Ukraine: How to Hold the Line

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Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

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Principal Findings

What's new? The spring of 2024 finds Ukraine on the back foot as Russian troops advance in the east. After months of delay, the U.S. Congress authorised much-needed aid. But to reach a successful outcome, Kyiv and its partners must apply the past year's difficult lessons in planning for a long war.

Why does it matter? A victory for Moscow would leave Kyiv facing political subjugation and a larger-than-pre-invasion Russian army close to NATO's borders. The resulting costs and risks, including the prospect that the Kremlin might test its luck beyond Ukraine, would be substantial.

What should be done? The best hope for meaningful diplomacy and sustainable peace is for Kyiv to hold the line against Moscow. Ukraine should better mobilise and train front-line troops while bolstering defensive positions. Its Western partners should increase arms production and deliveries, with Europe preparing to compensate if a divided U.S. steps back.

Executive Summary

The spring of 2024 has Ukraine and its supporters looking back at a frustrating 2023 and ahead at more grinding war. The counteroffensive Ukraine began in the summer of 2023 ended with the front line largely unchanged and Kyiv facing shortages of ammunition, soldiers and morale. Russia, meanwhile, spent 2023 solidifying a war economy as well as shipping large numbers of fighters and weapons to the front. Early in 2024, it began gaining territory. April brought a reprieve to Ukraine when, after months of infighting, the U.S. Congress approved a nearly $61 billion aid package. Meanwhile, in the shadow of a real risk of catastrophic (potentially even nuclear) confrontation between Russia and Ukraine's NATO backers, both Kyiv and Moscow aim to outlast the other, with each hoping that its adversary will offer major concessions in exchange for peace. To stop Russia's immediate momentum and ultimately withstand its assault – an outcome that would serve European stability – Ukraine and its Western friends must learn the lessons of 2023 as they plan for and, in Kyiv's case, fight a long war.

Ukraine's efforts to repel Russian aggression have suffered significant setbacks over the past year. In the period following Russia's all-out invasion on 24 February 2022, Ukraine showed remarkable resiliency in pushing back – thwarting the Russian move on Kyiv, which aimed to decapitate the Ukrainian leadership and subordinate the country to Moscow's designs. Russia was shockingly unprepared for what it had undertaken, leading to speculation that Ukraine might be able to drive Russian forces entirely from its territory and inspiring high hopes for what a 2023 counteroffensive could accomplish. But as military brass in both Kyiv and Washington had forewarned, that operation turned out to be much more challenging than the optimists thought. Ukrainian soldiers encountered dug-in Russian troops protected by drones, attack helicopters and landmines. Months of bloody fighting produced scant territorial gains while depleting the Ukrainian side's strength, arms and morale.

Things then went from bad to worse. As 2023 gave way to 2024, Russia went on the offensive, beginning to gain territory, including the strategic town of Avdiivka, and positioning itself for further slow, hard-fought gains in Ukraine's east. Ukrainians began to worry that Moscow could advance in the Kharkhiv region, where Ukraine had recaptured swathes of land from Russian hands in 2022. With the U.S. announcing in January that deliveries of arms and materiel could not continue because of Congressional inaction, Ukraine found itself increasingly outgunned. Since April, U.S. aid has begun to flow again, but there is catching up to do. Meanwhile, although the Ukrainian military can point to success stories – mainly in the realm of asymmetric operations against Russian assets in and around the Black Sea, which Ukraine has largely been able to reopen to its shipping – officers cannot disguise the reality that Kyiv is now losing ground, including, as of mid-May, in Kharkiv.

A big reason for the reversal of Ukraine's fortunes was Russia's own resiliency, and corresponding capacity to bounce back from its 2022 losses, while withstanding the pressure that the West brought to bear with economic sanctions. Moscow has benefited from high energy prices and prudent financial management; the willingness of many states to skirt sanctions and trade with it nonetheless; the successful redirec-

tion of its domestic industry to serve a war economy; and a wide-ranging effort to acquire weaponry from places like Iran and North Korea.

At the same time, 2023 underscored significant weaknesses in the hand that Kyiv is playing. One is the contingent nature of the Western support upon which it is fundamentally reliant. Although Europe's leaders seem solidly behind Ukraine's defence (not surprisingly, given the implications for continental security), political polarisation makes the U.S. a less dependable partner, not least because former President – and current presidential candidate – Donald Trump appears to be deeply sceptical about U.S. support for Kyiv. If the U.S. cuts back its assistance, Europe will need to fill the gaps. While it is ramping up its capacity to do so, it still has quite a distance to travel. Moreover, Western leaders face tough questions about what kinds of weapons to give Ukraine, with what sorts of caveats, as they both seek to enable battlefield success while avoiding dangerous escalation with a Russia that has threatened and (according to some accounts) internally discussed the possibility of using nuclear weapons as the war continues.

On the home front as well, Ukraine faces big challenges. Overmatched by Russia's sheer size, it must keep mobilising more front-line troops and give them the training they need to go confidently into battle – something with which it has struggled to date. While outside supporters supply ample training, it is insufficiently calibrated to battlefield realities. A feeling that troops are unprepared for what awaits corrodes morale and contributes to prospective conscripts desperately trying to avoid service. More broadly, neither the military nor civilian authorities near the front seem to have adequately planned for the moments when they will find themselves on the back foot during a long war.

But while Ukraine does not have the wind at its back, it is far from defeated. The challenge in the coming period will be to slow Russian advances to an eventual halt and then hold the line. For their part, European states will need to accelerate work to adapt their defence industries to produce for Ukraine in the near term and for themselves in the long term. That means overcoming supply chain bottlenecks, coordinating and putting more money into defence procurement, and sorting out the challenges of collective action, such that frustration over some countries doing more and others less does not undermine the broader effort. Although one lesson of 2023 is that ramping up defence production is easier said than done, firms are off to a solid start: one German company will nearly double production in the coming years, and artillery manufacturing in Europe looks set to be a growth industry.

All the same, getting Ukraine the advanced weaponry it seeks and, in all likelihood, needs will require its backers to walk a careful line. As in the past, the best approach will likely involve continuing to slowly scale up their assistance in kind as well as quantity, although they should improve their internal coordination of this strategy to mitigate delays from deliberation to delivery. Such gradual increases, such that the U.S. is now providing Ukraine with longer-range missiles it would not have considered sending even a few months ago, has proven an effective way to shift Russian perceptions of the threat that aid poses to Moscow. This approach will always involve risk, but experience to date indicates that there is no better way to minimise it.

Kyiv itself will need to ensure that it has the trained personnel it needs to use the weapons provided and a sustainable strategy for the long term. Its partners can help

with training, but it is up to the Ukrainians to define their needs and to take stock of how to fix a system that has put perhaps a million people in uniform but struggles to get enough to the front to hold positions. Revamping training to ensure that people are not sent to the front unprepared will help. So, too, will more transparency about rotations and demobilisation as well as better outreach to soldiers' and veterans' families. Meanwhile, both military and civilian authorities should prepare for a frequently shifting front line and the tactical, humanitarian and political implications thereof. That means not just building defences and continuing asymmetrical strikes on Russian targets but also putting in place adaptable plans for evacuations.

If Ukraine and its backers do not move fast to fix the problems, Kyiv may have little choice but to strike a deal on Russia's terms. While such a deal might bring an end to fighting in the near term, it will do so at tremendous cost not just to Ukraine, but also to European security, increasing the risk of additional bloodshed for years to come. If they can hold the line, however, they stand a chance of arriving at a reasonable agreement with Moscow that preserves Ukraine's security and autonomy, while allowing European governments to begin to put in place arrangements that help make the continent more stable over the long haul.

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I. Introduction

If the first year of full-scale war in Ukraine was one of tectonic shifts, the second revealed a more gruelling reality that has left Kyiv struggling. After Russia's multi-front invasion in February 2022, Ukraine surprised observers with its resiliency, while Russia's poor preparation defied expectations of a powerful Russian military machine. Russia failed in its paramount objective – to quickly remove Ukraine's political leadership and replace them with people beholden to Moscow. In the autumn of 2022, after Kyiv recaptured substantial territory in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions that Moscow had occupied in the early days of its campaign, the rosiest scenarios had Ukrainian victory in sight.[1]

2023 was a very different year. Hopes that Ukraine might mount a counteroffensive capable of retaking more territory, including breaking the land bridge connecting Russia through south-eastern Ukraine to Crimea, were soon dashed. Ukraine's troops had trouble piercing Russia's formidable defensive lines, spurring recriminations in Kyiv that echoed debates between Ukraine and its backers preceding the counteroffensive. Some among Ukraine's supporters voiced concerns that Kyiv had begun the offensive too late; that it misallocated forces along the front line; and that it failed to strike boldly enough in the south.[2] The U.S., which at least for the present is Kyiv's key arms supplier, struggled to overcome domestic political roadblocks that slowed crucial military aid. As 2024 dawned, it seemed that Russia's much larger population, productive capacity and enduring trade relations might give Moscow a decisive battlefield edge.

Washington threw Kyiv something of a lifeline in April. The U.S. House of Representatives – the lower chamber of the U.S. legislature – overcame internal divisions to approve a $61 billion aid package for Ukraine and the Biden administration rushed to move materiel out the door. It announced a first $1 billion tranche of assistance and teed up rapid deliveries of ammunition, air defence munitions and armoured vehicles

[1] Shashank Joshi, "Three scenarios for how the war in Ukraine could play out", *The Economist*, 14 November 2022.

[2] In the run-up to the counteroffensive, some Western military planners disagreed with Ukraine's decision to send its most experienced units east to Bakhmut – dubbed the "meat grinder" by the late Wagner Group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose fighters were assaulting the city. Post on Prigozhin's Telegram channel, 10:44am, 25 November 2022. They had doubts about Bakhmut's strategic value, saying the crack troops were better deployed to the south. The longer Ukraine put off the counteroffensive, the more concerns grew among top brass in Kyiv and the West. Every day of delay was one more for Russian troops to dig in. After the counteroffensive began, with Ukraine making little headway in the south, Western officials increasingly said Kyiv should have concentrated its forces there. Some even questioned Ukrainians' will. A European defence official put it bluntly: "It's not about the willingness to fight but the willingness to die". Crisis Group interviews, European officials and experts, London, December 2023. Others faulted the turn to artillery-heavy tactics. "We built up this mountain of steel for the counteroffensive", a U.S. official told the *Washington Post*. "We can't do that again". John Hudson and Alex Horton, "U.S. intelligence says Ukraine will fail to meet offensive's key goal", *Washington Post*, 17 August 2023.

– some pulled from stocks in Europe.[3] It then announced a further $6 billion package, some of which will take time to work its way through the pipeline.[4] The White House has also sent long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems to Kyiv, setting aside earlier qualms about supplying long-range weaponry.[5] Senior Western officials are looking through their inventories for Patriot long-range air defence missile systems that are at the top of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's wish list – with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin urging allies to give up batteries they might prefer to keep for their own defence.[6] But Western moves to add to Ukraine's arsenal run real escalatory risks that will require careful calibration.

As May draws to a close, fighting remains fierce, and Russian troops continue to creep forward while Kyiv and its backers hope that the influx of new weapons will halt the Russian advance, if not reverse it immediately. While behind closed doors, both Ukrainian and Western officials have long accepted that success does not require that Kyiv regain all its territory by force of arms, no one presently seems to see space for negotiations that could allow at least a pause in combat. The reason is rooted in Russia's insistence that it will negotiate only for Ukraine's surrender and demilitarisation, as well as curtailment of Western support for Kyiv, at least for the near term. It seems confident that, eventually, Kyiv will have no choice but to accept those terms. But until it is either proven right or its confidence wanes, war will continue.

This report seeks to draw the key lessons of the setbacks that Ukraine and its partners faced in 2023, suggesting how these can be applied to hold the line before Russia's advance so as to make meaningful diplomacy possible. It is based on dozens of interviews with Ukrainian, Russian, European and U.S. officials, civil society figures, aid agency employees and defence experts over the past year. The report also relies on government documents and news articles from Ukraine, Russia, Europe and the U.S. from the same period, as well as past Crisis Group writing and research on Russia's war in Ukraine.[7]

[3] Chris York, "The U.S. weapons making their way to Ukraine right now", *The Kyiv Independent*, 27 April 2024.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Eric Schmitt, "U.S. secretly shipped new long-range missiles to Ukraine", *The New York Times*, 24 April 2024.
[6] Ibid.
[7] See, eg, Crisis Group Statement, "War in Europe: Responding to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", 24 February 2022; Olga Oliker, "Putin's Nuclear Bluff: How the West Can Make Sure Russia's Threats Stay Hollow", *Foreign Affairs*, 11 March 2022; Crisis Group Statement, "Avoiding an Even Worse Catastrophe in Ukraine", 18 March 2022; Crisis Group Commentary, "The Ukraine War: Europe's Critical Challenge", 25 May 2022; Crisis Group Statement, "Staying the Course in Ukraine", 23 September 2022; Crisis Group Commentary, "Walking a Fine Line in Ukraine", 10 October 2022; Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°96, *Answering Four Hard Questions About Russia's War in Ukraine*, 8 December 2022; Crisis Group Commentary, "Keeping the Right Balance in Supporting Ukraine", 31 January 2023; and Crisis Group Commentary, "Why the War in Ukraine May Be a Long One", 7 July 2023.

