

Russia's Grinding War in Ukraine

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Russian forces have suffered approximately 1.2 million casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) and as many as 325,000 fatalities in Ukraine since February 2022, according to new CSIS data. Combined Russian and Ukrainian casualties may be as high as 1.8 million and could reach 2 million total casualties by the spring of 2026.
- Despite being on the offensive in most areas since January 2024, Russian forces have gained less than 1.5 percent of Ukrainian territory since the start of 2024. In total, Russian forces have seized around 75,000 km² (approximately 12 percent of Ukraine) since the 2022 invasion and control about 120,000 km² (approximately 20 percent of Ukraine and an area roughly the size of Pennsylvania), including territory seized before 2022 such as Crimea and parts of the Donbas.
- Russia has several vulnerabilities the United States can exploit. Increased sanctions against Russia's energy sector—including sanctions against any country that buys Russian oil—would likely cause major pain. If Moscow continues to drag its feet on peace talks, the United States should provide more advanced and longer-range weapons, mines, engineering capabilities, and other matériel to Ukraine.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

A close look at the data suggests that Russia is not winning the war in Ukraine and that Russia is increasingly a declining power.

Russian forces have suffered approximately 1.2 million casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) and as many as 325,000 killed since February 2022. No major power has suffered anywhere near these numbers of casualties or fatalities in any war since World War II. Russia has accepted the costs of high casualties in hopes of eventually wearing down Ukraine's military and society.

In exchange for its losses, Russia has made little recent progress on the battlefield. In the last 24 months, Russian forces seized only approximately 8,500 km² of Ukrainian territory—an area smaller than the state of Connecticut. Despite being on the offensive in most areas since January 2024, Russian forces have advanced at an average rate of between 15 and 70 meters per day in their most prominent offensives, slower than almost any major offensive campaign in any war in the last century. In total, Russian forces have seized around 75,000 km² (approximately 12 percent of Ukraine) since the 2022 invasion and control about 120,000 km² (approximately 20 percent of Ukraine and an area roughly the size of Pennsylvania), including territory seized before 2022 such as Crimea and parts of the Donbas. These gains fall decisively short of the Kremlin's goal to militarily conquer Ukraine.

Territorial Control in Ukraine, January 2024–January 2026



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Congress should impose sanctions on Russia's energy, defense, and financial sectors, as well as secondary sanctions targeting key enablers of Russia's wartime economy.
- Congress should also extend, expand, and accelerate military assistance to Ukraine to protect the country—including innocent civilians—from Russian brutality, including long-range strike systems, air defenses, artillery, and ammunition. These steps would enhance Ukraine's defense and increase pressure on the Kremlin to reach a peace settlement.

Additional Resources

Read the full report: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-grinding-war-ukraine>.

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Although the Russian economy has held up better than some expected following Western sanctions, there are signs of growing strain and faltering long-term competitiveness. Russian manufacturing is declining, consumer demand is weakening, inflation remains stubbornly high, and the country faces a labor shortage. Economic growth slowed to 0.6 percent in 2025, and Russia continues to fall behind in key technologies such as AI. Russia had a grand total of zero companies in the top 100 list of technology companies in the world as measured by market capitalization.

LEGISLATIVE & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Congress can play a critical role in punishing 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 defense systems are developed and produced.

The Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025 (S.1241 and H.R.2548) would impose sweeping measures tied to Russia's conduct in peace negotiations, including a ban on U.S. persons purchasing Russian sovereign debt, restrictions on certain financial transfers and transactions involving sanctioned Russian persons and institutions, and a punitive tariff (at least 500 percent) on U.S. imports from countries that knowingly purchase Russian-origin energy products and uranium. Increased sanctions against Russian oil, gas, and other products would likely cause major pain in a regime that continues to punish Ukrainian civilians.

In the FY26 NDAA passed in December 2025, Congress extended the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) authorizing \$400 million for each of FY26 and FY27. This is a modest level of funding relative to appropriations between FY22 and FY24 that is best understood as sustaining longer-lead assistance programs rather than serving as the vehicle for more immediate assistance previously provided by the Presidential Drawdown Authority. However, the recently passed minibudget containing defense appropriations for FY26 did not provide direct funding for USAI but appropriated \$400 million for European capacity building efforts, which some lawmakers state is for assistance to Ukraine.

Estimate of Russian Casualties

Aggregate

1.2M

800K

400K

0

Feb. 2022

Jan. 2023

Jan. 2024

Jan. 2025

Dec. 2025

Source: CSIS estimates; UK Ministry of Defense; analysis of data collected by Russian news outlet Mediazona and the BBC Russian Services; and interviews with U.S., European, Ukrainian, and other government officials.