

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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July 23, 6:00 pm 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.

Ukrainian forces are likely preparing to launch or have launched a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast as of July 23, but open-source visibility on the progress and tempo of the counteroffensive will likely be limited and lag behind events. Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Adviser Serhiy Khlan stated on July 23 that Ukrainian forces have seized unspecified settlements in Kherson Oblast but called on Ukrainian civilians to remain silent on the progress of the counteroffensive until Ukrainian authorities release official statements.¹ Foreign Policy National Security Reporter Jack Detsch reported on July 22 that an unspecified senior US defense official stated that Ukrainian forces have recaptured unspecified “portions of Russian-occupied villages” in Kherson over the past week of July 15-22, indicating that Ukrainian forces have made some unspecified territorial advances along frontlines.² The area between the front line and Kherson City is rural and primarily composed of small settlements that are less likely to report on force movements and engagements, allowing control-of-terrain in this area to change without evidence appearing in open-source reporting. Russian authorities additionally have no incentive to report on Ukrainian territorial gains. The informational dynamics that allow ISW to report on Russian offensive operations with relatively little lag are thus inverted in this situation. ISW will report on the progress of any Ukrainian counteroffensives to the best of its ability within these constraints.

Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov seemingly confirmed that Colonel General Sergey Kuzovlev has replaced Army General Aleksandr Dvornikov as acting commander of Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD).³ Kadyrov stated that Kuzovlev, to whom he explicitly referred as acting commander of the SMD, visited Chechnya on July 23 in order to inspect Kadyrov’s “Akhmat” battalions.⁴ Kuzovlev had previously served as chief of staff of the SMD and commanded the Russian grouping in Syria from November 2020 to February 2021.⁵ Kuzovlev’s visit and inspection of Kadyrov’s forces, which comes two days after Kadyrov announced that these battalions will not be immediately deploying into Ukraine, may support other hints that Kadyrov is facing mounting domestic pressure.⁶ The anti-Kadyrov Sheikh Mansour battalion reportedly announced an insurgency against Kadyrov’s regime on July 21, and Kadyrov may want to hold the newly formed Akhmat battalions in Chechnya to handle any local unrest.⁷

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian forces are likely preparing to launch, or have already launched, a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov indicated that Colonel General Sergey Kuzovlev is the acting commander of the Southern Military District.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited reconnaissance operations east of Bakhmut and continued limited ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk, east of Siversk, and south of Bakhmut.**
- **The Kremlin continued to form regional volunteer battalions and likely intends to have 16 such battalions formed by the end of July.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to prepare for referenda on the annexation of occupied areas into the Russian Federation and are taking measures to isolate occupied areas from the non-Russian information space.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 23, 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.

- 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)

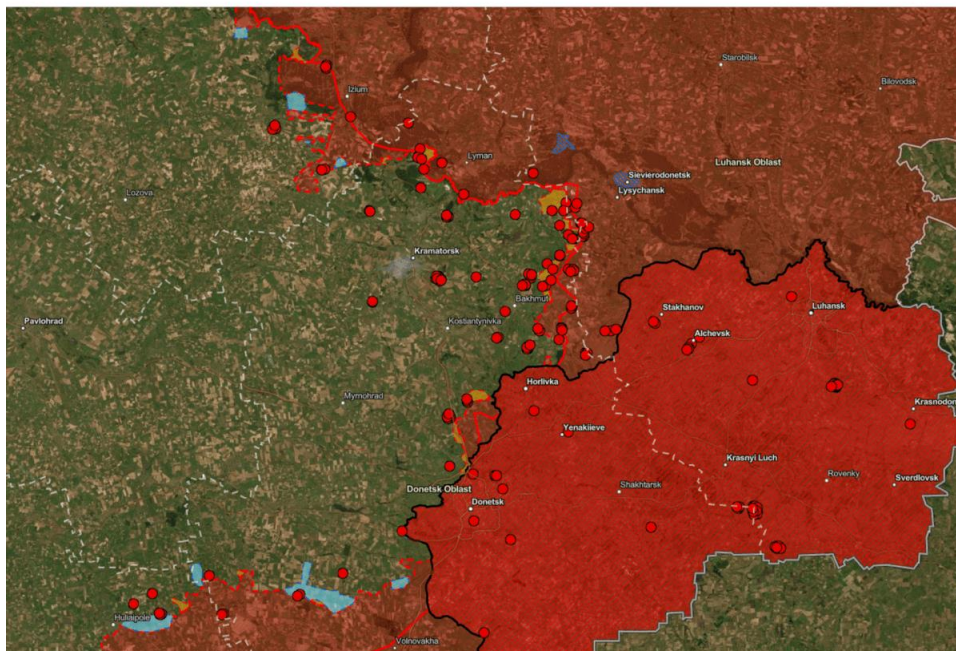
Russian forces conducted a limited ground assault northwest of Slovyansk and shelled settlements to the southeast and southwest of Izyum on July 23. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian troops neutralized a Russian reconnaissance group in Bohorodychne, about 20 km northwest of Slovyansk.⁸ Russian forces shelled Dibrovne, Krasnopillya, and Mazanivka, all northwest of Slovyansk along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border, as well as areas southwest of Izyum in the vicinity of Barvinkove.⁹

