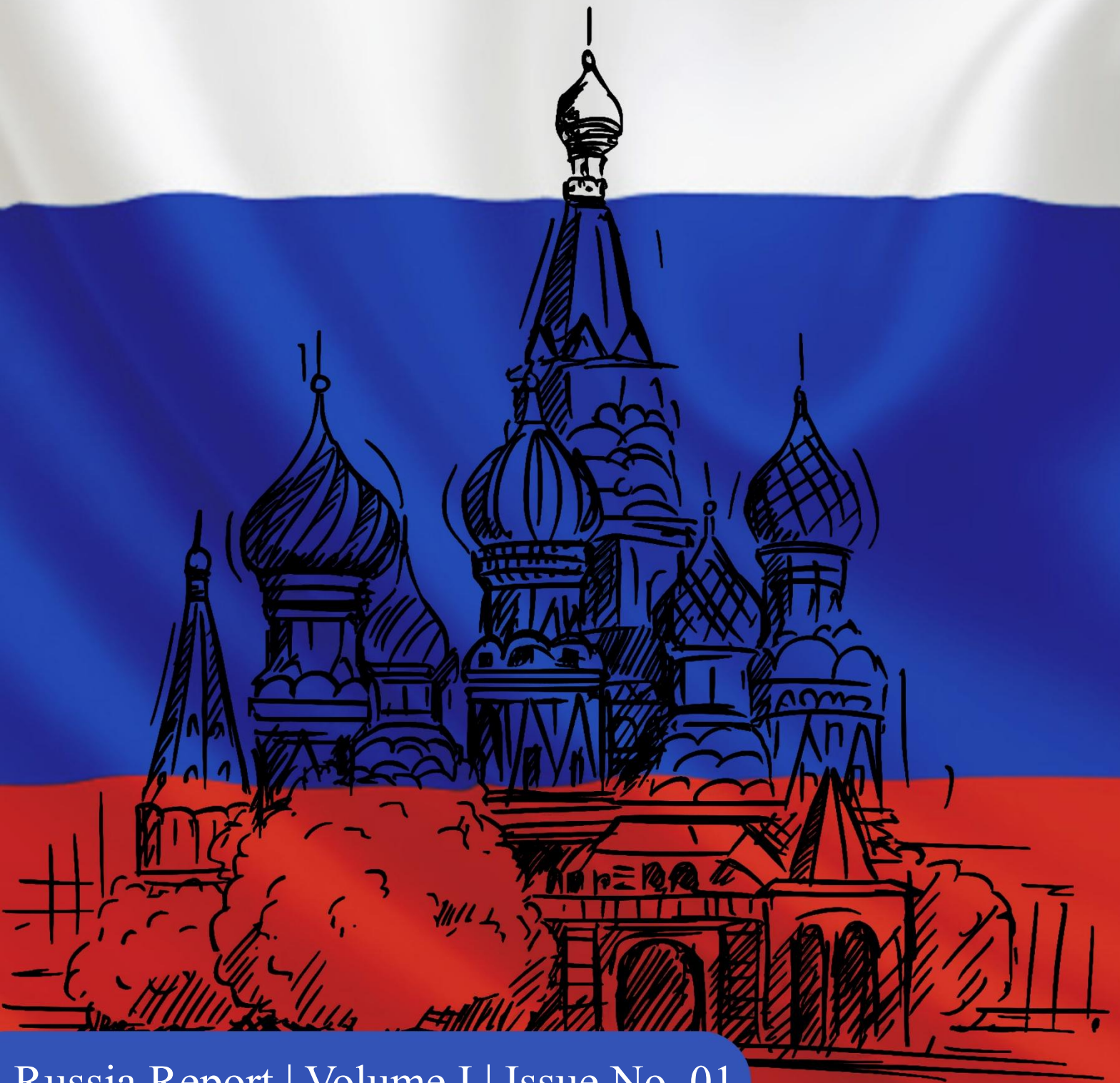




CLAWS Newsletter



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by Anoshna Mukherjee

BATTLEFIELD & FRONTLINE DEVELOPMENTS**24 June 2026 ([Kyiv Post](#)): Drone Strike Hits Major Gazprom Gas Plant in Orenburg, 1,500 km from Ukraine**

A Ukrainian drone raid struck the Orenburg Gas Processing Plant, a key Gazprom facility roughly 1,500 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, triggering explosions, fires, and a temporary airport shutdown in the region. Ukrainian monitoring channels reported multiple blazes confirmed by satellite imagery. The plant, part of the KazRosGaz joint venture, processes gas from Kazakhstan's Karachaganak field and is Russia's only producer of natural odorants and a major helium source. It was previously struck in October 2025, causing a supply disruption reported by Gazprom. The attack underscored the growing range of Ukraine's long-range strike campaign, which has increasingly targeted energy infrastructure deep inside Russian territory far from the front line, part of a broader strategy to degrade Moscow's war-financing capacity through sustained pressure on its hydrocarbon sector.