II. Ukraine on the Back Foot

The first several months of 2023 saw Ukraine and its Western partners preparing for the launch of a major counteroffensive against Russian forces amid soaring expectations.[8] Those with high hopes appeared to include President Zelenskyy. He reportedly brushed off arguments from people within his government that to get ready for what was shaping up to be a protracted fight, Kyiv should take time to build defensive lines rather than pressing the attack at the earliest opportunity.[9] Beyond a surfeit of confidence, other reasons militated in favour of moving quickly. Kyiv may have felt it had to show major gains to maintain Western public support for the war and counter those who argued that the conflict was becoming a quagmire. Behind closed doors, U.S. politicians admit that making the case for military aid was much easier when Ukraine appeared to be winning.[10]

Even so, many of those closest to the fight anticipated trouble. As the counteroffensive began in June 2023, some Ukrainian leaders and generals tried to temper expectations, fearing that Ukraine would have difficulty making strategic gains as Russian forces were well entrenched.[11] Then-Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov told the *Washington Post* in early May that "most people are … waiting for something huge", which he said could lead to "emotional disappointment".[12] In Washington, senior officials also sounded a cautionary note, with Defense Secretary Austin warning that "Ukraine's fight is not some easy sprint to the finish line".[13]

The sceptics proved correct. By all accounts, Ukraine's losses in the first days of the counteroffensive, as tanks and troops met dense minefields guarded by watchful Russian drones and attack helicopters, sent shock waves through the top brass.[14] Ukraine switched tack, reverting to a familiar attritional strategy: it would rely more heavily on long-range firepower to disrupt Russian supply lines and destroy its logistical hubs, while probing for weaknesses along three axes of the more than 1,000km front. The fighting that followed was slow and bloody. By the end of 2023, Ukraine had

[8] Siobhán O'Grady, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Laris Karklis and Samuel Granados, "Senior Ukrainian officials fear counterattack may not live up to hype", *The Washington Post*, 6 May 2023.
[9] Simon Shuster, "Volodymyr Zelensky's struggle to keep Ukraine in the fight", *Time*, 31 October 2023. See also Simon Shuster, *The Showman* (New York, 2024); and David Brennan, "Zelensky's pivotal counteroffensive call threatens to divide leadership", *Newsweek*, 16 August 2023.
[10] "It was pretty easy to make the case for more Ukraine aid last year after Kharkiv. It's tougher now because the [front] lines are pretty stable", a member of Congressional staff said. Crisis Group interviews, U.S. officials and Congressional staff, September 2023-January 2024.
[11] Crisis Group shared some of these concerns at the time. See Crisis Group Commentary, "Why the War in Ukraine May Be a Long One", op. cit.
[12] O'Grady, Khurshudyan, Karklis and Granados, "Senior Ukrainian officials fear counterattack may not live up to hype", op. cit.
[13] Eleanor Watson, "U.S. says Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia will likely take a long time and come at a 'high cost'", CBS News, 16 June 2023.
[14] In the first two weeks of Ukraine's counteroffensive, as much as 20 per cent of the weaponry it sent to the battlefield was damaged or destroyed, according to U.S. and European officials. Lara Jakes, Andrew E. Kramer and Eric Schmitt, "After suffering heavy losses, Ukrainians paused to rethink strategy", *The New York Times*, 15 July 2023.

gained only a few hundred square kilometres of territory. In the first months of 2024, it lost more than it had gained in the year prior.[15]

The costs of attrition fell disproportionately on Ukraine. In Russia, the war economy enabled easier ramp-ups of weapons and soldiers (and bombs were not falling on its munitions factories). In contrast, Kyiv increasingly had difficulty getting the trained troops it needed to the front. As for resources, Kyiv had been heavily reliant on successive U.S. packages of assistance, which dried up just as the counteroffensive fizzled. While both the White House and a majority in Congress supported a $61 billion aid package put forward in the fall of 2023, a small but powerful group of allies of former President Donald Trump in the House of Representatives obstructed it for months.[16] In January, the Biden administration announced that it could make no further deliveries until it received new funding (although it did find a way to supply a $300 million package in March).[17]

Ukraine's European backers tried to make up the difference in arms deliveries, but they struggled to execute. By March, the EU had sent less than a third of the one million artillery shells it had promised.[18] To plug the gap in Kyiv's near-term needs, they belatedly scrambled to obtain ammunition from around the world, in an initiative developed by the Czech Republic and financed by its European allies – but those items, too, were slow to reach the front lines.[19] After highly damaging Russian barrages prompted desperate pleas from Kyiv, Germany launched the Immediate Action on Air Defence initiative, calling on European allies to find and finance more air defence systems.[20]

Ukraine did have successes in 2023, almost entirely thanks to asymmetric tactics. It downed a variety of Russian aircraft and struck targets inside Russia. Its Black Sea strikes, some with homemade drones and others with missiles supplied by the UK and France, had Russian boats avoiding the sea's western half by late 2023.[21] By the spring of 2024, Ukraine estimated its forces had disabled or destroyed a third of Rus-

[15] See Josh Holder, "Who's gaining ground in Ukraine? This year, no one", *The New York Times*, 28 September 2023; Cédric Pietralunga, "Russia makes slow but steady advance in Ukraine", *Le Monde*, 5 April 2024; "Russia takes five villages in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, defence ministry says", Reuters, 11 May 2024; and Laris Karklis, Júlia Ledur and Ruby Mellen, "Russia seizes more land than Ukraine liberated in 2023 counteroffensive", *Washington Post*, 17 May 2024.

[16] Sarah Harrison, "Behind the Debate over U.S. Military Aid to Ukraine", Crisis Group Commentary, 23 February 2024.

[17] Tara Copp and Lolita C. Baldor, "Pentagon has no more money for Ukraine as it hosts a meeting of 50 allies on support for Kyiv", Associated Press, 24 January 2024; Mike Stone, Idrees Ali, Patricia Zengerle and Jeff Mason, "U.S. to send new weapons package worth $300 million for Ukraine", Reuters, 13 March 2024.

[18] Clea Caulcutt, Veronika Melkozerova and Laura Kayali, "Less talk, more shells. Ukraine tells EU leaders to get serious about ammo", *Politico*, 26 February 2024.

[19] Mariia Yemets, "First batches of ammunition from Czech-led initiative will be in Ukraine in late May or early June – Borrell", *Ukrainska Pravda*, 22 April 2024; Bojan Pancevski, "In Central Europe, Czechs go hunting for arms for Ukraine", *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 March 2024; David Axe, "Estonia just found another million shells for Ukraine", *Forbes*, 6 April 2024.

[20] "Germany targets air defense ramp-up as Berlin corrals allies behind Ukraine", *Politico*, 21 April 2024.

[21] Thomas Grove and Jared Malsin, "Russia withdraws Black Sea fleet vessels from Crimea base after Ukrainian attacks", *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2024.

sia's Black Sea fleet, leading to week-long spans when no Russian vessel left port.[22] This campaign also enabled Kyiv to resume grain shipments via a route hugging the Black Sea's western shore, which had been halted when Russia pulled out of the deal that had made commercial maritime traffic possible, despite the war, until the summer of 2023. Kyiv claims that ports in Odesa and nearby were exporting almost as much grain in January 2024 as they were before the full-scale war began.[23]

But these successes did little to offset frustration with the ground counteroffensive. The rancour came to a boil in a late 2023 quarrel between Ukraine's top military commander, Valerii Zaluzhnyy, and President Zelenskyy when the former described the war as a "stalemate" in *The Economist*, only to be contradicted by the latter.[24] The next February, Zelenskyy replaced Zaluzhnyy with his ground forces commander, Oleksandr Syrskyy, and Ukrainian troops began falling back to defensive positions, having been forced to give up the strategic town of Avdiivka. Although slowly and at high cost, Russia continued to seize more territory even as Ukraine dug new defensive lines. Meanwhile, until the April breakthrough with the aid package in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ukrainian generals were unsure if they would have enough ammunition to keep fighting in the months to come.[25]

[22] "Ukrainian navy says a third of Russian warships in the Black Sea have been destroyed or disabled", Associated Press, 26 March 2024; "Black Sea clear of Russian warships for six days in a row – Ukrainian navy", *New Voice*, 10 March 2024.

[23] "Oleksandr Kubrakov: More than 20 million tonnes of freight have been exported from greater Odesa ports through the Ukrainian corridor", Government of Ukraine, 3 February 2024 [Ukrainian].

[24] "Ukraine's commander-in-chief on the breakthrough he needs to beat Russia", *The Economist*, 1 November 2023. "Zelenskyy: What we have at the front today is not a stalemate", Interfax Ukraine, 4 November 2023 [Ukrainian].

[25] Francis Farrell, "'Our reserves will run out': Ukrainian artillery sounds alarm on Western shell shortage", *The Kyiv Independent*, 22 February 2024.

III. Russia on a Roll

A. *Surprising Resilience*

Russia's resilience over the last year has surprised its adversaries. Despite far-reaching sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its European allies, Russia's economy and war machine have increasingly seemed invigorated rather than destroyed by the war in Ukraine. "They are still producing more weapons and they still have more friends than we had hoped", a senior European official said.[26]

Moscow has stayed strong in part through effective fiscal management honed over years of earlier Western sanctions, many put in place for its earlier encroachments upon Ukrainian sovereignty, but also because its trade did not evaporate as Western states thought it would.[27] Russian budget revenues were up by more than 50 per cent in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 2023, thanks to high energy prices and changes in taxation of oil companies.[28] With many countries unwilling to abide by sanctions they had no role in defining, Moscow kept exporting. China has replaced the EU as Russia's main trading partner.[29] A Western bid to cap oil prices at $60 per barrel hurt Russian sales somewhat in the first half of 2023, but Russia was soon selling at higher prices, with India and China buying up supplies.[30] Russia has also found ways to use banks and intermediaries in the Gulf Arab states, Türkiye and the Eurasian Economic Union to procure sanctioned goods.[31]

Moreover, even where sanctions worked – for example in depriving Russia's arms industry of sophisticated components – Moscow has proven nimble, making do with less advanced weaponry and being creative about where it gets parts.[32] After the full-scale invasion began, Russia started looking for Soviet-standard arms and ammunition wherever it could, both in post-Soviet countries and farther abroad.[33] In addition, like other sanctioned goods, materials needed to build weapons are passing through China, Türkiye and Gulf Arab countries, as well as Central Asian states.[34] Russia has

[26] Crisis Group interview, European government official, December 2023.
[27] "How much oil and gas revenues the new oil price calculation will bring to the budget", RBC, 14 February 2023; "State Duma approves changes in oil taxes to boost budget revenues", RBC, 21 July 2023.
[28] Alexandra Prokopenko and Alexander Kolyandr, "Russia's surging budget revenues", *The Bell*, 19 April 2024.
[29] "China sees biggest trade increase with Russia in 2023, Chinese customs data shows", CNN, 7 June 2023.
[30] "Western insurers say Russian oil price cap doesn't work", Reuters, 30 April 2024; Victor Jack and Gabriel Gavin, "Russian oil price cap has largely failed, new report finds", *Politico*, 5 December 2023; "How Russia dodges oil sanctions on an industrial scale", *The Economist*, 29 January 2023; Sergey Vakulenko, "Double Win: How Russian Oil Companies Defied Sanctions and Paid Less", Carnegie Politika, 15 February 2023.
[31] The Eurasian Economic Union is a trade bloc led by Russia and including four other former Soviet countries: Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.
[32] Mary Ilyushina, "Russia ramps up weapons production, using mass quantity to outgun Ukraine", *Washington Post*, 19 April 2024.
[33] Crisis Group interview, Russian expert, 6 September 2023.
[34] "Challenges of Export Controls Enforcement", Yermak-McFaul International Working Group on Russian Sanctions and Kyiv School of Economics, January 2024.

also pummelled Ukraine with ballistic missiles and shells from North Korea and drones bought from Iran.[35]

Putin has put the Russian economy on a war footing, with a third of the national budget spent on defence.[36] With factories running around the clock, Russia has gone from making some 40 long-range missiles per month to about 100.[37] As for artillery munitions, a NATO intelligence estimate put Russian production capacity at 3 million a year – far surpassing Europe's current capacity.[38] "Russia has this ability to kickstart the military-industrial complex to produce", a senior European government official said. "I mean, they're ahead of us now".[39] Russia understands that its productive capacity gives it a leg up over Ukraine, where the arms industry is growing but faces frequent bombing and which would be lost without the Western aid it depends on.[40] The Ukrainians have "no weapons industry of their own, no money of their own, and so no future", said Putin expansively (if inaccurately) at a December Kremlin ceremony. "But we do".[41]

Finally, there is the issue of troop strength. With a population more than four times that of Ukraine, Russia has maintained a flow of soldiers to the front despite reportedly huge casualties. According to independent calculations at the end of February, some 75,000 Russian soldiers may have been killed in two years of war in Ukraine, although the casualty rates seem to be declining.[42] In the meantime, according to official figures, Russia mobilised about 300,000 troops in 2022 and recruited about 590,000 more in 2023-2024.[43] It has kept the ranks full by increasing payments to soldiers and recruiting from the poor and prison populations. It has also pressured conscripts to sign contracts. In exchange for a variety of benefits, the contracts require young men to serve longer than the single year conscription mandates and make them eligible to be sent into combat.