Russian forces conducted ground attacks east of Siversk in an attempt to directly advance on the city on July 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops tried and failed to advance in the directions of Verkhokamyankse and Siversk. The language of this report suggests that Russian forces may be advancing closer to the outskirts of Siversk itself from positions in the east.¹⁰ Russian forces also continued air and artillery strikes to the north, south, and east of Siversk.¹¹

Russian forces conducted limited reconnaissance operations to the east of Bakhmut and continued unsuccessful ground attacks south of Bakhmut on July 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces stopped Russian reconnaissance groups from probing Ukrainian positions around Pokrovske (5 km east of Bakhmut) and Soledar (10 km northeast of Bakhmut) and that Russian forces continued unsuccessful attacks near the Vuhledar Power Plant in Novoluhanske, about 20 km southeast of Bakhmut.¹² Russian forces continued artillery and airstrikes on and around Bakhmut to continue to set conditions for advances directly on the city.¹³

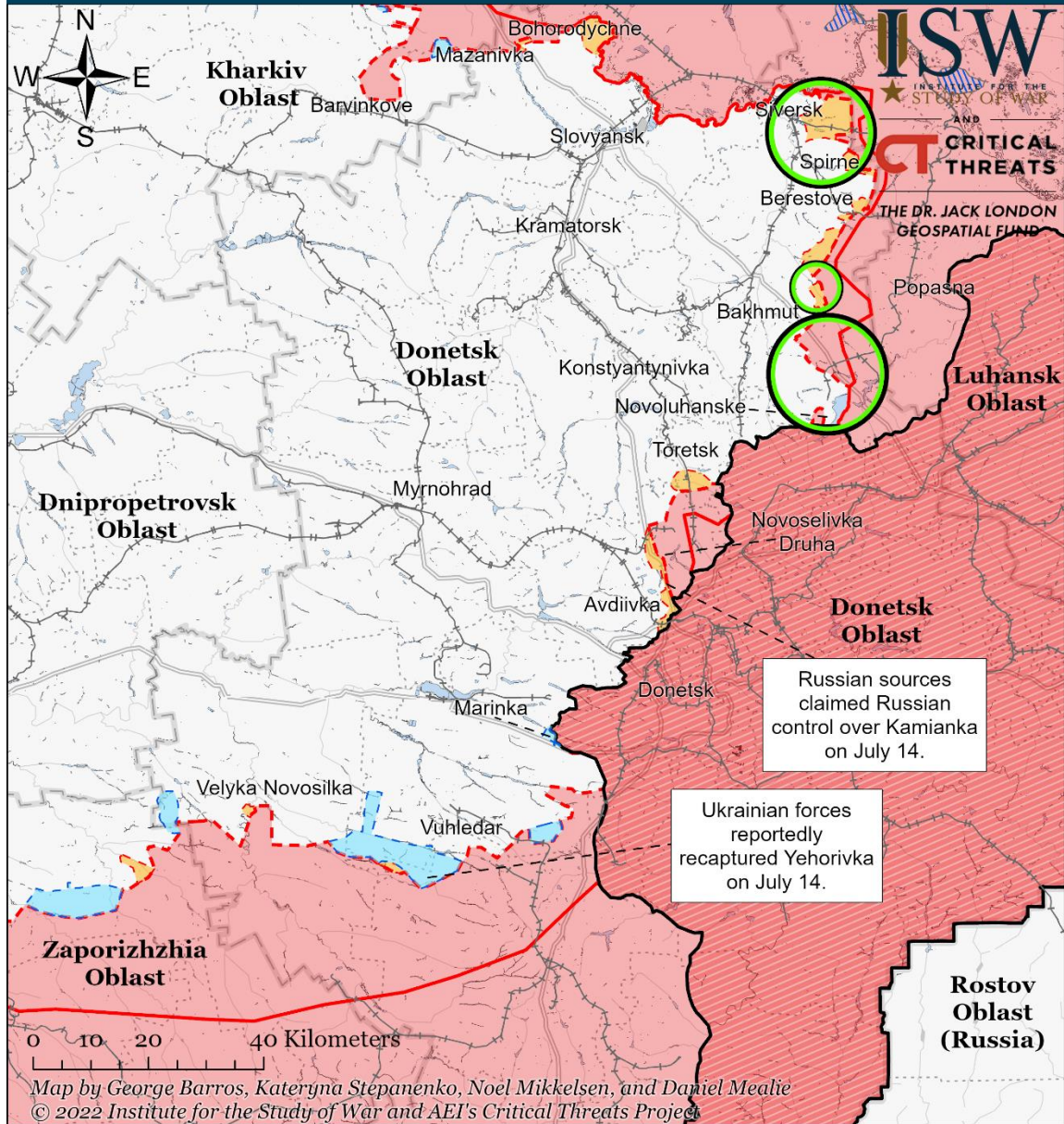
Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in the Avdiivka area and continued to fire on Ukrainian positions along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline.¹⁴ NASA FIRMS data from July 15-23 shows consistently fewer fires along the entire frontline in the Donbas, which strongly suggests that HIMARS are having a continued impact on Russian artillery capabilities.

