### Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 30, 2023

Nicole Wolkov, Christina Harward, Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan

September 30, 2023, 5:15pm ET

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.

Click here to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on September 30. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and near Bakhmut on September 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol direction (western Zaporizhia Oblast) and near Bakhmut.[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv), Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv), and Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[2] A fringe Russian milblogger reportedly affiliated with the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces implicitly recanted claims from September 24 that Ukrainian forces occupy half of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[3] The fringe milblogger claimed on September 29 that elements of the 7th Guards VDV Division still hold Verbove despite suffering losses.[4]

The Kremlin has seemingly not yet clarified what Ukrainian territories it claims that Russia has annexed, leading to continued confusion among Russian government and occupation officials a year after the illegal annexation of occupied territories. Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a speech in honor of the so-called "Day of Reunification of the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhia, and Kherson Oblasts with Russia" on September 30 in which he reiterated boilerplate rhetoric about the international legitimacy of the illegal Russian annexation referenda, the West's alleged role in starting the war in Ukraine, and the unity between Russia and occupied Ukraine.[5] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev posted a map on his Telegram channel in honor of the holiday that showed the entirety of Crimea and Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts as Russian territory.[6] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration posted a different map that showed Russian territory roughly extending to the current frontlines in the four most recently annexed territories.[7] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedey, a notable nationalistic and extreme voice in the Russian government, ambiguously claimed that the war in Ukraine will continue until "the original Russian territories are liberated."[8] Medvedev's unclear statement and occupation officials' disparate maps indicate that the Kremlin has yet to clarify what territories it claims to have annexed or intends to annex.

Russian forces conducted a series of drone strikes primarily targeting Vinnytsia Oblast on the night of September 29 to 30. Ukrainian military sources reported on September 30 that Ukrainian forces downed 30 out of 40 Shahed-131/136 drones that Russian forces launched from occupied Crimea.[9] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces struck an infrastructure facility in Vinnytsia Oblast.[10] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian drones struck a Ukrainian military arsenal near Kalynivka (22km north of Vinnytsia) in Vinnytsia Oblast.[11] Russian sources also claimed that Russian drones struck Ukrainian port infrastructure in Odesa and Mykolaiv oblasts on the night of September 29 to 30.[12] The Romanian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that its radar systems indicated a possible unauthorized entry into Romanian airspace during the Russian strike series on the night of September 29 to 30.[13] The Romanian MoD stated that Romanian authorities have not yet identified any objects that may have fallen into Romanian territory.[14]

Russian milbloggers claimed on September 30 that the Russian military command removed the commander of the Russian 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade following recent outrage from milbloggers about the brigade's command.[15] The same group of Russian milbloggers extensively amplified reports about elements of the 205th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) suffering significant losses due to inadequate artillery support and poor leadership in the Kherson direction in late August.[16] One of the Russian milbloggers stated on September 30 that the removal of this commander is a "rare case" in which truth and justice prevailed.[17] The removal of the commander suggests that Russian ultranationalist outrage may still be able to pressure the Russian military command despite the apparent decline in such reactions in the wider Russian information space since the Wagner Group's June 24 rebellion.

An organization with alleged ties to Russian First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Sergey Kiriyenko is reportedly categorizing Russian internet user data in an effort to disseminate tailored information to specific domestic populations as part of a wider attempt to control the Russian information space. Independent Belarusian outlet Vot Tak reported on September 29 that Russian non-profit organization Dialog is gathering Russian internet user data and information from Russian government agencies in order to categorize Russian media consumers and then feed tailored narratives to specific categories of users.[18] A former employee of Dialog told *Vot Tak* that Dialog's database categorizes internet users by profession, interests, and political beliefs and specifically orients false news about the war in Ukraine and pro-war narratives toward Russian military personnel, relatives of military personnel, and civil servants.[19] The former Dialog employee also claimed that Dialog categorizes internet users as "loyal" and "disloyal" and shares its information with Russian security services.[20] The former Dialog employee claimed that Dialog has failed to make a significant ideological impact on the Russian information space because Dialog could not produce unified and clear narratives.[21] Dialog's efforts to promote narratives to specific Russian populations are likely a more subtle part of the Kremlin's effort to control the Russian information space and commensurate with the Kremlin's more overt efforts to promote self-censorship.

#### **Key Takeaways:**

• Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and near Bakhmut on September 30.

