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[RUSSIA: Moscow Likely to Sustain Operations through Use of Unconventional Tactics](#)

Summary: On 11 November, Russian forces launched intensified assaults around Pokrovsk (Donetsk Oblast) and Kupiansk (Kharkiv Oblast), claiming significant territorial gains. Open-source imagery and video footage suggest the employment of unconventional and improvised tactics, including the use of motorbikes and heavily modified civilian vehicles. These developments likely reflect that Moscow is adapting to heavy attrition, limited mobility, and restrictive Western tariffs. The increasing reliance on such methods likely marks a turning point in Moscow’s operational approach to sustaining offensive momentum despite material degradation.

Background: At a briefing to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on 31 October, Ukrainian intelligence estimated approximately 170,000 Russian troops deployed in the Donetsk Oblast region. This concentration follows Moscow’s renewed push under the larger “Fortress Belt” campaign, an operation aimed at breaking through Ukraine’s deeply fortified defensive network. Over the past 11 years, Kyiv has invested heavily in transforming the “Fortress Belt” into a multi-layered defensive line, believed to be among the most resilient fortifications in Europe. Pokrovsk represents one of the least fortified entry points in the region and serves as a critical node for Ukrainian logistics and command. Russian forces previously failed to penetrate this area during the 2022 assault. According to the Institute for the Study of War,

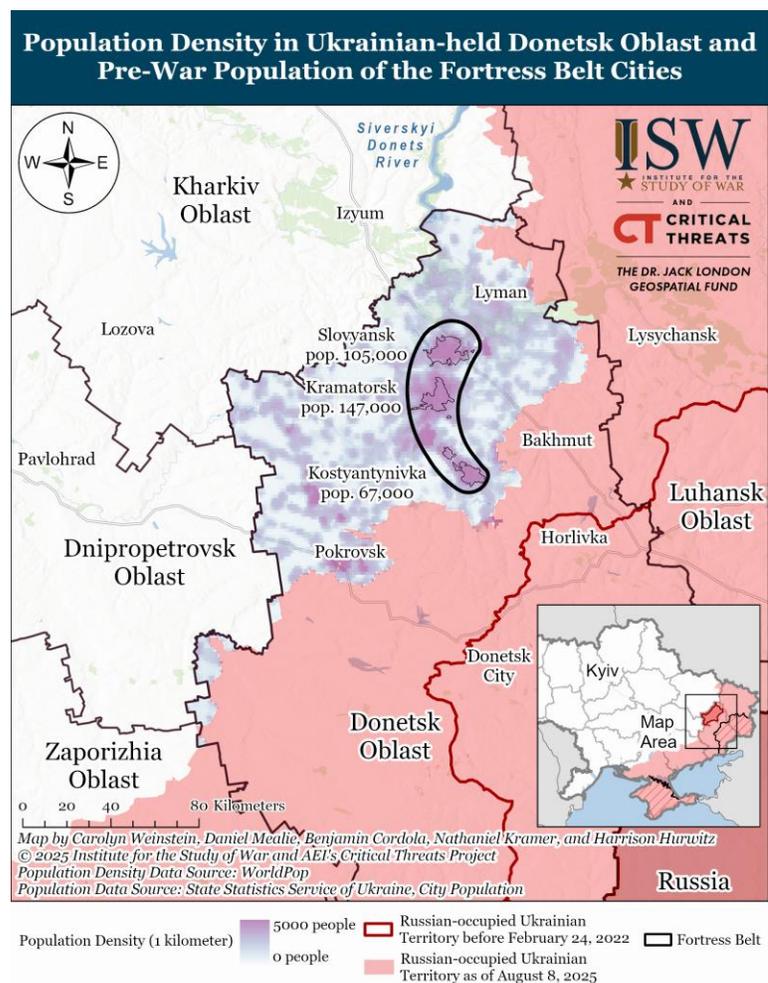


Figure 1: Map of the “Fortress Belt” and Russian occupied land as of August 8 (Source: Institute for the Study of War)

“Russian forces are currently still attempting to envelop the Fortress Belt from the southwest and are engaged in an effort to seize it that would likely take several years to complete.”

