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Ukraine war update 01-15 November 2022

During his triumphant visit to Kherson city on 14 November 2022, Ukraine President Zelensky states that the city’s liberation marked “the beginning of the end of the war”. Ukrainian troops entered Kherson on Friday when Russian troops abandoned the southeastern city which they controlled for the past eight months.

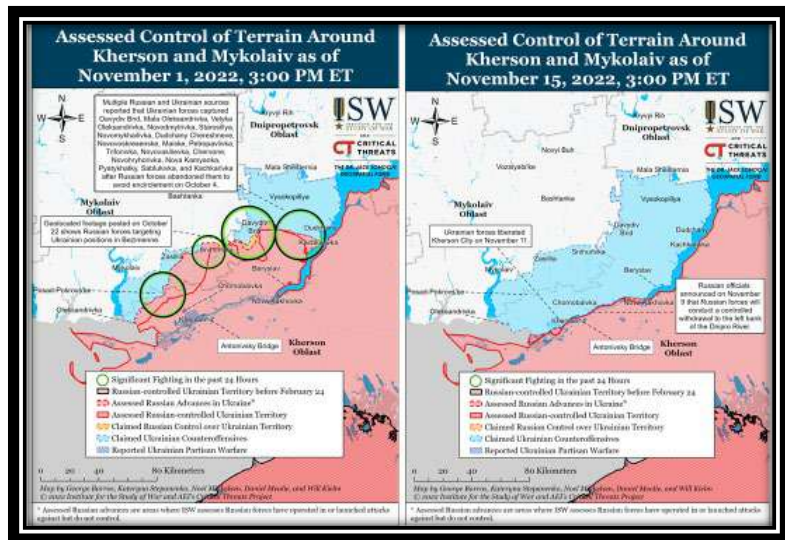


On 09 Nov 2022, General Surovikin, Commander of Russian Forces in Ukraine informed Sergei Shoigu, Russia’s defence minister in a televised briefing that Russia’s position in Kherson had become

untenable and the “most sensible option” in the circumstances would be to establish a new defensive line on the eastern side of the Dnieper river. By dawn on November 11th, the Russian withdrawal was complete. Unlike the unorganized rout in Kharkiv, the retreat from Kherson was organized and retreating forces managed to evacuate their weapons and equipment.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast launched in late August did not look too promising initially. Incremental tactical gains followed in early September without serious breakthroughs. However, the severe lack of supplies sent via ineffective ferry crossings on the Dnipro made the ongoing Russian presence in the region increasingly expensive and complicated. In early October Ukrainian troops made breakthroughs in the northern part of the front, eventually bringing the front line to within 30km of the city and Russia’s grip on the city of Kherson appears increasingly fragile

Russia’s withdrawal from Kherson, a narrow finger of sand at the mouth of the Dnipro River south of Kherson known as Kinburn Spit has become an area of focus. On 12 Nov 2022, The Ukrainian military announced its intention to liberate Kinburn. As per some reports, boats containing Ukrainian forces were seen approaching Kinburn Spit. According to Russian news agency Tass, Russia has affirmed its military control over Kinburn and has denied the



reports of the alleged landing of Ukrainian on the Spit. The ensuing contest over this narrow strip may look minor in terms of land area, but it could pose a serious operational challenge to Russia. They now have to shift their already overstretched forces to address a new front which would now be within the Ukrainian artillery range based in Kherson.

In addition to Kinburn, there are significant gains for Ukraine from its Kherson offensive. It could allow Ukraine to focus more on Zaporizhzhia. If Ukraine can push towards Melitopol, the land corridor between the Russian mainland and Crimea would be broken. However, as winter approaches, conditions are likely to get much more difficult for both sides. It is possible that regaining the right bank of the Dnipro could increase Ukraine's ability to attack Russian-controlled territory with long-range artillery, especially HIMARS. In addition, Ukraine may intensify its efforts to regain Bakhmut in Donetsk where Russia has been trying to achieve a breakthrough for months.

