Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 5

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Angela Howard, and Mason Clark September 5, 10:30pm 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.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive is tangibly degrading Russian logistics and administrative capabilities in occupied southern Ukraine. As ISW has previously reported, Ukrainian officials explicitly confirmed that Ukrainian troops seek to attrit Russian logistical capabilities in the south through precision strikes on manpower and equipment concentrations, command centers, and logistics nodes. These counteroffensive actions also have intentional radiating effects on Russian occupation authorities. The head of the Kherson Oblast occupation regime, Kirill Stremousov, told Russian media outlet TASS that his administration has paused annexation referendum plans in Kherson Oblast due to "security" concerns.² The Ukrainian Resistance Center similarly reported that Russian occupation authorities are abandoning plans for referenda due to the ongoing counteroffensive. 3 Shortly after TASS published his comment, Stremousov posted on Telegram denving he called for a pause because his administration had never set an official date for the referendum.4 Both of Stremousov's statements indicate a high level of disorganization within occupation regimes that is likely being exacerbated by the effects of the counteroffensive. Ukrainian forces intend to slowly chip away at both Russian tactical and operational level capabilities in Kherson Oblast, and in doing so will likely have significant impacts on the administrative and bureaucratic capabilities of occupation officials.

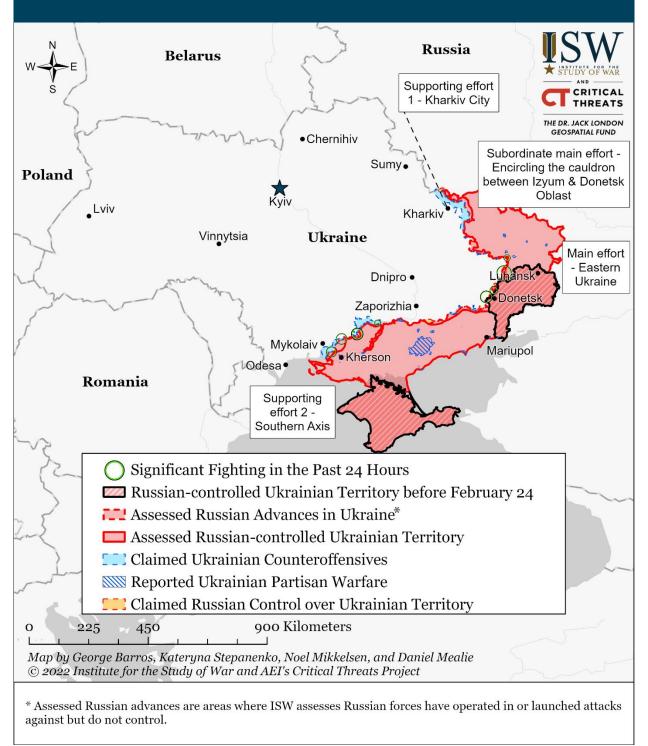
Putin publicly praised DNR and LNR forces (and denigrated the Russian military) on September 5, likely to motivate proxy recruitment and reframe Russian coverage of the war. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on September 5 that personnel in the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (the armed forces of the DNR and LNR) are fighting better in Donbas than professional Russian soldiers and insinuated that he is unhappy with the performance of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Putin's comments are likely intended to promote recruitment and force generation in the DNR and LNR and refocus coverage of the war in the Russian media space away from the fighting in southern Ukraine. Russian forces have increasingly relied on DNR and LNR personnel as core fighting forces, and the Kremlin likely seeks to rhetorically elevate their role in the war to enhance recruitment and increase morale. Putin additionally likely seeks to elevate the Kremlin's preferred (and false) narrative of its invasion of Ukraine as an effort to "protect" the DNR and LNR by praising their forces.

