessions, leading to countermeasures and the detention of two German-Russian citizens in Bavaria for suspected sabotage at a US base.

<sup>10</sup> The plan also seeks to secure "Ukraine's strategic place in the global security infrastructure" and compel Russia to conclude the conflict through diplomatic means while preserving macro-economic stability.

<sup>11</sup> The base, which hosts NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, heightened its security in response to concerns about possible "terrorist actions" against NATO facilities.





- 6.2. Earlier, representatives from Norway, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland met for a closed-door session organised by Norway's Police Security Service (PST). The meeting focused on collaborative strategies to counter espionage and sabotage risks posed by Russia, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding critical infrastructure.
- 6.3. Meanwhile, on 05 August, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) revealed it had intercepted a major espionage and sabotage network organized by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). This network operated across six Ukrainian oblasts—Dnipropetrovsk, Sumy, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Donetsk, and Odesa—leading to the arrest of nine individuals, including a Dnipro City Council member and an Odesa city council official. These detainees face treason charges for allegedly sharing critical infrastructure and military position information with Russian handlers. Additionally, six young residents of Odesa, aged 18 to 24, were arrested for allegedly setting fire to military vehicles on FSB orders.

***Audere Comment:*** *There continues to be an intensification of Russian-directed sabotage operations against organisations and governments operating in or for the benefit of Ukraine. Audere continues to emphasise heightened caution, including a reassessment of business strategic risks for facilities outside of Ukraine. For bespoke information on how to mitigate such exposure, contact [research@audereinternational.com](mailto:research@audereinternational.com).*

**7. India's Omni-Diplomatic Strategy** | On 23 August, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kyiv, marking the first visit by an Indian leader to Ukraine in modern history. According to the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two leaders focused on a range of bilateral issues, including trade, defence, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and education in a broader effort to rejuvenate trade and economic relations between India and Ukraine, which have seen a downturn in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Notably, four agreements were signed during the visit, covering community development projects, drug control standards, cultural exchange, and agriculture; the leaders also agreed to convene an Inter-Governmental Commission to facilitate this process by the end of the year.

- 7.1. Analysts underscore that Prime Minister Modi's peace rhetoric was largely unchanged from the message he had delivered in Moscow during his visit in July, stressing that 'only dialogue and diplomacy could end the fighting.'
- 7.2. Nevertheless, on 04 September, leaked Russian state documents revealed the Kremlin's covert establishment of a trade channel with India to obtain critical electronics and dual-use technologies for its military operations in Ukraine, undermining New Delhi's foreign policy initiatives to "*counter perceptions that the country views Ukrainian affairs predominantly through a Russian lens*" and "*to demonstrate [it] can play a constructive, friendly role in resolving the war.*"<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> President Modi later said on X that the exchange was intended to discuss "measures to further strengthen [their] Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership."

<sup>13</sup> Specifically, this plan – resembling the techniques employed by the KGB during the Cold War, utilised rupees accumulated from oil sales to India – approximately Rs82 billion (circ. \$1 billion) – to acquire advanced dual-use electronic systems.



- 8. Regulatory Action** | Last month, the US imposed sanctions on more than 400 entities and individuals for supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine, including Chinese firms involved in shipping machine tools and micro-electronics (such as the import-export arm of China's Dalian Machine Tool Group), transnational networks involved in procuring ammunition, and individuals aiding sanctions evasion. The Biden Administration also added 123 entities – 63 Russian and 42 Chinese – to its US export control list, forcing suppliers to obtain licenses before being allowed to ship to the targeted companies.
- 8.1. Additionally, on 04 September, the US Treasury Department announced sanctions on ten individuals and two entities “as part of a coordinated US government response to Moscow’s malign influence efforts targeting the 2024 US presidential election,” including Russian state-funded news outlet RT (and its editors and managers). The US State Department introduced a new visa-restriction policy requiring “*Foreign Missions Act-designated entities [...] to notify the Department of all personnel working in the US*” and to reveal all real properties they own, targeting the likes of Rossiya Segodnya, RIA Novosti, RT, TV-Novosti, Ruptly, and Sputnik. Meanwhile, the US Justice Department are seizing 32 internet domains for violating money laundering and criminal trademark laws in a similar effort to combat Russian disinformation campaigns.

