

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Frederick W. Kagan
July 28, 7:30 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.

The Russian grouping in Donetsk Oblast is likely seeking to capitalize on recent marginal gains southeast of Bakhmut by continuing to attempt to advance in that area. Russian forces may be de-emphasizing attempts to take Siversk in order to concentrate on Bakhmut, but it is too soon to tell. Russian forces continued efforts to advance northward on Bakhmut from recently gained positions around Novoluhanske and the Vuhlehirska Power Plant while pursuing southwestward advances along the T1302 highway from recently captured positions in Berestove. By contrast, Russian forces have been struggling to make concrete gains around Siversk and have not made any confirmed advances toward the city since the capture of the Luhansk Oblast Administrative border in early July. Russian command is likely, therefore, seeking to maintain momentum around Bakhmut, potentially at the expense of continued pressure on Siversk. Russian forces remain unlikely to take Bakhmut itself, despite recent incremental advances in its direction.

Putin replaced Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko as deputy defense minister and head of the Main Military-Political Directorate on July 28.¹ Putin signed a decree appointing Colonel-General Viktor Goremykin to Zhidko's position and has not publicly announced the appointment of Zhidko to a new position.² ISW previously reported that Zhidko would become the overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, a report that appears to have been incorrect.³

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces in Donetsk Oblast likely seek to capitalize on recent marginal territorial gains around Bakhmut and may deprioritize efforts to take Siversk.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk and northeast and southwest of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces may be intensifying offensive operations around Avdiivka to reduce Ukrainian strikes in and around Donetsk City.**
- **Russian forces may be setting conditions for renewed offensive operations toward Kharkiv City.**
- **Russian forces attempted a limited ground offensive on the Southern Axis but are likely facing territorial losses in Kherson Oblast.**
- **Russian forces are attempting to preserve their ground lines of communication over the Dnipro River connecting Kherson City to rear areas in eastern Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin continued measures to compensate for officer and manpower losses in Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is continuing to institutionalize its occupation administrations in occupied parts of Ukraine to prepare for sham referenda, annexation, and integration into Russia.**
- **Russian occupation forces are continuing to pressure Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas to use Russian rubles and passports and to attend Russian-run schools, setting conditions for longer-term social control in occupied territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 28, 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.

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)

