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Russia's war with Ukraine

As Russia's war in Ukraine grinds into its fifth month, it is increasingly marked by [acts of savage brutality](#). After its capture of Luhansk region in late June, Russia continues [operations](#) to bring the remainder of Donetsk region under its control, while Ukraine is preparing for a counter-offensive to liberate the Black Sea coast. Kyiv's forces have been [attempting](#) to cut off the southern Russian-occupied city of Kherson from supplies and [stepped up](#) their attacks. The counteroffensive is "gathering momentum", [according](#) to British defence and intelligence officials, while Russia is [moving](#) large numbers of troops to Ukraine's south in preparation for it.

Sergiy Khlan, an aide to the head of Kherson region, [predicted](#) in an interview with Ukrainian television that Ukraine will recapture the southern region of Kherson by September. However, other reports suggested that Ukrainian forces were doing well just to hold the frontline in nearby villages. Russian missiles struck Kyiv on 28 July for the first time in weeks. Ukrainian officials [said](#) Russian forces launched missiles from the Black Sea, which hit Ukrainian forces in Liutizh, a Kyiv suburb.

Grain export deal

The [announcement](#) on 22 July of a grain deal between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the UN – which could allow Ukraine to export up to 22 million tons of grain stuck in its ports via the Black Sea – was a rare ray of light. The resumption of food exports could prove crucial for Ukraine's economy as well as global food security but will rely on a fragile truce in the Black Sea (on international food security and

Ukrainian grain exports, see NATO Watch [Update 17](#), [Update 18](#), [Update 20](#) and [Update 21](#)). The deal will last for 120 days with the possibility of being renewed, according to the Facebook [page](#) of the deputy head of the Ukrainian president's office. The Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, [said](#) Ukraine had about \$10bn worth of grain available for sale in the wake of the deal. "This is another demonstration that Ukraine can withstand the war," he said in a late-night address on 22 July. Ukraine would also have a chance to sell the current harvest, which Zelenskiy later [claimed](#) could be half its usual amount because of the Russian invasion.

However, less than 24 hours after the agreement was signed, Russian missiles [struck](#) the Ukrainian port of Odessa, and Ukraine warned that the deal would stall if there were further Russian airstrikes on key ports. A Russian government spokesperson [said](#) that the Odessa strikes "should not affect" the agreement, adding that the missiles targeted military infrastructure unconnected to grain exports. "Striking a target crucial for grain export a day after the signature of Istanbul agreements is particularly reprehensible & again demonstrates Russia's total disregard for international law & commitments", [tweeted](#) Josep Borrell Fontelles, who coordinates the EU's foreign policy.

Despite the attack on Odessa, Ukraine [said](#) it hoped to start exporting grain from its ports shortly. Details of the procedures are expected to be published by a joint coordination centre that is liaising with the shipping industry, deputy UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said. On

29 July Ukraine [said](#) it was ready for grain exports to leave its ports again but it was still waiting for the go-ahead from the UN. The first grain-exporting ship could leave Ukraine's ports on 1 August, a Turkish spokesperson [said](#), although one of the biggest [obstacles](#) is insurance uncertainty.

The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [embarked](#) on a tour of several countries in Africa (Egypt, the Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia) to reassure allies that Russian grain supplies would continue. Lavrov reportedly received a warm welcome in each country, with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni [defending](#) Russia's war in Ukraine as legitimate. "Whenever issues come up and some people want us to take positions against Russia, we say 'but you people, these people have been with us for the last 100 years, how can we be automatically against them?'", Museveni added. During a trip to Benin, French President Emmanuel Macron [criticised](#) the "hypocrisy" of African leaders who refuse to condemn the Ukraine war, adding that he considers Russia an "imperial colonial power".

Stalled diplomacy

Ukraine and Russia have held intermittent peace talks since the end of February 2022. However, negotiations have stalled and there appears to be no real prospect for any diplomatic breakthroughs or ceasefires in the near future. France and Germany lead a NATO bloc favouring negotiations, while the US and UK lead a bloc that may favour continuing to send more advanced weapons. One of the potential frameworks being discussed for a negotiated settlement is a four-point Italian proposal, calling for Ukraine committing to neutrality and not joining NATO, security guarantees for Ukraine, and negotiations between Ukraine and Russia on Crimea and the Donbas (see [NATO Watch Update 16](#)).

For options of what a possible settlement for Ukraine might look like, see Cambridge University's [Ukraine Peace Settlement Project](#).

