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Topics:

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- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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- *THEME ANALYSIS: Who's next after the NATO summit in Vilnius (2023)?*



Photo: Russian soldiers in Rostov-on-Don

Source: Reuters

On August 7 this year, it was fifteen years since the Russian Federation's armed attack on Georgia. Fifteen years ago, at the Bucharest Summit, the North Atlantic Alliance denied granting the MAP to Ukraine and Georgia, which effectively unleashed the hands of the aggressor state. **Today, parts of Georgia and Ukraine are under Russian occupation, and NATO is repeating the mistakes of the past.**

At the Vilnius summit, Ukraine did not receive clear timeframes and conditions for its future accession to the Alliance. One of the arguments used to explain this decision is Russia's alleged readiness to create an "eternal war" to prevent Ukraine from joining the Alliance. It is therefore assumed that the absence of an invitation is the best solution for Ukraine itself. However, this argument is not viable. Russia is trying to gain regional dominance and return all the countries that were once part of the USSR to its sphere of influence. The aggressor state questions Ukrainian statehood and the existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation. Ukraine's struggle against Russia is existential and the state is looking for ways to strengthen its security. **NATO's decision would not be the reason for the continuation of the war. On the contrary, the Russian Federation would have received a**

signal that its war is futile and that it has no veto power in Ukraine-NATO relations.

However, this has not happened, and the North Atlantic Alliance has once again been reluctant to bring Ukraine closer to membership. The NATO summit showed that the Alliance is not ready for a direct confrontation with Russia.

After delivering an ultimatum to NATO demanding a return to the 1997 borders in December 2021, Russia attacked Ukraine. Hoping to subjugate a country of 40 million people and a nearly half-million-strong army, the Kremlin expected that in the near future, a reinforced Russian army would be on the borders of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and the Baltic states. From the point of view of the Russian leadership, the subsequent invasion of the Baltic states, which was practiced during the military strategic exercises "West-17" and "West-21," should have resulted in the fulfillment of the conditions that Russia had put forward to NATO. A year and a half has passed since then. The Russian army has suffered significant losses in Ukraine in both equipment and personnel. At the same time, the human resource of the aggressor state remains significant, as well as its military capabilities.

The desire for regional dominance has not disappeared, and the countries on NATO's eastern flank are still under the threat.

Russian missiles have already fallen on the territory of Poland and Romania, and the North Atlantic Alliance has chosen to ignore this. Similarly, freedom of navigation in the Black Sea has not existed since 2021. Avoiding conflict with Russia under any circumstances is a strategic mistake that can come at a high cost to NATO member states. **The joke that a NATO country will cease to be a NATO country once it is attacked by Russia is not really a joke.** After the Prigozhin rebellion, Russia moved the Wagner PMC forces to Belarus and then to the border with Poland. This caused considerable alarm in Vilnius and Warsaw. The relocation of Wagner's forces to the border with Poland is not the only step that reminded of the danger to the Eastern European country. On August 1, 2023, two Belarusian helicopters violated Polish airspace. These aircraft were participating in military exercises near the border. Poland responded by further strengthening the border, but neither Russia nor Belarus received a response for the airspace violation.

According to Ukraine's estimates, there are about 5,000 Wagner PMC fighters in Belarus.¹ These are capable units with extensive combat experience, which many soldiers in the armies of the North Atlantic Alliance countries do not have. According to Michał Kaminski, Vice Marshal of the Polish Senate, his country takes seriously the threat posed by the presence of Wagner mercenaries near the Polish border in Belarus. "No one in Poland excludes the possibility that in order to test NATO, so to speak, to test the Alliance's solidarity with Poland, with Eastern Europe, they may try to enter Poland. Most likely, it will be a kind of terrorist operation by the Wagner PMC rather than a full-scale invasion, as in the case of Ukraine."

In recent weeks, anti-Polish propaganda has been actively spread on Russian information resources. Vladimir Putin has personally questioned the territorial integrity of Poland, as he has done in his previous statements about Ukraine. The Russian dictator said on Friday, July 21, that Poland's western territories are a "gift from Stalin." According to him,

¹ У Білорусі перебуває понад 5 тисяч «вагнерівців» - Демченко, 30.07.2023,
URL: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3742145-u-bilorusi-perebuvaе-ponad-5-tisac-vagnerivciv-demchenko.html>

Poland received "significant lands in the West - the lands of Germany" thanks to the position of the USSR and Joseph Stalin personally. "The western territories of present-day Poland are Stalin's gift to the Poles. Our friends in Warsaw have forgotten about this, we will remind them,"² he said at a meeting of the Russian Security Council. The head of the State Duma Defense Committee, Andrei Kartapolov, in turn, said on Russian television that the Wagner PMC was sent to Belarus "not only and not so much" to train the Belarusian armed forces, but to take the Suwalki corridor if necessary. This scenario is quite likely. The Russian army will not immediately send its troops to occupy the Suwalki corridor or the Baltic states. This could be a provocation by Russian mercenaries. A provocation scenario is likely to be used to accuse Poland of aggression and further attack this neighboring country.

