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The Russia–Ukraine War, Mid-2026: From the Winter Energy War to the Summer of Deep Strikes

A six-month timeline of the Russia–Ukraine war (Feb–Aug 2026): the Starlink cutoff and Ukrainian counteroffensive, the failed Russian Spring-Summer offensive, the air-defense crisis over Kyiv, Ukraine's deep-strike campaigns against Russian oil and shipping, and where the front stands today.

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2026 Black Sea air defense ceasefire deep strike campaign front line timeline

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This is a snapshot of the Russia–Ukraine war as of 11 August 2026 (day ~1,630 of the full-scale invasion). The through-line of the past six months: Russia's grinding offensive has stalled and its casualties have hit record highs, while Ukraine has shifted the war onto Russian territory — into Russian oil refineries, the Black Sea shadow fleet, and the airspace over Russian cities — even as it struggles to defend its own cities from ballistic missiles it cannot reliably intercept. The front line itself is nearly frozen: the war's decisive action now happens in the air, at sea, and in the Russian rear[1][2][3].

The winter: energy war and the Starlink cutoff (Dec 2025 – Feb 2026)

The period opened with Russia's most punishing winter campaign of the war, targeting Ukraine's power grid. Russia launched **15 large-scale strikes on Ukraine's energy system between December 2025 and February 2026** — more than three times the average of the previous three winters — leaving Kyiv's 3.5 million residents without power for about half of each day in January[4]. DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy firm, said strikes had cut its generating capacity

by 60–70% and caused $64–70 billion in damage [5]. Ukraine's available generating capacity fell from 33.7 GW at the start of the invasion to about **14 GW by January 2026** [4].

Diplomatically, the U.S. tried and failed to pause the energy war. On 29 January Trump claimed Putin had agreed to a week-long halt on strikes against Ukrainian cities and power infrastructure; Moscow and Kyiv then said on 30 January they had agreed to a moratorium on energy strikes, but the terms collapsed within days and the strikes resumed [6] [7]. US–Russia–Ukraine trilateral talks in Abu Dhabi on 23–24 January produced no breakthrough, with Moscow reiterating its maximalist war aims [5].

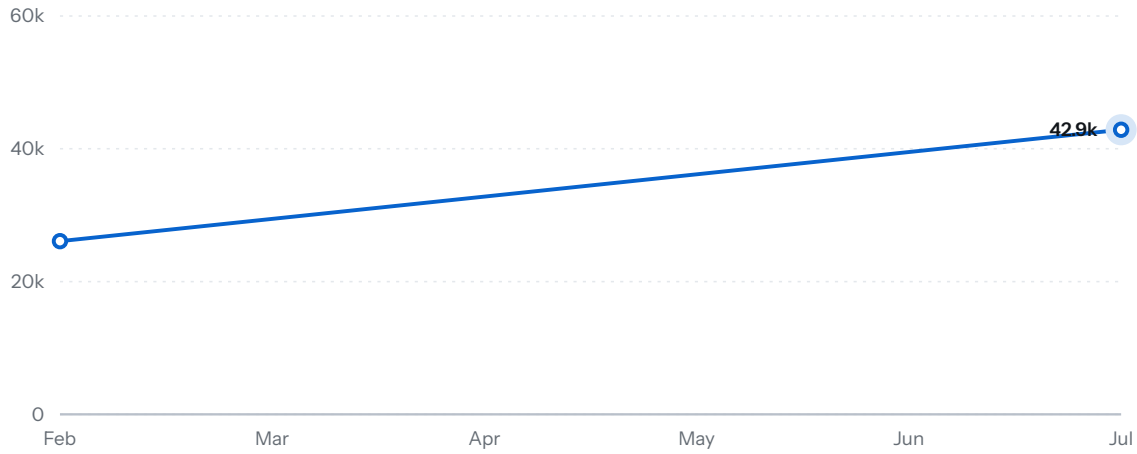
The pivotal military event came in early February. After talks between Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov and Elon Musk, **SpaceX enforced a "whitelist" that cut off Starlink terminals used by Russian forces** in occupied Ukraine — Russia had relied heavily on contraband Starlink for command-and-control and drone guidance. The Kyiv Independent quoted analyst Rob Lee calling the Russian near-total loss of Starlink "truly game changing" [8] [9]. Russia has since scrambled to build its own satellite constellation (the "Rassvet" system, first batch launched late March), which Ukrainian intelligence says already gives Russian forces connectivity windows for drone strikes — but not full coverage [3].

The February–June counteroffensive and Russia's failed spring push

Riding the Starlink disruption, **Ukraine launched its first major counteroffensive since 2023 on 11 February 2026**, aimed at expelling Russian forces from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast [10]. In its first week Ukraine made its fastest territorial gains in 2.5 years; by late February Zelenskyy said 300 km² had been liberated, and Syrskyi put the figure at **400 km² (eight settlements) by 23 February** — the first month since summer 2023 (excluding the 2024 Kursk incursion) in which Ukraine net-gained territory [10]. The drive later extended into western Donetsk and the Lyman salient, with Syrskyi claiming **600 km² recaptured by 8 June** [10]. Ukrainian forces were largely able to halt Russia's offensive and reclaim most of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast by April [10].

