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Russian Combat Air Strengths and Limitations: Lessons from Ukraine

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Abstract

This study provides an in-depth examination of the performance of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) over Ukraine, and an analysis of where and why this performance differed from Western civilian and military pre-war expectations. It draws on fieldwork in Ukraine by the author, including interviews with senior Ukrainian Air Force commanders, military scientists, and inspection of captured and recovered Russian weapons and aircraft systems. The primary purpose of the study is to provide an open-source assessment of the enduring threat posed by the VKS to Ukraine in the short term, and to NATO nations in the medium and long term. To that end, the final section of the study looks specifically at the nature of that threat; particularly in the context of Russia's highly effective ground-based air defence network and long-range precision fires capabilities.

Cover image: Russian Ministry of Defense.

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