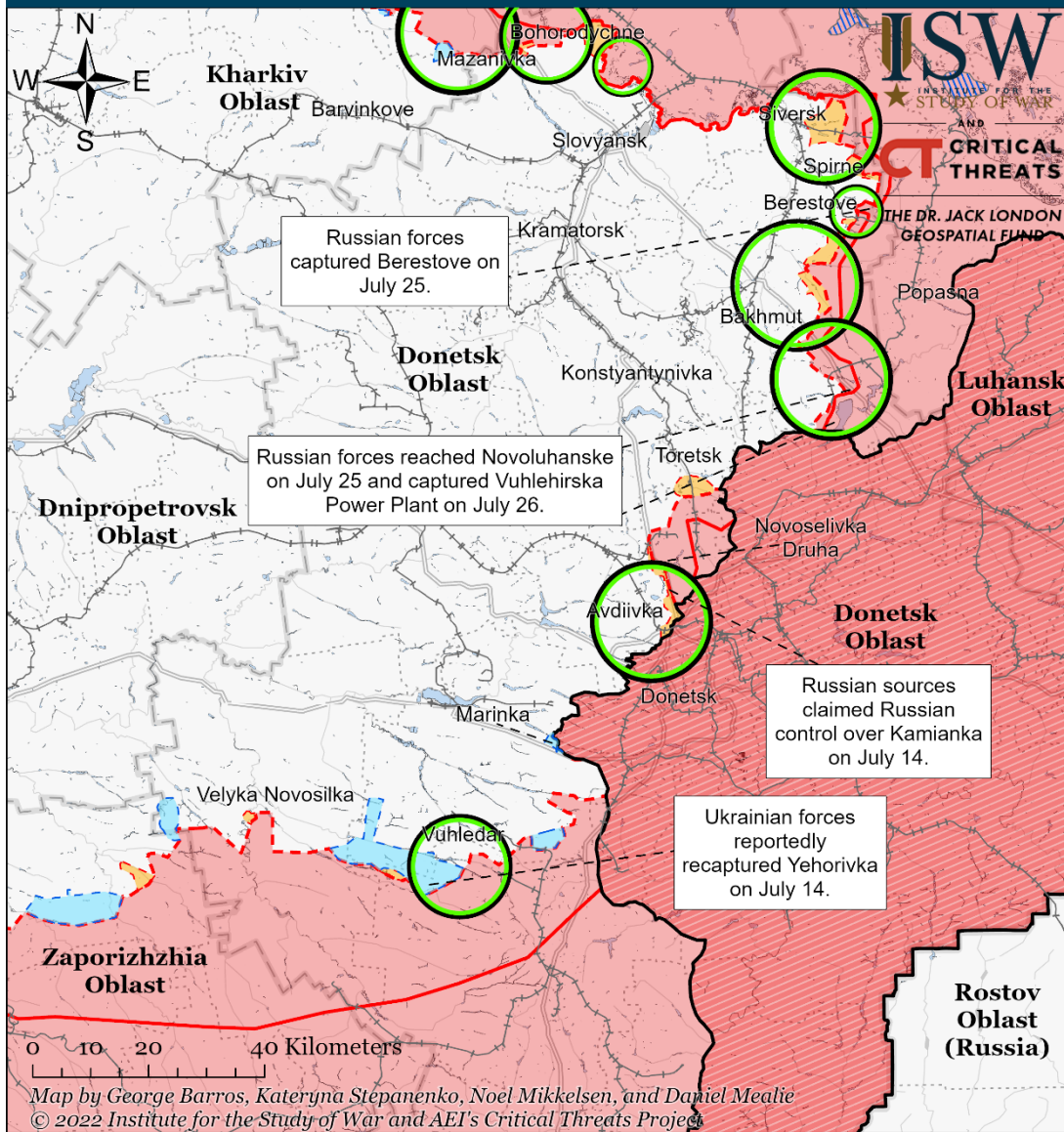
Russian forces conducted a series of limited ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk on July 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted an unsuccessful reconnaissance-in-force attempt near Brazhkyvka, about 25 km northwest of Slovyansk in contested territory.⁴ Russian troops also reportedly attempted to advance from the Dovhenke area to Mazanivka, about 20 km northwest of Slovyansk, and from Pasika to Dolyna, about 20 km northwest of Slovyansk.⁵ On July 27, the Ukrainian General Staff indicated that a Russian reconnaissance group operated near Ukrainian positions in Pasika, seemingly suggesting a limited Ukrainian counterattack in the area.⁶ However, reports of a Russian attempt to advance southwest of Pasika toward Dolyna confirm ISW’s control of terrain assessment that Pasika remains in Russian-controlled territory. Russian forces additionally continued shelling settlements northwest of Slovyansk along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border and northeast of Slovyansk around Pryshyb and Tetyanivka.⁷

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in the Siversk area and Ukrainian positions around Siversk City on July 28.⁸

Russian forces continued efforts to advance southwest toward Bakhmut along the T1302 highway and conducted ground attacks southeast of Bakhmut on July 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted an unsuccessful reconnaissance attempt in the direction of Berestove to Nahirne, which is along the T1302 and about 20 km northeast of Bakhmut.⁹ Russian forces continued to fight on the outskirts of Soledar (less than 10 km northeast of Bakhmut) and attempted to advance around Volodymyrivka and Stryapivka.¹⁰ Russian forces additionally conducted limited ground assaults southeast of Bakhmut around Vershyna, Vidrozhennya, Semihirya, Klynove, and Myronivskiy and are likely attempting to leverage ground gained around Novoluhanske and the Vuhlehirske Power Plant to support attempts to advance north.¹¹ Russian forces continued artillery strikes in the vicinity of Bakhmut.¹²

