## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 8

Layne Philipson, Katherine Lawlor, Karolina Hird, George Barros, Angela Howard, and Frederick W. Kagan
August 8, 7:00 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.

Western and Ukrainian outlets circulated a report, likely false, of a Russian general allegedly threatening to destroy Europe's largest nuclear facility, the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), if Russia could not hold the plant. Multiple news outlets shared a screenshot from the Russian social networking site Vkontakte that claimed to cite the Russian head of the Zaporizhia occupation garrison, Major General Valery Vasilev, stating that Russia had mined the Zaporizhzhia NPP and that the plant would be "either Russian land or a scorched desert." The screenshot appeared to be a news report posted in a Vkontakte group run by Russian outlet *Lenta Novosti Zaporizhia*. The outlet itself claimed that the screenshot was from a faked group and denied writing the report. The Russian Ministry of Defense condemned the report and screenshot as a "fake" and claimed that Vasilev was in Uzbekistan at the time he was purported to have made the statement to forces at Zaporizhzhia. Regardless of the origin (or existence) of the original post, the reporting is unreliable. It is indirect and does not claim to cite an official statement or a statement made on any official Russian news or government website.

This likely misreporting distracts from the very real risks of Russia's militarization of the Zaporizhzhia NPP, which may include mining the plant and almost certainly includes the unsafe storage of military armaments near nuclear reactors and nuclear waste storage facilities. Bellingcat geolocated a drone video of the Zaporizhia NPP that was shared by Russian opposition outlet *The Insider* on August 5. The video depicts Russian military vehicles moving in and around the plant, including military trucks and armored vehicles moving around and into the building containing the first of the plant's six nuclear reactors. Russian forces have also dug trenches in and around the plant and may have established firing positions. Russian officials claim that Ukraine has repeatedly attacked the plant, while Ukrainian officials claim that Russian forces are attacking Ukrainian positions from within the plant, preventing Ukrainian return fire and essentially using the plant as a nuclear shield. Russian forces have repeatedly shelled the nearby Ukrainian-controlled town of Nikopol, likely from positions in or around the NPP, since July.

ISW continues to assess that Russian forces are likely leveraging the threat of nuclear disaster to degrade Western will to provide military support to a Ukrainian counteroffensive.<sup>9</sup>

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.

## **Key Takeaways**

 Reporting of a likely falsified Russian statement distracts from the real risks of a Russian-caused nuclear disaster at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Russian forces continue to conduct attacks from and store military equipment near the plant's nuclear reactors, likely to play upon Western fears of a nuclear disaster and degrade Western will to provide additional military support to Ukraine.

- Russian forces conducted ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk and northeast and southeast of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces continued ground attacks northwest and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Russian officials postponed reopening the Antonivskyi Bridge after a Ukrainian strike damaged the bridge and nearby construction equipment.
- Russian forces are deploying less-professional occupation forces and increasing pressure on Ukrainian populations in occupied areas.

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.

- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian Troops in the Cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis
- Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



### Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

<u>Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts</u> (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed advances northwest of Izyum on August 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted an airstrike on Zalyman, approximately 30 km northwest of Izyum, and shelled settlements north of Izyum, including Husarivka and Asiivka.<sup>10</sup>

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack northwest of Slovyansk on August 8. The Ukrainian General staff reported that Russian forces conducted a failed offensive to improve their positions near Bohorodychne.<sup>11</sup> Russian forces continued to shell settlements between Izyum and Slovyansk along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border and additionally conducted an artillery strike directly on Slovyansk.<sup>12</sup> Russian journalist and milblogger Evgeniy Poddubniy claimed on August 7 that Ukrainian forces are continually forming new brigades in Kharkiv Oblast despite continuous Russian strikes and projected that this force generation shows that Ukrainian forces can simultaneously conduct advances in the Kherson direction and in Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>13</sup>