24 June 2026 ([CNN](#)): Russia Inches Forward Toward Kostyantynivka Amid Claims of Exaggerated Progress

Russian forces continued a slow campaign to encircle Kostyantynivka and Lyman, key anchors of Ukraine's Donbas 'fortress belt', though Ukrainian soldiers and independent analysts told CNN that Moscow's claims of rapid advances were overstated. The city, alongside Druzhkivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, has become the central focus of Russia's Donetsk campaign, with Russian units relying on infiltration tactics rather than large, mechanised assaults, mirroring the prolonged battle that preceded the capture of Pokrovsk earlier in 2026. Analysts suggested the Kremlin was seeking to project a narrative of battlefield success to offset the psychological and economic impact of Ukraine's intensifying deep strikes on Russian oil refineries and energy infrastructure, which have caused fuel shortages nationwide.

2 July 2026 ([Kyiv Independent](#)): Russia's Deadliest Strike on Kyiv This Year Kills at Least 31

Russia launched 74 missiles and 496 long-range drones at Ukraine overnight, with the bulk aimed at Kyiv, killing at least 31 people and injuring over 100 in the capital's deadliest attack of 2026. Rescue operations concluded on 4 July after the last victim was recovered from a collapsed residential building in the Darnytskyi district. Mayor Vitali Klitschko called it the war's 'most massive' assault on the city and declared a day of mourning. Ukraine's air force said

48 missiles and 476 drones were intercepted, but 25 ballistic missiles and 12 drones struck 33 locations. President Volodymyr Zelensky said the strikes reflected Putin's inability to achieve battlefield results, framing the intensified bombardment as an attempt to intimidate civilians rather than a sign of strength.

4 July 2026 ([Reuters](#)): Russia Claims Capture of Kostiantynivka in Eastern Ukraine

Russia's Defence Ministry announced that its forces had captured Kostiantynivka, a strategically important city in Ukraine's Donetsk region, describing it as one of Kyiv's principal defensive hubs in the Sloviansk–Kramatorsk axis. President Vladimir Putin stated that the city's capture marked significant progress in Russia's objective of securing the entire Donetsk region. Moscow also reported continued advances around Lyman and along the Kharkiv and Sumy border areas. However, Ukraine denied losing the city, maintaining that fighting was ongoing and that Russian advances had slowed, with Ukrainian forces reclaiming some positions. The development comes amid stalled peace negotiations and continued Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian territory, underscoring the continuing intensity of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

6 July 2026 ([NPR](#)): Russian Missile and Drone Barrage on Kyiv Kills 22 Ahead of NATO Summit

Russia fired 68 missiles, including 23 ballistic missiles, and 351 drones at Ukraine overnight, killing at least 22 people and injuring 90 in Kyiv, officials said. Ukraine's air force reported intercepting 37 missiles and 326 drones, but the remainder struck 34 locations, with the capital bearing the brunt of the damage across four districts. Zelensky again appealed for additional Patriot interceptors, saying Ukrainian defences had performed well against drones and cruise missiles but struggled against ballistic missiles due to insufficient stockpiles. He urged Western partners to use the NATO summit in Ankara, opening the same day, to strengthen Ukraine's air defence. Moscow's Defence Ministry said the strike was retaliation for Ukraine's deep strikes on Russian energy infrastructure, which have caused fuel shortages across the country.

6 July 2026 ([RBC-Ukraine](#)): Ukrainian Drones Destroy Russian S-400 Launcher Used in Kyiv Strikes

Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian S-400 air-defence launcher that had been used in strikes against Kyiv, according to Ukrainian military reporting, part of a broader campaign to degrade Russian air-defence and strike infrastructure supporting the ongoing bombardment of the capital. The strike came the same day Ukrainian drones hit the Omsk oil refinery deep in Siberia,

underscoring the parallel tracks of Ukraine's strike campaign — targeting both the military systems enabling Russian strikes on Ukrainian cities and the economic infrastructure financing the wider war effort. Russian state media did not immediately confirm the loss, though Ukrainian sources described it as part of a sustained effort to erode Russia's layered air-defence network along key strike corridors.

