Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Click <u>here</u> 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 <u>here</u> 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 cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on September 29. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 30 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and in the Bakhmut area on September 29. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked north of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and near Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) and Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv) on September 28 and 29.¹ Russian milbloggers claimed on September 29 that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance east of the railway line south of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) and reported heavy fighting across the Klishchiivka-Andriivka-Kurdyumivka line.²

The Russian government announced details about the semi-annual conscription cycle set to begin on October 1 in most of Russia, reportedly including the illegally annexed territories in Ukraine. Russian Deputy Chief of the Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Rear Admiral Vladimir Tsimlyansky stated on September 29 that the semi-annual conscription cycle will begin on October 1, except in some regions of Russia's Far North where conscription will begin on November 1 due to poor weather.³ Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on September 29 stating that the Russian military will conscript 130,000 personnel from October to December 2023, as compared to 147,000 personnel conscripted in the spring conscription cycle according to Tsimlyansky.⁴ Tsimlyansky claimed that Russia will not send conscripts to the war in Ukraine and that conscripts will serve for 12 months.⁵ Tsimlyansky stated that the fall conscription cycle will take place "in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation," including in occupied territories in Ukraine according to multiple Russian state media outlets.⁶ The Russian laws that illegally incorporated Ukrainian territory in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts into Russia in October 2022 stated that military conscription in these territories would begin in 2023, but Russian government officials announced the day before the beginning of the spring 2023 conscription cycle that conscription in these territories "would not occur until further notice."

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and former Wagner Group commander and current Ministry of Defense (MoD) employee Andrey Troshev on September 29 signaling that Putin will likely back the MoD in its apparent competing effort with the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) to recruit current and former Wagner personnel. Putin stated that at his last meeting with Troshev (call sign "Sedoy") the two discussed that Troshev would be involved in the formation of volunteer detachments that perform combat

missions primarily in Ukraine.⁸ Wagner-affiliated sources claimed that Troshev left Wagner following Wagner's June 24 rebellion to work for the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)-affiliated Redut private military company (PMC), and Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov acknowledged on September 29 that Troshev works for the MoD.⁹ Russian sources widely identified the volunteer detachments that Putin tasked Troshev with forming as Redut PMC formations.¹⁰ Putin also stated during his meeting with Troshev that Troshev maintains relationships with his former comrades, further suggesting that the MoD seeks to leverage Troshev's connections to Wagner.¹¹ Yevkurov has been overseeing the MoD's effort to subsume Wagner elements abroad and is likely heavily involved in the MoD's campaign to recruit Wagner personnel for MoD-affiliated PMCs operating in Ukraine.¹² The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported on September 29 that several hundred former Wagner fighters have returned to Ukraine in the past weeks either with regular Russian forces or PMCs.¹³

There are increasing reports that Wagner personnel are operating alongside Rosgvardia and that the State Duma will consider a proposed bill that will allow Rosgvardia to form volunteer formations. ¹⁴ Current Wagner Commander Anton Yelizarov (call sign "Lotos") is reportedly negotiating with Rosgvardia for current Wagner personnel to join volunteer formations under Rosgvardia on terms more favorable to Wagner. ¹⁵ A Russian insider source claimed that elements of the Wagner contingent in Belarus do not want to sign contracts with either the MoD or Rosgvardia and instead plan to join Belarusian President Lukashenko's effort to create a Belarusian-based PMC for Wagner fighters under the command of a Wagner commander with the call sign "Brest." ¹⁶ Putin's backing of the MoD effort is likely significant for factional dynamics among the Russian military leadership and the wider Russian security apparatus, but it does not portend a significant redeployment of Wagner personnel to Ukraine. The piecemeal deployment of former Wagner personnel to any areas of the frontline is unlikely to generate any significant strategic or even localized effects on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is likely supporting amendments to a Russian State Duma bill that would expand its tools of digital authoritarianism to surveil users of Russian internet, banking, and telecom companies. Russian outlet *Kommersant* reported on September 29 that the bill would allow Russian law enforcement agencies to remotely access, edit, and delete information in Russian private businesses' databases. The Russian State Duma is reportedly proposing these amendments to protect the personal data of Russian judges, FSB employees, and police from data leaks of personal information. Kommersant reported that the Russian Big Data Association – which includes Russian internet giant Yandex, Russian telecommunications companies, and banks – opposed the amendments and claimed that such access could lead to new data leaks. The FSB's efforts to gain control over large companies' databases are likely part of an attempt to strengthen surveillance measures over the Russian populace and populations in occupied Ukraine. The FSB also intends to use potential new access to databases to mask its operations more easily. The FSB's potential new access to private companies' databases may affect information security in other countries that use services provided by the Russian Big Data Association. In August, the Kremlin attempted to force Yandex into supplying international user data to the FSB.

