Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 9

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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.

Ukrainian forces have captured an estimated 2,500 square kilometers in Kharkiv Oblast in the Kharkiv area counteroffensive as of September 9. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhnyi stated on September 8 that Ukrainian forces liberated over 1,000 square kilometers between September 1-8 – a day before Ukrainian forces reached the southern approach to Kupyansk and the Oskil River on September 9.1 Ukrainian forces are likely clearing pockets of disorganized Russian forces caught in the rapid Ukrainian advance to Kupyansk, Izyum, and the Oskil River, given the influx of observed pictures of Russian prisoners of war in the past 48 hours.2

Ukrainian forces may collapse Russian positions around Izyum if they sever Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) north and south of Izyum. Ukrainian forces continued to advance on Kupyansk and towards Izyum on September 9, and are undertaking measures to isolate the Russian Izyum grouping of forces. If Ukrainians are successful in severing the Russian GLOCs, then they will have an opportunity to create a cauldron around Izyum and collapse a major portion of the Russian positions in northeastern Ukraine.

The Kremlin is rushing resources to the Kharkiv City-Izyum line in an attempt to halt Ukrainian advances after Ukrainian forces achieved remarkable operational surprise. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Kremlin wires published footage of Russian military convoys reportedly en route to reinforce Kupyansk, Izyum, and the general Kharkiv direction but did not acknowledge Ukrainian successes in the area.3 While Russian milbloggers largely welcomed the reports of reinforcements, some criticized the Kremlin for first relocating units away from the Kharkiv City-Izyum line, only to deploy them again to the same location.4 Russian forces have been redeploying out of southern Kharkiv Oblast to reinforce Donetsk Oblast and the Southern Axis to address the threat of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast and to resume offensive operations west of Donetsk City for several weeks.5 The successful Ukrainian counteroffensive is upending the Kremlin’s effort to make Izyum an economy of force area. Some milbloggers also noted that September 10 will be a decisive day if Russians are unable to generate reserves and capable command in time.6

The Kremlin is refusing to publicly address Ukrainian successes in Kharkiv Oblast, but the counteroffensive likely prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to convene a meeting with top Russian security and political officials on September 9.7 The Kremlin did not discuss the topic of the security council meeting, and the Kremlin’s Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that the Kremlin will not comment on the
“situation around Balakliya and other events in the special operation zone.”° Peskov directed all inquiries regarding the issue to the Russian MoD.

Ukraine’s counteroffensive operation in Kherson Oblast to degrade Russian forces on the Southern Axis is continuing simultaneously with Ukrainian operations on the Kharkiv City-Izyum line. Ukrainian forces are continuing to target Russian pontoon and ferry crossings daily, which indicates a long-term commitment to consistently destroying re-emerging Russian GLOCs. Ukrainian forces are maintaining a strict operational silence in southern Ukraine, which may appear as if Ukrainian forces are not advancing. Ukrainian forces are also likely operating in several directions in Kherson Oblast.

Key Takeaways
- Ukrainian forces have captured an estimated 2,500 square kilometers in Kharkiv Oblast in the Kharkiv counteroffensive as of September 9.
- The Kremlin is rushing resources to Kharkiv Oblast in response to effective Ukrainian operations.
- Ukrainian forces reached the outskirts of Kupyansk and are advancing on Izyum from the northwest, north, northeast, and southeast as of September 9 and will likely sever Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCS) to Izyum within the coming days.
- Ukrainian forces may have advanced north of Hrushivka towards a Russian logistics hub in Velykyi Burluk, northeastern Kharkiv Oblast.
- Ukrainian forces are continuing counteroffensive operations in southern Ukraine, including interdicting Russian GLOCs, degrading Russian morale.
- Russian forces conducted ground assaults north of Kharkiv City and across the Eastern Axis.
- The United Nations released a report detailing poor Russian treatment of Ukrainian POWs and detained civilians.

