Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 29 Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan October 29, 7:30 pm ET

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.

Likely Ukrainian forces conducted an attack against a Grigorovich-class frigate of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) near Sevastopol with unmanned surface vehicles on October 29. Social media footage documented an unknown number of unmanned surface vehicles striking at least one Grigorovich-class frigate in Sevastopol on October 29. Footage also showed smoke near the port in Sevastopol and what appeared to be Russian air defense in Sevastopol engaging air targets. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces used seven autonomous maritime drones and nine unmanned aerial vehicles to conduct a "terrorist attack" against the BSF and civilian targets in Sevastopol. Attacks on military vessels in wartime are legitimate acts of war and not terrorist attacks. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed all air targets, destroyed four maritime drones on the outer roadstead, and three maritime drones on the inner roadstead. A similar unidentified unmanned surface vehicle first appeared on the coast of Crimea on September 21.4

Damage to Black Sea Fleet vessels is unclear at this time. The Russian MoD claimed that the attack inflicted minor damage against BSF minesweeper *Ivan Golubets* and a protective barrier in the south bay.⁵ Russian officials did not acknowledge any damage to a Grigorovich-class frigate, similar to how the Russian MoD denied any damage to the cruiser *Moskva* when Ukrainian forces sunk it on April 14. Ukrainian officials have not claimed responsibility for the attack as of this publication.

The Russian Foreign Ministry announced that Russia indefinitely suspended its participation in the United Nations-brokered grain export deal with Ukraine due to the attack on October 29.6 Russia had been setting rhetorical conditions to withdraw from the deal for some time, however.

The Black Sea Fleet has three Grigorovich-class frigates, all of which are capable of firing Kalibr cruise missiles. A Ukrainian decision to target Kalibr-capable frigate at this time makes sense given the intensified Russian drone and missile strike campaign targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure. If Kyiv ordered this attack, it would have been a proportionate, even restrained, response to the extensive Russian strategic bombing campaign attacking civilian targets throughout Ukraine over the past few weeks.

The Kremlin reportedly relieved the commander of the Central Military District (CMD), Colonel General Alexander Lapin, of his position as the commander of the "central" group of forces in Ukraine. The Kremlin has not officially confirmed Lapin's relief as of October 29, prompting the rise of contradictory reports across Kremlin-sponsored outlets and Telegram channels. Kremlin-sponsored outlets cited reports from Chechnya-based TV channel "Grozny," milbloggers, and other unnamed official sources that Lapin no longer commands Russian forces in northern Luhansk Oblast. Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Lapin resigned on his own initiative, while others claimed that he was unfairly terminated. A Wagner-affiliated milblogger claimed that Lapin lost his position due to his devastating failure to deploy and organize mobilized men in his zone of responsibility, and ISW has previously reported

on the poor treatment of untrained mobilized men on the Svatove-Kreminna frontline under Lapin's command.9

It is unclear whether Lapin was also relieved of his command of the Central Military District. Some milbloggers implied that Lapin is no longer the CMD commander as well, however, there is no clear reporting or evidence. ¹⁰ Local Russian outlet *Ura* claimed that Lapin is taking a three-week-long medical leave citing an unnamed Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) source. ¹¹

ISW cannot independently confirm the reports of Lapin's dismissal, but the deluge of conflicting reports may indicate that the Kremlin is struggling to control the narrative regarding its higher military command. The Kremlin had previously refrained from discussing command changes before the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in Lyman, after which Russian President Vladimir Putin formally replaced the commanders of the Western and Eastern Military Districts (WMD and EMD). Putin likely publicly reshuffled district commanders to use them as scapegoats for Russian military failures in Kharkiv Oblast and Lyman.¹² The increasing transparency within the Russian information space—spearheaded by the siloviki Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Wagner Group financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin, and the pro-war community—is likely making it more challenging for the Kremlin to conceal and explain away any command changes in public. Kadyrov and Prigozhin both have publicly attacked Lapin on several occasions, leading some milbloggers to point out that other Russian district commanders did not receive any criticism despite their own failings (and firings).¹³ The reports of Lapin's dismissal, whether true or false, indicate that the Russian siloviki faction is gaining dominance in the information space that allows it to damage the image of the Russian higher military command that the MoD would likely prefer to present.