The apparent self-censorship in the wider Russian information space has likely opened the door for some fringe elements to directly criticize and speculate about senior Russian military commanders without pushback. A fringe Russian milblogger reportedly affiliated with the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces recently claimed that Russian Chief of the General Staff and overall theater commander Army General Valery Gerasimov removed VDV Commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky as deputy commander in Ukraine, and no Russian sources have offered claims consistent with this one until recently.²² ISW has no independent way of verifying the channels' claims and speculations and is by no means ready to assess that Teplinsky's role has changed, but the emergence and spread of such claims, though currently limited, in the Russian information space is notable amid this unusual Russian informational environment.

The response of the wider Russian information space to fringe claims about Teplinsky's role in the war in Ukraine may portend an inflection point in discussions about the Russian military command. A Russian insider source who publishes monthly lists purportedly of Russian President Vladimir Putin's so-called "war cabinet" notably excluded Teplinsky from their September list.²³ The fringe Russian milblogger complained that Teplinsky did not appear on this list for the first time since being added in April 2023.²⁴ The exclusion of Teplinsky from the "war cabinet" list is consistent with the fringe Russian milblogger's September 22 claim that Gerasimov removed Teplinsky from his duties as deputy commander in Ukraine.²⁵ ISW has observed that this insider source is one of several whose information is often a harbinger of larger conversations in the wider Russian information space, specifically about changes and dynamics within the Russian leadership. ISW is not assessing at this time that the Russian military command has removed Teplinsky from some of his duties. These claims may prompt a wider discussion in the Russian information space about changes in command and factional dynamics among the Russian leadership that has been increasingly quiet since Wagner's June 24 rebellion. If the wider Russian information space continues to ignore these fringe conversations about Teplinsky, however, this may further suggest that Russian sources are engaging in self-censorship--or, alternatively, that the claims are so nonsensical as to require no response.

A Russian insider source speculated about Gerasimov's intent for Russian defensive operations in southern Ukraine, possibly in an attempt to renew animosity toward Gerasimov. A Russian insider source claimed on September 4 that Gerasimov wants to conserve Russian forces for the defense of Melitopol and Berdyansk, possibly at the expense of defending Tokmak.²⁶ Social media sources circulated this rumor on September 27 and 28 after which the Russian insider source claimed that Gerasimov is also willing to withdraw forces from Bakhmut and prefers to defend Melitopol to prevent Ukrainian forces from bringing artillery closer to Crimea.²⁷ The claim that Gerasimov intends to withdraw Russian forces to Melitopol to strengthen Russian defenses there is far outside of Gerasimov's pattern of observed behavior.²⁸ ISW has no evidence to confirm the insider source's claims, however. If these claims are false, it could indicate that there is a concerted effort in the Russian information space to discredit Gerasimov, possibly in tandem with protecting Teplinsky.

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and in the Bakhmut area on September 29.
- The Russian government announced details about the semi-annual conscription cycle set to begin on October 1 in most of Russia, reportedly including the illegally annexed territories in Ukraine.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and former Wagner Group commander and current Ministry of Defense (MoD) employee Andrey Troshev on September 29 signaling that Putin will likely back the MoD in its apparent competing effort with the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) to recruit current and former Wagner personnel.
- The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is likely supporting amendments to a Russian State Duma bill that would expand its tools of digital authoritarianism to surveil users of Russian internet, banking, and telecom companies.
- The apparent self-censorship in the wider Russian information space has likely opened the door for some fringe elements to directly criticize and speculate about senior Russian military commanders without pushback.
- Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, in the western Donetsk-

eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced in some areas on September 29.

