Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 19

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan August 19, 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.

Recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian military and transportation infrastructure in Crimea and Kherson Oblast are likely reducing Russian confidence in the security of Russian rear areas. Reports from August 18 about Ukrainian strikes are affecting the Russian information space despite the fact that these reports were likely overblown. Available open-source evidence indicates that Ukrainian forces did not conduct a successful kinetic attack against either the Stary Oskol Air Base in Belgorod or Belbek Air Base in Crimea on August 18. Geolocated footage shows that a fire started at a field just south of the Stary Oskol Airfield (rather than at the airfield itself), and satellite imagery shows Russian forces transporting ammunition and military equipment to a forest close to the field.¹ An unspecified Russian Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official reiterated that Russian air defenses near the Kerch Strait Bridge activated against a Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) rather than an incoming strike.2 There is no visual evidence of damage to either air base of as August 19. Geolocated footage shows no explosions or evidence of kinetic activity near the Belbek Air Base overnight on August 18-19, lending credence to claims that footage reportedly showing the explosion is recycled footage misattributed to the Belbek Air Base.³ As ISW reported on August 18, Russian sources largely reported on and disseminated these false or exaggerated reports, indicating broader Russian panic.4

Russian authorities are visibly increasing security measures in Crimea, indicating growing worry among Russian authorities and civilians about the threat of Ukrainian strikes on rear areas previously believed to be secure. Russian authorities installed checkpoints to search Ukrainian cars and identify saboteurs in Sevastopol.⁵ Certain Russian milbloggers made dramatic, pessimistic assessments that Ukrainian forces used strikes on the Kerch Strait Bridge and Belbek Air Base to conduct reconnaissance on Russian air and missile defense readiness and make assessments for new attacks, particularly the feasibility of a large strike.⁶ Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications (UA StratCom) reported on August 19 that Russian forces are not in control of the situation in Crimea as evidenced by the blocking of the Kerch Strait Bridge and activation of air alarms in Sevastopol for the first time since the start of the invasion.⁷ UA StratCom warned that Ukrainian forces have not yet struck the Kerch Strait Bridge with full capabilities and that prior Ukrainian strikes on the bridge demonstrate that the bridge is not as safe as the Russians previously believed.⁸

The situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) remained largely unchanged on August 19, despite the Russian Ministry of Defense's August 18 claims that Ukrainian forces would stage a provocation at the ZNPP on August 19. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces shelled the ZNPP at night on August 18-19 but did not claim that Ukrainian forces launched a large-scale attack on the facility, contrary to Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) statements on August 18.9 Zaporizhia Oblast Head Oleksandr Starukh emphasized on August 19 that the situation at the ZNPP remains tense but under control.¹⁰

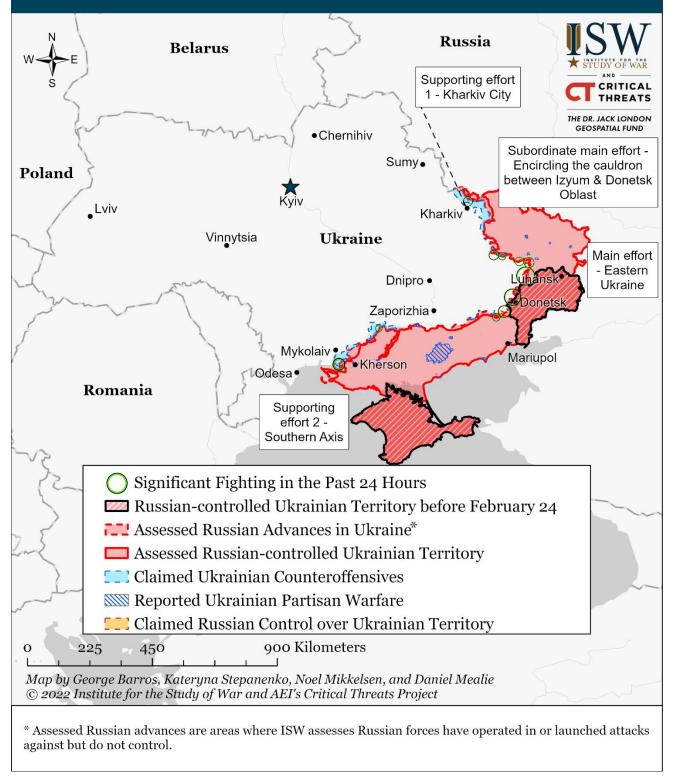
Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian authorities are likely preparing to hold show trials for Ukrainian soldiers in Mariupol around August

