

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 9, 2023

Nicole Wolkov, Riley Bailey, Grace Mappes, Angelica Evans,
Kateryna Stepanenko, and Frederick W. Kagan

August 9, 2023, 6:30 pm ET

Click [here](#) to see ISW’s interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to access ISW’s archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cutoff for this product was 12:00pm ET on August 9. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. Speculations about the Wagner Group’s withdrawal from Belarus suggest that aspects of the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin following Wagner’s armed rebellion on June 24 have collapsed. A Russian insider source claimed on August 8 that Wagner forces are conducting their first stage of withdrawal from Belarus by bussing groups of 500 to 600 personnel from Belarus to Krasnodar Krai and Voronezh and Rostov oblasts and that the second stage will begin after August 13.[1] The insider source and a Wagner-affiliated source speculated that Wagner forces may be leaving Belarus because Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko refused to finance Wagner when he discovered that Russia would not be paying for Wagner as he had evidently expected.[2] Putin and Lukashenko allowed Wagner forces and Prigozhin to continue to operate in Belarus after the armed rebellion.[3] The insider source claimed that a small group of Wagner instructors would remain in Belarus to train Belarusian forces.[4] ISW has not observed visual evidence of Wagner forces moving out of Belarus, however. The insider source claimed on August 6 that Wagner forces that did not deploy to Libya “urgently” went on leave in Russia, and that Wagner’s command called on their fighters to keep in touch because new orders could come at any time.[5] Wagner-affiliated sources claimed that the main Wagner forces will “activate” at the end of August but did not elaborate on the statement.[6] Claims that Wagner forces are moving out of Belarus — a relatively safe haven for Wagner and Prigozhin — back to Russia, Wagner command’s mentions of new orders, and claims of the future “activation” of Wagner forces at the end of August likely suggest that aspects of the deal that allowed Wagner to move to Belarus and continue operations there and in Africa have collapsed.

The validity of these claims and the future of the Wagner Group remain unclear at the time of publication. ISW offers the following assessments and hypotheses for the potential implications of these claims, if true, on the Russian power composition, Putin’s regime, and the Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) efforts to integrate Wagner personnel into conventional Russian formations. ISW will continue to monitor and report on indicators and counter-indicators that support, undermine, or inform these hypotheses and assessments.

Putin is likely still concerned about the threat that Prigozhin poses to his long-term goals and continues to focus on definitively separating Prigozhin from Wagner. Putin has previously attempted to present Prigozhin as corrupt and a liar to destroy his reputation among Wagner personnel and within Russian society and to rhetorically separate Prigozhin from Wagner.^[7] ISW assessed on June 27 that the Kremlin would likely continue to attack Prigozhin's character to break Prigozhin's popular support, discourage Wagner personnel from following him to Belarus, and destroy his financial power.^[8] Putin's June 29 meeting with Prigozhin and 35 Wagner commanders further indicated that Putin intends to maintain the Wagner Group as a cohesive fighting force rather than breaking it up while also seeking to separate Prigozhin from Wagner leadership and forces.^[9] Prigozhin's presence at a Wagner base near Asipovichy, Belarus, on July 18 and on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg on July 27 suggests that Prigozhin has maintained his position as the effective leader of the Wagner Group and that Putin has thus far failed to separate Prigozhin from Wagner.^[10] A Russian insider source claimed on August 9 that the Kremlin's rhetorical attacks against Prigozhin decreased dramatically after Putin's meeting with Wagner leadership on June 29, but began to increase again in early August.^[11] An increase in Kremlin attacks on Prigozhin, if true, could indicate that Putin has recommitted to his original goal of destroying Prigozhin and creating a clear separation between Prigozhin and Wagner.

Putin's prioritization of separating Prigozhin from Wagner and attempting to maintain a reconstituted Wagner fighting element appears to be at odds with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's objectives. A Russian insider source claimed that Shoigu has taken over Russia's relationships with African countries from Prigozhin, angering the Wagner leadership and personnel and depriving Wagner of opportunities in Africa.^[12] If true, Shoigu's ambitions in Africa are likely to create issues for Putin's greater goals with Wagner by angering the very people Putin is trying to woo. Putin's and Shoigu's priorities have become periodically misaligned throughout the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, often when Putin prioritizes balancing competing groups and interests while Shoigu attempts to establish full control over the Russian military in Ukraine.^[13]

Alternatively, Putin may intend for Wagner's forces to return to Russia in order to facilitate the destruction or restructuring of Wagner. Putin appealed to Wagner commanders in a speech on July 26 seeking to persuade them to continue to fight in Ukraine by joining the Russian military.^[14] Putin's appeal may have suggested that the Kremlin intended to organize Wagner forces into the Russian MoD. This appeal appears not to have been successful as many Wagner personnel deployed to Belarus and individual Wagner commanders and personnel continued to express loyalty to Wagner and Prigozhin.^[15] The Kremlin has also reportedly attempted to control Wagner's operations in the Middle East and subordinate Wagner's operations there to the Russian MoD following the rebellion on June 24.^[16] Wagner commanders released a statement on August 9 claiming that Wagner fighters have been receiving calls advertising opportunities to work with other private military companies (PMCs) in Africa.^[17] The calls may suggest that the Russian government seeks to lure Wagner personnel away from Wagner with new work opportunities. Putin may intend for Wagner's forces to return to Russia so that he can more easily facilitate Wagner's subordination to the Russian MoD or disband the organization entirely.

There are other possible outcomes that would see Wagner reconstitute as a unitary fighting force reminiscent of its operations in Ukraine, although ISW has observed no indicators for these outcomes, which appear unlikely based on available information. The Kremlin's likeliest courses of action vis-à-vis Wagner will likely lead to an overall

decrease in the combat power that Wagner could offer the Russian military, as either approach will likely dissuade some elements of Wagner from continuing to serve, whether in a Wagner without Prigozhin or in some type of entity completely subordinated to the MoD.