Russian forces may be intensifying offensive operations in the Avdiivka area to reduce Ukrainian strikes on the Donetsk City area. Deputy Head of the Ukrainian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate Oleksii Gromov stated that Russian forces are deploying elements of the 2nd Army Corps (forces of the Luhansk People's Republic) and other unspecified formations to the Avdiivka area to form offensive groups, which suggests that Russian forces may be increasingly interested in committing combat power to assaults on Avdiivka.¹³ The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces resumed assault operations in the direction of Avdiivka and Pisky, just southwest of Avdiivka.¹⁴ Multiple Russian sources reported that Russian troops are increasing artillery pressure on Avdiivka in order to support more serious ground attacks against Ukrainian lines of defense surrounding the city.¹⁵ Russian milbloggers are progressively emphasizing the increase in the pace of operations in the Avdiivka area and claiming that Ukrainian forces are using positions around Avdiivka to target Russian positions in Donetsk City.¹⁶ This recent Russian push is likely premised on extending the Russian defensive pocket around Avdiivka and pushing Ukrainian forces out of fortified positions that have existed since 2014 in order to relieve pressure against Russian assets in Donetsk City. This push likely does not indicate that Russian forces are opening up a new offensive in the southwestern sector of Donetsk Oblast intended to drive far into the oblast.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

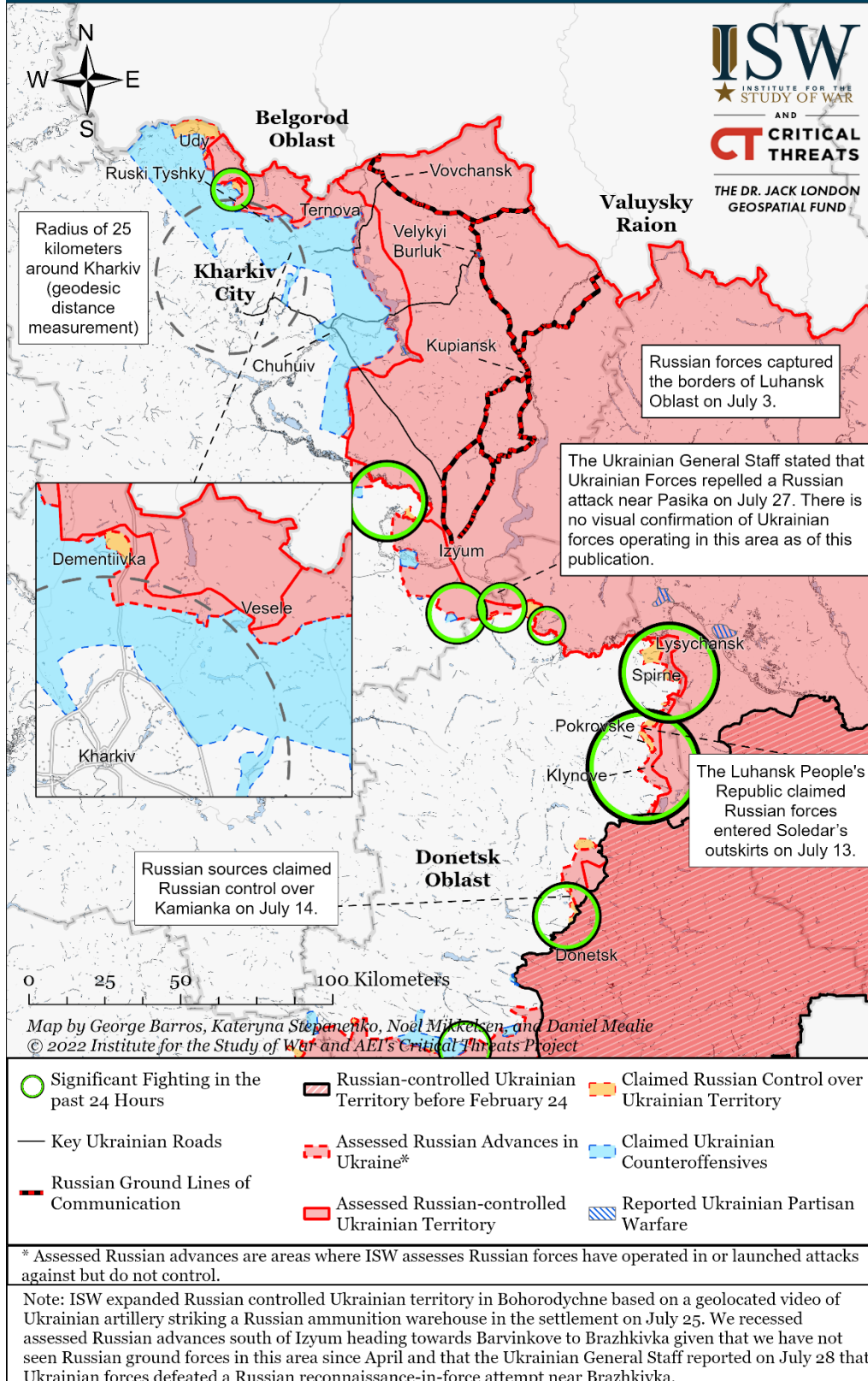
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: ISW expanded Russian controlled Ukrainian territory in Bohorodychne based on a geolocated video of Ukrainian artillery striking a Russian ammunition warehouse in the settlement on July 25. We reassessed assessed Russian advances south of Izyum heading towards Barvinkove to Brazhkyvka given that we have not seen Russian ground forces in this area since April and that the Ukrainian General Staff reported on July 28 that Ukrainian forces defeated a Russian reconnaissance-in-force attempt near Brazhkyvka.

