

EURASIA DIGEST

Volume 1, Issue 30

October 10, 2025

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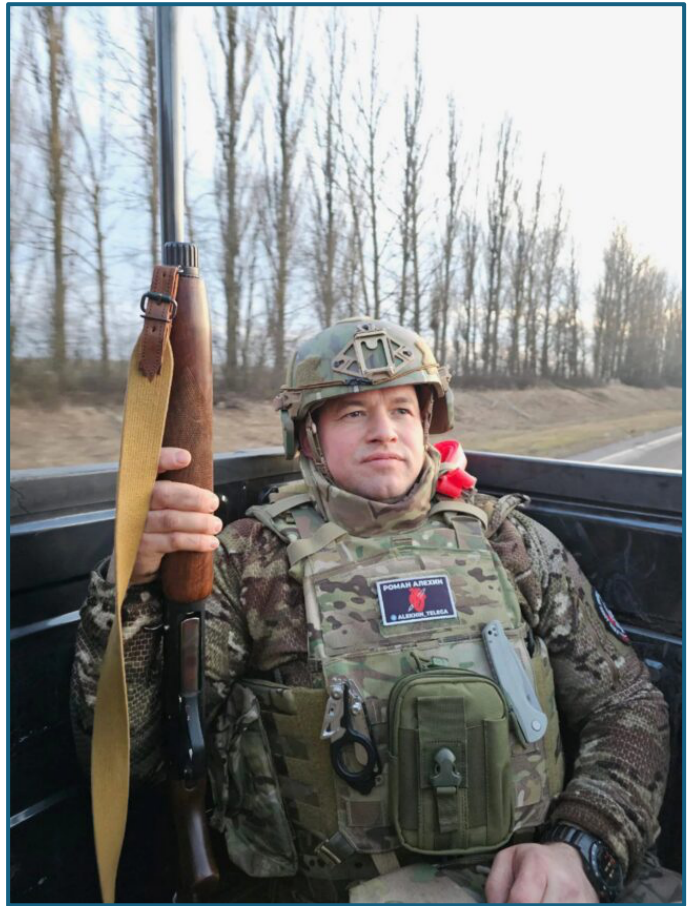
Kremlin Fears That Russian ‘War Correspondents’ Could Prototype Civil Society

Kassie Corelli

October 6, 2025

Executive Summary:

- The September 7 Kremlin-backed religious-nationalist procession in Moscow only drew 40,000 people, supporting the argument that right-wing activists remain a marginal force and do not pose a threat to the regime.
- In contrast, grassroots networks built around “war correspondents”—Russians who post information about the war independent of the Kremlin, including soldiers—that supply the army with equipment have grown influential, forming a parallel civil society. War correspondents openly highlight problems at the front while remaining ideologically pro-war yet semi-independent of Kremlin control.
- The Kremlin, initially tolerant because these networks aid the army, has begun repressive measures, for example, labeling blogger Roman Alekhin a “foreign agent, to curb war correspondents’ independence while avoiding turning them into symbols of resistance.



(Source: Telegram/@Alekhin_Telegra)

The relatively small turnout at a Russian government-sanctioned religious-nationalist procession in Moscow on September 7 led some independent analysts to conclude that the number of right-wing activists is not large, at least in the capital. Journalist Andrey Pertsev notes that the event,

which was encouraged by the Kremlin and became a rallying point for nationalists, attracted no more than 40,000 people—a small segment of Moscow’s population of 15 million. Pertsev concluded that the influence of the radical right, including protest elements such as supporters of Igor Girkin (Strelkov) or late-Wagner leader Yevgeniy Prigozhin, is exaggerated and poses no threat to the regime ([Riddle](#), September 12).

Writer and Z-communities—communities that actively support Russia’s war against Ukraine—researcher Ivan Filippov believes that the volunteer war-support network forming at the direction of “war correspondents” is a genuine grassroots movement not limited to ultra-nationalists ([Holod](#), July 10). These “war correspondents” post information about the war independently of the Kremlin, including details about soldiers, solicit assistance from the Russian people to purchase equipment needed at the front, and deliver it to the military, thereby forming “true civil society in action.”

War correspondents who make posts that are unflattering to the Kremlin risk retribution from the regime, including their lives. The decision to independently share the reality of life at the front, despite the government’s wishes, is ideologically motivated. Filippov believes that this network of soldiers and volunteers at home could pose a serious threat to the regime after the war ends. The Kremlin does not repress “war correspondents,” however, because their donors send the army everything from transport support to bandages ([Holod](#), July 10).

Popular “Rybar” Z-channel writer Mikhail Zvinchuk confirms this perspective. Zvinchuk notes that urgent fundraising efforts by “war correspondents” supply the Russian army with generators, building materials for defensive positions, and even water (Telegram/rybar, September 21). Independent fundraising networks may be especially crucial to the military now, as Moscow allegedly plans a “decisive breakthrough,” which could significantly impact the war’s future course ([Re: Russia](#), September 16).

The Russian government would like to control the “war correspondents” who openly write about problems in the army, including its corruption, and the network of volunteers inside Russia that supports them. These war correspondents—often pro-war and nationalistic “Z-writers” who have issues with how the Kremlin is conducting its war against Ukraine—compete with state-affiliated fundraising for “aid to the front” ([Holod](#), July 10).

This competition for funds highlights the conflict between Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyev and Roman Alekhin, a Z-blogger and former counselor to the governor of Kursk Oblast. The authorities caught Alekhin explaining how he could embezzle money meant for medical supplies for Russian soldiers. According to Filippov, this discrediting of independent war correspondents will sharply reduce donations and subsequent supplies to the Russian military ([Facebook/Ivan Filippov](#), September 10).

Solovyev attacked not only Roman Alekhin, but war correspondents and Z-bloggers generally with personal insults, threats, and accusations of “alarmism” for their criticism of the Russian Ministry of Defense (Novorossiia, [August 13, September 24](#)). After war correspondents revealed that Ukraine destroyed Russian armored vehicles at the start of 2024, Solovyev called for their imprisonment and execution as “enemies” of Russia ([NV.ua](#), February 2, 2024).

The Kremlin did not react to Solovyev’s demands until recently. The case of Alekhin, however, gave the Kremlin the ideal pretext to launch targeted repression of Z-bloggers, warning the pro-war community only to spread Kremlin narratives. On September 19, the Russian Ministry of Justice added Alekhin to the registry of “foreign agents” because he allegedly spread “unconfirmed information” about the decisions of the Russian authorities and “unreliable reports intended to promote a negative image of the soldiers of the Russian Federation” ([BBC Russkaya Sluzhba](#), September 19).

Telegram channels loyal to the Kremlin predict that Moscow will not stop at labeling Alekhin a “foreign agent,” and will launch a corruption investigation with the potential for criminal prosecution (see [EDM](#), September 9). According to these regime loyalists, the goal “is to deter war correspondents who transgress the bounds of loyalty and simultaneously to stop dark money” ([Telegram/vechernii_m](#), September 19). The channels’ writers admit that the Kremlin fears creating an aura of “victims of resistance” around Alekhin and others like him through excessive pressure ([Telegram/vechernii_m](#), September 19).

The Nezygar Telegram channel, relying on its sources in the Kremlin, also claims that “the government’s repressive mechanisms threaten not only ‘liberal groups,’ but also people known for their ‘loyalty and patriotism’” ([Telegram/russicaRU](#), September 21). The channel emphasizes that the authorities plan to prevent solidarity among war correspondents by employing varied means of repression—threats, pitting war correspondents against one another, or criminal cases.

The “civil society” formed within the Z-community appears unprepared to defend its members—at least those who have been discredited in the eyes of state-affiliated media. Even so, the Kremlin clearly sees the movement’s relative independence as a threat that could grow after Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine ends.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

Georgian Dream Consolidates Power Following Municipal Elections

Beka Chedia

October 6, 2025

Executive Summary:

- The ruling Georgian Dream party won an overwhelming victory in Georgia's October 4 municipal elections, capturing all 64 mayoral seats amid an opposition boycott, low voter turnout, and minimal international monitoring presence.
- Critics allege the elections were manipulated to fabricate a competitive image through "technical opposition" parties aligned with Georgian Dream, while genuine opposition movements faced repression, arrests, and exclusion under restrictive new laws.
- Following the failed opposition protests, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze claimed the protests were orchestrated by foreign intelligence services, fostering an argument for potentially banning opposition parties and consolidating Georgian Dream's power.