Russian forces conducted ground assaults to the east of Siversk on August 8. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces attempted failed offensives in the direction of Verkhnokamyanskye (5 km east of Siversk) and four other unnamed settlements but retreated with losses. <sup>14</sup> Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai also reported that Ukrainian forces neutralized Russian reconnaissance groups near unspecified settlements. <sup>15</sup> Russian forces continued to shell Siversk and nearby settlements with tank, tube, and rocket artillery and targeted neighboring villages, Hryhorivka and Ivano-Darivka, with airstrikes. <sup>16</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks to the east and south of Bakhmut on August 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces defeated Russian reconnaissance groups of unspecified echelons near Bakhmutske, and Yakovlivka—villages approximately 15 km northeast of Bakhmut—and that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults near Zaitseve and Vershyna—villages approximately 10 km southeast of Bakhmut.¹¹ Russian forces likely seek to establish control over Soledar to Bakhmut's north and Zaitseve to Bakhmut's south to set conditions to disrupt Ukrainian control over the To513 trunk road that supports Ukrainian frontline positions in northeast Donetsk Oblast.

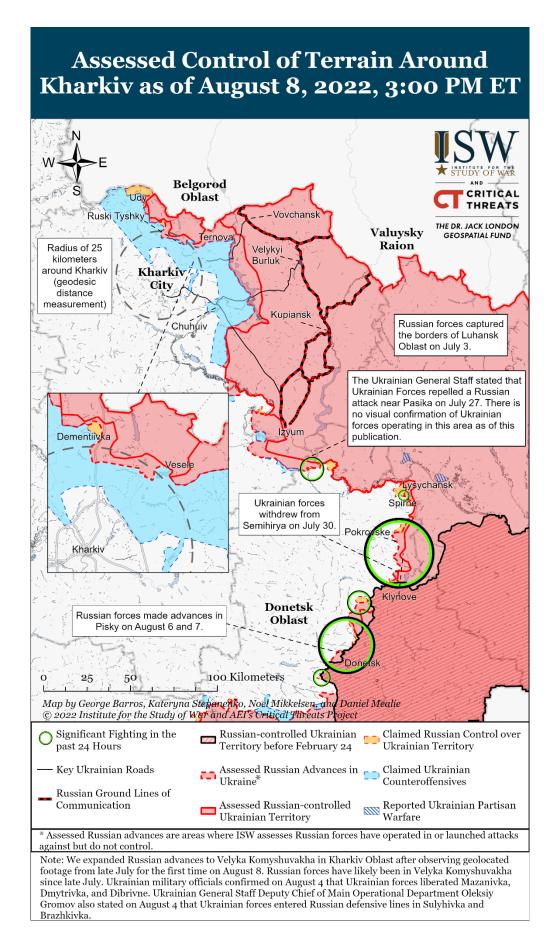
Russian forces continued ground attacks to the northwest and southwest of Donetsk City on August 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to advance toward Avdiivka (5 km north of Donetsk City) Pisky (5 km northwest of Donetsk City), and Nevelske (12 km northwest of Donetsk City). Social media footage posted on August 7 previously showed Russian forces advancing within Pisky itself and, taken in tandem with the vague language of the Ukrainian General Staff report, Russian forces are likely focusing on advancing northwest through Pisky from positions in the center of the settlement. Russian troops additionally conducted localized ground attacks southwest of Donetsk City near Maryinka and Shevchenko. Donetsk City near Maryinka and Shevchenko.

#### **Assessed Control of Terrain Around** Donetsk as of August 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET Mazanivka Kharkiy Oblast Barvinkove Slovyansk Spirne THREATS Berestove THE DR. JACK LONDON Kramatorsk GEOSPATIAL FUNE Ukrainian forces withdrew from Semihirva on July 30. Popasna Donetsk Konstyantynivka Luhansk Oblast **Oblast** Toretsk Russian forces likely captured Traveneve on August 5. Dnipropetrovsk Novoselivka Oblast Druha Russian forces reached the Butivka coal mine Avdiivka Donetsk ventilation shaft on **Oblast** August 2. Russian forces made advances in Pisky on Marinka August 6 and 7. Velyka Novosilka Russian sources claimed control over Vuhledar half of Marinka on August 5. Zaporizhzhia **Oblast** Rostov **Oblast** 40 Kilometers ~10x (Russia) Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Mealie © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Projec Significant Fighting in the Assessed Russian-controlled Reported Ukrainian Partisan past 24 Hours Ukrainian Territory Russian-controlled Ukrainian Claimed Russian Control over - Major Railroads Territory before February 24 **Ukrainian Territory** Assessed Russian Advances in 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 expanded Russian control of terrain over Semihirya given that Ukrainian General Staff Deputy Chief