The likely collapse of aspects of the Wagner-Putin-Lukashenko deal indicates that Putin has failed to decisively resolve issues posed by Prigozhin and Wagner following Wagner's June 24 rebellion. Putin is unlikely to resolve the Wagner problem as long as tensions remain between Putin's own aim of separating Prigozhin from Wagner and Shoigu's aims to secure full MoD control over Wagner and the other armed forces fighting for Russia. Speculations about Shoigu taking over Russian military operations in Africa from Wagner, if true, will likely only exacerbate tensions between the MoD and Wagner personnel returning from Belarus or Africa to Russia rather than persuading the Wagner personnel to join conventional Russian military formations in accord with the prior deal.[18] Pro-Wagner sources have historically coalesced around Prigozhin because of anger at the MoD and likely retain the ability to rally the support of Wagner rank-and-file and supporters regardless of Prigozhin's actual participation in current rhetoric.[19] Angering Wagner personnel further while bringing them back to Russia poses challenges if Putin seeks to eliminate the Wagner threat. Putin's decision to allow Shoigu to undermine this aspect of the prior deal, if true, then threatens to undermine the careful façade of internal security that Putin has extensively attempted to project following the June 24 rebellion.[20] **This situation is evolving dynamically in an increasingly complicated information environment marked by the absence of direct commentary from Prigozhin or other Wagner leaders. ISW will continue to evaluate these and other hypotheses and assessments as more information becomes available.**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu attempted to justify the recreation of the Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts by reamplifying boilerplate rhetoric posturing NATO as an existential threat to Russia. Shoigu opened a meeting of the Russian MoD Collegium on August 9, focusing on issues related to the creation of the two military districts but primarily commented on Western support for Ukraine and NATO's expansion.[21] Shoigu stated that the NATO countries' attempts to help Ukraine win are creating serious risks for further escalation and that Finland's accession and Sweden's planned accession to NATO are "a serious destabilizing factor." [22] Shoigu stated that it is likely that NATO will deploy military contingents and strike weapons on Finnish territory that can strike critical targets in Russia, and Shoigu accused NATO of intentionally militarizing Poland as part of America's alleged anti-Russia policy.[23] Shoigu stated that Eastern European militaries have a combined manpower of 360,000 personnel with 8,000 armored vehicles, 6,000 artillery systems, and 650 aviation units deployed to the immediate vicinity of the borders of the Union State.[24] Shoigu suggested that the Russian MoD is strengthening the Russian grouping of forces along Russia's western borders to respond to these alleged threats.[25] Shoigu announced on January 17, 2023, that the MoD will reestablish the Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts as part of long-term goals to significantly increase the size of the Russian military.[26] Shoigu is likely framing the recreation of these military districts as a necessary response to alleged Western aggression towards Russia in order to justify the cost of resources, time, and institutional capacity required for their recreation.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front and advanced in some areas on August 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut, Berdyansk (Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area), and Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) directions.[27] Geolocated footage published on August 9 suggests that Ukrainian forces advanced northeast of Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast, but the duration and extent of these advances are currently unclear.[28] Ukrainian Tavriisk Operational and Strategic Group of Forces Spokesperson Serhii Kuzmin stated on August 8 that Ukrainian forces reached the Russian first line of defense in an unspecified area in the Melitopol or Berdyansk directions.[29] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on August 9 that Ukrainian forces were partially successful south of Velyka Novosilka near Urozhaine and Pryyutne and southeast of Orikhiv near Verbove.[30] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced into Urozhaine in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and suggested that Ukrainian forces may have captured some Russian positions south of Bakhmut.[31] Malyar stated that the Ukrainian forces are conducting the counteroffensive as expected and are successfully degrading Russian offensive potential as Ukrainian forces did during the summer-autumn 2022 interdiction campaign in Kherson Oblast.[32]

The Russian veteran community may be attempting to rehabilitate the nominal Russian deputy theater commander in Ukraine, Army General Sergei Surovikin, following scrutiny over his affiliation with the Wagner Group. Surovikin's former commander, Colonel General Valeriy Marchenkov, told state affiliated *URA.ru* outlet that Surovikin did not and could not ever renege on his oath and praised Surovikin for pioneering a defensive strategy that is slowing down Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in southern Ukraine.[33] Marchenkov claimed that Surovikin successfully reduced the frontline length and strategically redistributed Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast. Marchenkov also defended Surovikin's decision to withdraw Russian troops from the west (right) bank of Kherson Oblast in November 2022, stating that this decision allowed Russian forces to construct the current defensive lines in Kherson Oblast and prevent military and civilian deaths. Marchenkov also attributed the creation of the Russian military police to Surovikin and boasted about Surovikin's efforts to suppress the August 1991 coup in Moscow. Russian veterans communities were instrumental in rehabilitating and promoting Surovikin's claimed affiliate, Russian Airborne (VDV) Forces Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, in March-April 2023.[34] Russian VDV veterans appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin on behalf of Teplinsky, after which Teplinsky returned to the frontlines ahead of the Ukrainian counteroffensive.[35] Former Commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army Major General Ivan Popov has also rallied veteran and army groups, sparking a discussion around his removal from command in mid-July.[36]

Marchenkov's interview may suggest that Surovikin and the anti-Gerasimov faction believe there is a chance for Surovikin to return to the frontlines. Marchenkov's public defense of Surovikin is in line with previous veteran efforts to secure the reinstatement of commanders who oppose Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov. Marchenkov notably did not publicly disclose Surovikin's whereabouts. One Russian insider source claimed that the Kremlin's agreements with Wagner began to "sag," a claim that accords with ISW's assessments as noted above, which the source claimed can explain the lack of a new appointment for Surovikin.[37] ISW assessed on April 30 that Putin fails to decisively dismiss commanders and instead demotes them in order to encourage them to seek to regain his favor and to retain options for future appointments.[38] Surovikin's return to command will likely depend on his ability to convince

Putin of his loyalty and usefulness on the battlefield – both narratives presented in Marchenkov’s interview.