Positions between the two sides remain incompatible: Ukraine insists on full

sovereignty over all Ukrainian territory as it existed when Ukraine became independent in 1991, while Russia claims sovereignty over Crimea and recognition of independence of the Donbas separatist republics. Moreover, Russia has recognized the independence of the Donbas republics on the whole administrative territory of the Donbas, even though some of that territory remains in Ukrainian hands and is the focus of current fighting. Speaking to envoys at an Arab League summit in Cairo on 24 July, Sergei Lavrov [said](#) Moscow is determined to help Ukrainians "liberate themselves from the burden of this absolutely unacceptable regime" – a clear indication that Moscow's overarching goal is to topple the Zelenskiy government.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [announced](#) on 27 July that he will speak with Sergei Lavrov "in the coming days" – the first discussion between the foreign secretaries since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February. In a press conference, Blinken said the meeting will focus on two key issues: securing the release of [two Americans detained in Russia](#) and ensuring the implementation of the deal to restart the export of Ukraine's grain stocks. Later in the press conference, Blinken emphasized that the call "will not be a negotiation about Ukraine", adding that "any negotiation regarding Ukraine is for its government and people to determine".

The German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, [said](#) in a speech on 24 July in the western German city of Paderborn that Russia's war against Ukraine is also a "war against the unity of Europe". "We must not let ourselves be divided, we must not let the great work of a united Europe that we have begun so promisingly be destroyed," he said, adding "This war is not just about the territory of Ukraine, it is about the double shared foundation of our values and our order of peace". Meanwhile, during a 23 July speech in Romania, Hungary's nationalist prime minister Viktor Orbán [called](#) for US-Russian peace talks to end the war in Ukraine. Orbán argued that Kyiv has no path to victory given Moscow's larger military. "The more modern weapons NATO gives the Ukrainians, the more the

Russians will push the frontline forward. What we are doing is prolonging the war”, he said. “As Russia wants security guarantees, this war can be ended only with peace talks between Russia and America”. Orban’s statement is a sign of the fragility of Western unity on Ukraine, which is likely to be further tested by the looming gas crisis that threatens much of Europe (see below).

Military and financial assistance to Ukraine

Ukraine continues to rely heavily on international military and financial support from Western states. In the five months since Russia launched its war in Ukraine, the United States has [pledged](#) about \$24 billion in military aid to Ukraine—more than four times Ukraine’s 2021 defence budget. America’s partners in Europe and beyond have [pledged](#) an additional \$12 billion, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

The US Defense Department [announced](#) on 25 July that it will be sending four more high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS), taking the total to 16, and over 500 Phoenix Ghost drones to Ukraine as part of an additional \$270 million in military aid to Ukraine. The same day, Ukraine [said](#) it destroyed 50 Russian ammunition depots using the earlier US-supplied Himars. Ukrainian officials claim that the systems are turning the war in their favour by dismantling Russia’s logistics and slowing down its offensive. The Russian government [said](#) it destroyed HIMARS in Bogdanovsky, Ukraine, although the reports were rejected by the Ukrainian government. The US is also exploring whether it can send American-made combat aircraft to Ukraine, the White House [said](#) on 22 July.

Recent European arms supplies to Ukraine include: the UK [announced](#) on 21 July that it will send scores of artillery guns ,more than 1,600 anti-tank weapons, counter-battery radar systems, hundreds of drones and more than 50,000 rounds of ammunition; North Macedonia plans to [donate](#) an unspecified number of Soviet-era tanks as it seeks to modernise its own military to meet NATO

standards; and Germany will [deliver](#) 16 Biber bridge-layer tanks.

For further details on arms transfers to Ukraine, see, the [Forum on the Arms Trade](#)

Ukraine [aims](#) to strike a deal for a \$15-\$20bn programme with the International Monetary Fund before the year-end to help shore up its war-torn economy, the country’s central bank governor, Kyrylo Shevchenko, told *Reuters*.

Humanitarian and environmental consequences of the war

Exact figures for the number of war fatalities, both military and civilian, are difficult to verify and confirm. [Undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in in war. Ukraine [claims](#) to have killed more than 41,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date, while CIA Director William J. Burns [said](#) on 21 July that 15,000 Russian soldiers have died and 45,000 others have been injured while fighting in Ukraine. Ukraine has given no official total of soldiers killed during the war, but in early June, a senior Ukrainian presidential aide [told](#) BBC News 100-200 Ukrainian solders were dying in the Donbas region every day. In April, Russia [said](#) it had killed about 23,000 Ukrainian troops.

UN figures [revealed](#) that, as at 25 July, 5,237 civilians have died since Russia first invaded Ukraine in February, including 348 children. The actual figures are likely to be considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration. According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 5,776 people by 1 August. From this number, 2,435 were killed and 3,341 were injured across 764 incidents. Ninety-five per cent (5,483) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas.

