Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 8

Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey, Angela Howard, Grace Mappes, and Frederick W. Kagan October 8, 10:30 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.

A large-scale explosion damaged the Kerch Strait Bridge that links occupied Crimea with Russia on October 8. Maxar satellite imagery shows that the explosion collapsed one lane of the road bridge and damaged the nearby railway track.¹ The Russian Investigative Committee stated that a truck exploded on the bridge and ignited seven fuel tanks on the railroad.² A small fraction of Russian milbloggers speculated that Ukrainian saboteurs used a boat to detonate the bridge from the sea, though there is no visible evidence for such a conclusion.³ The Kremlin refrained from accusing Ukraine of sabotage or attack, echoing similar restraint following the sinking of the cruiser *Moskva* and the Ukrainian strike on Saky airfield in Crimea.⁴ Ukraine did not claim responsibility for the incident, but *The New York Times* reported that an unnamed senior Ukrainian official stated that Ukrainian intelligence participated in the explosion.⁵ Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov noted that the Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a government commission composed of government officials, security services, and the Ministry of Emergency Situations to investigate the "emergency." of the cruiser with the property of the cruiser of the cru

The explosion will not permanently disrupt critical Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Crimea, but its aftermath is likely to increase friction in Russian logistics for some time. The road bridge appears at least partially operational, and the railroad bridge did not suffer significant structural damage according to Russian reports that generally seem plausible based on the available video evidence. Russian footage shows people walking on the damaged road bridge and a train moving on the railroad bridge. The Head of occupied Crimea Sergey Aksyonov claimed that the remaining lane of the road bridge opened to cars and buses after a rigorous security check, but that trucks must move by ferry. The collapsed lane of the road bridge will restrict Russian military movements until it is repaired, forcing some Russian forces to rely on the ferry connection for some time. Russian forces will likely still be able to transport heavy military equipment via the railroad. Russian officials will likely intensify security checks on all vehicles crossing the bridge, however, adding delays to the movement of Russian military equipment, personnel, and supplies to Crimea. Putin has already signed a decree strengthening the security protocol on the bridge under the supervision of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

The Kremlin is likely continuing to frame the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) as the scapegoat for the Kerch Bridge explosion and other Russian military failures to deflect the blame from Putin. The Russian MoD has not issued an official statement regarding the incident as of this publication. Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that the Russian Presidential Administration sent out a guide to Russian mass media on the appropriate way to downplay the severity of the damage to the bridge, and it is possible that the Kremlin has ordered the Russian MoD to remain quiet regarding the situation. Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov stated that Russia must initiate a strike campaign on critical Ukrainian infrastructure instead of listening to Russian MoD promises. 12

Some nationalist voices noted that Putin and his close circle are failing to immediately address the attack on a symbolic bridge, voicing direct criticism of Putin for the first

time. A milblogger warned that if Putin fails to undertake retaliatory actions it "will be mistaken for the weakness of the president himself." Another milblogger noted that it is hypocritical for the Kremlin to call on Russians to rally behind Putin if he is unable to comment on significant events such as the *Moskva* sinking, prisoner exchanges including Azovstal fighters, or the collapse of the Kharkiv frontline. Others criticized the silence of Russian Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev regarding the explosion, given that Medvedev had made several statements defining any attacks on the Kerch Bridge as a violation of Russian "red lines." Russian milbloggers and propagandists alike called on the Kremlin to resume strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure and notably did not make any calls for Russia to use tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

Ukrainian and Russian sources claimed that the Kremlin targeted some higher military command figures following the Kerch Bridge explosion, but these reports remain unverified as of this publication. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that the Kremlin detained, arrested, and blocked unspecified military officials and ordered the units of the elite Dzerzhinsky Separate Operation Purpose Division to enter Moscow on October 8.¹⁶ Milbloggers who favor the Wagner Group claimed that the Kremlin has replaced Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov supposedly with Tula Governor Alexey Dyumin and the deputy commander-in-chief of the ground forces, Lieutenant General Alexander Matovnikov, respectfully.¹⁷ ISW cannot independently verify either of these reports at this time.

