Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 13

Kateryna Stepanenko, Grace Mappes, Riley Bailey, Angela Howard, and Frederick W. Kagan November 12, 7:30 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.

Russia's withdrawal from Kherson City is igniting an ideological fracture between prowar figures and Russian President Vladimir Putin, eroding confidence in Putin's commitment and ability to deliver his war promises. A pro-war Russian ideologist, Alexander Dugin, openly criticized Putin-whom he referred to as the autocrat-for failing to uphold Russian ideology by surrendering Kherson City on November 12.1 Dugin said this Russian ideology defines Russia's responsibility to defend "Russian cities" such as Kherson, Belgorod, Kursk, Donetsk, and Simferopol. Dugin noted that an autocrat has a responsibility to save his nation all by himself or face the fate of "king of the rains," a reference to Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in which a king was killed because he was unable to deliver rain amidst a drought. Dugin also downplayed the role of Putin's advisors in failing to protect the Russian world and noted that the commander of Russian Forces in Ukraine, Army General Sergey Surovikin was not responsible for the political decision to withdraw from Kherson City. Dugin noted that the autocrat cannot repair this deviation from ideology merely with public appearances, noting that "the authorities in Russia cannot surrender anything else" and that "the limit has been reached." He also accused the presidential administration of upholding a "fake" ideology because of its fear of committing to the "Russian Idea." Dugin also made a reference to the use of tactical nuclear weapons, which he vaguely stated was "the end" and proceeded to note that overdue Russian changes to the military campaign have not generated any effect to change the course of the war. He also suggested, however, that Russia must commit to the Russian Idea rather than pursuing the "stupid" use of nuclear weapons.

Putin is having a harder time appeasing parts of the highly ideological pro-war constituency due to his military's inability to deliver his maximalist goals of overthrowing the Ukrainian government and seizing all of Ukraine, as ISW has previously assessed.² Putin's nationalist-leaning propagandists such as Vladimir Solovyov are increasingly demanding that the Kremlin and higher military command to fully commit to their goals in Ukraine, and Solovyov even called for full mobilization and the firing of incompetent officials following the Russian surrender of Kherson City.³ Select milbloggers have previously criticized Putin for his failure to respond to the attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge on October 9, while others noted that Putin has failed to uphold the ideology of Russian superiority since 2014.4 Direct criticism of Putin within the pro-war community is almost unprecedented, and Dugin's high-profile and unhinged attack on Putin may indicate a shift among the Russian nationalist ideologues.⁵ Putin needs to retain the support of this community and has likely ordered some of his propagandists to suppress any critiques of the Russian withdrawal from Kherson City, since many state TV news programs have been omitting or downplaying the aftermath of withdrawal.⁶ The ever-increasing doubts among extreme Russian nationalists about Putin's commitment to Russian ideology reduce Putin's appeal to the nationalist community, while mobilization and high casualties will likely continue to upset members of the Russian society.

Wagner-affiliated channels are also turning on the Kremlin following the loss of Kherson Oblast, which may further elevate the influence of the *siloviki* faction. Some milbloggers implied that the Kremlin has betrayed Kherson City by "selling out," while others noted that the Kremlin has consistently surrendered its territories without asking the Russian people.⁷ Other milbloggers further questioned the legitimacy of the claimed 87% support rate for Russian annexation of Kherson Oblast.⁸ Wagner Group financier Yevheny Prigozhin and some milbloggers have previously discussed the possibility of "Russia's civil society" stepping up to defend Russia.⁹ The growing criticism of the decision to withdraw from western Kherson contrasts with the general support for the decision among the milblogger community before today.

