

As of August 7th, 2024, footage uploaded to Twitter already confirms UKR's advance in a Kursk village, called, Zaoleshinsky (RUS: Заолешенский/UKR: Заолешинський). The Ukrainian milblogger on Twitter wrote in a post on August 7th, 2024: “Заявлено про українську техніку поблизу населеного пункту Заолешинський, Курська область.” [] - [@EjShahid: status/1821311435131027729]

Confirmed geolocated footage, however, indicates that the Ukrainians have advanced well beyond Zaoleshinsky (RUS: Заолешенский/UKR: Заолешинський) to as far north as past Mirny in the Russian village called Перечное (i.e., Perechnoe). The advance is significant, since in the village stands in the shadow of the Russian ground line of communication connecting Bryansk to Belgorod, parallel to the borders with these regions. Mirny is a point of dislocation for the major ground line of communication along the entire eastern Russian border with north eastern Ukraine.

The Ukrainians, however, did not manage to establish a foothold past Mirny. The Russian milblogger on Telegram, The_Wrong_Side, indicated that the sighting past Zaoleshinsky (RUS: Заолешенский/UKR: Заолешинський) in Перечное (i.e., Perechnoe) became short lived for the Ukrainians. The video footage The_Wrong_Side uploaded shows a truck with 15 Ukrainian soldiers on fire, while Russian FPV drones target two armored fighting vehicles (i.e., Боевая бронированная машина (ББМ)) that veer off the road into the woods for cover. A Russian reconnaissance drone hovering above the three vehicles witnesses their destruction. It is unclear what happened to the remaining Ukrainian soldiers.[]- [The_Wrong_Side:17496] In addition, the Russian milblogger, Rybar, however, indicates that as a major position in the battle for Suzhda Mirny is still contested, as per an infographic from August 8th, 2024.[] - [] The Institute for the Study of War published an infographic with a map, detailing how Ukrainians have not captured Sudzha in its entirety, confirming Rybar's reporting.[] - [“Ukrainian Incursion into Kursk Oblast as of August 7, 2024, 3:00PM ET]. It is unclear whether the appearance of Ukrainian armor past Zaoleshinsky (RUS: Заолешенский/UKR: Заолешинський) is the same Ukrainian armor the Russian blew up in Перечное (i.e., Perechnoe).

At the outset of the Kursk operation, the Russians suffered devastating losses. These losses were a Mi-28 helicopter, into whose propeller the Ukrainians sent an FPV drone. In addition to that helicopter, the Russians lost one of their famous Ka-52 “alligator” helicopters, the ones they used during Ukraine's ‘Spring’ counteroffensive to prevent a breakthrough at Robotyne. These helicopters are produced at a rate of 15 per year, meaning that Russia makes roughly three every quarter. Within a single hit, the Ukrainians therefore eliminated the result of one third of Russia's industrial capacity for the production of helicopters accumulated from the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. On the ground, Russian forces, who appeared to be dazed, confused, or even lost, witnessed Ukrainians destroy not merely two tanks but two armored transport vehicles in a single attack. These losses, the only ones for which there are confirmed

geolocated footage, are significant, especially for the speed of Ukraine's advance.

The Ukrainian troops, who facilitated the breakthrough at Suzhda, appear to have been trained in a way altogether different from the previous ways NATO developed instruction for training. These troops, whose formations appear to be operating in tandem with mobilized, mechanized armor, bears the hallmarks of storm, infiltration, and assault in a coordinated fashion. The troops who were situated on vehicles decorated their helmets with localized camouflage with branches, bushes, or head pieces torn from the surrounding flora and fauna. Mortar crews appeared to be serving underneath artillery crews in a support role.

What is most significant of all, however, is that for the first time in the history of the Ukraine war the Ukrainians centered on quantifiable military objectives. Whereas in the past, Ukraine's high command, whose leadership lackluster American commanders like Mark Miley likely spoiled in both sense of the word, suffered from an overwhelming propensity to view the progress of combat strictly in terms of territory, whether Ukraine reclaimed this or that piece of land lost to the Russians. In contrast with the territorial obsession, the lightning advance centered on the acquisition of a military objective whose value is quantifiable according to the value of its political, societal or economic power.

