

Russia's Battlefield Woes in Ukraine

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Russian military has failed to effectively advance along multiple axes in Ukraine, seized limited territory, lost substantial quantities of equipment, and suffered high rates of fatalities and casualties since January 2024, according to new CSIS data.
- Congressional support to increase sanctions on Russia and continue U.S. military assistance to Ukraine would likely raise the costs for Moscow of slow-rolling peace talks and killing Ukrainian civilians. The Kremlin is betting on waning U.S. support, but the United States still holds critical leverage.
- Russian forces have seized less than 1 percent of Ukrainian territory since January 2024, an outcome that decisively falls short of Moscow's objective to expand its control of Ukrainian territory.
- Russian forces have advanced as little as 50 meters per day in recent key military operations, much slower than both Russian and Ukrainian advances earlier in the war and slower than virtually every major offensive campaign during World War I and World War II.
- Russia will likely have suffered 1 million casualties by summer 2025, with 250,000 fatalities. Russian deaths in Ukraine are five times higher than all Soviet and Russian deaths combined from World War II to February 2022.

By Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since early 2024, Russia has launched offensive operations across multiple fronts in Ukraine. But its battlefield performance has been marked by staggering inefficiency, poor performance, and attrition. Russian forces have advanced at an average rate of just 50 to 135 meters per day in key areas such as around Kupiansk in the north and toward Pokrovsk in the east. Russia's advances have been slower than some of history's most grinding military campaigns and much slower than both Russian and Ukrainian advances earlier in the war. These efforts have yielded fewer than 5,000 square kilometers of new territory seized in the last 16 months—less than 1 percent of Ukrainian territory.

Russia has resorted to a strategy of attrition, attempting to wear Ukraine down through the piecemeal destruction of its military. Russia's offensives rely heavily on infantry and mechanized assaults, artillery, drones, and glide bombs. But the Russian military has not used long-range fires effectively to shape the battlefield and set the conditions for maneuver warfare. In addition, Ukrainian forces have imposed significant costs with their defense in depth, using trenches, dragon's teeth, mines, and other barriers—along with artillery and drones—to attrit advancing Russian soldiers and vehicles.

Russia has consistently lost two to five times more equipment than Ukraine on the battlefield, including thousands of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and armored fighting vehicles since January 2024. Russia's personnel losses have also been severe, with total Russian fatalities reaching as high as 250,000 and casualties approaching 1 million. In fact, Russia has suffered five times the number of fatalities in Ukraine (in just over 3 years) as in all Russian and Soviet wars *combined* since World War II (covering roughly 77 years). Russian forces have paid an extraordinary price in blood and equipment for only marginal gains in Ukraine, an outcome that decisively falls short of Moscow's objective to greatly expand its control of Ukrainian territory.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Congress can play a critical role in sanctioning Russia for its failure to seriously engage in peace talks, as well as supporting additional aid to Ukraine that benefits workers in Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Texas, and other states where these defense systems are developed and produced.

The Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025 (S.1241 and H.R.2548) would enact extensive new sanctions on Russia and countries that purchase Russian energy, as well as expand restrictions on Russian sovereign debt and financial transactions involving sanctioned entities. Russia

