

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 29

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September 29, 7:30 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.

The Kremlin continues to violate its stated “partial mobilization” procedures and contradict its own messaging even while recognizing the systematic failures within the Russian bureaucracy just eight days after the declaration of mobilization. Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged and deflected the blame for repeated “mistakes” during the first week of mobilization in his opening remarks at the Russian Security Council meeting on September 29.¹ Putin recounted instances of mobilizing men without prior military experience, assigning servicemen to the wrong specializations, and unfairly mobilizing men with health conditions or large families. ISW has previously reported that Kremlin-state media began exploring similar complaints just days after Putin's declaration of “partial mobilization.”² Putin called on the Russian General Staff, Ministry of Defense (MoD), and federal subjects to fix the reported problems with mobilization, while noting that prosecutors and working groups within enlistment centers will monitor all complaints. Speaker of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin also announced that Russian men with a military registration cannot leave their permanent residence without the approval of enlistment centers.³ Volodin and the Kremlin's Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov later retracted these statements, noting that the Russian MoD informed him that Russian officials may only restrict the movement of military-registered men in case of full mobilization.⁴ Republic of Dagestan Head Sergey Melikov also condemned a police car with a loudspeaker that ordered all men to appear at the enlistment center while driving around Derbente, Republic of Dagestan, stating that local authorities did not authorize such announcements.⁵

The Kremlin's contradictory statements and procedures demonstrate the fundamental nature of the systemic weakness of the Russian military establishment that have characterized the entire invasion. Russian officials continue to execute a supposed reservist call-up as a confused undertaking somewhere between a conscription drive and the declaration of general mobilization, likely issuing conflicting orders to already flawed bureaucratic institutions. CIA Director Williams Burns noted that even if the Kremlin manages to mobilize 300,000 men it will not be able to ensure logistic support or provide sufficient training and equipment to the newly-mobilized men.⁶ Ukrainian military officials noted that Russian forces have already committed mobilized men to Kharkiv Oblast who have since told the Ukrainian forces that they did not receive any training prior to their deployment around September 15.⁷

The bureaucratic failures in the Russian partial mobilization may indicate that Putin has again bypassed the Russian higher military command or the Russian MoD. The deployment of mobilized men to centers of hostilities on the Kharkiv or Kherson frontlines may suggest that Putin is directly working with axis commanders on the ground who are likely clamoring for reinforcements, rather than following standard military practices (that are also required by Russian law) such as providing training to the mobilized prior to their deployment to the frontlines. ISW has previously reported that Putin bypassed the Russian chain of command on numerous occasions when making decisions regarding the progress of the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine, likely because he had lost confidence in the Russian MoD.⁸ The contradictory and inconsistent narratives used by

Kremlin officials and the Russian MoD about mobilization procedures could indicate that Putin, as the supreme commander, issued divergent or contradictory orders.

Belarus remains highly unlikely to become directly involved in the war in Ukraine on the part of Russia, despite statements made by Ukrainian sources on September 29 that Belarus is preparing to accommodate newly mobilized Russian servicemen. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Belarus is preparing to accommodate up to 20,000 mobilized Russian men in existing civilian premises, warehouses, and abandoned agricultural facilities in Belarus.⁹ Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Oleksiy Hromov, similarly stated that actions are being taken to expand the Luninets Airfield (50km from the Belarusian-Ukrainian border) and to repair storage and military infrastructure.¹⁰ Independent monitoring organization Belarusian Hagan Project also reported that Russia delivered Su-30 aircraft to the Baranavichy airfield in Belarus.¹¹ These data points may indicate that Russia hopes to use Belarusian military facilities and infrastructure to hold and potentially train newly mobilized Russian forces, but it remains exceedingly unlikely that these are leading indicators of imminent Belarusian involvement in Ukraine on Russia's behalf. Hromov also stated that there are no signs of Russian troops forming a strike group to target northern Ukraine, which suggests that Russian forces are unlikely to use Belarus as a launching pad for ground attacks into Ukraine despite reports of troop and equipment accumulations in Belarus.¹² These reports more likely suggest that Russian President Vladimir Putin is continuing to leverage his relationship with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in order to use Belarusian land for the development of Russian military capabilities. ISW has previously assessed that Lukashenko cannot afford the domestic ramifications of Belarusian involvement in Ukraine.¹³ ISW also assesses that Russia does not have the ability to form a ground strike force from scratch or from existing units in Belarus quickly.