(Source: Inna Kukudzhanova/TASS)

On October 4, local government elections were held in Georgia, with 12 political parties participating ([Radio Tavisupleba](#), September 10). As expected, the ruling Georgian Dream party, which controls power at the central level, won an absolute majority in all 64 municipalities. Georgian Dream representatives were elected as the mayors of all municipalities, and the party also won an absolute majority of seats in the municipal assemblies (sakrebulo). According to the Central Election Commission, 81.7 percent of voters (1,104,545 votes) cast their ballots for Georgian Dream nationwide ([Georgian Central Election Commission](#), October 4; [Ekho Kavkaza](#), October 5). This was made possible in part by at least nine influential opposition parties boycotting the elections ([Civil Georgia](#), October 2).

To artificially simulate a competitive election campaign, Georgian Dream satellite parties, as well as two opposition parties—The Strong Georgia - Lelo party and Gakharia For Georgia party—participated in the elections, which led to criticism from the opposition (see [EDM](#), July 16). Some suspect that these two small parties are attempting to exploit the country's political crisis, especially given the authorities' plans to legislate a ban on all major opposition parties (see [EDM](#), April 15). This would transform these two parties into the sole opposition—something they would

otherwise have been unable to achieve in a competitive environment. Both parties have experience cooperating with Georgian Dream. The leader of Gakharia For Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, served as prime minister under Georgian Dream from 2019 to 2021 (see [EDM](#), September 16, 2019).

Georgian Dream has now been able to legitimize the elections and create a so-called “technical opposition” in municipal assemblies. The Russian political system has a similar arrangement, where a formal opposition exists without any real power. The Strong Georgia – Lelo party came in second place in Georgia with 90,790 votes (6.7 percent). Gakharia for Georgia came in third with 49,815 votes (3.7 percent) ([Georgian Central Election Commission](#), October 4; [Ekho Kavkaza](#), October 5). On October 4, the opposition chose two different strategies. The Strong Georgia – Lelo party and Gakharia For Georgia, although they, along with other parties, declared the 2024 parliamentary elections illegitimate, allegedly decided to use the municipal elections as a means to remove Georgian Dream from power (see [EDM](#), October 28, 2024). Another section of the opposition chose the path of revolution and boycott. Both strategies failed, however, due to incompetence and a lack of organization.

On October 4, the main opposition, led by the Initiative Group, a group led by Paata Burchuladze, a world-famous opera singer and founder of the anti-government civil movement “Rusavteli Avenue,” organized a peaceful demonstration attended by thousands. The organizers envisioned a peaceful revolution aimed at overthrowing the current government. The opposition’s attempt, however, failed. After the rally, participants, who had gathered in front of the parliament building, read a declaration on the transfer of power to the people and attempted to march on the nearby presidential palace. Police subsequently used force against them ([Interpressnews](#), October 4; [YouTube/@tvpirveli1](#), October 4).

The demonstration was dispersed, and all organizers on the organizing committee were arrested that same night. On October 5, the Georgian State Security Service (SSSG) reported the discovery of “a large quantity of firearms, ammunition, and explosives with a detonator hidden in a forest near the capital city of Tbilisi” ([SSSG](#), October 4). According to the SSSG, a Georgian citizen—who has already been arrested—purchased a large quantity of firearms, ammunition, and explosives on the instructions of a Georgian representative of one of the military units operating in Ukraine. The SSSG claims that acts of sabotage were planned in Tbilisi on October 4 ([SSSG](#), October 4).

In most municipalities, Georgian Dream candidates faced no competition for mayor. The results of these elections were in keeping with the best Soviet traditions. In at least 25 of the 64 electoral districts, the Georgian Dream mayoral candidates received 100 percent of the votes ([Tabula.ge](#), October 4). A total of 1,438,116 citizens participated in the elections, representing 40.93 percent of all registered voters in the country. This was the lowest voter turnout in Georgia’s electoral history ([Netgazeti](#), October 4).

One of Georgian Dream's most influential leaders and simultaneously one of the most anti-Western politicians, incumbent Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, was elected for the third time with 71.5 percent of the vote (214,872 voters). In 2017, when he ran for mayor for the first time and his approval ratings were at their peak, he received 204,061 votes ([Ekho Kavkaza](#), October 4). The rise in votes amid his declining popularity raises doubts about the fairness of the recent municipal elections.

Many citizens, heeding the calls of the main opposition parties, refused to vote. There were practically no local and foreign observers present at the elections, or only a minimal number of them. Only 81 international observers from 28 organizations participated in the municipal elections, whereas more than 1,000 foreign observers were present at the previous local self-government elections in 2021 ([Radio Tavisupleba](#), October 4). The majority of foreign observers represented post-Soviet authoritarian countries, as well as states in Africa and the Middle East. According to local media reports, 27 observation organizations with over 7,000 observers were registered with the Central Election Commission, most of whom were affiliated with Georgian Dream ([Radio Tavisupleba](#), October 4).

Georgian Dream ensured that even the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which traditionally monitors elections in Georgia, was absent this time. Initially, the government simply stated that the OSCE had no practice in monitoring local elections and therefore declined to invite them. Four weeks before the elections, however, Georgian Dream suddenly decided to invite the OSCE, which declined due to a lack of time to prepare ([Civil Georgia](#), September 9). Local observers were also left without a role due to new laws on foreign influence and the adoption of the "Foreign Influence Transparency Law," which effectively rendered most Georgian non-governmental organizations (NGO) ineffective just before the elections (see [EDM](#), September 30).

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze described the mass demonstration in Tbilisi and the subsequent attempt to seize the presidential palace as an action orchestrated by foreign intelligence services, referring to EU countries and the United States ([Civil Georgia](#), October 5). Kobakhidze did not directly mention the United States, but just a few days earlier, on October 2, the new head of the SSSG and Kobakhidze's close ally, Mamuka Mdinardze, accused the U.S. Embassy in Thailand of funding radical groups seeking to overthrow the Georgian government ([Formula News](#), October 2).

Kobakhidze promised to punish all those responsible, effectively announcing further repression. Virtually all the key leaders of influential parties were already in prison. Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zourabichvili, however, described the unrest in Tbilisi and the attempted seizure of the

Presidential Palace as a failed Russian special operation. “They set a trap of sorts, which consisted of breaking into the Presidential Palace,” she stated ([Gruzia Online](#), October 5).

Following this, Kobakhidze, on the second day after the failed revolution and victory in the municipal elections, stated that the European Union must accept that Georgian Dream will rule the country for a long time. He said it would be pragmatic for the European Union to reset relations with Georgia’s ruling party ([Business Media](#), October 4).

Georgian Dream’s victory in the local elections and the failure of the revolution were immediately commented on by the Kremlin’s chief ideologist, Alexander Dugin. He wrote on VKontakte, “Georgia is the only country in the South Caucasus where things have been better, not worse, for us lately” ([VKontakte/duginag](#), October 4). In a separate post, he wrote:

The globalists see how they are managing to outmaneuver us in the post-Soviet space, and here, Georgia clearly defies their trend. It is completely unwilling to fight Russia, which means it is the perfect time to stage a color revolution there. We desperately need a success story right now. In the post-Soviet space and beyond ([VKontakte/duginag](#), October 4).

Dugin is repeating Georgian Dream’s rhetoric about a supposedly externally organized revolution.

This provocation provided Georgian Dream with unprecedented grounds to justify its long-standing narrative that certain forces are allegedly attempting to overthrow the constitutional order by force (see EDM, [January 13, April 9](#)). Georgian Dream has a compelling argument for potentially banning several opposition parties and consolidating its power, even amid record-low public support.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

Non-Russians Increasing Their Share of Russia's Population

Paul Goble

October 7, 2025

Executive Summary:

- Non-Russians in the Russian Federation are increasing their share of the country's population despite decreasing in absolute numbers because the decline in the number of ethnic Russians is far greater.
- This proportional increase reflects higher fertility rates among non-Russians than among ethnic Russians and is exacerbated by the influx of non-Russian immigrants at a time when ethnic Russian immigration has dropped to almost zero.
- The Kremlin has tried to reverse this trend by promoting a pro-natalist policy, Russifying non-Russians, and reducing immigration. Moscow hopes to conceal the issue by ending the publication of key demographic data, but these steps have been ineffective or counterproductive.



