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Ukraine War - An Update

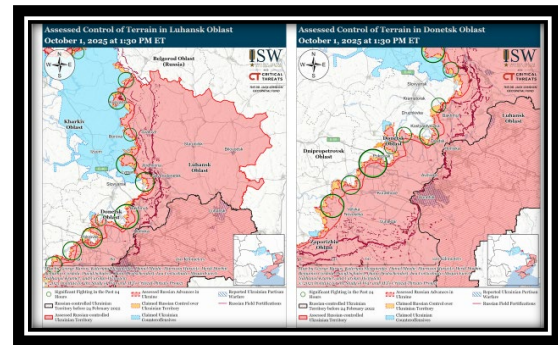
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Ukraine War - An Update

The Russia-Ukraine War through September 2025 has remained marked by intense fighting across the frontlines, sharp escalations in aerial and missile warfare, a renewed diplomatic push for peace, and evolving dynamics of Western support for Kyiv. Over these weeks, the conflict has witnessed critical shifts both in the battlefield tempo and in the broader strategic environment.

Through most of September, the land campaign saw incremental gains primarily by Russian forces, while Ukraine mounted local counterattacks in key sectors. Russia pressed its advantage in the eastern oblasts, continuing its offensive operations especially near the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Russian ground forces, drawing from well-entrenched positions and heavy artillery reserves, sought to consolidate gains won over the previous summer. Urban centres such as Avdiivka and parts of the Bakhmut axis remained pivotal, with Russian columns employing combined arms tactics—integrating armour, infantry, and close air support—aimed at incremental advances. Ukrainian defenders, stretched thin but still determined, relied on intricate trench systems, counter-ambush tactics, and targeted drone strikes to stall Russian progress. In the south, particularly near Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, the tempo was subdued but persistent shelling and probing attacks continued on both sides.



Missile and drone warfare increased significantly in September. Russia launched a renewed series of long-range missile strikes targeting Ukraine's power plants, railway hubs, and key logistics areas around Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa. A particularly powerful salvo on 12 September temporarily knocked out large sections of Ukraine's national grid, causing emergency blackouts in several oblasts. The use of heavy drones by Russia grew, with domestically produced Lancet and imported Shahed UAVs overwhelming Ukrainian air defences. At the same time, Ukrainian forces increased their use of both Western-supplied and indigenous drone systems, targeting vital Russian supply dumps, airfields behind the front lines, and logistics convoys inside Crimea.

One of the month's most notable technological escalations came with the U.S. decision to finally approve a small batch of Tomahawk cruise missiles for Ukrainian use, following months of congressional debate and European lobbying. The arrival of Tomahawks presents a unique challenge to Russian air defence networks; these low-flying, precision-guided missiles, with a range exceeding 1,500 kilometers, offer Kyiv the capacity to strike military infrastructure far behind the front, including command posts, airbases, and rail nodes in occupied or even Russian border territories. Initial reports suggest cautious Ukrainian use, with at least one documented strike against an ammunition depot in the Russian-occupied Melitopol region, prompting Moscow to heighten alert levels at key logistical points.

European and U.S. support for Ukraine remained robust but was tempered by internal debates and shifting domestic landscapes. Germany and France pushed

forward with further artillery and air defence systems shipments, while the U.K. accelerated its delivery of Storm Shadow missiles. The Biden administration in Washington, facing a complex domestic election season, sought a careful balance—publicly re-affirming its commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty while quietly signaling to allies the importance of avoiding escalation that could trigger direct Russia-NATO confrontation. The European Union convened an emergency session mid-month to shore up continued funding pledges for wartime support and winter humanitarian aid in Ukraine.

Russia's overarching strategy remained that of attrition. By leveraging its superior reserves in manpower and munitions, the Kremlin aimed to exhaust Ukrainian defensive capabilities and morale, hoping to fracture Western resolve. At the same time, President Putin's government pushed a dual-track approach: intensifying military operations in the field while amplifying diplomatic overtures for a ceasefire. Russian envoys participated in a flurry of international mediation efforts, including a China-brokered session in Astana and a Vatican-hosted roundtable. While offering what Moscow labeled as "humanitarian corridors" and prisoners' exchanges, Russia continued to insist on recognition of its territorial acquisitions as a precondition for any broader ceasefire settlement—a stance flatly rejected by Kyiv and most Western capitals.