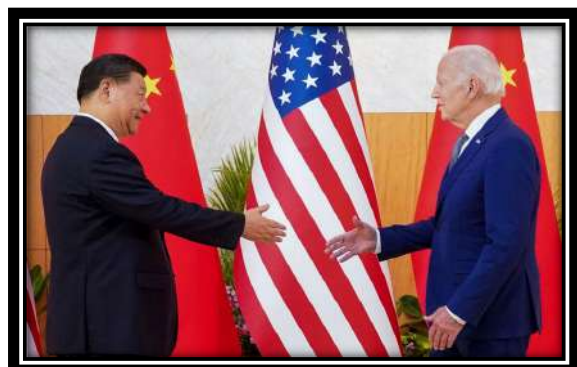
Weather constraints of the looming winter are expected to slow down the tempo of operations. While both sides are expected to continue with long-range attacks on troops, bases and infrastructure, the coming winter is expected to bring a slowdown in military advances on both sides. There have been some suggestions that winter-induced pause may open up avenues for initiating peace talks.

During his virtual speech to the G-20 summit in Bali on 15 November 2022, Ukrainian President Zelensky said that the war should be ended "justly and based on the UN Charter and international law". He outlined his 10-point path to peace which includes radiation and nuclear safety; food security; energy security; release of all prisoners and deported persons; implementation of the UN Charter and restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the world order; withdrawal of Russian troops and cessation of hostilities; restoration of justice; countering ecocide; preventing escalation; and finally - confirmation of the end of the war.

Hours after the Ukrainian President's G20 speech, Russia launched a wave of missile strikes across Ukraine targeting power infrastructure in several regions of the country. As per reports, Ukrainian air defences shot down 70 of more than 90 missiles fired at Ukraine. Two missiles or rockets also reportedly hit a farm in Poland near the border with Ukraine, killing two people, according to Polish media.

Biden-Xi Summit in Bali

On November 14, US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping engaged in a three-and-a-half-hour-long conversation on the sidelines of the ongoing G-20 Summit. This much-anticipated summit was the first face-to-face meeting between leaders during the Biden presidency. During Biden's presidency, bilateral ties between the



two countries have been strained by the significant intensification of rivalry for global influence, military dominance and command of new technologies. Even though the two leaders have spoken five times by phone or video call during the last two years, their lengthy discussions have not resolved a range of deep disagreements and acrimony.

The summit was held with low expectations. While the US Side was aiming to “build a floor for the relationship and ensure that there are rules of the road that bound our competition”, China aimed to reiterate its red lines on Taiwan and trade. The candid conversation during the summit indicated the willingness of both sides for restoring lines of communication and selective collaboration. Biden stressed the need to maintain “open lines of communications ... between [Xi] and [Biden] personally” but also between their respective governments. Xi’s response – while relatively muted personal ties with Biden – stressed the need for China and the United States to “work with all countries to bring more hope to world peace.”

In veiled criticism, Xi said bilateral relations failed to meet “the fundamental interests” of the two countries and the global expectations. Despite the smiles, the US president brought up several contentious issues as per white house readouts. Biden raised the US objections to China’s “coercive and increasingly aggressive actions” towards Taiwan, which he said undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and jeopardised global prosperity. Xi told Biden that the Taiwan question was at the “very core of China’s core interests” and the “first red line” in bilateral ties that must not be crossed.

Notwithstanding partial thawing, both sides remained unrelenting on their baseline issues. For Beijing, these include areas such as Taiwan, China’s adherence to socialism, and the distinctive logic of governance pursued by the country. For the United States, these include its geostrategic interests in the Indo-Pacific (including Taiwan) and national security.

As per China, President Biden has reiterated his "five noes" (i.e., not seek a new Cold War; not seek to change China's system; the revitalization of its alliances is not against China; not support “Taiwan independence”; not look for conflict with China) and other important statements on multiple occasions as his commitment to improving ties with China. The White House readout does not mention any such assurances. On the other hand, it emphasizes that President Biden laid out in detail that our one China policy has not changed, and the United States opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo by either side. In addition, Biden raised concerns about PRC practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and human rights more broadly along with U.S. objections to the PRC’s coercive and increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan.