Key Takeaways

- The Ukrainian counteroffensive is tangibly degrading Russian logistics and administrative capabilities in occupied southern Ukraine.
- Putin publicly praised DNR and LNR forces (and denigrated the Russian military) on September 5, likely to motivate proxy recruitment and reframe Russian coverage of the war.
- Ukrainian military officials maintained their operational silence regarding the progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive but reported on the further destruction of Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in Central Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces conducted ground attacks east of Siversk, northeast and south of Bakhmut, and along the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.
- Ukrainian special forces conducted a limited operation against a Russian FSB base in the Enerhodar area.

- Power unit No. 6 of the ZNPP became disconnected from the Ukrainian power grid.
- Russian authorities continue to seek unconventional sources of combat power and are increasingly turning to ill and infirm individuals.
- Occupation authorities set a 1.25 ruble/1 hryvnia exchange rate in Zaporizhia Oblast in order to facilitate the economic integration of occupied Zaporizhia into the Russian Federation.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 5, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukrainian military officials maintained their operational silence and did not release any information pertaining to Ukrainian advances in Kherson Oblast on September 5. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two Russian reconnaissance drones in Vysokopillya after previously not confirming that Ukrainian forces entered the town.⁶ ISW independently assessed that Ukrainian forces captured the town on September 4 due to several social media videos.⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched airstrikes on Bezimenne and Sukhyi Stavok, approximately six and ten kilometers southeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River.⁸ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces recaptured Kostromka (the village in between Bezimenne and Sukhyi Stavok), but geolocated footage depicted Ukrainian tanks attacking Russian positions around the settlement.⁹ Combined with the geolocated footage, the Ukrainian General Staff report may indicate that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Kostromka and Bezimenne areas. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces shelled the area of Novovoskresenske (about 18km southeast of Vysokopillya) but it is unclear if Ukrainian forces have advanced in the vicinity of the settlement.¹⁰

Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian groundlines of communication (GLOCs) and ammunition depots in Central Kherson Oblast. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command noted that Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian pontoon crossing in Lyove (west of Nova Kakhovka), struck the command post of the 35th Combined Arms Army in the Kakhovka Raion, and two observation posts belonging to battalion tactical groups (BTGs) of the 247th Guards Air Assault Regiment in Mykolaiv Raion and the 126th Separate Coastal Defense Brigade in Beryslav Raion. 11 Ukraine's Southern Operational Command added that Ukrainian forces struck a pontoon crossing in the area of the Kakhovka Bridge on September 5.12 Ukrainian strikes also reportedly destroyed a Russian ammunition depot in Tomyna Balka (about 19km west of Kherson City), indicating Ukrainian forces are not operating in the settlement. 13 CNN previously reported that Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement on August 29.14 Ukraine's Southern Operational Command added that Ukrainian missile units destroyed two ammunition depots in Khersonskyi Raion. 15 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian strikes eliminated 30 Russian servicemen and three tanks in the area of the Antonivsky Bridge, and an anti-aircraft missile system with six trucks near an unspecified crossing. 16 Geolocated footage showed Russian military convoys waiting to cross the Dnipro River from the left bank, and the Russian convoys remain vulnerable to Ukrainian strikes. 17 The Ukrainian General Staff added that Russian forces are prohibiting and threatening locals from crossing the Dnipro River.¹⁸

Social media footage from September 4 and September 5 also supports Ukrainian military reports that Ukrainian forces are continuing their missile campaign throughout central Kherson Oblast. Ukrainian Telegram channels reported smoke around the Darivka Bridge over the Inhulets River, which is likely the result of another round of Ukrainian strikes on the GLOC east of Kherson City. ¹⁹ Ukrainian social media users also reported witnessing explosions in the industrial area of Tavriisk (east of Nova Kakhovka) and in Kherson City. ²⁰ Kherson City residents also noted that unspecified actors fired signal flares in the city on September 4. ²¹

Russian forces are continuing to undertake measures to establish river crossings and maintain their GLOCs to northern Kherson Oblast. Head of the Kherson Oblast occupation regime, Kirill Stremousov published a video rant depicting a pontoon crossing constructed out of barges in the background along the Antonivsky Road Bridge. The footage showed that the pontoon bridge is halfway finished from the Kherson City direction. Satellite imagery from September 4 also showed three Russian pontoons and ferries operating west of Nova Kakhovka. Akknowka.

Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces fought in four different areas around Kherson Oblast: in the vicinity of Vysokopillya, southwest of the bridgehead over the Inhulets River, approximately 60km east of Mykolaiv City in Snihurivka area, and northwest of Kherson City.

A Russian milblogger stated that the new Russian frontline south of Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border runs through southern parts of Arkhanhelske and Olhyne, southern outskirts of Vysokopillya and Potomkyne, and via the southwestern outskirts of Novovoznesenske.²⁴ Milbloggers largely claimed that Russian forces are creating artillery "kill zones" by allowing Ukrainian forces to advance near the bridgehead.²⁵ A milblogger noted that Ukrainian forces will continue to try to extend the Ukrainian bridgehead and push for the T2207 highway.²⁶ Milbloggers also stated that artillery combat continued in Snihurivka, with Russian forces reportedly destroying a Ukrainian observation post in Kyselivka (about 28km west of Snihurivka).²⁷ Social media footage reportedly showed a large smoke cloud in Snihurivka, and some social media users noted that Ukrainian forces have struck a Russian base in the area.²⁸ Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting resumed in Ternovi Pody-Zelenvi Hai-Kyselivka line (within 30km northwest of Kherson City area), but Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in the area.²⁹ A Russian milblogger noted that elements of the 7th Guards Air Assaults Division and 20th Guards Motor Rifle Division of the 8th Guards Combined Arms Army are firing artillery at Ukrainian forces attempting to advance northwest of Kherson City. 30 The milblogger added that elements of the 33rd Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 20th Division raided Ukrainian positions from the direction of Ternovi Podv.³¹ Social media footage also showed Russian forces transporting two S-300V systems (a variant of the S-300 intended to target ballistic missiles) in unspecified areas of Kherson Oblast.32

The Russian Defense Ministry maintained that Ukrainian forces are unsuccessfully attempting to gain a foothold in certain areas in the Mykolaiv City-Kryvyi Rih direction, while Russian forces are striking Ukrainian reserves and units with artillery and precision missiles.³³ The Russian Defense Ministry likely is claiming Russian precision strikes on Ukrainian forces in Kherson and Mykolaiv Oblasts in an effort to emulate Ukrainian strikes on Russian reinforcements and GLOCs. Some milbloggers continued to express criticism towards Russian defenses around Inhulets River, with one milblogger claiming that Russian SPETSNAZ requested artillery support for hours before Ukrainian forces were able to break through Russian defenses.³⁴ Former Russian politician Viktor Alksnis noted that the Russian Defense Ministry again limited its discussion of conducting offensive operations, which likely indicated that Russian forces are largely undertaking defensive measures.³⁵ Alksnis noted that Russians do not have awareness of the lack of progress during the Russian "special military operation" in Ukraine. Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation also noted that the Kremlin is exploiting Ukrainian operational silence to invent false claims about the Ukrainian counteroffensive.³⁶

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
- 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 1- Kharkiv City

- Russian Supporting Effort 2- Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Russian Main Effort- Eastern Ukraine

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

Note: We have revised our organization of Russian lines of effort to include Russian operations in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast as part of the Donetsk Oblast effort due to recently observed force allocations indicating the Russian grouping east of Hulyaipole, previously grouped with the Southern Axis, will support efforts southwest of Donetsk City.