Note: ISW expanded Russian control of terrain over Semihirya given that Ukrainian General Staff Deputy Chief of Main Operational Department Oleksiy Gromov confirmed on August 4 that Ukrainian forces withdrew from the settlement on July 30. Gromov also confirmed on August 4 that Ukrainian forces left their positions around Butivka Coal Mine on July 30, but Russian forces likely seized Ukrainian positions on August 2.

# <u>Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City</u> (Russian objective: Defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum and prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks northeast of Kharkiv City and focused on maintaining their current lines on August 8.21 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted airstrikes and UAV reconnaissance northeast of Kharkiv City.22 Russian forces also struck residential areas near central Kharkiv City with multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and continued to strike Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements with S-300 missiles, mortars, tanks, and tank, tube, and rocket artillery.23

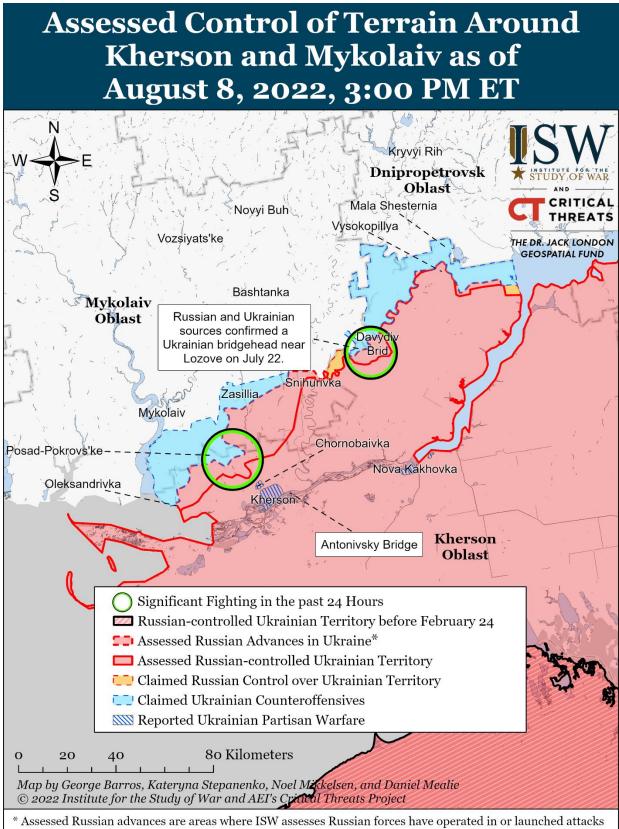


# <u>Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces continued focusing efforts on maintaining their current positions and preventing Ukrainian advances along the Southern Axis on August 8.24 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued shelling civilian and military infrastructure using tank, tube, and rocket artillery and intensified aerial reconnaissance using UAVs along the entire line of contact.25 Russian forces also conducted airstrikes on Lozove and Andriivka, both on the eastern bank of the Inhulets River, and Olhyne, located along the northern part of the T2207 highway.26 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces also conducted airstrikes in Prechistivka, Volodymyrivka, Novomykhailivka, and Poltavka.27

Russian forces continued to target settlements in Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts with artillery and missiles. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched two Kh-59 cruise missiles at Kamianske and continued shelling Nikopol, Zelendolsk, Marhanets, and Velika Kostromka, Dniprotrovsk Oblast.<sup>28</sup> Russian forces also continued shelling settlements on the outskirts of Mykolaiv City but did not launch any strikes directly on Mykolaiv City.<sup>29</sup> Odesa officials reported that Ukrainian air defense forces shot down four Russian Kalibr missiles fired from the Black Sea.<sup>30</sup>