24, notably coinciding with Ukraine's Independence Day.¹¹ The GUR warned that Russian authorities intend to hold a show trial of captured fighters from the Azovstal Steel Plant in the Mariupol Philharmonic Theatre and may use the theatre to stage a false-flag attack on August 24.¹² Mariupol Mayor Advisor Petro Andryushchenko confirmed that the Mariupol occupation administration canceled rehearsal schedules at the theatre in order to accommodate the show trials, which ISW previously reported on August 11.¹³ As ISW previously reported, these show trials will likely be orchestrated in order to create the impression for Russian domestic audiences that Russian occupation authorities are taking necessary steps to secure occupied areas as well as attempt to demoralize Ukrainian troops.¹⁴ Russian authorities are likely orienting the trials around Ukraine's Independence Day in order to set further information conditions to exert law enforcement control of occupied areas.

Key Takeaways

- Recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian military and transport infrastructure in Crimea and Kherson Oblast are likely reducing Russian confidence in the security of Russian rear areas.
- The situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) remained relatively unchanged on August 19 despite Russian claims that Ukrainian forces would stage a provocation at the plant.
- Russian authorities are likely preparing show trials of Ukrainian defenders of Azovstal on Ukraine's Independence Day in order to further consolidate occupational control of occupied areas of Ukraine and set conditions to demoralize Ukrainian troops.
- Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Kharkiv City, southwest and southeast of Izyum, east of Siversk, and south and east of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces conducted multiple unsuccessful ground assaults on settlements on the Southern Axis.
- Russia continues to generate regional volunteer units and will likely deploy many of them to Kherson and Ukraine's south as part of the 3rd Army Corps.
- Russian occupation authorities are strengthening their control of educational infrastructure in occupied areas in preparation for the approaching school year and may be sending Ukrainian children to Russia as part of a broader repopulation campaign.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 19, 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.

- 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 Oblast
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis
- Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- · Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

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)

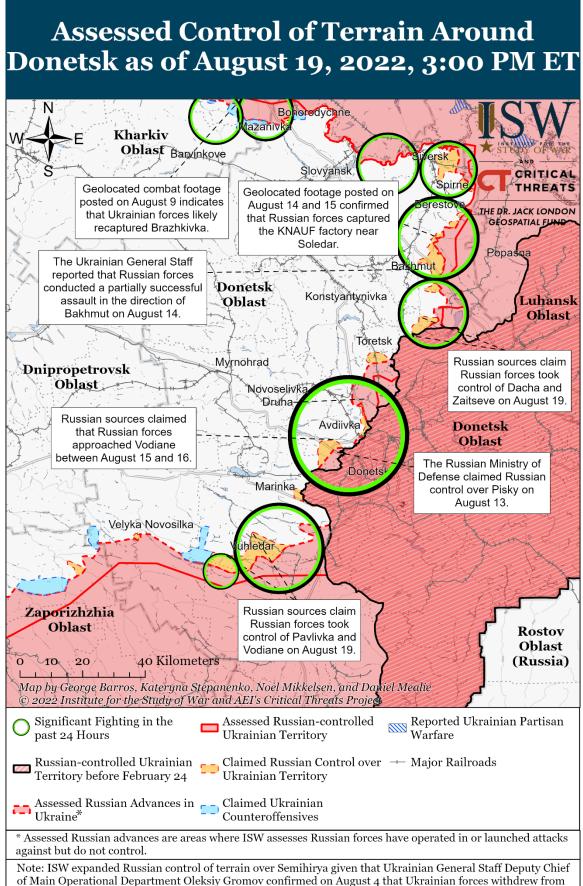
Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks southwest and southeast of Izyum near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border on August 19. Russian troops attempted to break through Ukrainian defensive lines in the area of Karnaukhivka, Dibrovne, Virnopillya, and Nova Dmytrivka—all within 25 km southwest of Izyum.¹⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces also conducted a ground attack near Dolyna, 25 km southeast of Izyum and along the E40 Izyum-Slovyansk highway.¹⁶ Russian troops also shelled the Kramatorsk Technology and Design College.¹⁷