NASA FIRMS Data near Donbas on July 15, 2022



Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System over Donbas, July 15 – July 23 and Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources claimed Russian control over Kamianka on July 14.

Ukrainian forces reportedly recaptured Yehorivka on July 14.

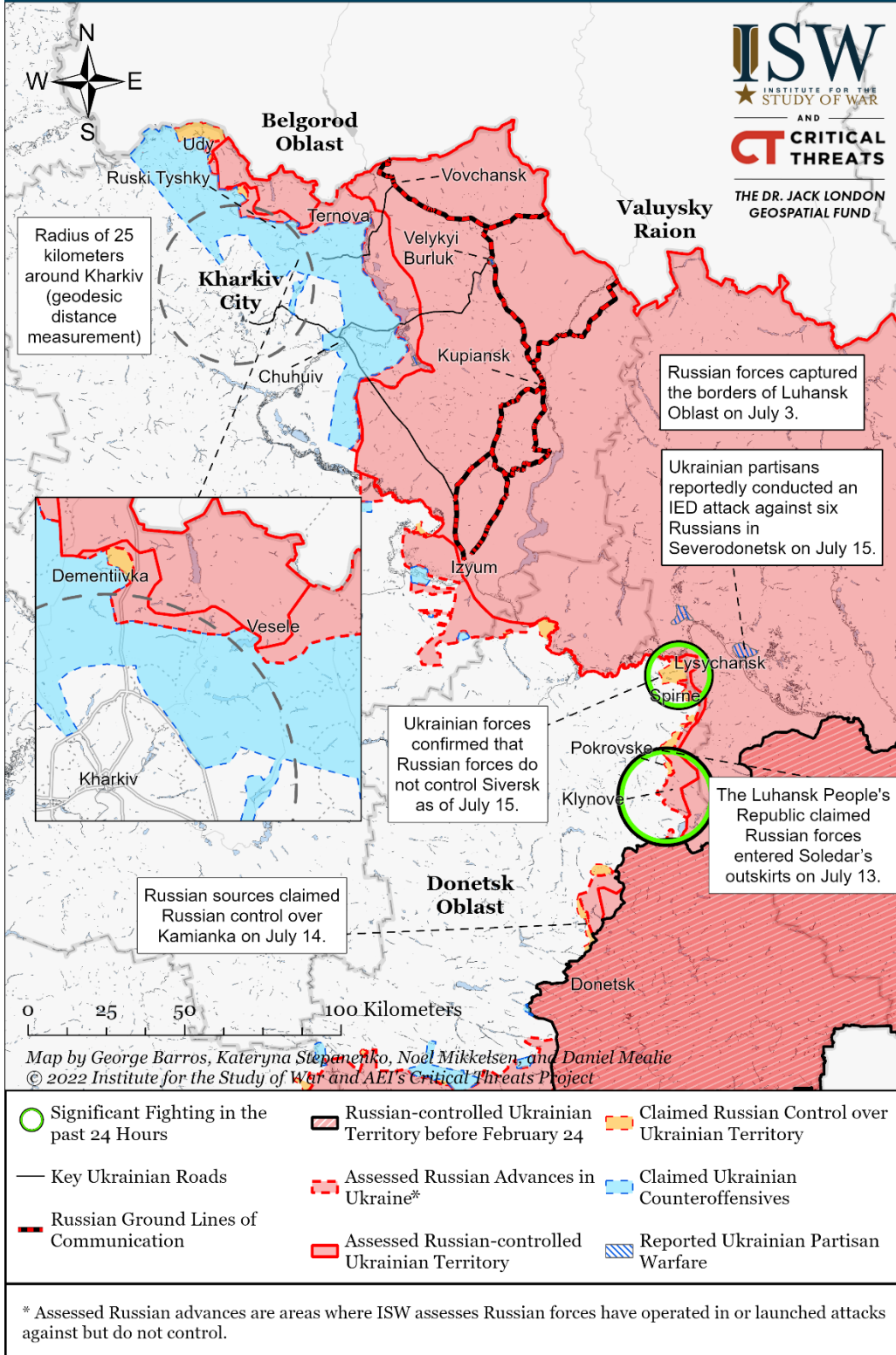
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Major Railroads
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

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

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 did not conduct any ground assaults on the Kharkiv City Axis on July 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued to focus on restraining Ukrainian advances toward the international border.¹⁵ Russian forces conducted an airstrike on Verkhni Saltiv and continued shelling Kharkiv City and the surrounding settlements.¹⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of July 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