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 1- Kharkiv City
- Russian Supporting Effort 2- 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-Izym-Lyman Line)

Ukrainian forces reached the outskirts of Kupyansk and are advancing on Izym from the northwest, north, northeast and southeast as of September 9. Ukrainian forces will likely sever Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izym within the coming days, possibly collapsing Russian positions in this area. A geolocated image confirms Ukrainian forces reached the southern outskirts of Kupyansk on September 9 along the R79 highway, and Russian sources reported ongoing tank battles in the area. Ukrainian strikes have damaged the Kupyansk bridge over the Oskil River likely beyond usability, which will degrade Russian forces’ ability to supply and reinforce their positions against Ukrainian assaults. Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces also reached the west bank of the Oskil River at Senkove and advanced south on the R79 at least as far as the northern outskirts of Horokhovatka (20km northeast of Izym). Unconfirmed reports state that Ukrainian forces reached Oskil (7km east of Izym), which would severely disrupt the Russian GLOCs from Izym to Lyman and degrade the ability of Russian forces in Lyman to support defensive operations in Izym. Russian sources reported that Ukrainian forces launched ground attacks in the Lyman area. A Russian source expressed worry that Ukrainian forces intend to either pin Russian forces in Lyman so they cannot reinforce Russian forces in Izym or seize Lyman and advance on Izym from the southeast.

Russian forces and occupation authorities in the rear of occupied Kharkiv Oblast are panicking to reinforce Russian positions and “evacuate civilians” amid the high pace of the Ukrainian advance. Geolocated Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) footage shows Russian military convoys in Raihorodka, Luhansk Oblast driving north reportedly to reinforce Russian forces in unspecified areas of Kharkiv Oblast. This footage is so far the Russian MoD’s only acknowledgement of the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast. Russian sources reported that Russian forces are reinforcing Kupyansk and Izym with manpower, armor, and other vehicles via ground convoys and transport helicopters. A Russian source claimed that some Russian units previously redeployed to unspecified axes far from the Kharkiv Oblast Axis are being rushed back to the Kharkiv Oblast Axis to defend against the counteroffensive. Kharkiv Oblast occupation administration head Vitaly Ganchev announced the evacuation of civilians from Kupyansk, Velykyi Burluk (about 42km northwest of Kupyansk), and Izym, reportedly towards Svatove, Luhansk Oblast, a major Russian transportation node connecting eastern Kharkiv Oblast with northern Luhansk Oblast.

Ukrainian and Russian sources also suggested that Ukrainian forces may have advanced north of Hrushivka (12km west of Kupyansk) towards the Russian logistics hub in Velykyi Burluk, but these reports remain ambiguous and unconfirmed. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault in Plotske on September 9. There are 16 known villages named Plotske in Ukraine, and only one village - located three kilometers southwest of Velykyi Burluk - is near Russian-occupied territories. NASA’s Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) remotely sensed data showed fires about eight kilometers southwest of Plotske. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces conducted a strike on an unspecified settlement called Yuriyivka, which could suggest a strike at the Yurivka 7 kilometers north of Velykyi Burluk. The Ukrainian General Staff did not specify the Oblast or location of the Yurivka village. Former Russian military commander and milblogger Igor Girkin also claimed that Ukrainian forces are launching attacks in the direction of the northernmost Russian logistics hub in Vovchansk. Girkin’s directionality is vague and notional, but Velykyi Burluk is in the direction of...
Vovchansk if Ukrainians are moving from Hrushivka. Ganchev’s evacuation order for Velyky Burluk may also suggest that Ukrainian forces are within artillery range of the settlement. Russian sources also previously claimed that Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups conducted an unspecified operation near Vovchansk and Hnylytsya (approximately 15km west of Velykyi Burluk) on September 7.23 Ukrainian and Russian sources previously reported on Ukrainian activity on the eastern bank of the Pechenihiy Reservoir, which may indicate that Russian forces hold positions closer to Velyky Burluk rather than the reservoir.24 ISW will continue to monitor the situation and update its assessment of Russian control of terrain.


**Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)**

Ukrainian military officials kept their operational silence regarding the progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast on September 9 but reiterated that Ukrainian forces are continuing to interdict Russian logistics in southern Ukraine.25 Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command stated that Ukrainian missile units struck two Russian pontoon crossings in Darivka and Nova Kakhovka over the Inhulets and Dnipro rivers.26 ISW previously reported that social media users witnessed explosions near the Darivka bridge on September 8, which is consistent with the Ukrainian official statement.27 Ukrainian aviation and missile units reportedly struck a ferry crossing in Nova Kakhovka, two ammunition depots in Beryslav Raion, and several command-and-control posts throughout Kherson Oblast.28 Odesa Oblast Military Administration Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk stated that Ukrainian forces struck barges in Hola Prystan (about 12km southwest of Kherson City) that Russian forces likely intended to use as a pontoon crossing over the Dnipro River.29 Local reports corroborated Baratchuk’s statement, but the Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces shot down Ukrainian HIMARS and Olkha rockets in the vicinity of Hola Prystan.30 Local Telegram channels reported the activation of Russian air defense
systems in Nova Kakhovka, and many residents reportedly heard explosions in unspecified parts of the city.\textsuperscript{31}

Ukrainian military officials stated that Ukrainian counteroffensives in southern Ukraine are continuing to degrade morale among Russian servicemen. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces are intensifying air patrols over Babenkovka Druha (22km northwest of the Kherson Oblast-Crimea western border) due to the increasing number of Russian deserters.\textsuperscript{32} Social media footage previously reported that six Russian jets flew over Chaplynka (about 22km due northeast of Babenkovka Druha) on September 1, which may indicate that Russian forces are conducting air patrols along the Kherson Oblast-Crimea border.\textsuperscript{33} The Ukrainian General Staff added that some unarmed Russian servicemen moved through the southwestern part of Kherson Oblast to Crimea and noted that Russian forces are prohibiting civilians from leaving Velyka Oleksandrivka on the Inhulets River to use them as "human shields" against Ukrainian counteroffensives.\textsuperscript{34}

Ukrainian and Russian sources identified three areas of kinetic activity in Kherson Oblast on September 9: near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River, south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast administrative border, and northwest of Kherson City. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on Bezimenne (approximately 12km southeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River), and the Russian MoD claimed that Russian artillery continued to strike Ukrainian military equipment and personnel in Bezimenne. Local Telegram channels published footage of Ukrainian forces raising a flag in Blahodativka also on the eastern bank of the Inhulets River, confirming previous Russian milblogger claims that Ukrainian forces advanced to the settlement on September 3. Russian forces notably launched air and missile strikes on Barvinok (about 14km north of Kherson City) and shelled Novovoskresenske (about 20 km south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border), areas in which ISW assesses Russian forces are operating. The head of the Kherson Oblast occupation regime, Kirill Stremousov, claimed that Ukrainian forces are not conducting offensive operations in Snihurivka (about 60 east of Mykolaiv City), but have shelled the settlement with artillery.

The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces made several unsuccessful assaults along the Kherson Oblast border. Milbloggers significantly decreased their coverage and discussions of the southern counteroffensive in favor of reporting on the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast.

**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 did not conduct any confirmed ground assaults near Siversk on September 9 and continued routine strikes on Siversk and the surrounding settlements.\textsuperscript{40}

Russian forces conducted ground assaults south of Bakhmut on September 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults on Zaitseve, Mykolaivka Druha, and Maiorsk, all within 20km of Bakhmut. Geolocated footage posted on September 7 shows that Wagner Group elements advanced to a power station in northeastern Vesele Dolyna (southeast of Bakhmut) to conduct an ambush on an
The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces conducted airstrikes on Bakhmut. Russian forces continued routine artillery strikes on Bakhmut and the surrounding areas.

Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults on and near Avdiivka on September 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults on Avdiivka and Kamyanka (18km north of Donetsk City). Russian forces continued routine artillery strikes on Avdiivka and the surrounding settlements.

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted an assault southwest of Avdiivka on September 9. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to seize Pisky but that Russian and DNR forces repelled the attack.

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack west of Donetsk City on September 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground assault on Pobieda, 4km west of Marinka. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces struck Hulyaipole and Rivnopillya (11km north of Hulyaipole) in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast. Russian forces continued routine artillery strikes along the western Donetsk Oblast-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast line of contact.

