Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 5, 2023

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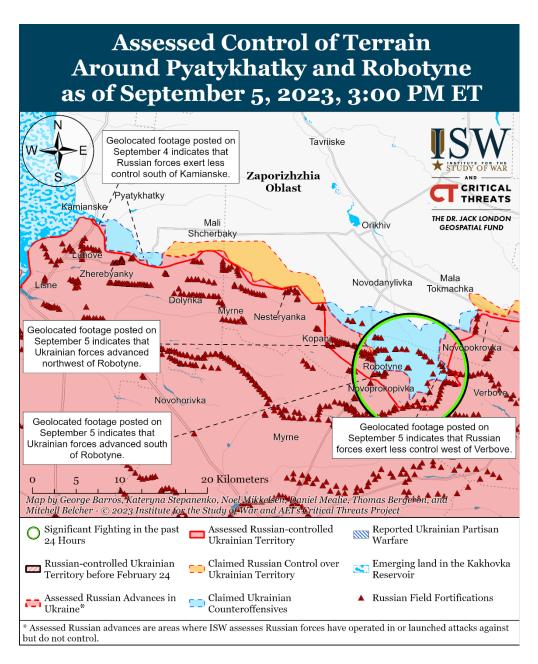
September 5, 2023, 5:30pm ET

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 12:30pm ET on September 5. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 6 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces continue to advance in western Zaporizhia Oblast. Geolocated footage posted on September 5 shows Russian forces striking Ukrainian positions northwest and west of Robotyne, indicating that Ukrainian forces have advanced into an area near the settlement that Russian forces previously claimed to control.[1] Additional geolocated footage posted on September 5 shows that Ukrainian forces have also advanced south of Robotyne and northwest of Verbove (about 10km east of Robotyne).[2] Geolocated evidence of Ukrainian forces northwest of Verbove suggests that Ukrainian forces are advancing along the line of Russian fortifications that runs into the settlement. Ukrainian military sources also confirmed that Ukrainian forces have been successful in the Robotyne—Novoprokopivka directions south of Orikhiv, and further reported that Ukrainian forces are pursuing successful offensive operations south of Bakhmut.[3]



Russian sources continue to complain that Russian forces lack sufficient counterbattery capabilities and artillery munitions in the face of ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive activities, which the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) are reportedly attempting to combat. Russian milbloggers claimed on September 4 and 5 that Russian counterbattery systems are performing poorly along the front in Ukraine.[4] The milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are relying heavily on Lancet drones and 220mm and 300mm rounds for Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), of which there are limited stockpiles.[5] One Russian milblogger noted that the Russian MoD's plans to form five new artillery brigades in each of Russia's five military districts are in part meant to improve general counterbattery capabilities.[6] It is unclear if the milblogger is claiming that the MoD plans to form five or 25 brigades total. The milblogger claimed that the Russian MoD would equip the new brigades with 203-mm 287 Pion and 287M Malka artillery systems from Russian stores.[7] *The New York*

Times reported on September 4 that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok from September 10-13 and will reportedly discuss North Korea's supply of artillery shells to Russia.[8] Russian sources have continually complained that Russian forces face problems with counterbattery operations.[9]

Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area are likely succeeding in pinning elements of the 7th Guards Mountain Airborne (VDV) Division and preventing them from laterally redeploying to critical areas of the front in western Zaporizhia Oblast. A Russian milblogger posted an audio recording on September 5 purportedly from a soldier in the Russian 247th VDV Regiment in which the soldier claims that he has to retrieve bodies of Russian personnel near Staromayorske because the Russian command is not overseeing the retrieval of bodies and claimed that his unit lost 49 killed in action in one day of fighting.[10] The Russian soldier's claims suggest that elements of the 247th Regiment remain defending in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast area, despite claims from a prominent Russian source in late August that some elements are fighting in the Robotyne area.[11] ISW previously observed that elements of 108th VDV Regiment and 56th VDV Regiment — the two other constituent regiments of the 7th VDV Division — have redeployed to the Robotyne area.[12]

