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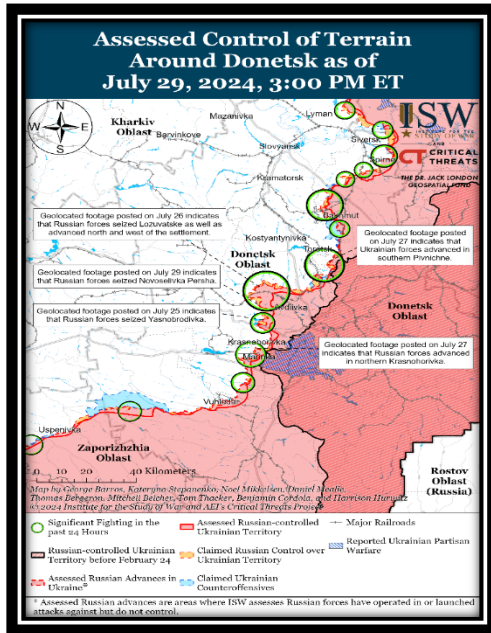
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Ukraine War Update, 01-31 Jul 2024

Since the beginning of July, Russian offensive operations have shown a broader coordinated effort in various areas such as Chasiv Yar, Toretsk, and Avdiivka. Russian forces have demonstrated the ability to launch simultaneous attacks in multiple directions. Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces have been trying to regain control through limited, localized counterattacks. The arrival of aid from Western sources has helped Ukrainian forces stabilize critical areas of the front, enabling them to conduct successful counterattacks in northern Kharkiv Oblast and toward Kreminna. Despite these efforts, Russian forces have quickly advanced in the



eastern Donetsk region, capturing several villages and closing in on the city of Pokrovsk, a major Ukrainian defensive stronghold. In the South, Russian forces have retaken Urozhaine, which was liberated by Ukraine last summer.

While Russian advances so far have not translated into breakthroughs, Russia's recent advances appear to be threatening Ukraine's last defensive belt in the Donetsk region. Russian forces are reported to be within artillery range of a key road linking Pokrovsk to other Ukrainian strongholds in the area.

Notwithstanding such incremental gains, the much-vaunted Russian summer offensive seems to have lost momentum. Russia's

incremental territorial gains have come at a significant cost in terms of men and materials. Few Western experts have argued that Russia will face medium- to long-term economic and equipment challenges that will impede the Russian military's ability to indefinitely retain the theatre-wide initiative, sustain consistent offensive pressure that results in gradual creeping advances, and win a war of attrition.

Material constraints are posing a significant challenge for Ukraine as well. Ukraine is addressing its manpower challenges and is forming several new brigades, but delayed and insufficient Western weapons deliveries will likely prevent Ukraine from equipping all these new brigades. Timely and appropriate Western security assistance continues to be a crucial determinant of when and at what scale Ukrainian forces can contest the battlefield initiative and conduct operationally significant counteroffensive operations in the future.

Western and US officials reportedly assess that Ukrainian forces will continue to be on the defensive for the next six months and will not be able to conduct a large-scale counteroffensive operation until 2025. Ukrainian forces are already attempting to contest the tactical initiative in limited counterattack in select sectors of the front, however, and Ukrainian forces may be able to conduct limited counteroffensive operations even while largely on the defensive depending on the arrival of Western aid.

Both Russia and Ukraine have continued missile, drone and artillery attacks on each other critical infrastructure and military assets. Russia has managed to destroy nearly 50% of Ukraine's energy infrastructure. While Ukraine has managed to repair some of the damaged infrastructure, Russian aerial attacks continue relentlessly. There are not enough air defence batteries to knock out all the missiles.

Increasingly, Ukraine has begun to attack targets deep within Russian territory. Ukrainian forces conducted a series of drone strikes against Russian energy and military infrastructure in Belgorod, Kursk, Rostov, Astrakhan, and Volgograd oblasts overnight on July 8 to 9. Ukrainian drone strikes deep within Russia continue to pressure Russia's air defence umbrella and force the Russian military command to prioritize allocating limited air defence assets to cover what it deems to be high-value targets.

