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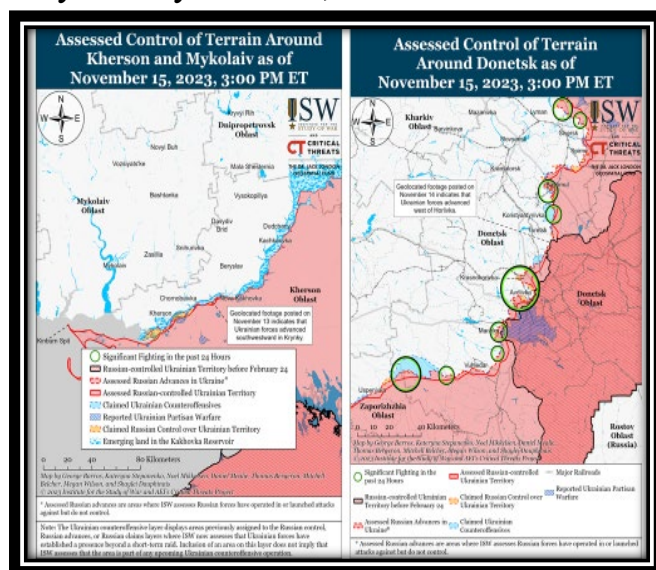
In Early November, a handful of Ukrainian troops reached the occupied side of the Dnipro River and established a foothold in Russian-controlled territory in the Kherson region. Estimates of the number of Ukrainian troops involved in the operation range from dozens to several hundred and they are reported to be engaged in heavy fighting with Russian forces on the far side of the river. As per news reports, Ukrainian marines were reinforcing Mykolaiv positions in three villages on the eastern bank of the river, including with armoured Humvees and at least one infantry fighting vehicle, and had cut off one road that Russians used to resupply troops in the area.

On 15 November 2023, the first official confirmation of the beachhead on the Eastern bank of Dnipro was provided by Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential administration. He said the crossing showed that Kyiv was still making advances in a months-long counteroffensive that has so far failed to yield major territorial gains. A Russian-backed regional official also confirmed that Ukrainian troops had crossed the river, urging calm and claiming that additional Russian forces were being deployed to repel the attack.

On the other hand, Russian forces during the last fortnight have continued with offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, near Avdiivka, west and southwest of Donetsk City, in the Donetsk Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced in some areas.

Ukrainian counter-offensive has thus far remained far short of declared objectives and had made only modest progress on the flanks of Bakhmut and in the south, in Zaporizhia province. Five months into its counter-offensive, Ukraine has managed to advance by just 17 kilometres. A combination of weary units, limited ammunition and wet weather is likely to considerably slow offensives during the winter while some small-unit infantry attacks may continue.

In an essay and interview with the Economist, Ukraine's top general, Valery Zaluzhny, said aloud what is evident on the battlefield: Ukraine is at a stalemate with Russia and "there will most likely be no deep and beautiful breakthrough." Sharing his first comprehensive assessment of the campaign General Valery Zaluzhny, highlighted the battlefield in Ukraine reminded him of the great conflict of a century ago. In his view, "Just like in the First World War, we have reached the level of technology that puts us into a stalemate,". The general concludes that without a massive technological leap to break the deadlock, "there will most likely be no deep and beautiful breakthrough."



On the contrary, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, reaffirmed his stance that this is not the time to negotiate with Russia, and he also denied that any Western leaders were pressuring him to do so. Zelenskiy also rejected the assessment of his commander-in-chief about the war being in a stalemate. The divergence of views on the state of war at the strategic level in Kyiv is being interpreted as a serious divergence of views between the civilian and military wings of Ukraine's leadership.

Russia rejected the assessment that the conflict had reached a stalemate. "No, it has not reached a stalemate," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "Russia is steadily carrying out the special military operation. All the goals that were set should be fulfilled," he added, using the Kremlin's term for its full-scale military intervention.

With fronts in stalemate, both sides have intensified aerial strikes on critical targets using drones, artillery and missiles.

