Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 12

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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.

Ukraine’s southern counteroffensive is continuing to have significant impacts on Russian morale and military capabilities in southern Ukraine. Satellite imagery of known Russian positions in Kyselivka, 15km northwest of Kherson City, shows that all but four Russian vehicles have departed from previous forward positions, consistent with rumors that Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) troops have abandoned Kyselivka and moved back towards the Dnipro River.[1] Kyselivka is an operationally significant location for Russian forces around Kherson City because it is the last major settlement along both the E58 highway and a railway line between current Ukrainian positions and Chornobaivka, the outermost part of Kherson City. The apparent withdrawal of Russian troops from this position may compromise the Russians’ ability to defend the northwestern outskirts of Kherson City and suggests that Russian troops in this area perceive an imminent threat to their positions. Spokesperson for Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command, Natalya Humenyuk, stated on September 12 that Russian forces located along the right bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast are attempting to negotiate for surrender under the auspices of international law.[2] Ukrainian operations in Kharkiv Oblast are unlikely to have had such a dramatic psychological effect on Russian troops this far south, and both the withdrawal of troops from forward positions in Kyselivka and reports of surrender negotiations are indicators that Ukrainian counteroffensives in the south are progressing in a significant way, even if visibility on this axis is limited by the shift in focus to Kharkiv.

The success of recent Ukrainian counteroffensive operations may be impacting the will or ability of the Russian military command to use newly formed volunteer units in Ukraine in a timely fashion. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Russian military command has suspended sending new, already-formed units to Ukraine due to recent Russian losses and widespread distrust of the Russian military command, factors which have caused a large number of volunteers to categorically refuse to participate in combat.[3] This assessment is still unconfirmed, but low morale due to Ukrainian counteroffensive success may prove devastating to the Kremlin’s already-poor ability to generate meaningful combat capability. The deployment of these newly formed units to reinforce defensive lines against Ukrainian counteroffensives would be an operationally-sound decision on the part of Russian military leadership; and the delay or potential suspension of these deployments will afford Ukrainian troops time to consolidate and then resume the offensive, should they choose to do so, without having to face newly arrived and fresh (albeit undertrained and understrength) units.
Key Takeaways

- Ukrainian forces are continuing to make impactful gains in Kherson Oblast and are steadily degrading the morale and combat capabilities of Russian forces in this area.
- The Russian military command may be suspending the deployment of newly formed units to Ukraine due to recent Russian losses and overall degraded morale.
- Russian forces are failing to reinforce the new frontline following Ukrainian gains in eastern Kharkiv Oblast and are actively fleeing the area or redeploying to other axes.
- Ukrainian forces continued targeting Russian military assets and positions in Kherson Oblast, likely steadily degrading them.
- The Ukrainian recapture of Izyum has likely degraded Russian forces’ ability to conduct artillery strikes along the Izyum-Slovyansk highway.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced the restoration of the second reserve power transmission line to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).
- Ukraine’s sweeping counteroffensive is damaging Russian administrative capabilities and driving Russian departures from occupied parts of Ukraine far behind the line of contact.
Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Mealie
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* 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)

Ukrainian forces continued to consolidate gains in eastern Kharkiv Oblast on September 12. The Kharkiv Oblast detachment of Ukrainian Azov Regiment Special Forces stated that Ukrainian troops have taken control of the entire northeastern part of Kharkiv Oblast along the Vesele-Vovchansk line.[4] Ukrainian sources confirmed that Ukrainian troops have retaken Dvorchina (100km east of Kharkiv City) and Ternova (30km northeast of Kharkiv City), demonstrating the range of the Ukrainian advance in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast.[5] Ukraine’s Airborne Assault Command also claimed that Ukrainian paratroopers took control of Bohorodychne, a small settlement in northwestern Donetsk Oblast directly along the southeastern Kharkiv Oblast border.[6] Geolocated imagery additionally shows that Ukrainian troops have taken full control of Sviatohirsk, 3km due east of Bohorodychne.[7]

Russian sources claimed that the front has largely stabilized at the Oskil River, which runs just west of the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border.[8] Russian milbloggers reported that Ukrainian and Russian forces are fighting around Lyman, but that Lyman remains under the control of Russian and proxy forces.[9] Some Russian sources also voiced concerns that Ukrainian troops are trying to cross the Siverskyi Donets River around Zakitne (about 15km southeast of Lyman) to take back Yampil.[10] Russian sources are seemingly focused on the Lyman-Yampil line as the next potential target for Ukrainian advances.