Key Takeaways

- **The Kremlin continues to violate its stated “partial mobilization” procedures and contradict its own messaging even while recognizing the systematic failures within the Russian bureaucracy just eight days after the declaration of mobilization.**
- **Belarus may be preparing to accommodate newly-mobilized Russian servicemen but remains unlikely to enter the war in Ukraine on Russia's behalf.**
- **Ukrainian troops have likely nearly completed the encirclement of the Russian grouping in Lyman and cut critical ground lines of communication (GLOCS) that support Russian troops in the Drobysheve-Lyman area.**
- **Ukrainian military officials maintained operational silence regarding Ukrainian ground maneuvers in Kherson Oblast but stated that Russian forces are deploying newly-mobilized troops to reinforce the Kherson Oblast frontline.**
- **Ukrainian troops continued to target Russian logistics, transportation, and military assets in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian troops continued ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian forces have likely increased the use of Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones in southern Ukraine.**
- **An independent Russian polling organization, the Levada Center, found that almost half of polled Russians are anxious about mobilization, but that support for Russian military actions declined only slightly to 44%.**

- **Ukrainian officials reiterated their concerns that the Kremlin will mobilize Ukrainian citizens in occupied oblasts following Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation announcement.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those 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 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.

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Southern and Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Ukrainian Counteroffensives (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Vovchansk-Kupyansk-Izyum-Lyman Line)

ISW's September 29 maps do not depict the reported encirclement of Lyman because the first Russian reports of the Ukrainian encirclement of Lyman broke after the 3:00 pm EST daily map cutoff. The ISW maps of September 30 will include all verified and updated information about the reported encirclement of Lyman.

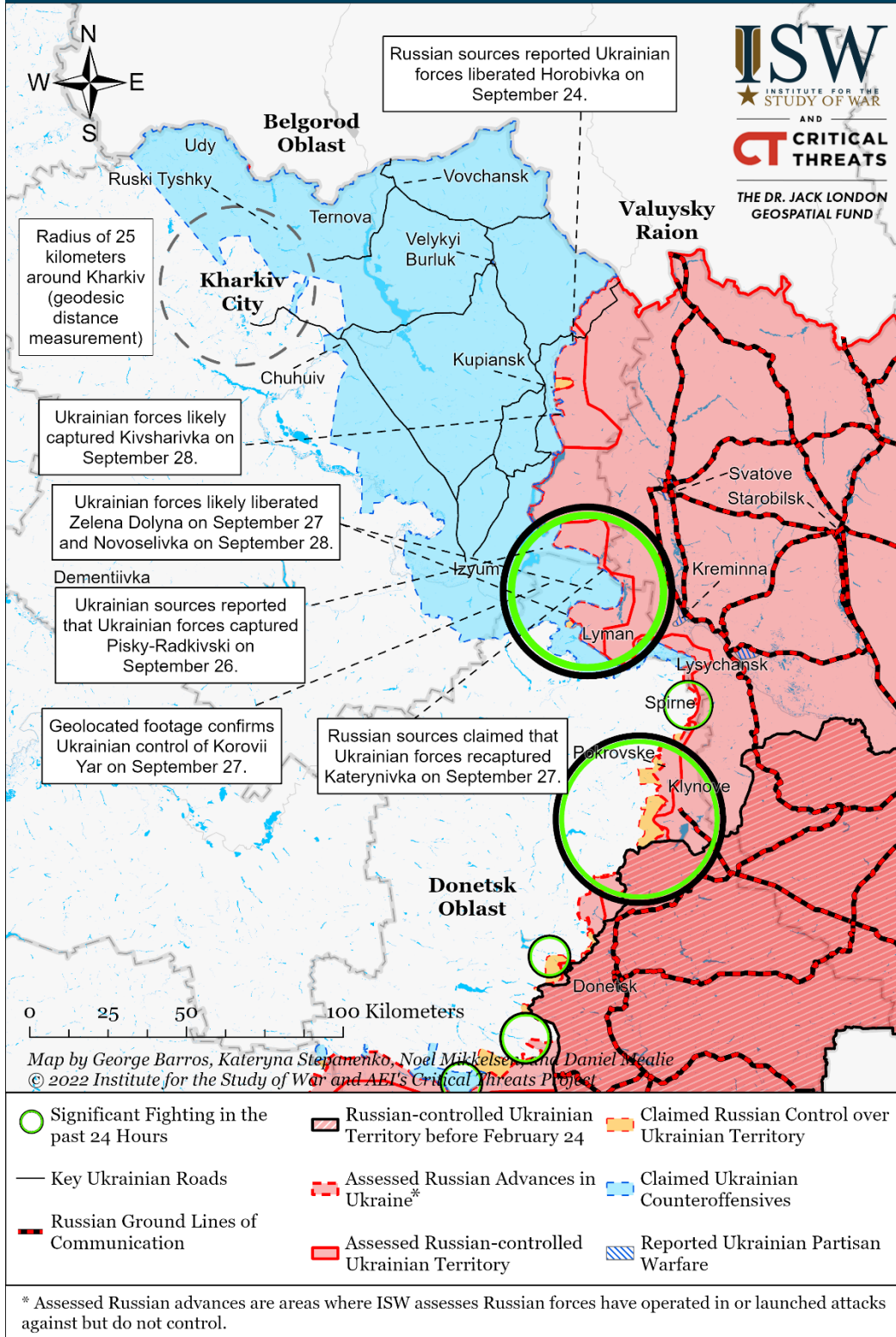
Russian sources indicated that Ukrainian troops have likely completed the envelopment of the Russian grouping in the Lyman area as of the end of the day on September 29. A prominent Russian military correspondent reported that Ukrainian forces broke through Russian defenses around Stavky, 10km north of Lyman, and cut the Torske-Drobysheve road that is the last supply and egress route for Russian elements holding the line west of Lyman.¹⁴ The correspondent called the situation “extremely difficult” for elements of the BARS-13 detachment and the 752nd Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 20th Combined Arms Army, which are reportedly defending around Drobysheve and into Lyman.¹⁵