Russian sources claimed that poor safety regulations led to an explosion near the Zagorsk Optical Mechanical Plant in Moscow on August 9, and notably, most Russian sources did not suggest that Ukrainian actors may have been responsible for the incident.[39] The explosion caused widespread damage to the plant and surrounding areas, injured at least 60 people, and killed at least one person.[40] The explosion reportedly occurred at a facility at the plant leased by Russian pyrotechnics company PiroRoss, and the Russian authorities have reportedly opened a criminal case against PiroRoss for the violation of industrial safety requirements.[41] Russian sources also claimed that Russian authorities have detained PiroRoss Director Sergei Chanakev in connection with the explosion.[42] Shvabe Holding Company, a subsidiary of Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec, owns the Zagorsk Optical Mechanical Plant, and the plant produces pyrotechnics and precision optical equipment for the military.[43] Russian media outlet *Agentstvo* reported that the Zagorsk Optical Mechanical Plant has also been participating in the development of a next-generation strategic stealth bomber “Poslannik” since 2019.[44]

Key Takeaways:

- **Speculations about the Wagner Group’s withdrawal from Belarus suggest that aspects of the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin following Wagner’s armed rebellion on June 24 have collapsed.**
- **Putin is likely still concerned about the threat that Prigozhin poses to his long-term goals and continues to focus on definitively separating Prigozhin from Wagner.**
- **Alternatively, Putin may intend for Wagner's forces to return to Russia in order to facilitate the destruction or restructuring of Wagner.**
- **The likely collapse of aspects of the Wagner-Putin-Lukashenko deal indicates that Putin has failed to decisively resolve issues posed by Prigozhin and Wagner following Wagner’s June 24 rebellion.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu attempted to justify the recreation of the Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts by reamplifying boilerplate rhetoric posturing NATO as an existential threat to Russia.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front and advanced in some areas on August 9.**
- **The Russian veteran community may be attempting to rehabilitate the nominal Russian deputy theater commander in Ukraine, Army General Sergei Surovikin, following scrutiny over his affiliation with the Wagner Group.**
- **Marchenkov’s interview may suggest that Surovikin and the anti-Gerasimov faction believe there is a chance for Surovikin to return to the frontlines.**
- **Russian sources claimed that poor safety regulations led to an explosion near the Zagorsk Optical Mechanical Plant in Moscow on August 9, and notably most Russian sources did not suggest that Ukrainian actors may have been responsible for the incident.**

- **Russian forces continued offensive operations on the Svatove-Kreminna line, in the Bakhmut area, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, along the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced on the Svatove-Kreminna line, north of Bakhmut, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front and advanced in some areas on August 9.**
- **Footage published on August 9 further supports ISW's assessments that the Ukrainian incursion near Kozachi Laheri in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on August 8 was likely a limited raid.**
- **Russian forces may be moving military equipment through Kazakhstan to Russia, but ISW has observed no geolocated footage confirming these reports.**
- **Russian officials appear to be setting conditions to justify the possible need to cancel or postpone regional elections in the occupied territories in case of Ukrainian counteroffensive successes.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

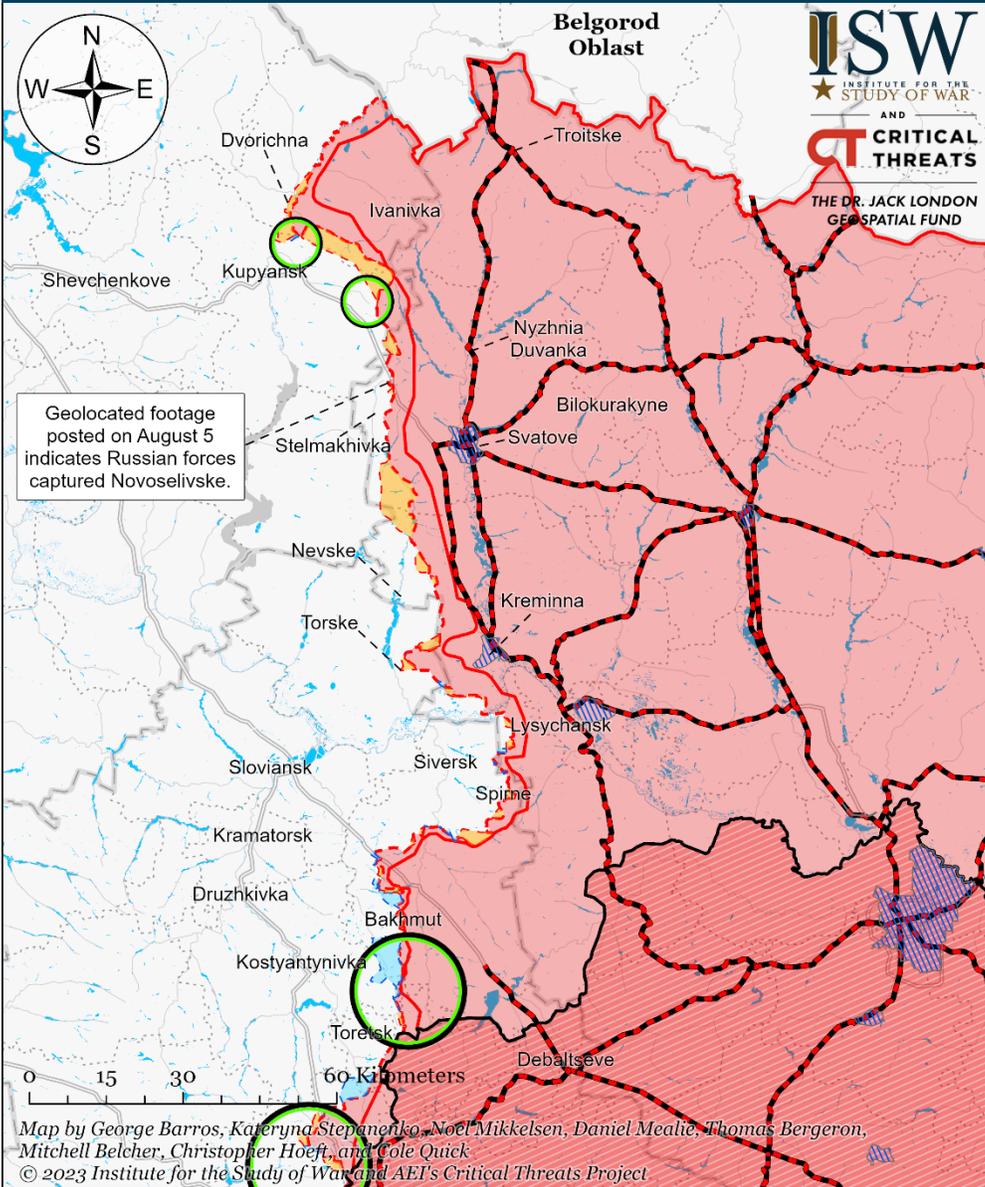
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces continued offensive operations on the Svatove-Kreminna line and reportedly made gains on August 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks north of Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk) and northeast of Ivanivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk).[45] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Russian forces have formed an offensive group that is attempting to break through Ukrainian defenses in an effort to advance directly to Kupyansk.[46] The Russian MoD claimed that assault groups of the 6th Combined Arms Army (Western Military District) seized four Ukrainian positions and five observation posts near the Mankivka tract (around 15km east of Kupyansk).[47] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Russian forces are trying to build on previous success in Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove), and attacked Ivanivka and Synkivka.[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are clearing Ukrainian positions near Lyman Pershyi (12km northeast of Kupyansk).[49] Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Military Administration Head Artem Lysohor reported that Russian forces are continuing to suffer significant casualties on the Svatove-Kreminna line and have deployed medical staff of the 442nd District Military Hospital of the Russian MoD to Svatove to evacuate the wounded.[50]