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 make any territorial gains on the Kharkiv Axis on July 28 but may be setting conditions for renewed offensive operations in the Kharkiv City direction. The Derhachi City Council reported that Ukrainian and Russian forces continued fighting in Kozacha Lopan, Tsupivka, Dementiivka, and Velyki Prokhody, north of Kharkiv City.¹⁷ Russian Telegram channel Rybar claimed that Russian forces conducted successful raids on Ukrainian positions near Borshchova, Sosnivka, and Petrivka, which could later enable Russian forces to advance on Kharkiv City from the Ruska Lozova salient to Borshchova, approximately 28 km northeast of Kharkiv City.¹⁸ Russian forces launched an airstrike near Rusky Tyshki, approximately 25 km north of Kharkiv City, and continued launching tube and rocket artillery strikes at Kharkiv City and settlements to the north, northeast, and southeast.¹⁹ Successful Russian offensive operations in Kharkiv are extremely unlikely, but the Russians will likely try to gain more ground in the oblast before the September referenda.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of July 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



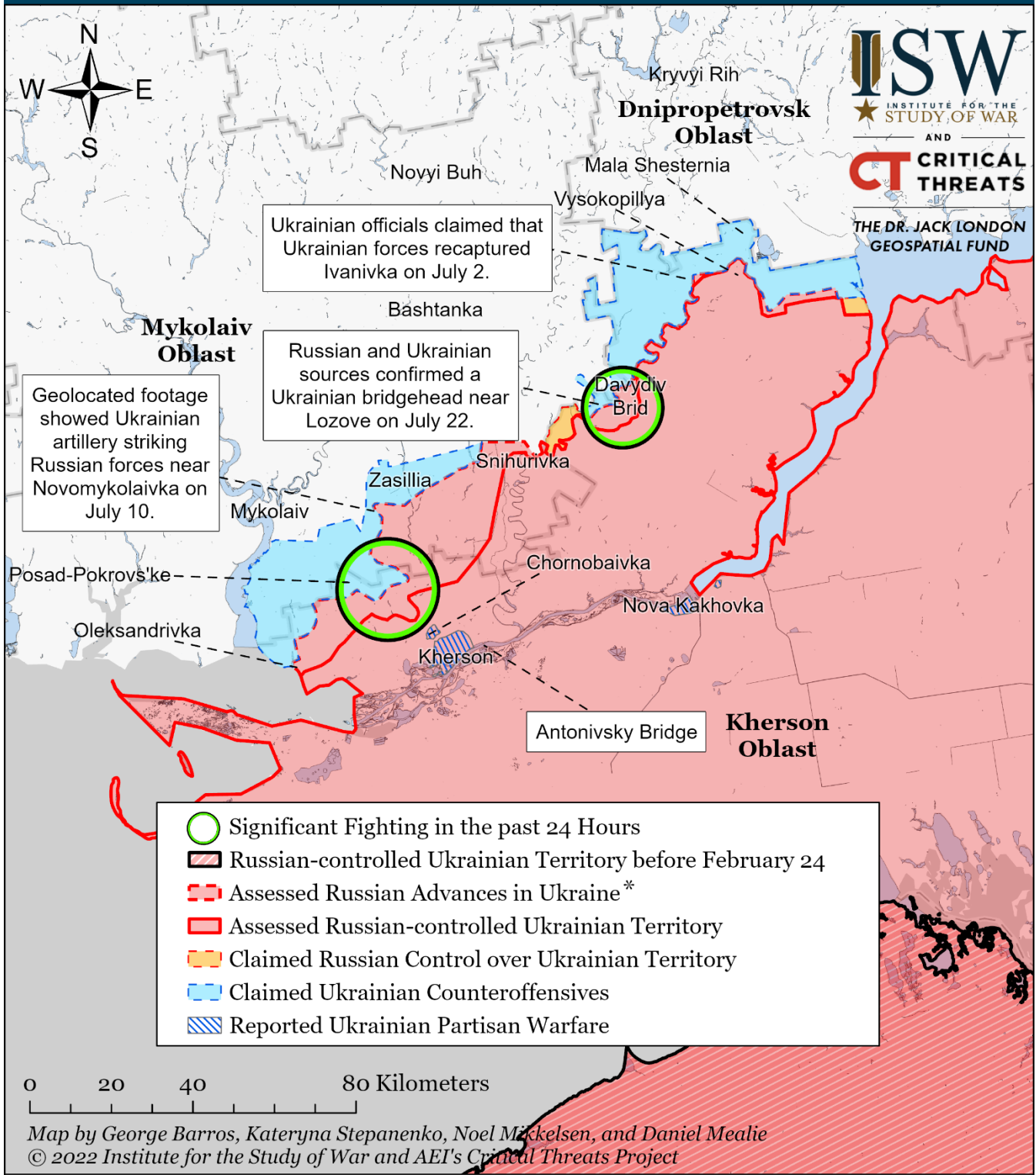
Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces attempted a limited ground assault on the Southern Axis on July 28 but are likely suffering territorial losses in Kherson Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground assault toward Brukivka-Bikohirka, Kherson Oblast, and that Russian forces in the Kryvoriz'kyi direction in northern Kherson Oblast are focusing on regaining lost positions.²⁰ Deputy Head of the Ukrainian General Staff's Main Operative Command Brigadier General Oleksii Gromov reported that Russian forces are transferring reserves from the Kharkiv and Luhansk directions to the Mykolaiv and Kryvyi Rih directions.²¹ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted artillery duels around Novovoznesensk, Potemkyne, and Vysokopillya, south of Kryvyi Rih.²² Russian forces shelled the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River near Lozove, Kherson Oblast, confirming that Ukrainian forces retain a bridgehead over the Inhulets River.²³ Russian forces continued shelling along the entire line of contact.²⁴

Ukrainian forces continued striking Russian military infrastructure on the Southern Axis on July 28. Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov reported that Ukrainian forces struck the Melitopol airfield after Russian forces began to repair the airfield from the July 23-24 strikes.²⁵ Fedorov stated that Russian forces use the airfield as a hub for weapons and equipment deliveries.²⁶ Ukrainian forces likely struck Russian military infrastructure in Chornobaivka on the northern outskirts of Kherson City. Footage of Chornobaivka shows a large smoke plume rising from the city, and Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administrative Head Serhiy Khlan posted a picture of the smoke plume with a caption suggesting that Ukrainian forces conducted a successful strike.²⁷