These moves seem to have helped Russia overcome the challenges of low morale, fatigue and discord within the armed forces about how to wage the war, which perhaps reached a peak in the summer of 2023, when the late Yevgeny Prigozhin led his Wagner paramilitary forces on a march to within 200km of Moscow before agreeing to

[35] "Debris from North Korean missile found in Kharkiv, say UN sanction monitors", *The Guardian*, 29 April 2024; Parisa Hafezi, John Irish, Tom Balmforth and Jonathan Landay, "Exclusive: Iran sends Russia hundreds of ballistic missiles", Reuters, 21 February 2024.
[36] Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, 5 February 2024.
[37] "Russia has enough missiles to again hammer Ukraine with massive barrages, but it looks to be going after different targets", RUSI, January 2024.
[38] "Exclusive: Russia producing three times more artillery shells than US and Europe for Ukraine", CNN, 11 March 2024.
[39] Crisis Group telephone interview, September 2023.
[40] Lara Jakes, "Ukraine's arms industry is growing, but is it growing fast enough?", *The New York Times*, 2 April 2024.
[41] "Al Arabiya English: 'Ukraine has no future, we do': Putin", video, YouTube, 11 December 2023.
[42] "At least 75,000 dead Russian soldiers", *Meduza*, 24 February 2024; "Russia's March front-line losses turned out to be lowest since start of war in Ukraine", *Strana*, 5 May 2024.
[43] "Shoigu told how many contract soldiers and volunteers were recruited into the army", RIA Novosti, 19 December 2023; "Defence Ministry reveals how many military contractors have been recruited since the beginning of the year", RBC, 3 April 2024.

turn them around.[44] Stories of soldiers serving on the front for over a year and bribing commanders to get leave have faded.[45] A movement of mothers and wives demanding that soldiers be sent home was met with repression.[46]

Looking to the future, Moscow has issued new regulations to make mobilisation easier.[47] These increase the number of men subject to compulsory military service by raising the maximum age at which it could call them up from 27 to 30.[48] It has digitalised draft notices following a spate of fires that destroyed paper documents at mobilisation facilities in 2022. It has also banned draftees from leaving the country, as hundreds of thousands did when Russia began a large mobilisation in the autumn of 2022, and imposed stiffer penalties on those refusing to serve.[49]

B. *Moscow's Next Moves*

As the war's tide seemed to turn in its favour over the course of 2023, the Kremlin's confidence increased. While many experts argued that its battlefield gains would be minimal, as Ukrainian defences were too strong, some speculated that Russia might try to mount offensives while it knows Ukraine is struggling to fill its ranks and arsenals.[50]

As of now, it seems to be doing just that. Russia's military progress until April was mainly in Donetsk, part of eastern Ukraine's Donbas region. Just as some analysts had forecast, and perhaps in a bid to draw Ukrainian forces away from the front in the east, in May Russia reopened an offensive to the Kharkiv region, where Ukraine had proudly recovered the vast majority of what Russia had grabbed in 2022, enabling it to mount attacks on nearby Russian border regions.[51] It is possible that, if success-

[44] Alissa de Carbonnel, Oleg Ignatov, Simon Schlegel and Pauline Bax, "Assessing the Wagner Group's Aborted Run on Moscow: What Comes Next?", Crisis Group Commentary, 29 June 2023.

[45] "Russian soldiers increasingly using bribery to avoid combat or to be discharged after 'injury'", *Novaya Gazeta*, 28 November 2023.

[46] Guy Faulconbridge, "In Russia, some women demand return of their men from Ukraine front", Reuters, 5 December 2023; "Anti-mobilization protests by Russian soldiers' wives and mothers quashed", *The Moscow Times*, 20 November 2023; "People detained at Russia protest calling for troops to return from Ukraine", Al Jazeera, 3 February 2024. See also "Demobilisation: Will the mobilised return home after Belousov's appointment", RTVI, 13 May 2024.

[47] See "Russia increases maximum size of armed forces by 170,000 servicemen", Reuters, 1 December 2023; "'This law is written for a big war. It already smells of it' – MP Kartapolov on mobilization laws", Mediazona, 25 July 2023; "Putin issues decree to increase army's standard strength by 137,000 as of 2023", TASS, 25 August 2022; "'Give your life, get maimed': Will there be a new mobilization in Russia?", BBC, 26 September 2023; "Medvedev: Russia will increase its army for effective defense of independence", Sputnik Belarus, 25 October 2023; and "'I've never been an underdog, but it felt like I've been brainwashed'", Holod Media, 27 July 2023.

[48] "Russia extends conscription for compulsory military service up to age 30", Reuters, 25 July 2023. Although some women reportedly receive draft notices, few serve in Russia's combat forces.

[49] "'This law is written for a big war. It already smells of it'", op. cit.

[50] Crisis Group interviews, Russian experts, spring 2024. See also "Large-scale Russian offensive expected soon in Ukraine: ISW", Euronews, 22 April 2024.

[51] "Heavy casualties and an effective airstrike campaign will soon make it difficult for Ukraine to defend not only Donbas, but Kharkiv", a Kremlin adviser said. Crisis Group interview, 27 February 2024. See also "A fresh Russian push will test Ukraine severely, says a senior general", *The Economist*, 2 May 2024; and "Facing Russian advance, a top Ukrainian general paints a bleak picture", *The New York Times*, 13 May 2024. On the most recent Russian gains, see Isobel Koshiw and Polina

ful in Kharkiv, Russia will press ahead there (including in Kupiansk), in Donetsk and in the neighbouring Sumy region.

Still, Russian manoeuvres thus far are small-scale and not necessarily groundwork for a larger operation, which would require far more soldiers. Should Putin attempt a major offensive, Western defence officials and Russian sources say, it could go badly, costing Russia much in blood and treasure.[52] Moscow may be hoping to wear Ukraine down before it takes the plunge: "We are expecting two very difficult months for both Russia and Ukraine, but if Ukraine doesn't hold out, things could start moving fast", a Kremlin adviser told Crisis Group.[53]

The stakes go beyond Moscow's territorial control, however. Moscow's paramount objective is political – ie, to subjugate Ukraine by demilitarising it and limiting its foreign support. Russia will continue seeking battlefield gains but simply as a means to this end.[54] "The Kremlin is waiting for Ukraine to wear itself out and make an offer to initiate negotiations", said a Russian political strategist with close ties to the Kremlin. "There is no alternative strategy at the moment".[55] While a Kremlin adviser told Crisis Group that "Putin is absolutely serious when it talks about negotiations to bring the war to an end", the pose is misleading, coming as it does with the caveat that talks must begin with Ukraine accepting "new realities".[56] By this phrase Moscow refers not just to Russian control of parts of Ukraine, but also to its claims to Ukrainian land it does not hold but purports to have annexed. More recently, Russian officials have also spoken of a "sanitary zone" reaching further into Ukrainian-controlled territory.[57]

The narrative created by this open invitation to join negotiations, however self-servingly framed, feeds the Kremlin's efforts to cultivate the good graces of countries loath to take sides in the conflict and those looking for reasons to oppose the West. It allows Moscow to paint itself as a force for stability and Kyiv as intransigent while also lending fodder to sceptics in the West, who believe Kyiv should be strong-armed into negotiating with the threat of withdrawing support.[58]

For the most part, Kyiv's Western backers continue to believe that a Moscow that attains these gains in Ukraine will pose a growing threat. They point to Russia's proposals of late 2021 – made amid last-minute Western diplomatic efforts to ward off its full-scale invasion – which would have hamstrung NATO's capacity to defend its eastern members from future attack by keeping allied forces off their territories, suggesting that Moscow's goals have not changed.[59] Indeed, Russia's foreign policy

Ivanova, "Russia attempts to break through Ukraine's defences in Kharkiv region", *Financial Times*, 13 May 2024.

[52] Crisis Group interviews, September 2023-January 2024.

[53] Crisis Group interview, Kremlin adviser, 13 May 2024.

[54] Crisis Group interviews, Russian experts, spring 2024.

[55] Crisis Group interview, Russian political consultant, 20 October 2023.

[56] Crisis Group interview, Kremlin adviser, 2 May 2024. See also David E. Sanger, "Putin quietly signals he is open to a ceasefire in Ukraine", *The New York Times*, 23 December 2023; and "Putin sends U.S. signal on Ukraine talks, seeing war advantage", Bloomberg, 25 January 2024.

[57] "Peskov: Russia needs to reach the administrative borders of new regions", *Kommersant*, 22 March 2024; "Putin did not rule out the creation of a sanitary zone in Ukraine", RBC, 18 March 2024.

[58] George Beebe and Anatol Lieven, "The Diplomatic Path to a Secure Ukraine", Quincy Institute, 16 February 2024.

[59] "International Security and Estonia 2024", Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 31 January 2024.

"concept", issued in 2023, centres a global confrontation with the U.S., whose alliances the Kremlin aims to weaken.[60]

Thus far, Russia's attack on Ukraine has boomeranged on that front, notably with Finland and Sweden joining NATO, but that is hardly reason for Russia's neighbours or the alliance as a whole to be sanguine. Ukraine's defeat and demilitarisation would leave countries outside NATO exposed. Moldova and Georgia, which have received EU candidacy status but lack security guarantees from Western states, would be exposed to tremendous Russian pressure. A Moscow further emboldened by successes, still on a war footing and with a much larger army, could even look to test NATO's wherewithal by encroaching on an alliance member's lands, if not in the immediate future, then in the years to come.

This new Russian approach, and indeed this new Russia, may or may not be sustainable. Russia has battled persistent inflation, and it will likely have to raise taxes on businesses and trim social welfare programs to maintain record levels of defence spending. Although it has succeeded in evading many sanctions, it has felt a weapons squeeze.[61] While it has seemingly been able to keep soldiers flowing to the front, a large-scale mobilisation, such as that needed to launch a substantial offensive, would still be difficult for Moscow. Furthermore, Russia has miscalculated in the past, including in launching the February 2022 invasion with inadequate personnel, equipment and planning. It may do so again.

That said, Russia does not need to convince its adversaries that it can keep going forever: it only needs to persuade Ukraine and its backers that it can last longer than they can, even as Kyiv attempts to do the reverse.

[60] Oleg Ignatov, "Saying the Quiet Part Out Loud: Russia's New Vision for Taking on the West", Crisis Group Commentary, 2 May 2023.

[61] Crisis Group telephone interviews, September-November 2023. See also "Russia turns to longtime arms customers to boost war arsenal", *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 November 2023.

IV. The West: Divided and Deliberative

A. *Political Fault Lines*

Over the course of 2023, the notion that Western supporters would provide war-sustaining assistance to Kyiv indefinitely yielded to a more complicated reality, at least in Washington. In the early days following Russia's all-out invasion, U.S. and other Western leaders, committed, in the oft-repeated words of President Joe Biden, to back Ukraine "as long as it takes".[62] But toward the end of 2023, Biden, speaking alongside the visiting Zelenskyy, instead said the U.S. would offer support "as long as we can" – and underlined that it was impossible to keep doing so without supplemental funding.[63] This money was held up in the House, highlighting a new divide: aid for Ukraine has become a fault line separating a core group of Trump supporters from the mainstream political establishment.