Reports of Lapin's dismissal further highlighted the fragmentation within the Russian pro-war community. A milblogger who had defended Lapin stated that unspecified "lobbyists" had finally removed Lapin from his post acting in their own self-interest, going against the pro-Lapin group of milbloggers. Kremlin-leading Russian outlets also emphasized that a group of milbloggers supported Lapin, indicating the ever-growing influence of milbloggers in the information space. The milblogger added that he and other pro-Lapin milbloggers faced criticism accusing the milbloggers of being on Lapin's payroll and producing propaganda in support of him. A pro-Wagner milblogger, in turn, stated that overwhelming cries in support of Lapin did not conceal his numerous military failures. Milbloggers from both sides are effectively focusing on failures of Russian military command from either side of the argument, which further undermines the reputation of the Russian Armed Forces and the Kremlin.

Russian pro-war milbloggers have recognized that Western-provided HIMARS halted Russian offensive operations in northwestern Kherson Oblast in July. Some Russian milbloggers commented on satellite imagery of an empty Russian military base at the Kherson International Airport Chornobaivka (northwest of Kherson City) obtained from the private US company Satellogic. The milbloggers noted that Russian forces withdrew their "contingent," military equipment, and aviation from Chornobaivka between May and September in an effort to protect their equipment against Ukrainian strikes on the base. To One milblogger noted that while Russian forces withdrew some aviation elements from the base between May and June due to Ukrainian Tochka-U strikes, the introduction of HIMARS forced Russian command to establish a withdrawal plan from the base that concluded in September. Another milblogger noted that the satellite images further confirmed that the situation on the northwestern Kherson Oblast frontline has not changed in two months and that withdrawn detachments did not return to their positions. Previous satellite imagery from the August-September period showed at least

16 main battle tanks and armored personnel carriers at Chornobaivka, which indicates that the total Russian withdrawal from the Kherson International Airport is fairly recent.²⁰

Russia is likely expediting efforts to forcibly depopulate areas of Kherson Oblast along the Dnipro River and repopulate them with Russian soldiers, some out of uniform in violation of the law of armed conflict. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported on October 28 that Russian officials gave residents of Kherson City a two-day eviction notice and that Russian forces have introduced intensified inspection and verification checkpoints at roadblocks on the "evacuation" routes to Russian-occupied Crimea. The Ukrainian General Staff also stated on October 29 that Russian forces are continuing to forcibly evacuate civilians from Nova Kakhovka and that in Beryslav, Russian soldiers are changing into civilian clothes and moving into private residences *en masse*. International law considers the "simulation of civilian status" to constitute a resort to perfidy, which is a violation of the laws of armed conflict. Russian may be using resort to perfidy tactics to depopulate areas of Kherson Oblast and repopulate them with soldiers in civilian dress in order to set conditions to accuse Ukraine of striking civilian targets when attacking Russian military positions.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is likely responding to pressure levied by milbloggers regarding its treatment of Russian prisoners of war (POWs) and the conduct of prisoner exchanges. The Russian MoD announced on October 29 that Russia negotiated the release of 50 Russian prisoners of war but did not provide further details on the identities of the POWs or the terms of exchange. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin stated that seven of the POWs are DNR servicemen and that two are servicemen of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR).²⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that in exchange 52 Ukrainian POWS returned from Russia.²⁵ The Russian MoD's announcement of the exchange is particularly noteworthy in light of recent milblogger criticism of the Russian MoD's previous handling of POWs and POW exchanges. As ISW reported on September 22, the Russian MoD faced substantial criticism for a POW exchange wherein 215 Ukrainian soldiers, including commanders of the Azov Regiment, were released in exchange for 55 Russian soldiers and political prisoners.²⁶ Russian sources additionally previously complained that the Russian MoD has neglected to contact and adequately care for Russian POWs and demanded that Russian authorities do more to secure the safety of POWs.²⁷ The Russian MoD is likely attempting to mitigate public pressure over the handling of POWs by presenting a more proactive approach to POW exchanges.