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks east of Siversk on August 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to advance on Siversk from Ivano-Darivka (10 km southeast of Siversk) and Vyimka (7 km southeast of Siversk). Russian troops shelled Siversk and the surrounding settlements. 19

Russian forces continued ground assaults to the east and south of Bakhmut on August 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to advance on Soledar (10 km northeast of Bakhmut) from around Stryapivka and Volodymyrivka.²⁰ Russian troops, including Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) elements, continued to fight in the eastern outskirts of Soledar, likely in order to consolidate control of the nearby section of the T1302 Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway.²¹ Russian troops also continued ground assaults south of Bakhmut around Kodema, Zaitseve, and Klynove, all within 15 km southeast of Bakhmut. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Territorial Defense claimed that DNR troops in the Horlivka area took control of the northern part of Zaitseve (different from the aforementioned Zaitseve and about 20 km southwest of Bakhmut) and Dacha (15 km south of Bakhmut).²² ISW cannot independently confirm the status of control of these two settlements, but Russian forces in the Horlivka area are likely continuing efforts to gain control of settlements along the To513 Horlivka-Bakhmut highway in order to increase pressure on Bakhmut from the southwest.

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks to push west of the outskirts of Donetsk City on August 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted assault operations in the direction of Pervomaiske (15 km northwest of Donetsk City) and fought around Opytne and Pisky, both on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.²³ Russian sources also continued to report that Russian troops control more than two-thirds of Marinka on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City and that attempts to advance through the rest of the settlement are complicated by Ukrainian fortifications.²⁴ Russian forces continued to target Ukrainian positions along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline with artillery strikes.²⁵

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack southwest of Donetsk City in the direction of the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border on August 19. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to improve their tactical positions near Novomykhailivka, 25 km southwest of Donetsk City. Russian sources also claimed that Russian troops have reportedly moved to support an encirclement of Vuhledar (45 km southwest of Donetsk City) and taken control of the surrounding settlements of Pavlivka and Vodyane. While ISW cannot independently verify these claims, Russian forces will likely continue operations around Vuhledar to gain access to the road that runs northeast into Marinka in order to support efforts to push west of the Donetsk City area.

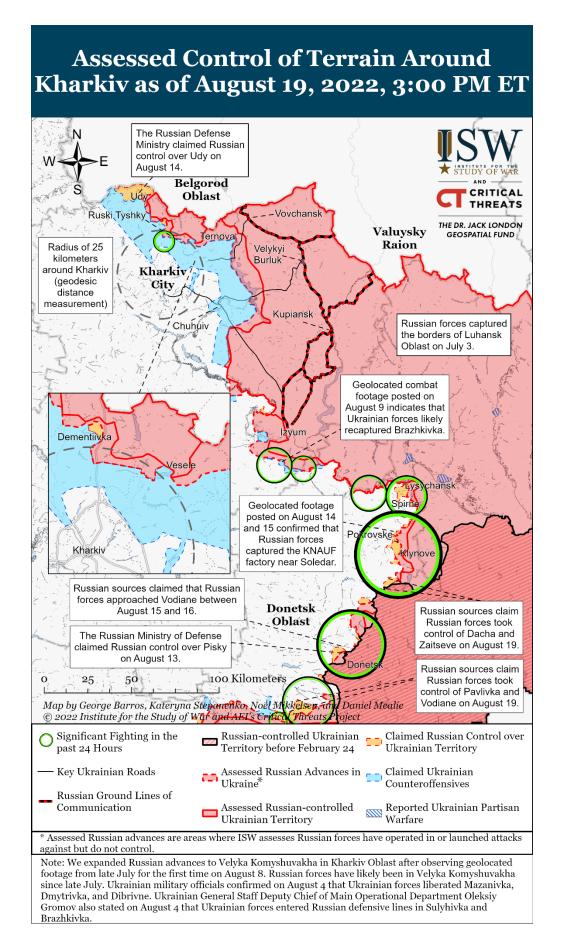


the settlement on July 30. Gromov also confirmed on August 4 that Ukrainian forces left their positions around