Trump's allies on the populist right disagree fundamentally with the administration's approach both to Ukraine and the trans-Atlantic partnership that has united Western nations behind it. They have insisted that money spent supporting Kyiv should instead be allocated to what they regard as more pressing tasks, especially stemming irregular migration to the U.S. A prominent Trump surrogate in the 2024 election campaign, Senator J.D. Vance, a Republican from Ohio, also argues that the U.S. lacks the productive capacity to arm Ukraine at the same time that it meets Israel's, Taiwan's and its own needs.[64] More broadly, the Trump-Vance wing of the Republican Party envisages a reconfiguration of the trans-Atlantic security partnership that reduces the U.S. role and enlarges that of Europe, which these politicians contend can do much more to fend for itself.[65]

How precisely this division will play out with respect to support for Ukraine is not fully clear. Trump himself did not vocally oppose the April aid package, reportedly because Republican supporters of the bill lobbied him hard and included face-saving measures – in particular, structuring part of the package as a loan – that the former president favoured.[66] But Kyiv cannot relish the idea of a second Trump administration. Trump's threats to withhold military aid from Ukraine unless Zelenskyy gave him political dirt on Biden was the basis for his first impeachment in 2019, and it is hard to imagine that he would be a reliable supporter were he elected in 2024.[67] Indeed, Trump has said he would take no more than 24 hours to hammer out a peace deal between Moscow and Kyiv – which Ukraine and its friends understandably

[62] Steven Erlanger, Jim Tankersley, Michael D. Shear and Alan Yuhas, "Biden vows to back Ukraine 'as long as it takes' despite economic toll", *The New York Times*, 30 June 2022.
[63] "Remarks by President Biden and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine in Joint Press Conference," White House, 12 December 2023.
[64] J.D. Vance, "The math on Ukraine doesn't add up", *The New York Times*, 12 April 2024.
[65] Christopher Miller, "Department of Defense" and Kiron K. Skinner, "Department of State", in Paul Dans and Steven Groves (eds.), *2025: Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (Washington, 2023).
[66] Vivian Salama, "Why Donald Trump didn't sink Mike Johnson's Ukraine aid bill", *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 2024.
[67] Jeremy Stahl, "Zelensky's 'perfect phone call' with Trump in 2019 explains a lot right now", *Slate*, 2 March 2022.

presume would mean pressure on them to settle with Russia on unfavourable terms.[68] Regardless of whether he wins, Trump's scepticism about both aiding Ukraine and trans-Atlanticism will shape the politics of these questions as long as he remains a force.

European backing, while not militarily of the same scale as U.S. aid, is arguably on firmer political ground, though as the war drags on it will likely also face challenges, especially if far-right parties pick up seats in national legislatures and the European Parliament. Over the last two years, member states have been keen for Europe to assume greater responsibility for continental security, including by ramping up arms production, though they continue to debate what that means. Talk of a more integrated defence union has surfaced, but even its proponents have trouble articulating what it would look like. Should the far right gain traction amid a protracted conflict, discussions about military, financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine could become more polarised within and among EU member states.

For right now, the EU's Ukraine supporters are doing what they can to lock in assistance for the long term. They overcame Hungary's threatened veto on 1 February to agree upon a €50 billion, four-year aid package – the first tranche of which was released in March.[69] They have also stepped up military assistance, with combined (military plus other) European aid overtaking the U.S. total in 2023.[70] The UK, France, Italy, Denmark, Latvia, the Netherlands, Germany and Finland have signed agreements with Ukraine for continued weapons shipments and other security assistance. Similar deals with Norway and the EU as an institution are under negotiation. These pledges are meant to signal that support will remain steadfast.[71]

But Ukraine's needs will remain substantial for as long as war lasts, and its most urgent requirements for arms and other materiel are not yet something that Europe can meet on a sustained basis. The gap between EU commitments and allocations remains large.[72] Nor is the new U.S. aid package in itself adequate to keep Ukraine going into the future: the funding should guarantee about a year's worth of U.S. help, although some components will run out earlier and others arrive later.[73] Especially if the U.S. does not follow up with additional large-scale aid, Europe will need to shoulder more of the burden.

[68] Andrew Carey and Victoria Butenko, "'Very dangerous': Zelensky on Trump's claim he could end Russia-Ukraine war within 24 hours", CNN, 20 January 2024.
[69] "EU summit agrees €50 billion aid for Ukraine despite Hungary's veto threat", France 24, 1 February 2024.
[70] "Europe has a long way to go to replace US aid – large gap between commitments and allocations", Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 16 February 2024.
[71] Daniil Ukhorskiy, "Can new security agreements forge Ukraine's path to victory?", *Kyiv Independent*, 29 March 2024; "Security commitments and long-term support: Ukraine and Finland have signed a security agreement", President of Ukraine, 3 April 2024; Anton Filippov, "Ukraine signs security agreement with Latvia", *European Pravda*, 11 April 2024; "Contents of security agreement between Ukraine and EU revealed", *European Pravda*, 13 May 2024.
[72] "Europe has a long way to go to replace US aid – large gap between commitments and allocations", op. cit.
[73] "What is in the Ukrainian aid package, and what does it mean for the future of the war?", CSIS, 1 May 2024.

B. *Deliberation and Delay*

The West has encountered other challenges as well in its efforts to assist Ukraine. In considering whether, when and how to ramp up aid, partner governments have been constrained by several factors above and beyond the political considerations described above. These include limited availability of the materials in question, bureaucratic hurdles and fear that certain weapons or tactics might cross Russia's red lines.[74] Among the scenarios of greatest concern to Western powers is that NATO troops might be drawn into direct conflict with Russian forces, creating an escalatory dynamic that would be hard to contain and could even lead to nuclear use.[75] Western leaders have also worried that providing weapons that Ukraine then uses to strike deep into Russia might be seen by Moscow as tantamount to direct NATO involvement.[76]

Such fears have resulted in much deliberation and a piecemeal approach to the provision of new weapons systems to Ukraine. The slow pace brought benefits: it bought time to assess Russian responses and mitigated the escalation risks in the war's most uncertain early months.[77] Intentionally or otherwise, it may have allowed the West to provide more advanced armaments over time: had the same items, in the same numbers, been sent sooner, Russia might have reacted more aggressively.

But incrementalism also created anomalies and costs. Western states (often including the U.S.) repeatedly ruled out providing a weapons system only to succumb to pressure to do so months later. Repeatedly, Ukraine's non-U.S. partners tested the waters by sending a new system first, and the more cautious U.S. later followed suit.[78] For example, President Biden long withheld Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS), which have a maximum range of 300km, from Ukraine for fear of crossing Putin's red lines and amid scepticism that these missiles were the best means of hitting Kyiv's targets (eg, supply nodes and air bases).[79] But the White House changed its mind, transferring a small number of older missiles of the same type with a maximum range of 165km, after Ukraine had been firing British Storm Shadow and French SCALP missiles, which are similar, for months. In the spring of 2024, amid talk that the U.S. would finally decide to send longer-range ATACMs to Ukraine, reports emerged that it had already done so in secret.[80]

A related issue is the caveats that Western countries put on their long-range systems. Until recently, U.S., French and British missile shipments were all contingent

[74] Crisis Group interviews, U.S. and EU officials, September 2023-April 2024. Michael Wasiura, "Fear of Russian nuclear escalation still impeding military aid to Ukraine", *Newsweek*, 20 September 2023.
[75] Crisis Group Briefing, *Answering Four Hard Questions about Russia's War in Ukraine*, op. cit.
[76] Matthew Karnitschnig, "Germany's Ukraine policy is incoherent for a reason", *Politico*, 7 March 2024.
[77] Olga Oliker, Michael Wahid Hanna and Brian Finucane, "No-Fly Zone in Ukraine: War with Russia by Another Name", Crisis Group Commentary, 7 March 2022.
[78] "McCaul, Kean, Wilson, Keating, Lieu, Golden Introduce Bipartisan Resolution Urging Immediate Transfer of ATACMS to Ukraine", press release, U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, 6 September 2023.
[79] David E. Sanger, "Inside Biden's reversal on sending long-range missiles to Ukraine", *The New York Times*, 17 October 2023.
[80] Michael Williams and Arlette Saenz, "Biden signs foreign aid bill providing crucial military assistance to Ukraine", CNN, 24 April 2024; Eric Schmitt, "U.S. secretly shipped new long-range missiles to Ukraine", *The New York Times*, 24 April 2024.

on Ukraine using the projectiles to hit targets in Russian-held parts of Ukraine but not in Russia itself.[81] (Kyiv has used Ukrainian-made weaponry to strike targets in Russia.[82]) The UK is now lifting this restriction, but the U.S. and French have kept it in place.[83]

Ukraine, not surprisingly, would like as much freedom to use long-range weaponry as it can get. In 2022, Kyiv was able to leverage U.S. HIMARS rocket launchers to strike deep in Russia's rear to disrupt supply lines. It would like to do so again, but with Russia having dispersed supply lines precisely to avoid such attacks, Kyiv would need to be able to fire on Russian territory.[84] Its strikes in Russia to date have hit high-profile targets – military sites and oil facilities – to demonstrate capacity. These operations are risky, however: Russian experts argue that Moscow's devastating assaults on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in the spring of 2024 are at least partly a response to the latter attacks (they added that Kyiv would reject a deal to eschew energy infrastructure strikes, declining to say if Moscow would consider it). Escalation risks are, of course, certain to inform Washington's thinking (as well as that of other Western partners) about whether, when and how to follow London's lead in loosening use restrictions.[85]

Kyiv and friends express frustration with U.S. incrementalism, arguing that it creates delays with battlefield costs.[86] Some say excessive deliberations meant that Leopard tanks and Bradley infantry fighting vehicles arrived after Russia had dug in behind minefields, too late for the new gear to make a great battlefield impact.[87] Relatedly, critics argue that Washington overreacted to Moscow's perceived threats to resort to nuclear use in 2022, when Russia was on the back foot militarily, suggesting that the U.S. is still too easily bluffed by the Kremlin.[88] They worry that the Biden administration thinks that if Ukraine gains a decisive upper hand it could spook Putin and risk dangerous escalation – leading the U.S. to give Ukraine enough to survive but

[81] Tom Watling, "Ukraine would win war quicker if it could use British missiles to strike Russia, says Kyiv's naval chief", *The Independent*, 28 January 2024.
[82] "Not once has Ukraine used Western weapons to attack Russia – Zelenskyy", 24 Channel, 10 April 2024 [Ukrainian].
[83] Serhii Korolchuk and David L. Stern, "U.K. lifts restrictions on Ukraine's use of weapons against Russia", *The Washington Post*, 3 May 2024.
[84] Crisis Group interviews, politician with defence portfolio and former senior defence official, Kyiv, March 2024.
[85] Crisis Group interviews, Russian military experts, spring 2024.
[86] Crisis Group interviews, European government and U.S. officials, August-November 2023.
[87] Crisis Group interviews, Ukrainian and European officials, September-December 2023. See also Chris Panella, "Ukraine's offensive has a problem: Russia knew what was coming and was given way too much time to figure out how to beat it", *Business Insider*, 1 August 2023.
[88] Ibid. See also "Exclusive: U.S. prepared 'rigorously' for potential Russian nuclear strike in Ukraine in late 2022, officials say", CNN, 9 March 2024.

not enough to win.[89] Biden administration officials, however, categorically deny that such is their approach.[90]

The bottom line remains that the stakes of a war with a major nuclear power on one side and three major nuclear powers backing the other are tremendous. U.S. intelligence analysis, meanwhile, reportedly indicates that Russia has considered nuclear use during the conflict, casting doubt on arguments that all of Moscow's nuclear talk is bluff.[91] Meanwhile, Moscow will certainly persist with its unnerving efforts to make its threats more credible. Putin's 6 May announcement of tactical nuclear deployment drills as a response to what the Kremlin perceived as menacing moves by Western officials is a case in point.[92] Thus, careful risk assessment and incrementalism will likely continue to be the best approach to the delivery of new weapons systems given the risks at play.

[89] Crisis Group interviews, Russia analyst, current and former officials, September 2023-April 2024. "There was and still is an irrational fear of escalation", said an analyst with U.S. government experience. "The administration was thin on Cold War experts and Russian expertise – when decisions went up the chain, people fell back on the escalation risk and threat of nuclear war – not much more analysis". Crisis Group interview, spring 2024.

