

## **Fresh Russian Offensives on the Kharkiv Front**

Since 10 May 2024, Russia has intensified its offensive on the Kharkiv front, displacing thousands and evacuating 8,000 civilians from Vovchansk. Russian glide bombs have targeted Kharkiv City since Mar 2024, highlighting Ukraine's need to intercept aircraft in Belgorod Oblast due to a shortage of long-range air defenses.

This new offensive expanded the active hostility zone by almost 70km. On May 17, Ukrainian President Zelensky noted Russian troops pushed 10km into Kharkiv Oblast. Russian sources claim control over 13 settlements, and as of 20 May Ukraine holds about 60% of Vovchansk, with Russia controlling the north and west.

Russian forces continue operations near Lyptsi and Zelene, making advances in Vovchansk. Their push places Kharkiv City within range of Russian artillery. Ukraine's long-range HIMARS and ATACMS missiles are conditionally bound, preventing strikes within Russia, weakening Kharkiv's defenses against hard-to-intercept glide bombs.

The Russian strategy aims to stretch Ukrainian forces, relieve pressure on Belgorod Oblast, provide the Russian Air Force with strategic depth, and coordinate efforts in Luhansk and Donetsk to isolate Luhansk from Western Ukraine.

The open terrain on the Vovchansk front challenges Russian re-supply, making them vulnerable to Ukrainian strikes. The fighting here contrasts with the static nature of the Donbas front. Russia's buildup of forces indicates a focus on steady gains rather than swift maneuvers.

On 17 May 2024, Putin stated Moscow's goal to create a buffer zone without capturing Kharkiv City, while Zelensky enacted laws to bolster military strength. Putin insists any peace deal should follow the 2022 draft deal negotiated in Istanbul.