Annalena Baerbock, the German foreign minister, said on Thursday she was confident that the European Union next month would advance Ukraine's bid to join the bloc at a summit seen as a key milestone in Kyiv's efforts to integrate with the West. Germany proposed a detailed and innovative roadmap to expand the EU that would give candidate countries such as Ukraine early benefits including observer status at leaders' summits in Brussels before full membership. EU leaders are expected to decide in December 2023 whether to accept the European Commission's recommendation to invite Kyiv to begin membership talks with the bloc. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia does not believe the European Union's promises to admit Ukraine are "real".

Ukraine and Britain have agreed to discounts on insurance against military risks for Ukrainian exports, including through the Black Sea corridor, the Ukrainian prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, has said. "This will make the Black Sea corridor more accessible to a wider range of exporters." Ukrainian transport authorities confirmed that 91 vessels exported 3.3 million metric tons of agricultural and metal products as of November 09, 2023. Ukraine's government expects a harvest of 79 million tons of grain and oilseeds in 2023, with its 2023/24 exportable surplus totalling about 50 million tons.

Israeli Ground Operations in Gaza Gain Momentum

After six weeks of war and three weeks of ground fighting, Israel now has effective control of the area north of Wadi Gaza, a riverbed that bisects the 45 km-long strip. Weeks of heavy Israeli bombardment and a ground offensive have in effect dislodged Hamas from power, at least in the northern part of the enclave.

During the last few days, attention has been focused on Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in Gaza, and other such facilities. Israel says Hamas has an underground headquarters beneath Al-Shifa. It also believes that some of its 239 hostages were hidden there, at least temporarily. On November 15th, after encircling it for six

days, Israeli troops entered the hospital compound. While Israel justified its latest action against Al Shifa hospital in northern Gaza, the US, UN and the Palestinians among others reiterated that infrastructure like hospitals should not be targeted.

The White House also warned against a post-war occupation of Gaza by Israeli forces. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clarified that he was not seeking to reoccupy Gaza but instead was in favour of some sort of a “credible force” within the Palestinian territory to prevent the rise of militant groups.

Civilian casualties continued to rise in the Gaza Strip. To neutralize a Hamas commander, the IDF on 31 October struck the Jabalia refugee camp, Gaza’s largest refugee camp, leading to the death of a large number of civilians. This bombing was followed by air strikes on the Al-Maghazi refugee camp on 5 November, killing several people. The White House on 9 November stated that a four-hour humanitarian pause in northern Gaza will be observed by the Israeli security forces to enable civilian movement away from the areas of intense fighting. While the death toll in Gaza breached the 11,000 mark, the IDF lost more than 45 soldiers.

At the Gaza Aid conference in Paris on 9 November, Cyprus proposed a humanitarian sea corridor from its port of Limassol to Gaza. France, Germany, Denmark and the European Union announced increased financial aid amounting to more than 300 million Euros cumulatively.

Hamas had captured more than 200 hostages during its daring operation against Israel. While four have been released so far – and one IDF soldier has been rescued, a Hamas spokesperson stated that they will be willing to release women and children in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and a pause in fighting. Amidst international pressure for an end to hostilities, Netanyahu reiterated that the release of hostages is a prerequisite for a ceasefire.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told American media that the US was also involved in negotiations involving Israel and Qatar to secure the release of US hostages. At least 10 Americans are reportedly among the hostages taken by Hamas. Analysts noted that as long as Israel’s war aim continues to be the elimination of Hamas, there may not be much forward movement on the issue of hostages. Further, the complexities involved in



negotiating with a terrorist group in an area with frequent communication blackouts, among other logistical issues, were also highlighted.

On Israel's northern borders meanwhile, Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah's threats of escalation were met by a stern warning by Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Galant who warned that such a war would lead to the destruction of Lebanon. Reports noted that Israel has killed more than 70 Hezbollah fighters on its northern borders since the outbreak of hostilities with Hamas.