Another Russian milblogger stated that Ukrainian troops are attacking Lyman from three directions and have cut Russian access to the critical Svatove-Lyman road, which is the major ground line of communication (GLOC) sustaining the Russian grouping within Lyman itself.¹⁶ Several milbloggers stated that the fall of Lyman to Ukrainian troops is imminent without the immediate reinforcement of Russian forces.¹⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff reported earlier in the day on September 29 that seven tank units formed by newly mobilized and low-skilled personnel deployed to the Lyman area without proper fire training for tank weapons and got into a road accident.¹⁸ It is highly unlikely that any deployment of additional, newly mobilized, forces to Lyman will afford the existing Russian grouping significant defensive capabilities and prevent Ukrainian troops from collapsing the Lyman pocket.

Russian sources also continued to discuss Ukrainian counteroffensive operations along the Oskil River in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast on September 29. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian troops attempted to break through Russian defenses near the Kharkiv-Luhansk border in an unspecified

location.¹⁹ Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff's Main Operational Department, Oleksiy Hromov, stated on September 29 that the Russian 4th Tank Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army suffered considerable losses over the past few weeks while operating in Kupyansk, which lies near the Oskil River by the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border.²⁰ As ISW previously reported, the 4th Tank Division lost nearly an entire regiment worth of advanced T-80 tanks during earlier stages of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast, which suggests that whatever remnants of the 4th Tank Division that are currently operating around near Kupyansk are severely understrength.²¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of September 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