Pattern of Operational Failure: Even at full strength, the Russian Army was unable to breach the Fortress Belt during the 2022 offensive, and the current assault will likely face similar difficulties. The region’s extensive fortifications draw support from nearby urban centers, and that both Kyiv and Moscow very likely view control of Donetsk as a decisive factor in determining the outcome of the war. Given these conditions, it is highly likely the area will remain heavily contested, with both sides committed to prolonged and attritional combat. Should Moscow continue frontal assaults, Russian forces will very likely again be repelled after sustaining heavy losses. To mitigate further attrition, Moscow will likely continue deploying low-cost, improvised vehicles and motorcycles, the so-called “Mad Max” fleet, to preserve its primary combat assets for future operations and reduce exposure to Ukrainian artillery and drone strikes.

Change in Strategy: The introduction of improvised vehicles and motorcycles likely indicates a tactical shift aimed at bypassing traditional, high-risk supply and movement corridors. The decentralized nature of Russian troop deployment in the Pokrovsk region suggests Moscow has determined that conventional troop transport columns are too vulnerable to Ukrainian unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and long-range fires. These lighter, faster vehicles enable small-unit maneuvering, provide improved survivability against drone observation, and allow for rapid dispersion in urban or broken terrain. While this approach enhances flexibility and survivability, it also underscores depleted Russian armored reserves and growing logistical constraints. Moscow’s reliance on such measures likely reflects a strategic necessity rather than innovation, revealing both the adaptability and desperation of a force struggling to maintain offensive capability under mounting pressure.

Logistical Strain: The war in Ukraine almost certainly has drained Moscow’s finances and resources. Russia has sustained high extremely high equipment and personnel losses, including the loss of between 200,000 and 220,000 soldiers, since the invasion began, according to *MEDUZA*. These improvised “Mad Max” vehicles likely show the logistical pressure the conflict imposes on Russian forces. Moscow now fields motorcycles and salvaged vehicles because they cost far less to maintain than traditional armored platforms. Western sanctions limit Moscow’s ability to manufacture new armored vehicles and precision components, likely forcing Moscow

to rely on modified civilian equipment. Continued dependence on such equipment will likely erode combat effectiveness and readiness over time.

Outlook and Implications: Moscow will likely continue using improvised and unconventional tactics to sustain offensive operations in Eastern Ukraine. Persistent losses, depleted armored reserves, and Western sanctions have forced Russian commanders to adapt with whatever resources they can find. While these methods demonstrate short-term flexibility, they also expose deep logistical and industrial weaknesses. Over time, reliance on improvised vehicles and decentralized tactics will likely reduce Moscow's ability to project power effectively and maintain combat readiness. The continued evolution of these tactics will likely serve as a key indicator of Russia's operational endurance and its broader capacity to sustain the war effort.

[Bennett Kidder]

RUSSIA: Kyiv's Drone Strikes Likely to Disrupt War Economy

Summary: Kyiv's continued strikes on Russian oil refineries will almost certainly disrupt Moscow's ability to fund the war. Kyiv's technologically advanced drones and long-range missiles have inflicted major damage on Russia's oil infrastructure and economy. Each attack deepens economic strain, leading to fuel shortages and growing economic instability. As Kyiv's strategy escalates, it will almost certainly slow Moscow's war funding and push the economy toward collapse.

Background: Since mid-2025, Ukraine has intensified its long-range drone and missile strikes targeting Russian oil infrastructure. Ukraine has carried out nearly 160 successful strikes on Russian oil facilities this year, including six refineries and multiple fuel terminals, according to the Ukrainian Security Service. On 6 October, Ukraine struck the Sverdlov ammunition plant in western Moscow, a key facility that supports Russian aviation forces, according to AP News. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine's strikes have destroyed more than 20% of Moscow's oil capacities, according to the *Kyiv Post*. According to *National Security Journal*, Russia's oil and gas export fell 25% in September compared with the same month last year.