Russian forces are attempting to preserve their ground lines of communication over the Dnipro River connecting Kherson City to rear areas in eastern Kherson Oblast. Russian forces established a ferry crossing under the Antonivskyi Bridge to allow passenger traffic to cross the Dnipro after Ukrainian strikes on July 27 rendered the bridge unusable.²⁸ Russian occupation authorities repaired the Darivka Bridge east of Kherson City enough to reopen the bridge to passenger traffic; they tore down the previously reported pontoon bridge erected after Ukrainian strikes on the bridge on July 23.²⁹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 28, 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.

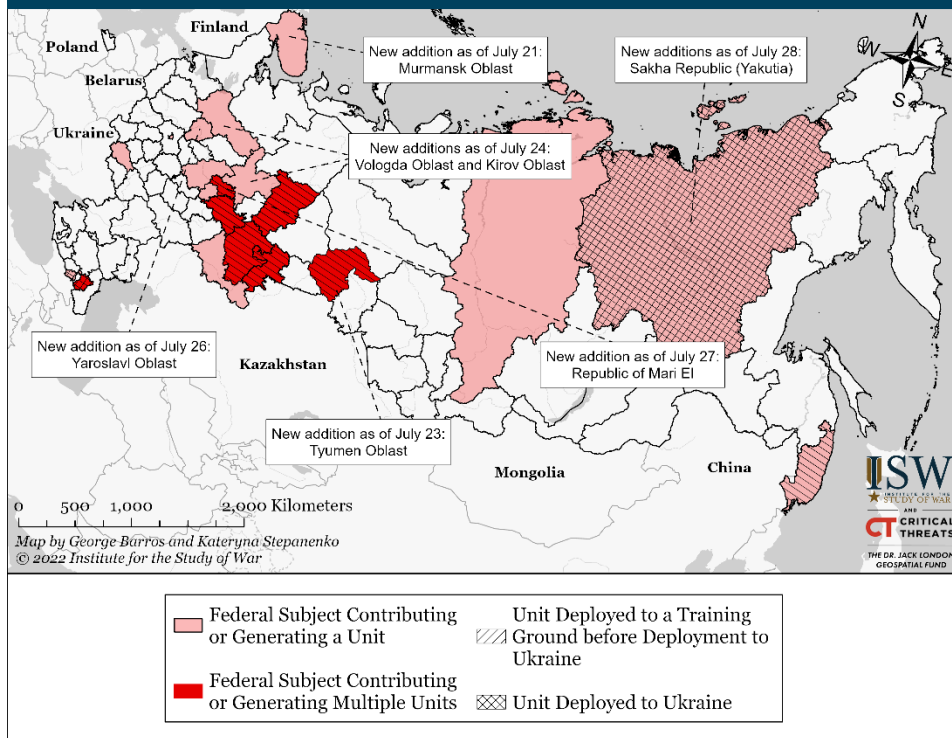
Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

Russian military authorities continued to take measures to compensate for personnel losses in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on July 28 that Russian military leadership has begun to assign the officer rank of junior lieutenant to non-commissioned officers (NCOs) without requisite education or experience on a widespread basis.³⁰ The GUR additionally reported that the Russian military leadership is forming specialized medical commissions to identify servicemembers who are faking illnesses to get out of service requirements.³¹

Russian federal subjects continued to form regionally-based volunteer battalions. Russian media outlet *Bez Formata* reported on July 28 that the “Bootur” battalion from Russia’s eastern Sakha Republic (also known as “Yakutia”) has been formed with 105 volunteers for deployment into Ukraine.³² The GUR notably reported that servicemembers from eastern regions such as Yakutia are reluctant to participate in the war in Ukraine partially due to the fact that these volunteer units are not formed on a professional basis.³³ ISW has updated the map of volunteer battalions to reflect developments in the Sakha Republic.