Supporting Effort #1 - Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults north and northeast of Kharkiv City on September 9. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults near Prudyanka (north of Kharkiv City on the T2117), Ruski Tyshky (20km northeast of Kharkiv City), and Kostyantynivka (13km north of Zolochiv), and Udy. Russian forces continued routine artillery and airstrikes on Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements.

Supporting Effort #2 - Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces maintained defensive positions in western Zaporizhia Oblast and maintained their shelling and missile campaign throughout the Southern Axis on September 9. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported that Russian forces have turned five schools in Melitopol into military bases and noted that Ukrainian partisans already destroyed one such base. Social media users also reported a large unidentified explosion in Berdyansk. Russian forces conducted missile strikes on settlements in Mykolaiv Oblast, fired at Nikopol with heavy tube artillery, and launched an airstrike on Radushne in Kryvyi Rih Raion.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) did not identify the responsible party for shelling of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on September 8-9. The shelling may prompt Ukrainian officials to shut down the ZNPP’s operations. IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi stated that there is now a low chance that reliable off-site power can be restored at the ZNPP because of increased shelling targeting Enerhodar. Grossi noted that the shelling on September 8-9 (which resulted in a power blackout in Enerhodar) affected the Zaporizhzhia Thermal Power Plant (ZTPP) that serves as an offsite power source for the ZNPP. Grossi said that the IAEA understands if Ukrainian nuclear operating enterprise Energoatom decides to shut down the remaining operating reactor at the ZNPP due to continuous shelling, but warned that Energoatom will not be able to restart ZNPP.
operations unless they re-establish offsite power. Grossi called for the establishment of a safety zone around the plant. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) blamed Ukrainian forces for firing 27 shells at Enerhodar and bombarding the city six times resulting in a power outage.\textsuperscript{58} The Russian MoD maintained its narrative that Ukrainian authorities are deliberately attempting to create a “man-made disaster” at the ZNPP.

Russian and proxy sources claimed that Russian forces stopped a series of Ukrainian special operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on September 9. Proxy officials claimed to have stopped the landing of Ukrainian special forces in Enerhodar, Dniprorudne, and Vasylivka (all on the southern bank of the Kakhovka Reservoir).\textsuperscript{59} Ukrainian special forces previously conducted a successful operation in Kamianka-Dniprovska (west of Enerhodar) on September 5, and Russian sources may be attempting to information conditions to accuse Ukrainian forces of targeting the ZNPP or civilian infrastructure.\textsuperscript{60}

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

Russian Armed Forces are continuing to offer financial incentives to attract fighters to fight in Ukraine. A Russian milblogger reported that Russian Armed Forces are forming “Storm” assault detachments and are offering individual recruits financial rewards for every square kilometer of land captured in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{61} The milblogger specified that the Russian Armed Forces are forming these new assault detachments with elements of the failed Russian Combat Army Reserve (BARS) initiative.\textsuperscript{62} ISW previously reported that the Armavir City Military Recruitment Center in Krasnodar Krai previously also promised each serviceman 50,000 rubles (about $840) for each kilometer that a recruit advances on the frontline.\textsuperscript{63} This new effort indicates that Russian recruiters are desperate to lure any men into assault detachments with the promise of financial rewards and motivate them to make advances, despite previously failing to generate recruits with financial incentives through prior recruitment campaigns such as BARS and the formation of volunteer units.

Former Security Minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Alexander Khodakovsky called on Russia’s military command to better supply existing units on the ground before announcing new recruitment campaigns or declaring mobilization.\textsuperscript{64} Khodakovsky added that Ukrainian forces managed to launch counteroffensives in Kherson and Kharkiv Oblasts because Russian units lack the necessary equipment to repel Ukrainian advances. Khodakovsky’s argument highlights the Kremlin’s tendency to commit additional inexperienced and unprepared “cannon fodder” forces to the frontlines, without investing in adequate equipment or establishing logistic support necessary to support combat forces.