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reiterated boilerplate rhetoric intended to dismiss recent Ukrainian advances and highlight the beginning of a new academic year for Russian military institutions during a meeting with Russian military leadership on September 5. Shoigu claimed that the Ukrainian forces had not achieved any of their goals for the counteroffensive.[13] Shoigu noted that the Zaporizhia direction, most likely referring to the Robotyne area, has become the tensest area of the front lines and that Ukrainian forces have committed several brigades from their "strategic reserve" to this area.[14] Shoigu claimed that Russian forces have destroyed a heavily exaggerated amount of Ukrainian personnel and military equipment since the Ukrainian counteroffensive began in June 2023.[15] Shoigu noted that Russian military schools and training programs began a new academic year on September 1.[16] Shoigu also noted that the curriculum of Russian military training programs has been adjusted to prepare students for the conditions they would face fighting in Ukraine.[17]

Russian President Vladimir Putin drew historical parallels between Soviet participation in the Second World War and the current war in Ukraine to set ideological expectations for a prolonged war effort. Putin gave a speech on September 5 that invoked the memory of significant Soviet military victories during the Second World War, including turning points in the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk and recapturing the Caucasus and Donbas.[18] Putin had notably attended a concert in honor of the Battle of Kursk's 80th anniversary as Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's plane crashed on August 23.[19] Putin criticized the international community's "attitude" to the buildup to the Second World War — very likely criticizing European countries for failing to intervene against Nazi Germany prior to the outbreak of war (and ignoring the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that briefly allied the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany, permitted the Soviet invasion of the Baltic States, and partitioned Poland) — as also creating conditions for the current conflict in Ukraine and drew parallels between reconstruction efforts and veterans assistance measures during and after the Second World War and the current war in Ukraine.[20] Putin also reamplified the Kremlin information operation falsely portraying the Ukrainian government as a "Nazi regime." These direct parallels between the "special military operation" and the Second World War are likely the closest that Putin or any other senior Russian

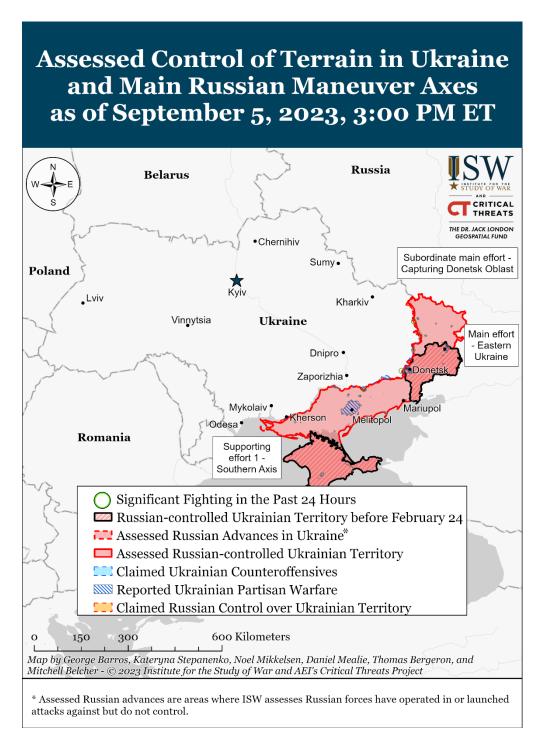
official has come to acknowledging the war in Ukraine as an actual war. These parallels also message to a domestic Russian audience that the ongoing Russian war effort is really a war effort despite the insistence on the euphemistic "special military operation."