Russian troops pose a particular threat to the Baltic states, which, in the event of a Russian attack, would probably not have enough strength to stop the Russian occupation forces. The Russian leadership may be considering such steps to raise the stakes and further de-escalate on its own terms. Putin is not interested in starting a global, world war. However, expanding the theater of operations and drawing other countries in the region into the war may be seen by the Kremlin as a viable scenario.

According to YouGov polls, only one in ten Germans is ready to defend their homeland in the event of an armed attack. About 25% would be ready to leave the country in such a case.³ The question arises, how many Germans are ready to de-occupy, for example, Estonia? ***The United States of America lacks ammunition to meet the needs of the Armed Forces, while the country is preparing for the potential defense of Taiwan.*** At the same time, the fear of a Third World War in NATO countries is forcing some people to call for a halt to aid to Ukraine, even without the physical presence of member states' troops. Apparently, the average isolationist American who does not want to "provoke Putin" does not care whether Russia attacks Ukraine or Estonia, Lithuania, or Poland, countries he would not be able to show on a map. **If Putin attacks Eastern European allies, the war has the prospect of a faster ending in peace, but on Russia's terms.** This could include a return to the 1997 NATO borders, the lifting of sanctions against Russia, guarantees of personal security for the Russian leadership, and the legalization of the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, and four Ukrainian regions. **The societies of NATO countries are not ready to defend their bloc, and the leaderships of these countries have not yet fully realized the Russian threat.**

The NATO summit's decision not to define a clear timeline for Ukraine's accession demonstrated **that Russia's veto power in Ukraine's relations with the Alliance remains intact.** NATO has demonstrated a desire to avoid confrontation with Russia, which the aggressor perceives as weakness. The results of this can already be seen in practice, as Russia is stepping up its aggressive actions against the Alliance and redeploying fighters from the terrorist Wagner PMC to the border with Poland. **The coming months may be difficult for Poland and the Baltic states, which will face a real threat to their borders and territorial integrity.**

² Путін заявив, що західні землі Польщі - "подарунок Сталіна", 21.07.2023,
URL: <https://www.dw.com/uk/putin-zaaviv-so-zahidni-teritorii-polsi-podarunok-stalina/a-66310601>

³ One year on: European and American attitudes to the war in Ukraine, 24.02.2023,
URL: <https://today.yougov.com/topics/international/articles-reports/2023/02/24/one-year-european-and-american-attitudes-war-ukrai>

- *THEME ANALYSIS: Russia is moving to total war against Ukraine and its main manifestations*



*Photo: Consequences of Russian attack on Odesa
Source: WP*

The withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the Black Sea Grain Initiative marked a change in the tactics of the aggressor state in the war against Ukraine. The change is based on the intention to destroy Ukraine's economy and its infrastructure through air strikes and a complete naval blockade. After withdrawing from the initiative, Russia began to launch regular strikes against Odesa region, destroying port infrastructure, including the one used for grain storage and export, as well as residential buildings, including those belonging to the UNESCO cultural heritage. The aggressor state has also unlawfully declared that all commercial vessels traveling through the Black Sea to Ukrainian ports will be considered military targets.

In their attacks on Ukrainian ports and cities in Odesa region, the Russians use almost all the means at their disposal: Iranian Shahed drones, Kalibr and Iskander-K cruise missiles, Iskander-M ballistic missiles, anti-ship supersonic Oniks and X-22 missiles. Currently, Ukraine does not have sufficient capabilities to effectively repel all Russian attacks.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, 29 cultural heritage monuments of national and local significance were damaged in the night shelling of Odesa on July 23. On the night of August 2, a Russian strike in Izmail damaged at least 10 residential buildings, 15 apartments, a hotel and the office of the Ukrainian Danube Shipping Company. According to the Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine, Oleksandr Kubrakov, Russians struck at warehouses and grain elevators, damaging almost 40,000 tons of grain that was supposed to be transported to Africa, China, and Israel. The port of Izmail suffered the most damage. In total, **in nine days from late July to early August, the Russian Armed Forces attacked 26 separate port facilities in Ukraine. Five ships were shelled, and 180,000 tons of grain were damaged or destroyed.**