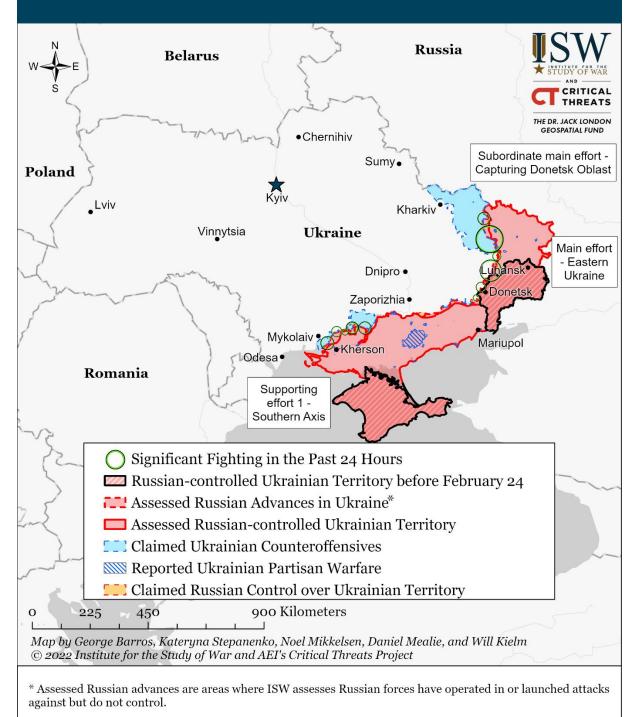
The Kremlin named the Russian Commander of the Aerospace Forces, Army General Sergey Surovikin, the new commander of the Russian operation in Ukraine, and this appointment has generated positive feedback within the nationalist community. Sorovikin previously commanded the "southern" group of forces in Ukraine and was reportedly responsible for the capture of Lysychansk in July.¹8 Milbloggers shared their excitement regarding Surovikin's appointment, noting that Surovikin has the "tough" character necessary to regain the initiative in Ukraine.¹9 Wagner financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin extravagantly praised Surovikin because he "got into a tank and rushed to save" the Soviet Union during the 1991 coup attempt in Moscow.²0 Prigozhin's interview further confirmed reports of a fissure between pro-war and "liberal" factions within the Kremlin, which ISW will consider in more detail in subsequent reports.

Key Takeaways

- A large-scale explosion seriously damaged the Kerch Strait Bridge that links occupied Crimea with Russia.
- The Kremlin named the Russian Commander of the Aerospace Forces, Army General Sergey Surovikin, the new commander of the Russian operation in Ukraine, and this appointment has generated positive feedback within the nationalist community.
- Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in Kharkiv and Luhansk Oblasts.
- Russian forces continued establishing defensive positions in northern Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces continued to attack settlements around Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and west of Donetsk City.

- Ukrainian forces reportedly continued to shoot down Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones.
- Russian federal subjects are facing financial challenges in funding mobilization.
- Russian and occupation administration officials continued measures to remove Ukrainian children from their homes in Russian-occupied territories.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of October 8, 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.

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Southern and Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

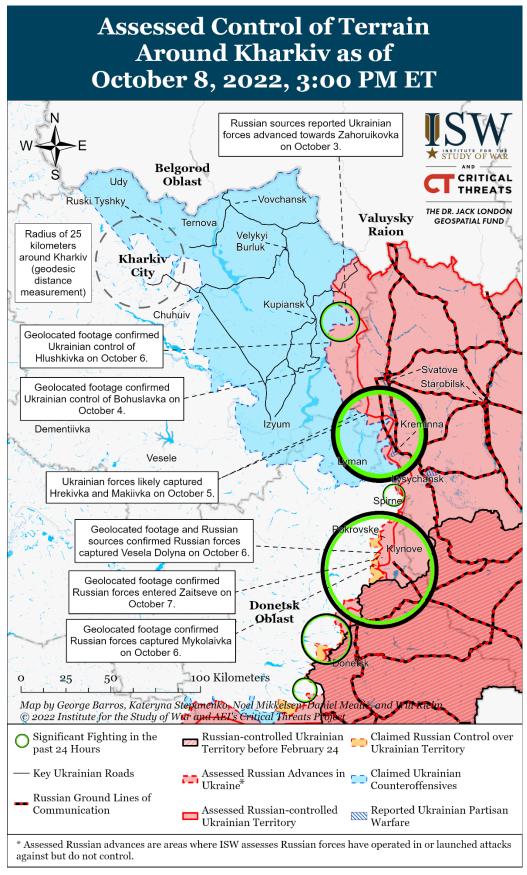
<u>Ukrainian Counteroffensives</u> (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Eastern Ukraine: (Oskil River-Kreminna Line)