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks along the Izyum-Slovyansk line on September 5 and continued routine shelling along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.³⁷ An *RT* war correspondent noted that the most intense fighting along this axis in the last six months has occurred in the wooded area dubbed "Sherwood Forest" that lies alongside the E40 Izyum-Slovyansk highway.³⁸ Ukrainian and Russian troops in this area reportedly exchange small arms fire at a range of 10m or less, and the dense vegetation in the area is likely obfuscating precise troop movements along much of the Izyum-Slovyansk axis.³⁹

Ukrainian military officials further confirmed on September 5 that Ukrainian troops made marginal gains northeast of Slovyansk along the left bank of the Severskiy Donetsk River on September 4. The Ukrainian General Staffreported that Ukrainian forces retook positions previously occupied by Russian forces in the "Kramatorsk direction," typically describing the Lyman-Slovyansk-Kramatorsk area.⁴⁰ The language of the General Staff statement is consistent with reports that Ukrainian troops retook Ozerne (20km northeast of Slovyansk) on September 4.⁴¹

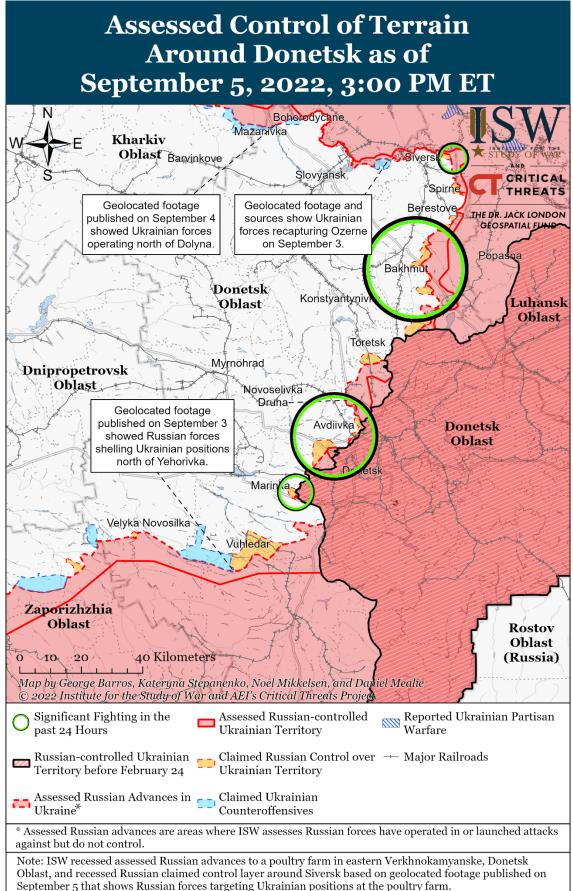
Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks east of Siversk on September 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian advances in Hryhorivka, about 10km northeast of Siversk, and in Bilohorivka.⁴² It is unclear if the Bilohorivka that the General Staff referred to is the one 12km northeast of Siversk or 17km southeast of Siversk.⁴³ Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) troops also reportedly fired on Ukrainian positions in Verkhnokamyanske, about 5km due east of Siversk, suggesting Russian troops lost their previous positions in Verkhnokamyanske on an unspecified date.⁴⁴ Russian forces continued routine artillery strikes on Siversk and surrounding settlements.⁴⁵

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast and south of Bakhmut on September 5. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops fought in Pokrovske (10km east of Bakhmut) and the Bakhmutske-Soledar area (10km northeast of Bakhmut).⁴⁶ Russian troops, including Wagner Group fighters, continued attempts to advance north on Bakhmut from Kodema (13km southeast of Bakhmut), Vesela Dolyna (5km southeast of Bakhmut), Zaitseve (8km southeast of Bakhmut), and Semihirya (16km southeast of Bakhmut).⁴⁷ Russian troops also continued routine air and artillery strikes on and around Bakhmut.⁴⁸

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on September 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted assaults around Lozove, Spartak, Pervomaiske, Vodyane, and Nevelske, which all lie along the northwestern corner of Donetsk City.⁴⁹