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 attempted a limited ground assault north of Kharkiv City near Pytomnyk and shelled Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements on August 19.28 The UK Defense Ministry (UK MoD) reported that, despite a limited Russian force presence on the Kharkiv City Axis, Russian forces have shelled Kharkiv City consistently since the start of the war and conducted small-scale ground attacks to prevent Ukrainian forces from reallocating personnel from this axis to other axes.29 The UK MoD's report confirms ISW's previous assessments of the limited Russian focus on Kharkiv City and spoiling attacks north of the city.30 Russian forces conducted airstrikes on Staryi Saltiv and remotely mined both Verkhnii Saltiv and Staryi Saltiv northeast of Kharkiv City on the left bank of the Siverskyi Donets River.31



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

Russian forces conducted multiple unsuccessful ground assaults in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts on August 19. The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces withdrew to their original positions after launching an unsuccessful ground assault in the Oleksandrivka-Stanislav direction.³² The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to break through Ukrainian defenses near an unspecified village named Kirove (likely referring to Zarichne in Mykolaiv Oblast west of Arkhanhelske because Zarichne used to be called Kirove), approximately 5 km south of the Mykolaiv - Dnipropetrovsk oblast border.³³ Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces continued conducting offensive actions to capture new settlements along the Southern Axis. The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces encountered two unspecified Russian airborne units during offensive Ukrainian operations in an unspecified area in Kherson Oblast on August 18.³⁴

Russian forces continued focusing on maintaining occupied lines and preventing Ukrainian advances along the Southern Axis on August 19.35 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted active reconnaissance of Ukrainian anti-aircraft positions in the Zaporizhia direction and continued UAV reconnaissance along the Southern Axis.36 The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces conducted airstrikes near Lozove and Bila Krynytsia, both near the Ukrainian bridgehead across the Inhulets River.37 Russian forces also conducted airstrikes near Novosilka, near the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border, Shcherbaky (approximately 40 km south of Zaporizhia), and Dorozhnyanka (approximately 112 km southeast of Zaporizhia City).38 Russian forces continued shelling along the entire line of contact using tank, tube, and rocket artillery.39

Russian forces continued to target settlements in Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv Oblasts on August 19. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces used tube artillery to strike civilian infrastructure in Nikopol and Marhanets, both located across the Dnipro River from Russian-occupied positions in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴⁰ The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces launched eight S-300s missiles on educational and civilian infrastructure in Mykolaiv City at night on August 18-19.⁴¹

Ukrainian forces again struck the bridge near the Nova Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant at night on August 18-19.⁴² Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan confirmed that Ukrainian forces "destroyed" Russian plans to restore and reopen the bridge to transport military equipment in Kherson Oblast.⁴³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of August 19, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

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.

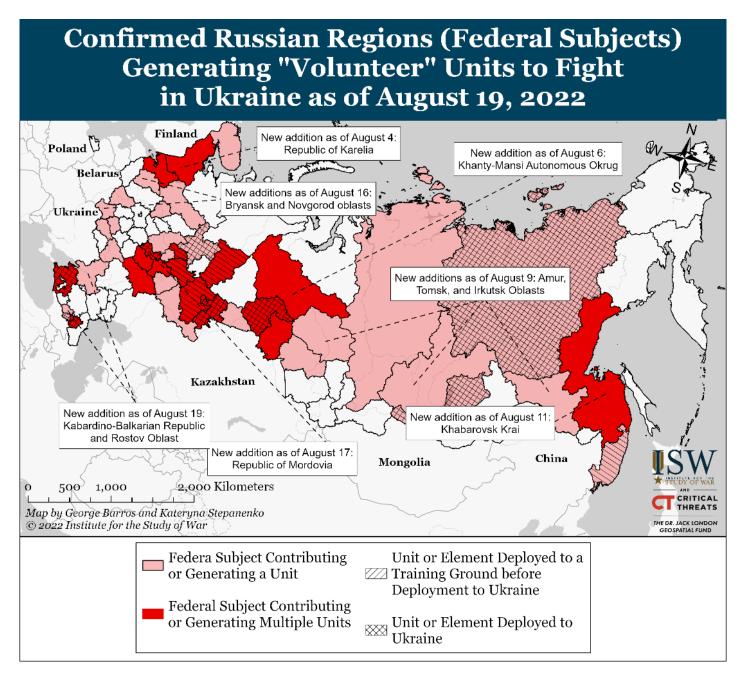
<u>Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts</u> (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