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations from Kharkiv Oblast in the direction of Svatove on October 8. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults southeast of Kupyansk.²¹ The Head of the Kharkiv Oblast administration, Oleg Synehubov, reported that Russian forces continued to shell Kupyansk and surrounding settlements.²² Russian forces continued routine artillery, air, and missile strikes in eastern Ukraine in the vicinity of Kharkiv City, Bohodukhiv, and near Izyum.²³

Russian sources also claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Kreminna direction on October 8. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian forces attempting to cross the Zherebets River at an unspecified location.²⁴ The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) People's Militia claimed that Russian forces maintain full control over the Kreminna-Svatove highway, despite previous reports of Ukrainian forces operating in the area.²⁵ The Russian MoD also claimed that Russian airstrikes hit two Ukrainian concentrations of manpower south of Kreminna near Siversk and west of Kreminna near Yampilivka.²⁶ The Russian MoD is increasingly including tactical details about Ukrainian forces in its claims, likely in response to Russian milblogger criticism that they do not report enough on Ukrainian advances. ISW makes no attempt to evaluate the veracity of the details the Russian MoD presents about the sizes, echelons, designations, or types of Ukrainian units and will not present those details in our reports.

Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces are continuing to suffer personnel losses in Luhansk Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 8 that Russian forces transported 300 wounded personnel to a hospital in Luhansk Oblast.²⁷



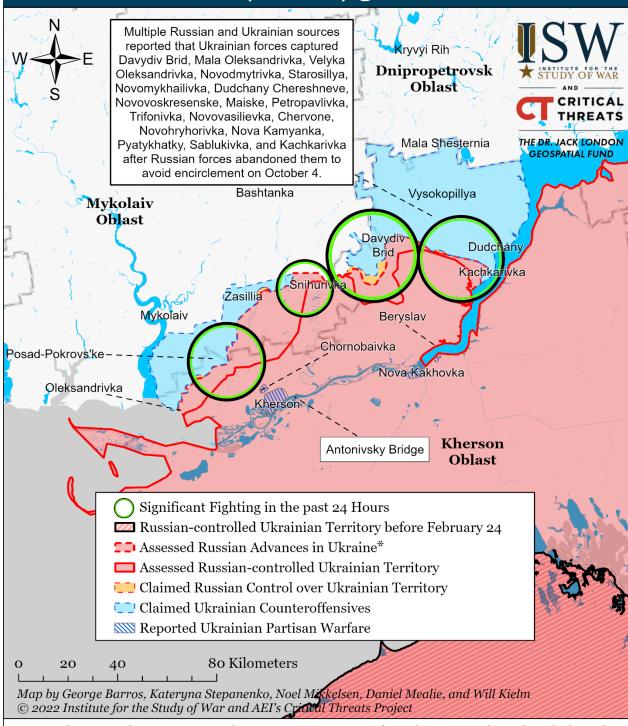
Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Russian forces continued establishing defensive positions in Kherson Oblast on October 8. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces continued to shell areas along the line of contact to prevent Ukrainian advances and began establishing new defensive lines in the Beryslav and Nova Kakhovka Raions.²⁸ A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces are continuing to consolidate along the front line near Davydiv Brid and Mala Oleksandrivka and are equipping strongholds in Bezimenne, all near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River.²⁹ ISW does not attempt to validate Russian forecasts of possible Ukrainian operations and offers no comment on their plausibility.

Ukrainian and Russian sources reported ongoing battles north and northwest of Kherson City, near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River, and northeast of Beryslav on October 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack near Ternovy Pody, roughly 20km northwest of Kherson City.³⁰ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance in the area of Davydiv Brid and Mala Oleksandrivka near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River.³¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to advance near Sukhanove, Pyatikhatki, Sadok, Ishchenka, Burskynske, Shchaslyve, and Mala Seidemynykha on the northern Kherson Oblast frontline.³² A Russian source claimed that Russian forces retook Pravdyne, 33km northwest of Kherson City.³³ A Russian source claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian ground attack near Dudchany on the western bank of the Dnipro River.³⁴ The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) claimed that Russian forces maintain positions in Snihurivka, Mykolaiv Oblast, approximately 60km east of Mykolaiv City, and reported ongoing fighting on the outskirts of the settlement.³⁵