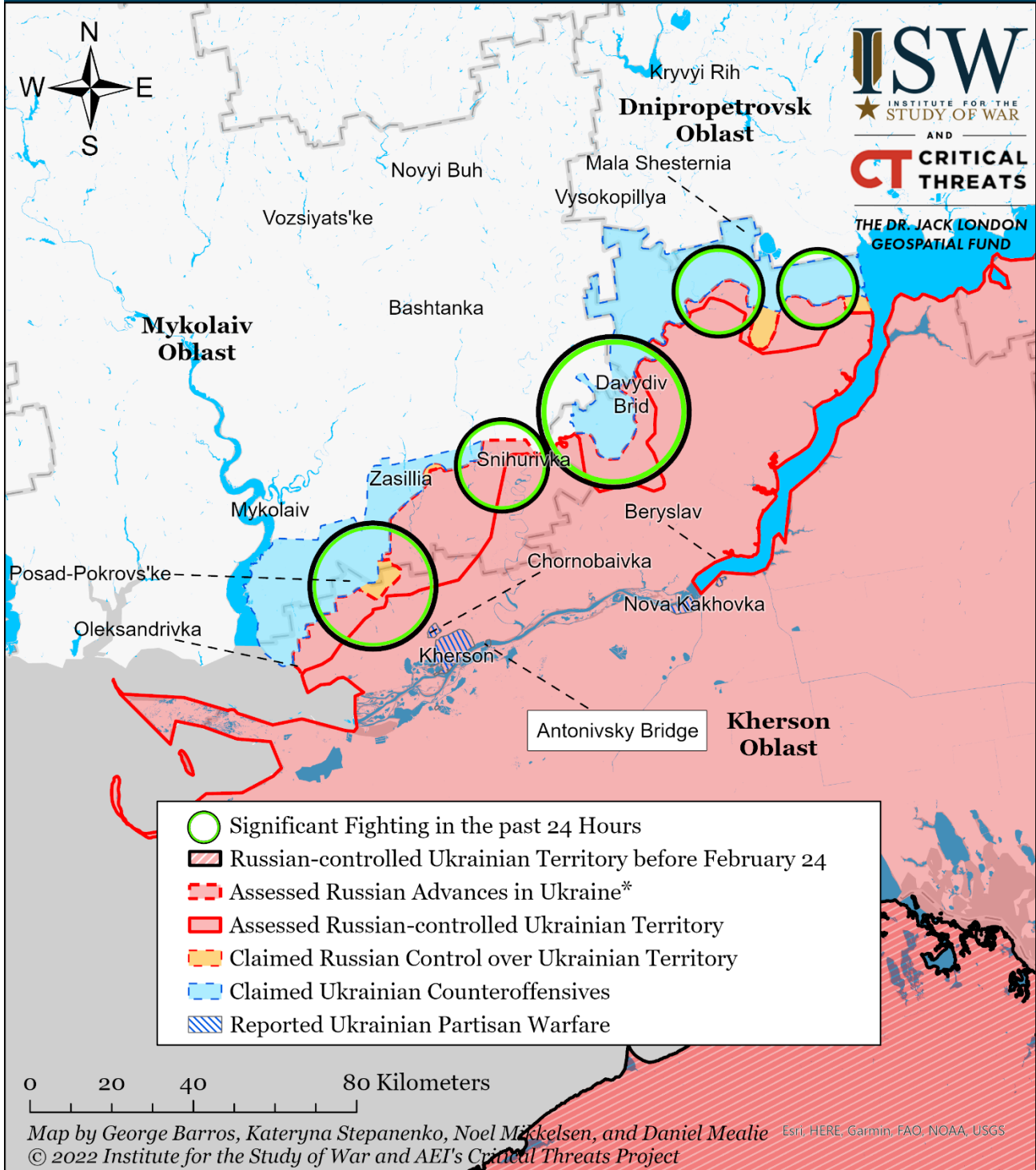
Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Ukrainian military officials maintained operational silence regarding Ukrainian ground maneuvers in Kherson Oblast on September 29 but emphasized that Russian forces are deploying new troops to the area, likely to reinforce Russian defensive lines against the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russia deployed 2,000 mobilized men from Crimea to Kherson Oblast on September 27, many of whom are newly-mobilized members of the historically marginalized Crimean Tatar community and are likely undertrained and unmotivated to fight on the side of Russian troops.²² Ukrainian military officials reiterated that Ukrainian troops are continuing an interdiction campaign against Russian military, logistics, and transportation assets, as well as concentration areas, in Kherson Oblast.²³