The seizure of the Suzhda gas terminal, the preeminent military objective of the initial phase of the operation, represents a major turning point in the way that Ukraine views and implements strategy on the battlefield. In terms of its 'military' significance, the Suzhda gas terminal, whose terrain is full of barren fields, is an indefensible, flat, landmark with nothing to offer in terms of combat. In terms of its political, societal, or economic power, however, the Suzhda gas terminal is a major chess piece on the ground chessboard of the Special Military Operation. It is the first geopolitically significant acquisition by Ukraine.

Suzhda gas terminal's geopolitical significance is profound. Since the Suzhda gas terminal supplies gas not only to both Hungary as well as Slovakia, both of which have been forced 'to diversify away' from Russian sources of cheap energy through 'input substitution,' the gas terminal is largely responsible for European supplies on the whole. [] It is unlikely that its significance for the whole of European, however, is the primary objective of its political leverage for the Ukrainians. This is merely 'icing on the cake.' Its significance for Hungary and Slovakia, however, is. This is the cake.

Shortly before the Kursk operation, the Ukrainians shut off supplies of Russian cheap energy to both of these countries, whose political leadership is aligned with Russia, Moscow and the Putin regime in opposition to NATO, the European Union and the United States. With control over the gas terminal, Ukraine is therefore in a position to leverage greater control over the flow of that gas against both the pro-Russian Eastern European bloc, as well as against Russia itself. Neither force is in a position now to dictate the outcome of the flow of cheap Russian gas from that terminal. Ukraine is. They have essentially been subjected to a 'checkmate' to use the terminology of Brzeziński fanatics.

This significantly advances Ukraine's ability to negotiate an immediate end to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. What makes the Suzhda gas terminal so significant is quantifiably. It is responsible for imports and exports and the money from these imports and exports on average, both before and after the war, can translate into a solid store of value for a Donbas concession. The Donbas, whose historic storehouses of raw materials is unparalleled in Europe, is home to many of the world's most important, coveted, and rare earth minerals, deposits or metals. In terms of the scales, balance, or weights the leaders of the world use to negotiate how the world is carved up, further divided, decided, and settled, the Suzhda gas terminal is like nothing Ukraine seized previously.

Suzhda, however, is a bargaining chip. To emphasize just how important the seizure of a bargaining chip is over territory, it is important to compare it to the tug of war over Kharkiv. Russia seized the Kharkov region in a lightning attack at the beginning of the war. [] - [] צבא רוסיה נכנס למרכז העיר חרקוב, העיר השנייה בגודלה באוקראינה. רוסיה: [] - [] Ukraine later focused its efforts on its recapture. [] - [] אם הצבא האוקראיני יצליח לשים מצור על הכוחות [] - [] הרוסיים ליד חארקיב זו תהייה המפלה הגדולה ביותר של צבא רוסיה מאז מלחמת העולם [] - [] Ukraine's recapture of Kharkiv, however, did not result in a significant change for its ability to negotiate. It simply prolonged the war. This is in essence the significance of the Kharkov battles for Ukraine.

Russia has sought to downplay the significance of the Kursk operation and discredited any attempt to attribute a military significance to its achievements, quoting from multiple Western sources, such as both the New York Times, as well as the Financial Times, while utilizing terminology from Forbes. Russia's immediate reaction, however, indicated the severity of the Kursk operation's success, especially on Putin's face during the course of the August 7th special briefing led by Gerasimov rather than Belousov. It is apparent in Putin's face that is visibly distraught and on the edge.

The initial Russian counteroffensive on August 8th from three directions has not resulted in the removal of Ukrainian forces, despite news agencies such as Sky News's Arabic channel, exclaiming how " " [] - [] " August 7th, 2024] In subsequent reporting, Sky News sought to exaggerate the overall significance of Ukraine's assault in a post on Twitter. [] - [] [@skynewsarabia: status/1821287998128095436] It raised the question, "هل اقترب الصدام الكبير؟" It is unlikely that 'a big clash' is expected to occur as a result.

