Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 1

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September 1, 11pm 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 President Vladimir Putin reiterated his false framing of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine as a defensive operation to protect Russia on September 1. During a meeting with schoolchildren in Kaliningrad, Putin stated that the purpose of the "special military operation" is to eliminate the "anti-Russian enclave" that is forming in Ukraine and is an existential threat to the Russian state.¹ Putin similarly invoked the concept of an "anti-Russia" in his February 24 speech declaring a "special operation" in Ukraine.² Putin's reiteration of an "anti-Russian" entity that must be defeated militarily to defend Russia reaffirms his maximalist intentions for Ukraine and is likely intended to set the information conditions to call for further Russian efforts and force generation going into the fall and winter of this year.

Russian milbloggers continued attempts to claim that Ukraine's counteroffensive in the south has already failed. Igor Girkin, a Russian nationalist and former commander of militants in the 2014 fighting in Donbas, stated that Ukrainian forces are continuing to attack after the "failure of the first attack"—falsely portraying ongoing Ukrainian operations as separate attacks after an initial failure—and reiterated the common Russian narrative that what he claims are Ukraine's "Western handlers" pushed Ukraine to conduct a counteroffensive.³ Girkin additionally stated that Ukraine's Western partners poorly planned for the counteroffensive, underestimated Russian capabilities and assumed Russians are incompetent, and principally accounted for political—not military—considerations.⁴ One milblogger stated that Ukraine's defeat in the south will be the strongest psychological blow to Kyiv and that this failure will have a continued long-term psychological effect on Ukraine's morale.⁵ The Russian milbloggers are increasingly centrally describing Ukrainian attacks as tactless and "suicidal" rushes.⁶

As ISW has reported, military operations on the scale of the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive do not succeed or fail in a day or a week. Ukrainians and the West should not fall for Russian information operations portraying the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast as having failed almost instantly or that depict Ukraine as a helpless puppet of Western masters for launching it at this time.

The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin has extended the deadline for Russian forces to capture Donetsk Oblast from August 31 to the still highly unlikely target date of September 15, and Russian forces are conducting several redeployments to meet this goal.8 Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian Main Operational Department Oleksiy Gromov stated that Russian forces are regrouping elements of the Central Military District (CMD) operating in the Luhansk-Donetsk Oblast directions in an effort to increase the number of troops west of Donetsk City.9 Gromov added that Russian forces deployed two battalion tactical groups (BTGs) in the direction of the western Zaporizhia Oblast frontline from Belgorod Oblast, which he noted might support resumed Russian offensive operations in Donbas.¹¹o Gromov stated that Russian military officials are continuing to form the 3rd Army Corps to deploy to Donetsk Oblast, also likely to resume offensive operations in the Donetsk operational area.¹¹ Gromov noted that it is unclear if all mobilized 3rd Army Corps servicemen have undergone military training.¹² Russian forces also reportedly introduced one BTG each to the Slovyansk and Mykolaiv directions.¹³ RFE/RL's footage also shows that

Russian forces are continuing to react to the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast by consistently transferring military convoys to southern Ukrainian via the Kerch Strait Bridge. ¹⁴ These Russian deployments are likely intended to set conditions for a revised operation to capture Donetsk Oblast, but Russian forces remain highly unlikely to make the progress necessary to capture the Oblast by September 15.

The Kremlin is likely seeking to capitalize on the significance of seizing areas around Donetsk City that have been contested since 2014 to boost the morale of Russian and proxy forces. Russian forces have not been successful in advancing toward Siversk or capturing the E40 highway to Slovyansk-Bakhmut since the fall of Lysychansk and are likely experiencing challenges incentivizing Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) elements to continue fighting to reach the Donetsk Oblast administrative borders. Russian forces had minor territorial gains around Avdiivka, which generated positive chatter among the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) fighters in early August after which the advances stalled west of Donetsk City.

Key Takeaways

- Ukrainian forces continued to target Russian logistical nodes and key positions throughout Kherson Oblast in support of the ongoing counteroffensive in southern Ukraine.
- Russian milbloggers reiterated claims that Ukrainian forces are fighting along four axes of advance in Western Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces conducted ground attacks northwest of Slovyansk, south and northeast of Bakhmut, and northwest and southwest of Donetsk City.
- Russian authorities escalated claims that Ukrainian forces are threatening both the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and the newly arrived International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) delegation on the territory of the ZNPP.
- The Russian 3rd Army Corps is continuing to form for deployment to Donbas.
- Russian occupation authorities are likely increasingly recognizing their inability to successfully hold sham referenda in occupied areas of Ukraine due to Russian military failures and ongoing Ukrainian resistance in occupied territories.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



<u>Ukrainian Counteroffensives</u> (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

Ukrainian military officials reiterated that Ukrainian forces continued targeting Russian logistics and reinforcements and maintained operational silence on the progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in southern Ukraine on September 1. Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian Main Operational Department Oleksiy Gromov stated that Russian losses are currently concentrated due to a series of Ukrainian missile, air, UAV, and artillery strikes on Russian command posts, positions, and ammunition depots between August 29 and August 31.¹⁷