Russian and Ukrainian sources stated that Ukrainian strikes impacted three main areas in Kherson Oblast on September 29: around Kherson City, east of Kherson City in the Nova Kakhovka-Beryslav area, and south of the Dnipro River. Several sources reported that Ukrainian troops struck Oleshky (8km southeast of Kherson City), Antonivka (5km east of Kherson City), and Mala Kardashynka (10km southwest of Kherson City).²⁴ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command and Russian milbloggers additionally stated that Ukrainian troops struck Russian positions and concentration areas in Nova Kakhovka and Beryslav, 60km and 65km east of Kherson City, respectively.²⁵ Footage posted to local Kherson Oblast Telegram channels additionally shows the aftermath of a reported Ukrainian strike on a gas pipeline in Brylivka, 45km southeast of Kherson City.²⁶

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian sources identified any specific areas where Ukrainian troops conducted ground maneuvers on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops once again attempted to advance towards Bezimenne (western Kherson Oblast near the Inhulets River).²⁷ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command noted that Ukrainian troops "suppressed" Russian strongholds in Khreschenivka (northeastern Kherson Oblast) with "active actions."²⁸ This language is vague and could either mean that Ukrainian troops conducted ground attacks in this area or inflicted fire damage on Russian positions. The Ukrainian General Staff also stated that Russian troops struck Ternovi Pody (25km northwest of Kherson City), indicating that Ukrainian troops control this settlement.²⁹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



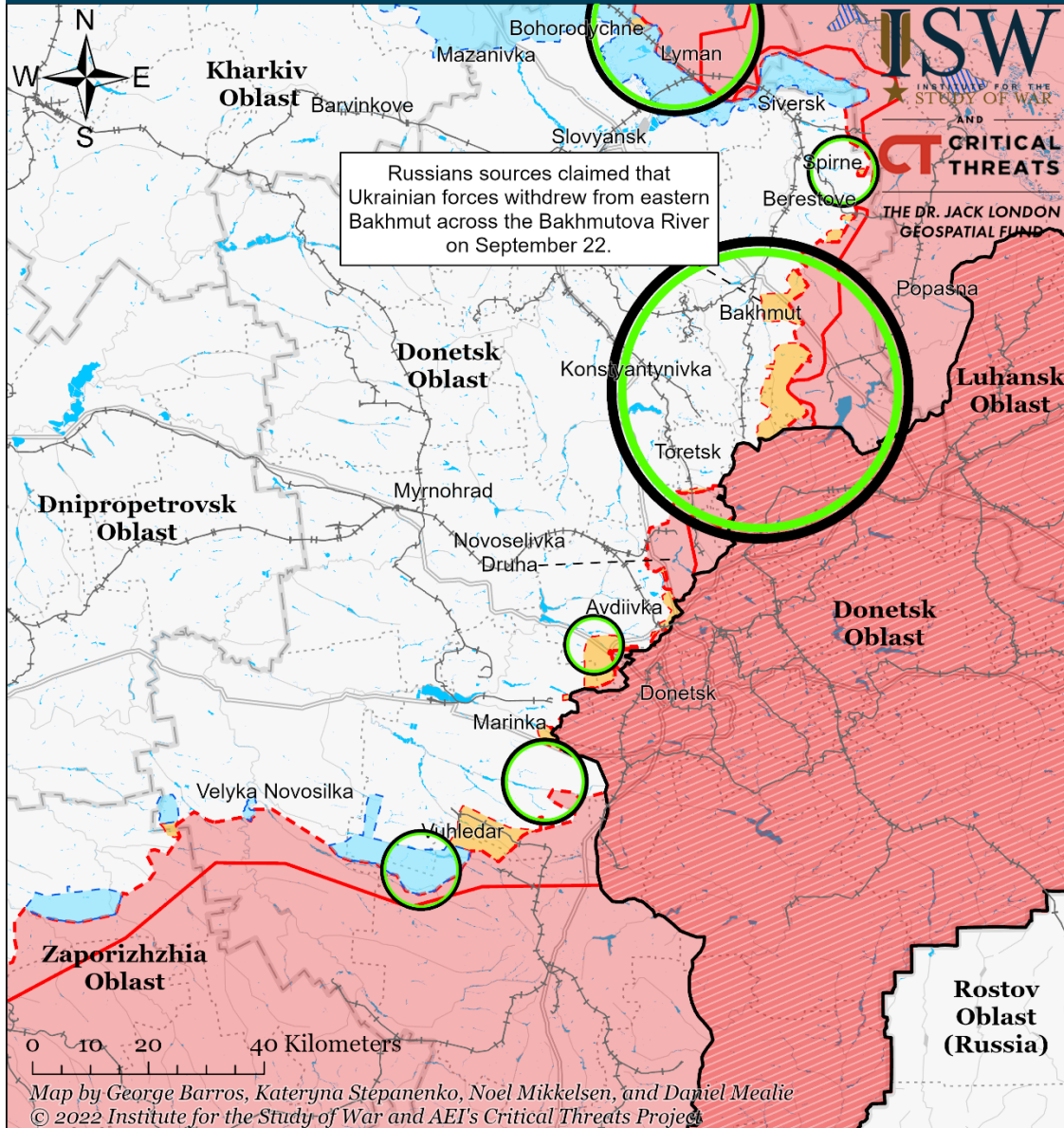
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on September 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled ground assaults northeast of Bakhmut near Bakhmutse and south of Bakhmut near Zaitseve (about 8km southeast of Bakhmut), Mykolaivka Druha (about 13km south of Bakhmut), Odradivka (about 9km south of Bakhmut), Zalizne (about 26km southwest of Bakhmut), and Mayorsk (20km south of Bakhmut).³⁰ A Russian military correspondent claimed that Ukrainian troops are retreating further into Bakhmut itself, although ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.³¹ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks southwest of Avdiivka and Donetsk City in Pervomaiske, Pobieda, Novomykhalivka, and Pavlivka. Ukrainian sources reported on September 29 that Russian forces continued routine artillery, air, and missile strikes throughout the line of contact in Donetsk Oblast.³²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 29, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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	Major Railroads
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.