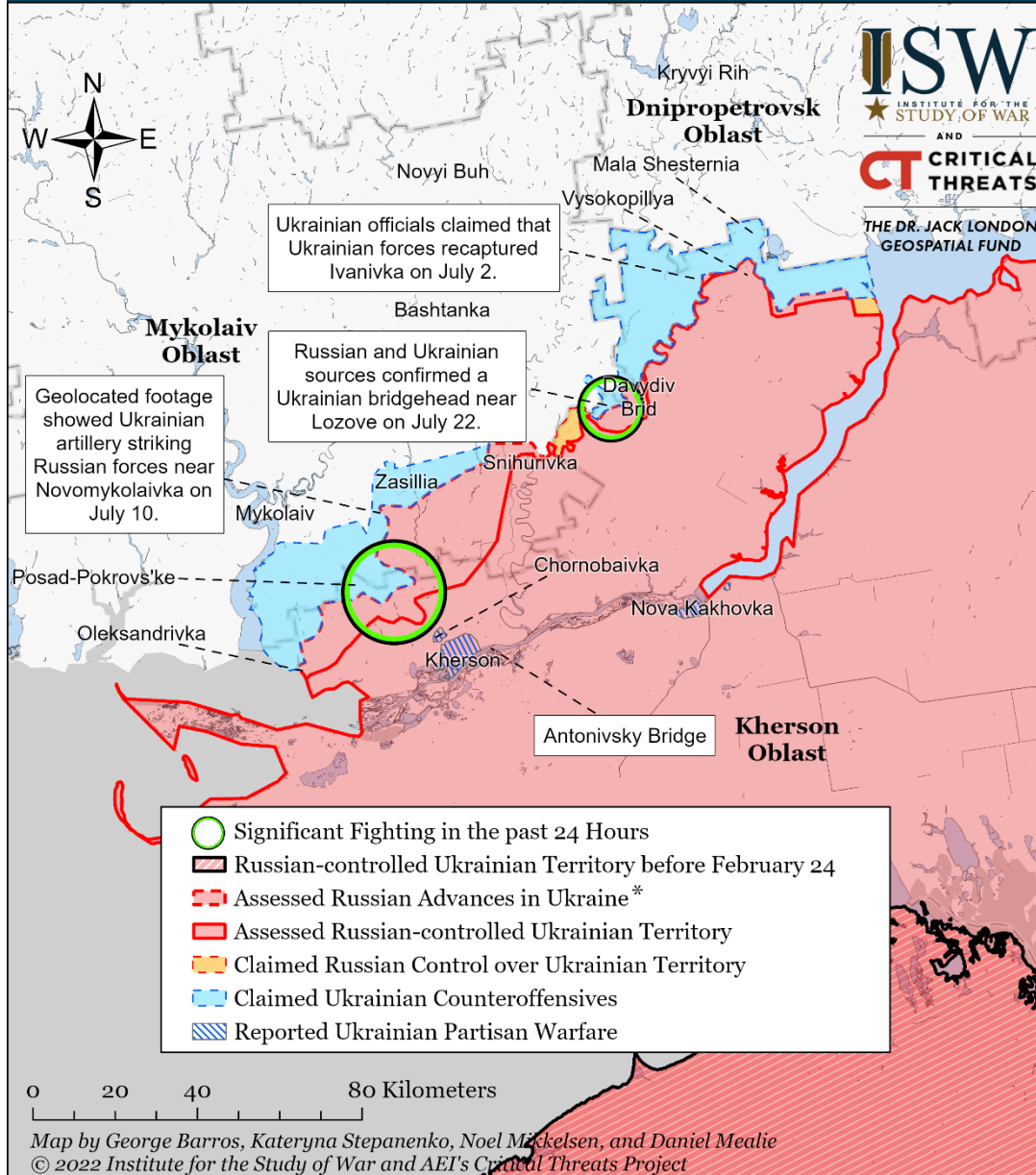
Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Ukrainian forces struck a bridge over the Inhulets River less than 10 km from Kherson City in Dariivka, Kherson Oblast on July 23. Footage shows six equidistant points of impact on the bridge and that passenger vehicles are able to cross the bridge but must evade the holes.¹⁷ Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration Adviser Serhiy Khlan stated that Ukrainian forces struck the Dariivka Bridge as part of a sustained operation to cut the supply lines of Russian forces in Kherson City.¹⁸

Russian forces conducted strikes on rear areas of the Southern Axis on July 23, likely to stymie Ukrainian preparations for a counteroffensive on this axis. Russian forces launched four Kalibr missiles at the port of Odesa, striking a pumping station and granary without significant damage.¹⁹ Footage of the strike shows Ukrainian air defense intercepting at least two missiles.²⁰ Kirovohrad Oblast Head Andriy Raikovych stated that Russian forces also struck the Kanatove military airfield and a Ukrzaliznytsia rail transport facility in Kirovohrad Oblast with eight sea-launched Kalibr missiles and five air-launched Kh-22 missiles.²¹ Ukrainian Mykolaiv Oblast Head Vitaly Kim stated that Russian forces again struck Mykolaiv City with six S-300 anti-air missiles.²²

Russian forces did not conduct any ground assaults on the Southern Axis on July 23 and continued shelling along the entire line of contact.²³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 23, 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.