(Source: RBC)

The total population of the Russian Federation is declining fast. Even the Russian government admits it, and some experts are suggesting that Russia will lose as much as almost half of its current population by the end of this century as a result ([The Moscow Times](#), January 31; [Carnegie Politika](#), September 19; [Meduza](#), September 29). Neither Russian officials nor independent demographers, however, have focused on what may become the most critical aspect of this decline. The percentage of ethnic Russians in the country's population will almost certainly decline while that of non-Russians will continue to increase. This is the product of much lower fertility rates among the former than the latter and the changed nature of immigration from one dominated by ethnic Russians in the 1990s to one now overwhelmingly dominated by non-Russians from Central Asia and the Caucasus ([Carnegie Politika](#), September 19). Moscow has sought to counter this by launching campaigns to Russify non-Russians, boost birthrates—which have unintentionally sparked greater rises among non-Russians than among ethnic Russians—make it easier for remaining ethnic Russians abroad to come to Russia, and impose increased restrictions on non-Russian immigration. The Russian government is covering up its population decline by stopping the publication of demographic data that would allow analysts and others to track the issue

(see [EDM](#), May 15, 2024; [Millyard Tatar](#), June 10; [Yesli byt' tochnym](#), August 6; [Krizis Kopilka](#), September 27; [MariUver](#), October 1).

These efforts have been far less successful than the Kremlin suggests. Demographers mine indirect data sources and the policies of the Russian government, which in many cases, prove openly counterproductive and subject to criticism ([Window on Eurasia](#), January 26, 2024; see [EDM](#), October 22, 2024). Moreover, many ethnic Russians can see from what is going on around them that their position in the population is slipping, however much Putin suggests otherwise with his talk of an ethnic “Russian world” ([Bereg](#), July 10). The experience of many Russians, especially in major cities, has sparked popular demands for restrictions on immigrants far more radical than the Russian government wants and the Russian economy can tolerate. This has also caused the formation of far-right Russian nationalist groups such as the Russian Community to drive out immigrants and rein in indigenous non-Russians (see [EDM](#), [November 9, 2021](#), [October 15, 2024](#), [July 30](#), [September 18](#)). Some in the Kremlin are supporting these groups, which may help Moscow tactically, but may also pose a strategic threat to Russia, both in economic and political terms. This support only prompts non-Russians to take countermeasures and potentially think about pursuing independence (see [EDM](#), April 30, 2024).

The Kremlin continues to insist, and most observers in Russia and the West continue to repeat, that ethnic Russians form roughly 80 percent of the total population of the Russian Federation. That figure is no longer true, however, and will be even less so in the coming decades. That figure does not include the more than seven million Central Asian and Caucasian immigrants now living in the country or reflect how a large swath of the Russian population was not counted in the 2020–2021 census, but rather estimated based on projections, which detailed studies have suggested were extremely inaccurate (see [EDM](#), June 7, 2022; [Window on Eurasia](#), [July 17](#), [August 11](#), 2023; [Yesli byt' tochnym](#), March 24, 2024). That, in turn, means the percentage of ethnic Russians actually resident in the Russian Federation is now likely to be closer to 70 percent than to the 80 percent Moscow claims. This number will continue to fall, given that fertility rates in Russian cities already approach 1.0 children per woman per lifetime, far below the 2.2 needed to maintain a constant population. Such rates are also below replacement levels in predominantly ethnic Russian oblasts, while, in non-Russian areas, these rates remain close to or, in some cases, far above replacement levels ([RG.ru](#), February 2, 2020). That pattern does not mean that the Russian Federation, over the course of the rest of this century, will have a population evenly divided between ethnic Russians and non-Russians as was the case in the Soviet Union in 1991. Nor does it mean that its economy will collapse, or its military be forced to contract because of a shortage of men. It does almost certainly mean, however, that the share of ethnic Russians will be far lower than it is now.

Many in the Kremlin refuse to believe this because they remain trapped in a paradigm that is no longer true—or at least not as true as it once was—and assume that the current declines will be

reversed in the next decade or so. Since World War II, Russia has experienced a series of demographic “waves” triggered by the huge losses in that conflict. As a result of those losses, the number of women in prime child-bearing age groups has declined every 20 to 25 years. This has meant that the number of children they give birth to has declined, but then recovered at least slightly as more of those children become parents. That pattern held until the end of Soviet times, but plunging fertility rates in the cities has changed that. This almost certainly means that there will not be the bounce a decade or so from now that Russia experienced in the past and that Russian officials continue to count on ([Meduza](#), September 29). Additionally, as these same observers have pointed out, there simply are not enough ethnic Russians abroad who might come back and cover losses, as was the case in the first post-Soviet decade, and urban Russians are not going to have more children unless housing becomes more affordable and their incomes rise dramatically.

This demographic trend is already impacting ethnic Russians and non-Russians alike. Ethnic Russians are becoming even more nationalistic and hostile to non-Russians, indigenous as well as immigrants. This will raise the ethnic temperature within the country while simultaneously leading them to question Kremlin efforts to continue to rely on immigration or expand the borders of the Russian Federation. This is a step that would, as the case of Ukraine, inevitably add an even greater share of non-Russians to the total and even recreate much sooner some of the same demographic forces that contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union ([Window on Eurasia](#), [March 17, 2022](#), [February 28, 2024](#)). At the same time, many non-Russians are already encouraged by their increasing share in the population, but discouraged by their falling numbers. They are likely to become increasingly radicalized, especially if the Kremlin responds, as seems likely, with greater repression.

Demography is not destiny, except in the long term. Governments can and do change their policies. The aging Russian President Vladimir Putin leadership, however, seems disinclined to do so in this area. That almost certainly means that, in the coming decades, demography will be a central issue in Russian life, one that could easily explode if the Kremlin does not change course ([Window on Eurasia](#), April 21, 2024).

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

Kremlin Faces Problems in Recruiting Veterans into Political Elite

Paul Goble

October 9, 2025

Executive Summary:

- Veterans returning from Russian President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine pose challenges not only to Russian society but also to the political elite, where the Kremlin fears returning veterans could grow into a challenge to the powers that be.
- Putin has announced a program to integrate veterans into the elite, both through appointments to positions of authority and via elections to legislative bodies at the local, regional, and eventually federal level.
- Those efforts have been less than fully successful, given resistance from current officials as well as from veterans themselves. Putin, however, clearly feels he must continue these policies, despite the risks they pose to him and his system.



(Source: RIA Novosti)

Since the start of Russian President Vladimir Putin's expanded war against Ukraine in 2022, Russians have worried that the future return of veterans of that conflict will spark a crime wave and destabilize society (see [EDM](#), February 25). Such fears have grown as the war has dragged on and the number of potential veterans, now estimated to be 700,000, already exceeds the notorious Afgantsy when they returned from the Soviet war in Afghanistan (see [EDM](#), February 25). The Kremlin is also concerned about this, despite appearing confident that it has sufficient police powers to control the situation. Putin, however, appears even more concerned about something else—that the veterans could coalesce into a political force that might challenge the current regime (see EDM, [January 19, 2024](#), [May 27](#), [September 18](#)). To prevent that from happening, Putin has instituted a program to integrate returning veterans into the political elite, both through appointments to positions in the government and via elections to legislative bodies at the local, regional, and, in prospect, federal level (see [EDM](#), May 22). That program has not been a success so far. Many current officials fear that the Kremlin could use the returning veterans to launch a purge of themselves and many veterans lack the necessary political skills or even interest in government jobs given their aspirations for greater rewards than those the junior positions they have been offered provide ([VKrizzis.ru](#); [Novaya Gazeta Evropa](#), September

10; [Vedomosti](#), September 18; [MOST.Media](#), September 29; [Radio Svoboda](#), September 30). Despite these problems, Putin is unlikely to change course given his memories of precedents from Russian history, in which returning veterans often proved, as in the case of the Decembrists in 1825 and during the Russian revolutions of 1917, to be a greater threat to the existing political elite than to Russian society at large.

