

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 15

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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.

Elements of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) militia reportedly refused to continue fighting in Donetsk Oblast and complained about the grueling pace of offensives outside of Luhansk Oblast. The emotional significance of recent Russian targets in Donetsk Oblast resonates with audiences in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), but not with LNR audiences tired of grueling offensives beyond their claimed borders. Several Ukrainian channels shared a video on August 15 of soldiers from LNR Battalion 2740 refusing to fight for the DNR.¹ The soldiers claim that they celebrated victory on July 3, when LNR forces reached the borders of Luhansk Oblast, and that their work is done. At least one Russian milblogger has criticized the LNR servicemembers for desiring Russian support for their own "liberation" and then refusing to fight in Donetsk Oblast.² ISW cannot independently verify the origin or authenticity of this particular video. Its message reflects a larger trend of diminished LNR investment in and morale to support the Russian war in Ukraine, however. This trend is particularly dangerous to Russian forces seeking to recruit still more new soldiers from Luhansk Oblast to make up for recent losses. Further division within Russian-led forces also threatens to further impede the efficiency of the Russian war effort.

DNR units have previously recorded similar appeals when operating in Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Kherson Oblasts, which may indicate that proxy troops might not fully support the Kremlin's expansive invasion plans. ISW has previously reported that servicemen of the 3rd Infantry Battalion of the DNR's 105th Infantry Regiment complained when the unit was redeployed from Mariupol to Luhansk Oblast in late May.³ The 113th Regiment of the DNR also published a similar appeal from the Kherson Oblast frontlines in early June.⁴ Another serviceman of an unspecified DNR battalion complained that Russian border guards held the unit at the Belgorod Oblast border after the unit fought around Kharkiv City in mid-May to allow Russian units to withdraw first.⁵ DNR-based war correspondents have been boasting about the DNR progress around Avdiivka, but such attitudes may sour again if the DNR units are recommitted to another axis.

Russia's annual Technical Forum and Army Games which began in Moscow on August 13 do not represent any immediate military threat to Ukraine. The forum and army games are not military exercises. The forum is the Kremlin's premier annual military-industrial complex exposition and generates reliable arms sale revenue, which the Kremlin uses to supplement income lost due to sanctions.⁶ The Army Games are a complementary series of competitive military sporting events that the Kremlin uses to demonstrate Russian weapons systems in the field and develop relationships with foreign militaries. This year's Army Technical Forum will be held from August 15 to August 21 and the Army Games will run from August 13 to August 27.⁷

Key Takeaways

- A reported video of LNR servicemen refusing to fight in Donetsk Oblast suggests further division among Russian-led forces.
- Russian forces attempted several limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk.
- Russian forces conducted multiple offensive operations east and southeast of Siversk and northeast and southeast of Bakhmut.
- Russian forces continued conducting offensive operations northwest, west, and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Russian forces conducted a limited ground assault north of Kharkiv City.
- Russian and Ukrainian forces continued to trade accusations of shelling the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant.
- St. Petersburg authorities officially denied summoning local men to military recruitment and enlistment centers for discussions of contract service.
- Russian occupation authorities continued preparations for the integration of occupied territories of Ukraine into Russia.

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian Troops in the Cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis
- Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces attempted limited ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk on August 15. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces withdrew following unsuccessful assaults in the Mazanivka direction (24km northwest of Slovyansk) and the Dolyna direction (20km northwest of Slovyansk).⁸ Russian forces also failed in their attempts to dislodge Ukrainian forces with concentrated artillery fire in Krasnopillya and Mazanivka (both about 24km northwest of Slovyansk), Hrushuvakha (30km west of Izyum), and Asiivka (45km northwest of Izyum).⁹ Russian artillery also continued routine shelling and strikes on Slovyansk, northwest of Izyum, and along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border, including near Zalyman, Bohorodychne, Brazhktivka, and Virnopillya.¹⁰

Russian forces conducted multiple offensive operations east and southeast of Siversk on August 15. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian attempts to advance toward settlements east and southeast of Siversk were all unsuccessful.¹¹ Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that Chechen “Akhmat” special forces (SPETSNAZ) gained unspecified strategically important grounds around Siversk, confirming that Chechen units are still operating on the Siversk-Lysychansk axis.¹² Russian aviation operated near Spirne and Pryshyb.¹³ Russian media additionally shared footage of Russians using loitering munitions to strike Ukrainian positions near Siversk.¹⁴ Russian forces continued routine shelling of the Siversk area on August 15.¹⁵