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued to counterattack on the Svatove-Kreminna line on August 9. The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces launched unsuccessful counterattacks in the vicinity of Novoselivske, Synkivka, and the Mankivka tract.[51] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks along the Raihorodka-Karmazynivka line (12km west to 13km southwest of Svatove).[52]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks near Kreminna but did not advance on August 9. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near the Serebryanske forest area south of Kreminna.[53] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Terny (17km west of Kreminna) and Hryhorivka (10km south of Kreminna).[54]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

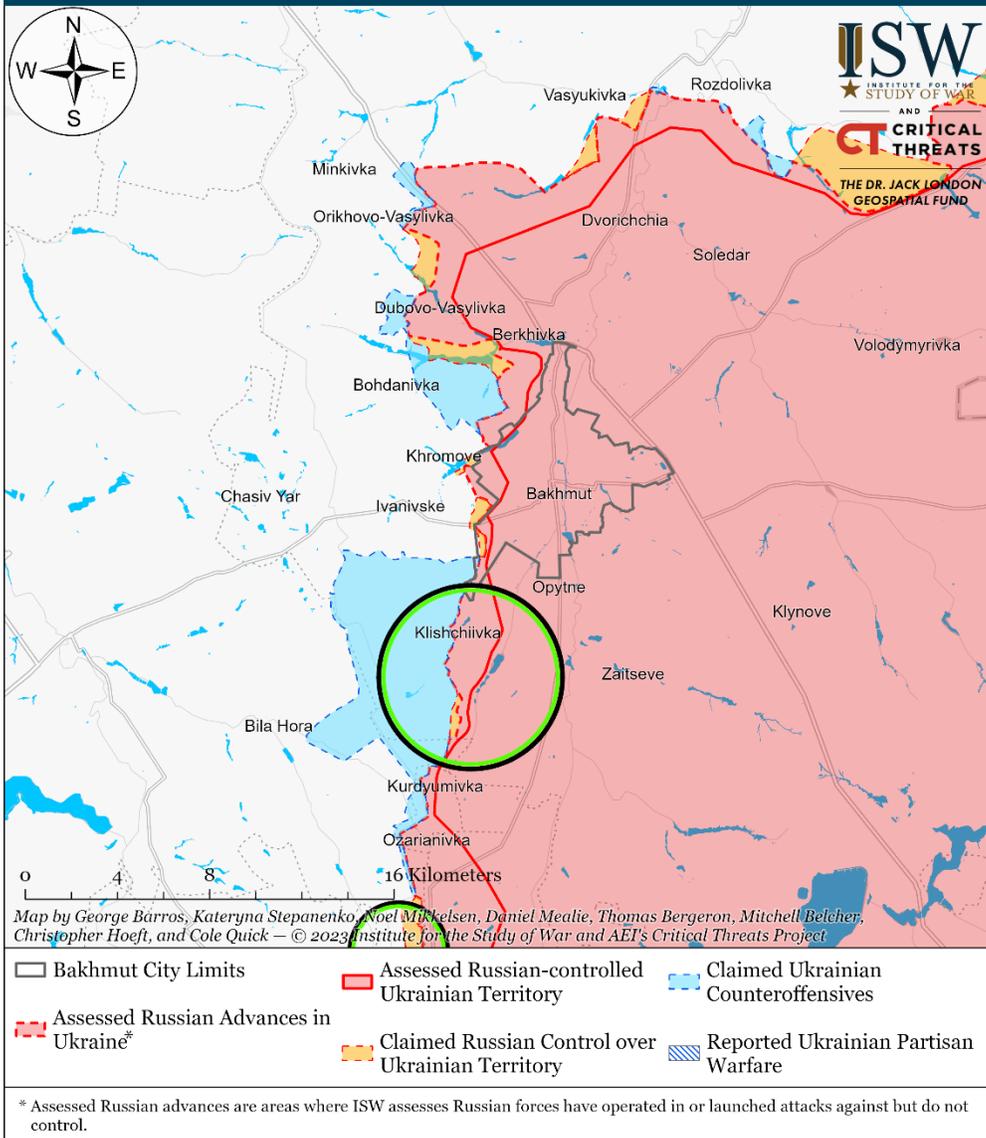
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on August 7 that Russian forces advanced three kilometers in depth along a 11 kilometer front in the Kupyansk direction over the past 3 days.