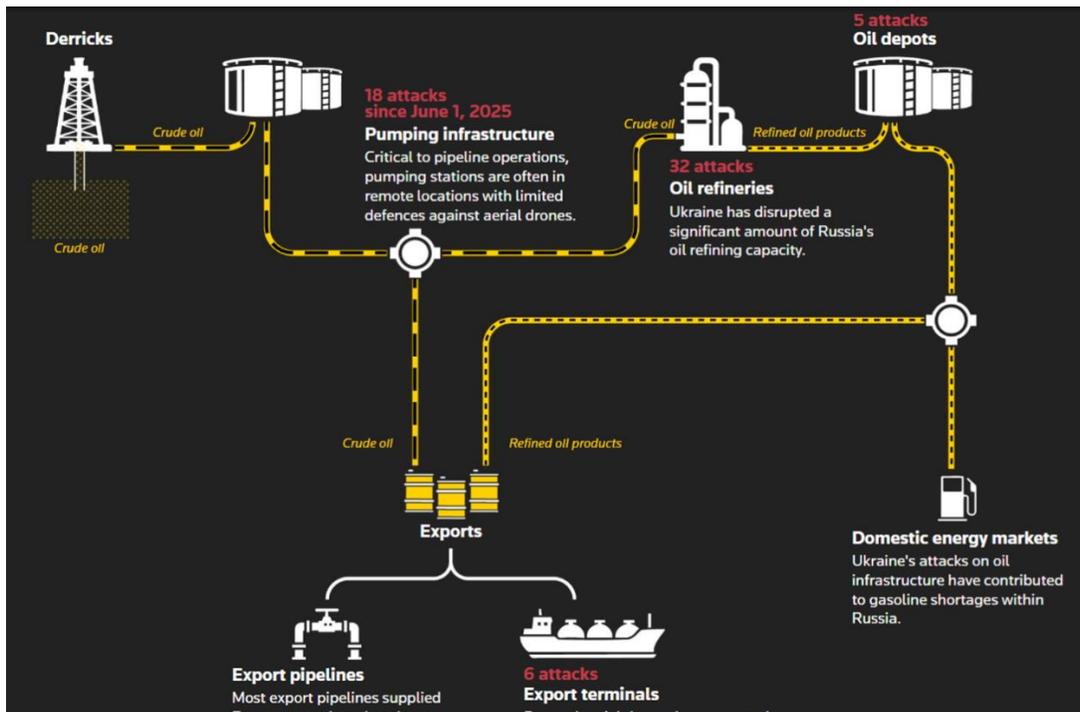


Figure 2: Number of Kyiv's successful strikes on Moscow's oil industry (Source: Reuters)

Kyiv's New Advanced Weapons: Kyiv will almost certainly leverage new weapons to intensify its aggressive strategy of targeting Russia's oil economy. Kyiv's recent successful strikes on refineries and fuel terminals likely reflect advancement in its domestically produced weaponry. Ukrainian authorities are actively improving their weapons systems to counter Moscow's invasion, according to AP News. Zelensky has expressed optimism about the Flamingo and Ruta missile systems, describing the Flamingo as a "very powerful and long-range weapon," according to the *Kyiv Post*. These developments almost certainly demonstrate Ukraine's growing capacity and aggression to degrade Russia's oil infrastructure and weaken its war financing.

Organized Financial Pressure: NATO's increased sanctions and financial pressure will likely deepen Russia's economic crisis. The European Union (EU) has proposed ending all Russian gas imports, a move that will likely hurt one of Moscow's most critical revenue streams. The EU stated its proposal to end Russian gas imports by 1 January 2028, according to Reuters. This block against Russia's gas will likely deepen Moscow's economic instability and deny Moscow the resources needed to sustain its invasion in Ukraine. Sanctions almost certainly further restrict Russia's access to global financial markets, raising the likelihood of long-term economic isolation and inflationary shocks.