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast and southeast of Bakhmut on August 15, and made limited territorial gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces withdrew to their original positions after conducting unsuccessful offensives in the directions of Soledar (10km northeast of Bakhmut), Kodema (20km southeast of Bakhmut), and Vershyna (15km southeast of Bakhmut).¹⁶ Geolocated footage showed that unspecified Russian Cossack units advanced to the Knauf Gips Donbas gypsum factory southeast of Soledar, and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia Rodion Miroshnik claimed that Russian forces are “clearing out” Soledar.¹⁷ Proxy officials have claimed control over the Knauf factory since August 5, and it is likely that they are exaggerating the extent of Russian advances in Soledar.¹⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff also stated that Russian forces intensified reconnaissance in the Bakhmut direction and conducted airstrikes near Soledar and Yakolivka (16km northeast of Bakhmut).¹⁹ Russian forces also continued shelling settlements in the Bakhmut direction, including the city itself.²⁰

Russian forces continued to conduct offensive operations around Avdiivka on August 15. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces retreated after launching unsuccessful offensive operations to improve tactical positions around Pisky, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Staromykhailivka, all situated southwest of Avdiivka.²¹ Russian Telegram channels claimed that the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) 100th Brigade pushed Ukrainian forces towards Pervomaiske using infantry assault groups and MLRS support, but geolocated footage shows that both Ukrainian and Russian forces are engaged in heavy artillery combat around Avdiivka.²²

Russian forces launched ground assaults in an effort to break Ukrainian defenses southwest of Donetsk City on August 15. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully launched assaults in the directions of Novomykhaylivka, Volodymyrivka, Pavlivka, and Vodyane, all situated southwest of Donetsk City and near the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border. DNR Deputy Information Minister Daniil Bezsonov claimed that Russian forces have broken Ukrainian defenses around Vuhledar (about 50km southwest of Donetsk City) but did not provide concrete details of the

advance.²³ Russian forces likely intensified their attacks in the area in an effort to gain control over the T0524 highway to Donetsk City.²⁴ The DNR claimed that the DNR 107th Battalion is advancing in Mariinka, approximately 22km west of Donetsk City.²⁵ Russian forces continued to target Ukrainian-held territories west of Donetsk City using airstrikes and tank, tube, and rocket artillery.²⁶

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum and prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

Russian forces conducted limited offensive operations along the Kharkiv City axis on August 15. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces from Kozacha Lopan again unsuccessfully attempted to break Ukrainian lines of defense near Udy.²⁷ Russian sources have claimed control of Udy since August 13 but have yet to produce evidence of any reported gains.²⁸ Russian forces also targeted settlements approximately 40 km north, east, and southeast from Kharkiv City with airstrikes.²⁹ Russian forces continued to target Kharkiv City and surrounding settlements with unspecified missiles and tube, tank, and rocket artillery.³⁰

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

Russian and Ukrainian forces again exchanged accusations of shelling the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast on August 15. Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces fired Western-provided M777 rounds at Enerhodar, but provided no evidence for these claims.³¹ Russian sources also rejected the August 14 international call for Russian forces to leave the territory of the Zaporizhzhia NPP and doubled down on accusing Ukrainian forces of shelling the NPP and Western states of overinvolvement and misplaced blame.³² Russian forces shelled Nikopol and Marhanets (across the Dnipro River from Enerhodar) with MLRS systems.³³

Russian forces did not conduct any reported ground assaults on the Southern Axis on August 15 but continued shelling across the entire southern front line.³⁴ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces on the Southern Axis have not changed their troop composition or position as of August 15.³⁵ Kherson Oblast Military Administration Head Serhiy Khlán stated on August 15 that Ukrainian strikes to the bridges leading to upper Kherson Oblast have rendered the bridges inoperable to heavy equipment.³⁶ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted airstrikes on Andriivka, Bilohirka, and Lozove near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River in northwestern Kherson Oblast, and near Myrne and Blahodatne, northwest of Kherson City.³⁷ Russian forces also conducted airstrikes on Shcherbaky on the T0812 highway, and Charivne south of Tavriiske, Zaporizhia Oblast.³⁸ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command also reported that Russian forces launched missiles from S-300 air defense systems on educational and civilian infrastructure in Mykolaiv City.³⁹ Russian forces continued shelling along the line of contact.⁴⁰

Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian ammunition depots in Blahodativka near the bridgehead at Lozove, and Novopetrivka in northern Kherson Oblast.⁴¹ Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian partisans blew up a rail bridge on the southwestern outskirts of Mariupol on August 13 that Russian forces frequently used to transport military equipment between the south and the east.⁴²

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

St. Petersburg officials denied sending local men letters summoning them to military recruitment and enlistment centers on August 15, after local media outlet *Fontanka* reported that men received calls and letters from military recruitment centers on August 13.⁴³ The local officials claimed that unknown provocateurs distributed the fake letters asking men to immediately appear at the military recruitment center. Local officials also denied distributing any conscription notices. ISW reported on August 14 that a St. Petersburg military recruitment center confirmed to *Fontanka* that its staff distributed the letters and called men into the office to advertise contract service.⁴⁴

These letters and calls are not conscription notices and do not indicate that Russia has instituted general conscription, as men who have responded to the summonses discussed prospects for contract service with military recruiters. Russian law also requires conscripts to receive written notice of conscription.⁴⁵ Russian lawyers have previously warned that military recruitment centers illegally mimic conscription notices left at the mailbox or via spam calls to lure men to sign military contracts upon arrival to the center, but such deception is not a part of Russia's biannual conscription drive.⁴⁶ Russian Telegram channels previously featured reports of men receiving similar misleading summonses in Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, Tyumen, Perm, and Tolyatti cities the week of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24.⁴⁷

St. Petersburg officials' denial of the distribution of summonses is a microcosm of the Kremlin's fear of public pushback should Russia attempt to conduct a full-scale mobilization. Social media comments under the *Fontanka* article discounted the letters as another attempt to scare men into signing military contracts on their own terms (with high pay and benefits) rather than waiting until general mobilization.⁴⁸ These commenters also expressed their knowledge of their rights and Russian conscription laws, which indicates that St. Petersburg residents are prepared to oppose illegal efforts at coercive mobilization. St. Petersburg is home to many conscription lawyers and human rights organizations, such as the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg, which could explain the unsurprised reaction of local social media users.⁴⁹ The distribution of the summonses also indicates that the Kremlin is continuing its pre-war attempts to mislead and coerce men who are unaware of their rights into signing military contracts to reinforce Russian war efforts in Ukraine.

Russian occupation authorities continued covert mobilization efforts in Mariupol by offering residents non-military related jobs in occupied Donetsk Oblast territories. The Mariupol City Council reported that Russian occupation authorities are sending Mariupol residents text messages offering jobs in a "paramilitary mining rescue service" or as drivers before deploying the recruits to Donetsk City, Horlivka, and Makiivka.⁵⁰ Advisor to the Mariupol Mayor Petro Andryushenko reposted an advertisement urging Mariupol men to seek employment with the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) police forces without any required prior experience.⁵¹ Andryushenko noted that the DNR is likely attempting to reinforce its troops rather than recruiting additional police forces.⁵²

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)

Russian occupation authorities continued setting conditions for long-term Russian control of occupied territories in Ukraine. The UK Ministry of Defense reported on August 15 that Russian occupation officials are likely in the “advanced planning stages” for a referendum to join Russia but that it is unclear if they have determined to proceed with a vote.⁵³ Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan reported on August 14 that Russian occupation authorities are planning a seminar for educators in occupied territories and Russian officials, including Russian Minister of Education Sergey Kravtsov, in Henichesk on August 26-27.⁵⁴ The aim of this seminar is likely to coordinate education integration with Russia.⁵⁵ Khlan also stated that Russian officials plan to launch the propaganda TV company “Tavria” on August 15, emphasizing that “Tavria” newspapers previously spread in Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast, presenting Ukrainian authorities as “fascists.”⁵⁶ The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) reported that Kherson car owners received the first batch of Russian-model license plates and driver’s licenses on August 12.⁵⁷

Russian authorities continued incentivizing Russian citizens to work in occupied territories in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on August 15 that the Russian government is offering Belgorod Oblast administration employees and employees of Russian state institutions double their salaries to work in the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples’ Republics (DNR and LNR).⁵⁸ GUR also stated that Belgorod Oblast leadership is responsible for supporting occupation efforts in Bilokurakhyne and Troitske, Luhansk Oblast, and that Belgorod Oblast teachers will start working in these areas in September.⁵⁹

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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⁶ <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/12194589>

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³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=569579461317317>

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⁵⁰ <https://t.me/mariupolrada/10571>

⁵¹ <https://t.me/andriyshTime/2335>

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