Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 30

Karolina Hird, Riley Bailey, Madison Williams, Yekaterina Klepanchuk, and Frederick W. Kagan November 30, 8:00 pm 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.

Russian efforts around Bakhmut indicate that Russian forces have fundamentally failed to learn from previous high-casualty campaigns concentrated on objectives of limited operational or strategic significance. Russian forces have continually expended combat strength on small settlements around Bakhmut since the end of May; in the following six months, they have only secured gains on the order of a few kilometers at a time. As ISW has previously observed, Russian efforts to advance on Bakhmut have resulted in the continued attrition of Russian manpower and equipment, pinning troops on relatively insignificant settlements for weeks and months at a time.² This pattern of operations closely resembles the previous Russian effort to take Severodonetsk and Lysychansk earlier in the war. As ISW assessed throughout June and July of this year, Ukrainian forces essentially allowed Russian troops to concentrate efforts on Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, two cities near the Luhansk Oblast border of limited operational and strategic significance, in order to capitalize on the continued degradation of Russian manpower and equipment over the course of months of grinding combat.³ Russian troops eventually captured Lysychansk and Severodonetsk and reached the Luhansk Oblast border, but that tactical success translated to negligible operational benefit as the Russian offensive in the east then culminated. Russian efforts in this area have remained largely stalled along the lines that they reached in early July. Even if Russian troops continue to advance toward and within Bakhmut, and even if they force a controlled Ukrainian withdrawal from the city (as was the case in Lysychansk), Bakhmut itself offers them little operational benefit. The costs associated with six months of brutal, grinding, and attrition-based combat around Bakhmut far outweigh any operational advantage that the Russians can obtain from taking Bakhmut. Russian offensives around Bakhmut, on the other hand, are consuming a significant proportion of Russia's available combat power, potentially facilitating continued Ukrainian counteroffensives elsewhere.

Russian state nuclear power company Rosatom stated that the former chief engineer of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) has become the new director of the ZNPP. Rosatom advisor Renat Karchaa announced on November 30 that Yuriy Chernichuk has become the new ZNPP director and the first deputy general director of the Joint Stock Company "Operating Organization of the ZNPP," which is the entity that Rosatom formed on October 3 to essentially replace Ukrainian company Energoatom as the plant's operator and to oversee the "safe operation" of the ZNPP and manage personnel activities within the plant.⁴ Karchaa also noted that the entire management company of the ZNPP is formed of existing members of ZNPP staff who have signed a new employment contract.⁵ Rosatom's direct role in appointing and overseeing ZNPP management is consistent with previous efforts to install and maintain Russian control of the ZNPP in a way that is likely intended to force the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to *de facto* accept Russian claims over the plant by interacting with Russian-controlled ZNPP staff.⁶

The Kremlin continues efforts to stifle domestic dissent through legislation that broadens the definition of "foreign agents" and those amenable to foreign influence.

Russian media began reporting on November 23 that the Russian government approved new restrictions on the ability of those deemed "foreign agents" to post materials created by foreign-influenced sources and conduct public activities, which will enter into effect on December 1.7 The Russian Ministry of Justice expanded the list of "individual-foreign agents" on November 27 on the basis of those individuals conducting unspecified political activities.⁸ The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (UK MoD) also noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin has approved amendments to the 2012 "Foreign Agents Law" that extends the original definition of "foreign agents" to anyone who is under undefined "influence or pressure" from foreign actors.⁹ The amendments also afford the Russian Ministry of Justice the purview to publish the personal details of designated foreign agents, opening them up to public harassment.¹⁰ These measures are likely intended to crack down on increasing instances of domestic dissent about the Kremlin's conduct of the war. By broadening the definition of those classified as foreign agents, the Kremlin can expand its weaponization of this designation to ratchet up censorship measures and exert increased control over the information space.