6–7 July 2026 ([CNBC](#)): Ukrainian Drones Strike Russia's Largest Oil Refinery in Omsk, Siberia

Ukraine's military said its drones struck the Gazprom Neft refinery in Omsk, roughly 2,500 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, marking one of Kyiv's deepest strikes of the war. Local officials confirmed a fire after several drones penetrated Russian air defences; the facility processed around 23 million metric tons of oil in 2025 and halted operations following the attack, according to industry sources, worsening domestic fuel shortages. Ukraine's General Staff described it as the last of Russia's eleven largest gasoline producers to be hit during the ongoing campaign. Separately, Ukraine's military intelligence agency struck the Slavneft-Yanos refinery in Yaroslavl the same night. Zelensky called the Omsk strike proof that 'Siberia, too, is now within reach of Ukrainian precision strikes,' as fuel-price pressures mounted on the Kremlin.

14 July 2026 ([Ukrainska Pravda](#)): Ukrainian Special Forces Strike Salavat Petrochemical Complex in Bashkortostan

Deep Strike units of Ukraine's Special Operations Forces hit the Gazprom Neftekhim Salavat facility, one of Russia's largest oil-refining and petrochemical complexes, located in the republic of Bashkortostan. The strike reportedly reached one of the last major refineries that had remained untouched through 2026, extending a months-long Ukrainian campaign targeting Russia's downstream oil sector. Analysts estimate Ukrainian strikes have knocked out roughly a fifth to a quarter of Russia's total refining capacity since March 2026, dropping national output to its lowest level in over two decades and contributing to acute gasoline shortages across multiple Russian regions. The Kremlin has downplayed the disruption publicly, while regional governors have periodically confirmed fires and damage at targeted sites.

19 July 2026 ([TASS](#)): Kursk Region Reports Sustained Drone and Artillery Barrage Along the Border

Kursk Region Governor Alexander Khinshtein reported that air defences shot down 120 Ukrainian drones over the region in a single 24-hour period, while Ukrainian artillery shelled evacuated border areas 26 times and drones struck with explosives on 11 further occasions, injuring eight people. The report reflected the persistence of cross-border strikes on Russian territory more than a year after Ukraine's brief 2024 incursion into the region. Russian authorities also reported hundreds of additional drones intercepted over the wider Moscow region and elsewhere during the same period, illustrating the geographic breadth of Ukraine's ongoing long-range strike campaign, which continues to target both military and energy-related infrastructure across multiple Russian border and interior regions.

21 July 2026 ([Russia Matters](#)): War by the Numbers: Russian Gains Slow but Continue Through Mid-July

Russian forces made a net territorial gain of roughly 15 square miles of Ukrainian territory between 23 June and 21 July, according to Ukraine's DeepState OSINT project, compared with 12 square miles in the preceding four weeks — a modest acceleration but far below the pace of gains recorded in prior years of the war. Independent analysis of Institute for the Study of War data put the figure at around 10 square miles for the same period. Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, have struggled with interceptor shortages for Patriot air-defence batteries, managing to down only a fraction of incoming Russian ballistic missiles in some recent barrages. Analysts noted Russia's slowing advance rate reflects the toll of over four years of attritional fighting on both militaries.

DIPLOMACY & PEACE EFFORTS

26 June 2026 ([Euronews](#)): Russia and Ukraine Exchange 160 Prisoners of War Each

Russia and Ukraine carried out a prisoner-of-war exchange in which 160 soldiers were returned to each side, according to the Russian Defence Ministry, continuing a pattern of periodic swaps that have remained the most tangible outcome of the broader diplomatic track since talks stalled earlier in the year. Russia's Commissioner for Human Rights later confirmed that both sides were coordinating lists of servicemembers and civilians for a further exchange, without disclosing a date to avoid disrupting the process. Officials described the swaps as being carried out separately from the wider ceasefire negotiations, which have made little progress despite periodic direct contact between Moscow and Washington throughout the summer.