Key Takeaways

- Likely Ukrainian forces conducted an attack against a Grigorovich-class frigate of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) near Sevastopol with unmanned surface vehicles on October 29.
- The Kremlin reportedly relieved the commander of the Central Military District (CMD), Colonel General Alexander Lapin, of his position as the commander of the "central" group of forces in Ukraine.
- Russia is likely expediting efforts to forcibly depopulate areas of Kherson Oblast along the Dnipro River and repopulate them with Russian soldiers, some of them out of uniform in violation of the law of armed conflict.
- The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is likely responding to pressure levied by milbloggers regarding its treatment of Russian prisoners of war (POWs) and the conduct of prisoner exchanges.

- Ukrainian forces consolidated gains and continued counteroffensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line.
- Ukrainian intelligence indicated that the highest quality Russian troops are still responsible for the defense of Kherson Oblast.
- * Russian forces continued to establish defensive positions on the western bank of the Dnipro River.
- Russian forces likely slowed the pace of offensive operations in the Bakhmut area due to a Ukrainian strike.
- Russian sources claimed that Russian troops launched an offensive in the Vuhledar area.
- Russian troops likely made marginal gains around Donetsk City.
- The Kremlin reportedly instructed Russian judges to not grant prisoners parole but instead to direct them toward recruitment in unspecified private military companies (PMCs).
- The Kremlin is likely conducting an information operation to reduce tensions between Christians and Muslims in Russia to cater to religious minority groups within the Russian armed forces.

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



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.

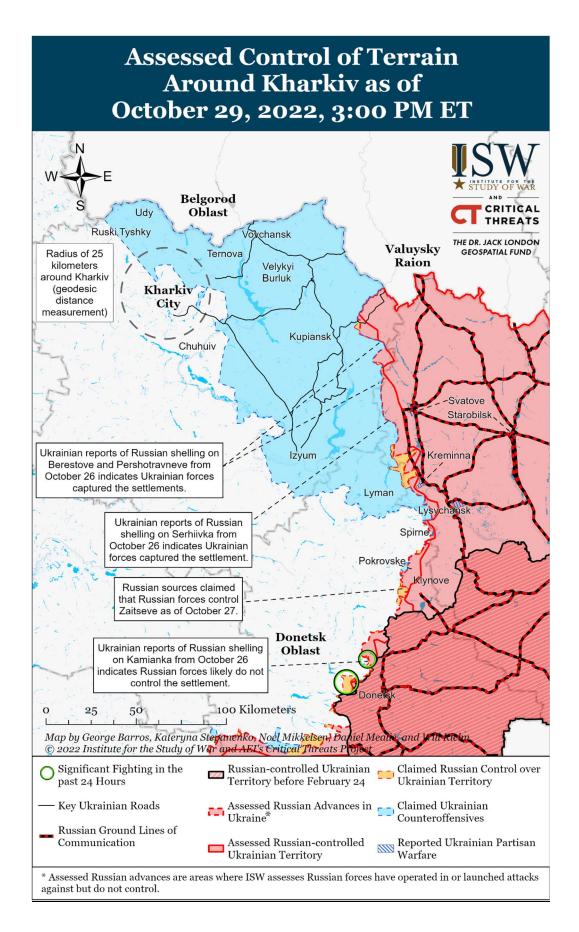
- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Southern and Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force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

<u>Ukrainian Counteroffensives</u> (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Ukrainian forces consolidated gains and continued counteroffensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line on October 29. Spokesperson for Ukraine's Eastern Group of Forces Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on October 29 that Ukrainian troops have established full fire control of the main sections of the R66 (Svatove-Kreminna) road, which Cherevaty noted makes it impossible for Russian logistics and supplies to continue along the route. Russian reported that fighting is ongoing along the Svatove-Kreminna line. A prominent Russian milblogger similarly claimed that Ukrainian troops are attempting to break through to Kreminna and accumulating forces to attack a position less than 2km away from current Russian positions and within 4km of the R66 highway. Several Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), reported that Ukrainian troops attacked in the direction of Chervonopopivka, 6km northwest of Kreminna. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that a Ukrainian precision strike eliminated 20 Russian soldiers and wounded 30 in Chervonopopivka.