The Armenian government appears to be seriously questioning its decades-long security relationship with Russia, amid reports of Armenian humanitarian aid to Ukraine and increasing public dissatisfaction with Russia's security guarantees. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Armenia service Radio Azatutyun reported on September 5th that the Armenian government has reportedly sent unspecified humanitarian aid to Ukraine for the first time since the war in Ukraine began.[21] Radio Azatutyan's sources claimed that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's wife Anna Hakobyan will personally deliver the aid to Kyiv and attend the "Third Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen" that begins on September 6.[22] The Armenian government has not officially confirmed this information. Pashinyan notably stated that Russia cannot meet Armenia's security needs in an interview with Italian newspaper La Repubblica published on September 4 and called Armenia's dependence on Russia for security a "strategic mistake."[23] Pashinvan also reported that Russia could not meet Armenia's security needs even if it so desired, given the Russian military's current need for weapons and ammunition likely referring to use in Ukraine.[24] Kremlin newswire TASS notably reported on August 28 that Azerbaijani law enforcement officers detained three Nagorno-Karabakh residents, reportedly escorted by Russian peacekeepers, at a checkpoint in the Lachin corridor, prompting protests outside the Russian embassy in Yerevan.[25] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger confirmed on September 5 that Major General Kirill Kulakov replaced Colonel General Alexander Lentsov as the commander of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces continue to advance in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian sources continue to complain that Russian forces lack sufficient counterbattery capabilities and artillery munitions in the face of ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive activities, which the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) are reportedly attempting to combat.
- Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area are likely succeeding in pinning elements of the 7th Guards Mountain Airborne (VDV) Division and preventing them from laterally redeploying to critical areas of the front in western Zaporizhia Oblast.
- Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reiterated boilerplate rhetoric intended to dismiss recent Ukrainian advances and highlight the beginning of a new academic year for Russian military institutions during a meeting with Russian military leadership on September 5.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin drew historical parallels between Soviet participation in the Second World War and the current war in Ukraine to set ideological expectations for a prolonged war effort.
- The Armenian government appears to be seriously questioning its decadeslong security relationship with Russia, amid reports of Armenian humanitarian aid to Ukraine and increasing public dissatisfaction with Russia's security guarantees.

- Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced in some areas on September 5.
- Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in at least two sectors of the front and advanced near Bakhmut, in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 5.
- Russian sources continue to report on Russian efforts to recruit volunteers amid continued rumors of general mobilization.
- The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) reportedly attempted to assassinate a Russian occupation official in occupied Luhansk Oblast on September 5.



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.

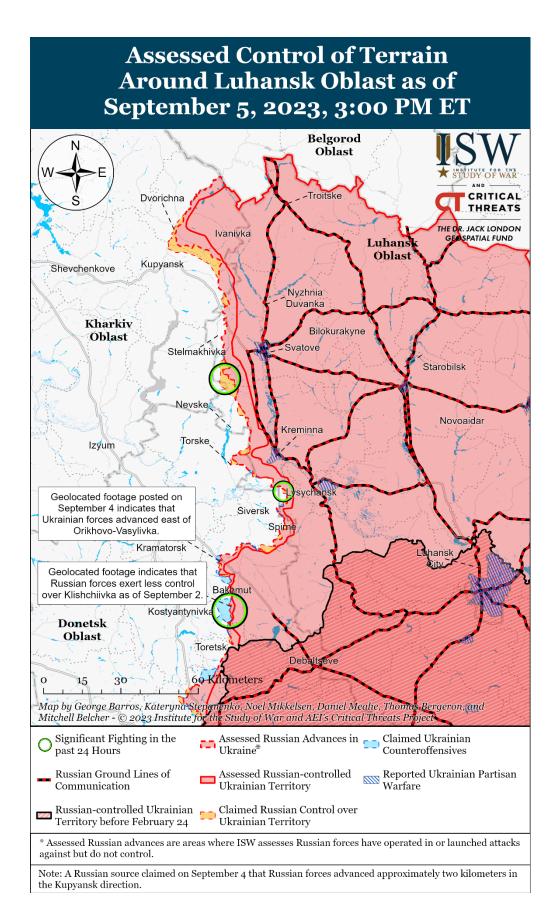
- Russian Main Effort Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 Capture the entirety of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