During the month, Ukrainian forces have escalated drone and missile attacks on Russian military installations and energy infrastructure on the Crimean peninsula. The arrival of ATACMS with a 300 Km range has significantly enhanced Crimean ability to strike military targets in Crimea with greater precision. In light of the growing threat, Russia has withdrawn all its warships from the Sea of Azove and bases on the Crimean peninsula.

Despite the apparent lack of operational gains for either side on the battlefield, there has not been any success in ensuring peace through negotiations. The Kremlin continues to signal its unwillingness to participate in peace negotiations that do not result in complete Ukrainian and Western capitulation to the Kremlin's demands amid ongoing Ukrainian efforts to form an international consensus for future negotiations. Ukraine continues to demonstrate its willingness to negotiate with Russia on Ukraine's own terms, and Ukraine's demands for a peace settlement are in accordance with international law — in direct contrast to Russia's unwillingness to engage in negotiations that end in anything short of full Ukrainian surrender.

Outcomes of the 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting

The 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) took place in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on July 25, 2024. The meeting was chaired by Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay Kommasith. The Joint Communiqué signed on July 27, affirmed ASEAN's commitment to the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, strengthening of ASEAN centrality and the promotion of peace, security and stability in the region. The meeting reviewed the progress of ASEAN Community building, aligning with Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience". Regional infrastructure connectivity as a central theme under Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship was notably reflected at the ASEAN meeting and its outcome. This becomes a key priority for ASEAN as the region seeks to expand cooperation in areas of digital economy, green transition, and supply chain resilience. The joint communique which lays the groundwork for the ASEAN Summit that will be held in Laos in October 2024, emphasized strengthening relations with external partners

and the other evolving regional architecture, in which ASEAN would be the driving force.

ASEAN foreign ministers have committed to upholding regionalism and multilateralism. Therefore, they reiterated and stressed the importance of adhering to key principles, shared values and norms enshrined in the UN Charter, the ASEAN Charter, the Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the 1982 UNCLOS, the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, the 2011 Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. In terms of the regional challenges, the discussions were focused on the increasingly violent civil war in Myanmar and tensions in the South China Sea (SCS).



As the political crisis in Myanmar continues, with the widening conflict between the military State Administration Council (SCA) and a broad coalition of rebel forces, ASEAN foreign ministers are stuck by the bloc's peace plan. ASEAN has barred political appointees from Myanmar at its high-level meetings by inviting only a "non-political representative" from the country. The junta, which initially sat out of the meetings, began sending a senior bureaucrat in January this year. ASEAN foreign ministers said that they will continue to adhere to ASEAN Leaders' Five-Point Consensus (5PC) as the "main reference" to address the Myanmar crisis. ASEAN's concern over the escalation of conflicts and humanitarian situation in Myanmar hoped towards achieving an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led for peace, security and stability in the region. ASEAN has also called for the international community to scale up humanitarian assistance to Myanmar.

The ASEAN ministers also discussed the situation in the SCS, during which concerns were expressed on issues relating to land reclamation activities; serious incidents and actions in the area which has put the safety of all persons at risk; and impact on the marine environment. These actions and incidents according to some of the ASEAN ministers' have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region. In its joint communiqué, ASEAN has urged for the peaceful and non-militarized resolution of disputes in the South China Sea. The AMM, reaffirmed ASEAN's principled stance on international and regional issues, underlining the necessity of fully and effectively implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) in the South China Sea and creating a favourable environment for negotiating an effective and substantive Code of Conduct (COC) in the SCS in accordance with international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982 UNCLOS). The joint communiqué welcomed the progress achieved so far in the

ongoing negotiations on the COC, notably the third reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text (SDNT) and encouraged continued positive momentum in this regard.

ASEAN has been able to achieve consensus on a position on Ukraine and Gaza, in which the bloc stressed the necessity to adhere to international law and called for the need to respect sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity. The AMM condemned attacks against civilians and public infrastructure in Gaza; and called for the immediate cessation of hostilities in both Gaza and Ukraine.

The gathering of the ASEAN foreign ministers took place at a time of immense challenges, internal as well as factors external to the region. Therefore, much focus of the AMM was on the need towards strengthening ASEAN's collective response to regional and global challenges.