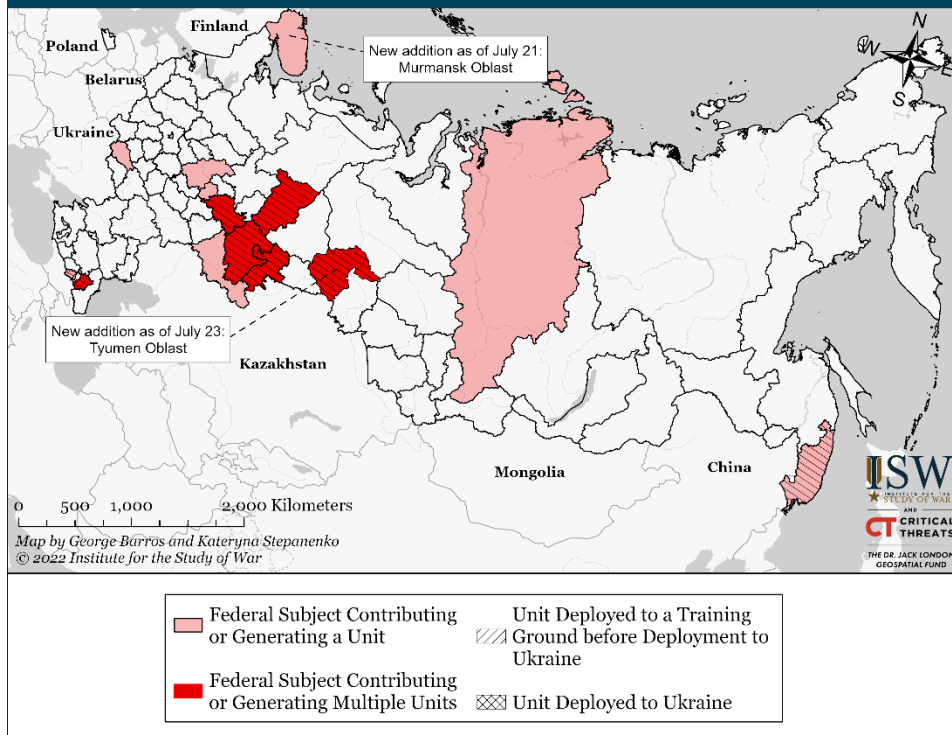
Note: ISW expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives to Lozove on the left bank of the Inhulets River on July 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on July 6 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian offensive in the direction of Lozove in Kherson Oblast, indicating that Ukrainian forces still maintain a position there. Russian Telegram Channel Rybar claimed that Ukrainian forces launched unsuccessful attacks on the Snihurivka-Lozove-Bila Krynytsya line on July 4. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian platoon counterattack in the Lozove area, indicating that Ukrainian forces are in Lozove. Russian Telegram channel Rybar confirmed that Ukrainian forces crossed the river and are in Lozove on July 22. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces defeated a Russian attack near Bilohirka on July 22, indicating Ukrainian forces also likely control Bilohirka. We will update our maps as we collect and confirm more information.

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

The Kremlin is continuing efforts to form regionally-based volunteer battalions. Spokesperson for Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Vadym Skibitskyi gave an interview to Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL) on July 23 wherein he indicated that the Kremlin is planning to form 16 new volunteer battalions by the end of this month.²⁴ Skibitsky also noted that the Kremlin is forming another corps in Mulino, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, which seemingly supports prior statements made by the former Kyiv defense force commander Oleksandr Pavlyuk that Russia is forming a 3rd Army Corps (the forces of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics currently form the 1st and 2nd Army Corps, respectively) with up to 15,000 servicemen in Mulino.²⁵ Skibitsky stated that eight volunteer battalions have already been formed as of July 23. The Kremlin has not yet formed a volunteer battalion in St. Petersburg, the birthplace of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Authorities in Russia's Tyumen Oblast additionally announced the formation of three volunteer units in Tyumen Oblast on July 22.²⁶ Alexei Kulichkov, Tyumen's Military Commissar, stated that the first company of the "Tobol" separate engineering battalion, comprised of over 50 people, has already deployed to unspecified training grounds and that Tyumen is also forming the "Taiga" volunteer sniper unit (echelon unspecified) and "Siberia" artillery battalion ("артиллерийский дивизион") for deployment to Donbas after two or three weeks of training.²⁷ Russian federal subjects are notably forming combat, combat support, and combat service support units, so not all 16 new battalions (or 85 if and when all federal subjects form units) will be combat battalions.

Confirmed Russian Regions (Federal Subjects) Generating "Volunteer" Units to Fight in Ukraine as of July 23, 2022



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 officials continued to set conditions for referenda on the integration of occupied areas into the Russian Federation. Russian-backed head of Zaporizhia's occupation administration Yevheny Balitsky stated on July 23 that he signed a decree to initiate preparations for a referendum on the integration of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast into Russia by the autumn of 2022.²⁸ Balitsky claimed that this decree eliminated existing election bodies and created an entirely new election commission.