Russian Main Effort - Eastern Ukraine

<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 along the Kupyansk-Svatove line on September 5 and did not make confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful operations near Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove) and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).[27] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces captured several unspecified Ukrainian positions near Synkivka (7km east of Kupyansk) and Petropavlivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk) and continued to push Ukrainian forces out of positions near Petropavlivka.[28] Russian sources claimed on the evening of September 4 that Russian forces were successful near Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove) and continued to advance slowly toward the Oskil River west of Svatove.[29] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on September 5 that Ukrainian forces are repelling about eight Russian attacks each day in the Lyman direction and that Russian forces are preparing for more offensive operations in the Lyman and Kupyansk directions.[30]

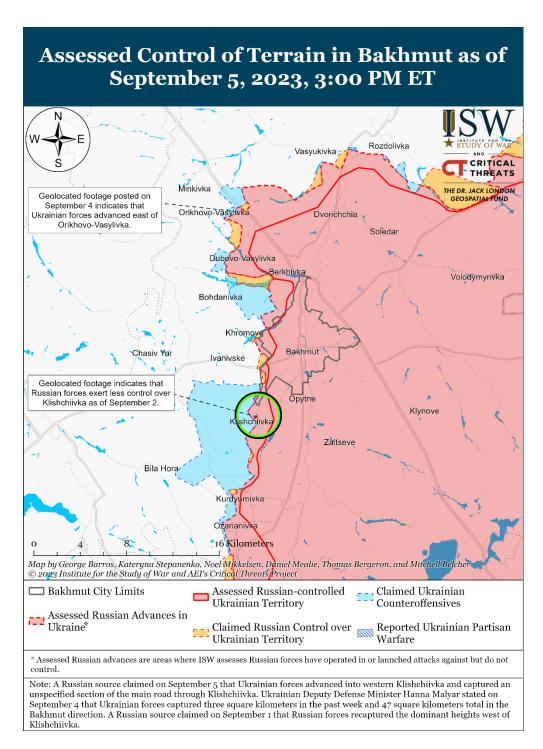
Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Kreminna on September 5. The Russian MoD and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna), the Serebryanske forest area (10km southwest of Kreminna), and Torske (15km west of Kreminna).[31]



<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 continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut direction on September 5 and have made confirmed advances. Geolocated footage posted on September 5 indicates that Ukrainian forces have made marginal gains south of Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[32] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations south of Bakhmut and are consolidating positions in the area.[33] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Ilya Yevlash noted that Ukrainian forces are advancing in the Klishchiivka area (6km southwest of Bakhmut).[34] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces managed to advance in the western part of Klishchiivka and took control of an unspecified sector of the road that runs through the settlement.[35]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Bakhmut direction on September 5 and did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian troops repelled unsuccessful Russian attacks north of Klishchiivka.[36] Several Russian milbloggers claimed that there are ongoing positional battles near the Berkhivka reservoir (about 2km northwest of Bakhmut) and that Russian forces regained lost positions near Kurdyumivka (12km southwest of Bakhmut).[37] The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade claimed that elements of the 4th Brigade and Chechen "Akhmat" fighters also recaptured positions near Klishchiivka.[38]