[90] Crisis Group interviews, U.S. officials, January-March 2022.

[91] Shannon Bugos, "Russian officials talk nuclear war, U.S. intelligence says", *Arms Control Today*, December 2022.

[92] "Russia's Putin orders tactical nuclear deployment drills", Deutsche Welle, 5 May 2024.

V. Holding the Line

Ukraine and its backers thus approach the summer of 2024 in a less than ideal but still viable posture. They face the simultaneous challenges of stopping Russia's immediate momentum and girding themselves for a fight that could extend well over the horizon. The goal, though rarely if ever articulated so starkly, remains what it has been since the beginning: they want to head off a scenario in which Kyiv is forced either to surrender or to negotiate with Moscow from a position of such weakness that any deal would undermine not just Ukraine's security but that of Europe as a whole.[93] Such outcomes remain avoidable. But Kyiv and its partners will almost surely need to make changes to enable Ukraine to fight on and puncture Russia's confidence. The following six areas require particular attention.

A. *Close the Arms Production Gap*

For as long as the war continues, Ukraine will need ammunition and air defences. When its counteroffensive began, Ukraine was firing up to 7,000 artillery shells a day and Russia about 5,000.[94] In April, Zelenskyy said Russia is now able to fire ten times more artillery rounds than Ukraine.[95] Just how close Ukraine was to running out of ammunition before the U.S. Congress agreed to send more aid is not clear, but concerns about scarcity appear to have hindered its resistance of Russia's advances in the counteroffensive's wake.[96] Nor is a paucity of artillery shells Kyiv's only problem. Russia has been pounding Ukrainian positions with thousands of glide bombs (dated munitions retrofitted with wings and guidance systems and fired by warplanes a safe distance away), taking advantage of Ukraine's dwindling store of anti-aircraft munitions.

The U.S. aid that is on its way will help replenish both Ukraine's air defence munitions and artillery stocks, providing relief but leaving open the question of what will happen when they next run low, if Washington does not summon the political will to act. Given the headwinds that the 2024 aid package faced and the openly sceptical signals that Trump and his allies have sent about the value of the NATO alliance, Europe needs to actively hedge against two possibilities. One is that the U.S.

[93] Crisis Group interviews, European capitals (including Kyiv), Washington and New York, February 2022-May 2024.

[94] Jack Watling, "Yes, Ukraine can still defeat Russia – but it will require far more support from Europe", *The Guardian*, 27 December 2023.

[95] Ukrainian troops had to deal with the same ratio, one shell for every ten Russia shot at them, during the final days of the battle for Avdiivka in early February. Olha Kyrylenko, "The last days of Avdiivka: What led to the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the city and how it took place", *Ukrainska Pravda*, 22 February 2024. "Exclusive: Zelenskyy says 'no chance of winning' without U.S. aid", PBS "News Hour", 16 April 2024.

[96] While hardly sanguine about the shortages, U.S. officials expressed hope in late 2023 that shifting from offence (which typically requires heavy firepower) to defence would reduce Ukraine's need for ammunition, and that supplies could last well into the summer, even without replenishment. Crisis Group interview, Washington, December 2023. The next March, Ukrainian sources said Kyiv had not yet dipped into its reserve stocks. If there was rationing, as was widely reported in the press, they indicated it was precautionary. Crisis Group interviews, former officials and experts, Kyiv, March 2024.

will not come through next time for Ukraine. The other is that it will give less weight to the trans-Atlantic partnership.

For Europe to both support Ukraine and hedge against the possibility of a less engaged U.S., it must fill substantial gaps. It will have to overcome hurdles from supply chain bottlenecks to shortages of explosives to the impact of inflation on defence spending. It must also surmount structural issues to develop sustainable EU-level coordination in procurement and defence industry activity.[97] Despite showing unprecedented unity since Russia's full-scale invasion, Europe remains fragmented when it comes to aid and investment, with some countries spending more than others on defence – both at home and farther afield – and some giving more to Ukraine than others.

Trend lines are generally positive. European states are making progress toward increasing defence production. For instance, German manufacturer Rheinmetall, one of Europe's most forward-leaning, expects to hike its annual throughput from 450,000 rounds up to 600,000-700,000 by 2025.[98] In March, the EU put €500 million toward making artillery shells in member state territories.[99] On 23 January, NATO signed a $1.2 billion contract to enable purchase of 220,000 155mm shells.[100] European states have also sought to address Ukraine's need for air defence interceptors and replacements for weapons that have been worn down by use. The EU has revamped its multi-billion euro fund, the Ukraine Assistance Fund, to subsidise joint procurement from European defence firms.[101]

But while Europe has made progress in contracting more arms, its states are not yet producing near the point where they can satisfy Ukraine's needs and restock their own warehouses. These states will need to keep pushing to develop domestic capacity, coordinate better, level up defence spending and make hard decisions about when to entertain arms purchases from the U.S., even beyond systems such as Patriots, which only the U.S. can supply. (Buying more U.S. arms is, after all, probably a useful contingency, as well as a means of keeping Washington engaged.) Maintaining all these efforts amid the push-pull of domestic politics and as attention waxes and wanes will likely remain a challenge for the continent's political leaders.

[97] NATO Military Committee Chair Admiral Rob Bauer warned in January that a jump in ammunition prices would eat up increases in allies' defence spending. With scarcity a growing concern, the price of the NATO-standard 155mm shells now so in demand at the front has risen fourfold since 24 February 2022. "Ensuring an Allied Deference Industrial Base for NATO's New Deterrence and Defence Baseline", NATO, October 2023. See also Daniel Michaels and David Cameron, "Wars push up demand for weapons, sparking fears of shortages", *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 October 2023; and "NATO urges arms production boost as warehouses 'half full'", Reuters, 4 October 2023.

[98] "Rheinmetall fährt Munitionsproduktion stark hoch", ARD, 12 February 2024.

[99] By the beginning of 2026, the EU executive expects to be producing two million shells per year, including both NATO-standard 155mm shells and the old Soviet alternative 152mm ones. "The Commission allocates €500 million to ramp up ammunition production, out of a total of €2 billion to strengthen EU's defence industry", press release, European Commission, 15 March 2024.

[100] "NATO signs key artillery ammunition contract to replenish allied supplies and help Ukraine", Associated Press, 23 January 2024.

[101] "EU tables reform proposal for Ukraine weapons fund", *Euractiv*, 22 January 2024.

B. *Provide Advanced Weapons Systems, but Carefully*

Striking the right balance with respect to the provision of advanced weapons systems to Ukraine will be another conundrum. On one hand, the goal of Western support is to help Kyiv persuade Moscow of the futility of its aggression; here, better weapons can only help. On the other hand, notwithstanding the criticism it has attracted, Western caution about sending more advanced weapons systems to Kyiv has been well advised. The potential for catastrophe in the event of escalation is not something to take lightly, and President Biden and his team have been – and should continue to be – guided by recognition of this reality.[102] The key to good decision-making will be dynamic assessment of escalation risks that incorporates lessons learned over the past two-plus years and close monitoring of what Russia's internal discourse reveals about its threat perceptions.

Over the past two years, Russia has engaged in nuclear sabre-rattling both to prevent NATO's direct participation in hostilities and to coerce Ukraine's backers to cease their aid.[103] Against this backdrop, Western governments have had to use careful judgment in discerning when Moscow's tough talk is bluster and where it is more than that, even as they recognise that Russia itself may not always know.

Western states would surely have behaved cautiously even without Moscow's signalling because they are familiar with longstanding Russian doctrine that permits nuclear weapon use if Russia's existence, or that of its nuclear arsenal, is at risk. A direct war with NATO members, which would create expectations of (if not actual) immediate strikes on Russian infrastructure and command and control, would likely be hard to contain at a level below that perceived threshold.[104]

But divining Russia's red lines when it comes to measures short of direct NATO participation in the conflict is more difficult. Moscow, of course, wants it this way. It has tried – through hints, threats and concrete actions – to convince Ukraine's backers they are flirting with danger not just if they send troops into the fight, but also by dint of arming Kyiv. One component of its approach lies in reminders of its nuclear capacity and backing away from deals that constrain its behaviour in that realm. These include announcing that Moscow would cease observing the New START arms control treaty and de-ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (although it remains below the limits of the first and has not moved to carry out nuclear tests).[105] The Kremlin also said it would deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus and even allowed

[102] See Janice Gross Stein, "Escalation Management in Ukraine: Assessing the U.S. Response to Russia's Manipulation of Risk", Kissinger Center Papers, Johns Hopkins University, August 2023.
[103] Charles Maynes, "Putin warns of nuclear war if NATO sends troops to Ukraine", NPR, 29 February 2024; Guy Faulconbridge and Felix Light, "Putin ally warns NATO of nuclear war if Russia is defeated in Ukraine", Reuters, 19 January 2023.
[104] Crisis Group Briefing, *Answering Four Hard Questions About Russia's War in Ukraine*, op. cit. To be sure, some of the countries backing Ukraine have begun to doubt that Russia would, in fact, escalate to nuclear use. Crisis Group interviews, Estonian official, September 2023; European experts, September 2023; and French officials, November 2023.
[105] Yashar Parsie, "Has New START reached a dead end?", *Lawfare*, March 29, 2024; "Putin revokes Russia's ratification of nuclear test ban treaty", Al Jazeera, 2 November 2023.

a lively civilian analytical debate about nuclear use, spurred by an expert's proposal of nuclear strikes on Poland to bring Western states to their senses.[106]

Most recently, in May, Moscow cited Western "provocative statements and threats" when it announced non-strategic nuclear weapon exercises. In addition to these comments, Moscow threatened the UK conventionally, stating that if its weapons are used to hit targets on Russian soil, Moscow might well go after British facilities in Ukraine or elsewhere.[107]

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later specified that Russia was especially frustrated with comments by French President Emmanuel Macron, British officials and "U.S. Senate" representatives.[108] Moscow is upset with Macron's refusal to rule out direct French military involvement, which is best understood as performative ambiguation intended to keep allies cognisant of the stakes, French voters aware of his strong position and the Kremlin on its toes (just as Russia's threats are meant to keep Ukraine's backers nervous).[109] The Kremlin is also angry about British official statements in effect withdrawing opposition to Ukrainian use of UK-provided weapons to strike Russian territory. In the third case, the reference may be to House (not Senate) Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, a representative from New York, who said in an interview that a Russian win could lead the U.S. to send troops to Ukraine.[110] (Jeffries was speculating about what might happen if Russia emerges victorious and, in any case, was not speaking for the administration.)

So, how should Western powers think about Russia's rhetoric? First, that Moscow cited the Macron (and perhaps Jeffries) comments underlines its own worries and strong desire to avoid direct war with NATO.[111] Here, its own record makes that even clearer. Despite early threats, the Kremlin has not, in fact, used a nuclear weapon. Had it used one, it would have been a spectacularly reckless move that would have unsealed the decades-long taboo against the use of atomic weaponry and opened the door to world-ending conflagration. (At the very least, it would have provoked a devastating response from the West and caused considerable upset with China and other partners.) Indeed, until now, it has also refrained from strikes, overt sabotage

[106] Most, though not all, of the debate took place in the pages of *Russia in Global Affairs*. See Sergei A. Karaganov, "A Difficult but Necessary Decision", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 13 June 2023; Ilya S. Fabrichnikov, "Demonstrative Restraint as a Recipe against Unnecessary Decisions", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 16 June 2023; Ivan Timofeev, "A Preemptive Nuclear Strike? No!", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 20 June 2023; Dmitry V. Trenin, "Conflict in Ukraine and Nuclear Weapons", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 22 June 2023; and Fyodor A. Lukyanov, "Why We Won't Be Able to 'Sober Up the West' with a Nuclear Bomb", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 26 June 2023.

[107] "Russia warns Britain and plans nuclear drills over the West's possible deepening role in Ukraine", AP, 6 May 2024. The drills themselves are not unusual, but by drawing attention to them and blaming Western provocations, Moscow was explicitly sending a signal.

[108] "Kremlin says nuclear weapon drills are Russia's response to West's statements", Reuters, 6 May 2024.

[109] Crisis Group interviews, French officials, Paris, 11-12 March 2024. See also Sylvie Corbet, "Putting Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not 'ruled out' in the future, French leader says", Associated Press, 26 February 2024. Macron has said he sees no reason to send troops now, and his allies in the U.S. and Germany have ruled out this option.

[110] Brit McCandless Farmer, "Democratic leader Jeffries: 'Pro-Putin faction' in GOP delayed Ukraine aid", CBS News "60 Minutes Overtime", 5 May 2024.