4 July 2026 ([CNN](#)): Putin and Trump Hold 90-Minute Call Ahead of NATO Summit

Russia's foreign ministry said President Putin and President Trump held a 'businesslike' call lasting nearly 90 minutes, during which Trump again offered to help end the war in Ukraine. The call came just before the NATO summit in Ankara and as Russian forces intensified efforts to seize more of Donetsk Oblast, even as Ukraine continued its long-range strikes on Russian energy infrastructure. Moscow did not disclose further specifics of the conversation, though it followed a pattern of periodic direct engagement between the two leaders since the Alaska summit in August 2025. The call underscored Washington's continued attempts to broker a settlement even as battlefield dynamics and mutual strikes showed few signs of abating on either side.

8 July 2026 ([Council on Foreign Relations](#) / [The Jerusalem Post](#)): Trump Meets Zelensky at NATO's Ankara Summit; Kyiv Expects Only a Partial Ceasefire

President Trump held a cordial bilateral meeting with President Zelensky on the margins of the NATO summit in Ankara, reinforcing a Western narrative that battlefield momentum had shifted toward Ukraine. However, Ukrainian officials told reporters they consider a full end to the war unlikely and view a partial ceasefire as the most realistic near-term outcome. The talks took place against the backdrop of the so-called 'Alaska Understandings', which Moscow says emerged from the August 2025 Putin-Trump summit and reportedly involve pressure on Kyiv to cede the Donbas — a proposal Ukraine has repeatedly rejected. Russia, for its part, has continued to refuse talks hosted in countries it considers non-neutral, complicating prospects for a formal negotiating track.

9 July 2026 ([Reuters](#)): Putin Likely to Escalate War Despite Trump's Peace Push, Kremlin Sources Say

Three sources close to the Kremlin told Reuters that President Putin is rejecting calls to negotiate with Kyiv and is instead likely to escalate the war, emboldened rather than deterred by Ukraine's intensifying strikes on Russian oil refineries and ports. One source described a 'high probability' of escalation in the coming months. The report followed Trump's comments that Putin wanted the war to end and that a resolution was 'closer than people realize.' Analysts noted Putin had expanded his territorial demands beyond the Donbas to include the broader historical designation of 'Novorossiia', spanning areas from Kharkiv to Moldova's border, suggesting the Kremlin's negotiating position was hardening rather than softening despite mounting economic costs at home.

10 July 2026 ([Council on Foreign Relations](#)): Trump's Patriot Interceptor Decision Seen as Insufficient to Close Ukraine's Air-Defence Gap

Analysts at the Council on Foreign Relations assessed that President Trump's decision on supplying additional Patriot interceptors would do little to close Ukraine's near-term air-defence gap, noting Kyiv would need months if not years to produce interceptors domestically at scale. The assessment came as Putin, rather than moving toward negotiations following the Ankara summit, intensified aerial strikes on Ukrainian cities, exploiting widening gaps in Ukraine's defensive coverage. Analysts pointed to Putin's two phone calls with Trump in the spring as evidence of Moscow's interest in reviving talks that broke down in February, even as the Russian leader simultaneously expanded his territorial demands and continued to press the military advantage created by Ukraine's strained interceptor stockpiles.

16 July 2026 ([The Moscow Times](#)): Russia and Ukraine Exchange Remains of More Than 530 Fallen Soldiers

Russia and Ukraine exchanged the remains of more than 530 soldiers killed in the war, according to Russian news outlet RBC, citing a Russian lawmaker. The exchange formed part of a continuing series of humanitarian arrangements between the two sides that have persisted even as broader ceasefire negotiations remained stalled. The handover came amid separate diplomatic friction, after a French official disputed remarks attributed to the Russian foreign ministry as 'intemperate.' Repatriation of remains, alongside POW exchanges, has remained one of the few areas of functional cooperation between Moscow and Kyiv throughout 2026, even as both sides continued to trade long-range strikes on military and energy infrastructure.

23 July 2026 ([The Hill](#)): Putin Acknowledges No Formal Deal Was Reached With Trump at Alaska Summit

President Putin acknowledged there was no signed agreement with President Trump to end the war, contradicting earlier Kremlin statements suggesting a deal had been reached at their August 2025 Alaska summit. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had separately accused the Trump administration of not honouring the purported understanding, describing the summit as a 'U.S. ploy to buy time to rearm the Kyiv regime,' while also claiming Putin had signed on to an American proposal. Trump, for his part, has maintained that the meeting was 'extremely productive' but stressed 'there's no deal until there's a deal.' The contradictory accounts highlight the ambiguity that has persisted around the substance of the Alaska talks nearly a year on.