The attacks on Ukrainian Black Sea ports have a serious impact on Ukraine's economy, which is currently critically dependent on exports, as this is the source of foreign exchange earnings, and before the war, ports accounted for 2/3 of the country's exports. At the same time, Russian tactics affect not only Ukraine but also other countries. Immediately after the attack, global food prices rose. Wheat prices on the Chicago Board of Trade, according to Reuters, jumped by 6.5%. Kenya predicts that grain prices for the country will double after Russia withdraws from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Thus, countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia are also paying the price for Russian aggression. At the same time, most states of the so-called "Global South" are still trying to remain neutral in Russia's war against Ukraine. At the Russia-Africa summit, Cyril Ramaphosa noted that he respected Russia's decision to provide grain to a number of African countries, but emphasized that this was not the main task of the African states that came to the forum. The Russian president was urged to return to the grain deal. However, given that African states demonstratively continue to cooperate with the aggressor country, do not impose sanctions and develop bilateral cooperation, the calls of the South African president are unlikely to have any effect on the Russian dictator.

Even UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will not be able to change the behavior of the Russian Federation. Last month, the UN condemned the transfer of cluster munitions to Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war, the Russian Federation has been using this type of ammunition against Ukrainian cities, both against soldiers and civilians. With the reduction of conventional ammunition, Ukraine's ability to defend itself is diminishing. **The UN did not call for more weapons to be provided to Ukraine to implement Article 51 of the UN Charter, or at least for American ATACMS missiles and German Taurus missiles to be delivered instead of cluster munitions. Instead, the institution is actually calling for limiting Ukraine's defense capabilities and ability to regain territory.** In the case of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the role of the United Nations was to try to get Russia back on board by mediating a proposal to allow Russia to regain access to SWIFT. In other words, ***the UN was working to lift sanctions against the aggressor and trying to prevent Ukraine from being provided with weapons.***

In the face of the UN's incapacity and playing along with the aggressor, the North Atlantic Alliance might ensure freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. NATO has sufficient forces and capabilities to do so. However, **the Alliance continues to avoid confrontation with Russia at all costs.** A possible way to restore freedom of navigation was described by

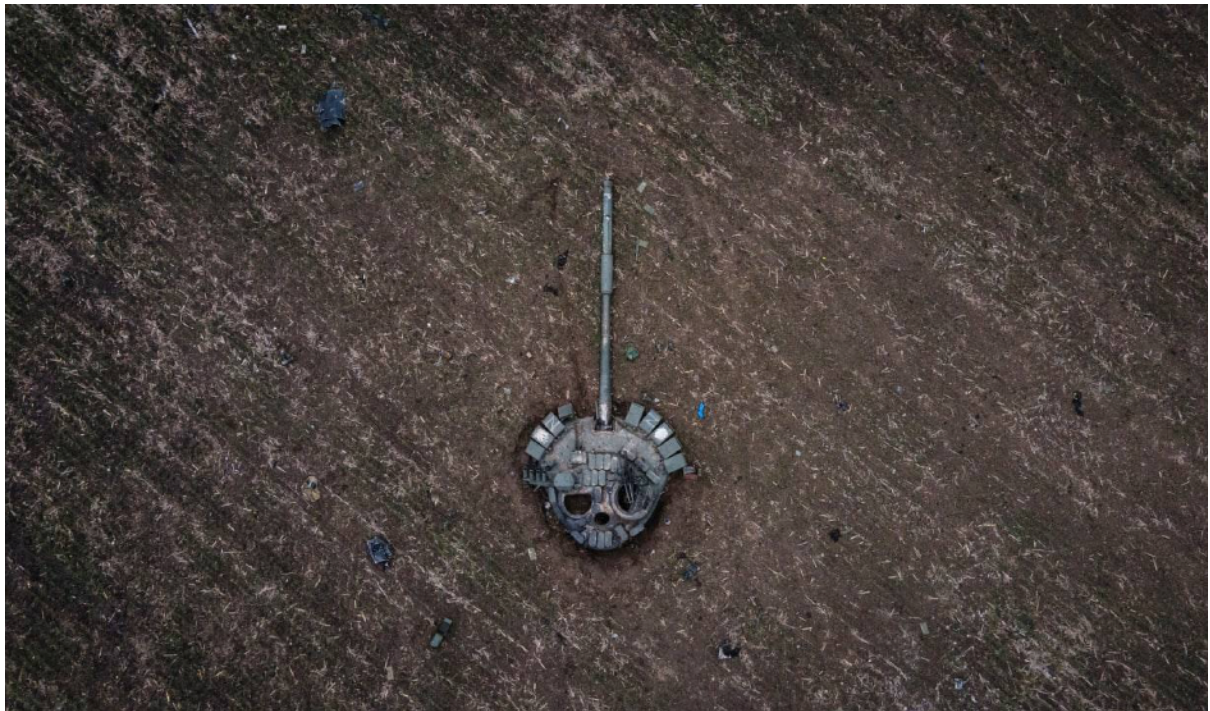
Daniel Szeligowski, Coordinator of the Eastern Europe Program at the Polish Institute of International Affairs.¹ The scholar proposed the creation of a coalition of concerned countries to protect merchant ships sailing to and from Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea. As an example, he mentions the numerous missions initiated unilaterally by the United States in the Persian Gulf during the "tanker war." Szeligowski also proposes a number of measures, including information campaigns aimed at the "Global South," strengthening Ukraine's air defense system, and developing a mechanism for international insurance of commercial vessels traveling to or from Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea and Danube.²