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

Russian forces have increased their use of Iranian-made drones to attack Ukrainian positions and cities in southern Ukraine. Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian General Staff's Main Operational Department, Oleksiy Hromov, stated that Russian forces used two Iranian-made drones in attacks in southern Ukraine last week, whereas thus far Russian forces have used 29 drones between September 25 and September 29.³³ Ukrainian Strategic Command reported that Ukrainian air defenses struggle to detect the Shahed-136 drones because they can operate at low altitudes.³⁴ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces operate the drones from Crimea and primarily use them in operations targeting critical and military infrastructure throughout Southern Ukraine.³⁵ Ukrainian sources also claimed to have shot down 22 Shahed-136 drones since September 10.³⁶

Russian forces continued routine artillery, air, and missile strikes west of Hulyaipole and in Mykolaiv and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts on September 29.³⁷ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Mykolaiv City and Nikopol and Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.³⁸ Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that Russian forces continued heavy shelling and rocket strikes in the vicinity of Berezhneuvate.³⁹ Ukrainian sources claimed that Ukrainian air defense systems shot down four Russian Kh-59 cruise missiles over Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia Oblasts on September 29.⁴⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff also claimed that Ukrainian forces struck and destroyed three Russian S-300 systems in Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴¹

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

The Kremlin continued to face challenges in attempting to suppress anti-mobilization protests throughout Russia. A Russian Human Rights group reported that Russians protested in 11 different Russian cities and settlements on September 29.⁴² Russian sources reported that Russian police dispersed an anti-mobilization protest in Kyzyl, Tuva Oblast, detaining 20 women.⁴³ Russians continued to attack local administrations and military recruitment centers, with Novosibirsk Oblast officials claiming to have detained a man who had attempted to set a military recruitment center on fire in Novosibirsk.⁴⁴ Russian sources also reported that unknown protesters set village administrations on fire in Moscow and Rostov Oblast on September 28 and September 29, respectively.⁴⁵ Unknown perpetrators also reportedly attempted arson at a military recruitment center in Vladivostok two nights in a row on September 27 and September 28.⁴⁶

Independent Russian polling organization Levada Center found that almost half of polled Russians are anxious about mobilization, but the support for Russian military actions has not significantly declined since the declaration of partial mobilization. Levada found that 47% of Russians expressed concern over mobilization, 13% were outraged, and 11% noted experiencing depression as a result of the mobilization; 23% reported feeling prideful for Russia.⁴⁷ More than half of polled Russians said they are afraid that war in Ukraine may lead to general mobilization, whereas a majority of respondents did not express such concern in February 2022. Levada noted that the percent of Russians reporting concern about the situation in Ukraine increased from 74% in August to 88% this week, but absolute support for Russian forces' actions in Ukraine only decreased by two percent to 44% in the same time frame.⁴⁸