The Belarusian Minster of Defense made comments likely in support of ongoing information operations, and some Russian sources reframed those comments so as to place further pressure on Belarusian officials to support Russia's war in Ukraine. Belarusian Minister of Defense Lieutenant General Viktor Khrenin stated on November 30 that the actions of bordering NATO members suggest that preparations are underway to conduct military operations in the eastern direction (i.e., against Belarus). While Khrenin's comments incorporate several possible types of military operations, Russian media and a milblogger reported his comments as saying explicitly that NATO is preparing for offensive operations in the eastern direction (which is a nonsensical accusation).¹² Khrenin likely made the comments about NATO military activities on the borders with Belarus in support of what ISW has previously assessed is an ongoing information operation aimed at fixing Ukrainian forces on the border with Belarus in response to the threat of Belarus entering the war. 13 ISW has also previously assessed that Belarus is highly unlikely to enter the war.¹⁴ Russian sources likely framed Khrenin's comments to be more inflammatory in order to support the information operation about Belarus entering the war but also to set more escalatory information conditions that may place more pressure on Belarusian officials to further support the Russian offensive campaign in Ukraine.

Russian opinion polling suggests that the Russian public may be tiring of Russia's war in Ukraine. Russian opposition media outlet *Meduza* reported on November 30 that it had gained access to the results of an opinion poll commissioned by the Kremlin for internal use that shows that 55 percent of Russians favor peace talks with Ukraine and 25 percent favor continuing the war. ¹⁵ Russian independent polling organization *Levada's* October polling shows a similar breakdown with 34 percent favoring continuing military actions in Ukraine and 57 percent favoring negotiations. ¹⁶ Internal Kremlin polling reportedly placed the percentage of Russians supporting negotiations with Ukraine at 32 percent in July and the percentage favoring the continuation of the war at 57 percent. ¹⁷ *Meduza* reported that the director of the Levada Center Denis Volkov stated that the share of Russians likely to support peace talks with Ukraine began to grow rapidly following Russian President Vladimir Putin's partial mobilization decree. ¹⁸ Disruptions associated with partial mobilization and Russian setbacks on the battlefield have likely contributed to an increasing war weariness among the Russian public, as reflected in the polling.

Key Takeaways

- The Russian military's efforts around Bakhmut suggest that Russian forces failed to learn from previous costly campaigns focused on operationally insignificant settlements.
- Russian state nuclear company Rosenergoatom appointed a new director for the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.
- The Kremlin continues efforts to stifle domestic dissent through an expansion of measures ostensibly aimed against "foreign agents."
- Russian opinion polling suggests that the Russian public may be growing tired of Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Russian forces continued efforts to defend against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line.
- Russia forces continued to make incremental gains around Bakhmut and to conduct offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area.
- A Ukrainian official acknowledged that Ukrainian forces are conducting an operation on the Kinburn Spit.
- Russian and Ukrainian sources indicated that Russian officials are continuing to conduct partial mobilization measures.
- Russian officials' ongoing efforts to integrate illegally annexed territories into the Russian Federation are likely very disorganized.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of November 30, 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.

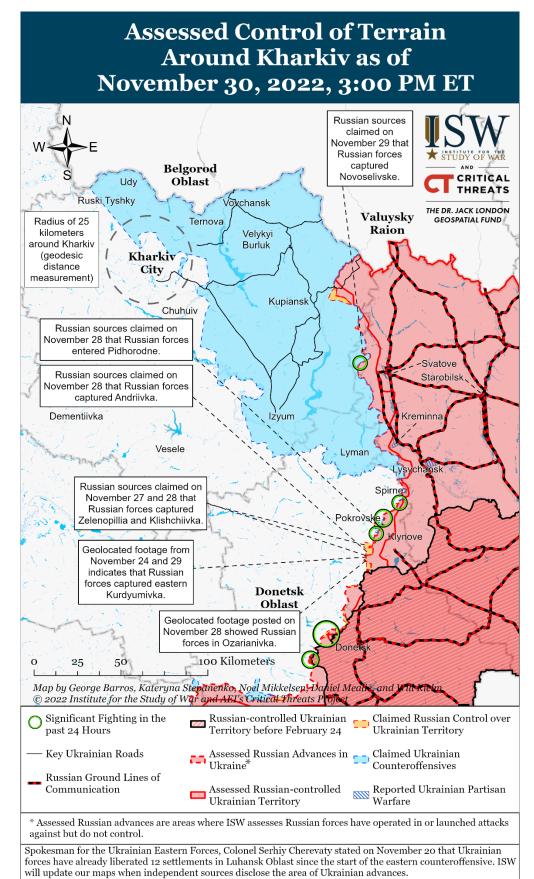
- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and one supporting effort);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation 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 forces continued efforts to defend against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations and regain lost positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line on November 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted an assault near Stelmakhivka, 15km northwest of Svatove. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked Russian positions in Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove). Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops conducted ground attacks south of Svatove around Kreminna and reported that Russian troops repelled Ukrainian attacks in the direction of Ploshchanka (15km north of Kreminna), Chervonopopivka (6km northwest of Kreminna), and Zhytlivka (8km north of Kreminna). The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian troops shelled Chervonopopivka and Ploshchanka, indicating that Ukrainian troops have actually advanced into these settlements. Russian troops additionally attacked Ukrainian positions south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka, and Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces shelled Lysychansk (29km southeast of Kreminna).