Two years into his expanded invasion of Ukraine, Putin announced that veterans of that conflict would become the new Russian elite. These words were clearly designed both to recruit more men for his army by reassuring them that returning veterans would be given positions of power and authority (see [EDM](#), March 13, 2024). In the months since, he has pursued a three-pronged effort to provide substance to this ideological campaign. First, he has worked to ensure that angry veterans will turn their energies to pocket nationalist organizations rather than radical opposition groups, limiting the chance that they will threaten his power (see EDM, [May 27](#), [September 18](#)). Second, he has appointed veterans to various political positions and directed lower-ranking officials to do the same ([The Moscow Times](#), May 13; [Radio Svoboda](#), September 30). Third, he has orchestrated the nomination and election of some veterans to local and regional legislative assemblies, a policy presaging the nomination of more to the Russian State Duma next year ([Novaya Gazeta Evropa](#), September 10; [Vedomosti](#), September 18). While Putin has had some success with the first, he so far has failed to achieve what he hoped for in the second and third—and those failures point to potentially serious political problems ahead.

That failure was clearly evident during September's elections at the local and regional level. While Kremlin outlets celebrated that there were "at a minimum" 870 veterans among the candidates, a figure 2.6 times higher than in such voting a year earlier, the veterans formed only 1.85 percent of all candidates. This number hardly augurs well for the Kremlin in next year's Duma elections ([Vedomosti](#), September 18). There are two reasons this number is so small. On the one hand, for veterans to have a chance to run, incumbents or ambitious non-veterans who have been working in politics must yield their positions, something few are inclined to do, given that such behavior could condemn them to political oblivion ([Svobodnaya Pressa](#), September 15). On the other hand, relatively few veterans appear all that interested in being recruited to run in such elections. Even victory would leave them less well off than they were as soldiers who signed up with huge bonuses and received supplements for participating in the war. Being a deputy in a city or oblast assembly is neither attractive immediately nor over the longer term. The only reason the parties were able to attract most of the veteran candidates is that a large share of the latter have not been able to find jobs at all once they have returned to Russia, and thus are ready to take any position they can get. These are the kind of people who will become effective Putin loyalists capable of winning support for the regime ([The Moscow Times](#), June 2).

The problems of recruiting veterans to serve in more senior positions are even greater, given that most veterans lack the necessary skills to perform effectively. Many are ready to engage in corruption, even to the extent of exceeding the level the Kremlin tolerates or even supports. It appears that the veterans, in at least some cases, have gotten used to high pay and have assumed, as a result of Putin's comments, that they are a protected class. That has led to the dismissal and even arrest of a large percentage of these appointees, outcomes that have likely reduced further public support not only for giving veterans such a leg up but even for the war itself. It has also led other officials to take aim at the new arrivals, fearful that Putin may use them to initiate a purge against those already in office. (For documentation on all these points, see the comments of Russian experts on the removal of veterans from more senior jobs at [MOST.media](#), September 29; [Radio Svoboda](#), September 30.)

Putin is unlikely to end his efforts to include more veterans in the political elite. There are at least three reasons for that conclusion. First, he has little choice, given that veterans form a significant share of the younger generation, which he will need to draw on to renew the elite amid the rapid aging of those in top jobs. Second, if he continues his aggressive foreign policy, he will have to promise those he wants to fight that they will not only be well paid while engaged in military action but will be taken care of once they come home. Third, Putin, perhaps even more obsessed with history than other Kremlin leaders, knows that returning veterans from earlier Russian wars have caused political as well as social problems and that he must do what he can to prevent any similar threat to himself and his regime. To date, his efforts have not been as successful as he had hoped. They have, however, not been complete failures. Putin, who tends to respond to problems by doubling down rather than changing course, is likely to continue this effort. Whether that will save him or the situation he has created very much remains an open question.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

FOREIGN POLICY & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

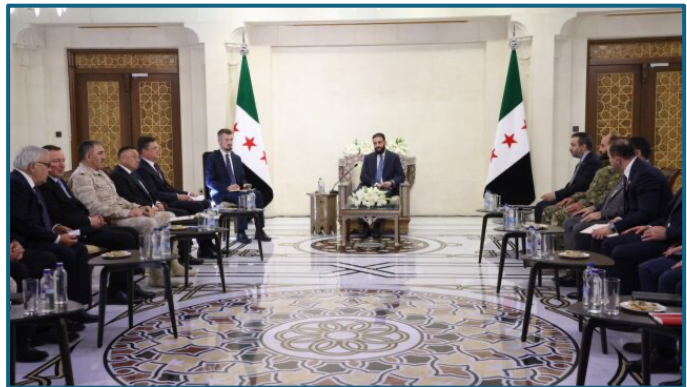
Russia Aims to Open a ‘New Page’ with Post-Assad Syria

Dario Cristiani

October 6, 2025

Executive Summary:

- On September 9, a high-level Russian delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, paid an unannounced visit to Damascus and held talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani.
- The talks focused on energy, military basing, and reconstruction, with Damascus demanding cheaper fuel and technical aid, while Russia wants to maintain access to the Tartus naval base and Hmeimim air base in south-east Syria.
- Moscow intends to reset ties with Syria’s new leadership after last year’s ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, one of Russia’s strongest regional allies.



(Source: Government of Russia)

On September 9, Russia dispatched a large, unannounced delegation to Syria, led by Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s top energy strategist, in its most visible effort to recalibrate relations with the post-Assad government. The delegation included other senior figures, such as Special Envoy Alexander Lavrentiev, Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin. They were welcomed by the Secretary-General to the Syrian Presidency, Maher al-Sharaa ([Government of Russia](#), September 9). Novak framed the visit as an attempt to “open a new page” and expand cooperation in energy, defense, politics, and reconstruction. At the same time, Shibani emphasized that ties must now be “based on respect” and designed to enable Syrians to “build their future.” He also highlighted the upcoming Russia-Arab summit in Moscow, scheduled for October 15, where Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s participation is meant to symbolize a strategic reset in relations with Russia after the ouster of his predecessor and Russian ally, Bashar al-Assad, last December ([The Moscow Times](#), September 9).

Shibani acknowledged the historical depth of ties with Russia but underlined the need for balance. He warned that any foreign presence must genuinely serve Syrian reconstruction and not perpetuate control. He noted that Damascus and Moscow are capable of forging ties “based on sovereignty, justice, and shared interests,” adding that Russia’s explicit endorsement of Syria’s new political path would be “a step in favor of Syria and the entire region” ([Asharq Al-Awsat](#), September 10).

Energy cooperation remains the cornerstone of the Russian–Syrian relationship, although its terms are now being contested. Syria’s energy sector, shattered by 13 years of conflict, is dependent on imports, with urgent needs for diesel, fuel oil, and equipment to revive oil and gas production ([TASS](#), September 9). Novak confirmed that Russia, as well as Qatar, were exploring options to support Syria’s energy and humanitarian needs ([North Press Agency](#), September 9). Syrian officials, however, expect tangible concessions, including subsidized fuel, the return of Russian technicians, and reconstruction assistance, in exchange for guarantees on Moscow’s continued access to its military bases in Syria’s south-east, Tartus and Hmeimim. Russian sources acknowledged that Damascus pressed for virtually free fuel supplies as part of the bargain. A once-unilateral arrangement—where bases and contracts flowed easily to Moscow—is now becoming transactional, with the Syrian side demanding visible returns. This signals a shift in leverage and a broader Syrian attempt to redefine the framework of cooperation ([The New Arab](#), September 10).

Military issues remain central but equally fraught. Although Novak avoided public reference to Russia’s bases, discussions likely touched on the future of Tartus and Hmeimim, training and rehabilitation for Syrian forces, and possible arms supplies carefully calibrated to avoid direct clashes with Israel ([TASS](#), September 9). Damascus is considering the resumption of Russian military police patrols in southern Syria to deter Israeli raids, while at the same time reviewing older agreements it regards as unfair. Shibani stressed that Syria is closing the chapter on chemical weapons by cooperating with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a clear effort to distance the new leadership from Assad’s legacy while signaling openness to conditional international re-engagement ([SANA](#), September 9). For Moscow, the challenge is to secure its military assets without being seen as obstructing Syria’s sovereignty or provoking further Israeli escalation.