Ukrainian forces continued targeting Russian military positions and ammunition depots in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported that Ukrainian high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) strikes destroyed a "significant amount of" Russian military equipment and manpower concentrations in industrial districts throughout Melitopol at night on August 7-8.31 Fedorov also noted that Russian forces transferred a significant part of their air defense systems from Melitopol to Kherson during the week of July 31-August 7.32 Ukrainian officials confirmed that Ukrainian forces struck the Antonivsky and Kakhovka bridges at night on August 7-8.33 Russian Deputy Head of the Russian Occupation Administration in Kherson Oblast Kirill Stremousov stated that Russian officials will postpone reopening the Antonivskyi bridge, scheduled for August 10, due to the damage to construction equipment near the bridge.34 Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Vladislav Nazarov reported that Ukrainian airstrikes hit two Russian strongholds in the Kherson and Berislav districts and that Ukrainian indirect fire destroyed a Russian ammunition depot in Charivne, approximately 65 km northeast of Kherson City on August 7.35



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

Note: Kherson Oblast Administration Head Dmytro Butriy reported on August 2 that Ukrainian forces liberated an additional seven unnamed villages in Kherson Oblast. ISW will continue to monitor the situation and will update our maps when open sources name the liberated settlements.

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

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov stated that a Russian Special Forces volunteer group completed a two-week accelerated tactical and fire training course at the Russian Special Forces University in Gudermes, Chechnya.<sup>36</sup> Kadyrov stated that a flight of volunteers departed the Grozny airport for deployment to an unspecified area in Ukraine on August 8.<sup>37</sup>

# <u>Activity in Russian-occupied Areas</u> (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 Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on August 8 that Russian forces are deploying less-professional occupation forces and increasing pressure on local populations. The GUR reported that Russian occupation forces are increasing pressure on civilians at checkpoints in Kherson Oblast, particularly in Hola Prystan. The GUR reported that Russian forces deployed a newly mobilized battalion of Russian convicted criminals (likely pardoned for their service) to Balaklia, Kharkiv Oblast, and that cruelty, "immoral behavior," and aggressive attitudes toward the local population "increased sharply" upon their arrival.<sup>38</sup> This report demonstrates one effect of Russia's wide-ranging attempt to mobilize as many Russians as possible, regardless of fitness for service. The GUR also reported that racialized conflicts between Russian occupation units of different ethnicities are increasing, affecting the safety of civilians in occupied areas. The GUR claimed that Russian forces shot and killed the Chechen deputy commander of a unit in Zaporizhia for ethnically motivated reasons. The GUR also reported that an intoxicated Russian soldier driving an armored personnel carrier (APC) knocked down an electrical pole in Zelenopillya, Luhansk Oblast, cutting off electricity to the town.

Newly mobilized Russian battalions are likely worse trained, less professional, and more brutal to occupied populations than professional Russian soldiers or even conscripts who completed formal military training prior to their deployments. Russian forces may increasingly deploy low-quality, poorly trained units, like those made up of convicts, to control populations in occupied parts of Ukraine. Such deployments may reduce the competence of occupation authorities and counter-partisan operations and may increase Ukrainian support for movements that resist Russia's occupation.

Russian occupation officials are beginning to issue formal orders to prepare for sham annexation referenda. The head of the Russian Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Administration, Yevheny Balitsky, said on August 8 that he ordered the oblast's central election commission "to start working on the issue of organizing a referendum on the reunification of Zaporizhia Oblast with the Russian Federation."39 Balitsky claimed that he signed the order after 700 delegates voted "unanimously" at the "We Are Together with Russia" event held in Zaporizhia Oblast on August 8. ISW has previously assessed that the Kremlin likely founded, coordinates, and promotes the "We Are Together with Russia" organization to create a facade of public support for the annexation and integration of occupied Ukrainian oblasts into Russia.40 Other Russian occupation officials amplified Balitsky's referendum preparation and congratulated him for "following the path of Crimea." The Russian deputy head of the Kherson Occupation Administration, Kirill Stremousov, posted video footage on Telegram that he claimed showed residents of Kherson Oblast claiming that they are ready to vote in a referendum to join Russia.<sup>42</sup> Stremousov claimed that Kherson "has already been liberated from slavery and the colonial regime of the collective West." Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov announced on August 8 that residents of Kherson and Zaporizhia want to hold referendums to join Russia and claimed that "It's not us [the Kremlin] who are holding the referendum."43