So far, **the international community's response to Russia's naval blockade of Ukraine has been weak.** This sets a dangerous precedent for other potential aggressors, such as China and Iran. The US and its partner countries are interested in free navigation in the Black Sea, but declarations are not enough. For Ukraine, the naval blockade threatens the functioning of the economy. This is one of the components of Russia's approach to total war. In August, Vladimir Putin signed a law raising the conscription age to 30. The law will come into force on January 1, 2024. This indicates that Russia is ready to further mobilize human resources and continue to fight against Ukraine. At the same time, the aggressor country will keep destroying Ukraine's economy and infrastructure and increasing weapons production on its own territory. Russia's military-industrial complex is adapting to functioning without Western components, and the country is acquiring some of the necessary technologies through third countries. In particular, these countries may include China, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Georgia, the United Arab Emirates, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

Russia has not abandoned its goal of occupying the territory of Ukraine. *War fatigue may prompt international partners to reduce their support for Ukraine and push the state to negotiate.* However, Russia's concessions will lead to the continuation of the conflict, as Russia is adapting to new conditions and will continue the war if there is no pressure on the aggressor state, no resistance to the maritime blockade and in case of weakening sanctions regime. **Russia will raise the stakes until it gets what it wants. Therefore, the only possible response is to strengthen Ukraine's capabilities and restore the power of international law to defeat Russia in Ukraine.**

¹ Daniel Szeligowski Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, 10.08.2023,
URL: <https://www.pism.pl/publications/options-for-securing-free-trade-navigation-in-the-black-sea>

² Обстріл Ізмаїла: ЗМІ розповіли про мету росіян, 02.08.2023,
URL: <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2023/08/02/novyna/bezpeka/obstril-izmayila-zmi-rozpovily-pro-metu-rosiyan>



Source: Army FM

■ *Changes at the front*

In the Kupyansk and Lyman directions, the Ukrainian Defense Forces continue to curb the Russian offensive.

In the Berdiansk direction, fighting continues near Pryiutne and for Urozhayne.

In the Bakhmut direction, fighting continues along the Klishchiyivka-Kurdyumivka line.

In the Avdiivka direction, Russian occupation forces are trying to advance from Krutka Balka.

In the Zaporizhzhia direction, fighting continues near Robotyne and Verbove.

Ukrainian troops are striking at the occupation forces' warehouses and logistics in the south, in particular, two key road bridges on the land lines connecting the occupied Crimea and the occupied Kherson region - the Chongar and Henichesk bridges.

■ *Military assistance*

In the second half of July, it became known the following weapons had been transferred to Ukraine:

From Slovakia:

-2 Zuzanna self-propelled artillery systems;

From Spain:

-Ten M113 armored personnel carriers;

-Ten military trucks;

-One armored multipurpose vehicle;

-Three civilian ambulances;

-One armored vehicle for transfer to military hospitals;

-one armored civilian ambulance for the border guard service;

From Germany:

-Leopard 1A5 tanks;

-artillery shells

-vehicles and radars;

-20 MG3 machine guns to arm Leopard 2 tanks;

-Marder armored personnel carriers;

-Pionierpanzer Dachs engineering vehicles;

-1,305 155-mm artillery shells;

-2,064 smoke shells;

-one bridge system;

-12 trailers;

-10 ground surveillance radars

-four protected vehicles;

-16 Zetros trucks;

-100 thousand individual first aid kits;

-80 RQ-35 HEIDRUN military reconnaissance drones

-13 Vector drones;

-10 Bandvagn 20 tracked all-terrain vehicles;

-six Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft systems and more than 15 thousand rounds of ammunition.