Israel’s shadow loomed large over the visit. Just a day before the Russian delegation’s arrival, Israeli jets struck Syrian targets, underscoring the vulnerability of Damascus ([The Times of Israel](#), September 9). Novak proposed leveraging Russia’s “unique negotiating capabilities,” built on its contacts with Israel and diverse Syrian communities, to act as a stabilizer. He openly condemned Israel’s “destructive” actions and suggested that Moscow could serve as a mediator to reduce tensions ([The New Arab](#), September 10). For Syria, Russia’s possible role in negotiating with Israel is open for debate. There are questions over whether Russia still has enough influence to constrain

Israel's freedom of action, or if Moscow's promises will amount to little more than rhetoric. For Moscow, positioning itself as an intermediary offers a means to reinforce its regional role, particularly as it seeks to counterbalance the West's influence in the Middle East.

The Russian delegation's surprising visit to Damascus underscored both continuity and change in Russian-Syrian relations. Moscow remains committed to protecting its military foothold, securing energy and reconstruction contracts, and leveraging its diplomatic ties with Israel to stay relevant. Damascus, however, is no longer willing to accept the terms of near-total dependency that defined the Assad era. By pressing for cheaper fuel, greater technical support, and a rebalanced military framework, the new Syrian leadership is signaling a more transactional, sovereignty-conscious approach. The dynamic is evolving into a negotiation between two sides with overlapping interests but increasingly divergent expectations. Russia aims to prevent recalibration from turning into estrangement, while Syria hopes to extract resources and security guarantees without reverting to the clientelism of the past. The visit, therefore, was not just ceremonial; it was a test of whether Moscow and Damascus can redefine their partnership to fit the realities of a post-Assad order, one where Russia still maintains a significant role but is no longer untouchable.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

Diplomatic Spat Between Georgia and Europe Continues

Giorgi Menabde

October 7, 2025

Executive Summary:

- The missions of 25 member states of the European Union, along with the United Kingdom, issued a joint statement on September 24, strongly condemning the Georgian government's "baseless and damaging" statements criticizing their diplomatic missions in Georgia.
- The vast majority of European states oppose Georgian Dream's policies, which have distanced the Caucasian country from the European Union, despite its candidate status.
- Statements from Georgian Dream leaders demonstrate that the ruling party has no intention of changing its policy, especially after accusing the ambassadors of European states of "interference in internal affairs."



(Source: Facebook/Georgian Dream)

On September 24, the embassies and diplomatic missions of 26 European countries issued a joint statement firmly rejecting accusations against their missions in Georgia, marking the first joint diplomatic demarche criticizing Georgia since it gained independence in 1992 ([Civil Georgia](#), September 24). [1] The statement read:

We firmly reject the baseless and damaging accusations about the role and activities of some diplomatic missions in Georgia ... We do not support any particular political party, and claims that we support violence and extremism are simply not true ... We urge all political leaders to refrain from divisive rhetoric and to work towards de-escalation of tensions ([European Commission](#), September 24).

This statement, which many observers also perceived as a warning, was made in response to the accusations from the leaders of the ruling Georgian Dream party that Western ambassadors and mission representatives are interfering in Georgia's internal affairs, meeting with extremist forces who are preparing a coup d'état in Georgia, encouraging and supporting violence, including in the form of bullying, and violating the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which prohibits interference in a country's internal affairs ([OC Media](#), September 17).

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Speaker of Parliament Shalva Papuashvili have frequently made such statements ([Civil Georgia](#), September 17). The intensity of the accusations increased with the approach of the October 4 municipal elections, and against the backdrop of the unprecedented protests that have been ongoing in Tbilisi and other Georgian cities for over 300 days against Georgian Dream policies (see EDM, December [6](#), 10, 2024, [January 13](#), [July 15](#), [September 30](#), [October 6](#)). In the opinion of the opposition, Georgian Dream policies are distancing Georgia from the European Union, despite the country still holding candidate status for EU membership.

German Ambassador to Georgia Peter Fisher faced an official summons to the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 24, after Papuashvili accused him of “encouraging extremists” ([Civil Georgia](#), September 24). Before entering the ministry, Fischer addressed the media, stating, “A summoning is a form of diplomatic sanction. It is highly unusual between friendly states” ([1tv.ge](#), September 24). The next day, U.K. Ambassador to Georgia Gareth Ward was also summoned to the Georgian Foreign Ministry for “supporting extremist forces” and “encouraging violence.” The U.K. ambassador left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs without comment ([1tv.ge](#), September 25).

Khatia Dekanoidze, one of the leaders of Georgia’s main opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM), believes that summoning the ambassadors of friendly states to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contradicts Georgia’s fundamental national interests. She stated, “This is the first time in the history of Georgia when partner countries’ ambassadors are summoned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I can call it disgrace and the violation of our fundamental national interests.” She further argued, “Germany and the United Kingdom are very important countries backing Georgia for years. It is a Russian game. [Georgian Foreign Minister Maka] Botchorishvili is not considered seriously, because the shift in Georgian Dream foreign policy is obvious” (Author’s interview, October 1).

The European Union is visibly toughening its diplomatic demarches against the Georgian government. For example, Botchorishvili was not invited to the European Union’s foreign affairs ministerial meeting, scheduled for October 20 in Luxembourg, despite the presence of foreign ministers from other non-EU member countries in the Black Sea and Central Asia regions ([Radio Tavisupleba](#), September 23).

A prominent supporter of the opposition movement, former Member of Parliament Teona Akubardia, believes that the government’s anti-Western disinformation, as well as its hostile diplomatic actions, demonstrates its goal to accelerate Georgia’s isolation from the West and to silence those ambassadors who openly support Georgian democracy and its European future. Furthermore, Georgian Dream aims to shift responsibility to the West rather than its own regime,

which is turning Georgia back toward the Russian orbit. In an interview with this author, Akubardia noted, “All this is happening at a time when the European Union is going to review the conditions Georgia was supposed to meet in October to retain its visa-free regime with Europe; Georgian Dream has not fulfilled any of these conditions” (Author’s interview, September 30).

Citizens of Georgia gained visa-free travel to states within the Schengen Area in 2017, but against the backdrop of recent events, about half of the EU member states now support the abolition of the visa-free regime (see [EDM](#), May 7). Georgian opposition leaders, however, are urging their European colleagues to impose sanctions against the Georgian government, rather than the Georgian people. For example, Davit Avalishvili, from the independent resource Nation.ge, stated in an interview with this author regarding the potential cancellation of the visa-free regime, “No one knows what the reaction to this decision will be among the people who are currently fighting in the streets to preserve the European future.” According to him, such a decision could lead to disappointment, which would only strengthen Georgian Dream’s position (Author’s interview, October 1).

Until today, the only sanction the European Union has imposed on the Georgian government was its decision in January to cancel the visa-free regime for Georgians holding diplomatic passports ([European Council](#), January 27). The European Union has not taken action against Georgian Dream since then, however, as consensus is necessary to impose EU sanctions, and Slovakia and Hungary currently do not support this decision ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), October 7). It is no coincidence that representatives of these two states did not sign the joint statement of the 26 European states.

The European Union is approaching the point where it will be forced to make decisions on the topic of Georgia, which has recently become highly problematic for the organization. This is especially true given that the European Union has invested hundreds of millions of euros in Georgia’s democracy and its economy over the past decades.

Note:

[1] These signatories include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan Expand Foreign Partnerships

Alexander Kim

October 8, 2025

Executive Summary:

- Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan used the UN General Assembly to secure major agreements with U.S. companies and U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, highlighting their efforts to attract investment and strengthen international partnerships, particularly in connectivity and energy.
- Uzbekistan announced over \$100 billion in potential investments, including an \$8 billion aircraft deal, while Kazakhstan signed a \$4.2 billion locomotive production agreement and reaffirmed its commitment to work with American oil companies.
- Despite media focus on competition, both nations are balancing Western engagement with ongoing ties to Russia, navigating domestic dynamics and geopolitical realities as they seek greater international visibility and influence.



(Source: Kazakh Presidential Press)

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan demonstrated their focus on diplomatic maneuvering at the UN General Assembly, gathering considerable media attention in the process ([Eurasianet](#), September 23). Both countries, traditionally seen as anchor states in Central Asia and increasingly close partners, used the high-level gathering to secure new agreements with the U.S. government and major U.S. companies ([President of Uzbekistan](#), September 24; [Kazpravda](#), September 26). Their efforts underscore a clear determination to attract targeted investment in Central Asian connectivity, enhance the Western focus of their international partnerships, and strengthen their global standings.