[111] For previous Crisis Group analysis of these matters, see the publications cited in fn 7.

or cyberattacks on the territory of the alliance's members.[112] Given that the Western powers fully grasp and appear aligned with Russia's preferences when it comes to keeping NATO and Russian troops away from each other – whatever Macron and Jeffries may have said – Moscow has little to fear on that front, with or without threats.

As concerns longer-range weapons, however, the calculus is less clear-cut and will likely be clarified only as all involved test one another. While Russia would like all Western military aid deliveries to Ukraine to cease, it is particularly worried about longer-range systems for two reasons. First, it is concerned about how such weapons might enhance Ukraine's ability to do Russia harm in the future, regardless of how they are used now.[113] Secondly, and immediately, it frets that these weapons could do real damage to Russia's military machine in the present war. With its new conventional threat against the UK, Moscow is sending the signal that it would see their use against its territory as cause to retaliate against a NATO member state (though it would likely start with the weapons supplied to Ukraine). Russia seems genuinely worried about the implications of these developments for its war effort.

Another wrinkle here is that some of the weapons in question require donor state troops to accompany and operate them in Ukraine. Apparently, Germany's bunker-busting Taurus missile is one such weapon. Germany's concerns about providing Ukraine with the Taurus (which Kyiv sought for its superior capacity to destroy infrastructure, likely with thoughts of doing severe damage to the Kerch bridge connecting Russia to Crimea) had echoed the U.S. discussion of ATACMs, focusing on the escalatory risks inherent in Ukrainian strikes on targets in Russia and Crimea.[114] But in March, amid mounting pressure on German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, including from his own defence minister, to send these missiles to Ukraine, a Russia-leaked conversation between German officials indicated that Berlin fears it cannot provide them absent German military personnel. Scholz thinks that dispatching personnel would make Germany a combatant and invite dangerous escalation.[115] The Russian threats against the UK may suggest Moscow believes that missiles it provides are operated by British military personnel.

There is no easy answer to the complex problem of managing the risk of providing advanced weapons systems. While the record suggests that Moscow does not mean all it says, there is no reason to think all its threats are empty. At the same time, giving Moscow a full veto over supplying Ukraine the weapons it needs to succeed on the

[112] "We have expressed a few red lines to Russia: no cyberattacks on US infrastructure; nuclear use; and NATO territory". Crisis Group interview, senior U.S. official, Washington, September 2023.
[113] Crisis Group interviews, Russian experts, spring 2024. See also Igor Dmitrev, "In the Duma, they have warned about repercussions of ATACMs missile provision to Ukraine", *Lenta*, 19 March 2024; "Expert: Russia and the U.S. may be on the verge of a direct military clash in 2023", TASS, 25 December 2022; and "Statement by the MFA of Russia in connection with the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation conducting exercises to practice the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons", Russian Foreign Ministry, 6 May 2024.
[114] Officials and military analysts close to the chancellery say Berlin was especially wary of providing the Taurus for fear it would indeed be used to hit the Kerch bridge. Crisis Group interviews, September-January 2024. See also Sylvia Pfeifer and Patricia Nilsson, "Why Germany's Taurus is Europe's most-wanted long-range missile", *Financial Times,* 14 March 2024.
[115] Katie Marie Davies and Kirsten Grieshaber, "Germany and Russia spar over a leaked audio on missiles for Ukraine. Berlin promises to investigate", Associated Press, 4 March 2024.

battlefield is not a reasonable way forward. Western governments should thus continue to look for responsible ways to give Ukraine what it needs and strive to better coordinate among themselves as they adapt their policies.

Although no policy, save capitulation, can entirely remove risk from these dynamics for any party, the lessons of the first two-plus years of conflict suggest that incrementalism helps leverage the Kremlin's own risk aversion to enable further deliveries. Should Western arms suppliers decide to move forward with lifting caveats, sticking with a calibrated approach would be prudent. Western powers might thus get rid of some restrictions, but keep others in place, for instance limiting Ukrainian strikes in Russia to unquestionably military targets (rather than, for example, infrastructure) and communicating this policy to Moscow. Careful deliberation, and methodical analysis to anticipate Russia's response, will require paying a price in the form of delay and the political fallout that results. But, given the stakes, this way ahead is the most prudent.

Moscow, meanwhile, will continue trying to coerce changes in Ukrainian and Western behaviour, but its specific actions will also provide evidence of its real capabilities and risk tolerance, which could help Ukraine and its backers calibrate their own next steps. For instance, if the UK and Ukraine do test Russian wherewithal, Moscow's response will help elucidate its true red lines.

Another potential tactic for risk mitigation relates to Russia's insistence that its concerns are not just about the present conflict, but also about the arsenal Ukraine is building for the future.[116] If this worry is indeed significant in Russian officials' minds, there may be a way to quietly signal to Moscow that, if and when talks to end the war commence, limits on this sort of weaponry could be on the table. Of course, if Russia dictates terms, Ukraine would lose these weapons. But even if it does not, Ukraine might consider limits in exchange for concomitant restrictions on Russia. While it is unclear if sketching this prospect would mitigate Russia's present-day threat perceptions, it could only help and seems worth trying.

C. *Fill the Ranks*

No amount of weaponry, advanced or otherwise, will do Ukraine any good if it lacks the soldiers to wield the arms. Kyiv is struggling to mobilise and adequately train front-line troops to replace the dead and wounded and spell those exhausted by long stretches of combat.[117] While Zelenskyy announced in late February that Ukraine had lost 31,000 soldiers in two years of fighting, this number reflected only the casualties whose deaths in combat and identities were confirmed.[118] U.S. officials estimated that 70,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed as of the summer of 2023.[119] The challenge goes deeper than finding new fighters: it also has to do with the morale,

[116] Crisis Group interviews, Russian experts, spring 2024.
[117] "'At what cost?' Ukraine strains to bolster its army as war fatigue weighs", Reuters, 28 November 2023.
[118] Emmanuel Grynszpan, "L'Ukraine ne pourra lancer de contre-offensive que lorsque l'armée disposera de troupes fraîches, bien équipées et entraînées", *Le Monde*, 5 March 2024.
[119] Constant Méheuf and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "After two years of bloody fighting, Ukraine wrestles with conscription", *The New York Times*, 28 January 2024.

physical fitness and training of conscripts, who in many cases fear that they are being shuffled off to battle without sufficient support for them and their families. "The military now no longer recruits the people who want to fight but those who do not want to refuse", a former senior defence official said.[120]

Coming up with a new mobilisation framework that corresponds to current reality has proven complicated. In late 2023, Ukraine's armed forces said they needed half a million new recruits.[121] But a government bill to reform mobilisation, introduced around the same time but not geared to any specific number, was stuck in parliament for months before finally being signed in April 2024. The new law, which entered into force on 18 May, was proposed by the defence ministry, but has been much amended in the course of parliamentary debate.[122] It seeks to widen the pool of recruits, including by obliging conscription-age men to update their data and reassessing the "unfit for service" status of some men previously rejected.[123] Prior to its passage, Zelenskyy signed an older bill into law which lowered the minimum age for mobilisation from 27 to 25.[124] The high mobilisation age was an artefact of Ukraine's now irrelevant conscription regulations, under which men are subject to be drafted until the age of 27 and those over that age to be mobilised.

The mobilisation bill moved slowly for several reasons. Zelenskyy and his team worried that provisions broadening the pool of people subject to serve would be unpopular.[125] The president has also asked the military to explain why it needs so many fighters and highlighted the risk that large-scale mobilisation could aggravate labour shortages.[126] A member of Ukraine's parliament furthermore told Crisis Group that legislators felt the new mobilisation law could not widen the aperture too much, for instance to even younger men or more women (women in a lengthy list of professions are subject to being drafted on paper, although they are rarely if ever called up), in order to leave space for future expansions of the force.[127]

The president's worries about unpopularity are surely rooted partly in wide-spread reports of draft evasion. Crisis Group has for months heard accounts of men failing to respond to mobilisation notices.[128] Reportedly, somewhere between tens and hundreds of thousands of military-eligible men have fled the country, although the wide range reflects how difficult it is to get an accurate count.[129] According to a BBC

[120] Crisis Group interview, former senior defence official, Kyiv, 4 September 2023.
[121] Roman Olearchyk and Ben Hall, "Ukrainian army chiefs seek to mobilise 500,000 more troops", *Financial Times*, 19 December 2023.
[122] "Ukraine to submit revised mobilization bill after criticism", Reuters, 11 January 2024. "The government endorsed a new version of the draft law on mobilisation and passed it on to the Verkhovna Rada", *Ukrinform*, 30 January 2024 [Ukrainian].
[123] "Law 3633-IX", Verkhovna Rada, 11 April 2024.
[124] Hanna Arhirova and Samya Kullab, "Ukraine lowers its conscription age to 25 to replenish its beleaguered troops", Associated Press, 3 April 2024.
[125] "Ukraine's ruling party may lack votes for revised mobilization bill", *The New Voice of Ukraine*, 2 February 2024.
[126] Veronika Melkozerova, "Zelenskyy wants more details before authorizing half a million new troops", *Politico*, 20 December 2023.
[127] Crisis Group interview, member of parliament, Kyiv, spring 2024.
[128] Crisis Group interviews, officials and analysts in Kyiv and Dnipro, September 2023 and March 2024.
[129] See "Nearly 20,000 men have fled Ukraine to avoid being drafted", BBC, 17 November 2023; and Jamie Dettmer, "Ukraine is heading for defeat", *Politico*, 17 April 2024.

investigation, those who flee bribe border guards to ignore the exit ban for men between the ages of eighteen and 60, or to give them papers saying they have a disability.[130] "If you have hands and feet, you end up paying a bribe at every checkpoint [to avoid being drafted]", a businessman complained.[131] To fill their billets, recruiters have been accused of using coercive tactics, sometimes illegally detaining men and compelling them to enlist. Units have also taken to freelancing, recruiting personnel directly into their own ranks with promises of good support and treatment.[132]

Corruption is recognised as a problem. Ukrainian media regularly report corruption cases involving mobilisation officers and medical commissions.[133] The army command recently ordered an investigation into a senior secret service officer, who tried to use a draft notice to silence a journalist working on a story about the officer's surprising wealth.[134] President Zelenskyy also cited corruption in August 2023, when he fired every regional recruitment chief.[135]

Zelenskyy was also right to ask the military to explain its needs. It is hard to get a sense of just how many military personnel Ukraine has and what they are doing. Accounting is certainly inadequate, and indeed one of General Syrskyy's early administrative acts was to commence an audit of the armed forces.[136] Ukrainian officials and experts told Crisis Group that despite the draft dodging, the country has some one million people in uniform, if not more. But while the number is high, the military's fighting strength is insufficient to hold the front line. Support units, they say, are well staffed; it is combat forces that face persistent troop shortages.[137] Although units may look good on paper, they may not have their full reported complement because they have been pressed to accept mobilised personnel who were not, in fact, ready to fight for health or other reasons.[138] Attrition then takes its toll. Some front-line battalions are down to a fraction of their previous strength, with one commander telling the *Washington Post* his unit dropped to 40 from 200.[139]

According to both officials and experts, prospective soldiers avoid service in general and front-line service in particular because they fear that they will not be adequately trained and equipped. They also worry that, if they are wounded, they will not get battlefield and further medical care and that, if the worst happens, their families will not get help. These are not idle concerns. Training gaps are very real, and as

[130] "Nearly 20,000 men have fled Ukraine to avoid being drafted", BBC, 17 November 2023.
[131] Crisis Group interview, Odesa region, 26 October 2023.
[132] Crisis Group interviews, Western military experts, Washington, April 2024.
[133] For an incomplete collection of publicised cases, see Iryna Labiak, "What's wrong with mobilisation in Ukraine: Scandals of manhandling recruits into buses and corruption", TSN, 31 March 2024 [Ukrainian].
[134] Andrii Vodiannyi, "Syrskyy ordered an investigation into a draft notice handed to a journalist who was working on an investigation about the SBU", *Liga*, 7 April 2024 [Ukrainian].
[135] Tweet by Volodymyr Zelensky, @ZelenskyyUa, president of Ukraine, 2:14pm, 11 August 2023.
[136] A Ukrainian told Crisis Group his family member remained on the active-duty roster for nine months while he sought formal recognition of his wartime injury. Crisis Group interview, March 2024.
[137] Crisis Group interviews, Ukrainian experts and former officials, February-March 2024.
[138] Crisis Group interviews, Western experts with extensive knowledge of the Ukrainian military, Washington, April 2024.
[139] Isabelle Khurshudyan and Anastacia Galouchka, "Front-line Ukrainian infantry units report acute shortage of soldiers", *Washington Post*, 8 February 2024.

discussed below, battlefield medicine reportedly continues to struggle. Crisis Group has heard of families facing great difficulties trying to learn the fate of loved ones.[140]

Defence ministry officials have talked of shifting from a system of mobilisation to one of recruitment. They do not want to end mobilisation, but to make signing up, whether when called or voluntarily, more appealing. They will need to enhance the benefits available to soldiers and their families, ensure that they get care and attention when they are wounded or otherwise need support, and, while providing a revamped training to everyone, offer volunteers more options regarding where and how they serve.[141] A transparent system of rotation in and out of the most dangerous combat zones and clarity about who is allowed to leave the army could also ease fears among prospective recruits. The military command and government removed provisions for clearer troop rotation and demobilisation frameworks from the mobilisation bill just before it came up for a vote.[142] These should almost certainly be revisited and resuscitated.