Newly formed Russian volunteer battalions are deploying or preparing to deploy to Ukraine. Local media outlet Amur Press reported that the Khabarovsk Krai "Baron Korf" signals battalion will support the deployment of Russian field posts in Kherson Oblast and provide command and control to the new Russian 3rd Army Corps—a unit still in formation to which many of the newly observed Russian volunteer units are subordinated—indicating the Kremlin will likely deploy many of its new volunteer units to Kherson and Ukraine's south.⁴⁴ Local Kirov media reported that an element of Kirov Oblast's "Vyatka" battalion deployed to Ukraine, and local media filmed approximately 60-70 men of the "Vyatka" battalion at a pre-deployment ceremony.⁴⁵ ISW previously reported that the "Vyatka" battalion had almost finished assembling as of July 9.⁴⁶ As ISW has previously assessed, these volunteer units are unlikely to generate significant combat power.⁴⁷

Russian federal subjects (regions) are continuing to form volunteer units. The Kabardino-Balkarian Republic Military Commissariat announced on August 18 that the republic is recruiting for the "Kabardino-Balkaria" volunteer regiment that will be an element of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (of the 58th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District).⁴⁸ The Commissariat announced that it is accepting volunteers aged 18-50 years with salaries of 168,000-200,000 rubles (\$2,695-3,368) per month for general military service, and 18-50 years old for salaries of 200,000-300,000 rubles (\$3,368-5,053) per month for deploying to Ukraine.⁴⁹ The regiment offers contracts for lengths of three months, one year, and three years.⁵⁰

Rostov Oblast State Duma Deputy Viktor Vodolatsky announced on August 18 that Rostov Oblast is forming the Cossack "Don" volunteer brigade, recruiting men aged 18-60 years old and requiring no prior military service.⁵¹ The "Don" volunteer brigade offers 200,000 ruble-per-month salaries, 40,000 rubles (\$674) to purchase supplies and equipment, and contracts for three and six months.⁵²

Local Russian news outlet *New Companion* reported on August 16 that Perm Oblast is forming the 2nd "Parma" volunteer battalion, which is currently training before deploying to Ukraine.⁵³ ISW previously reported on the formation of the 1st "Parma" and "Molot" battalions, and *New Companion* reported that the "Molot" volunteer tank battalion completed recruitment and is currently training at unspecified training grounds before deploying to Ukraine.⁵⁴



Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov appears concerned about his ability to control Chechen units in Ukraine, possibly impacting his ability to recruit for Chechen military and volunteer units. Kadyrov claimed that the "blood feud" between Chechens is effective at deterring aggression between pro-Russia Chechens and Ichkerian Chechens, who Kadyrov claimed ally themselves against Russia and with Ukraine. Kadyrov claimed that Ichkerian Chechens will answer for their disloyalty and crimes against the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, regardless of the outcome of the war. Kadyrov's rant indicates a growing concern about the Chechens he cannot control and cannot convince or easily compel to join the Russian military.

<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)

Russian occupation authorities are strengthening control of educational infrastructure in occupied areas of Ukraine in preparation for the approaching school year. DNR Head Denis Pushilin met with a member of the United Russia Party on August 19 to discuss the development of education in Donbas, which reportedly includes the "retraining" of teachers in accordance with Russian curricula.57 Pushilin stated that United Russia will provide schools in Donbas with all necessary educational materials as part of the ongoing "Books for Donbas" campaign, which is likely an effort to saturate schools in occupied areas with Russian educational materiel and effectively erase Ukrainian curricula. LNR Head Leonid Pasechnik similarly secured the patronage of Russia's Astrakhan Oblast, which will oversee the reconstruction of educational infrastructure in occupied Luhansk Oblast.⁵⁸ Russian-backed head of the Zaporizhia occupation administration, Yevheny Balitsky, signed an education cooperation agreement with the Russian political organization "Russian Society: Knowledge," which Balitsky claimed intends to facilitate knowledge development and participation in various education platforms.⁵⁹ Such measures indicate that Russian occupation officials are taking actions to secure control of the teaching and dissemination of Russian-approved curricula in occupied areas, as well as contributing to the physical reconstruction of schools and other educational institutions in order to integrate occupied areas into the Russian system.