Notwithstanding prevailing divergences over baseline issues, there was some progress on non-baseline issues. In a significant departure from China’s previous stances, Xi openly called upon and invited “the United States, NATO, and the EU” to undertake direct dialogue with Russia, with the hope of securing de-escalation. According to the White House statement, Xi and Biden agreed "that a

nuclear war should never be fought and can never be won and underscored their opposition to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine” The Chinese readout included no mention of nuclear weapons.

The two leaders also spoke about North Korea — a longstanding regional security issue. Biden warned if Beijing is unable to rein in Pyongyang's weapons ambitions, the U.S. would beef up its presence in the region — a move that will be read by Beijing as a threat to its security.

In what analysts called a "breakthrough," Beijing and Washington said they would resume climate talks that had been frozen following House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's controversial visit to Taiwan in August, which Beijing claims as its own. The White House said the leaders "agreed to empower key senior officials to maintain communication and deepen constructive efforts."

Netanyahu's New Government in Israel

Recently concluded 20th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Israeli President Isaac Herzog invited Benjamin Netanyahu to form the government on 13 November, after he secured the support of 64 out of the 120 newly-elected Knesset members, as against the support of 28 members for outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid. Staying true to the twists and turns of Israeli politics, Netanyahu moved towards victory with his coalition of far-right politicians and parties even as accusations of corruption remain attached to his



previous tenure in power as the country's longest-serving leader. Netanyahu secured the key support of a right-wing coalition, Religious Zionist, which secured 14 seats, eight more than their previous tally.

Netanyahu has governed Israel for most of the past quarter century. In his earlier terms in the government, he helped entrench the occupation of the West Bank,

empowered the far right and oversaw the collapse of peace negotiations with the Palestinians. However, he almost always governed in coalition with at least one centrist party, setting a limit on how far right his government could move.

The new coalition led by Netanyahu in many ways marks a return to the familiar. At the same time, a government sans centrist political grouping is a leap into the unknown. At present, Israel appears to be on the road to a “full right” coalition with four parties pulling Netanyahu further in their ideological direction. The question ahead for Israel remains how Netanyahu and his political partners on the far right would wield their new power.

Notwithstanding these uncertainties, experts opine that in two important areas—foreign policy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—Netanyahu’s next government might not even differ substantively from the outgoing government.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Bennett-Lapid’s policy hardly differed from what Netanyahu called “conflict management,” which meant containing occasional escalations and allowing incremental improvements in the material conditions in the Palestinian territories without seeking an end to the conflict. However, his new coalition allies’ priorities are likely to heighten tensions with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu in his earlier terms has overseen initiatives to improve regional ties, including the normalization of relations with Arab countries. Regionally, Israel’s relationship with countries like the UAE has grown by leaps and bounds, in the aftermath of the Abraham Accords, which he helped deliver during his previous stint in office. While he could not visit the UAE or Morocco before demitting office in July 2021, it will be interesting to see how quickly he can make the trip to Israel’s newest Arab friends. The Iran nuclear contentions, meanwhile, have gotten even more complicated after the Trump withdrawal and domestic churning in Iran. Netanyahu was a robust champion of strong measures to tackle Iran’s nuclear programme and it is expected that he will take up the thread running in his new term.

Some experts have argued that a hardline coalition would test some of Israel’s diplomatic relations, most notably with the United States, Israel’s most critical strategic partner. In addition, Netanyahu generally has had a tough time with past Democratic administrations, on a range of issues including Iran and Israeli settlement activities. It remains to be seen how he engages with the Biden administration, which has been further strengthened politically in the aftermath of the US midterm elections. Netanyahu has also vowed to ‘neutralise’ the maritime boundary agreement with Lebanon, which was achieved with the help of US mediation. Analysts, though, note that the new Israeli prime minister may not undo the agreement, widely seen as beneficial to Israel, especially in the context of energy security implications in the aftermath of the ongoing Russian military intervention in Ukraine.

Israel’s multifaceted relationship with India, meanwhile, is expected to be further strengthened, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi warmly congratulating Netanyahu on his electoral victory.