Russian sources also continued to claim that Russian troops conducted offensive operations in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast on October 29. The Russian MoD claimed that unspecified Russian "active actions" destroyed Ukrainian equipment concentrations in Timkivka, Ivanivka, Tabaivka, and Khrokmalne, all in the Kupyansk area and about 20km northwest of Svatove.³³ Geolocated footage posted on October 29 shows a Ukrainian strike destroying a Russian tank in Pisky (a small settlement in northeast Kharkiv Oblast about 3km south of the international border), indicating that Russian troops are still holding positions east of the Oskil River near the international border.



Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

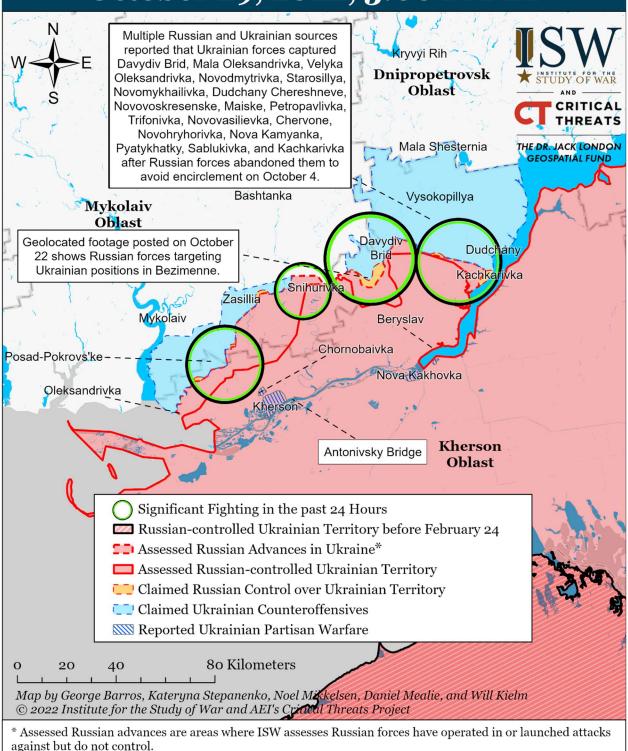
Ukrainian intelligence reported that Russian forces still have their highest quality forces operating in Kherson Oblast, predicting that Ukrainian forces will liberate the city by the end of November. Chief of the Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR), Kyrylo Budanov, stated that there are 40,000 Russian servicemen in Kherson Oblast, of which most are competent units from Russian airborne troops, special operations forces, and naval infantry. Budanov added that Russian forces are reinforcing these units with mobilized personnel and noted that the Russian grouping of forces operates in Kherson City, and on the western and eastern banks of the Dnipro River. Budanov noted that Russian forces are continuing to resist and are impeding Ukrainian advances on a daily basis. Budanov reiterated that the GUR's officially assesses that Russia will not fully destroy the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant Dam, but instead will destroy the road that goes over the dam to slow Ukrainian advances across the Dnipro River.

Russian forces continued to establish defensive positions on the western bank of the Dnipro River on October 29. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces are continuing to deploy mobilized men to the western bank, despite the fact that these men show signs of low morale and a lack of prior training.³⁷ Ukraine's Resistance Center reported that Russian forces are forcing civilians to construct fortifications in Kherson Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff added that Russian forces continued to evacuate unspecified occupiers and are stealing medical equipment from Kherson City hospitals.³⁸ Advisor to the Kherson Oblast Military Administration Serhiy Khlan stated that Russian forces have not yet prepared for street fights in Kherson City.³⁹