## Developments in Ukraine

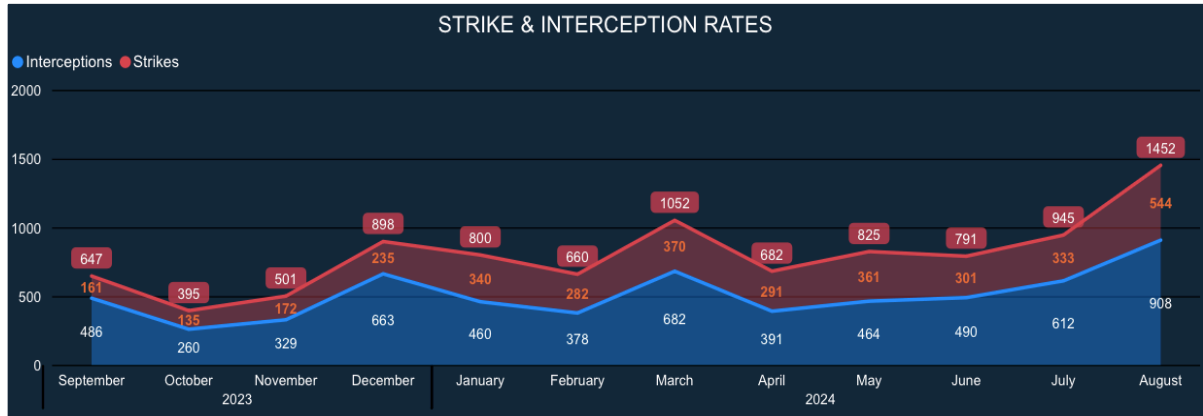
Last month, Russia continued drone and missile strikes on Ukrainian civilian and critical infrastructure, though air defences were successful in intercepting 62.53% of the targets. Ukraine’s government experienced a significant reshuffle, following the resignations of five ministers including Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Strategic Industries Minister Alexander Kamyshin, and Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Olha Stefanishyna. Elsewhere, Ukraine experienced changes in its energy generational capacity and debt restructuring arrangements.

- 9. Mass Strikes** | Last month, Russia persisted in its widespread strike campaign against Ukraine, conducting strikes on 83.8% of the days, compared to 60% in July. They preliminary focused civilian (53.1%), critical (16.4%) and industrial (16.4%) infrastructure, with particular focus on Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv and Poltava regions. Out of the record 1452 aerial projectiles launched towards Ukraine, Ukrainian Air Defence Forces (ADF) intercepted 908 (62.53%), a relatively high interception rate despite a 53.7% increase in the number of launches. Nevertheless, of the 544 successful strikes, the majority were caused by SDBs (177 – 0% interception rate – primarily targeting the northeastern Sumy Oblast), Shahed-131/136 drones (108 – 87.8% interception rate – all Operational Commands including Kyiv, Rivne, Khmelnytskyi, Lutsk, and Ternopil), and Ballistic Missiles (84 – 7.7% interception rate – primarily targeting Kharkiv and Sumy Oblasts).

*Note: It was anticipated that the F-16 fighter jets would prove effective in intercepting strategic bombers or, at the very least, reduce the frequency of missile launches towards eastern Ukraine. However, on 26 August, during an interception of a mass Russian attack, Ukraine suffered the loss of its first F-16, along with the pilot, Oleksii Mes, known by the*



call sign Moonfish.<sup>14</sup> With an estimated five remaining F-16s currently in-country, Audere does not expect these valuable aircraft to be operational in border regions until the investigation is complete and, if necessary, the ADF's "friend or foe" (IFF) systems are modernised.