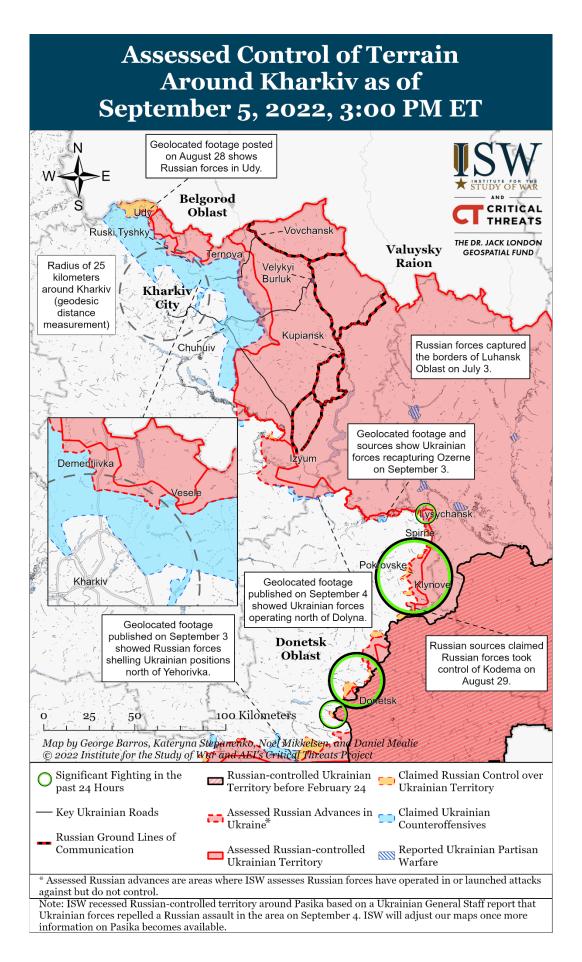
Russian sources indicated that elements of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) 11th Regiment are continuously attempting to advance from Pisky to Pervomaiske, with certain sources claiming that DNR troops have entered the outskirts of Pervomaiske itself. ⁵⁰ Proxy troops additionally continued attempts to advance within Marinka, on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City. ⁵¹ Russian and proxy troops conducted routine artillery strikes along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline. ⁵²

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks southwest of Donetsk City or in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast on September 5 and continued routine air and artillery strikes in these areas.⁵³



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

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast on September 5 and continued routine air, missile, and artillery strikes on Kharkiv City and its environs.⁵⁴ Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) and logistical hubs in Kupyansk and Semenivka southeast of Kharkiv City between September 4 and 5.⁵⁵ Russian forces expanded shelling near Bairak, Husarivka, and Chepil, between 8 and 18km from the site of confirmed Ukrainian strikes southeast of Kharkiv City on September 4.⁵⁶