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations on Bakhmut’s southern flank on August 9 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations south of Bakhmut and are entrenched at newly reached lines.[55] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[56] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces failed to advance in these areas, although one prominent milblogger claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces have exchanged control over unspecified strongholds in the area several times.[57] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut) and Minkivka (16km northwest of Bakhmut).[58] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Berkhivka (4km north of Bakhmut).[59]

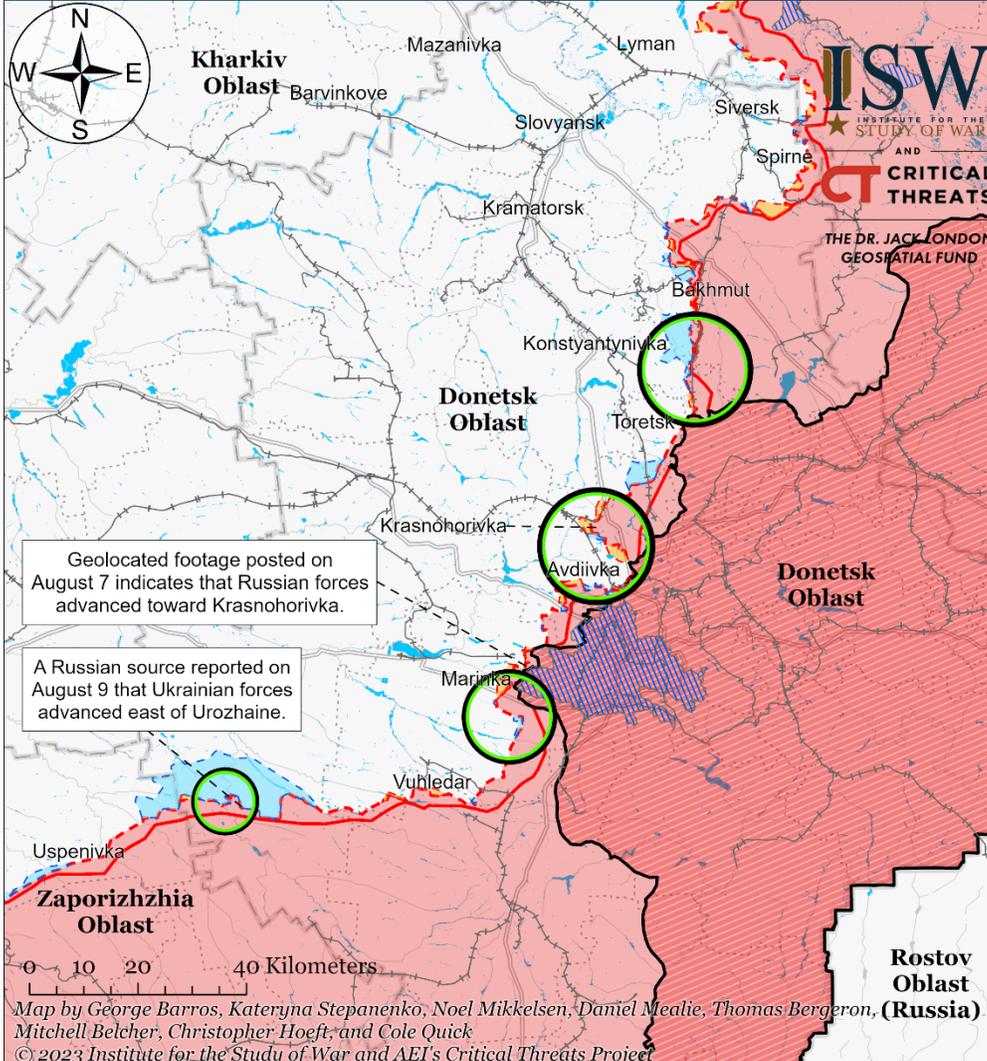
Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces continued limited counterattacks in the Bakhmut area on August 9 and recently advanced north of Bakhmut. Geolocated footage published on August 8 indicates that Russian forces advanced west of Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut).[60] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 9 that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults on the outskirts of Klishchiivka, northeast of Druzhba (20km southwest of Bakhmut), and near Zaitseve (21km south of Bakhmut), and Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar added that Russian forces consistently counterattack in these areas.[61] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces also unsuccessfully counterattacked near Kurdyumivka.[62] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted successful counterattacks near Klishchiivka on August 7 and 8 and pushed Ukrainian forces from several unspecified strongholds, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[63]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on August 9 but did not make gains. The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Avdiivka.[\[64\]](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- + Major Railroads

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine and Pryvutne directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy reported on August 8 that Ukraine forces are advancing in the Tavriia direction. A Russian source claimed on August 7 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian advance into Urozhaine.

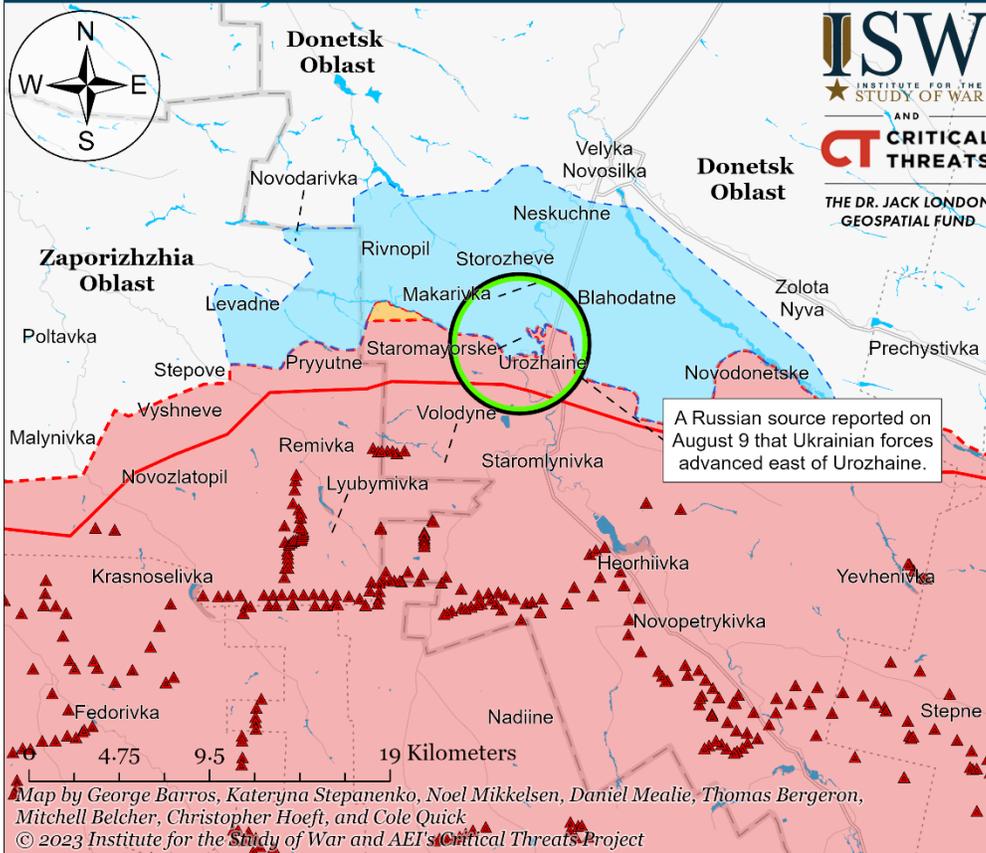
Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on August 9 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Avdiivka, Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka), and Novokalynove (13km northwest of Avdiivka).[65]

Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on August 9. Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Oleg Chekov claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian ground attack in the direction of Mykilske (4km southeast of Vuhledar).[66]

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations along the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and marginally advanced on August 9. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Ukrainian forces achieved partial success in the direction of Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[67] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces captured positions on the northern outskirts of Urozhaine, and other milbloggers reported unspecified Ukrainian gains near Urozhaine.[68] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces also attacked near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) on August 9.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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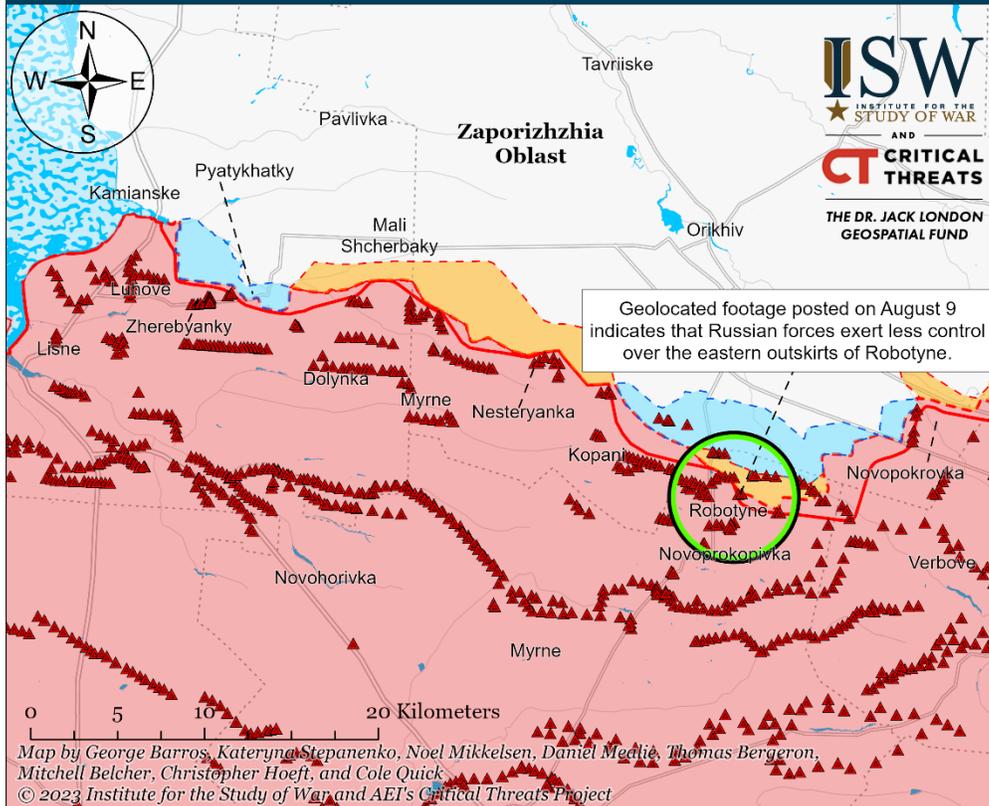
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▲ Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine and Pryyutne directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy reported on August 8 that Ukraine forces are advancing in the Tavriia direction. A Russian source claimed on August 7 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian advance into Urozhaine.

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations along the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area and did not make any confirmed or claimed advances on August 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attempts to recapture lost positions near Staromayorske.[70]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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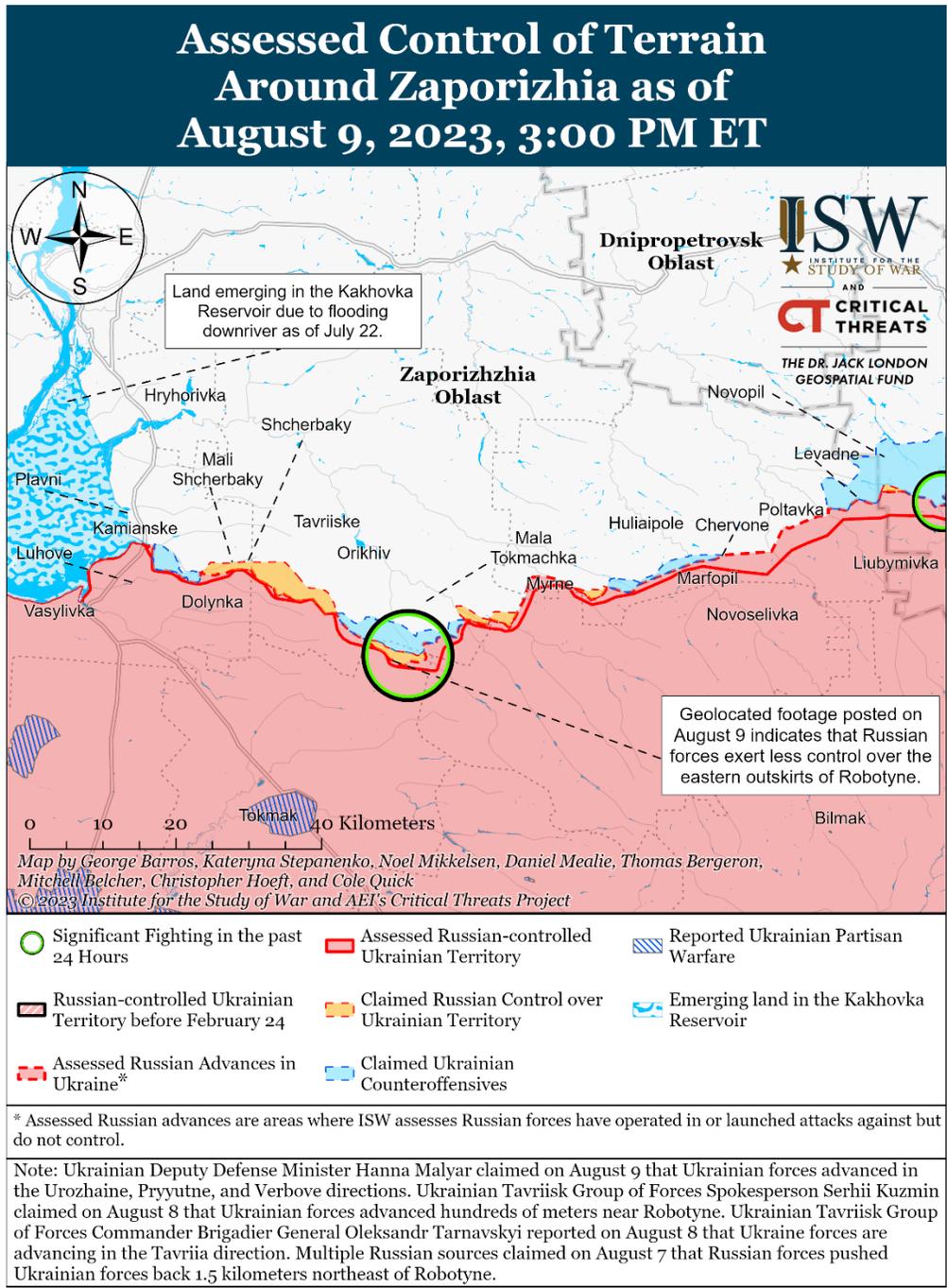
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- ▲ Russian Field Fortifications