Benefit payment disparities between among members of Russian volunteer units and BARS servicemen may cause rifts within combat forces. A wounded BARS serviceman published an appeal addressing the Chelyabinsk Oblast governor, stating that the oblast government failed pay him regional bonuses promised to other participants of the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{65} Chelyabinsk Oblast officials, in turn, stated that regions only provide special bonus payments to recruits within the Chelyabinsk volunteer battalions. Russian opposition outlet Novaya Gazeta previously reported that although BARS elements and volunteer units are subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Defense under the same military contract, they may receive different payments.\textsuperscript{66} The Ukrainian Strategic Communications Center also reported that BARS servicemen did not administratively have the Russian MoD as a specified payee on their military contacts, which overcomplicates bureaucratic processes such as filling for veteran benefits, medical
treatment, and payments.\textsuperscript{67} These complications are likely to degrade the effectiveness of Russian recruitment efforts and degrade morale among personnel who receive disparate benefits despite serving in similar capacities.

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed the Russian 237th Guards Air Assault Regiment (of the 76th Airborne Division) and that the regiment “ceased to exist due to the death or injury of all servicemen.”\textsuperscript{68} The GUR also added that Russian military commanders are dissatisfied with new recruits operating in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast direction because most of them are 55 to 60 years of age.\textsuperscript{69}

**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)**

The United Nations (UN) released a report on September 9 detailing poor Russian treatment of Ukrainian POWs and detained civilians. Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine Matilda Bogner stated that Russian authorities are preventing UN officials from visiting Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) currently held in Russia and Russian-occupied territories.\textsuperscript{70} Bogner stated that the UN has documented instances of torture, poor treatment, and lack of adequate food, water, healthcare, and sanitation in POW sites.\textsuperscript{71} Bogner also reported infectious disease breakouts at a Russian penal colony in Olenivka, Donetsk Oblast, likely the same colony where Russian forces killed 53 Ukrainian POWs on July 28.\textsuperscript{72} Bogner stated that the UN has recorded instances of Russian authorities preventing Ukrainian POWs from contacting their families to inform on the POWs’ detention, location, and health.\textsuperscript{73} The UN recorded that Russian authorities in occupied Ukraine have arbitrarily detained or enforced the disappearances of 416 Ukrainian civilians, of whom 166 were released and 16 were found dead.\textsuperscript{74}

Ukrainian forces continued efforts to demoralize Russian forces and civilians in occupied Crimea. Odesa Military Administration Spokesman Serhiy Bratchuk reported that television channels in occupied Crimea are broadcasting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s August 30 speech calling for the deoccupation of Crimea and warning local residents to stay away from Russian military facilities.\textsuperscript{75} Ukrainian hackers previously hacked Crimean television channels and a sign on the Kerch Strait Bridge to show pro-Ukrainian messaging on August 20.\textsuperscript{76}

Russian occupation authorities are likely artificially inflating claimed local support for annexation referenda in Russian-occupied territories. Advisor to Kherson Oblast Military Administration Head Serhiy Khlan stated that Kherson Oblast occupation authorities are spreading falsely inflated poll numbers of civilian support on propaganda sites. Khlan stated that one poll claims that 71% of Kherson Oblast residents are ready to vote in the referendum and that 76% support annexation, while a second poll claims 61% are ready to vote and 63% support annexation.\textsuperscript{77}

**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.

2 https://t.me/rybar/38458; https://t.me/rysnya200/3354; https://t.me/rysnya200/3322; https://t.me/rysnya200/3309
3 https://t.me/rian_ru/177285; https://t.me/mod_russia/19693; https://t.me/mod_russia/19696; https://t.me/readovkanews/41483; https://t.me/readovkanews/41490
4 https://t.me/wargonzo/8180; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/9349; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/9344; https://t.me/vysokygovorit/9342
5 https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-14
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Institute for the Study of War and AEI’s Critical Threats Project
2022
In this briefing note, the UN Human Rights Council invited Ukraine, the Kyiv government, and the Kyiv municipal council to show a united and impartial position on the Ukrainian authorities’ answers to the war and its critical threats in the Kyiv region.

The briefing note acknowledged local government initiatives to improve security and safety, and emphasized the need for ongoing cooperation and support from the international community.

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