The Kremlin is continuing to leverage private military companies (PMCs) to support operations in Ukraine. Commander of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) General Stephen Townsend stated on July 27 that the Wagner Group PMC has transferred an unspecified number of forces from Libya to fight in Ukraine.³⁴ The Kremlin is increasingly relying on the Wagner Group as its premier strike group and Wagner Group leadership likely seeks to maintain its presence in Ukraine (and by extension, its positive perception with Russian military leadership) through importing fighters from other areas of operation.³⁵

Confirmed Russian Regions (Federal Subjects) Generating "Volunteer" Units to Fight in Ukraine as of July 28, 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)

The Kremlin is continuing to institutionalize its occupation administrations in occupied parts of Ukraine to prepare for sham referenda, annexation, and integration into Russia. Russian Senator Andrei Klishas said on July 28 that he “fully admits” that the primary objective of the autumn session of the Russian Duma will be “the integration of new territories into the legal space of the Russian Federation.”³⁶ The autumn session is scheduled to begin on September 12, one day after the most likely date for sham annexation plebiscites to be held in occupied territories. In the meantime, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) announced on July 28 that it has created “temporary departments” and deployed MVD employees to occupied Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts to support occupation authorities in “ensuring order on the streets,” assisting in the formation of local police departments, conducting operational-search activities, fighting extremism, and assisting in the “permanent issuance” of Russian passports.³⁷ The Kremlin has likely been unable to recruit many Ukrainians to enforce occupation laws and combat resistance efforts in occupied territories.

Russian occupation forces are continuing to pressure Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas to use Russian rubles and passports instead of Ukrainian hryvnias and identification documents. Acting Ukrainian Head of Kherson Oblast Dmytro Butrii said on July 28 that Russian occupation forces have banned the use of the hryvnia in Kherson and that occupation police are patrolling local markets to threaten and punish those using hryvnias.³⁸ Butrii also reported that occupation officials have begun to remove ATMs from local markets, suggesting that the Kremlin may be attempting to not only eliminate the use of the hryvnia, but also limit cash access to civilians who cooperate with the occupation administration. The Kremlin could also attempt to drive occupied areas toward a cashless (and

therefore more trackable) economy. Russian milblogger Boris Rozhin claimed that 10% of Zaporizhia Oblast residents had received or were in the process of receiving Russian passports as of July 28.³⁹ He also claimed that passportization is underway in occupied parts of Kharkiv Oblast and claimed that the slow formation of Kharkiv occupation administration accounts for the low percentage of Kharkiv residents in the passport process so far.

Russian occupation authorities are also advancing their efforts to influence schools and curricula in occupied territories in the face of some Ukrainian resistance. Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov claimed that all Zaporizhia Oblast school leaders have refused to cooperate with occupation authorities as of July 28.⁴⁰ Fedorov said that occupation officials have decided to consolidate four unspecified universities in occupied areas down to one and that 2,000 students would return at an unspecified date, compared to peacetime university attendance of 14,000 students in the oblast. Russian Zaporizhia Occupation Administration Head Yevheny Balitsky claimed on July 28 that his agenda for a meeting with senior occupation officials included not only discussions of price controls, social payments, and the annexation referendum, but also preparation for the new academic year, demonstrating the degree to which occupation officials are prioritizing control over Ukrainian education in occupied territories.⁴¹

Ukrainian advisor to the mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko reported that Ukrainian teachers from Donetsk and Mariupol completed a pre-certification course for “knowledge and teaching of Russian propaganda” to children in occupied territories. Occupation officials likely brought in Russian specialists to reform Ukrainian curriculums and may be forcing Ukrainian teachers who hope to keep their jobs to re-certify their educational credentials to match Russian standards and curricula. Evacuees from near Mariupol told NPR on July 9 that Russian forces threatened to take children from their parents if they did not attend schools with Russian teachers, suggesting that children in occupied areas will be largely forced to attend Russian-controlled educational institutions.⁴² That Russian effort is one component of the Kremlin campaign to set conditions for longer-term Russian social control throughout occupied parts of Ukraine.