Ukrainian and Russian sources provided limited information regarding the situation on the Kherson Oblast frontline on October 29. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces struck Davydiv Brid and Mala Seideminukha (on the eastern bank of the Inhulets River) and Kobzartsi (about 60km east from Mykolaiv City).⁴⁰ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled five Ukrainian ground attacks in the directions of Mylove, Sukhanove, Pyatikhatky, Ishchenka, Bruskinske, and Sadok along the frontline in northern Kherson Oblast.⁴¹ A Russian milblogger also claimed that elements of the 126th Separate Guards Coastal Brigade and the 11th Guards Air Assault Brigade continued to operate in the northeastern direction in (presumably) western Kherson Oblast.⁴²

Ukrainian forces continued conducting their interdiction campaign on October 29. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian missile and artillery units destroyed three ammunition depots in the Beryslav and Mykolaiv Raions.⁴³ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command added that Ukrainian aviation also carried out eight strikes on Russian manpower and equipment concentration areas, air defense, and logistics support areas. Ukrainian social media sources reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Antonivsky Bridge and noted two explosions in Chornobaivka, northwest of Kherson City.⁴⁴

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



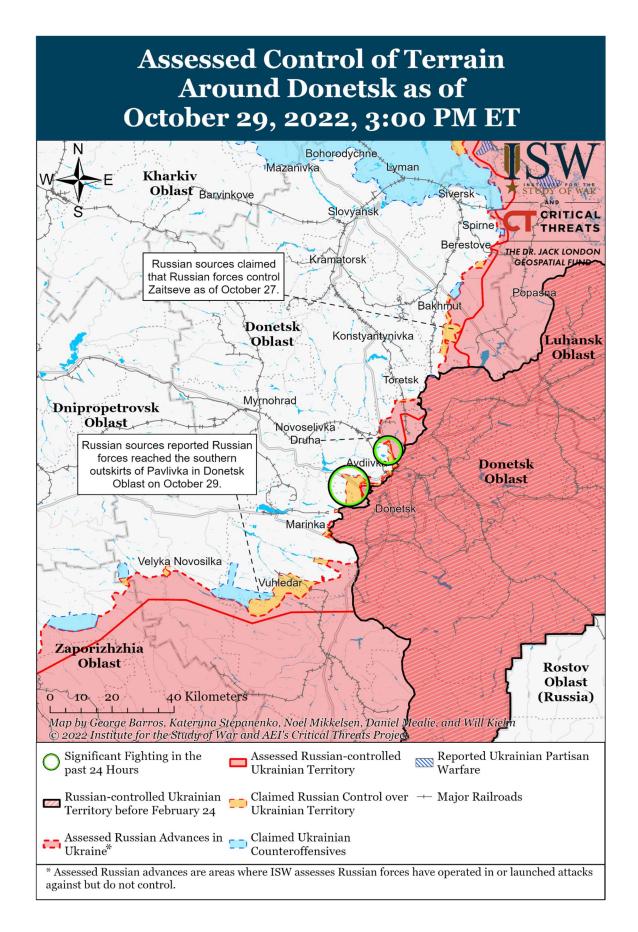
Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces likely slowed their tempo of offensive operations near Bakhmut on October 29, likely recovering from a Ukrainian strike on October 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted a high-precision strike against Russian forces, who were preparing for another attack, south of Bakhmut near Mayorsk on October 28.⁴⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the strike killed approximately 300 Russian personnel and that Russian forces evacuated 60 wounded personnel to a medical facility in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast.⁴⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff subsequently did not report any Russian ground assaults near Bakhmut in either its morning or its evening reports.⁴⁷

Russian milbloggers claimed *en masse* that Russian forces began an offensive push towards Vuhledar in western Donetsk Oblast on October 28-29.⁴⁸ A Russian source claimed that Russian forces attacked towards Pavlivka from positions to the south near Yehorivka and from the east near Mykilske.⁴⁹ Some Russian sources claimed that Russian forces destroyed the first line of Ukrainian defenses and entered the southeastern outskirts of Pavlivka.⁵⁰ None of these claims included corroborating combat footage. The Ukrainian General Staff did not report that Russian forces conducted any ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on October 29.⁵¹