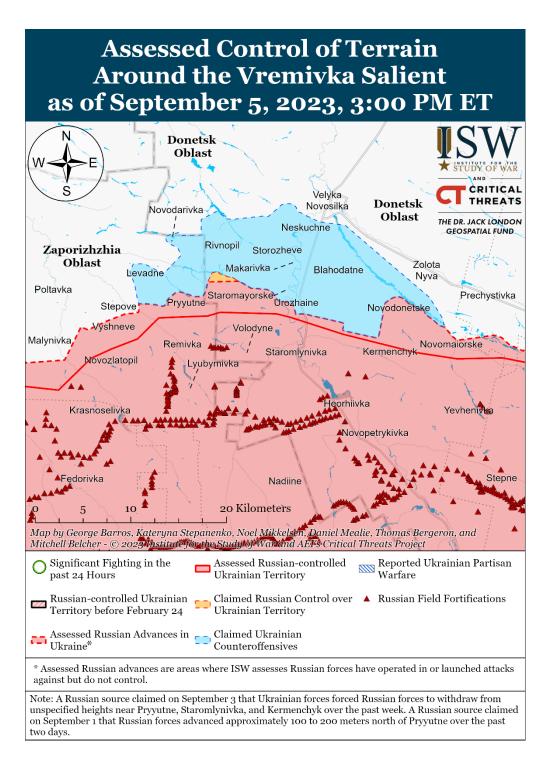


A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited and unsuccessful attacks on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on September 5. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a platoon-sized attack near Opytne (about 3km southwest of Avdiivka on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City) but that Russian forces ultimately repelled the attack.[39]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations southwest of Donetsk City on September 5 and did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks near Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[40] A Russian milblogger noted that Russian forces continue to assault Marinka but that the frontline southwest of Donetsk City has not changed.[41]

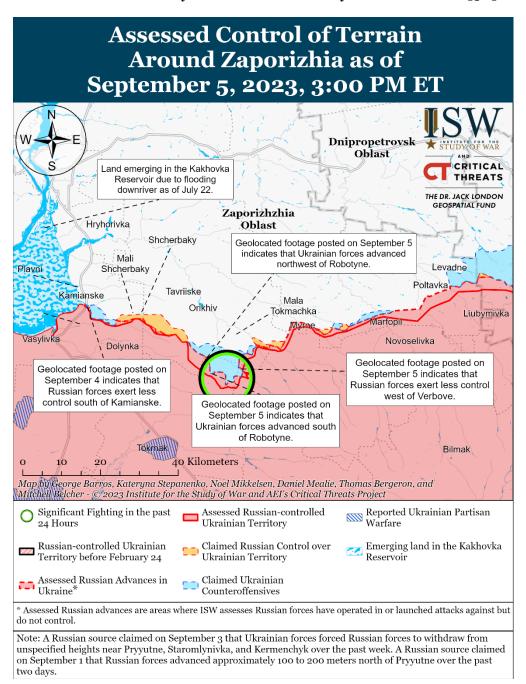
<u>Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces increased the tempo of offensive operations and marginally advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on September 5. Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted small-scale armored assaults against positions of the Russian 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District), 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), and possibly the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Kaskad" Operational Tactical Combat Formation on the Novodonetske-Novomayorske line (11-17km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[42] Russian "Vostok" Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky claimed that Ukrainian forces captured some unspecified Russian positions in this area, but other Russian milbloggers claimed that heavy fighting is still ongoing on the outskirts of Novodonetske and Novomavorske.[43] Khodakovsky also claimed that heavy Ukrainian artillery fire southeast of Velyka Novosilka is degrading Russian morale and reducing the effectiveness of Russian minefields in the area, as Russian sappers are unable to lay more mines.[44] Another prominent milblogger noted that Russian forces in this area need increased counterbattery capabilities to combat Ukrainian artillery.[45] Russian milbloggers also claimed that fighting is ongoing near Staromayorske and Urozhaine (both about 8km south of Velyka Novosilka).[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that an unspecified Russian naval infantry unit, likely the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet), and elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army (Eastern Military District) repelled Ukrainian attacks north of Mykilske (27km southwest of Donetsk City).[47]



A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful counterattack near Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on September 5.[48]