9.1. Notably, recent strike trends indicate a decrease in dumb bomb munition launches (including SDBs and Guided Bomb Units – GBUs / GABs) towards Kharkiv region, evidenced by 28 strikes in August compared to 49 in July. This is primarily attributed to Ukraine's Kursk incursion, resulting in a shift in Russia's target set, with 165 launches towards Sumy and bordering regions in August (from nearly 0 in July). Nevertheless, this decline was supplemented by a 76.9% and 42.9% rise in drone and ballistic missile strikes, respectively. As such, along with northeastern Sumy, the northern part of the Kharkiv Oblast and the north/northeast areas of Kharkiv city remain classified by Audere as extremely high-risk zones.

***Audere Comment: Russia is increasingly conducting targeted, yet highly effective strikes, with a growing reliance on human intelligence. Audere advises heightened vigilance for those operating in-country, including comprehensive risk assessments and the implementation of threat mitigation strategies. This month, the Kremlin is expected to persist in its efforts to disrupt Ukraine's energy system, targeting power generation, distribution, and transformer units in the lead-up to winter.***

**10. Cabinet Reshuffle** | Between 04-05 September, Ukraine's parliament – the Verkhovna Rada – approved the resignations of Foreign Minister Kuleba, Strategic Industries Minister Kamyshin, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Stefanishyna, Justice Minister Denys Maliuska, and Ecology Minister Ruslan Strilets. This follows a series of positional adjustments, which also include State Property Fund head Vitalii Kova, and Deputy Prime Minister and Reintegration Minister Iryna Vereshchuk. The full acceptance of changes has yet to be approved by the Verkhovna Rada however, with sources indicating that the

<sup>14</sup> American media have speculated that the crash could have been caused by either a technical malfunction or pilot error, though this remains under investigation. Meanwhile, Voice of America, citing sources within the Ukrainian Air Force, indicated that the possibility of "friendly fire" cannot be entirely ruled out.



replacement of all five ministerial roles (by individuals who are “*not politically active*”) require further “*horse trading*” with the likes of Danylo Hetmantsev and Yulia Tymoshenko.

- 10.1. In line with Audere reporting earlier this year, Oleksandr Merezhko, a senior lawmaker and chair of the parliament's foreign affairs committee, stated that these changes were expected “*long ago*,” with sources indicating additional changes following reshuffles in the military – including the role of Commander-in-Chief (Zaluzhnyi to Syrskyi) – in early February, alongside the dismissal of Infrastructure Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for Reconstruction Oleksandr Kubrakov and Agriculture Minister Mykola Solskyi in May. Audere’s sources indicate the changes come amid growing internal tensions, including the Ministers’ failure to “*follow the party line*” and their “*challenging of the status quo*.” It also comes amid continuing Russian advances on the frontline, and a failure to lobby Western allies to use western-manufactured weapon systems on Russian territory. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky claims the reshuffle comes as Ukraine braces for a difficult end quarter and confronts a new set of challenges, requiring “*our state institutions [...] to be set up in such a way that Ukraine will achieve all the results we need – for all of us*.”
- 10.2. In terms of replacements, Andriy Sybiha, Ukraine’s deputy foreign minister (since April 2024) and former deputy head of president's office – and known by sources as a “*career diplomat*”, has been promoted to Kuleba’s position; Herman Smetanin, current CEO of state arms company Ukroboronprom will replace Kamyshin – who will go to the president’s office – as Minister for Strategic Industries; the president's office deputy Oleksiy Kuleba will become deputy prime minister and the minister of infrastructure and regional policy; and Olga Stefanishyna will become justice minister while keeping her post as deputy prime minister for EU integration.