Russian officials, however, are likely encountering widespread resistance from Ukrainian citizens who do not want to participate in the Russian-controlled education system. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities are pressuring Ukrainian parents into sending their children to Russian-run schools in occupied areas by fining families who do not enroll in Russian schools up to 148,000 rubles.60

Russian officials may be conducting mass deportation campaigns of Ukrainian children under the guise of taking children to Russia to attend youth camps and extracurricular programs. During a working meeting with the United Russia party, Pushilin stated that children from Donbas will be provided the opportunity to "rest" in Russia and participate in all-Russia youth programs as part of the wider educational cooperation agreement between the DNR and United Russia. 61 Russian-backed head of the Kherson occupation administration Kirill Stremousov stated that his administration has sent 1.500 children from Kherson Oblast to Russian "resorts" as of August 19.62 Russian occupation authorities may be using the facade of engaging children with Russian youth programs in Russia to conduct forced deportation, potentially as part of an extended population replacement campaign.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.



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¹ https://twitter.com/COUPSURE/status/1560362098063966208;

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² https://t.me/tass agency/151577; https://twitter.com/Faytuks/status/1560347609256148992

³ https://twitter.com/neonhandrail/status/1560433911443820544;

https://twitter.com/Aviation_Intel/status/1560362117034782720; https://twitter.com/am misfit/status/1560363822355030018; https://twitter.com/am misfit/status/1560350538759213056; https://twitter.com/JimmySecUK/status/1560349809277558784

⁴ https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-18

⁵ https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1560479910166134784 https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1560602059677700097; https://t.me/stranaua/58668

⁶ https://t.me/strelkovii/3099; https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/10116

⁷ https://t.me/spravdi/15583; https://t.me/spravdi/15473

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⁹ https://t.me/readovkanews/40431; <a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/40431;"

¹⁰ https://t.me/zoda_gov_ua/11879; https://www dot zoda.gov.ua/news/62424/problemni-pitannya-vasilivskogo-rayonu-virishujutsya-popri-diji-okupantiv.html

¹¹ https://gur.gov dot ua/content/24-serpnia-okupanty-mozhut-planuvaty-terakt-pid-chas-sudylyshcha-nad-ukrainskymy-heroiamy-v-mariupoli.html; https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-11

¹² <u>https://gur.gov</u> dot ua/content/24-serpnia-okupanty-mozhut-planuvaty-terakt-pid-chas-sudylyshcha-nad-ukrainskymy-heroiamy-v-mariupoli.html

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¹⁵ https://t.me/synegubov/3941;

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¹⁷ https://youtu.be/EsBrpoasJYk; https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/17314;

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https://twitter.com/Lyla lilas/status/1560529572684234752; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/60857

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²¹ https://t.me/rybar/37444;https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/39434; https://t.me/readovkanews/40445; https://t.me/s/rlz the kraken; https://t.me/denazi UA/18600;

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²² https://t.me/TRO_DPR/6506; https://t.me/TRO_DPR/6507; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/60867; https://t.me/epoddubny/11983; https://t.me/rlz_the_kraken/52025; https://t.me/denazi_UA/18600

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²⁴ https://t.me/nm_dnr/8801; https://t.me/epoddubny/11981; https://t.me/anna_news/37995

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²⁵ https://t.me/RtrDonetsk/8500; https://t.me/milchronicles/1035; https://t.me/rybar/37448; https://t.me/rybar/37424

²⁷ https://t.me/boris rozhin/60867; https://t.me/rlz the kraken/52025; https://t.me/zastavnyii/1197

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²⁹ https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1560504387692380160; https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/156050444646719488; https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1560504490943549442 https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-14;

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