Conflicting reports emerged on the general pace of the Ukrainian counteroffensive along the Svatove-Kreminna line on November 30. Multiple Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian counteroffensive operations stalled in the area due to a shortage of artillery ammunition and an inability to procure supplies due to poor weather conditions and energy disruptions.²⁴ A Russian source stated that on the contrary, the situation around Kreminna is growing increasingly tense and claimed that Ukrainian forces are amassing north of Kreminna near Chervonopopivka.²⁵ Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that Chechen Akhmat Spetsnaz forces and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) 2nd Army Corps troops are making excellent progress in the area.²⁶



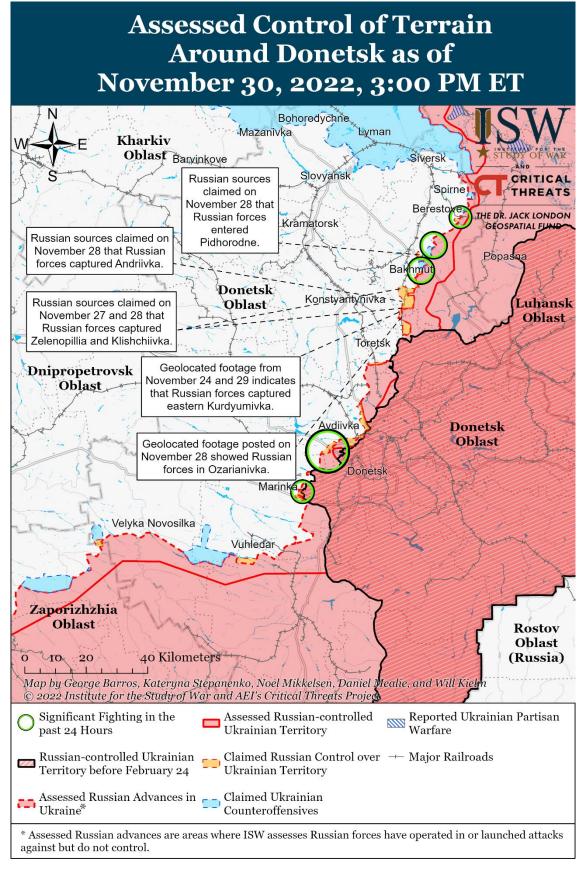
Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

<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 continued to make incremental advances south of Bakhmut on November 30. Geolocated footage posted between November 28 and 29 shows Ukrainian troops claiming to be encircled by Russian troops on the eastern side of Kurdiumivka, about 12km southwest of Bakhmut.²⁷ Russian sources circulated conflicting reports on the status of control of Kurdiumivka, with some reporting that Ukrainian troops still control the western half of the settlement and that fighting is ongoing while some claimed that Russian troops have taken full control of the settlement and are in the process of clearing Ukrainian positions.²⁸ ISW has only observed visual confirmation of the former and assesses that Russian troops made gains in the eastern half of Kurdiumivka.²⁹ Geolocated footage posted on November 30 also shows slight Russian advances on the southeastern and northeastern outskirts of Bakhmut itself.³⁰