Russian occupation officials are also attempting to incentivize Ukrainian cooperation with Russian data collection efforts that occupation officials will likely use to falsify the results of the sham annexation referenda but are facing resistance. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on August 8 that Russian occupation forces in Kherson are expanding the number of "one-time financial assistance" locations at which civilians in occupied areas can receive 10,000 rubles (approximately 165 USD) in exchange for their passport data.44 The Resistance Center reported that this approach has not generated as much data collection as occupation officials had planned, leading them to expand the number of locations throughout occupied Kherson Oblast.<sup>45</sup> Ukrainian partisan Telegram channel Yellow Ribbon called on Kherson Oblast residents to mobilize and prevent Russians from holding an annexation referendum on August 8 and asked civilians in occupied areas to provide information on Russian planning, collaborators, and troop movements.46 Yellow Ribbon also shared images of partisan supporters posting partisan posters and slogans in Kherson, Nova Kakhovka, Melitopol, and Crimea on August 8 and called on Ukrainians to resist Russian "passportization" efforts.47



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.thedailybeast.com/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-disaster-miraculously-avoided-during-suicidal-russian-attack; https://focus dot ua/uk/voennye-novosti/524694-tut-budet-russka-zemlya-ili-vyzzhennaya-pustynya-komandir-okkupantov-nazaporozhskoy-aes; https://antikor dot com.ua/ru/articles/565687-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://zp-news dot ru/other/2022/08/08/14127.html; https://vk dot com/public213127547; https://vk dot com/public213127547?w=wall-213127547 3075

<sup>3</sup> https://t.me/mod russia/18347

<sup>4</sup> https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-6

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://twitter.com/wammezz/status/1556605121664106496?s=20&t=wzB8 Kk8dnB 3Z4FSvjFSA

<sup>6</sup> https://twitter.com/wammezz/status/1556605152500523008?s=20&t=wzB8 Kk8dnB 3Z4FSvjFSA

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/08/world/europe/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-plant.html?smid=url-share

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<sup>9</sup> https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02STQSgyvVQggZbz2E6dof1wUuGys1A7uKEyzt9knqzHqwhV8 eRKHNzzYdiE3xhZ7Rl;

<sup>12</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02STQSgyvVQggZbz2E6dof1wUuGys1A7uKEyzt9knqzHqwhV8eRKHNzzYdiE3xhZ7RI;

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<sup>13</sup> https://t.me/epoddubny/11849

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15 https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/4831

<sup>16</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02STQSgyvVQggZbz2E6dof1wUuGys1A7uKEyzt9knqzHqwhV8eRKHNzzYdiE3xhZ7RI;

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<sup>19</sup> https://twitter.com/Arvelleg1/status/1556302428638674947; https://twitter.com/zcjbrooker/status/1556259391514492928

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<sup>21</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02STQSgyvVQggZbz2E6dof1wUuGys1A7uKEyzt9knqzHqwhV8eRKHNzzYdiE3xhZ7Rl

o <sup>22</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02STQSgyvVQggZbz2E6dof1wUuGys1A7uKEyzt9knqzHqwhV8eRK HNzzYdiE3xhZ7RI;

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<sup>23</sup>. <a href="https://t.me/synegubov/3868;">https://t.me/synegubov/3866;</a>

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- 39 https://t.me/BalitskyVGA/164
- <sup>40</sup> https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-30
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- 46 https://t.me/yellowribbon\_ua/959
- <sup>47</sup> https://t.me/yellowribbon\_ua/964; https://t.me/yellowribbon\_ua/970; https://t.me/yellowribbon\_ua/971; https://t.me/yellowribbon\_ua/977;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> https://t.me/spravdi/14965; https://t.me/mykolaivskaODA/2049