- The Kremlin has seemingly not yet clarified what Ukrainian territories it claims that Russia has annexed, leading to continued confusion among Russian government and occupation officials a year after the illegal annexation of occupied territories.
- Russian forces conducted a series of drone strikes primarily targeting Vinnytsia Oblast on the night of September 29 to 30.
- Russian milbloggers claimed on September 30 that the Russian military command removed the commander of the Russian 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade following recent outrage from milbloggers about the brigade's command.
- An organization with alleged ties to Russian First Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Sergey Kiriyenko is reportedly categorizing Russian internet user data in an effort to disseminate tailored information to specific domestic populations as part of a wider attempt to control the Russian information space.
- Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Kupyansk, Kreminna, Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and marginally advanced along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.
- Russian authorities have started to conscript citizens in occupied Ukraine who have Russian passports.
- Russian authorities continue to forcibly deport children from occupied Ukraine to Russia in order to assimilate Ukrainian children into Russian culture.



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian 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.

- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

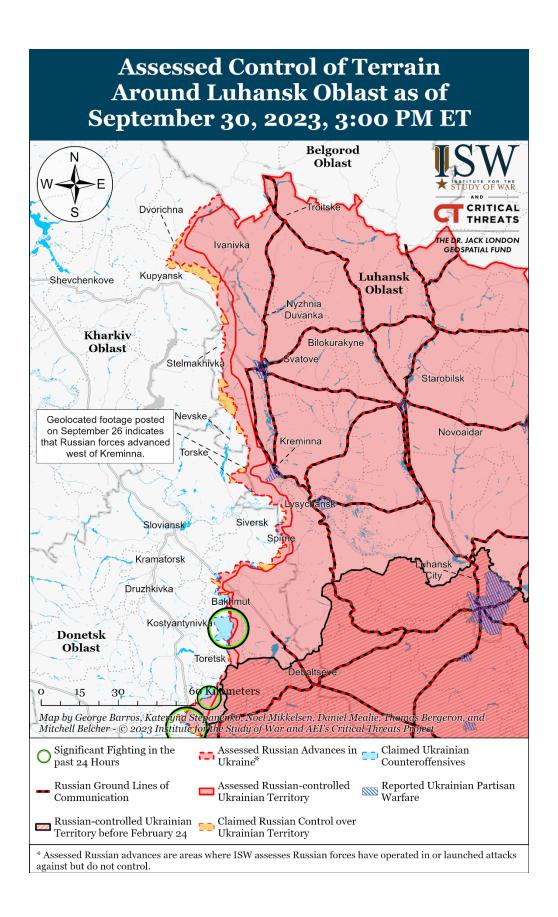
#### <u>Russian Main Effort - Eastern Ukr</u>aine

## <u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Kupyansk and Kremmina on September 30 but did not make confirmed advances. A Russian milblogger claimed that positional battles are ongoing near Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk) and in the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[22] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions near Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).[23] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated that Russian forces resumed assault operations in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions and unsuccessfully tried to break through unspecified Ukrainian defenses twice over the past day.[24] Footage published on September 30 purportedly shows elements of the "Moscow" Volunteer Battalion assaulting and capturing a Ukrainian position near Kreminna.[25] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly formed the "Moscow" Volunteer Battalion in January 2023, and the volunteer detachment consists of athletes and Russian soccer fans.[26] Footage published on September 30 purportedly shows elements of the 88th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps) operating in the Siversk direction (19km south of Kreminna).[27]

The Russian military has reportedly deployed elements of the newly created 25th Combined Arms Army (CAA) along the frontline in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction. Yevlash reported on September 30 that Ukrainian forces have observed a total of 12,000 25th CAA personnel along the frontline in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction and that the 25th CAA consists of mobilized personnel and personnel from heavily degraded units that have completely lost their combat capabilities. [28] Yevlash also stated that the 25th CAA has unspecified weapons, logistics, and personnel problems. [29]

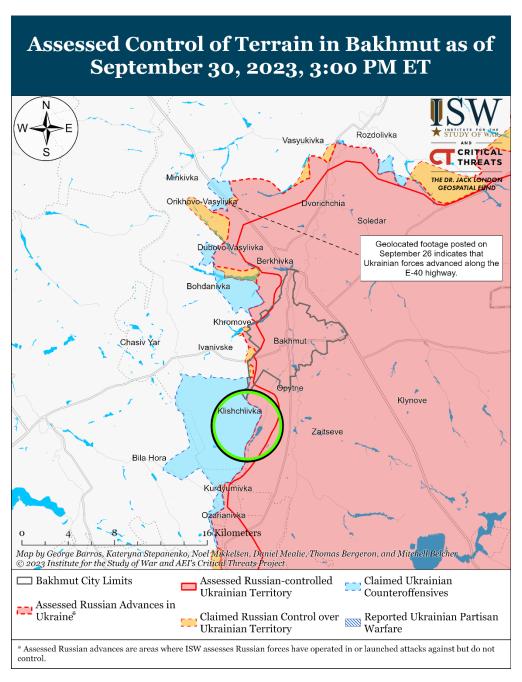
The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna), Torske (12km west of Kreminna), and Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna) on September 30.[30]