- Russia may be continuing attempts to circumvent sanctions through military-technical cooperation with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member countries.
- Russia is relaxing passport controls on Ukrainian citizens leaving and entering Russia likely in an attempt to simplify the movement of Ukrainian citizens to Russia.

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

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

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line but did not make confirmed gains on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack near Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast (12km south of Kreminna), and that Russian forces did not conduct any offensive actions in the Kupyansk direction.²⁹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces expanded control over unspecified positions near Torske (12km west of Kreminna), although ISW has not observed confirmation of this claim.³⁰

Russian forces continue to target Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in near rear areas in the Kupyansk direction. Geolocated footage published on September 28 shows Russian forces striking a bridge across the Oskil River west of Kupyansk.³¹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have destroyed at least four bridges across the Oskil River in Kupyansk and south of the settlement in recent days.³² The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have established pontoon crossings near damaged bridges.³³

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on September 29 that Russian forces repelled 12 Ukrainian counterattacks near Torske (15km west of Kreminna) and in the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna) between September 24 and 29.34

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut area on September 29 and reportedly recently advanced. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces captured a height near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) on an unspecified date.³⁵ Russian milbloggers claimed that heavy fighting continues near Klishchiivka, Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).³⁶ The milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Kurdyumivka and unsuccessfully tried to cross the railway line bisecting the settlement.³⁷ A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces briefly crossed the rail line near Klishchiivka on September 28 before Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces west of the railway line.³⁸

Russian forces continued limited counterattacks in the Bakhmut area on September 29 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack near Klishchiivka.³⁹ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked near Andriivka, Klishchiivka, and Hryhorivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut).⁴⁰ Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces have regrouped near Klishchiivka and plan to recapture the settlement, but these Russian forces likely currently lack the combat capabilities necessary to do so.⁴¹ A Russian milblogger claimed that the Russian 88th Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps) replaced the 85th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd LNR Army Corps) during a rotation in the Bakhmut area.⁴² Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov and other Russian sources claimed that the "Shustroy" detachment of Akhmat Spetsnaz operates with the 4th Brigade (2nd LNR Army Corps) and 346th Spetsnaz Brigade (GRU) on the outskirts of Klishchiivka.⁴³

Russian forces continued offensive operations but did not advance on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks south of Avdiivka and Tonenke (7km northwest of Avdiivka) and near Nevelske (directly west of Donetsk City), Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City), and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).⁴⁴ Russian sources claimed on September 28 that unspecified elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) continue to fight in the Marinka area.⁴⁵

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

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area but did not advance on September 29. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked north of Zavitne Bazhannya (12km south of Velyka Novosilka).⁴⁶ Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Oleg Chekhov claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka), and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that from September 24 to September 29 Ukrainian forces conducted four unsuccessful attacks near Pryyutne.⁴⁷

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area and reportedly advanced on September 29. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces successfully counterattacked north of Pryyutne and achieved unspecified successes.⁴⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked west of Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).⁴⁹

Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not advance on September 29. A Russian milblogger claimed on September 28 that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked north of

Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv).⁵⁰ Russian sources claimed on September 28 and 29 that Ukrainian forces attempted to break through Russian defenses near Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv) but did not specify an outcome.⁵¹ A Russian milblogger claimed on September 29 that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations towards Novoprokopivka and Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).⁵² The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted eight unsuccessful attacks near Robotyne and Verbove from September 24 to September 29.⁵³

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not advance on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Robotyne, Verbove, and Chervone (9km east of Hulyaipole).⁵⁴ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked on the western outskirts of Robotyne but did not specify an outcome.⁵⁵

Russian air defenses reportedly shot down a Russian Su-35 fighter jet near Tokmak on September 29, although the situation remains unclear.⁵⁶ Ukrainian and Western media reported the Russian fratricide incident, but Russian sources have yet to acknowledge or deny the incident.⁵⁷ The reported footage of the event is unclear, but this incident, if true, would not be shocking as both Ukrainian and Russian forces use Soviet-era aircraft, making accidents through misidentification more likely in highly congested and contested airspace.⁵⁸ This possible Russian fratricide incident does not necessarily indicate a systemic problem with Russian air defenses.