Russian officials are increasingly normalizing the public and likely illegal deportation of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia. Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lyova-Belova publicized the illegal kidnapping of 52 medically fragile Ukrainian children from Kherson Oblast to an unspecified "safe" area in Russia on November 12, likely under a medical relocation scheme that Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Ambassador to Russia Rodion Miroshnik confirmed had started on November 5.10 High level Kremlin officials, including Lvova-Belova and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin have publicly acknowledged and praised the relocation of thousands of Ukrainian children to live with Russian families or in Russian facilities in recent weeks.¹¹ Russian Zaporizhia Oblast occupation officials have made public statements in recent weeks about the planned forced relocation of over 40,000 Kherson Oblast children to Russia and acknowledged on November 12 that their systems for caring for Ukrainian children are inadequate. 12 Russian and Ukrainian sources have previously reported that Russian and occupation officials have deported Ukrainian children to Russia under education, vacation, and other schemes within the past 10 days.¹³ Such frequent and public acknowledgements are a stark contrast to the first Russian official confirmation of such actions on August 23, when Krasnodar Krai authorities deleted an announcement about the arrival of 300 adoptable Ukrainian children from Mariupol and denied ever issuing the statement.¹⁴ As ISW has noted and will continue to observe, the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia represents a possible violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. 15

Russian military leadership is trying and largely failing to integrate combat forces drawn from many different organizations and of many different types and levels of skill and equipment into a more cohesive fighting force in Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian officials stopped the distribution of Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) documents, including documents regarding the participation of DNR and LNR forces in combat, on November 11.¹⁶ Russian authorities also ordered Southern Military District commanders to centralize payments to DNR and LNR fighters through Russian financial institutions and offered DNR and LNR soldiers the option to continue their service as contract servicemembers under Russian law.¹⁷ These efforts will likely increase friction between Russian officials and LNR and DNR officials due to the exclusion of DNR and LNR officials from the process. DNR and LNR servicemembers reportedly feel pressured to accept Russian contracts and have expressed fears that refusal of the new Russian contracts would lead to the annulment of their documents and termination of DNR/LNR benefits.¹⁸ ISW has previously reported bureaucratic conflict between DNR, LNR, and Russian authorities over administrative structures in occupied areas.¹⁹

The lack of structure inherent in the combination of DNR forces, LNR forces, Russian contract servicemembers, Russian regional volunteer servicemembers, Russian

mobilized servicemembers, and Wagner Group Private Military Company (PMC) forces creates an environment that fosters intra-force conflict. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 12 that tense relations between mobilized soldiers and Chechen volunteer soldiers triggered a brawl in Makiivka that injured three.²⁰

Key Takeaways

- Russia's withdrawal from Kherson City is igniting an ideological fracture between pro-war figures and Russian President Vladimir Putin, eroding confidence in Putin's commitment to and ability to deliver on his war promises.
- Russian officials are increasingly normalizing the public and likely illegal deportation of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia.
- The Russian military leadership is trying and failing to integrate ad hoc military formations into a more cohesive fighting force in Ukraine.
- Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the direction of Kreminna and Svatove.
- Ukrainian forces continued to liberate settlements on the right (western) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces continued offensive operations in the direction of Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Vuhledar.
- Russian officials may be trying to avoid providing military personnel with promised payments.
- Russian forces and occupation officials continue to endanger residents and subject them to coercive measures.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of November 12, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



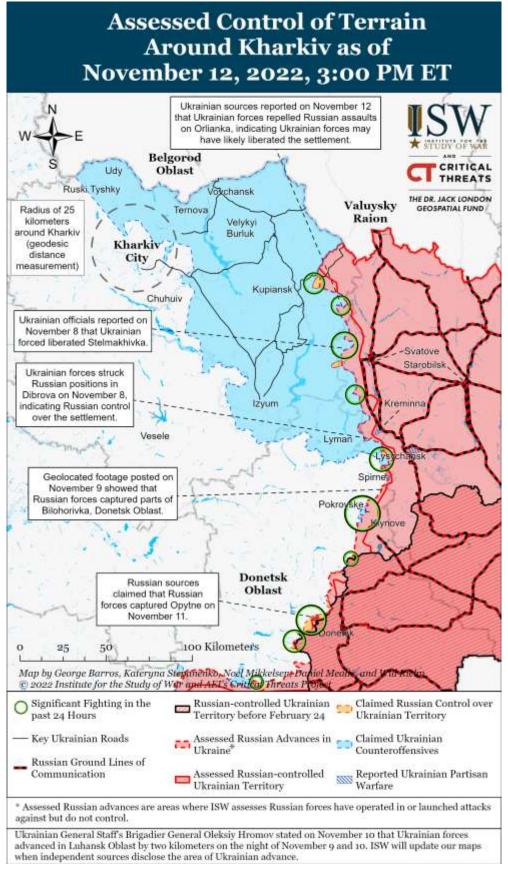
We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military 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: (Eastern Kharkiv Oblast-Western Luhansk Oblast)