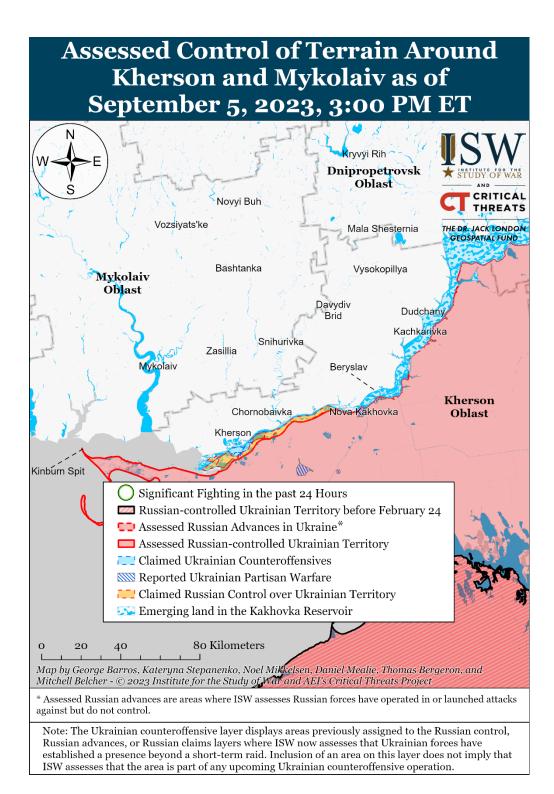
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and advanced on September 5. Geolocated footage published on September 5 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced northwest and south of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and northwest of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[49] Russian sources, including the Russian MoD, claimed that Russian forces repelled small Ukrainian infantry attacks on the Robotyne-Verbove line.[50]



Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recaptured several positions in Robotyne as of September 5, but ISW has observed no visual confirmation of these claims. Russian milbloggers claimed on September 4 and 5 that unspecified elements of the 76th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Division recaptured several streets in southern Robotyne during counterattacks from the west and

east.[51] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted additional counterattacks northeast of Novoprokopivka and southwest of Verbove, and that positions on the Robotyne-Verbove and Robotyne-Novoprokopivka lines frequently change hands.[52]

A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain limited positions in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast near Kherson City but that Russian forces have stabilized the situation near Hola Prystan.[53] The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces landed two small groups of 20 total personnel near the Antonivsky Bridge and that a 10-person Ukrainian grouping holds a position near Pidstepne (about 12km east of the Antonivsky Bridge).[54] Another milblogger claimed the situation near the Antonivsky Bridge and Dachy is increasingly tense due to nearby Ukrainian positions.[55]



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

Russian sources continue to report on Russian efforts to recruit volunteers amid continued rumors of general mobilization. Russian opposition news outlet *Govorit Nemoskva* stated on September 4 that

Russian regional authorities sharply increased efforts to recruit volunteers for military service in August 2023.[56] Voronezh Oblast authorities reportedly promised 120,000 rubles (\$1225) to volunteers from the oblast who sign a contract with the Russian MoD by the end of 2023 and reminded detainees that the Russian government will pardon anyone who serves in the war in Ukraine.[57] *Govorit Nemoskva* reported that Russian authorities in Perm, Chuvashia, St. Petersburg, and Volgograd began campaigns to coerce migrants to sign military contracts in exchange for Russian citizenship, consistent with ISW's previous reporting.[58] Regional officials reportedly expressed concern that the Russian government will conduct a wave of "total" mobilization if regional officials do not recruit enough volunteers for military service.[59] Russian sources, including State Duma Defense Committee Head Andrei Kartapolov, repeatedly denounced the circulation of a reportedly fake Russian MoD decree that orders the resumption of mobilization on September 5, indicating that Russian authorities remain concerned about how the Russian population would react to further mobilization.[60]

<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)

The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) reportedly attempted to assassinate a Russian occupation official in occupied Luhansk Oblast on September 5. Ukrainian news outlet *Hromadske* cited reported internal SBU sources and stated that the SBU attempted to assassinate former Chairman of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Customs Committee Yuri Afanasyevsky with an explosive device.[61] *Hromadske* reported that Afanasyevsky is a General Major in the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and "financier" of LNR Head Leonid Pasechnik.[62] *Hromadske* reported that Afanasyevsky laundered money to finance Russian military units fighting in the war in Ukraine.[63] **Significant activity in Belarus** (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

The Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) continued the "Combat Brotherhood-2023" operational-strategic command staff exercises in Belarus on September 5.[64] The chairmen of the defense and security committees in the parliaments of all CSTO member states held a Coordination Meeting in Minsk on September 5.[65]

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.

Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project 2023

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