Russian forces continued ground attacks northeast of Bakhmut on November 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled attempted Russian attacks near Bakhmutske (10km northeast of Bakhmut) and Bilohorivka (20km northeast of Bakhmut).³¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian troops entirely captured Bilohorivka, although ISW has not observed independent confirmation of this claim.³² Russian and Ukrainian sources indicated that Wagner Group fighters, largely including mobilized prisoners, and elements of both the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (troops of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, respectively) are responsible for operations in the Bakhmut area.³³

Russian forces additionally continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area and routine fire in western Donetsk Oblast on November 30. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops unsuccessfully attacked Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Marinka, all along the western outskirts of Donetsk City.³⁴ Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces, particularly soldiers of the BARS-11 (Combat Reserve) "Kuban" Cossack detachment, are fighting within Marinka.³⁵ Russian sources posted combat footage of Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) artillerymen striking Ukrainian positions near Avdiivka.³⁶ The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian troops continued unsuccessful attempts to regain lost positions southwest of Donetsk City near Vuhledar, and Russian troops continued routine fire along the line of contact around Donetsk City and in western Donetsk and eastern Zaporizhia oblasts.³⁷



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

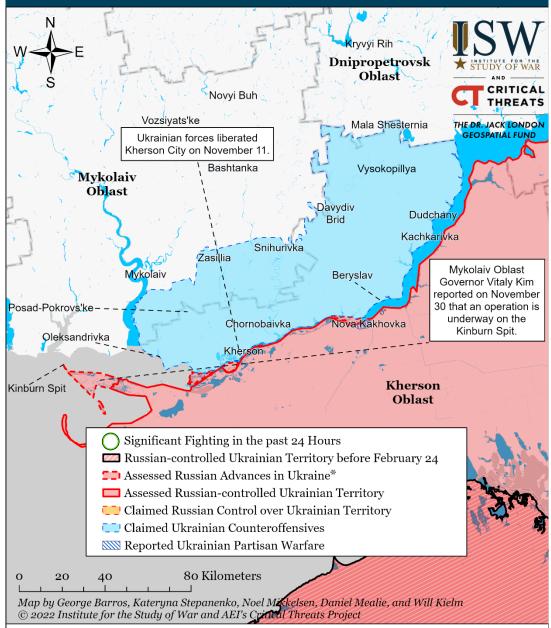
Russian forces continued defensive measures on the east bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast on November 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces are conducting positional defense on the east bank of the Dnipro River.³⁸ Ukrainian media outlet *Hromadske* posted a video on November 30 showing Ukrainian forces positioned under the Antonivskiy bridge on the west bank of the Dnipro River engaging in small arms and RPG fire with Russian forces across the river on the east bank.³⁹ Ukrainian soldiers interviewed by *Hromadske* stated that they are part of units in extremely forward positions tasked with preventing Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups from crossing the river.⁴⁰ The Ukrainian soldiers also stated that Russian forces have several observation posts on the east bank from which they direct artillery fire.⁴¹ Russian forces may have units on the east bank near the water line to prevent Ukrainian reconnaissance and sabotage groups from crossing the river and to offer positions from which Russian forces can better shell Kherson City and surrounding settlements.

Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian concentration areas in southern Ukraine. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian positions in Polohy and Tokmak in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 28 and 29, wounding about 100 Russian military personnel.⁴² Geolocated footage posted on November 30 shows the aftermath of HIMARS strikes on buildings in Polohy.⁴³ Other geolocated footage posted on November 30 shows the aftermath of purported Ukrainian strikes in Myrne, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴⁴ The Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported on November 30 that residents heard explosions in locations where Russian mobilized personnel recently settled.⁴⁵ Russian sources also continued to express concern about unverified Ukrainian assaults in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 30. Zaporizhia occupation deputy Vladimir Rogov claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to break through Russian defensive positions near Orikhiv in Zaporizhia Oblast.⁴⁶ ISW cannot verify the report about the Ukrainian assault and makes no assessments about future Ukrainian operations.