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine, Pryyutne, and Verbove directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Serhii Kuzmin claimed on August 8 that Ukrainian forces advanced hundreds of meters near Robotyne. Multiple Russian sources claimed on August 7 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back 1.5 kilometers northeast of Robotyne.

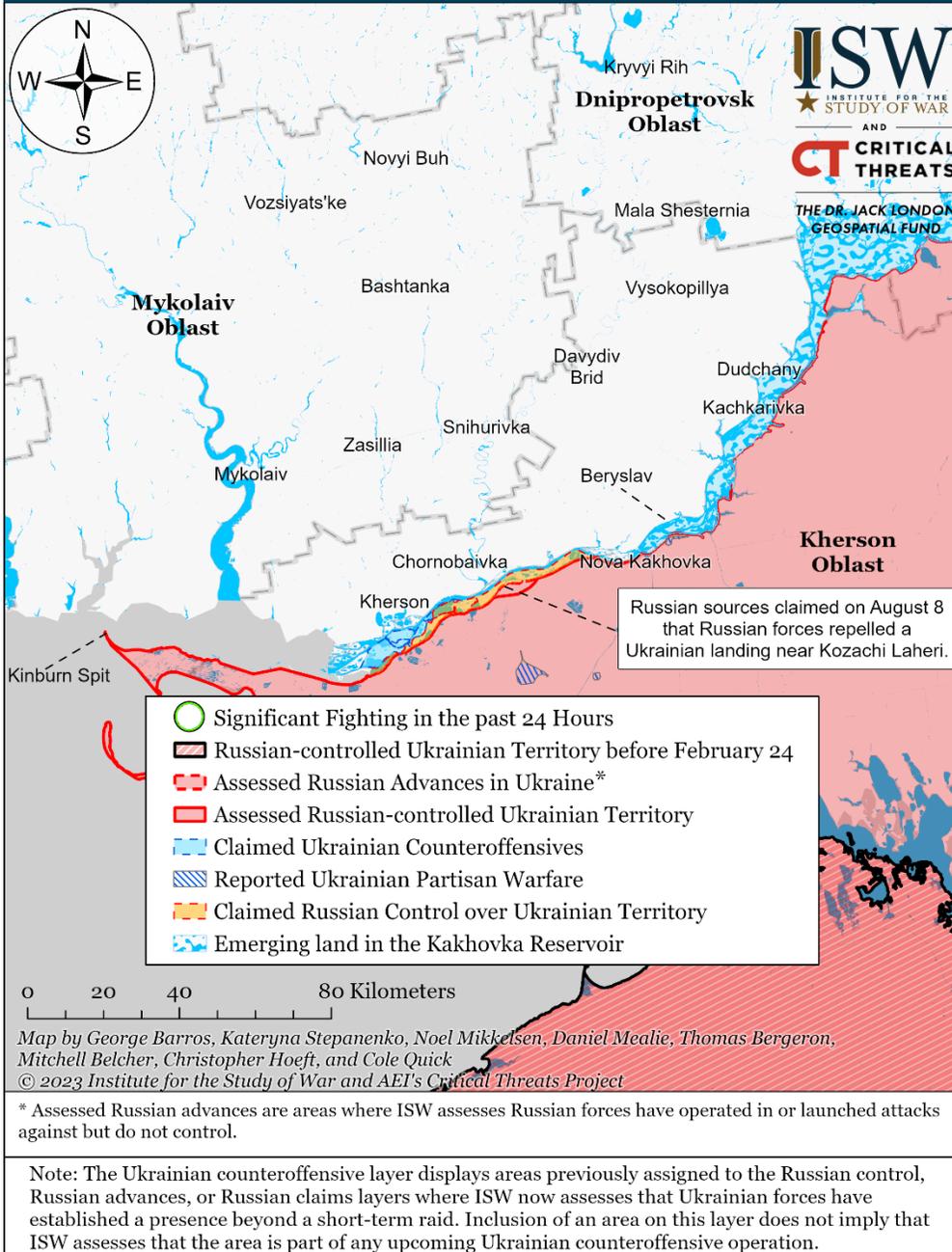
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast and reportedly advanced on August 9. Geolocated footage published on August 9 shows that Ukrainian forces recently advanced northeast of Robotyne (12km south of Orikhiv), but the extent and duration of this presence are unclear due to geolocated footage showing a Russian presence in the area and milblogger claims that the area is contested.[71] Ukrainian Tavriisk Operational and Strategic Group of Forces Spokesperson Serhii Kuzmin stated on August 8 that Ukrainian forces advanced hundreds of meters near Robotyne.[72] Malyar stated on August 9 that Ukrainian forces achieved partial success near Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[73] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces entrenched themselves in new positions three kilometers northeast of Robotyne and

consolidated control over an unspecified position but did not penetrate through Russian defenses, and other milbloggers reported continued attacks near Robotyne.[74] Another prominent milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces pushed Russian forces from positions near Verbove but failed to capture the positions themselves.[75] Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have shifted the focus of their assaults from near Robotyne to the east towards Bilohirya (16km southeast of Orikhiv) in recent days.[76] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked Russian positions north of Pyatykhatky (25km southwest of Orikhiv).[77]