It also became known that during the full-scale invasion, the United Kingdom government transferred about 100 Harpoon anti-ship missiles in the Block 1C modification. Sweden and France signed bilateral agreements with Ukraine on defense procurement. The United States also provided another package of military aid. It includes: 4 advanced surface-to-air missile systems (NASAMS) and ammunition; 152-mm artillery rounds; demining equipment; tube-launched, optical-tracking and guided missiles (TOW); Switchblade and Phoenix Ghost unmanned aerial systems; and precision aerial munitions; UAV countermeasures and electronic warfare detection equipment; 150 fuel trucks; 115 tactical vehicles for towing and transporting equipment; 50 tactical vehicles for evacuating equipment; equipment for protecting ports and harbors; tactical secure communication systems; additional ammunition for Patriot and NASAMS air defense systems; man-portable

air defense systems Stinger; shells for M142 HIMARS missile systems; 155-mm artillery shells; 105-mm artillery shells; 120-mm mortar shells; 60-mm mortar shells; 32 Stryker armored personnel carriers; TOW anti-tank missiles; Javelin anti-tank missiles; Hornet unmanned aerial systems; Hydra-70 aircraft missiles; tactical air navigation systems; explosive munitions for overcoming obstacles; more than 28 million rounds of small arms ammunition; night vision and thermal imaging systems; in addition, the United States transferred M864 cluster munitions. Bulgaria, in turn, announced the transfer of 100 armored personnel carriers. Berlin and Warsaw agreed to repair Leopard tanks for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The first two tanks have already arrived at a Polish company for maintenance.

Source: *Mil.ua*

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

The Struggle for Africa

In July of this year, the Russia-Africa summit was held in St. Petersburg. Contrary to many assessments of the event's failure and evidence of Russia's diplomatic isolation, this statement is not entirely accurate. ***The aggressor country, in fact, continues to maintain a presence on other continents and develop relations with other states.*** This fact, in turn, establishes the need to increase diplomatic pressure on Russia and intensify work with the countries of the Global South.

Forty-nine representatives of African countries attended the summit in St. Petersburg. 21 delegations were represented at the level of the head of state or government. Others were represented at the level of foreign ministers, ministers and ambassadors. Liberia, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Botswana did not participate in the event. Last year, 45 African countries were represented at the highest level.¹ This year, this figure has dropped. Probably, the leaders of these states want to distance themselves from Vladimir Putin in order to maintain better relations with the states of Europe and the United States. However, ***the vast majority of them do not condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine.*** refrain from criticizing Russia on international platforms and hope for further development of relations with the aggressor country.

Africa has great importance for Russia. The countries of the continent have many resources and the expansion of Russian influence on the African continent will allow Russia to remain a global player. Currently, the Russian military contingent from the Wagner Group operates in several African countries. Wagner is most active in the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Mali and Sudan. There is a possibility that these militants will soon replace

¹ "Росія запропонувала африканським країнам менше зерна, ніж вона краде в Україні". Експерти – про підсумки саміту Росія-Африка, 28.07.2023, URL: <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/pidsumky-sammitu-rosija-afryka/7202423.html>

the French contingent in Niger, a country that has only recently been a reliable partner of liberal democracies.

If the military coup in Niger is finalized, Russia will gain another geopolitical victory and strengthen its position in the Sahel region. ***The struggle between democracies and autocracies, which Joe Biden spoke about, is not currently developing in the best way.*** While the United States has managed to consolidate democracies it has allied relations with, autocracies outside this space are strengthening their positions. The United States and its partners need to strengthen their presence in Asia, Latin America, and Asia. Liberal democracies need to review their relations with Africa. In particular, in recent years, African societies have displayed a growing resentment toward the United States and Europe. At the same time, the openly racist, imperialist state Russia exploits the artificial image of a fighter for equality and against imperialism. Russia is gradually strengthening its presence in Africa, which gives it access to the continent's resources and increases its geopolitical weight. African states are important economic partners and a significant part of the votes in the United Nations. Developing relations with them is of strategic importance.

That is why the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba has already made 3 trips to Africa. Ukraine aims to open approximately ten embassies in African countries. However, the question arises as to the possibilities of financing new foreign diplomatic missions and the potential for their effectiveness. In its cooperation with African countries, Ukraine should coordinate its efforts with partner countries, in particular with Eastern European states. At the same time, the EU and the United States should reconsider their approaches to developing their predictable relations with Africa. The establishment of new cultural centers and sources of information for African countries' citizens is needed. Otherwise, in the next ten years, the Russian contingent will appear in other African states, and Russia, a "fighter against imperialism" seeking to colonize neighboring states, will push competitors off the continent.