Domestic Pushback Likely to Escalate: Moscow will likely face domestic opposition to the war as economic strain and military dissent intensify. Russian generals are currently questioning President Vladimir Putin's strategy, arguing that the conflict is damaging both the economy and national stability, according to *National Security Journal*. Retired Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov stated that constitutional procedures could likely remove Putin over the confrontation involving Ukraine, according to *National Security Journal*. The dissent in Moscow could lead to a coup attempt as protests against the war escalate. Furthermore, economic indicators suggest that Moscow is probably nearing a breaking point. Minister Maxim Reshetnikov warned that Moscow nears a recession, according to *The Telegram*. Given the economic conditions, this opposition to the war will almost certainly intensify.

Outlook and Implications: As Ukraine continues to degrade Moscow's oil infrastructure and NATO sanctions intensify, Moscow's ability to fund and sustain its war effort will likely collapse. Ukraine's aggressive attacks and growing dissent in Russia will likely pressure Moscow to scale back its efforts and funding in Ukraine. While the full impact of NATO's

diplomatic sanctions and kinetic operations remains uncertain, these forces will likely trigger a significant drop in Moscow's revenue to fund the war and provoke domestic backlash to the lack of energy resources. Over time, the increasing financial strain is likely to undermine Russia's ability to sustain prolonged operations in Ukraine.

[Ashley Calogero]

SOMALIA: Faltering Governance Will Likely Undermine Security through 2026

Summary: Somalia will likely face renewed security setbacks through 2026 as extremist groups exploit clan divisions and declining foreign support. The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission (AUSSOM) replaced the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), but with fewer troops and limited logistics capacity, Mogadishu will likely struggle to prevent the resurgence of extremists or recover areas they control.

Background: The replacement of ATMIS with the AUSSOM marks a formal transition toward Somali-led security. Operating under the joint authority of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC) and the Federal Government in Mogadishu, AUSSOM transfers primary responsibility for operations and population-center protection to Somali forces. AUSSOM operates in phased stages through 2029. Al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda's East African affiliate, retains control of rural southern and central Somalia, funding operations through taxation, extortion, and smuggling, while the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) holds smaller regions in Puntland's mountains and along coastal trade routes. Both groups exploit clan rivalries and governance gaps to recruit fighters while maintaining influence, according to *The Guardian*. Regional partners including Ethiopia, Kenya, Turkey, and Qatar, continue to provide training, but at reduced levels.

Fragmented Politics Undermine Security Integration: Persistent clan-based fragmentation will likely prevent Somalia's security institutions from integrating effectively through 2026. Federal-state tensions between Mogadishu and regional states hinder unified command and resource sharing. Political factions within Mogadishu and between regional states, such as Puntland and Jubaland, undermine coordination against insurgents. These divisions enable al-Shabaab to re-establish parallel governance in zones that its opponents vacated, collecting taxes and dispensing local justice. Political discord provides al-Shabaab its greatest strategic advantage and will likely persist without deeper reconciliation, according to the Institute for Security Studies in Africa. Beyond institutional weakness, elements within Somalia's political and business elite benefit from the persistence of localized insecurity. Informal taxation, smuggling, and aid diversion have created a security economy that rewards instability, reducing incentives for genuine reform if these networks continue to profit. As a result, AUSSOM and Mogadishu will likely struggle to consolidate control.

External Dependence Limits Transition: AUSSOM's effectiveness will likely depend on sustained foreign funding and technical support through 2026. Unreliable donor funding and

delayed payments are slowing logistics and troop rotations. On 2 July 2025, a military helicopter crashed while attempting to land at Mogadishu's airport, killing several personnel and damaging one of AUSSOM's few serviceable aircraft, according to Reuters. The incident highlights the mission's ongoing equipment shortages, training shortfalls, and limited air mobility capabilities. Without renewed external backing, AUSSOM will likely struggle to sustain operations and prevent extremist resurgence during the ongoing phases.