Even if officials commit to it, rolling out a new approach will take time, and Ukraine needs front-line fighters now. Ukraine's plans underline its challenges: rather than pulling from the better-staffed rear units to reinforce the front lines, an official said Kyiv will likely draw on other uniformed services.[143] So far, there is no evidence it has done so, but it may take this step soon. It is does not seem that Syrskyy's audit has turned up much in the way of trained units languishing untapped in the rear.

Kyiv will undermine its own goals rapidly if it proceeds with mobilisation without fixing the problems of service. In the very near term, it may have little choice but to muddle through, although some measures, including more transparency with both servicemembers and their families, can be taken rapidly. Indeed, even the promise of a better way forward may make it easier for soldiers to serve.

D. *Improve Training*

When it comes to training Ukrainian forces, the problems are twofold. One is that not everyone sent to the front gets more than a cursory version of the preparation they would optimally receive. Crisis Group has heard tales of people sent into battle with only days of training.[144] "Mobilised troops receive very little training because they are desperately needed on the front", said Konrad Muzyka, a Poland-based defence analyst. "It is a vicious circle. … Poor training results in more deaths, which results in more fragmentary mobilisation". Some pay for their own first aid classes

[140] Crisis Group interviews, officials, military personnel, NGO representatives, experts, European diplomats and others, Kyiv, Dnipro and Odesa, 2023-2024. "People need to know that they won't end up in Bakhmut or Avdiivka the day after they get mobilised", a politician familiar with the development of the mobilisation law said. See also Stefan Weichert, "The real reason thousands are fleeing conscription in Ukraine", *The Daily Beast*, 21 January 2024.

[141] Crisis Group interviews, Ukrainian officials, Kyiv, March 2024.

[142] "Provisions on demobilisation taken out of government-sponsored draft bill by request from Syrskyy and Umerov", *Censor*, 9 April 2024 [Ukrainian].

[143] Crisis Group interview, Ukrainian official, Kyiv, March 2024.

[144] Crisis Group interviews, officials, military personnel, NGO representatives, experts, European diplomats and others, Kyiv, Dnipro and Odesa, 2023-2024.

ahead of deployment.[145] Others join basic training courses for civilians provided by municipalities. Anecdotally, the vast majority of participants in these courses are women, some of whom intend to enlist. Others may want to be better able to protect themselves and their families with the men away.[146]

The second problem is that even longer-term training in its current form may not be adequate to Ukraine's needs. Not surprisingly under these conditions, knowledgeable Ukrainians in and out of uniform point out that not only are there gaps in combat preparation, but that units in the rear are also consistently unprepared to fight, limiting their capacity to backfill combat units and to hold on if Russian forces break through Ukraine's lines.[147]

The gap does not stem from lack of support from outside partners. Ukraine is getting substantial training assistance. All but three of the EU's 27 members, plus Norway, Türkiye, Australia, North Macedonia, Iceland, Albania and Serbia, have offered training or instructors.[148] The EU's Military Assistance Mission expects to train some 35,000 troops by the end of 2024.[149] The U.S. had drilled some 19,000 by early 2024, and the UK has prepared some 30,000 in Britain, with another 10,000 planned for the first half of 2024.[150]

The problem is more the training's content and pace. The core of what friendly states provide is a five-week, NATO-style combined arms course.[151] But the fighting itself is simply different – and more brutal – than the course assumes. Ukrainian recruits complain of long PowerPoint presentations and lectures on safety regulations that preclude realistic training.[152] They also say the curriculum fails to capture battlefield conditions in Ukraine. For example, it does not appropriately account for lack of air support and the proliferation of drones and jamming equipment.[153] Military experts say training has been too brief for the rank and file and too slow for higher-level staff.[154] One adviser to Ukraine's armed forces told Crisis Group that while foreigners drill Ukrainians abroad, up to 60 per cent of its own trainers sit idle.[155] Experts

[145] Konrad Muzyka, "Ukraine Conflict Monitor: 3 February-9 February 2024", Rochan Consulting, February 2024.
[146] Crisis Group telephone interview, Ukrainian expert, April 2024.
[147] Crisis Group interviews, officials and experts, Kyiv, spring 2024.
[148] "Ukraine", European Commission. See also "Training abroad: Which partner countries train tens of thousands of Ukrainians and how do they do it? Interview with Major General Oleksiy Taran", Armiya Inform, 5 January 2024 [Ukrainian].
[149] John Leicester, "Military training efforts for Ukraine hit major milestones even as attention shifts to Gaza", Associated Press, 13 November 2023.
[150] "Continued support for Ukraine is top of mind as U.S. army secretary visits Europe", press release, U.S. Army Europe and Africa, 15 February 2024. "30,000 Ukrainian recruits trained in largest UK military training effort since Second World War", press release, UK Government, 10 November 2023. "Ukraine War live", *The Guardian*, 22 February 2024.
[151] Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, "At U.S. base in Germany, Ukraine's military conducts war games", *The New York Times*, 2 March 2023.
[152] "It's Time to Ukrainify US Military Assistance", Modern War Institute, October 2023. "Stormbreak: Fighting through Russian Defences in Ukraine's 2023 Offensive", RUSI, September 2023.
[153] Crisis Group interview, non-governmental military trainer, Kyiv, June 2023.
[154] Crisis Group interviews, military experts with close knowledge of the Ukrainian military and Western support, September-November 2023.
[155] Crisis Group interview, military adviser, Kyiv, March 2024.

and journalists report that units often carry out their own training, some of it better, some worse.[156]

Ukrainian military advisers and senior staff have proposed alternative approaches. Among the ideas worthy of consideration is a division of labour under which foreign training would emphasise developing non-commissioned officers (NCOs), who carry the military's administrative burden, as well as imparting skills in leadership, military medicine and specific weapons that Ukraine has lacked.[157] Ukrainian trainers could then design courses that reflect battlefield conditions. Further, military advisers have suggested that Ukraine's trainers should have their own rotation system, so that they can develop skills and get needed breaks.[158] A retired senior Western military official said Kyiv might consider having Ukrainian trainers also rotate into combat duty, so that they have recent firsthand battlefield experience.[159] Importantly, Western trainers and their Ukrainian counterparts should establish mechanisms to ensure they learn from each other.[160]

For the long term, Ukraine needs a training plan that is not only better adapted to what troops will face when they get to the front but also begins to prepare the fighting army Kyiv and its backers hope to build over the next two to five years. NCO training will be critical to both. But so will training on weapons that will require long lead times, such as F-16 fighter jets, which Ukraine has sought from the start of the full-scale war and are now expected to enter combat later in 2024, after pilots have been trained abroad.[161] "We could have started training pilots a year ago", a German official said in September 2023, shortly after training had begun. "We knew we would get there at some point".[162] Of course, with debates proceeding, one cannot really know where, exactly, Ukraine's backers will get. But where agreement has been reached to provide weapons (or when it seems very likely) the training should surely begin as soon as possible.

[156] Crisis Group interviews, Western military experts, Washington, April 2024. See also Olga Shevchenko, "Getting rid of decades of Soviet mentality: What Ukraine's armed forces need to do for victory", *Fokus*, 9 June 2023 [Ukrainian].

[157] Crisis Group interview, military adviser, Kyiv, March 2024.

[158] Crisis Group interviews, military advisers and officials, Kyiv, March 2024.

[159] Crisis Group interviews, military advisers, Brussels, March 2024.

[160] Crisis Group interviews, military experts with close knowledge of the Ukrainian military and Western support, September-November 2023.

[161] "Biden 'ruling out' for now sending F-16s to Ukraine, he tells ABC's David Muir", ABC News, 24 February 2023; "USAFE boss: Ukraine won't get the F-16 until 2024 – and proficiency will take years", *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 18 August 2023. "F-16s key step for Ukraine, but won't be 'game-changer,' SECAF says", *Defense News*, 22 May 2023. "Perseverance and adaptation: Ukraine's counteroffensive at three months", *War on the Rocks*, 4 September 2023; "Netherlands to deliver 18 F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine", Reuters, 22 December 2023.

[162] Crisis Group telephone interview, German official, September 2023.

E. *Adapt Military and Civilian Strategy to a Long War and Active Defence*

In the spring of 2024, in the face of Russian advances and Ukraine's constraints, Ukrainian forces rushed to build defensive fortifications along key stretches of the front in what Zelenskyy described as a "new phase" of the war.[163] A variety of military and civilian observers within Ukraine and without understandably bemoaned the military's failure to beef up such lines sooner.[164] Because that was not done, they argued, forces falling back under Russian pressure might have nothing to fall back to.

While Ukraine has now reportedly made substantial and rapid progress on defensive lines, gaps remain.[165] Filling them is crucial, as Kyiv will almost surely find itself in a defensive posture for some time to come. Its supporters are encouraging it to focus on holding the territory it has now, to put it in a stronger position to keep inflicting losses on Russian forces and to guard against the risk of a Russian offensive while it regroups. A Western official prescribed a strategy of "active defence", whereby Ukraine keeps probing for weak spots and steps up its missile and drone attacks.[166] This idea seems the most plausible forecast of what Ukraine will do, assuming it can hold the line, until it is able to go on the offensive once more.

Ukraine will also, of course, do all it can to keep the pressure on Russian forces, even when it cannot break through their lines. The successes of its asymmetric warfare tactics in 2023 continued in the first part of 2024. In the first months of the year, these have included the use of naval drones to destroy a Russian missile boat on 1 February, sinking a patrol vessel on 5 March and damaging three ships moored in Sevastopol port on 23 March using cruise missiles. The Ukrainian air force also downed a Russian spy plane on 15 January and likely destroyed six fighter jets in a 5 April drone attack on an airfield in southern Russia.[167] The UK's defence ministry said losing one of its eight A-50 spy planes, most likely to a Patriot missile, will likely require Russia to think twice about reconnaissance flights near Ukrainian-controlled airspace.[168]

But Kyiv must prepare for what fighting defensively will mean and, anticipating a long war with Russia, plan for both defensive and offensive operations in the future.

[163] "Ukraine's Zelenskyy says the war with Russia is in a new phase as winter looms", Associated Press, 1 December 2023.
[164] Crisis Group interviews, former statesman, non-state security adviser and security contractor, Kyiv, March 2024.
[165] Josh Holder, Eric Schmitt and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Ukraine's race to hold the line", *The New York Times*, 22 April 2024; Maryam Zakir-Hussain, "Ukraine-Russia war latest: Kyiv troops say defensive lines 'barely exist' as Putin flaunts captured U.S. tanks", *The Independent*, 3 May 2024.
[166] Christopher Miller, "'Active defence': How Ukraine plans to survive 2024", *Financial Times*, 19 January 2024.
[167] "Ukraine 'hits Russian missile boat *Ivanovets* in Black Sea'", BBC, 1 February. "Russian patrol vessel 'sunk' off the coast of Crimea, Ukrainian military claims", RFE, 5 March 2024. Tweet by the UK Ministry of Defence @DefenceHQ, 2:30pm, 29 March 2024. "Ukraine destroys Russian spy plane and command aircraft – army chief", Reuters, 15 January 2024. Veronika Melkozerova, "Ukraine hits Russian air base in large drone attack", *Politico*, 5 April 2024. Rose Gottemoeller and Michael Ryan, "Ukraine has a pathway to victory", *Foreign Policy*, 8 January 2024. "Russia is losing the battle for the Black Sea", *The Economist*, 28 January 2024.
[168] Tweet by the UK Ministry of Defence, @DefenceHQ, 10:01am, 17 January 2024. See also "Not just a Patriot? How Ukraine managed to down the A-50", Deutsche Welle, 15 January 2024 [Russian].