Ukraine’s health ministry [said](#) that least 18 medical personnel have been killed and nearly 900 medical facilities damaged or destroyed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The ministry said

more than 50 medical workers had been wounded by Russian attacks and 123 medical facilities in Ukraine were totally destroyed by the invasion, while another 746 needed repairs. Meanwhile, the UNHCR [said](#) 3.7 million Ukrainian refugees have received temporary protection status in the EU, while 492,647 Ukrainian children have been [integrated](#) into the bloc's national school systems.

According to Ruslan Strelets, Ukraine's minister of environmental protection and natural resources, there have been 2,000 [recorded](#) cases of damage to nature since Russia invaded on 24 February, causing \$5.5bn in damage to Ukraine's environment.

Treatments of POWs

Russia and Ukraine both launched criminal investigations into strikes on 29 July that [reportedly](#) killed at least 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war who were held at a pre-trial detention centre in the village of Olenivka in Russian-occupied Donetsk, after both countries blamed the other side for the attack. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [accused](#) Russia of a "petrifying war crime" over the killings and called on world leaders to "recognise Russia as a terrorist state". The UN is prepared to send a group of experts to Olenivka to investigate the incident, if it gets consent from both parties.

Russian activities in occupied parts of Ukraine

On 29 July, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, [said](#) there should no longer be any doubt that Russia intended to dismantle Ukraine, adding that the US was seeing growing signs of Russia laying the groundwork to attempt to annex all of the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk and the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. Meanwhile, according to the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces, Russian proxies in the Russian-occupied territory of Donbas have been [confiscating documents](#) from forcibly mobilised troops in attempts to force them to fight against Ukraine and making it impossible for them to desert or identify those who have been killed.

Further reading:

On outcomes and consequences of the war

[Russia invites UN, Red Cross experts to probe Ukraine jail deaths](#), CNBC, 31 July 2022

Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, [Ukraine Needs Solutions, Not Endless War](#), National Interest, 30 July 2022

Dan Rice and Lee Van Arsdale, [Ukraine Has Earned Our Respect and Our Trust: We Need to Fully Arm Ukraine to Defeat Russia](#), Small Wars Journal, 30 July 2022

Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro, [The U.S. and Russia Need to Start Talking Before It's Too Late](#), New York Times, 27 July 2022

John Feffer, [The weaponization of food](#), Foreign Policy in Focus, 27 July 2022

Doug Bandow, [So if Europe wants to escalate against Russia who foots the bill?](#) Responsible Statecraft, 27 July 2022

[Russia, Ukraine should honor the grain deal: Erdoğan](#), Hurriyet Daily News, 26 July 2022

Raphael S. Cohen and Gian Gentile, [The United States Learned From Iraq and Afghanistan. Russia Didn't](#), Lawfare, 24 July 2022

[White House confirms plans to send US-NATO jets to fight Russia](#), Countercurrents, 23 July 2022

Edward M. Ifft, [Ending the war in Ukraine: practical, if painful, possibilities](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 22 July 2022

Joshua Huminski, [4 questions the US and NATO need to ask, and answer, about their Ukraine strategy](#), Breaking Defense, 22 July 2022

Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, [Friends with Benefits: Iran and Russia after the Ukraine Invasion](#), RUSI Commentary, 22 July 2022

Edmund J. Mazza, [Solzhenitsyn on NATO, Ukraine, & Putin](#), OnePeterFive, 21 July 2022

Hennadiy Maksak, [New Hybrid Threats from Lukashenko: How Should the West React?](#) Globesec, 19 July 2022

Oscar Arias and Jonathan Granoff, [Nuclear strategy and ending the war in Ukraine](#), The Hill, 19 July 2022

On investigations of war crimes in Ukraine and other legal processes

The ICC in the Hague opened an investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine just days after Moscow's forces invaded and it dispatched dozens of investigators to the country to gather evidence. On 14 July, 45 countries [agreed](#) at a conference in the Hague to coordinate investigations into suspected war crimes in Ukraine. With some 23,000 war crimes investigations now open and different countries heading teams, evidence needed to be credible and organised, officials said. Ukraine has [called](#) for an international tribunal to bring Vladimir Putin to justice more quickly. Trying Russia separately for the act of aggression, with international participation, would speed up its quest to hold the Russian president and his inner circle accountable, Ukrainian officials said.

