



Summary

Russia's war in Ukraine is continuing, though in recent weeks, Ukrainian troops have made significant advances in previously held Russian territories. On 21 September 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin, in an address to the nation, orders Russia's first mobilisation since World War II and backed a plan to annex swathes of Ukraine. He also warned the West that he was not bluffing when he said he would be ready to use nuclear weapons to defend Russia. During his address, President Putin called up 300,000 reservists, a mobilisation that is set to begin immediately. The move resulted in one-way flights out of Russia increasing in price and selling out quickly after the announcement was made on Wednesday. Meanwhile President Putin also gave his explicit support to referendums that will be held in the coming days in swathes of Ukraine that is controlled by Russian troops. This includes the self-styled Donetsk (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republics (LPR), which President Putin recognized as independent just prior to the invasion, with Russian-installed officials in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions also asking for votes. Referendums in these regions are set to be held between Friday 23 September and Tuesday 27 September and effectively pave the way for the formal annexation of about 15% of Ukrainian territory. By formally annexing these territories, President Putin is effectively giving himself the potential pretext to use nuclear weapons as Russia's nuclear doctrine allows the use of such weapons if weapons of mass destruction are used against it or if the Russian state faces an existential threat from conventional weapons.

Shipping

Ukraine continues to ship grain out of three main ports under a deal brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to unblock the country's sea ports. As of 18 September, the Ukrainian infrastructure ministry has reported that a total of 165 ships with 3.7 million tonnes of agricultural products on board have left Ukraine since the deal was brokered in July. On 18 September, ten vessels with 169,300 tonnes of agricultural products left Ukrainian Black Sea ports. In mid-September, President Putin threatened to restrict Ukrainian grain exports to European countries as he accused them of acting "like colonial powers," and used misleading figures to claim that developing countries are receiving a fraction of the exports they were expecting under the Black Sea Grain Initiative. For now, the Black Sea Grain Initiative is set to continue to ship agricultural products out of Ukraine. In late August, the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) announced a new route for merchant vessels going in and departing from the Ukrainian ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi/Yuzhny under the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The new route is 320 nautical miles long and connects the three Ukrainian ports with the inspection areas located inside Turkish territorial waters. The new route came into effect as of 26 August. The route was adjusted following an initial three weeks of operations and allows for shorter transit in the maritime humanitarian corridor as well as easier planning for the shipping industry.

On 21 September, reports emerged that at least one and possibly two uncrewed surface vessels were discovered on a shoreline outside the Russian Navy stronghold of Sevastopol, Crimea. The black craft is fitted with an electro-optical camera, a laser rangefinder, and two steel protrusions on the bow, which could be detonators or contractors for an explosive device. It appears to be an improvised product. Furthermore, a flat panel mounted on the stern could possibly be a satellite antenna for a remote-control uplink, while the bow is marked with the characters "4 5 VZNSI." While remote-controlled "bomb boats" have previously been used in waters off Yemen, the craft that was recovered on 21 September is the first reported appearance of such a device in the war in Ukraine. Russian social media suggest that two of these vessels may have been recovered from the beach.

As of mid-September 2022, around 82 ships with 418 seafarers remain stuck around Ukrainian ports. While the agreement reached in July created a protected sea transit corridor, it was designed to alleviate global food shortages. Furthermore, the initiative only involves dry bulk vessels around three Ukrainian ports, with dozens of other vessels, including oil tankers, not being able to access the corridor. These vessels continue to wait on approval to leave the region while waterways remain controlled by Russia and other ports are blocked by Ukraine.



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