The key highlights of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's visit to the United States include a brief bilateral meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump and the announcement of a package of potential investment agreements with U.S. companies totaling over \$100 billion. A landmark deal was reached as Uzbekistan Airways will purchase 22 Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft valued at over \$8 billion. Trump praised the agreement, saying it will create 35,000 U.S. jobs ([Euronews](#), September 23). In addition to aviation, Mirziyoyev highlighted opportunities in infrastructure

development, digital transformation, and financial market development, including potential Initial Public Offering (IPO) listings and the modernization of the Tashkent Stock Exchange ([President of Uzbekistan](#), September 22). Uzbekistan also confirmed its ambition to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) by 2026, signaling a growing commitment to global economic integration.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's visit to the United States included a strategic agreement with the U.S. locomotive producer Wabtec for the production and servicing of 300 locomotives valued at \$4.2 billion ([President of Kazakhstan](#), September 23). Tokayev also delivered a speech on UN reform, proposing that the role of middle powers be elevated so that they "can act as a bridge within the United Nations when major powers are divided" ([President of Kazakhstan](#), September 23; [The Diplomat](#), September 25). Additionally, Tokayev met with major U.S. firms, including Chevron, Citigroup, Blackstone, Meta, ExxonMobil, and Embraer, showcasing opportunities in oil and gas, digital innovation—such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs with Meta—and banking, as well as infrastructure. Chevron reaffirmed its \$55 billion investment in Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil project, one of the country's most critical energy assets. The contract with Chevron is set to expire in 2033, and both parties are already engaged in extension talks ([Energy Intelligence](#), May 8). The oil and coal industries will remain important for Kazakhstan, as evidenced by Tokayev's criticism of global climate change initiatives upon returning from the United States ([Forbes Kazakhstan](#), September 26).

Media coverage highlighted the similarities in the agendas of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, often framing them as competing for U.S. attention and investment ([Radio Azattyq](#), September 26). Uzbekistan secured an \$8 billion airplane deal, with Mirziyoyev holding high-level meetings and possibly tapping into informal networks, including the Uzbek diaspora and figures such as Uzbekistan-born U.S. Special Envoy for South and Central Asian Affairs, Sergio Gor ([President of Uzbekistan](#), September 22). For Kazakhstan, the Wabtec locomotives have an additional strategic importance. Wabtec has operated a locomotive assembly plant in Astana since 2009. Under the new contract, diesel engines will be produced at the Astana Diesel Service plant—Wabtec's first engine manufacturing site outside the United States ([Astana Times](#), September 22). This underlines Kazakhstan's expanding role as a production hub, as American as well as Chinese locomotives target the post-Soviet "1,520 gauge" market ([Telegram/@Logistan](#), September 23).

The growing diplomatic visibility of both nations reflects a broader trend in Central Asia to seek a stronger voice on the global stage. According to Central Asian analyst Arkadi Dubnov, "The post-Soviet region is experiencing a notable period of heightened activity ... moving toward America" ([Telegram/@arkadyDubnov](#), September 23). Dubnov notes that the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal—which envisages American businesses guaranteeing the construction of critical infrastructure communications in the South Caucasus—was a significant step away from Moscow (see EDM, [August 12](#), [September 9](#)). At the UN General Assembly, Tokayev also met with Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who suggested Kazakhstan could be a venue for potential peace talks with Russia. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev also met with Zelenskyy in Copenhagen, speaking with him in English, as did Tokayev ([Lenta.ru](https://lenta.ru/en/2022/10/02/zelenskyy-aliyev-tokayev/), October 2).

This Western shift cannot be completed immediately (see [EDM](#), July 9). Kazakhstan, for example, appears committed to maintaining a balance between Russia and the West. Astana recently replaced Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu with Ermek Kosherbayev. Kosherbayev's appointment suggests both intra-elite maneuvering and a desire for recalibration in Kazakhstan's foreign positioning ([Orda.kz](https://orda.kz/en/2022/09/25/kosherbayev/), September 25). Kosherbayev's previous posting in Moscow also implies a renewed effort to stabilize and balance relations with Russia, even as Tokayev distances Kazakhstan from Moscow's worldview. Tokayev is scheduled to visit Moscow in November, and Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Kazakhstan's Uralsk shortly after ([Kommersant](https://kommersant.ru/en/2022/09/10/putin-tokayev/), September 10).

Leaders in Central Asia and the Caucasus differ in their U.S. engagement strategies. Aliyev and Mirziyoyev have established informal personal connections with the Trump administration, making their diplomacy multidimensional. In contrast, Tokayev has primarily engaged with the United States through formal diplomatic channels, which might seem insufficient for current realities. The UN General Assembly has also confirmed that Central Asia is becoming a more visible and assertive player in global diplomacy. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are pursuing ambitious economic partnerships with the United States, deepening ties in energy, transport, and technology. Domestic elite dynamics, geopolitical balancing between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow, and competition for international recognition will continue to shape how both countries position themselves in the years ahead.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

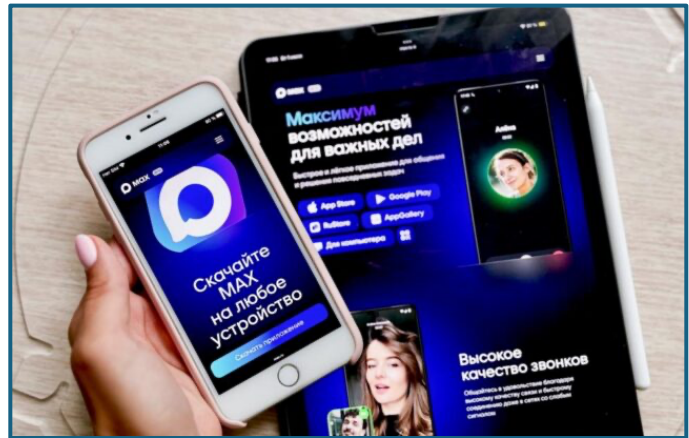
Kremlin's New Moves Towards 'Internet Sovereignty'

Luke Rodeheffer

October 7, 2025

Executive Summary:

- The Kremlin instituted restrictions on the civilian use of virtual private networks (VPN) and U.S.-built technology at the beginning of September, ostensibly fearing that the U.S. government is using the technology to sow internal discord in Russia.
- The Russian Duma approved legislation on July 15 to create a national messaging system, known as "Max," that will combine communications with state services, similar to the People's Republic of China's (PRC) WeChat.
- These measures fit into Moscow's broader project of creating a sovereign internet space, which includes banning foreign messaging platforms, restricting VPN use, and the continued crackdown on civilian digital encryption.



(Source: TASS)

The Kremlin is continuing to develop its "sovereign internet," a project to silo its domestic internet from global networks, under the pretext of national security (see EDM, [February 15](#), [November 25](#), 2024, [February 6](#)). Beginning September 1, Moscow instituted additional restrictions on the use of virtual private network (VPN) technology, including a ban on advertising VPNs or sharing information on circumventing the bans. VPNs are now also considered an "aggravating circumstance" while committing a crime ([SKBG Group](#), August 11; [Meduza](#), September 1). These new laws will require service providers to monitor search queries made by customers and continue traffic monitoring to block many VPN encryption protocols. One survey cited in the Russian press found that over 60 percent of VPN users in the country use the technology to access banned social media networks, highlighting the technology's ability to bypass the Kremlin's censorship structures ([Newizv](#), August 1).

The September legislation is not a full ban on VPNs, as commercial VPN technology is still necessary for various information technology (IT) tasks. The partial ban will still make work more difficult for Russia's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) firms, Russian companies that have employees outside of Russia, the numbers of which have grown dramatically since the outbreak of the war in 2022, and firms that rely on access to foreign information technology ([Interfax](#), July 21).

Russian Minister of Digital Development Maksut Shadaev stated that the U.S. State Department is financing the development of VPN technologies in Russia. Shadaev claims this financing began during September 2024 State Department meetings with major U.S. technology companies, including Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Facebook. Shadaev asserts that the meetings discussed how to improve VPN access inside Russia to create internal discord ([Interfax](#), June 22).