On the risk of nuclear war

The Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko [said](#) on 21 July the war must be stopped in order to avoid the "abyss of nuclear war" and insisted that Ukraine accept Russia's demands. Earlier, on 25 June, in a new and possibly precarious development in the deteriorating security situation in Europe, Russia and Belarus [announced](#) a nuclear sharing agreement, mirroring NATO's own nuclear sharing planning. Meanwhile, on 27 July, the UK's national security adviser Stephen Lovegrove, [warned](#) that the west risks the initiation of nuclear conflict with China or Russia because of a "breakdown of communication" with the two countries, adding that the erosion of backdoor channels had resulted in an increased chance of an accidental escalation into war.

[The Guardian view on nuclear warfare: dialogue or destruction](#), The Guardian editorial, 29 July 2022

Victor Gilinsky and Henry Sokolski, [Dealing with Russian contempt for the IAEA in Ukraine](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 28 July 2022

On sanctions against Russia and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine galvanized the US, UK and EU, and a handful of other Western-aligned countries, to unleash a series of sanctions meant to punish Vladimir Putin's government and pressure him to pull his forces back. However, rather than dissuading the Kremlin as intended, the penalties appear instead to be exacerbating inflation, worsening food insecurity and punishing ordinary Russians more than Putin or his allies. Moreover, Russia has claimed (see NATO Watch [Update 17](#) and [Update 18](#)) that it is getting more revenue from its fossil fuel sales now than before its invasion of Ukraine, despite (or partly because of) Western sanctions.

Recently, there has been more evidence that the Russian economy appears to be doing better than expected. On 26 July the International Monetary Fund [upgraded](#) Russia's GDP estimate for 2022 by 2.5%, although its economy is still expected to contract by 6%. "That's still a fairly sizeable recession in Russia in 2022", IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told *AFP*, adding that rising energy prices are "providing an enormous amount of revenues to the Russian economy". Meanwhile, Lithuania has [lifted a ban](#) on the rail transport of sanctioned goods into and out of the Russian territory of Kaliningrad. The Baltic state had stopped Russia from sending sanctioned goods via rail to Kaliningrad in June, triggering a promise from Moscow of swift retaliation.

Simon Jenkins, [The ruble is soaring and Putin is stronger than ever - our sanctions have backfired](#), The Guardian, 29 July 2022

Pavlo Sheremeta, [Ukraine: The Path to a Post-War Prosperity](#), Globsec, 28 July 2022

Vladimir Milov, [Yes, It Hurts: Measuring the Effects of Western Sanctions Against Russia](#), Globesec, 21 July 2022

On energy security in Europe

EU member countries [agreed](#) to voluntarily reduce their gas consumption by 15% in an attempt to avoid an energy crisis generated by further Russian cuts to supply. The reduction may become mandatory if Russia cuts off supplies. The agreement came a day after Russian energy company Gazprom [announced](#) that it would scale down the Nord Stream gas pipeline's capacity from 40% to 20% due to the "technical condition of the engine". However, German group Siemens Energy (which has been charged with maintaining the turbine) [disputed](#) Gazprom's reasoning, saying it saw "no link between the turbine and the gas cuts that have been implemented or announced". Despite growing anger in Germany over soaring energy prices, Germany's economy minister [said](#) on 29 July that putting the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline into operation was not an option as this would only play into the hands of President Putin. On 30 July, Gazprom [suspended](#) gas supplies to Latvia.

On developments within Russia

According to Ukraine's defence ministry intelligence directorate, two-hundred Russian marines from the 810th naval infantry brigade [refused](#) to return to fight in the southern regions of Ukraine. Meanwhile, Richard Moore, the head of UK intelligence agency, MI6, [said](#) half of all the Russian spies operating under diplomatic cover around Europe, totalling about 400, had been expelled since the start of the war in Ukraine.

The head of Russia's space agency, Yuri Borisov, [said](#) on 26 July that Russia will pull out of the International Space Station (ISS) after 2024. The ISS remains one of the few areas of partnership between the United States and Russia. However, despite Borisov's comment, officials at NASA have yet to receive official notice of the withdrawal, and Reuters subsequently [reported](#) that Russia will remain involved with the ISS until they build a separate station. It will be at least six years until this happens, according to US officials who were notified of Russia's plans.

Christopher Woody, [Russia's Yasen-class missile subs have impressed and worried NATO for years, and now Moscow may build more of them](#), Business Insider, 22 July 2022

Andrew Monaghan, [Kremlinology and the Great Power Competition](#), RUSI Commentary, 18 July 2022

On China's position on the war

Despite widespread Western criticism of China's position on the war in Ukraine, and the claim in NATO's new [Strategic Concept](#) of a "deepening strategic partnership" between China and Russia, an unnamed senior US official [confirmed](#) on 30 June that China has not been giving material support for Russia's war in Ukraine. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping [spoke](#) on the phone for over two hours on 29 July. They reportedly discussed the growing tensions between the United States and China about Taiwan as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the coronavirus pandemic, and the economy. The call came amid threats of a "forceful response" by Chinese officials to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's potential visit to Taiwan. A day earlier, a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier [entered](#) the South China Sea for a scheduled operation. In response, a Chinese official said that "it is clear from this for everyone to see who is the biggest threat to the South China Sea and the Asian region's peace and stability".