It must also recognise, and not just rhetorically, that its tactics will not always work. It needs to integrate undesired contingencies into its planning and not just prepare defensive lines, as is now under way, but also ramp up planning for civilian evacuation and support. While local authorities Crisis Group spoke to in eastern Ukraine in March took pride in the systems they had in place to support evacuees, they did not seem to be laying groundwork for ramped-up efforts if Russia takes more territory.[169] Nor were many humanitarian groups thinking about potential relocation needs (which in the past have required evacuations of civilians under fire) or the challenges of continuing to provide assistance if things grew more dire.[170] In May, as Russian troops moved forward in the Kharkiv region, the humanitarian response indeed struggled to keep up.[171]

Thus, for all the lessons of the past months, a certain amount of wishful thinking appeared to remain part of the calculus in Kyiv and among its partners. Sustainability will require a more clear-headed approach, as well as for Ukraine and its backers to hash out a coordinated strategy, in which aid and training schemes align with Ukraine's military planning and a variety of possible contingencies.

F. *Keep Channels Open*

While real peace talks are implausible under current conditions, Ukraine and its backers should also be thinking about how to help shape the battlefield to make them more likely in the future. This task will not be easy, with Russia seeming bent on continuing the war and gaining from it. But should the Kremlin cease to see quite so much advantage in further fighting, it would be more likely to cut a deal that does not undermine Ukrainian, European and global security.

To date, Kyiv's diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis Moscow has emphasised accountability and international legal mechanisms rather than deals. That is to say, Ukrainian officials have pressed their backers and partners to pursue charges against their Russian counterparts in international courts, agree to use frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine and raise questions about the legitimacy of the Putin government (which has, after all, repeatedly changed the Russian constitution to remain in power). It has also focused on broadening global support for Ukraine, including through the series of summits and senior leadership meetings convened around the world to discuss the Ukrainian government's "peace plan". Kyiv hopes the next meeting on 15-16 June, hosted by Switzerland in the lakeside resort town of Lucerne, will gather heads of states in a show of support. But the participation of key countries remains unclear with less than a month to go.[172]

[169] Crisis Group interviews, Kyiv and eastern Ukraine, March 2024.
[170] Crisis Group interviews, Ukrainian officials, NGO representatives and experts, Kyiv, Dnipro and Donetsk, March 2024.
[171] Crisis Group telephone interview, consultant for international humanitarian agencies in Ukraine, May 2024. See also Constant Méheut, Maria Varenikova and Michael Schwirtz, "Facing Russian advance, a top Ukrainian general paints a bleak picture", *The New York Times*, 14 May 2024.
[172] This meeting is the fifth after previous rounds in Copenhagen in June 2023, Jeddah in August 2023, Malta in October 2023 and Davos in January 2024, but the first that Ukraine wanted at the leader level. "Dozens of countries sign up for Ukraine peace summit, Switzerland says", Reuters, 15 May 2024.

That these meetings do not include Russia and that the plan is predicated on Russian retreat and acceptance of defeat is, of course, intentional. Kyiv's target with this engagement is not Moscow, but capitals around the world. As such, outreach that underlines Russia's violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity in contravention of a cardinal principle of modern international law as memorialised in the UN Charter indeed finds sympathy globally.

But Ukraine risks losing some of the global good-will it has by pressing on in this way, if only because the results are so minimal, and few leaders want to attend meetings for the sake of doing so. Moreover, Ukraine is far from the only deadly conflict on the planet, and frustration with the outsize attention it continues to draw has only grown over the last two years. Previous meetings have revealed divisions over perceived double standards (with Gaza getting frequent mention), the lack of Russian participation and, in the words of a European official, Ukraine's approach of "pushing too hard, as usual".[173]

At the same time, Kyiv does talk to Moscow, even if not at these summits. Although the UN- and Türkiye-brokered Black Sea grain deal lasted less than a year, it did underline that common interests could keep the parties talking, even as they fought. Ukraine and Russia have met to discuss exchanging prisoners of war and remains of dead soldiers. They have also arranged for the return of Ukrainian citizens from Russian territory, including children.

These discussions are not groundwork for a broader deal, by any stretch. But they demonstrate that mitigation of some of the war's damage remains possible. In principle, the parties could also discuss rules of the road for warfare, such as avoiding strikes on energy infrastructure. Although at this point both Ukraine and Russia have much to gain from strikes on Russian oil industry and Ukraine's overall grid, respectively, at a later time, they might consider agreeing to step back.

Ukraine's backers also talk to Russia. Here, they cannot by any means make a deal on Ukraine's behalf. But they can remind Moscow that deals on Ukraine that Kyiv can live with open the door to broader discussions of European and global security. Finding a way to make what looks set to be a long standoff between Moscow and Western capitals less unstable and less expensive would serve all parties' interests.

[173] Crisis Group interviews, participants in previous such meetings, September 2023-January 2024.

VI. The Road Ahead

Despite the U.S. Congress's recent show of unity, Moscow has reason to look back at the last year with satisfaction and the sense it is on the right track. Even with the resources that the U.S. is now putting into the assistance pipeline, the Kremlin's battlefield gains can only reinforce confidence in its staying power – and that is just part of the picture. The Kremlin tightened its grip at home following the would-be revolt by Wagner forces, and it is doing so again in the wake of the deadly ISIS attack at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in late March.[174] Mass anti-war protests are unlikely, and if they come will almost certainly be met with crackdowns, not policy shifts. U.S. elections are only months away; polls suggest that Trump has at least even odds of returning to the Oval Office brimming with animus toward Zelenskyy and scepticism about support for Kyiv. Even if Biden prevails, it is possible that Washington will grow fatigued with propping up a far-away protagonist in what some commentators already describe as another "forever war".[175]

Equally importantly, if Ukraine and its supporters cannot both adapt and maintain their resolve, Kyiv will almost surely continue to lose lives and territory. It will then eventually have little choice but to cut some sort of deal. A Moscow in a position to dictate terms will certainly look to deny Kyiv's capacity to rebuild its military and defend itself in the future – or to get help from partners. The Kremlin may well also demand European commitments to limit promises to defend (much less extend NATO or EU membership to) not only Ukraine, but also other states in Moscow's crosshairs, notably Moldova and Georgia. At best, its own losses may render Russia sufficiently chastened not to trot out demands it made in late 2021, prior to its full-scale invasion, when it sought to constrain NATO's ability to station forces to defend allies that had joined the alliance since the Cold War ended. But NATO members near Russia's borders fear it will do all it can to undermine their security and the alliance's unity.[176]

While any negotiated deal that ends the war will give Russia concessions, if it emerges with the appetite for greater aggression because of the scope of its success, the result will be a Ukraine and a Europe prone to instability. A Russia with a larger army than before the war and able to bend Kyiv to its will could well press its advantage, most likely first against Moldova and Georgia but eventually perhaps, as many NATO members that border Russia fear and believe, against their own territories.[177] Threats that draw closer to the alliance's eastern flank will likely be met with recriminations among NATO and EU allies faced with hard questions about these institutions' credibility when it comes to mutual defence. Some will insist on more forceful responses to new Russian aggression, military or political, than those of the last two years, increasing escalation risks. If the U.S., perhaps under a second Trump

[174] See Jerome Drevon, "ISIS Strikes Moscow", Crisis Group Commentary, 26 March 2024.
[175] Emma Ashford, Joshua Shifrinson and Stephen Wertheim, "What does America want in Ukraine?", *Foreign Policy*, 9 May 2024.
[176] Vanessa Gera, "Estonia's foreign minister says the Baltics have 3 to 4 years to prepare for Russian 'test' of NATO", Associated Press, 14 February 2024. "Almost half of Poles think Russia is likely to attack Poland", *European Pravda*, 22 February 2024.
[177] Crisis Group interviews, Russian officials, November 2023-January 2024.

administration, shows waning seriousness about its commitments to European security, the risks for the region will be even more dire.

Russia's big bet on aggression is most likely to fail if Ukraine and its backers learn the lessons of the past year as Kyiv prepares to fight for its future. The U.S. will need to summon the political will to provide the support that only it can offer. European countries will need to step up to ensure that their assistance can help Ukraine survive the U.S. stepping back, even as they do what they can to prevent that from happening. All will need to work together to position Ukraine as strongly as it can be to defend its territory – with the right weaponry, troop strength, training and field posture to hold the line.

Ukraine, meanwhile, will need to dig in as it fixes its broken recruitment and deployment system, revamps its approach to training and prepares its population for a continuing war, even as it signals its openness to meaningful diplomacy. The strongest card in its hand is asymmetric tactics, such as its strikes in the Black Sea, that chip away at Russia's capacity to do harm and perhaps its morale. Moscow's return to nuclear threats in May suggests that it is not as pleased with the state of affairs as its rhetoric suggests and is genuinely worried about the implications of greater Western assistance. It will be for the Western governments and their intelligence services to assess perils associated with delivering advanced weapons systems, but those risks should not be dismissed out of hand. All involved should embark upon the next months of war clear-eyed and prepared to mitigate dangerous contingencies, even as they look to take advantage of openings to end the war on more favourable terms should these appear.

Finally, even as Ukraine prepares for a long war, Kyiv and its backers should keep front of mind that the end goal of their efforts remains diplomacy, which implies compromise and long, painful negotiations. That means keeping the fight going until Moscow is interested in a deal that not only ends the shooting, but limits Russian capacity for future aggression, perhaps in exchange for constraints on Ukraine and its backers' capacity to do Russia harm. It is worth preparing for this eventuality, with all parties assessing their true red lines, even if behind closed doors. Signals of willingness to mitigate the damage, such as through mutual agreement to refrain from attacking energy infrastructure, could also be valuable in the meantime. While such initiatives may fail, an openness to creative solutions that undermine neither party signal that both smaller and larger deals remain possible, even if, for now, peace talks involving the genuine give-and-take required to end the war in a way that does not create more danger seem out of the question.

Kyiv/London/Washington/Brussels, 28 May 2024

Appendix A: Ukraine's 1,000km Front Line

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kyiv, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. The ideas, opinions and comments expressed by Crisis Group are entirely its own and do not represent or reflect the views of any donor. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Austria (Austrian Development Agency), Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, DG INTPA), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), France (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency), Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs), Japan (Japan International Cooperation Agency and Japan External Trade Organization), Principality of Liechtenstein (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), The Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), New Zealand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Qatar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Slovenia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), United Kingdom (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) and the World Bank.

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May 2024

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Europe and Central Asia since 2021

Special Reports and Briefings

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2021-2022, Special Briefing N°6, 13 September 2021.

7 Priorities for the G7: Managing the Global Fallout of Russia's War on Ukraine, Special Briefing N°7, 22 June 2022.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2022-2023, Special Briefing N°8, 14 September 2022.

Seven Priorities for Preserving the OSCE in a Time of War, Special Briefing N°9, 29 November 2022.

Seven Priorities for the G7 in 2023, Special Briefing N°10, 15 May 2023.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2023-2024, Crisis Group Special Briefing N°11, 14 September 2023.

Balkans

Relaunching the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, Europe Report N°262, 25 January 2021 (also available in Russian).

Managing the Risks of Instability in the Western Balkans, Europe Report N°265, 7 July 2022.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Hot Summer, Europe Briefing N°95, 26 September 2022.

Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties, Europe Report N°269, 2 April 2024.

Cyprus

An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus, Europe Report N°268, 17 April 2023 (also available in Turkish).

South Caucasus

Post-war Prospects for Nagorno-Karabakh, Europe Report N°264, 9 June 2021.

Nagorno-Karabakh: Seeking a Path to Peace in the Ukraine War's Shadow, Europe Briefing N°93, 22 April 2022.

Averting a New War between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Europe Report N°266, 30 January 2023.

Ukraine

Responding to Russia's New Military Buildup Near Ukraine, Europe Briefing N°92, 8 December 2021 (also available in Russian and Ukrainian).

Responding to Ukraine's Displacement Crisis: From Speed to Sustainability, Europe Briefing N°94, 26 September 2022 (also available in Ukrainian).

Answering Four Hard Questions About Russia's War in Ukraine, Europe Briefing N°96, 8 December 2022.

Turkey

Turkey-Greece: From Maritime Brinkmanship to Dialogue, Europe Report N°263, 31 May 2021 (also available in Turkish).

An Enduring Challenge: ISIS-linked Foreigners in Türkiye, Europe Report N°267, 28 February 2023.

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