The September ban also targeted Speedtest, a technology developed in the United States that Russian telecom operators use to measure internet data transfer speeds. The Kremlin justified the ban by citing the company's supposed compliance with U.S. intelligence services ([Cnews](#), July 30).

On July 15, the Russian State Duma approved legislation to create a national messaging system that will combine communications with state services, similar to WeChat in the People's Republic of China (PRC) ([T-J](#), June 24). Social media company VKontakte developed the Russian national messenger system, known as "Max." The messaging application will enable citizens to interact with government services, according to parliamentarian Sergei Boyarskii. The platform enables users to sign documents electronically, verify their identities by uploading documents, and obtain digital identification for everyday use ([RBC](#), June 10). Max works with both Russian and Belarusian phone numbers, demonstrating the two countries' pursuit of a "unified information space" (see [EDM](#), March 27; [Belta](#), July 11). Sources in Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) remain skeptical about the platform's security and do not want citizen data stored in the system until the remaining security issues are resolved, according to independent industry press sources ([Habr](#), August 5).

The Russian Communications Authority (Roskomnadzor) banned the use of foreign messaging platforms for communication with Russian citizens, effective June 1, because the services did not comply with laws requiring their server infrastructure to be located within Russia ([IXBT](#), June 1). In August, Roskomnadzor banned Signal, a messaging platform that utilizes end-to-end encryption for secure communication ([Interfax](#), August 9). Later in the summer, Russian users began to experience outages when attempting to use WhatsApp and Telegram ([RBC](#), August 13).

The bans target some of Russia's most common communications technologies—68 percent of Russian citizens use WhatsApp daily ([Lenta](#), July 18). The Russian government has also blocked the Discord messaging app since October 2024, ostensibly for distributing content that is banned ([Interfax](#), October 9, 2024).

Eurasia Digest

The development of a national messaging service fits with the Kremlin's overall goal of walling off the Russian internet following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moscow has taken steps, including creating a national Transport Layer Security (TLS) certificate system, testing a national Domain Name Service (DNS) system, and continuing its crackdown on civilian use of digital encryption. Russia's internet restrictions also include disabling mobile telecommunications internet networks to block Ukrainian drone communications, a policy that also poses risks to Russians who may be left without the ability to communicate during crisis situations as the Kremlin's war against Ukraine continues ([Lenta](#), May 21). The creation of Max is just one example that highlights Russia's development of a "sovereign internet."

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

ENERGY & ECONOMICS

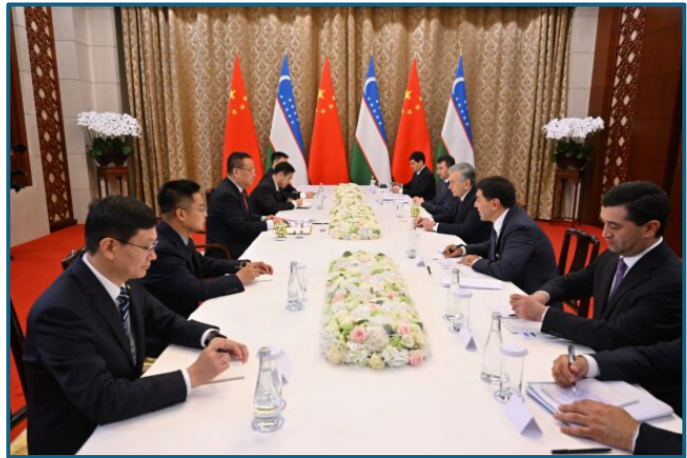
Uzbekistan Balances Nuclear Energy Cooperation with Russia and PRC

Syed Fazl-e-Haider

October 8, 2025

Executive Summary:

- Uzbekistan is pursuing nuclear power cooperation with both Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), aiming to become a nuclear energy hub in Central Asia.
- Tashkent is hedging against risks in working with Moscow due to Russia's weakened economic position amid international sanctions placed on the country over its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- Cooperation with the PRC as an alternative to Russia holds risks, as access to resources could hinge on the status of Tashkent's relationship with Beijing. Such dependencies could pose security and sustainability risks to nuclear power projects.



(Source: President of Uzbekistan)

On September 2, Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with Shen Yanfeng, the chairman of China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC), on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit held in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mirziyoyev and Shen explored expanding cooperation in the nuclear energy sector. The Uzbek president's office said, "Particular attention was paid to the Chinese company's participation in the transfer of modern technologies and the development of uranium deposits, geological exploration in promising areas, and the expansion of cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy" ([President of Uzbekistan](#), September 2).

Uzbekistan aims to become a nuclear power hub in Central Asia as it pursues an ambitious nuclear energy strategy in collaboration with Russia and the PRC ([Kun.uz](#), April 23). According to an announcement made during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June, Rosatom, Russia's state-owned nuclear energy company, will construct four nuclear power reactors in

Uzbekistan ([Interfax](#), June 12; [Telegram/@uzatom_info](#), September 26). This plan combines agreements signed by Uzbekistan and Rosatom in 2018 and 2024, and will construct two 1,000-megawatt and two 55-megawatt reactors at a site in the Darish district of the Jizzakh Province of Uzbekistan (see [EDM](#), July 10, 2018; [Kursiv](#), June 23; [Times of Central Asia](#), September 29).

Tashkent is uncertain about the progress of its deal with Moscow because of international sanctions imposed on Russia over its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Mirziyoyev discussed cooperation with Shen as a backup in case the agreement with Rosatom stalls. By holding talks with CNNC, Mirziyoyev has conveyed to Moscow that Tashkent is unwilling to delay work on the construction of its nuclear reactors and will seek alternative partners if Russia is unable to deliver ([Eurasia Net](#), September 3; [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), September 14). Tashkent's deal with Russia could be a risky path to nuclear energy, given the international sanctions and geopolitical tension that Moscow's war against Ukraine has incurred.

Russia's Rosatom, which is currently facing financial difficulties partly because of sanctions, has been playing a key role in developing Uzbekistan's nuclear energy facilities. In 2017, Rosatom and the Uzbek Nuclear Energy Agency (Uzatom) signed a general cooperation agreement on nuclear energy. This agreement led to a September 2018 agreement to construct two VVER-1200 pressurized water reactors, each with a 1,200-megawatt capacity, at a cost estimate of \$11 billion ([The Times of Central Asia](#), September 29). The project aimed to reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports and support Uzbek industrial growth ([Kursiv](#), September 5). In May 2024, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Uzbekistan, Rosatom and Uzatom signed a new agreement to build a nuclear power plant (NPP) comprising six small reactors with a capacity of 55 megawatts each. The plant, as per the 2024 agreement, was to produce a total of 330 megawatts in the Jizzakh region and was scheduled for completion by 2033. When the Jizzakh deal was signed, the head of Uzatom, Azim Akhmedkhodjayev, praised Rosatom's experience in implementing similar nuclear power projects ([Kursiv](#), October 16, 2024). The updated 2025 agreement between Rosatom and Uzatom, which combines elements of the 2018 and 2024 plans, will involve the construction of two large VVER-1000 reactors and two small modular RITM-200N units in the Farish district of Jizzakh Province, Uzbekistan.

Globally, Russia is the key contractor offering assistance in the construction of nuclear power plants and nuclear fuel supply (see EDM, January [23](#), [29](#), [June 25](#), [July 15](#), [September 5](#)). The 2024 World Nuclear Industry Status Report showed that Rosatom was the leading builder and exporter of reactors at that time, operating in countries such as Bangladesh, the PRC, Egypt, India, and Türkiye ([World Nuclear Industry Status Report](#), September 19, 2024; [Cabar](#), November 20, 2024).

The PRC also cooperates with Uzbekistan to develop its nuclear energy facilities. The PRC's small modular nuclear reactors have been the center of attention for Uzbekistan. In November 2024, the

PRC's CNNC and Uzbekistan's Uzatom agreed to assess the possibility of deploying the PRC's small modular nuclear reactors in the Central Asian country. They discussed cooperation in expanding uranium ore extraction, processing capacities, and the use of fuel in NPPs. In August 2024, a delegation of Uzatom officials visited the PRC, where they held meetings with energy companies and discussed acquiring PRC equipment used for cooling NPP equipment without water evaporation ([Gazeta](#), November 6, 2024). In April, a trilateral meeting of the representatives from Russia's Rosatom, the PRC's CNNC, and Uzbekistan's Uzatom assessed the capabilities of Shanghai Electric—one of the PRC's leading manufacturers of power and turbine equipment for nuclear and thermal power plants. The meeting explored adapting the company's turbine equipment to Uzbekistan's nuclear power plant ([Kun.uz](#), April 23).