***Audere Comment: The overall direction of travel for Kyiv’s foreign and domestic policy is unexpected to change and will almost certainly continue to enact efforts aligned with the “Victory Plan” (as discussed in Section 5). Nevertheless, for further source intelligence regarding the ongoing changes, contact [research@audereinternational.com](mailto:research@audereinternational.com) to organise an in-depth brief with our Director of Intelligence.***

- 10.3. Concurrently, the recent dismissal of Ukraine’s energy sector head, Kudrytskyi, has sparked controversy and criticism. The official rationale for his removal was his alleged failure to effectively protect Ukraine’s energy infrastructure amidst ongoing Russian missile strikes. This decision has faced backlash from two independent supervisory board members, Daniel Dobbeni and Peder Andreasen, who voted against Kudrytskyi’s dismissal and resigned the following day. Dobbeni and Andreasen condemned the dismissal as “*politically motivated*” and argued that it lacked a solid justification. They asserted that there had been ongoing political interference in Ukrenergo’s management, which they believe compromised the professional integrity of the organisation's leadership.

## 11. Economic Issues | Last month, Ukraine's private creditors approved a \$20 billion debt



restructuring deal, with 97.38% voting in favour, above the two-thirds majority needed. The deal involves saving \$11.4 billion by 2027 and \$22.75 billion by 2033; eurobond maturities have also been extended by nearly four years, supporting future market participation. The restructuring follows a two-year payment freeze due to increased defence spending from Russia's invasion.<sup>15</sup>

- 11.1. Despite this, Ukraine still faces a projected budget gap of \$35 billion for 2025, which includes an additional \$12 billion needed for the AFU. Moreover, the deal preceded a fifth round of negotiations with the IMF on revisions of the Extended Fund Facility Programme – a four-year funding agreement that will allow Kyiv to access \$15.6 billion in financial aid. According to Bloomberg's sources, Kyiv is expecting increased pressure to further devalue its currency (already at a historic low), cut interest rates, and raise taxes (including increasing the value-added tax from the current level of 20%), before an additional \$1.1 billion tranche is approved.

## Developments in Russia & Russian Occupied Territory

Last month, the AFU conducted counter strikes and cyber-attacks against Russia and its occupied territories, including the targeting financial institutions and military assets. Concurrently, the cooling tower at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) was severely damaged as a result of a shelling-induced fire on 12 August.

12. **Counter Strikes** | In August, Ukrainian Forces continued to conduct extensive strikes (employing UAVs and naval drones, sabotage activities and cyberattacks) against crucial economic hubs. Among others, the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine, together with Ukraine's Security Service targeted FDKU Kavkaz Combine oil depot in the Proletask district – part of Rosrezerv structure – in Rostov Oblast, which was targeted on 16 August and was extinguished only in 16 days – on 02 September. As a result, 30 tanks were damaged, each holding up to 500 cubic metres of fuel.<sup>16</sup>

***Audere Comment: We anticipated Ukraine will likely continue to focus on efforts to develop more capable, domestically produced long-range UAVs in an effort to both avert restrictions on the use of western weapons on Russian territory and reduce reliance on western deliveries.***

13. **Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant** | Following a fire, caused by reported Russian shelling, at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on 12 August, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) stated that the cooling tower had been severely damaged. Nonetheless, experts at the International Atomic Energy Agency noted: "The plant confirmed to the team that there is no risk of elevated radiation

<sup>15</sup> Ukraine has also suspended \$700 million in debt payments to Cargill Financial Services, \$825 million in Ukrenergo Eurobond guarantees, and temporarily halted GDP-linked warrant payments starting in May 2025.