Ukrainian forces have begun to dig in, as per Rybar's report dated August 8th, as engineering crews, who have followed the storm, infiltration and assault brigade formations, to develop a defense in depth, and take advantage of the surprise the operation achieved. [] - [] [rybar_force: status/1821564835764592676] "During the night from August 7 to 8, Ukrainian forces pulled up reserves and began to engineer their positions, simultaneously strengthening the onslaught and trying to advance in the Korenevo and Sudzha districts."

The Ukrainian storm, infiltration and assault groups have taken advantage of the advice one of the Nazi Wehrmacht's former commanders solicited in his memoirs on tank battles. Friedrich von Mellenthin (1904-1997), a German general in World War II who participated in many major campaigns and is known for his memoirs, emphasized in a list of bullet points in *Panzer Battles* the importance of surprise by attacking at night, as the Ukrainians did.[] - [*Panzer battles : a study of the employment of armor in the Second World War*, Friedrich von Mellenthin, 1971, pg. 261] Nearly every single one of these bullet points is observable from an analysis of the lightning speed of Ukraine's incursion into Kursk.

The author's posts [] - [@eric_giannini : status/1821231838956024137] from Twitter received confirmation from both Western as well as Eurasian sources such as the *Washington Post* and *Rybar*[] - [rybar_force: status/1821567987465306129]. The latter wrote: "A day later our conclusions about the economic aims of the Ukrainian offensive in the Kursk region have been confirmed by @WashingtonPost." The economic aims of the Ukrainian offensive in the Kursk region is: "to cut off the European Union countries from cheap energy, to strengthen their dependence on the United States and to put pressure on the discontented countries, particularly Hungary and Slovakia."

The *Washington Post* sought to gaslight the significance of the Suzhda gas terminal. Speaking under the condition of anonymity, a "Zelensky adviser," who could be anyone from Washington to Ukraine, stated: "Ukraine now controls a gas metering station about five miles inside Russia, the Zelensky adviser said. On Thursday, gas was still flowing through Sudzha, the last operational shipping point for a pipeline that carries Russian natural gas to Europe via Ukraine. The station was unlikely to be used for leverage, the adviser said, because with the pipeline running through Ukraine anyway, Kyiv could have disrupted flows at any time." Control over the terminal, however, is different from control over an extremity of the pipeline.[] - ["Battles persist in western Russia after bold cross-border attack by Ukraine," *Washington Post*, August 8th, 2024]

The author's posts [@eric_giannini : status/1821253905386238301] regarding the future political consequences of the Sudzha gas terminal for Slovakia and Hungary received confirmation in the rise of the price of gas in Europe. *Bloomberg* reported, for instance, in an article entitled, "European Gas Jumps to Fresh 2024 High With Ukraine Flows at Risk" that described how "European natural prices rallied for a third day, settling at the highest level since December on fears of possible disruptions to Russian fuel crossing Ukraine." [] - ["European Gas Jumps to Fresh 2024 High With Ukraine Flows at Risk," *Bloomberg*, August 8th, 2024]

"Russian gas will likely cease to cross Ukraine after the end of the year, when a transit agreement between the two nations expires. But a sudden and earlier halt in flows would still come as a shock for nations such as Slovakia, which currently depend on that supply and could see higher gas prices for companies and consumers if it's cut off."

In an earlier report *Bloomberg* mentioned how "European natural gas prices jumped on a report from Russia's unofficial *Rybar* military blogger that Ukrainian forces had seized

the key transit point of Sudzha in the region that carries gas via Ukraine to Europe.” [] - [“Russia Fights Largest Incursion by Ukraine Troops Since Invasion,” *Bloomberg*, August 7th, 2024]

Ukraine’s advances have not yet had an impact on Russia’s advances in the Donbas. On August 7th, 2024, Ukrainian milbloggers indicated that Russians continue to advance in the direction of Krasnoarmeysk, continuing the seizure of settlements such as Zhelanne. A Ukrainian milblogger named @AMK_Mapping_, for instance, described how “[multiple] reliable sources are now reporting that Russian forces advanced deep into the settlement, and now control the majority of the low-rise residential area in the West.” Ukrainians describe the situation in the direction of Krasnoarmeysk as ‘deteriorating’ for the “AFU in Zhellane,” expecting “the two to fall in the coming days.”[] - [AMK_Mapping_: status/1821385533060461000]