A Ukrainian official acknowledged that Ukrainian forces are conducting operations on the Kinburn Spit on November 30. Mykolaiv Oblast Head Vitaly Kim announced on November 30 that Ukrainian forces are conducting an operation on the Kinburn Spit under informational silence conditions.⁴⁷ Kim also stated that Russian forces forcibly removed residents from the Kinburn Spit on November 28.⁴⁸ ISW has previously assessed that Ukrainian forces would be better equipped to conduct potential operations on the east bank of the Dnipro in Kherson Oblast from locations on the Kinburn Spit.⁴⁹

Russian forces continued routine missile and artillery strikes west of Hulyaipole, in western Kherson Oblast, and in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast on November 30.⁵⁰ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Kherson City, Kizomys, Ochakiv, Zaporizhzhia City, Nikopol, and Marhanets.⁵¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of November 30, 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. Russian sources indicated on November 21 that Ukrainian forces are holding positions on Karantynyy Island near Kherson City, but it is unclear if Ukrainian forces regained control over other islands along the Dnipro River.

Note: ISW will report on activities in Kherson Oblast as part of the Southern Axis in this and subsequent updates. Ukraine's counteroffensive in right-bank Kherson Oblast has accomplished its stated objectives, so ISW will not present a Southern Ukraine counteroffensive section until Ukrainian forces resume counteroffensives in southern Ukraine.

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

Russian and Ukrainian sources indicated that partial mobilization continues, despite official Russian claims otherwise. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that the Russian information space has been circulating rumors that male employees of the Russian Presidential Administration are temporarily banned from traveling on business trips or vacations abroad due to the possibility of mobilization orders.⁵² The Russian source stated that the Kremlin has denied these rumors.⁵³ The same Russian source also shared audio from a call with a mobilization hotline operator, who admitted that, while the partial mobilization public recruitment campaign has ended, mobilization continues as long as mobilized soldiers are serving in Ukraine.⁵⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian officials continued to patrol the city and deny exit to residents who want to leave, despite Russian occupation officials claiming an end to mobilization in the occupied city of Khrustalnyi, Luhansk Oblast.⁵⁵

The Russian state continued to struggle under the burden of mobilization, forcing civilians to provide support themselves and driving low morale amongst Russian troops. Russian sources continued to report on the confusion surrounding mobilization, stating that Russian officials mobilized Russians who should not have mobilized, such as a man with a permanent disability, a chief suspect in a criminal case, and a man without any of the necessary training.⁵⁶ A prominent Russian news agency also reported on November 28 that Russian lawyers are confused as to whether they will be deferred or mobilized in the future.⁵⁷ The Russian state continued to renege on financial promises to Russian citizens, further degrading morale and trust in the state apparatus.⁵⁸ Putin acknowledged in a televised press meeting that there are delays in receiving salaries in some oblasts.⁵⁹ Russian Duma Deputy Maxim Ivanov submitted a list to the Russian military prosecutor's office on November 29 of almost 1,000 servicemembers who have not yet received promised October salaries.⁶⁰ A Russian milblogger amplified reports that St. Petersburg officials also refused to give plots of land to military veterans as previously promised.⁶¹ Russian sources reported that Russian troops continued to suffer from food shortages, faulty equipment, and diminishing supplies – to the point of incurring the cost of supplies, equipment, housing, and repairs themselves and seeking support from their loved ones.⁶² Multiple Russian sources continued to report that the Russian public subsidized Russian forces' logistical shortcomings with fundraisers and drives to provide everything from socks to vehicles.⁶³ Russian sources reported that some Russian servicemembers refused to fight, at least one more committed suicide, and others reported abandonment by their military leadership.⁶⁴