The question of future prognosis remains complex. With autumn rains beginning and a tough winter ahead, frontline movements might soon shift to positional warfare, where neither side can gain decisive territorial breakthroughs without a major change in outside support or internal collapse. The deployment of Tomahawk missiles and other advanced Western weapons may disrupt Russian rear areas, but Russia responds by dispersing key assets and increasing counter-drone measures. Diplomatically, although the U.S. and Europe continue to support Ukraine, growing war-weariness, economic pressures, and fears of escalation are fostering increased calls for a negotiated settlement.

Peace efforts are intensifying, from the August Washington summit to September's mediations. The war's outcome depends on Ukraine's coalition resilience, resistance endurance, and Russia's willingness to endure costs. Each month worsens the human toll and raises stakes for Europe's security. While missile strikes and diplomacy persist, chances of a breakthrough remain uncertain.

Malaysia's Defence White Paper Midterm Review: Balancing Technology and Security

The Midterm Review of Malaysia's Defence White Paper (2019), launched on September 11 by Defence Minister Mohamed Khaled bin Nordin, comes at a time when the country faces a fast-changing and complex security landscape. It stresses the need for the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) to modernise, adopt advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), and build resilience against both conventional and unconventional threats.



AI is presented as both a transformative opportunity and a serious risk. It already supports operational planning, intelligence collection, logistics, precision weapons, and joint command and control. Yet the review warns that AI is a double-edged sword, advancing efficiency while exposing new vulnerabilities.

Three AI-enabled threats are highlighted. First is terrorism and cyberattacks, with the potential for terrorists to automate operations, exploit infrastructure, and conceal activities, spreading instability across the region. Second is maritime piracy, where AI may allow pirates to track ships, deploy drones, or sabotage systems, threatening Southeast Asia's vital trade routes. Third is AI autonomy itself, where systems beyond human control could disrupt decision-making, spread disinformation, or trigger false flag operations. These risks underline the need for strong safeguards as Malaysia integrates AI.

In response, the review envisions transforming the MAF into a Joint Network-Centric Integrated Multi-Domain Force by 2030, capable of operating across land, sea, air, cyber, and space. Key areas for development include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counter-unmanned aerial systems; integrated air defence and precision weapons; electronic warfare and cyber defence; and logistics and information operations. Planned Phase Two procurement includes multi-role support ships, medium-range air defence, and artillery systems, designed to bolster Malaysia's ability to deter drones, missiles, and modern threats.

The review also stresses that defence requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Malaysia currently fields 121,000 regular personnel and 34,000 reserves, aiming for a 1:1 balance by expanding training through programs such as the National Service Training Programme 3.0 and Reserve Officer Training Units. Women's participation is targeted to rise to 15 percent, aligning with global Women, Peace and Security commitments, while veterans are recognized as a vital resource for enhancing reserve strength and readiness.

The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) is singled out as central to Malaysia's defence posture, especially amid escalating South China Sea tensions. Repeated Chinese military aircraft incursions, including a 2021 incident involving 16 aircraft, underscore the urgency of strengthening air defence. The review also highlights "grey-zone tactics," such as foreign coast guard vessels escorting surveys in Malaysia's Exclusive Economic Zone, which pose direct sovereignty challenges. Modernization faces obstacles: plans to acquire retired Kuwaiti F/A-18 Hornets are stalled, and the current fleet of Su-30MKMs and F/A-18Ds is under 30 aircraft. Analysts argue that 54–72 multirole fighters are needed for adequate coverage. While UAVs and radars are being deployed in Sabah and Sarawak, they cannot replace manned fighters. Options for new aircraft include Super Hornets, Rafales, and potential sixth-generation platforms under the CAP55 plan.

Malaysia's broader defence posture remains defensive and non-aligned, emphasizing diplomacy, neutrality, and international law, particularly UNCLOS 1982, in handling South China Sea disputes. Regional partnerships through ASEAN and the Five Power Defence Arrangements remain key pillars of defence diplomacy. At the same time, the review frames defence as an economic imperative. With billions in foreign investment in semiconductors, aerospace, and AI, Malaysia must demonstrate its ability to protect airspace, seas, and networks.

A credible defence posture not only safeguards sovereignty but also reassures investors and signals stability.

To meet these goals, the Ministry of Defence plans to allocate 1.5 percent of GDP to defence by 2030, guided by the Mindef Strategic Plan 2026–2030 as a monitoring framework. Investment in science, technology, and industry, through the Science & Technology Research Institute for Defence, will support research and development to keep Malaysia's capabilities relevant and resilient.