Competing Extremist Networks: Al-Shabaab and ISS will likely rapidly re-establish control in newly vacated areas through 2026 by

exploiting Mogadishu's inability to deploy and sustain replacement forces quickly. On 4 October 2025, al-Shabaab fighters stormed a Mogadishu prison, breached the perimeter and attempted to free detained members before security forces regained control. The attack demonstrates the group's ability to plan coordinated assaults on hardened sites and to exploit security gaps during the transition, signaling that al-Shabaab can rapidly regain operational tempo as Somali forces struggle to cover expanded territory. While al-Shabaab retains a countrywide reach, ISS has adapted by embedding within smuggling and extortion networks in Puntland, according to *Al Jazeera*. The two organizations occasionally clash over recruits and territory, even though they share a broader goal of undermining the federal government. ISS's limited resurgence likely diverts security resources from the primary al-Shabaab threat and exposes weaknesses in Somalia's counter terrorism strategy. Although al-Shabaab and ISS remain ideological rivals, isolated cases indicate limited cooperation in remote smuggling corridors, suggesting a pragmatic approach to survival rather than genuine cooperation. Clan militias, regional forces, and criminal networks also influence the conflict by shifting alliances, disrupting coordinated operations, and enabling extremist advances when they withdraw support. Their loyalty remains

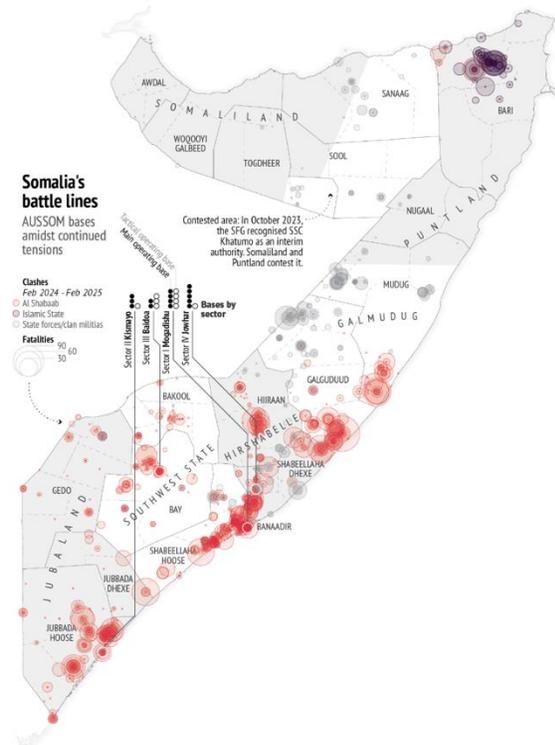


Figure 3: Somalia's battle lines , FEB 2024-FEB 2025 (Source: European Union Institute for Security Studies)

a key indicator of whether AUSSOM and Somali authorities can stabilize contested districts and prevent repeated extremist takeover.

Outlook and Implications: AUSSOM's early transition phase demonstrates commitment to Somali leadership, but it will likely face constraints from lower manpower and logistics compared with ATMIS. Al-Shabaab will likely maintain control across rural belts and continue high-profile attacks in urban centers. ISS activity will probably persist at a low but steady level, maintaining instability in Puntland and coastal regions. Somalia's broader outlook through 2026 will likely remain fragile as funding shortfalls, slow governance reform, and inconsistent clan cooperation limit Mogadishu's ability to consolidate gains even where AUSSOM provides initial support. These pressures suggest extremist groups will likely retain freedom of movement in rural corridors and exploit gaps that emerge when Somali forces rotate out or lack mobility. Without meaningful progress on governance reform and clan reconciliation, Somalia's transition toward self-reliance will likely stall and may require sustained external support to prevent further extremist expansion.

[Serena Green]

About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Currently, Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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Christina Muchow, a Junior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at editorsee@gmail.com or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 484, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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