RECOMMENDATIONS

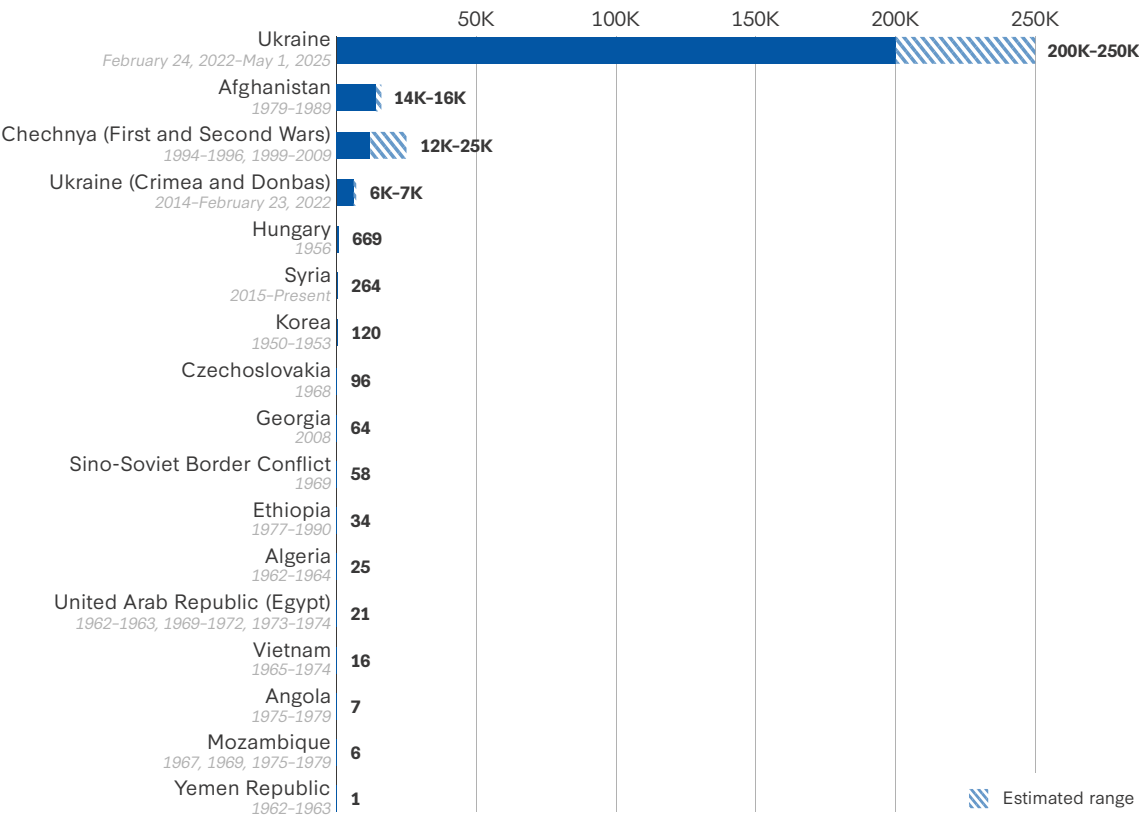
- Congress should consider new sanctions on Russia’s energy, defense, and financial sectors, as well as secondary sanctions targeting key enablers of Russia’s wartime economy.
- The United States should consider repurposing \$300 billion of frozen Russian assets to provide additional funding for Ukraine assistance.
- Congress should evaluate options to extend and accelerate military assistance to Ukraine, such as providing U.S. Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS), High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), 155 mm artillery rounds, air defense systems, and other weapons systems and intelligence assistance to raise the battlefield costs for Moscow of slow-rolling peace talks and killing Ukrainian civilians.

is grappling with stubborn inflation, labor shortages, and limited paths to economic growth. Increased sanctions against Russian oil, gas, uranium, and other products would likely increase pressure on the Kremlin to reach a peace settlement.

Several pending measures in Congress also aim to extend military assistance to Ukraine, such as the Ukraine Support Act (H.R.2913) and the Freedom First Lend Lease Act (H.R.1158). The Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, which is in its initial stages, could also be used to extend or expand Ukraine aid mechanisms. Several lawmakers have also introduced additional oversight tools for Ukraine assistance.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s Battlefield Woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, *CSIS Briefs*, June 3, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>.
- Iselin Brady et al., “Can Ukraine Fight Without U.S. Aid? Seven Questions to Ask,” CSIS, May 19, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-ukraine-fight-without-us-aid-seven-questions-ask>.
- Seth G. Jones, “Trump Can Make Russia Pay for Peace in Ukraine,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 28, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/trump-can-make-russia-pay-for-peace-in-ukraine-sanctions-economy-60d9e4d6>.



< Russian Fatalities in Selected Wars, 1946-2025

Source: Authors’ analysis from various sources (see Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s Battlefield Woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, *CSIS Briefs*, June 3, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>).