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the direction of Kreminna and Svatove on November 12. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults within 15km northwest of Svatove near Volodymyrivka and Kuzemivka, Luhansk Oblast.²¹ The Russian MoD reported that Russian forces also defeated Ukrainian forces by artillery fire in the vicinity of Pishchane, Kharkiv Oblast (24km northwest of Svatove).²² The Russian MoD also reported that Russian actions repulsed Ukrainian assaults towards Svatove and within 21km northwest of Kreminna in the direction of Ploshchanka, Makiivka, and Chervonopopivka.²³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults within 30km northwest of Svatove near Masyutivka and Orlianka in Kharkiv Oblast and near Miasozharivka and Novoselivske in Luhansk Oblast.²⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults within 21km northwest of Kreminna near Makiivka and within 12km south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.²⁵ Russian forces conducted these counterattacks likely to constrain the actions of Ukrainian forces in eastern Kharkiv and western Luhansk oblasts and not to regain limited territory. Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces continued routine missile and artillery strikes in eastern Ukraine.²⁶



Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Ukrainian forces continued to clear liberated settlements in Kherson Oblast on the right (western) bank of the Dnipro River. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukrainian forces have liberated over 60 settlements, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces are continuing to undertake stabilization measures.²⁷ Ukrainian officials announced that Ukrainian regional military administration officials returned to Kherson City.²⁸ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that some advanced Ukrainian units have reached the right bank of the Dnipro River.²⁹ Most Russian sources also acknowledged that Ukrainian forces are in control of the entire right bank, but some claimed that Russian artillery in Kakhovka is preventing Ukrainian forces from reaching the right bank.³⁰ Ukrainian military officials noted that Russian forces are continuing to use UAVs, MLRS systems, and artillery to strike Ukrainian forces in liberated settlements.³¹ Ukrainian officials are also looking for Russian servicemen out of uniform and abandoned military equipment.³² Social media footage showed that Russian forces have abandoned some military equipment like helicopters and armored vehicles, despite the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claims that Russian forces transferred 5,000 pieces of weaponry to the left (eastern) bank.³³

Russian forces are continuing to engineer defensive positions on the left bank of the Dnipro River and establish logistics in southern Kherson Oblast.³⁴ Recent Maxar Technologies and Satellogic satellite footage showed that Russian forces have established a new base approximately 70km southeast of Kherson City, likely in an effort to protect their equipment from Ukrainian HIMARS strikes.³⁵ Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian positions on the left bank and reportedly destroyed a Russian ammunition depot in Kakhovka Raion.³⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of November 12, 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.

ISW expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives to all of right bank Kherson Oblast on November 11 based on geolocated footage of Ukrainian forces liberating Kherson City and settlements north of the Dnipro River. Russian forces partially destroyed the Kakhovka and Antonivsky bridges, which indicates that Russian forces are not intending to hold positions on the right (western) bank. ISW assesses with high confidence that Ukrainian forces will clear the remaining settlements along the western bank of the river in the coming days, although some Russian troops may have remained behind to conduct partisan operations. ISW is not ready to reassess control of the various islands near the west bank of the river.

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 conducted ground attacks near Siversk, Bakhmut, and Avdiivka on November 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks east of Siversk near Verkhnokamianske, near Soledar, and near Bakhmut.³⁷ A Russian source claimed that Russian forces captured the Mayorsk Rail Station south of Bakhmut.³⁸ Geolocated footage shows Ukrainian forces storming Russian positions east of Bakhmut along the To504 highway.³⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults west of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske, Krasnohorivka, and Marinka.⁴⁰ Russian sources claimed there was ongoing fighting near Pervomaiske and south of Avdiivka near Opytne.⁴¹

Russian forces made marginal gains in their offensive push towards Vuhledar as of November 12. Geolocated footage shows that Russian forces made marginal advances into Pavlivka.⁴² A Russian source claimed that Russian forces shelled Pavlivka, indicating that Russian forces likely do not control the entire settlement.⁴³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian ground attack near Pavlivka.⁴⁴ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian ground attack east of Vuhledar towards Stepne and Volodymyrivka.⁴⁵