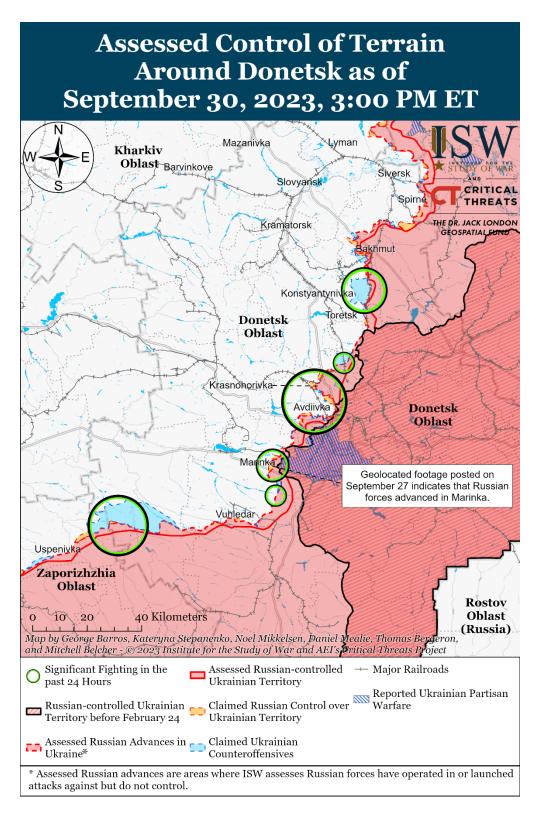
### <u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued offensive actions near Bakhmut on September 30 but did not make any confirmed advances. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to break through to the railway east of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[31] A Russian news aggregator claimed on September 29 that Ukrainian forces control half of Klishchiivka and that the other half of the settlement is a contested "gray zone."[32] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated on September 30 that Ukrainian artillery continues to target the To513 (Bakhmut-Horlivka) highway, which is a key Russian logistics line.[33]

Russian forces continued ground attacks near Bakhmut on September 30 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Klishchiiivka.[34] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back from the railway east of Klishchiivka.[35] A Russian news aggregator claimed on September 29 that Russian forces were entrenched at the railway near Klishchiivka and counterattacked near Andriivka.[36] A Russian milblogger posted footage claiming to show elements of the Russian 106th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division operating in the Soledar (10km northeast of Bakhmut) direction.[37] Another Russian milblogger posted footage claiming to show elements of the 98th VDV Division operating near Bakhmut.[38] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted footage claiming to show elements of Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz and the Russian 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] 2nd Army Corps) operating near Klishchiivka.[39]



Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on September 30 and recently advanced. Geolocated footage published on September 27 indicates that Russian forces marginally advanced west of Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[40] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks east of Stepove (8km northwest of Avdiivka), southwest of Avdiivka, and near Novoselivka (17km northeast of Avdiivka), Tonenke (7km northwest of Avdiivka), Marinka, and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[41] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces attacked near Novomykahilivka and Marinka but did not specify an outcome.[42] Another Russian milblogger amplified claims on September 29 that Russian forces conducted successful assaults near Opytne (3km southwest of Avdiivka) and Vesele (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[43]



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

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited unsuccessful ground attacks along the administrative border between Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts on September 30. The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled two Ukrainian attacks near Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Rivnopil (10km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[44] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Pryyutne in three small groups with 15 personnel each.[45] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted reconnaissance-in-force operations near Pryyutne and Novomayorske (18km southeast of Velyka Novosilka) on September 29.[46]

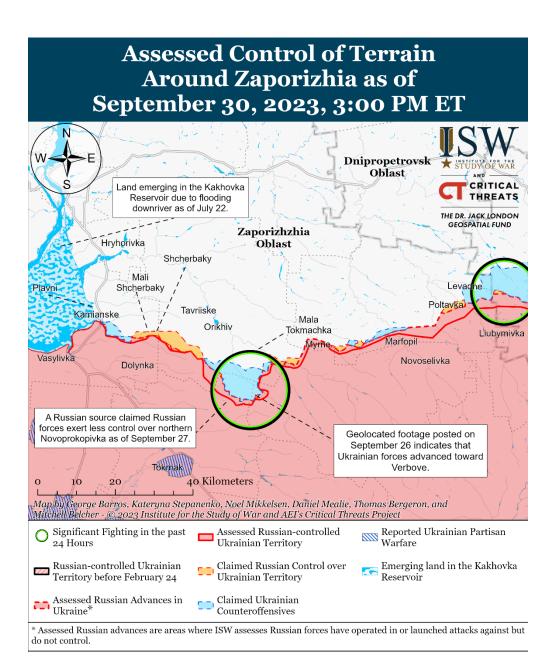
Russian forces continued limited ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on September 30 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and Novodarivka (15km south of Velyka Novosilka).[47] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are conducting localized offensive operations from Pryyutne in the direction of Rivnopil and are counterattacking near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian aviation struck a bridge across the Shaytanka River in Velyka Novosilka.[49]



Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 30 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[50] Russian milbloggers claimed that small Ukrainian infantry groups without armored vehicle support continue assaults near Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv), Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv), and Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[51] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked in an area north of Verbove and conducted assaults in the direction of Kopani (11km southwest of Orikhiv).[52]



Russian forces continued counterattacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 30 and recently made marginal gains. Geolocated footage published on September 29 indicates that Russian forces recaptured limited positions at a series of previously lost Russian defensive positions south of Robotyne.[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully tried to recapture lost positions near Robotyne and Verbove on September 30.[54] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are also counterattacking near Novodanylivka (4km south of Orikhiv) and Mala Tokmachka (7km southwest of Orikhiv).[55] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces resumed activities southeast of Hulyaipole, likely referring to limited Russian offensive actions near Chervone (9km east of Hulyaipole).[56] Russian sources acknowledged that Russian air defenses downed a Russian Su-35 attack aircraft in a fratricide incident near Tokmak on September 29 as ISW previously reported.[57]





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

Russian authorities will reportedly conscript citizens in occupied Ukraine who have Russian passports. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on September 30

that Russian authorities have begun requiring residents in occupied territories with Russian passports to go to military registration and enlistment offices for the Russian conscription cycle that will begin on October 1.[58] Khlan stated that Russian authorities are threatening civilians with Russian passports eligible for conscription with fines and detention for not appearing. ISW has previously reported that Russian authorities and occupation administrations continue to conduct forced passportization and mobilization in occupied Ukraine.[59]

The Russian military is reportedly continuing to recruit Cuban citizens to fight in Ukraine, possibly as a part of relatively elite Airborne (VDV) formations. Russian opposition media outlet *Mobilization News* stated on September 29 that Vladimir Shkunov, a researcher at the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences and a member of the Russian Government Expert Council, recruited eight Cuban citizens to fight in the war in Ukraine.[60] *Mobilization News* stated that about 140 Cuban citizens arrived in Russia in the summer of 2023 and joined the 106th VDV Division headquartered in Tula City, further indicating that the 106th VDV Division is likely degraded from fighting in Ukraine. *Reuters* reported on September 30 that according to Cuban recruits, there are 119 Cubans training at a Russian military base outside of Tula City and that some Cuban recruits are already in Ukraine.[61] ISW previously reported on September 8 that Cuban officials reportedly arrested 17 individuals on charges related to a human trafficking ring that lured Cuban men to serve in the Russian military.[62] The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on September 5 that "Cuba plays no role in the war in Ukraine" and that it will "act vigorously" against whoever participates in any form of human trafficking for the recruitment of mercenaries from Cuba.[63]

Russian companies are reportedly willing to break Russian laws surrounding military registration in order to retain IT employees. Russian outlet *Kommersant* reported on September 29 that some Russian companies would rather pay fines for not registering their employees' military records than risk having employees, especially IT specialists, quit over the military registration requirement.[64]

# <u>Activities in Russian-occupied areas</u> (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian authorities continue to forcibly deport children from occupied Ukraine to Russia in order to assimilate Ukrainian children into Russian culture. Russian Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug Governor Dmitry Artyukhov stated on September 30 that the Yamalo-Nenets government is launching a three-year program that will bring children from occupied Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast to Russia to visit "cultural heritage centers" in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod; Russian universities; and the "Russia" exhibition in Moscow.[65] Artyukhov stated that 500 Ukrainian children will participate in the program in fall 2023.

Russian federal subjects continue to expand their patronage networks in occupied Ukraine. Russian Head of the North Ossetia-Alania Republic Sergey Menyaylo claimed on September 30 that the North Ossetia-Alania Republic sponsors occupied Chernihivka Raion, Zaporizhia Oblast.[66] Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) head Leonid Pasechnik stated that Russian Irkutsk Oblast has helped construct infrastructure facilities and factories in occupied Holubivka, Luhansk Oblast.[67] Artyukhov stated that Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug has built social and residential infrastructure in occupied Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast.[68]

<u>Significant activity in Belarus</u> (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

Nothing significant to report.

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

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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