On developments within NATO

[NATO's force in Kosovo says it is prepared to intervene if stability is jeopardized](#), Anadolu Agency, 1 August 2022

[Russia Adopts Updated Maritime Doctrine; Lists U.S., NATO As Primary Threats](#), RFE/RL, 31 July 2022

Komal Khan, [NATO In Pakistan's Neighborhood – OpEd](#), Eurasia Review, 29 July 2022

[First Chair of the Military Committee to attend Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defence Conference](#), NATO News Release, 28 July 2022

Hamdan Khan, [NATO Bracing for a New Security Competition](#), Modern Diplomacy, 24 July 2022

James Pamment and Victoria Smith, [Attributing Information Influence Operations: Identifying those Responsible for Malicious Behaviour Online](#), NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, July 2022

David Hutt, [How European countries stand on 2% of GDP defence spending](#), Euro News, 22 July 2022

Hans Binnendijk and Timo S. Koster, [Now for the hard part: A guide to implementing NATO's new Strategic Concept](#), Atlantic Council, 22 July 2022

Melissa Shambach and Alex Gallo, [NATO's strategic awakening with China](#), The Hill, 22 July 2022

Rafael Loss, [Staying power: How the EU can support NATO in eastern Europe](#), ECFR, 21 July 2022

Timothy Perry, [An opening for NATO in the Arctic](#), The Hill, 21 July 2022

[Summit prepares ground for 'NATOisation of Europe' and continues collision course with China and high levels of military spending](#), NATO Watch Briefing No.96, 6 July 2022

On Finland and Sweden joining NATO

Finland and Sweden were invited to join NATO, after a [trilateral memorandum](#) with Turkey agreed on the eve of the NATO Madrid Summit assuaged Ankara's previous objections. The two Nordic countries will become NATO members after the Accession Protocol is ratified by all 30 member states. The invitation to Finland and Sweden represents a major geopolitical shift in Europe as the two countries move away from neutrality. However, ratification by Turkey is still by no means certain. The trilateral agreement could still falter on implementation, especially regarding Turkish extradition requests. To date, 19 NATO member states have ratified the decision.

In the United States, Rand Paul, a Republican senator from Kentucky is [delaying the vote](#) in the Senate after the House of Representatives

overwhelmingly approved a [resolution](#) supporting Finnish and Swedish membership in a 394-18 vote. The Senate is responsible for deciding on international agreements and requires a two-thirds majority vote for a measure to pass. The Senate had been expected to vote on the issue before their summer break, which begins on 4 August, but this now seems unlikely.

Hemant Adlakha, [Is 'NATO-ization' of Finland the end of 'Finlandization' in Europe?](#) Modern Diplomacy, 30 July 2022

[Montenegro becomes 20th member to ratify Finland's Nato accession](#), YLE News, 29 July 2022

[Turkey, Sweden, Finland NATO deal 'not an end but good start': Akar](#), Daily Sabah, 28 July 2022

Jens Petersson, [As Sweden gets ready for NATO, will its approach to nuclear weapons change?](#) Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 27 July 2022

[Turkey says Sweden and Finland not fulfilling NATO deal](#), Deutsche Welle, 27 July 2022

[Republican senator slows US approval of Finnish Nato bid](#), YLE News, 27 July 2022

Craig Hoyle, [Why NATO's ongoing expansion has Moscow rattled](#), Flight International, 25 July 2022

Walt Zlotow, [Sweden, Finland Joining NATO To Get 'Free Stuff'](#), Anti-War.com, 24 July 2022

[President okays bills to allow Finland, Sweden into Nato](#), The First News, 22 July 2022

[NATO: US Senate panel supports Finland, Sweden's accessions to alliance](#), EconoTimes, 22 July 2022

[Lithuania, Romania ratify Finland, Sweden's NATO accession](#), Euroactiv, 21 July 2022

For further details see:

[Murky trilateral agreement results in Turkey lifting objections to Finland and Sweden's NATO application](#), NATO Watch News Brief, 29 June 2022

[Should Finland and Sweden hold a referendum on NATO membership?](#) NATO Watch Briefing no. 93, 6 May 2022