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¹ https://t.me/mod_russia/18010; <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202207280001>

² https://t.me/mod_russia/18010; <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202207280001>

³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-26>

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<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid021rtvyCyoTG58saFWGLB3bfkiGL9vXP6sn6DTQcPUT9ek7HrmTbU5kRtCnUiDpZu8l>

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⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/372408655072219>;

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¹⁰ <https://t.me/rybar/36268>; <https://t.me/rybar/36285>; <https://t.me/kommunist/7840>;

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¹³ <https://youtu.be/Ouse5YHYnTc?t=1093>

¹⁴

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¹⁵ https://t.me/nm_dnr/8610; <https://t.me/kommunist/7856>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58575;
https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58618; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/38733>; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58575

¹⁶ https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58575; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58618; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/38733>;

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¹⁷ https://t.me/der_rada/2124

¹⁸ <https://t.me/rybar/36248>

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²¹ <https://youtu.be/Ouse5YHYnTc?t=1206>

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²³ <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1552623309581336582>; <https://t.me/asbmil/3362>;

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²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid021rtvyCyoTG58saFW>;
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²⁵ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/329

²⁶ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/329

²⁷ <https://t.me/hueviyherson/22983>;
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1552647593485910016?s=20&t=OceMZQ1vH-wR6j1AzlQ8pA>
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²⁸ https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16323; https://twitter.com/bayraktar_1love/status/1552385428971462659;
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<https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1552633967240781826>;
<https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1552622416383311874>; <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/729>;
[https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid0q4o1v5SmGg62sthNTDq3bCGvi485KiWyRbTCz13x1vDsJz1MdMdQoUUkGdcSzuTul?__cft__\[0\]=AZUbRYmBOoRgO1DZGgWA49oNAe9dvR9J552F61cG_1eDEt3Oh2kDmAzF5PEcdneVQw01U070lBnkk-13M2h8BN5EmIrp0lAPbLrnj9t4Kb5trRHDFXTkalCzefhbwMP2L73Yx40NKMMyseaD14ZR34n7SbuZweOrZyzDuzxZkhiQH3w&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid0q4o1v5SmGg62sthNTDq3bCGvi485KiWyRbTCz13x1vDsJz1MdMdQoUUkGdcSzuTul?__cft__[0]=AZUbRYmBOoRgO1DZGgWA49oNAe9dvR9J552F61cG_1eDEt3Oh2kDmAzF5PEcdneVQw01U070lBnkk-13M2h8BN5EmIrp0lAPbLrnj9t4Kb5trRHDFXTkalCzefhbwMP2L73Yx40NKMMyseaD14ZR34n7SbuZweOrZyzDuzxZkhiQH3w&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

²⁹ https://twitter.com/bayraktar_1love/status/155261944341040742;
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³⁰ <https://gur.gov dot ua/content/okupanty-popovniuiut-defitsyt-ofitseriv-za-rakhunok-serzhantskoho-skladu-ta-namahaiutsia-vyivliaty-symuliantiv-za-dopomohoiu-spetsializovanykh-medkomisii.html>

³¹ <https://gur.gov dot ua/content/okupanty-popovniuiut-defitsyt-ofitseriv-za-rakhunok-serzhantskoho-skladu-ta-namahaiutsia-vyivliaty-symuliantiv-za-dopomohoiu-spetsializovanykh-medkomisii.html>

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<https://yakutsk.bezformata dot com/listnews/otryad-bootur-iz-yakutii-otpravilsya/107871469/>

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³⁴ <https://www.state.gov/special-online-briefing-with-general-stephen-j-townsend-commander-u-s-africa-command-u-s-africom/>

³⁵ <https://meduza dot io/en/feature/2022/07/14/a-mercenaries-war>

³⁶ <https://t.me/stranaua/54773>; <https://t.me/andreyklishas/1004>

³⁷ <https://t.me/stranaua/54864>; <https://t.me/mediamvd/12837>

³⁸ <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/729>

³⁹ https://t.me/boris_rozhin/58587

⁴⁰ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/329

⁴¹ <https://t.me/BalitskyVGA/105>

⁴² <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1110577369>