<sup>16</sup> All targets listed last month include Russian submarine Rostov-on-Don (Kilo class) in Crimea; "Avangard" Military Plant in Sterlitamak, Republic of Bashkortostan; airbases in Morozovsk, Savasleyka, Borisoglebsk, Voronezh's Baltimore, and Kursk; the Conro Trader ferry in Port Kavkaz; an ammunition depot in Ostrogzhsk, Voronezh Oblast; the Gazpromneft-Omsk Oil Refinery; Gubkinskaya and Atlas oil depots, Rostov Oblast; an ammunition depot of Malaya Mezhenka, Voronezh Oblast; a fuel storage tank in Kotelnich, Kirov Oblast; Sapphire EW system in the Kursk Oblast.



levels as there is no radioactive material in the vicinity of the alleged attack area.” Ukrainian President Zelensky called on the IAEA to hold Russia accountable, stressing the ongoing dangers if Russia controls the plant. The IAEA later reported that it could not determine the cause of a fire at the ZNPP, which Ukrainian officials claimed was deliberately started by RF to incite panic.

## Developments on the frontline

Last month, while Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations into Russia’s Kursk region, the Kremlin augmented operational intensity in the directions of Vovchansk (Kharkiv), Kremmina (Luhansk) and Pokrovsk (Donetsk). As a result, while experiencing the loss of some 1,300 square kilometres – an area equivalent to all Russian advances since the end of April, RF made their largest monthly gains in two years.

**14. In the Kharkiv Oblast**, RF have maintained their offensive operations north of Kharkiv City, targeting areas near Hlyboke, Lyptsi, and Vovchansk, though no confirmed advances were reported. Notably, the use of light and heavy armoured vehicles has increased, and tactical aviation strikes have resumed after a pause.

**15. In Luhansk region**, RF have conducted operations around Kupyansk, Svatove, and Kreminna, with significant activity reported southwest of Pishchane. There have also been claims by RF of successfully clearing the southern outskirts of Synkivka, though this has not been fully confirmed.

**16. In the Donetsk region**, RF are advancing rapidly towards Pokrovsk in Donetsk Oblast, now positioned less than eight kilometres from the city and close to Myrnohrad. Acting as a key logistics hub – supporting Ukrainian forces along a broad frontline from Vuhledar to the north of Donetsk and beyond, the Kremlin’s advance within this sector is, nevertheless, hindered by conflicting priorities: securing southeastern positions to enable future encirclement, and launching a direct offensive on the city. Meanwhile, incremental gains are being made round Siversk, with advancements reported north of Bilohorivka and near Vyimka. In Chasiv Yar, RF secured positions in Zhovtnevyi Microraion and Kalynivka. Additionally, Russian troops advanced southwest of Donetsk City near Vuhledar, with claims of progress on the T-05-09 highway and in Prechystivka, though these lack independent confirmation.

**17. In the Zaporizhzhia region**, there were no significant changes reported on the frontline in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast. RF conducted ground attacks south of Velyka Novosilka near Makarivka, but no confirmed advances were noted.

**18. Along Ukraine’s northern border**, Andriy Demchenko, spokesperson for Ukraine's State Border Service, reported a continued build-up of Belarusian forces and former Wagner mercenaries in the Gomel region "*under the guise of exercises*". Notably, Demchenko highlighted that Belarus had previously conducted similar exercises, primarily for show; as such, Audere continues to believe that the build-up is an effort to stretch and divert Ukrainian forces, designed more for informational and strategic distraction rather than signalling an imminent invasion. This assessment has been further supported by President