Ukrainian forces continued their interdiction campaign in Kherson Oblast to support their southern counteroffensive on October 8. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces struck three Russian concentrations of manpower and equipment and a logistics point in Beryslav Raion.³⁶ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command also reported that Ukrainian aviation struck Russian anti-aircraft systems in Beryslav and Kakhovka Raions.³⁷ Geolocated images show that Ukrainian forces likely hit five fuel storage facilities near Kyselivka, Bilozerskyi Raion.³⁸ Ukrainian forces reportedly shot down a Russian Orlan-10 drone in Chervone, Beryslav Raion.³⁹ The Russian MoD claimed that land and maritime logistics routes are continuously provisioning Russian forces operating in the Mykolaiv-Kryvyi Rih and Zaporizhia directions, however.⁴⁰

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of October 8, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



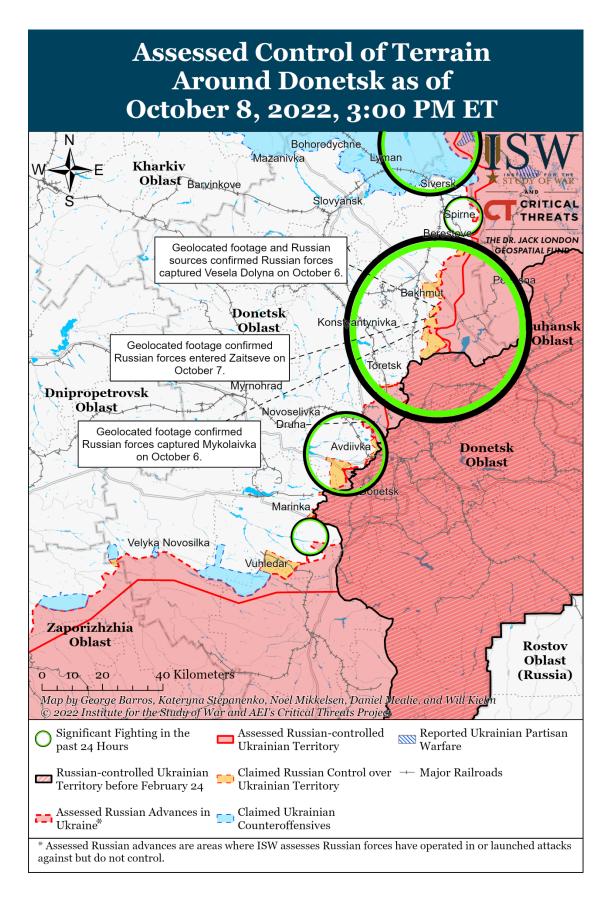
^{*} Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian forces continued conducting ground attacks throughout Donetsk Oblast on October 8. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks on and around Bakhmut near Vyimka, Bilohorivka, Bakhmutske, and Krasna Hora to the north and Mayorsk, Ozeryanivka, Zaitseve, Odradivka, and Andriivka to the south. A Russian milblogger referred to recent Russian-claimed gains south of Bakhmut of Zaitseve and Vesela Dolyna as a "tactical success." IsW first reported on Russian ground attacks against Zaitseve and Vesela Dolyna on August 5 and July 13 respectively, noting that Russian forces have taken over two months to be able to claim to have secured two small villages. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults around Avdiivka near Pervomaiske, Vesele, Kamianka, and Nevelske, and in western Donetsk Oblast near Pobieda, Krasnohorivka, and Novomykhailivka. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian counterattack at an unspecified location in the "South Donetsk" direction, possibly referring to the Vuhledar, western Donetsk Oblast area, but there is currently no independent confirmation of the Russian MoD's definition of this operational direction.