Russian enlistment officers are continuing to undertake sly measures to prevent Russian men from avoiding mobilization. Russian outlets reported that teachers may administer draft notices to men,

while enlistment officers in Vladivostok attempted to use fire alarms to coerce men into leaving their apartments.⁴⁹ Russian officials are also distributing summonses and establishing checkpoints at the Russian-Kazakh border in Astrakhan Oblast to prevent Russian men from fleeing abroad.⁵⁰

The Kremlin continues to redeploy troops and equipment from the westernmost part of Russia to reinforce war efforts in Ukraine. An unnamed senior Nordic defense official told *Foreign Policy* that Russia has approximately 6,000 remaining troops of its pre-war 30,000 at the borders with Baltic countries and Finland.⁵¹ The official stressed that Russian forces largely maintained their air power and the Northern Fleet in the area but deployed high-end military hardware such as anti-aircraft systems and missiles to Ukraine. The Kremlin's consistent deployment of troops and military equipment from westernmost bases is not consistent with Russian President Vladimir Putin's narratives claiming that the war is a response to NATO threatening Russian territory.

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow's choosing)

Ukrainian officials reiterated their concerns that the Kremlin will mobilize Ukrainian citizens in occupied oblasts following Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation announcement. A representative of Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), Vadym Skibitsky, said that the Kremlin would announce mobilization in occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia Oblasts after annexing these territories.⁵² Skibitsky added that Russian forces have already mobilized "almost all" of the male population in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Advisor to the Mariupol Mayor Petro Andryushenko stated that annexation will allow Russians to also mobilize temporarily displaced persons for Donetsk City, Makiivka, and Horlivka, that will be considered Russian citizens under Russian law.⁵³ Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai also noted that Russian border officials are not letting approximately 1,000 Ukrainian refugees from occupied territories in Pskov Oblast flee to Latvia.⁵⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff also noted that Russian occupation officials in Crimea are prioritizing mobilizing Crimean Tatars and are assigning them to units operating in areas of intense hostilities.⁵⁵

Ukrainian partisans continued to target collaborators in occupied territories. Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian partisans attempted to kill collaborator Olena Shapurova in an improvised explosive device attack in Melitopol on September 29.⁵⁶ Shapurova's husband reportedly sustained injuries as a result of the attack.

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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- ¹ <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/69459>; https://smotrim dot ru/article/2966351?utm_source=internal&utm_medium=main2-news&utm_campaign=main2-news6
- ² <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-26>
- ³ <https://meduza.io/news/2022/09/29/volodin-schitaet-cto-stoyaschim-na-voinskom-uchete-zapreschaetsya-uezzhat-iz-rf-minoborony-ob-yasnyalo-cto-mobilizatsiya-ne-predusmatrivaet-ogranicheniy-na-peredvizhenie>
- ⁴ <https://meduza.io/news/2022/09/29/volodin-schitaet-cto-stoyaschim-na-voinskom-uchete-zapreschaetsya-uezzhat-iz-rf-minoborony-ob-yasnyalo-cto-mobilizatsiya-ne-predusmatrivaet-ogranicheniy-na-peredvizhenie>; <https://vmdotru/news/999660-peskov-prizval-operativno-ispravlyatv-oshibki-pri-informirovanii-o-mobilizacii> ; https://tassdotru/armiya-i-opk/15907025?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop ; <https://www.vedomostidotru/politics/news/2022/09/29/943093-peskov-volodin-operativno-ispravil-svoi-oshibki>
- ⁵ <https://t.me/bazabazon/13571>;
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- ¹¹ <https://twitter.com/MotolkoHelp/status/1575428731262451717?s=20&t=NUDZulQ7bD5-CjFYX9XpUg>
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- ¹³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-23>;
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- ¹⁴ <https://t.me/wargonzo/8520>; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1574826431670018049;
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- ¹⁵ <https://t.me/wargonzo/8520>; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1574826431670018049;
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- ¹⁶ <https://t.me/rybar/39542>

¹⁷ <https://t.me/rybar/39542>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/8520>

¹⁸

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¹⁹ <https://t.me/sashakots/36083>

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