The 10th Pacific Islands Leaders' Summit (PALM10), Tokyo

Japan hosted the tenth edition of the Pacific Islands Leaders' Summit (PALM10), its flagship platform for engagement with the Pacific Island Countries (PIC), between 16 and 18 July 2024 in Tokyo. The Summit saw participation from all 18 members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) along with Japan and saw some new developments emerge from it.



The event commenced with an official banquet organised by the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary

Yoshimasa Hayashi and his wife Dr. Yuko Hayashi. There Hayashi delivered his welcome remarks, stating Japan's firm commitment to create 'kizuna' (bonds) with the PIC through close cooperation on urgent issues such as climate change. In response, the Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown, who as chair of PIF was co-host of the Summit, expressed appreciation for the continuation of the PALM process across a span of around thirty years.

On 17 July, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Mrs. Yuko Kishida of Japan hosted the visiting leaders for a banquet at the official guest house of the Japanese government. At the banquet, Prime Minister Kishida lauded the PALM process and its efforts across 27 years in ensuring closer ties between the PIC and Japan. He also expressed 'determination to elevate the relationship between Japan and the region to even greater heights and work together for the future' in light of geopolitical headwinds blowing across the region.

Finally, on 18 July, the Summit was inaugurated by speeches delivered by Prime Ministers Kishida and Brown where both sides spoke of the key issues facing the collective Indo-Pacific region. In line with the PIF's 2050 Strategy, deliberations were then divided into seven sections: political leadership and regionalism, people-

centric development, peace and security, economic development, climate change, environmental issues and technology and connectivity.

During his speech, Kishida announced that Japan would assist the PICs in all seven domains. He declared that climate change is ‘the single greatest existential threat’ facing the PICs and announced a Pacific Climate Resilience Initiative to help PICs overcome its worst effects. The new initiative would comprise three elements: disaster risk reduction capabilities, decarbonisation and Pacific leadership on all issues. For this, Kishida declared, ‘Japan will mobilise its technology, know-how and financial resources to strengthen its cooperation in climate action, disaster risk reductions and disaster risk financing’. He also announced Japan would deeply collaborate with the PICs on curbing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. On human resource development, Kishida promised to ramp up people-to-people exchanges further to ensure ‘human dignity’ is accorded to all through access to high-quality education and healthcare.

Kishida also touted the benefits of transparent and fair development finance, promising to ‘work on business matching, including startups, and fostering local industries’. He committed to helping PICs develop high-quality connectivity infrastructure by helping them lay down new submarine cables. Regarding peace and security, Kishida repeated the traditional Japanese commitment to work closely with like-minded countries throughout the region to thwart challenges to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), while agreeing to work with PICs on nuclear disarmament. North Korea’s activities came in for a special mention in this regard. The two sides also agreed on a joint action plan for the deployment of Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces (JMSDF) vessels as well as Japan Air Self-Defence Forces (JASDF) to local (air)ports for regular port calls.

The outcome documents of the summit, the Leaders’ Declaration and Joint Action Plan, reveal Japan achieving a small breakthrough in knotty issues surrounding the discharge of treated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. All the PICs essentially agreed with Japan’s stance on the discharges, to wit, that the discharge has been carried out with the utmost attention to relevant international safeguards issued by the IAEA and has been proven by that body to be safe for human and marine life. In the Leaders’ Declaration Japan also committed to improving the PICs’ radiation monitoring capabilities so as to enable independent verifications of the same, and to ‘never approve the discharge in a manner that endangers the well-being and livelihoods of the peoples of the Pacific or adversely affect human health and the marine environment’. However, the PIC members’ mention of the Rarotonga Treaty, which sets up a nuclear-free zone throughout the South Pacific, indicates that not all are convinced.

On China’s activities in the area, the summit documents were mostly silent, but did include boilerplate articulation on shared opposition to ‘any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by the threat or use of force or coercion’. Nevertheless, China’s Foreign Ministry promptly criticised the Summit, stating that Japan and the PICs were bashing their neighbour instead of ‘help[ing] promote peace, stability and development in the region’.