SANCTIONS & ECONOMY

23 July 2026 ([Council of the EU](#)): EU Adopts 21st Sanctions Package, Targeting Energy, Finance and Crypto

The European Union formally adopted its 21st package of sanctions against Russia, designating 48 individuals and 170 entities — the largest batch of listings in four years — while freezing the Russian oil price cap mechanism at its current level until mid-2027. The package tightens restrictions on 32 additional Russian banks, closes loopholes in crypto-asset services, and expands import-export bans, alongside parallel measures against Belarus. It also lays groundwork for a visa ban on individuals who served in Russia's armed forces since February 2022. Adoption was delayed for weeks over member-state objections, with Greece securing a last-minute exemption allowing continued shipping of Russian Arctic LNG. Brussels described the package as a response to Russian strikes on civilian infrastructure.

24 July 2026 ([Pravda.ru](#)): Bank of Russia Cuts Key Rate to 14%, Trims Growth Forecast

The Bank of Russia lowered its key interest rate by 25 basis points to 14%, marking a tenth consecutive round of monetary easing but its smallest cut in a year, as policymakers balanced persistent inflation against a slowing economy. Governor Elvira Nabiullina said underlying inflation remained in the 4–5% range, while the central bank cut its 2026 GDP growth forecast to 0.0–1.0%, down from an earlier 0.5–1.5% estimate. The bank raised its average rate forecast for the year to 14.5–14.6%, citing fuel-sector disruptions from Ukrainian strikes on refineries and slowing demand. Nabiullina said the baseline scenario assumed companies would restore refining capacity by year-end, though risks to that projection remained elevated.

ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE & NUCLEAR SAFETY

3 July 2026 ([UA.News](#)): Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Plant Loses External Power Supply Again

The Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant lost its external power supply after the 'Feroslavna' transmission line connecting it to Ukraine's grid was disconnected, forcing the facility to switch to diesel generators. Ukraine's state nuclear operator Energoatom said the incident posed a continuing threat to nuclear safety, noting that even brief power losses jeopardise cooling systems essential to preventing an accident. The company reiterated its position that the plant's safety can only be assured through a full return to Ukrainian control. The blackout was among several recurring incidents at Europe's largest nuclear facility since

Russian forces seized it in the early weeks of the 2022 invasion, with both sides continuing to trade blame over military activity near the site.

16 July 2026 ([The Moscow Times](#)): Zaporizhzhia Plant's Chief Engineer Killed in Drone Strike

Rosatom head Alexei Likhachev said a Ukrainian drone struck a service vehicle between the Zaporizhzhia plant and the nearby town of Enerhodar, killing chief engineer Alexander Yakovlev and the vehicle's driver. Likhachev said attacks in the area had killed 13 people and injured 48 over recent months and warned that a lack of Western response was 'encouraging escalation.' IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi condemned the incident as an unacceptable attack on the plant's management that seriously threatened nuclear safety. Ukraine's foreign ministry rejected Russian claims of Ukrainian involvement as unsubstantiated, calling instead for the plant's return to Ukrainian control as the only durable solution to recurring safety incidents at the Russian-occupied facility.

22 July 2026 ([Newsweek](#)): Russia Builds New Power Line to Connect Zaporizhzhia Plant to Its Own Grid

Satellite imagery analysed by Greenpeace experts in Ukraine showed Russia constructing a new electricity transmission line intended to connect the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant to Russia's own power grid, rather than Ukraine's. The move casts further doubt on the plant's future status, which has remained one of the most contentious issues in the stalled peace negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv. Ukrainian officials and the IAEA have long maintained that returning the plant to Ukrainian operational control under Energoatom is essential to ensuring long-term nuclear safety. The construction effort suggests Moscow may be preparing to formalise its de facto control of the facility regardless of the outcome of broader ceasefire or peace discussions.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Late June 2026 ([Russia Matters](#), citing FOM, VTsIOM and Gallup): Putin's Approval Slips to Lowest Level Since the Invasion Amid Economic Pessimism

Russian pollster FOM's late-June survey put trust in President Putin at 69%, the lowest reading since the full-scale invasion began, while Gallup found confidence in the Russian military had fallen to 66% from 80% in 2022 and trust in government had dropped to 53% from 66% over the same period. A separate Gallup survey found Russians more pessimistic about their

economy than at any point in twenty years, with 60% saying local conditions were worsening — even before this month's fuel shortages triggered by Ukrainian refinery strikes. Fifty-six percent said living standards were declining. The findings suggest mounting economic strain is gradually eroding public confidence even as the Kremlin tightens domestic control and censorship of critical voices.