The IDF also reported the successful interception of a Houthi missile by the Arrow 3 ballistic missile defence system in the Red Sea area. Reports noted that this marked the first operational interception by the Arrow system. This did indicate that regional groups inimical to Israel were testing the waters as it were to try to further complicate Israel's strategic situation. The US meanwhile increased its force presence in the area, including a nuclear-powered submarine.

At the joint Arab-Islamic summit convened on 11 November, the participating leaders strongly condemned Israel's actions and called for an arms embargo. Some reports noted that a few Arab powers blocked the adoption of clauses that would prohibit the use of US bases in the region to transfer its weapons and equipment to Israel, cut off Arab airspace for transit to and from Israel, put on hold any kind of economic or diplomatic contact with Israel, and leverage oil as a means to apply pressure.

AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park- Key Takeaways

The UK Government convened a two-day summit on the theme of AI Safety at Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes. This is the first-ever global summit on this theme. The AI Safety Summit was held from 1-2 November and had in attendance government leaders, research experts, civil society groups, and bigwigs in the AI industry such as Elon Musk, Mustafa Suleyman (DeepMind), Sam Altman (OpenAI), and Nick Clegg (Meta Platforms). The HM Government had encouraged top firms in the AI industry to make public their company policies on Frontier AI safety before the summit. Among the three "godfathers" of AI,



Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio were present, while their colleague Yann LeCun, currently Meta's Chief AI Scientist, was conspicuously absent, having dismissed concerns over AI as an existential threat to humanity as preposterous.

Consensus was reached in the form of the Bletchley Agreement, signed by 28 participating nations. The

declaration focused on “catastrophic” risks posed by a niche set of “frontier” AI models defined in the declaration as “highly capable general-purpose AI models, including foundation models that could perform a wide variety of tasks”. The delegations agreed that there is a need for a common approach in dealing with the rapid and unregulated development of frontier AI models to mitigate the harm that such powerful and transformative technology could pose to the public.

The Agreement underscored the need for working out a framework for international cooperation that is transparent and “human-centric”. The urgent need for guardrails in the AI industry was also voiced by the UN Security-General, who took the opportunity to talk about the newly instated UN Advisory Body on AI. It was agreed upon that the identification and mitigation of potential risks of AI technology requires all actors- governments, AI companies, research experts, civil society, and international organizations- to work in tandem.

The declaration made special references to frontier AI models such as ChatGPT by OpenAI, Claude by Anthropic and Llama by Meta. There are references to the threat of manipulation and generation of “deceptive content” as well as the likely domains affected by this technology such as cybersecurity and biotechnology. The declaration calls for an international effort to develop “human-centric, trustworthy and responsible AI” and a regulatory mechanism in tune with each country’s respective “national circumstance and applicable legal frameworks”. Tech companies involved in designing, testing and rolling out commercial versions of these models have been given a relatively free hand. The document “encourages” them to provide “context-appropriate transparency and accountability”.

While there was consensus on the aspect of regulation of AI, there was a divide among the participants on the issue of open-source vs closed-source research in AI. Elon Musk enunciated the difference between “insight” and “oversight” and said that insight must come before oversight. The same line was taken by UK PM Rishi Sunak, who said that it was too early to bring in legislation to regulate AI since it was not understood properly.

Musk’s statement can be seen as an indirect criticism of the EU’s approach which favours oversight of AI and will be reflected in the upcoming EU AI Act, likely to be unveiled in December 2023. Sunak stressed that AI firms should not be allowed to “mark their own homework”. To this effect, the summit has seen top AI leaders pledge to work alongside governments to test their new frontier AI models before market release to ensure user safety.

Notwithstanding broader consensus on the Bletchley Declaration during the summit, various civil rights groups have decried the closed-door session nature of the summit and the non-inclusion of either vulnerable groups or major civil society organisations working in the fields. The declaration, itself, has been argued to be very vague and ambiguous. For example, frontier AI models have been termed “highly capable” without contextualising the benchmarks when applied to multi-modal AI. There are numerous references to “unforeseen”, “significant” and “safety risks” but no clarity on what these risks might be.