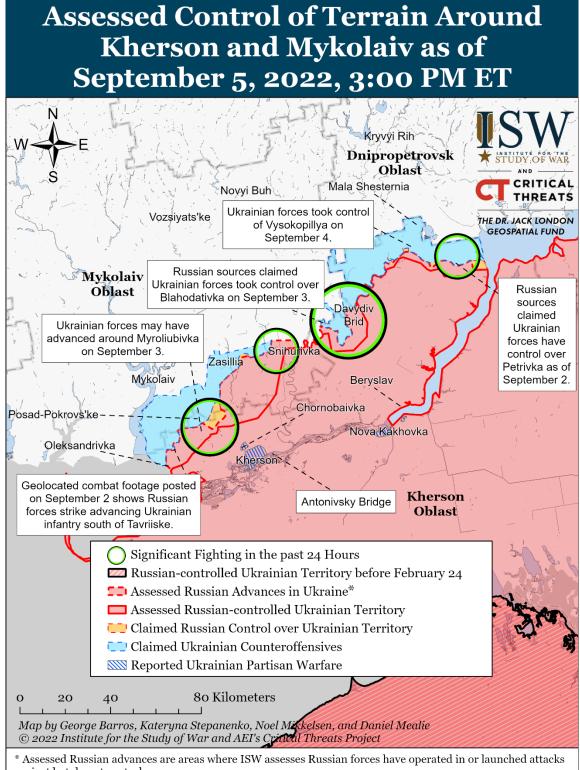


<u>Supporting Effort #2- Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in Western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 5 and continued routine shelling along the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline. ⁵⁷ The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) notably stated that a GUR Spetznaz detachment conducted a limited special operation into Russian-occupied Kamianka-Dniprovska, just west of Enerhodar and on the south bank of the Kakhkovska reservoir. ⁵⁸ The GUR noted that the Spetznaz detachment destroyed and significantly damaged Russian bases in the area, including a building where Russian forces were preparing for sham referenda and the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) base that was reportedly protecting the referendum headquarters. ⁵⁹ Geolocated satellite imagery corroborates the GUR report and shows a large fire burning in Kamianka-Dniprovska. ⁶⁰

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) continues to operate at the risk of violating radiation and fire safety hazards as a result of damage to the plant's power lines. Both Ukrainian and Russian sources exchanged accusations that the other side shelled the plant on September 5. Ukrainian nuclear operating enterprise Energoatom stated that Russian shelling over the last three days caused a fire that disconnected the last power line that linked the ZNPP to the Ukrainian power system, which forced power unit No. 6 (the unit that powers the ZNPP internally) to unload and disconnect from the grid. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces shelled infrastructure at the ZNPP and in Enerhodar. Notably, four of the six members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) delegation departed the ZNPP on September 5, with two members staying at the plant to establish a permanent presence.

Russian forces conducted missile and rocket strikes against Mykolaiv City and shelled along the line of contact in Mykolaiv Oblast on September 5.64 Ukrainian sources reported heavy shelling of Nikopol and other settlements in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, including a rocket strike against Kryvyi Rih.65 Russian air defense reportedly shot down a Ukrainian drone over Yevpatoriia, Crimea.66



against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian officials announced on August 29 that Ukrainian forces began a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast. An unnamed military official of an unspecified country told CNN on August 29 that Ukrainian forces liberated Praydyne, Nova Dmytriyka, and Tomyna Balka (northwest of Kherson City) and Arkhanhelske (along the Inhulets River). ISW will readjust the maps when more open sources confirm the liberation of these settlements. ISW extended Ukrainian counteroffensives to Sukhyi Stavok based on several claims from Russian milbloggers that Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement on August 29. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back to Sukhyi Stavok from Kostromka and Bezimenne on September 3. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched air strikes on Bezimenne and Kostromka on September 4, which may indicate a Ukrainian advance in the area.

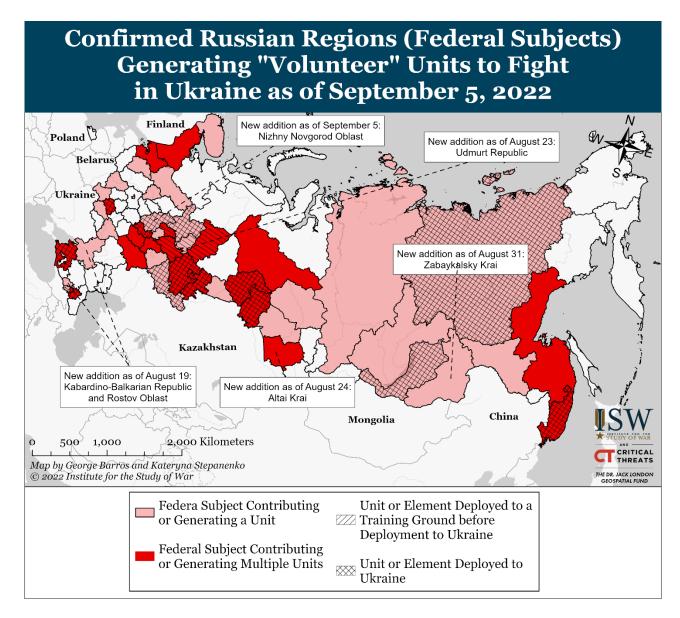
<u>Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts</u> (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