Russia's involvement in Uzbekistan's nuclear projects and cooperation in nuclear energy could have repercussions and risks for Tashkent in the current geopolitical climate. Moscow's war of attrition against Ukraine, its growing tensions with the United States and the European Union, and crippling sanctions imposed against it could create risks for Tashkent if it primarily depends on Russia for the construction and operation of nuclear energy facilities ([Cabar.Asia](#), November 20, 2024).

Uzbekistan's potential shift to cooperation with the PRC as an alternative to Russia would not be without risks. Frank Maracchione, an expert on the PRC's engagement with Central Asia at the University of Kent, claims that "the PRC is now completely integrated into the region. There is no denying its overwhelming presence in Central Asia" ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), September 14). If Tashkent depends on the PRC for its supply of spare parts, equipment, and technology for NPPs, access to those resources could hinge on the status of its relationship with Beijing. Such dependencies could pose security and sustainability risks to nuclear power projects ([Cabar.Asia](#), November 20, 2024).

Russia is rapidly losing its influence and contracts in Central Asian countries due to sanctions and its distraction with its war against Ukraine. Questions are being raised about the reliability and sustainability of Moscow's nuclear energy cooperation deals with Uzbekistan. The PRC is positioning itself as an alternative to Russian assistance with nuclear energy to increase its influence in Central Asia. Uzbekistan's nuclear power capabilities face a precarious path ahead as Tashkent grapples with its cooperation with Moscow and Beijing amid the two powers' shifting influence in Central Asia.

To read the article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).

MILITARY & SECURITY

Russia Tests NATO's Eastern Defenses

Yunis Gurbanov

October 9, 2025

Executive Summary:

- In September, a series of Russian drone and military incursions into North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) airspace over Poland and Estonia triggered emergency consultations under Article 4 and revived debate on escalation of deterrence.
- The Russia-Belarus Zapad-2025 exercise revealed a shift toward precision-strike, lower-footprint operations, combined air defense, and electronic warfare rather than mass force application.
- Moscow will continue to exploit alliance cracks through hybrid warfare and ambiguity to destabilize Europe without crossing any red lines to avoid conventional military escalation.



(Source: NATO)

In September, countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reported several incidents involving airspace violations. On September 10, 19 drones crossed into Polish territory, prompting Warsaw to call for Article 4 consultations ([Polskieradio](#), September 10; see [EDM](#), September 15). In a separate episode on September 19, three Russian MiG-31 jets briefly entered Estonian airspace before being intercepted by NATO air policing units ([Rus.Postimees](#), September 19). NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte described these developments as concerning and emphasized that the Alliance remains attentive to safeguarding its members' security ([NATO](#), September 23).

These incidents reflect an increasingly complex security environment along NATO's eastern flank. The combination of drone activity and jet overflights highlights the challenges of managing airspace security in an era of hybrid threats ([Meduza](#), September 20). At the same time, the use of unmarked drones, short-duration incursions, and deactivated transponders complicates

attribution and leaves room for differing interpretations of intent ([24tv.ua](#), September 12). NATO leaders emphasize the importance of maintaining readiness and alliance unity in the face of threats from Russia, while Moscow views such maneuvers as responses to what it perceives as increasing Western military pressure ([NATO](#), September 23; [RBC](#), September 27). In this delicate environment, transparency, communication, and crisis-management mechanisms are likely to play a decisive role in preventing unintended confrontation ([Lenta.ru](#), September 28).

The Zapad-2025 exercise, which took place in Belarus from September 12 to 16, has been noted for what it represents in terms of Russia's evolving military posture (see [EDM](#), September 15; [President of Russia](#), September 16). The exercise was nominally characterized by some 13,000 troops, a number aligned with reporting requirements under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Vienna Document ([Belta](#), February 20). Zapad- 2025, similar to previous iterations, may have represented an even larger body of activity outside the declared scope (see [EDM](#), September 15).

Contrary to past exercises oriented toward mass mobilization, this year's Zapad exercise appeared to prioritize the deployment of more discriminate, high-leverage capabilities. These included integrated air and missile defense systems, electronic warfare assets, precision strike platforms, and enhanced command-and-control measures ([TASS](#), September 18). Some in Belarus and Russia view the priority on these systems as a response to battlefield attrition lessons from Ukraine, as well as to Moscow's adaptation to resourcing constraints ([News.by](#), September 14)

The geography in the exercises, conducted deep within Belarus, in the context of smaller Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) exercises, suggests attempts to develop a tiered area of operations along the eastern boundary of NATO ([Kommersant](#), September 17). This would presumably provide Russia with greater room to project power toward the Baltic states or Poland if tensions are raised (see [EDM](#), June 11).

Russian officials presented the exercises as routine and defensive in nature, designed to enhance coordination with Belarus and prepare for contingencies under the CSTO umbrella ([President of Russia](#), September 16). From this perspective, Zapad is part of Moscow's overall strategy to reassure domestic constituencies and regional allies about its military staying power. Others argue that the exercise serves as a testing ground for new operational ideas, particularly hybrid warfare, electronic predominance, and the coordination of distant strikes. Such experimentation does not necessarily imply an instant escalation, but rather indicates that Russia is continuing to formulate its doctrine for potential long-term competition with NATO ([Belarusian Investigative Center](#), May 30).

More generally, Zapad-2025 illustrates the dual nature of Russian maneuvers. Externally, they are declared defensive in nature, but internally, they are doctrinally exploratory. The extent to which the changes are appreciated will depend on the political frame of analysis through which they are

viewed, as stabilizing maneuvers within Russia's declared defense zone, or as part of a broader effort to maintain leverage against NATO over an extended period of strategic tension ([Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), September 18).

Outside of the brief military actions, the never-ending crisis cycle between Russia and NATO places perception management at the forefront ([Mir24.tv](#), September 15). For Russia, limited incursions and drills, such as Zapad-2025, are not only military exercises but also a form of political communication with both domestic and foreign audiences. By demonstrating preparedness without directly crossing red lines, Russia maintains leverage without triggering escalatory measures. For NATO, the test is less about equalizing capabilities than about maintaining political unity among its 32 members, despite each having differing priorities and resource bases (see EDM, [June 3](#), [June 4](#), [September 16](#), [October 5](#)). Burden-sharing, defense budgets, and policy toward Ukraine are potential fault lines that Moscow can exploit (see [EDM](#), July 22). Confrontation is therefore as much about narrative control and alliance unity as it is about military deployments. Whether this phase coalesces into a prolonged standoff or stabilizes into managed competition will depend on how each one of them calculates deterrence and restrains itself ([Pronedra.ru](#), September 15).

In response to these operations, NATO launched Operation Eastern Sentry on September 12, enhancing air and sea deterrence in its eastern direction with additional aircraft, frigates, and missile defense capabilities ([NATO](#), September 12; see EDM, September [15](#), [17](#)). During its June 2025 Hague Summit, NATO pledged to increase defense expenditure to 5 percent of GDP by 2035—3.5 percent for central military capabilities and 1.5 percent for infrastructure ([NATO](#), June 15). That is from reactive deterrence to proactive resilience. Not all members of NATO have reached the former 2 percent threshold, casting doubt on whether the 5 percent mark can be achieved ([Atlantic Council NATO Defense Spending Tracker](#), September 2025).

The Russia-NATO relationship now unfolds on multiple levels. Moscow employs graduated pressure and hybrid tactics to test boundaries, and NATO navigates the need for deterrence credibility against the risk of over-escalation. The standoff is not a brief fire but an occurrence within a broader cycle of competition, with each learning to react to the other ([RG.ru](#), August 28).

The extent of the Alliance's commitment to remaining united and maintaining its credibility will determine the direction of this confrontation. If NATO holds firm, it may gain a new purpose from today's tensions. If divisions intensify, Moscow may achieve a strategic advantage without actual escalation ([Zavtra.ru](#), September 23).

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