14 July 2026 ([U.S. News](#)): Opposition Politician Nadezhdin Says Kremlin Is Sabotaging His Duma Campaign

Anti-war politician Boris Nadezhdin, barred from challenging Putin in the 2024 presidential race, accused authorities of trying to sabotage his campaign to run for the State Duma in September, after being designated a 'foreign agent' and questioned by police. Nadezhdin said his heart condition meant even a short prison term could endanger his life. The move came amid an intensifying crackdown on dissent as Russia approaches parliamentary elections, with the dominant pro-Putin United Russia party expected to win comfortably regardless. Analysts noted the crackdown reflected continued Kremlin sensitivity to any sign of organised anti-war sentiment, even from figures with limited public support, as the war entered its fifth year.

17 July 2026 ([PBS News](#)): Nadezhdin Convicted on Extremism Charge, Barred from September Election

Boris Nadezhdin was convicted of displaying 'extremist symbols', a ruling that disqualifies him from this year's parliamentary race. The charge stemmed from a 2023 video in which he briefly displayed an image of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny. The verdict came as Russia's fuel crisis, caused by sustained Ukrainian strikes on refineries, threatened to erode public support for the Kremlin ahead of the vote. Analysts said the ruling underlined authorities' determination to eliminate any residual dissent before September's Duma elections, in which the ruling United Russia party is seeking to preserve its dominance in the lower house despite growing economic discontent and declining approval ratings for the government.

17 July 2026 ([NBC News](#)): Former Pro-Kremlin Blogger Ilya Remeslo Arrested Amid Widening Crackdown

Ilya Remeslo, a former loyalist blogger turned Putin critic, was detained in St. Petersburg and accused of spreading false information about the armed forces — a charge that has been used to jail numerous war dissenters since 2022 and carries a sentence of up to ten years. His arrest coincided with a court hearing for opposition politician Boris Nadezhdin, reflecting what

analysts described as an intensified response to mounting internal dissent over the war's toll on Russian life. The overlapping cases illustrated a broadening crackdown that has moved beyond established opposition figures to include former state-media-aligned commentators who have grown critical of the war's conduct and its economic consequences.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

7 July 2026 ([The Moscow Times](#)): Kremlin Says It Is Closely Monitoring NATO's Ankara Summit

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia would closely follow the outcome of the NATO summit in Ankara, adding that a series of 'confrontational' statements about Russia had preceded the gathering rather than ones supporting 'constructive engagement and dialogue.' The summit, held as Trump pressed European allies to raise defence spending, concluded with a declaration reaffirming NATO's Article 5 commitments and characterising Russia as a long-term threat to Euro-Atlantic security. Secretary General Mark Rutte said Allies had made significant progress toward the goal of investing 5% of GDP in defence by 2035, with European Allies and Canada increasing core defence spending by more than \$139 billion in 2025 alone, reflecting the Alliance's continued posture shift in response to Russia.

8 July 2026 ([Yonhap News Agency](#)): South Korea and Ukraine Agree on Humanitarian Handling of North Korean POWs

President Lee Jae Myung of South Korea and President Zelensky agreed to address the status of North Korean prisoners of war held by Ukraine in accordance with international law and humanitarian principles, while respecting the individuals' own wishes, during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Ankara. The leaders also discussed Seoul's continued support for Ukraine, including a further US\$100 million assistance package, and exchanged views on post-war reconstruction. The issue has gained prominence following North Korea's deployment of troops to support Russian operations, particularly in the Kursk region, and highlights the broadening set of international actors engaged in managing the war's second-order humanitarian and diplomatic consequences.

19 July 2026 ([NPR News](#)): North Korean Foreign Minister Reaffirms Support for Russia During Moscow Visit

North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui met President Putin in Moscow, reaffirming Pyongyang's commitment to supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine, according to Russian

and North Korean state media. The talks focused on bilateral relations and implementation of the two countries' strategic partnership treaty, with Putin expressing appreciation for North Korea's support and conveying greetings to Kim Jong Un. The visit extended a pattern of high-level engagement between Moscow and Pyongyang that has intensified since the expansion of bilateral military cooperation, including North Korean troop deployments and munitions transfers that have materially supported Russian operations, particularly along the Kursk axis, over the past two years.



About the Author

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