Wagner financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin continued attempts to bolster Wagner's reputation by boasting of logistical and military successes in obvious contrast to Russian forces' failures. Zambian officials reported the death of Zambian student and convict Lemekhani Nathan Nyirenda while serving on the Russian side of the conflict in Ukraine on November 14.65 Western media and Russian milbloggers amplified reports on November 29 that Prigozhin boasted on his official social channels that Nyirenda

was a Wagner mercenary whom he "remembered" well.⁶⁶ Prigozhin, likely capitalizing on media attention, claimed that Nyirenda thanked the Wagner PMC for saving "thousands" of Africans and that it was a great honor to become a Wagner mercenary himself.⁶⁷ A Russian milblogger also highlighted Wagner's strength compared to Russian forces' logistical failures, inaccurately stating that Wagner has not faced a single significant scandal concerning the quality of equipment, training, or supplies.⁶⁸ The Russian milblogger praised Prigozhin's November 28 statement that, despite offers from the Russian public, Wagner has no need for donations.⁶⁹

Russian authorities made a concerted effort to placate the Russian public amidst growing concern over mobilized family members. A Russian source reported on November 29 that the Governor of St. Petersburg, Alexander Beglov, met with families of participants in combat operations in Ukraine and promised them he would create a public council for them to voice their concerns and opinions.⁷⁰ Another Russian source reported that government officials in Novosibirsk Oblast held a reception for families of participants in combat operations in Ukraine to listen to their appeals.⁷¹ A Russian milblogger reported that education authorities in Belgorod have unveiled a program for schools that details how to support and handle students who suffer from losses due to combat in Ukraine.⁷² The group "Council of Mothers and Wives" reported that they sent a request to the Russian Office of Human Rights to create a public body to monitor mobilization efforts, which was reportedly forwarded to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).⁷³ The Russian MoD appealed to the Russian public's growing concern over Russian forces' living conditions on the front in Ukraine, sharing a video of the supposed living quarters of mobilized soldiers on the front in which one mobilized servicemember proclaims that living on the front is just like civilian life: "warm, nice, and cozy."⁷⁴ ISW has not attempted to ascertain exactly where on the front line that soldier was serving.

<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 occupation officials continued to implement administrative measures that indicate that ongoing efforts to integrate illegally annexed territories into the Russian Federation are incredibly disorganized. The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) head Leonid Pasechnik claimed on November 30 that he signed a document recognizing the norms and decrees that previously established travel restrictions between the LNR and Russian Federation as invalid.⁷⁵ The supposed abolition of travel restrictions comes two months after Russia formally recognized its illegal annexation of Luhansk Oblast. The delay in allowing people who are supposedly Russian citizens to cross into the Russian Federation indicates that Russian officials are likely still unsure of how to legally recognize residents in illegally annexed territories. The delay and the fact that Pasechnik issued the document himself indicate that the Russian government's integration effort for illegally annexed territory is likely highly disorganized.

Ukrainian partisans may have conducted attacks on Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 30. Nikopol military administration head Evheniy Yevtushenko posted a video on November 30 purporting to show Ukrainian partisans near Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast.⁷⁶ Yevtushenko claimed that Ukrainian partisans near Ivanivka, Blahovishchenkka, and Enerhodar in Russian-occupied Zaporizhia Oblast killed up to a platoon of Russian military personnel.⁷⁷ Russian sources did not report on any partisan activity in Zaporizhia Oblast on November 30.

Russian occupation officials continue to engage in measures designed to facilitate the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation. LNR head Leonid Pasechnik claimed on November 30 that a Russian medical organization plans to examine 300 children from social institutions in Luhansk Oblast and take those in need of surgical intervention for treatment.⁷⁸ ISW has previously assessed that Russian officials are pursuing a medical relocation scheme that aims to use the guise of medical necessity to likely justify mass deportations of Ukrainian children to Russian territory.⁷⁹

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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² https://isw.pub/RusCampaignJuly25; https://isw.pub/UkrWar112922; https://isw.pub/UkrWar110322; https://isw.pub/RusCampaignJuly20

³ https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-4;

⁴ https://tass dot ru/ekonomika/16459527

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⁷ https://t.me/readovkanews/47464

⁸ https://t.me/readovkanews/47680

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Institute for the Study of War & The Critical Threats Project 2022

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