Russian-backed occupation administrators escalated measures to further isolate occupied areas from the non-Russian information space. Occupation heads of Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts announced on July 23 that they will start restricting the use of Google and YouTube in occupied areas in order to limit the ability of residents to search for Ukrainian websites on Google.²⁹ Kherson occupation Head Kirill Stremousov stated that he additionally banned the use of the Viber messaging app and that YouTube video hosting has been slowed down. The Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (LNR and DNR) blocked Google on July 21 and 22, respectively.³⁰ Russian authorities are likely to

keep enacting such controls on the information space in order to curb the dissemination of any anti-Russian messaging.

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<https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid0e8VwQokE6xWVko5Tii1RA7N87ricc4WVM4D7y8m7YZWYn7MShHJPcr98wXiExjPul>

² <https://twitter.com/JackDetsch/status/1550566432433471490>

³ https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2604?single

⁴ https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2604?single

⁵ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-general-officer-guide-may-11>

⁶ https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/2596

⁷ <https://twitter.com/Chritchen/status/1549075736732094464>;

<https://twitter.com/HelloMrBond/status/1549119414670352386?s=20&t=hjASWi53qvRMzp53Eu2QnQ>;

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¹¹ https://t.me/mod_russia/17881;

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¹⁴ <https://t.me/stranaua/53987>; <https://t.me/stranaua/53882>; <https://t.me/milinfo/87548> ;

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<https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1550825225826304000>

¹⁷ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1550727725262028801; <https://t.me/vesticrimea/5226>;

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<https://t.me/stranaua/53952>; <https://t.me/stranaua/53906>

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¹⁹ <https://suspilne dot media/263702-bez-poranenih-ale-z-pozezeu-stali-vidomi-naslidki-raketnogo-udaru-po-odeskomu-portu/>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/Militarylandnet/status/1550791093729607680>

²¹ <https://t.me/kirovogradskaODA/1844>;

[https://www.facebook.com/andriy.raykovich/posts/pfbid02sBKmLqX8S5Qdi3tVgTJ7EBuQLkUhEGcXo1Aas9wM3kgvccUy uxj7BHvMfxVqrMRKI?__cft__\[0\]=AZUXyjSarzsZN9vQ_R2hyG_tos1SqtHQx2TQvfdhJQbqhAC54e0BQ5oEwdcWm6jajR1QP mveukrgJfJuBO_mFJgrR-ltvNx-](https://www.facebook.com/andriy.raykovich/posts/pfbid02sBKmLqX8S5Qdi3tVgTJ7EBuQLkUhEGcXo1Aas9wM3kgvccUy uxj7BHvMfxVqrMRKI?__cft__[0]=AZUXyjSarzsZN9vQ_R2hyG_tos1SqtHQx2TQvfdhJQbqhAC54e0BQ5oEwdcWm6jajR1QP mveukrgJfJuBO_mFJgrR-ltvNx-TWYpU6TSofFiuvGZAdLw7k0SC8HTaBzPdDx82NU1taRGCKwagcL66Atgf7vm0pNtOG7JHz40Rs7V8A&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

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²² <https://t.me/mykolaiivskaODA/1865>

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<https://t.me/vilkul/1613>; https://t.me/Yevtushenko_E/283

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²⁵ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-rozvidka-rosia-batalyony/31956345.html>;

²⁶ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5479576>; <https://ria.ru/20220722/vs-1804400109.html>;

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²⁷ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5479576>; <https://ria.ru/20220722/vs-1804400109.html>;

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²⁸ <https://t.me/BalitskyVGA/80>

²⁹ <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/15291345>; <https://t.me/epoddubny/11682>; <https://ria.ru/20220722/google-1804407696.html>

³⁰ <https://ria.ru/20220722/google-1804407696.html>; <https://t.me/pushilindenis/2463>;

https://t.me/glava_inr_info/213; <https://t.me/stranaua/53592>; <https://www.interfax.ru/world/853228>