Russia's response — the **Spring-Summer 2026 offensive, which ISW dates to mid-March** — failed to achieve any operationally significant gains. ISW's assessment of 1 August is blunt: Russian forces advanced only **37.85 km² in all of July (1.22 km²/day)**, less than a tenth of the 455.74 km² they seized in July 2025, and Moscow's own claimed rate of advance is "only about footpace" [3].

Russian monthly casualties, 2026 (Ukrainian General Staff data)



Feb and Jul figures from ISW/Critical Threats; intervening months not reported in sources used.

The cost has been enormous. The Ukrainian General Staff reported **42,860 Russian casualties in July 2026 — a new monthly high for the war**, up from 26,090 in February; Zelenskyy said on 31 July that Russia had suffered almost 700,000 killed and about **1.6 million total casualties** since February 2022[3]. CSIS estimated in July 2026 that Russia has lost ~1.4 million killed, wounded or missing since the invasion began[4]. On the Ukrainian side, CSIS put losses at 525,000–625,000 killed, wounded or missing through June 2026[4].

Summer: the air-defense crisis and the war over Kyiv

While the ground front stalled, Russia found one Ukrainian vulnerability it could exploit: **a shortage of Patriot interceptor missiles**, which ISW assesses Russia is deliberately targeting with ever more ballistic missiles[3].

376	28	1/3
Russian missiles fired at Ukraine in July 2026	Ballistic missiles fired at Kyiv night of Aug 5	Interceptor supply vs start of 2026
`record month`	`0 intercepted`	`Zelenskyy`

Key strikes on Kyiv:

- **2 July**: 31 killed, ~102 injured in Kyiv[11].
- **6 July**: at least 26 killed, hours after Zelenskyy warned of a large attack[11].
- **19 July**: Russia's **largest ballistic missile assault on Kyiv of the war** — 125 drones, 25 ballistic missiles, 10 Zirkon hypersonic missiles; one of the most intense attacks since the invasion, per Ukrainian authorities[12][13].
- **24 July**: missile strike on a defense-industry drone exhibition near Kyiv killed 10 and injured ~100; Zelenskyy said the event "should never have taken place"[14].

- **31 July–1 Aug**: 35 missiles and 185 drones; nine killed in Kyiv, five ambulances destroyed, the Lithuanian Embassy damaged [3].
- **4–5 Aug**: 14 dead in Kyiv region; **on the night of 5 August, none of 28 missiles fired was intercepted** — "there were no interceptor missiles left for the Patriot system," Zelenskyy said [15].

Zelenskyy said in early August that Ukraine is receiving **one-third the interceptor missiles it got at the start of 2026**, largely because the US–Iran war is consuming the same scarce PAC-3 stocks [15] [16]. July 2026 was **the deadliest month for Ukrainian civilians since April 2022**, per UN OCHA; UN monitors confirmed **1,396 civilians killed and 7,978 injured in the first six months of 2026** [17]. Total confirmed civilian deaths in Ukraine stand at 16,431, with 48,613 injured [4].

Ukraine's answers are domestic missile production (the FP-7 ballistic missile nearing certification, expected in combat "early fall") and Patriot production licensing talks with the US — neither of which will help before the coming winter [15] [16].

Ukraine's deep strikes: oil, Wildberries, and the shadow fleet

The defining Ukrainian campaign of 2026 is a three-pronged assault on Russia's war economy, which Zelenskyy calls "long-range sanctions" [18].

Oil and refineries. Since March 2026 Ukrainian drones have hammered Russian refineries and export ports (Ust-Luga, Primorsk, Novorossiysk), and strikes reached Bashkortostan's Ufa refineries (~1,200–1,300 km from the border) in early August [1] [3]. Estimates of knocked-out refining capacity range from **20% to over 30%** — the Financial Times called it Russia's **worst fuel crisis since the Soviet collapse**, and Russia banned gasoline exports through end-2026 and diesel temporarily [4] [15]. Reuters reported Russia's crude processing fell to 4.69 million barrels/day in April, its lowest in over 16 years [4].

Wildberries. Beginning **18 July**, Ukraine began near-nightly drone strikes on warehouses of Wildberries, Russia's largest online retailer, in what Kyiv casts as retaliation for Russian strikes on Ukrainian logistics [18] [19]. An insider source cited by ISW says up to 21 Wildberries facilities (22% of its space) were hit between 18 July and 5 August, causing up to **400 billion rubles (~$4.82 billion)** in losses; at least eight people died in the first wave [3] [19].