Russian forces continued limited offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and marginally advanced on August 9. Geolocated footage published on August 9 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced northeast of Robotyne.^[78] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted counterattacks on a section of the T0408 highway near Robotyne and west of Novopokrovka.^[79] Another milblogger claimed that Russian scouts broke into Ukrainian positions in fields near Robotyne and that fighting in the area is ongoing.^[80]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of August 9, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Footage published on August 9 further supports ISW's assessments that the Ukrainian incursion near Kozachi Laheri in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast on August 8 was likely a limited raid.[81] Geolocated footage published on August 9 indicates that Russian forces maintain positions in and northwest of the settlement, but Ukrainian artillery fire suggests that these positions may be

unsafe.[82] Malyar stated that the Ukrainian General Staff and Ukrainian military do not confirm reports of Ukrainian forces crossing the Dnipro River.[83]

Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

Russian forces may be moving military equipment from Kazakhstan to Russia. Footage reportedly filmed on August 5 and 8 shows Russian trucks transporting tanks, missiles, semiconductors, microchips, and other materiel through Zhambyl Oblast, Almaty Oblast, Akmola Oblast, and near Astana in the direction of Russia.[84] ISW cannot verify where the military equipment is coming from, its destination, or if Russian forces intend to use the equipment in the war in Ukraine, however. ISW has also not observed geolocated footage of Russian forces moving military equipment through Kazakhstan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party may be facing challenges in recruiting military personnel who fought in Ukraine to serve as candidates for the 2023 and 2024 elections. A Russian insider source claimed that many veterans of the war in Ukraine recruited by United Russia are "extremely weak candidates" especially in provincial areas and small towns due to their lack of experience in politics.[85] The Russian insider source claimed Russian officials are considering either more carefully selecting veteran candidates or organizing a "special political school" to prepare veteran candidates for a political career.[86] ISW continues to assess that United Russia aims to recruit Russian military personnel who served in Ukraine as political candidates likely in order to establish itself as a definitive pro-war party.[87]

Russian authorities appear to be implementing some social benefits accorded to the relatives of Russian military personnel serving in Ukraine. Russian opposition news outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on August 9 that 833 students have entered the top 13 Russian universities in accordance with university quotas for participants of the war in Ukraine and their children.[88] *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that 24 percent of students enrolled without taking any entrance exams and that 69 percent of students who took entrance exams did not score well enough to enter these universities on their own merits.[89]

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian and Ukrainian sources continue to report the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration head Yevgeny Balitsky stated on August 9 that occupation authorities sent an unspecified number of Ukrainian students from Zaporizhia Oblast to Kuban State University in Krasnodar Krai to participate in a summer program.[90] Local Mariupol news outlet *Mariupol Resistance* reported that Russian occupation authorities took an unspecified number of Ukrainian teenagers from Mariupol, Khrestivka, Yenakieve, Horlivka, Shakhtarsk, Makiivka, and Donetsk City to Penza Oblast for a military-patriotic camp that will last almost three weeks.[91] *Mariupol Resistance* stated that occupation authorities also took another group of children to Saransk, Republic of Mordovia, and attempted to brainwash the children through "patriotic excursions" to Russian historical sites.[92] Kherson Oblast news outlet *Tavriya* reported on August 8 that Russian authorities took an additional 100 schoolchildren from Nova Kakhovka Raion, Kherson Oblast, to the "Medvezhonok" children's health complex in Gelendzhik, Krasnodar Krai.[93]

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) occupation officials appear to be fostering a patronage network with the Chechen Republic. DNR and Chechen officials, including Chechen Republic Chairman Muslim Khuchiev and DNR Head Denis Pushilin, signed an agreement on August 7 regarding trade, economic scientific, technical, social, and cultural cooperation between Chechen Republic and the DNR.[94] Grozny Mayor Khas-Magomed Kadyrov and Mariupol administrative head Oleg Morgun signed an agreement on August 9 naming Grozny and Mariupol “sister cities.”[95] Pushilin reportedly stated that DNR occupation officials “remember the pace of the restoration of Grozny” (following its destruction by the Russian military) and that the Chechen Republic’s previous experiences will help the DNR rebuild its own settlements in the future.[96]

Russian officials appear to be setting conditions to justify the possible need to cancel or postpone regional elections in the occupied territories in case of Ukrainian counteroffensive successes. Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) Head Ella Pamfilova announced on August 8 that the CEC may postpone regional elections in the occupied territories at the last moment due to security threats, but that this measure is currently unnecessary.[97] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on August 9 that occupation authorities and United Russia party candidates are planning campaigns in the occupied territories ahead of the elections on September 10.[98]

Russian authorities continued efforts to indoctrinate Ukrainian schoolchildren in the occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities are planning to introduce new history textbooks in the occupied territories aimed at destroying Ukrainian identity through false narratives about the “liberation” of Ukrainian lands and the presence of Nazis in the Ukrainian government.[99] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko stated that Russian officials are sponsoring a propaganda program at a Mariupol school and suggested that this program is part of Russia’s plan to indoctrinate Ukrainian children and destroy Ukrainian identity.[100] The Russian Kherson Oblast occupation administration claimed that United Russia and Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo provided Kherson Oblast libraries with over 300 Russian-language books, most of which are Russian-language children’s literature.[101] Russian President Vladimir Putin announced Russian government initiatives to provide Russian-language books to occupied territories of Ukraine on August 2.[102]

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus).

See topline text.

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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