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

Russia may be continuing attempts to circumvent sanctions through military-technical cooperation with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member countries. Delegations from the defense ministries of Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan arrived in Tula Oblast to discuss military and military-technical cooperation on September 29.⁵⁹ Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that CIS defense ministers also established a military research organization and a joint humanitarian demining unit.⁶⁰

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

Russia is relaxing passport controls on Ukrainian citizens leaving and entering Russia likely in an attempt to simplify the movement of Ukrainian citizens to Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on September 29 that would allow Ukrainian citizens to enter or leave Russia without a Russian visa and with a valid or expired internal or foreign passport.⁶¹ The new requirements retroactively came into force as of January 1, 2023, when the visa-free regime between Russian and Ukrainian citizens from 1997 expired.⁶²

Russian occupation administration officials continue to forcibly deport children from occupied Ukraine to Russia. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration Ministry of Labor and Social Policy claimed on September 28 that Russian senator for occupied Kherson Oblast Konstantin Basyuk and Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo organized a "tourist trip" for 20 children and an unspecified number of adults from occupied Kherson Oblast to Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai, for an unspecified length of time. ⁶³ Former Advisor to Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Rodion Miroshnik claimed on September 28 that 20 children and 17 mothers from front line areas of occupied Donetsk Oblast arrived at the Klyazma sanitorium in Moscow Oblast for a rehabilitation program that the "Helping Our Own" Foundation organizes. ⁶⁴ Miroshnik claimed that the "Helping Our Own" foundation has sent 150 people from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to

sanitariums in Russia in the past six months.⁶⁵ Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov posted footage on September 29 purportedly showing 20 children from occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts receiving Russian passports at the Victory Museum in Moscow.⁶⁶

The Russian government may be uninterested in funding large reconstruction projects across occupied Ukraine. Russian Minister of Construction, Housing, and Communal Services Irek Fayzullin stated on September 29 that the Russian government may not rebuild all cities destroyed in fighting in occupied Ukraine, citing the lack of a population in some destroyed cities.⁶⁷ Fayzullin also claimed that there is a shortage of funds for restoring occupied territories.⁶⁸ ISW has frequently observed reports of the Kremlin shifting the financial responsibilities of infrastructure restoration in occupied Ukraine to Russian federal subjects.⁶⁹

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

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko appointed Colonel Alexander Bykov as First Deputy Commander of the Internal Troops of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) on September 28.70 Bykov replaced Major General Igor Burmistrov in the position after Burmistrov entered reserve duty due to his age.71

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.

¹ https://t.me/rusich_army/11073; https://t.me/dva_majors/26430; https://t.me/RVvoenkor/53831; https://t.me/wargonzo/15349

² https://t.me/dva_majors/26430; https://t.me/RtrDonetsk/20569; https://t.me/wargonzo/15349; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/98846; https://t.me/readovkanews/66828; https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/3573; https://t.me/Sladkov_plus/8647; https://t.me/DnevnikDesantnika/3594; https://t.me/sashakots/42479

³ https://t.me/mod_russia/30939 ; https://telegra dot ph/Brifing-zamestitelya-nachalnika-Glavnogo-organizacionno-mobilizacionnogo-upravleniya-Generalnogo-shtaba-VS-RF-kontr-admirala-Vla-09-28

⁴ https://t.me/mod_russia/30964; https://t.me/mod_russia/30939; <a href="https://

⁵ https://t.me/mod_russia/30939 ; https://telegra dot ph/Brifing-zamestitelya-nachalnika-Glavnogo-organizacionno-mobilizacionnogo-upravleniya-Generalnogo-shtaba-VS-RF-kontr-admirala-Vla-09-28

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