The Kremlin directly acknowledged and took a further step toward creating a federal-level infrastructure for regional volunteer battalions to replace losses in Ukraine on September 5. Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov announced that Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to task the Russian Cabinet of Ministers with protecting the civilian job positions of Russians who volunteer for the war in Ukraine. This represents a departure from previous Kremlin silence on regional mobilization efforts, which allowed the Kremlin to present recruitment drives as "voluntary local initiatives" and insulate ethnically Russian areas and key urban centers from the burden of generating volunteer battalions. The Kremlin likely must take more direct measures in providing for regional battalions due to confusion over unclear or unset provisions from the central government.

Russian authorities are likely escalating efforts to forcibly mobilize residents of occupied Ukraine, potentially to meet increasing pressure from the Kremlin to solidify territorial gains before Putin's reported September 15 deadline to capture all of Donetsk Oblast. The Ukrainian Resistance center reported that Russian occupation authorities seek to mobilize 10,000 residents from Luhansk Oblast and are leveraging school enrollment data to forcibly mobilize fathers of schoolchildren attending Russian-run educational institutions. Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai also stated that authorities in the LNR are giving employees of LNR-owned enterprises recruitment quotas to incentivize the recruitment of contract soldiers in exchange for promises of extra pay and extended job security.

Russian authorities are apparently attempting to recruit personnel typically unfit for military service due to physical and mental illnesses, further indicating that traditional sources of combat power are being increasingly exhausted. St. Petersburg Psychoneurological Dispensary No. 2 posted now-deleted military recruitment ads to its website on September 5.70 The Ukrainian General Staff similarly noted that Russian authorities are forcibly mobilizing men of military age with various diseases and injuries from hospitals in occupied areas of Donetsk Oblast.71 The increasing reliance on individuals with physical and mental illness, who are unlikely to receive proper training, medical, or psychological support before being deployed, will likely exacerbate already-poor morale and discipline within mobilized Russian units in Ukraine.

Russian federal subjects (regions) are continuing to deploy volunteer battalions to Ukraine. Russian sources reported that the 400-strong "Kuzma Minin" Nizhny Novgorod tank battalion deployed to Ukraine on September 5.7^2



<u>Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (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)</u>

Russian occupation authorities are continuing efforts to facilitate the economic integration of occupied areas into the Russian Federation. The Russian-backed head of the Zaporizhia occupation administration, Yevheny Balitsky, stated that his administration has set the exchange rate in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast to 1.25 rubles/1 hryvnia, starting September 5.73 Such efforts to codify the "rubleization" of occupied areas are intended to ease the integration of occupied territories into the Russian economy.

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://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-3; https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-31;

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² https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kherson-referendum-plans-paused-due-security-situation-tass-cites-russian-2022-09-05/; https://tass.dot.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/15648957

³ https://sprotyv.dot.mod.gov.ua/2022/09/05/rosiyany-vidmovylys-vid-ideyi-provesty-11-veresnya-referendum-nahersonshhyni/

⁴ https://t.me/Stremousov Kirill/280

⁵ https://t.me/stranaua/61992

⁶ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1068259933866103; https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russianoffensive-campaign-assessment-september-4

¹¹ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=609032850810700

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¹⁷ https://twitter.com/NLwartracker/status/1566560115964231681

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²⁰ https://t.me/hueviyherson/25400; https://t.me/hueviyherson/25416; https://t.me/stranaua/62035;

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¹³ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=609032850810700; https://t.me/zalpalyanytsya/1515

¹⁴ https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-29

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²¹ https://t.me/hueviyherson/25390

²² https://twitter.com/666 mancer/status/1566709295328202753; https://t.me/Stremousov Kirill/279;

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²⁵ https://t.me/milchronicles/1077; https://t.me/rybar/38242

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²⁷ https://t.me/rybar/38229

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³⁰ https://t.me/rybar/38229

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³³ https://t.me/mod russia/19532

³⁴ https://t.me/grey_zone/14887

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