Russian forces are failing to reinforce the new frontline following Ukrainian gains in eastern Kharkiv Oblast and are actively fleeing the area or redeploying to other axes. Ukrainian sources claimed that all Russian forces have left Svatove, Luhansk Oblast (about 45km east of current Ukrainian positions along the Oskil River), and that only militia elements of the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR)—possibly locals—remain in Svatove.[11] Social media footage shows lines of cars stretching for kilometers near Schastia and Stanysia Luhanska, which are both along the border of long-held LNR territory and close to the Russian border.[12] Russian forces and pro-Russian collaborators are likely experiencing the psychological pressure of rapid Ukrainian gains and seek to remove themselves from settlements near the new frontline that they perceive as vulnerable to Ukrainian advances. Certain
proxy forces are also reportedly already redeploying from Kharkiv Oblast to southwestern Donetsk Oblast, indicating that the Russian command is not prioritizing reinforcing vulnerable positions east of the Oskil River.\[13\]
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of September 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

The Russian Defense Ministry’s daily briefing map of September 11 confirmed the withdrawal of Russian forces operating around Kharkiv City and on the western bank of the Oskil River on September 11.

The Russian Defense Ministry’s daily briefing map of September 11 confirmed the withdrawal of Russian forces operating around Kharkiv City and on the western bank of the Oskil River on September 11.

[Map showing key locations and Russian and Ukrainian forces]

Note: Ukrainian forces won the Battle of Kharkiv Oblast on September 11. The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed the withdrawal of Russian forces from this axis in its daily briefing map released on September 11. Ukrainian forces are likely still clearing some settlements in northern Kharkiv Oblast before announcing their full liberation.
Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Ukrainian military officials emphasized on September 12 that Ukrainian troops are making tangible gains in Kherson Oblast. Ukraine’s Kakhovka Operational Group announced that Ukrainian forces have penetrated the front line at depths between 4 and 12km in unspecified areas, amounting to over 500 square kilometers of liberated territory. The Kakhovka Group stated that Ukrainian troops have liberated 13 settlements, including Vysokopillya, Novoznesenske, Bilohirka, Sukhyi Stavok, and Myrolubivka. Ukrainian military officials also stated that Ukrainian troops are continuing an operational interdiction campaign and regularly striking Russian military, logistical, and transportation assets in southern Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade has lost more than 85% of its personnel and is now refusing to return to combat, suggesting that even brigade-level elements have suffered substantial losses as a result of the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Social media footage taken by residents of Kherson Oblast provides further visual evidence for Ukrainian strikes on Russian assets and positions in Kherson Oblast. Footage posted on September 12 shows smoke near the Antonivskyi Bridge in Kherson City following a Ukrainian strike, and residents reported the sound of explosions around Kherson City. Ukrainian sources additionally reported that Ukrainian troops successfully destroyed two Russian pontoon bridges near Darivka (15km northeast of Kherson City) and Nova Kakhovka (55km east of Kherson City), thus temporarily rendering passage across the Inhulets and Dnipro Rivers impossible in these areas.

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian sources discussed ground maneuvers along the Kherson-Mykolaiv frontline on September 12. Russian and Ukrainian sources discussed Russian indirect fire attacks on Ukrainian positions in northern and western Kherson Oblast, confirming that Ukrainian troops are holding recently recaptured positions near the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border and near the Sukhyi Stavok pocket in western Kherson Oblast. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued to provide likely excessive figures for Ukrainian losses in Kherson Oblast but did not make any additional claims on September 12. Russian sources are increasingly focused on providing commentary on Ukrainian advances in Kharkiv Oblast.
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Geolocated footage posted on September 8 shows Ukrainian forces have recaptured Ternovi Pody.

Indirect fire reports indicate Ukrainian advances near Myroliubivka and Novovoskrensnsk on September 10.

Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- 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: Ukrainian officials announced on August 29 that Ukrainian forces began a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast. An unnamed military official of an unspecified country told CNN on August 29 that Ukrainian forces liberated Pravdyne, Nova Dmytryvka, and Tomyna Balka (northwest of Kherson City) and Arkhanhelske (along the Inhulets River). ISW will readjust the maps when more open sources confirm the liberation of these settlements. ISW extended Ukrainian counteroffensives to Suhilii Stavok based on several claims from Russian milbloggers that Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement on August 29. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back to Suhilii Stavok from Kostromka and Bezimenne on September 3. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched air strikes on Bezimenne and Kostromka on September 4, which may indicate a Ukrainian advance in the area.
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)