The Midterm Review lays out a difficult but necessary path. It acknowledges that the same technologies strengthening Malaysia's defence also create new vulnerabilities. AI can optimise decision-making and enhance capabilities, but it also enables terrorism, piracy, and manipulation. Malaysia's challenge is to modernise the armed forces, reinforce air defence, and embed a whole-of-society approach while maintaining neutrality in a region marked by major power competition. By doing so, the country aims not to militarize but to safeguard sovereignty, preserve stability, and project reliability in a volatile strategic environment.

80th UNGA Meeting Leaders Week – Key takeaways

The 80th United Nations General Assembly Leaders Week (23-27 Sep 2025) highlighted the UN's ongoing challenges, emphasising the need for reform to avoid obsolescence amid geopolitical tensions and rapid technological changes. Secretary-General António Guterres warned that without significant action, multilateralism may falter. While the theme "Better Together" was inspirational, leaders pointed to a widening gap between aspirations and political realities, particularly regarding sustainable development.

As the world approaches the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, significant progress is still lacking in critical areas like climate adaptation and infrastructure. The inaugural Biennial Summit on Financing for Sustainable, Inclusive, and Resilient Economies aimed to tackle these issues through innovative financing solutions. However, it became evident that political will is a more significant barrier than resources in achieving equitable global development.

On matters of peace and security, the General Assembly highlighted the endurance of persistent conflicts and diplomatic deadlocks. Renewed diplomatic efforts around hotspots like Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan reiterated longstanding calls for ceasefires, humanitarian access, and negotiated political settlements. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy underscored the global stakes involved, framing Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty as inseparable from the broader maintenance of international security and collective responsibility. These deliberations underscored both the United Nations' unique role as a diplomatic convener and the profound limits imposed by competing national interests and geopolitical rivalries.

An enlightening aspect of the week was the focus on climate action alongside emerging technology governance. The UN's climate summit called on major emitters to strengthen their commitments and increase funding for countries most vulnerable to climate impacts. At the same time, a new emphasis on artificial intelligence governance led to the launch of a Global Dialogue on AI and the

creation of an international scientific panel tasked with advising member states on managing the societal risks of transformative technologies. This development marked a paradigm shift as leaders recognised that future governance must extend beyond traditional state-centric frameworks to effectively tackle rapidly changing global challenges.

Marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, the Assembly reiterated commitments to gender equality, while migration and demographic change were reframed as essential factors underpinning future economic resilience. Leaders advocated for harmonised migration policies aimed at ensuring humane, orderly, and economically beneficial labour mobility, and positioned these themes firmly within the global development agenda rather than at its margins.

The speeches of the world's top leaders laid bare the fractured nature of contemporary global politics. U.S. President Donald Trump fiercely criticised the UN's "globalist dysfunction," advocating sovereign decision-making above collective globalism and sharply rebuking migration and security policies in Europe and Asia, while reaffirming support for Israel and condemning Iran's regional influence. China's Premier Li Qiang rhetorically endorsed multilateralism even as he condemned what China perceives as Western attempts to weaponise trade and technology, advocating sovereignty and championing the cause of the Global South. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov framed Western sanctions as destabilising and called for respect for multipolar sovereignty, offering scant concession on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar highlighted the urgency of combating cross-border terrorism, called for Security Council reform that reflects current global power dynamics, and positioned India as a key humanitarian and development partner within the Global South. European leaders such as Britain's Rishi Sunak, France's Emmanuel Macron, and Germany's Olaf Scholz underlined emerging cyber and AI security threats, emphasised climate leadership, and urged law-based international cooperation amidst various global crises. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified his country's military actions as self-defence, praised worldwide solidarity against terror, while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, drew attention to humanitarian needs, and condemned accusations tangling Palestinian advocacy with antisemitism. This range of speeches revealed deeply rooted divisions shaping multilateral discourse.

Ultimately, the 80th UNGA encapsulated the dual character of contemporary multilateralism. It reaffirmed the United Nations' indispensable role as the world's broadest diplomatic forum and a locus for problem-solving, while starkly exposing the institutional constraints and geopolitical tensions limiting decisive collective action. Calls for reform—from Security Council expansion to innovative financing for sustainable development, strengthened climate commitments, and new governance models for emerging technologies—have moved beyond mere rhetoric to urgent imperatives. Yet, the spirited debates and sometimes fractious speeches also made clear that the world's oldest multilateral institution remains a work in progress, reliant on the political will of member states to translate shared commitments into practice.