Ukrainian forces likely conducted strikes against railway stations in the Russian rear in Donetsk Oblast on October 8. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces struck a railway station in Ilovaisk, Donetsk Oblast, damaging three diesel fuel tanks for trains and a technical area of the station.⁴⁶ Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces struck the Karan railway station in Andriivka, Donetsk Oblast, roughly 51km north of Mariupol.⁴⁷ Geolocated footage shows smoke rising from the station area with audible secondary detonations, likely from ammunition.⁴⁸



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

Russian forces continued to conduct routine artillery, air, and missile strikes west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv Oblasts on October 8.49 Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces attacked Zaporizhzhia City, Mykolaiv City, Ochakiv, and areas of Odesa Oblast with Shahed-136 kamikaze drones but stated that Ukrainian forces successfully shot them down.50 Russian forces continued artillery fire and drone strikes against infrastructure in Nikopol and Marhanets, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, on the north bank of the Dnipro River.51 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces shelled Russian manpower and equipment concentrations in the areas of Polohy and Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast, and that Russian forces suffered at least 85 casualties.52

Russian and Ukrainian sources traded accusations of shelling the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) overnight on October 7-8.⁵³ Russian and Ukrainian officials and the International Atomic Energy Agency stated that the shelling cut off the external energy supply to the ZNPP after engineers had just restored the external power line on October 7.⁵⁴ Ukrainian Enerhodar Mayor Dmytro Orlov later stated that engineers restored power to Enerhodar and the surrounding settlements on October 8.⁵⁵ Russian Zaporizhia Oblast occupation official Vladimir Rogov stated that Russian atomic energy agency Rosatom has already started the process of integrating the ZNPP into the Russian power grid.⁵⁶

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

The financial, logistical, and political challenges of supporting the Russian mobilization process continue to fuel societal division within Russia and criticism of the government. The Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) risk alienating core supporters including those supportive of mobilization by failing to address inconsistencies and inadequacies in the implementation of mobilization.

The large-scale removal of Russian men of working age (either through mobilization or through their flight) has left holes in the positions they formerly filled. A Russian source reported on October 6 that the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources proposed to exempt garbage collectors and garbage truck drivers from mobilization.⁵⁷ Forbes reported on October 6 that Russian sports centers again petitioned authorities for an exemption to mobilization for coaches and instructors, as mobilization applies to 70% of men employed in the industry.⁵⁸ Mothers caring for children after the mobilization of their husbands will also face greater non-work demands on their time. A Russian source reported on October 6 that the Liberal Democratic Party drafted a bill authorizing the reduction of work hours for mothers with mobilized husbands to 35 hours a week at prior salaries.⁵⁹ Russian authorities appear to have recognized and attempted to address labor shortages caused by mobilization. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 8 that local authorities in some Russian districts are attempting to implement mobilization plans drawing on unemployed men of conscription age.⁶⁰ However, the economic gaps left by the sudden removal of part of the Russian workforce are likely to continue to create complications.

Funding mobilization poses an economic challenge to Russian regions, as ISW has previously reported.⁶¹ Russian regions balance pressure to deliver on promises to the mobilized while remaining within their means. A local Russian source reported on October 6 that Tartarstan Deputy Finance Minister Gela Gerasimova stated that the budget of Tartarstan cannot finance mobilization.

Gerasimova claimed mobilization will draw on the federal budget.⁶² Omsk Governor Aleksandr Burkov stated on October 7 that he found an unspecified way to pay each mobilized person 100,000 rubles (\$1,603) after previously stating the region's budget could not afford such payments.⁶³ The costs of mobilization are likely to continue well into 2023, and the long-term viability of such solutions is questionable.

Poor behavior demonstrated by conscripts brought to training grounds has disturbed nearby communities. A Russian source reported on October 7 that residents of Mulino raised complaints that the mobilized sent to Mulino training grounds drank heavily and walked around the village. ISW has previously reported similar complaints in this area.⁶⁴ Nizhny Novgorod Governor Gleb Nikitin has therefore banned the sale of alcohol during mobilization in Mulino.⁶⁵

Reports from October 6 and 7 show a series of women across Russia recording video messages asking for help in response to their husbands' illegal mobilization.⁶⁶ ISW has previously reported an ongoing pattern of mobilization of Russians with disqualifying health and personal circumstances.⁶⁷ Fontanka Saint Petersburg reported on October 6 that a housewife in Krasnogvardeysky District, Saint Petersburg, received a mobilization notice.⁶⁸ This report is the first that ISW has identified detailing the mobilization of a woman without mention of a relevant work background.