The Ukrainian recapture of Izyum has likely degraded Russian forces’ ability to conduct artillery strikes along the Izyum-Sloviansk highway. The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces did not conduct artillery strikes in the Sloviansk direction on September 12, likely referring to settlements northwest of Sloviansk on the E40 highway.\[22\] Russian forces continued routine fire on Sloviansk and the surrounding area to the east, southeast, and south.\[23\]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on September 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults on various settlements around Bakhmut and Avdiivka.\[24\] The continued ground attacks in this area far from the counteroffensive frontlines are noteworthy because Central Military District Commander Colonel General Alexander Lapin was given responsibility for the western grouping of forces that had been in Kharkiv Oblast following the loss of most of that oblast to Ukrainian forces. Lapin has shown no indication that he intends to alter his ongoing limited offensive campaign despite suddenly receiving responsibility for a collapsing front. He appears instead determined to continue attacks that have no meaningful chance of securing operationally significant, let alone decisive, gains. Russian forces continued routine fire along the line of contact in Donetsk Oblast.\[25\]

Russian sources did not conduct any ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast or eastern Zaporizhia Oblast and continued routine fire along the line of contact east of Hulyaipole.\[26\] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are concentrating in the Vuhledar area and expressed concern that Ukrainian forces may launch ground attacks towards Vuhledar in the coming days.\[27\] However, one Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces in this area have since dispersed.\[28\]
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Ukrainian forces captured Sviatohirsk on September 12.

Ukrainian forces recaptured Bilohorivka, Luhansk Oblast, on September 10. Russian forces no longer control all of Luhansk Oblast as of September 10.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Medley. © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project.

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

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: ISW recessed assessed Russian advances to a poultry farm in eastern Verkhnykamyanske, Donetsk Oblast, and recessed Russian claimed control around Siversk based on geolocated footage published on September 5 that shows Russian forces targeting Ukrainian positions at the poultry farm.
Supporting Effort- Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces did not conduct any ground attacks in Zaporizhia Oblast west of Hulyaipole and continued routine fire throughout Mykolaiv Oblast on September 12. [29] Russian forces also continued routine shelling in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast along the north bank of the Kakhovka Reservoir. [30]

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced the restoration of the second reserve power transmission line to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on September 12. [31] The IAEA stated that this power transmission line allows Energoatom to keep one power line in reserve while the remaining line provides the ZNPP with necessary electricity to sustain essential safety operations during and after the cold shutdown. [32] The restoration of more power transmission lines to the ZNPP reestablishes safeguards that the Russian militarization and likely shelling of the ZNPP previously threatened or eliminated. Russian Zaporizhzhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov stated that ZNPP operations can restart after shelling ceases and the line of contact moves away from the plant, indicating that Russian officials likely hope to restart the plant and direct its energy production toward Russian grids in the future. [33] Russian officials have no formal authority to order the plant to start or to shut down and would likely have either to replace or coerce the Ukrainians operating the plant to restart it.

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

Nothing significant to report.

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)

Ukraine’s sweeping counteroffensive is damaging Russian administrative capabilities and driving Russian departures from occupied parts of Ukraine far behind the line of contact. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on September 12 that Russian forces throughout occupied Kherson Oblast have restricted general freedom of movement, strengthened military checkpoints, and increased looting, particularly of motorcycles—all apparent signs of Russian desperation. [34] Russian forces may be looting mopeds and motorcycles to flee in the event of a military collapse. The Russian-backed head of occupied Crimea, Sergey Aksenov, claimed on September 12 that Russian FSB officers detained Ukrainian “terrorists” who were planning an attack on the Kherson Occupation Administration. [35] The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that Russian forces increased patrols and checkpoints around Mariupol on September 12 to thwart Ukrainian “sabotage.” [36]

The impacts of Ukrainian counteroffensives may reduce the likelihood that Russia will hold sham annexation referenda in occupied territories in the next month. The Center reported that “a number of” specialists remain in occupied Kherson, but that the Kremlin has put the referendum “on pause.” The Russian-appointed head of Zaporizhia Oblast, Evgeny Balitsky, claimed on September 12 that the Zaporizhia Occupation Administration would hold its annexation referendum “as soon as we are ready in terms of security.” Balitsky also claimed that 86% of Zaporizhia residents support Russian annexation of the oblast—indicating either that occupation officials are conducting fake public
The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Ukrainian forces will use facial recognition and other intelligence to identify Russian officials and Ukrainian collaborators in newly liberated Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian forces arrested the occupation administration head of the village of Ivanivka, Kharkiv Oblast on September 9 and the collaborationist chief of occupation police for Balakliya, Kharkiv Oblast by September 11 and plan to prosecute both officials.[38]

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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