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

Russian forces continued routine air, missile, and artillery strikes west of Hulyaipole, and in Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv oblasts on November 12.46 Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Nikopol in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and Zaporizhzhia City.47 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian concentration area in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 10, wounding more than 100 Russian personnel.48

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

Russian military officers may be attempting to limit the cost of force generation by manufacturing justifications to avoid giving soldiers promised payments and benefits. Russian media reported on November 11 that two wounded Russian volunteer soldiers received notices of desertion and stopped receiving payments.⁴⁹ A prominent Russian Telegram channel accused officers of intentionally labeling the wounded soldiers as deserters to eliminate the need to fund their benefits and medical care.⁵⁰ The channel claimed that public outcry pushed authorities to correct the situation of one of the soldiers. Hospital workers allegedly threw the second soldier out on the streets, and he has reportedly received no response to his situation.⁵¹ ISW has previously reported that payments to contract soldiers, volunteer soldiers, and mobilized reservists place a heavy financial burden on both the Russian federal government and Russian regions.⁵² It remains unclear where officials will find funding to support force generation, and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has already failed to provision soldiers with basic supplies and equipment.⁵³ Incentives and bonus payments further exacerbate financial

challenges. However, officials continue to promise volunteers and mobilized soldiers further benefits as societal discontent with force generation grows.⁵⁴

Desertion remains a challenge for Russian forces as morale continues to drop. The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated on November 12 that Russian commanders are actively searching occupied Horlivka for deserters who fled Ukrainian counteroffensives in now-liberated Kharkiv Oblast. 55 Commanders reportedly issue weapons to discovered deserters, force them to purchase ammunition, and redeploy them to the southern front. 56 The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) released an audio intercept on November 12 in which a Russian soldier tells his mother that Russian commanders do not care about the lives of their personnel and that one commander told the rank-and-file soldiers they will all die anyway. 57 The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian authorities in occupied Henichesk instituted a prohibition on alcohol in response to deteriorating moral and psychological conditions among soldiers in occupied territories. 58

The popularity of Wagner Group forces may have inspired the creation of further private military companies (PMCs) for use in the war in Ukraine. Odesa Oblast Administration Spokesperson Serhiy Bratchuk claimed that Russian officials are planning the creation of an "Orthodox PMC" under the Russian Orthodox Church on November 12.⁵⁹ Private military companies are illegal in Russia.

<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 forces and occupation officials continue to endanger residents and subject them to coercive measures as of November 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on November 12 that Russian forces in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhia oblasts use the properties of religious organizations, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities to accommodate military personnel, store military equipment, and establish artillery fire positions. O Ukrainian Melitopol mayor Ivan Fedorov reported on November 12 that Russian occupation officials in Melitopol block residents from accessing certain radio, television, internet, and social media sources. Russian forces and occupation officials will likely continue to endanger residents and subject them to coercive measures as they prioritize the offensive against Ukraine over administrating the territories that they have already illegally annexed.

Russian forces continued to engage in measures designed to erase Ukrainian cultural heritage on November 12. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on November 12 that Russian forces stole 15,000 paintings from Kherson Oblast, including from the Kherson Art Museum and its branch in Nova Kakhovka.⁶² The looting of museums is a part of a wider Russian campaign to erase Ukrainian cultural heritage to undermine the strength of the Ukrainian national and ethnic identity.

Russian occupation officials continued to relocate their administrative presence further away from the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast on November 12. Russian outlet *RIA Novosti* reported on November 12 that Kherson occupation administration spokesperson Alexander Fomin announced that from now on the temporary administrative capital for Russian-occupied Kherson is officially Henichesk.⁶³ Russian sources reported on November 12 that Kakhovka raion occupation head Pavel Filipchuk announced that occupation administration employees are leaving the 15 km evacuation zone on the left bank of the Dnipro River.⁶⁴ The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on November 11 that Russian occupation officials and their families planned to evacuate from Nova Kakhovka to Arabat Spit on

November 12. ⁶⁵ Russian occupation officials will likely further struggle to administer Russian-occupied Kherson Oblast in these new administrative locations.

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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