Mobilized soldiers also continue to face extreme conditions. A Russian news source counted 15 deaths among the mobilized from various regions prior to deployment to Ukraine as of October 7.69

Discrepancies in the level of public concern for newly mobilized units as compared to contract soldiers have likely created a rift in Russian society. Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) published on October 8 a recording of a call between a contract Russian soldier and his mother. The mother complained that mobilized units face preferential treatment over volunteer and contract soldiers who have been fighting for months. The mother argued that Russian contract soldiers purchased their own equipment and faced the same difficulties as newly mobilized soldiers while the Russian public did not care in the same way that they do about the mobilized men. She also noted that contract soldiers faced such difficulties without the 200,000-300,000-ruble (\$3,207-4,811) bonus received by the mobilized. The mother directly expressed discontent with the apparent unreachability of Putin on issues related to soldiers' well-being and questioned whether he "even [knows] where our guys are?" ISW cannot confirm the extent of such dissatisfaction, but the increasing concessions given to mobilized men in response to broad criticism of the mobilization effort could increase such feelings among contract soldiers, volunteer soldiers, and their families.

Deputy Russian Minister of Defense Viktor Goremykin deflected criticism that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is severely undersupplying soldiers by claiming on October 7 that the Russian Armed Forces "have everything necessary to provide for every servicemember in full."⁷¹ Widespread reports of Russian mobilized units being forced to purchase their own equipment and clothing, going for days with no food or water, and requesting donations from Russian society contradict Goremykin's statement.⁷² Russian military bloggers publicly mocked Goremykin's false claim and marveled at the ability of the Russian MoD to continue denying obvious logistical problems. One Russian military blogger claimed that the Russian MoD prioritizes "attempts to create an external gloss" above the lives of soldiers and above the need to win.⁷³ Another military blogger stated that it is no longer possible to replace reality with beautiful reports.⁷⁴ Blatantly false claims decrease general belief in the credibility of the Russian MoD and contribute to the growing narrative of MoD incompetence.

Russian authorities appear to be avoiding prosecution of men avoiding military summonses. Russian lawyer Pavel Chikov posted to Telegram on October 7 that the Penza Prosecutor's Office canceled the first criminal case for evasion of mobilization under Article 328 of the Russian criminal code after launching the case two days before. Federation Council Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Building Head Andrey Klishas stated on October 7 that it is unlawful to threaten citizens with criminal liability under Article 328 for refusal to mobilize. Such responses could represent a response to public pressure or challenges in prosecuting all mobilization dodgers. They could also represent the desire to try mobilization dodgers under alternative articles or continue attempts to force dodgers to mobilize rather than sit in prison.

<u>Activity in Russian-occupied Areas</u> (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian and occupation administration officials continued to increase filtration and law enforcement measures in Russian-occupied territories on October 8. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on October 8 that Russian forces continue filtration activities near positions struck by Ukrainian forces to find suspected Ukrainian partisans that they believe to be providing Ukrainian forces with the positions of Russian manpower and equipment concentrations.⁷⁷ Russian media reported that Russian forces in Russian-occupied Melitopol have increased street inspections of residents' documents.⁷⁸ The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian and occupation administration officials launched a Telegram chatbot for reports on the location of Ukrainian partisans in the Russian-occupied territories.⁷⁹ The center also reported that Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) personnel increasingly question residents in filtration centers about their participation in the annexation referend that were held in Russian-occupied territories in late September.80 Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov claimed that occupation administration officials are deporting residents with pro-Ukrainian sentiments and transporting them to the Vasylivka border checkpoint, but that Russian forces are still not allowing residents to pass through into Ukrainian-held Zaporizhia Oblast.81 Russian and occupation administration officials are likely to increase filtration and law enforcement activities as Ukrainian counteroffensives progress.

Russian and occupation administration officials continued measures to remove Ukrainian children from their homes in Russian-occupied territories on October 8. The Head of the Kherson Occupation Administration Vladimir Saldo reported that Russian-occupied Crimea agreed to take over 5,000 children from Kherson Oblast "on vacation" and that 1,500 of those children have already arrived in Crimea. Vladimir Saldo also announced that the governors of Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai stated that their administrations are ready to accept up to 10,000 children from Kherson Oblast. Saldo did not specify a duration for such offers or "vacations." Vladimir Saldo stated that the children's parents would be able to join their children in the territories to which they are sent.

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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