Russian forces continued making incremental territorial gains near Donetsk City on October 29. Geolocated footage shows Russian forces entering the southeastern outskirts of Vodyane, north of Donetsk City.⁵² A Russian source claimed that Russian forces seized a section of the Mo4 highway and advanced near Nevelske and towards Pervomaiske, both northwest of Donetsk City.⁵³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults northeast of Avdiivka near Kamianka, north of Donetsk City near Vodyane, and northwest of Donetsk City near Nevelske.⁵⁴



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

Russian forces continued routine air, missile, and artillery strikes west of Hulyaipole and in Mykolaiv and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on October 29.55 Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that Russian forces struck Zaporizhzhia City, Mykolaiv City, Ochakiv, Nikopol, and Marhanets.56 Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to land on the south bank of the Dnipro River near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) but that Russian artillery fire repelled the attack.57

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

The Kremlin reportedly instructed Russian judges to not grant prisoners parole but instead to direct them towards recruitment in unspecified private military companies (PMCs), indicating an expansion of Wagner's influence over elements of the Russian criminal justice system. Russian human rights advocate Vladimir Osechkin claimed that unspecified Kremlin officials instructed Russian judges to not release prisoners on parole but direct them to military PMCs and noted that the Wagner Group recruits heavily from prisoners.⁵⁸ Osechkin stated that fewer prisoners are remaining in prison labor colonies, indicating that they are joining PMCs.⁵⁹ Osechkin's report also supports ISW's previous assessment that Russian military mobilization is increasing labor scarcity in Russia's labor market.⁶⁰

The Kremlin is likely conducting an information operation to reduce tensions between Christians and Muslims in Russia to cater to religious minority groups within the Russian armed forces. A Russian soldier filmed an appeal to the Arab world in the Middle East and North Africa in which the soldier claims Russia fights to protect the Christian and Islamic faith, customs, and traditions from "perverted Western liberal values." The soldier claimed that the US arms Ukraine just as the US armed ISIS in order to "destroy the countries of the Middle East." An unknown Russian entity called "Imarat Donbass" released an Islamic propaganda video around October 28 entitled the "Return of the Russian Caliphate," discussing how "all land belongs to Allah" and how Allah will grant land to those who fight in his name, while showing a compilation of Muslim soldiers fighting in Ukraine with nasheed music playing in the background. Muslim Russian servicemen committed a fratricidal altercation reportedly on religious grounds in Belgorod Oblast on October 15, and Russian social media footage showed a Russian officer beating a Muslim soldier for attempting to pray at a certain time on October 24.64

There is no strong evidence that the "Imarat Donbass" is an actual political or religious organization at this time. Some Russian sources describe it as a "media center." ⁶⁵ Imarat Donbass has been producing propaganda videos combining Islamic jihad elements overlaid with combat footage from the Russian war in Ukraine since at least May 2022. ⁶⁶ Russian milblogger Maxim Fomin promotes Imarat Donbass' content and features prominently in many of its videos. ⁶⁷

The Kremlin's various targeted information operations contradict each other. Kremlin information operations targeting politically-right Western audiences framing Russia as a bastion of Christianity and traditional Christian values are not compatible with other Russian information operations targeting the Muslim world that seek to portray Russia as an ally of Islam.

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

See topline text.

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.

 $^{^1} https://t.me/milinfolive/92614; \underline{https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1586358375389884417};$

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⁴⁸ https://t.me/vysokygovorit/9823; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/slavyangrad/17224; https://t.me/milchronicles/1255; https://t.me/rybar/40705; https://t.me/rybar/40705; https://t.me/aleksandr-skif/2460

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⁵¹https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0zA7WcoqouVyFz1RQYLwQup2y62RaGPMw6Nb6ywuau 9TCKU6bApiHJpGwY3HDs9n1l;

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²⁹ https://armyinform.com dot ua/2022/10/29/ukrayinski-vijskovi-vzyaly-pid-povnyj-vognevyj-kontrol-trasu-svatove-kreminna-na-donechchyni/; https://t.me/serhiy hayday/8510

³⁰ https://t.me/wargonzo/8946

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³⁵ https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/ukraines-intel-chief-on-how-the-war-ends-putins-nuclear-threats-iranian-drones-and-more

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