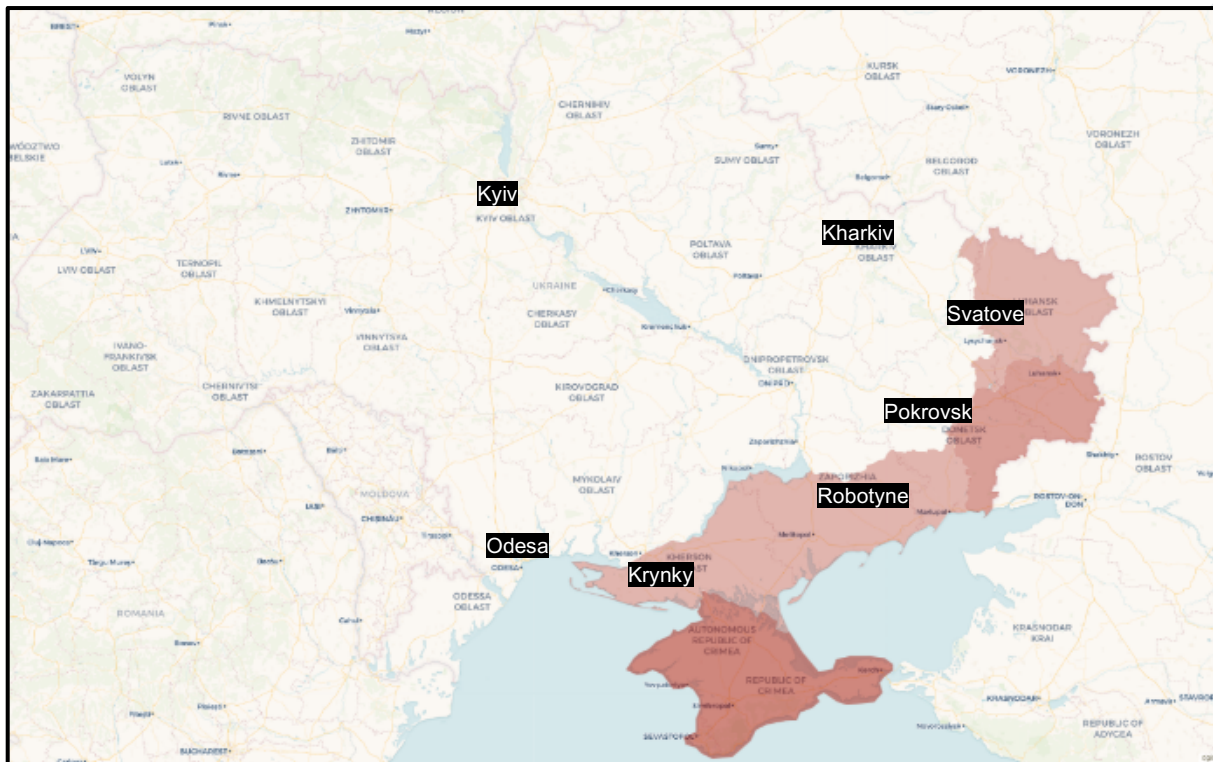


Aleksandr Lukashenko who, in an interview with Russian media channel, stressed that 'Belarus was ready to do anything possible to avoid its own direct involvement in the fighting.' Nevertheless, recent reports of a violation of Belarusian airspace, including the claimed interception of several "Shahed-type" drones over the Gomel region, has underscored the conflict's tacit potential for encroachment.

## Forecast for the upcoming month (06–30 September 2024)

**19. Russian Summer/Autumn Offensive |** RF are anticipated to press their advances in the Pokrovsk area, seeking to consolidate gains and potentially launch further offensives toward the city. The ongoing pressure could lead to additional Ukrainian withdrawals from less defensible positions. However, Ukrainian counteroffensive capabilities, bolstered by continued Western aid, and augmented by domestic advances in counterstrike weapon systems, may provide an aspect on notional parity against these advances. As such, while RF are likely to maintain their offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and in Donetsk, substantial breakthroughs are unlikely.

**END**



# Audere

GROUP



## Addressing Risk with Intelligence

### About us

The Audere Group is a specialist global intelligence and security risk advisory firm, with over a decade of operations spanning Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

Our commitment to Ukraine was solidified in May 2022 with the establishment of a physical office, the opening of a Security Operations Centre in Kyiv, and a joint venture comprising over 8,000 personnel and 600 vehicles.

### We are a trusted, long-term partner to

- Multinational corporations
- Commercial entities
- Law Firms
- Government organisations
- NGOs
- Charities
- High Net Worth Individuals

### Who we are




Our team comprises highly experienced international military and intelligence professionals. Their extensive expertise and specialised knowledge enable our clients to navigate an increasingly dynamic and complex security landscape.

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