Operation MoLoChKa (the shadow fleet). Launched **6 July**, this USF/SBU naval-drone campaign against Russia's shadow fleet in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea has struck **218 vessels** (134 in the Sea of Azov, 84 in the Black Sea) as of mid-August, per Ukrainian counts, closing the Kerch Strait ferry to commercial traffic and cutting its capacity by ~75% [20]. On 1 August Ukrainian naval drones sank the Rosatom container ship *Yanina* — the first major sinking of the campaign [15]. The campaign has diplomatic costs: strikes near the Caspian Pipeline Consortium terminal (which carries >80% of Kazakhstan's oil exports) halved Kazakh output and drew US warnings, and on 25 July Ukraine hit an Iranian merchant vessel in the Caspian, drawing threats from Tehran [15] [21]. The IMO condemned attacks on merchant shipping [20].

Ukrainian politics: the Fedorov affair

Ukraine's biggest political upheaval of the period was self-inflicted. On **15 July, Zelenskyy dismissed the popular reformist Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov** (the architect of the Starlink cutoff and drone programs), citing a rift with Commander-in-Chief Syrskyi [8] [22]. Mass protests ("Cardboard Maidan") followed; under pressure Zelenskyy then **dismissed Syrskyi on 21 July**, replacing him with Mykhailo Drapatyi [22]. Fedorov refused a lesser post, and as of mid-August Ukraine still has no confirmed defense minister (the Rada recessed until 18 August without voting) — an unresolved crisis at the top of the military establishment during the war's most consequential summer [15] [22]. A broader cabinet reshuffle installed Naftogaz CEO Serhii Koretskyi as prime minister [22].

Where it stands: diplomacy and the front, 11 August 2026

Front line. Russia controls **~19–20% of Ukraine's territory** (45,168 sq mi per DeepState, 45,676 per ISW, including Crimea and pre-2022 Donbas) [4]. In the four weeks to 4 August, Russia made a net gain of only **13 sq mi (DeepState) or 24 sq mi (ISW)** — the lowest rates in over a year — while Ukraine's foothold in Kursk/Belgorod shrank to 2 sq mi [4]. Russia's average monthly gain over the past year is ~80–88 sq mi, about 0.5% of Ukraine's 1991 territory per year [4]. The main fighting remains around Kostyantynivka-Druzhkivka, Pokrovsk, Kharkiv's northern border, and Huliaipole, with Russian "infiltration" tactics producing flag-planting claims rather than real gains [1] [3] [23].

Diplomacy. Peace efforts are alive but frozen. Trump said on 6 July a resolution was "getting closer than people realize" after calls with Putin and Zelenskyy; the two leaders met at the NATO summit in Ankara (8 July) and again in Washington (28 July) [16] [24]. Ukrainian and US officials floated an "air ceasefire" idea ahead of the Washington meeting, which Moscow called premature [25]. On 25 June Zelenskyy approved a **40-day Security Service operation to "push Russia toward ending the war"**, which ended 4 August; he declared himself "absolutely" satisfied and approved new operations, but no date for negotiations has been set [26]. Russia's Lavrov reaffirmed on 9 July that Moscow will fight until its maximalist territorial demands are met [27]. Polls cited by Russia Matters show **64% of Russians and 66% of Ukrainians support negotiations** to end the war [4]. Meanwhile the US Senate advanced the "Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act" (86–12 procedural vote, 28 July), proposing tariffs of up to 100% on the five largest buyers of Russian oil and gas [15].

Escalation vectors. North Korea is deepening its involvement: Zelenskyy said on 9 August that up to **50,000 North Korean troops** could be deployed in Russia (up from an earlier estimate of 30,000), and Ukrainian intelligence reported a North Korean missile unit (~90 personnel, up to 120 KN-23/24 ballistic missiles) deploying to western Russia [28] [29]. The war is also leaking across NATO's borders: a Russian Kh-101 missile fragment cratered Polish soil on 30 July, Romania shot down three drones in late July, and an explosive-laden drone was found near a Ukrainian cargo aircraft at Leipzig/Halle airport on 5 August [15] [25].

Bottom line

As of mid-August 2026 the war is a grinding stalemate with a shifting center of gravity. Russia cannot translate its enormous casualties into territory — its 2026 offensive has produced the smallest monthly gains of the war — but it has found a lever that works: overwhelming Kyiv with ballistic missiles Ukraine lacks the interceptors to stop, a crisis expected to worsen this winter. Ukraine, in turn, has made the war materially visible inside Russia through refinery strikes, the Wildberries campaign, and the Black Sea shadow-fleet offensive, while enduring a damaging leadership crisis (no defense minister, a fired commander-in-chief) and growing diplomatic friction with third countries caught in the crossfire. No ceasefire is in prospect: Moscow insists on maximalist terms, Kyiv on a just peace, and both sides are racing to build more missiles for a winter campaign both anticipate.

CAUTION

Casualty figures, vessel counts and refinery-outage estimates are contested: Ukrainian General Staff and ISW/CSIS figures (used here) differ from Russian accounts and from each other, and the 218-ship MoLoChKa tally is a Ukrainian claim that could not be independently verified. Territorial figures are DeepState/ISW estimates.

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