In the past month, Al-Arabiya, an Arabic news channel, reported how Russians had advanced more than 200 square kilometers in July. A more accurate calculation concluded that the Russians had acquired no less. The Ukrainian blogger recently posted a tweet stating that the more accurate calculation of lost Ukrainian territory during the month of July is 17.72% of Ukraine, a positive by 0.03%. The Ukrainian blogger approximates the actual amount to be less than 200km². The blogger estimates the amount to be at 177km². It is likely that Al-Arabiya’s calculation is a slight exaggeration.[] - [@War Mapper: /status/819130516223742408]

Russian milbloggers have published images depicting progress in the four regions Russian annexed in 2022.[] – [“روسيا تسيطر على 200 كلم مربع من أراضي أوكرانيا بشهر واحد“], Al-Arabiya, July 31st, 2024] The Russians have captured a majority of the Luhansk, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. In terms of the actual percentages, the blogger lists Luhansk at 98%, Donetsk at 62%, Zaporizhzhia at 70%, and Kherson at 75%. These percentages represent the Russians as having seized a majority of the territory in each of these regions. [] - [id7p_: sttatus/1820200076368887881] In terms of the Donetsk region alone, the blogger mentioned the following: “شن الجيش الروسي أقوى هجوم مضاد منذ بداية العملية العسكرية الخاصة في منطقة دونيتسك، حيث خلال شهر واحد فقط تقدم الجيش الروسي على إحدى الجبهات التي تسمى "بوكروفسك" وحرر 76 كم² مربع وحرر 10 مستوطنات وتقدم بعمق 17 كلم بخط مستقيم مما يعني اقتراب تحرير جمهورية دونيتسك الشعبية الحلم الذي طال انتظاره، حيث تبقى للجيش الروسي 35 كلم بالتمام” [] - [id7p_: status/1820203220616257550] Based on Russia’s continued advance in the direct of Krasnoarmeysk, the Ukrainians are not expected to stop Russia’s advance on the Dnipro.

Russia’s progress in the eastern Donbas comes at a critical time. Although Russia’s economy is listed in the fewest top ten for debt, Al-Arabiya reported on August 8th, 2024 how Russia’s budget deficit has widened with increased expenditures.[] - [] Alongside Al-Arabiya’s reporting is an article from the *Der Spiegel*, indicating that Russian advances in the Donbas have not secured a greater standard of living for those already settled throughout the wider region. An article published on August 8th, 2024 indicates how “[viele] Menschen in der von Russland besetzten Stadt Donezk haben seit zweieinhalb Jahren keinen regelmäßigen Zugang mehr zu sauberem Leitungswasser.

Nun blockierten sie aus Protest eine Straße. Russland verspricht eine Lösung, hat aber keine.”[] - [“Im Donbass protestiert die Bevölkerung gegen die russischen Besatzer, wegen Wassermangels,” *Der Spiegel*, 01.08.2024] The lack of clean drinking water in the Donbas has led to ever widening protests without resolution.

With Ukraine’s seizure of the Suzhda gas terminal, the political ruling elite responsible for the ultimate decision making in Ukraine are expected to exacerbate its leverage over Russia in any way possible. The fall out over the fallout over the Kursk operation is a perfect opportunity for these decision makers to apply additional pressure not only upon Russia, whose weakened economy makes it especially vulnerable to concessions, but upon its allies in NATO such as Slovakia and Hungary. With Fico and Orban cut off from cheap Russian energy and the price of heating and fuel scheduled to rise, UK’s protests are a testing ground for south Eastern European mass protests to overthrow Fico and Orban. The pressure on Slovakia and Hungary to diversify away from Russian gas exacerbates Russia’s weakened situation. Should Slovakia and Hungary be unable to further its diversification away from Russian gas before the onset of winter in a scenario where Ukraine maintains its hold over the Suzhda gas terminal, Russia’s ability to negotiate from a position of strength with respect to the Donbas comes under an immediately deepening threat from multiple dimensions of the shifting geopolitical chessboard.