The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed a pontoon bridge over the Inhulets River in Darivka, about 18km northeast of Kherson City and situated on the Kherson City-Nova Kakhovka highway. Ukrainian forces have particularly targeted pontoon crossings since August 29, likely to tactically disrupt Russian forces and support ongoing Ukrainian offensive operations. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command also noted that Ukrainian forces struck six ammunition depots in the Bersylavsky and Khersonsky Raions (Districts) in Central Kherson Oblast, and Hennichensky Raion, near the eastern Kherson Oblast-Crimea border. Ukrainian forces also reportedly destroyed command posts of the Russian 331st Guards Airborne Regiment of the 98th Guards Airborne Division and the 56th Airborne Assault Regiment of the 7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division in unspecified areas. The 331st Regiment previously operated near Hostomel, Kyiv Oblast, in February and March and suffered significant losses, and Ukrainian military officials stated that Ukrainian forces previously struck the unit's command post south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border in Novovoskresenke on August 23. Li is unclear if Ukrainian forces struck the 331st Regiment's command post in Novovoskresenke or another location.

Ukrainian forces likely continued to strike Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) and key positions throughout central Kherson Oblast on September 1. Local Ukrainian civilians reported hearing explosions and witnessing active air defense systems in Nova Kakhovka and Kakhovka (approximately 12km northeast of Nova Kakhovka), and social media footage showed new Ukrainian strikes against the Antonivsky Bridge.²³ The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Russian forces shot down Ukrainian AGM-88 HARM missiles over Antonivsky Bridge.²⁴ A Ukrainian Telegram channel reported that a Ukrainian missile hit an unspecified target in Oleshky (about 9km southeast of Kherson City on the left bank of the Dnipro River), and that Russian air defense systems shot down a Ukrainian missile over Kalanchak (about 67km due south of Kherson City).²⁵ A Ukrainian Telegram channel also published footage of a reported destroyed Russian military base in Shyroka Balka, about 35km west of Kherson City.²⁶ Geolocated footage also showed the destruction of a Russian military base in the former barracks of the Ukrainian National Guards in Kherson City, likely destroyed during a Ukrainian strike on August 29.²⁷ Ukrainian Telegram channels have also reported Russian forces transporting more barges to Nova Kakhovka, likely in an attempt to facilitate cross-river transportation in the area.²⁸

Russian milbloggers reported that Ukrainian forces continued attacking in at least four directions in Kherson Oblast, but these claims remain largely unverifiable. Various milbloggers claimed that fighting continued west of Vysokopillya south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border, east and northeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River, around Snihurivka about 65km east of Mykolaiv City, and north of Kherson City.

Some milbloggers reported that Russian airborne troops repelled Ukrainian attacks on Olhyne, while others noted that Russian forces have "confident control" over the southern halves of Olhyne and Vysokopillya and are engaged in defensive battles south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border.²⁹ Ukrainian forces reportedly continued fighting in Arkhanhelske near the Inhulets River in the

northernmost part of Kherson Oblast.30 Some Russian milbloggers reported that Russian forces established partial control of Bila Krynytsia (between the Ukrainian bridgehead and Davydiv Brid), while others claimed that Rosgvadia and Russian airborne troops are fighting Ukrainian forces in Davydiv Brid itself.³¹ Geolocated footage also showed Russian forces striking Ukrainian military equipment south of Bila Krynytsia.32 A milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian forces captured Kostromka (10km southeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead) and advanced to the outskirts of Bruskynske on the T2207 highway, while simultaneously attacking Shchaslyve south of Kostromka.³³ Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) officials and milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack on Snihurivka, and geolocated footage showed Ukrainian forces shelling Russian positions in the settlement.³⁴ A milblogger claimed that Russian forces regained control over Zeleny Hai (approximately 23km north of Kherson City) and noted that Russian forces continued to fire at Ukrainian positions with artillery.³⁵ Geolocated footage showed Russian artillery shelling Ukrainian forces near Myrne (approximately seven kilometers west of Zeleny Hai), and Russian milbloggers previously stated that Russian forces failed to advance to Myrne on August 31.36 Geolocated footage also showed a destroyed Ukrainian tank in Liubomyrivka (about 7km north of Zeleny Hai), which corroborates Russian milbloggers' claims from August 31 of Ukrainian advances in the area.³⁷ Geolocated footage seemingly shows five Russian soldiers surrendering to Ukrainian forces in Pravdyne (about 35km northwest of Kherson City).38

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed it destroyed Ukrainian ammunition depots on the western bank of the Inhulets River.³⁹ The Kherson Oblast Occupation Police also claimed it neutralized a Ukrainian "terrorist" headquarters in Kherson City.⁴⁰

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.

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

Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

Russian 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)

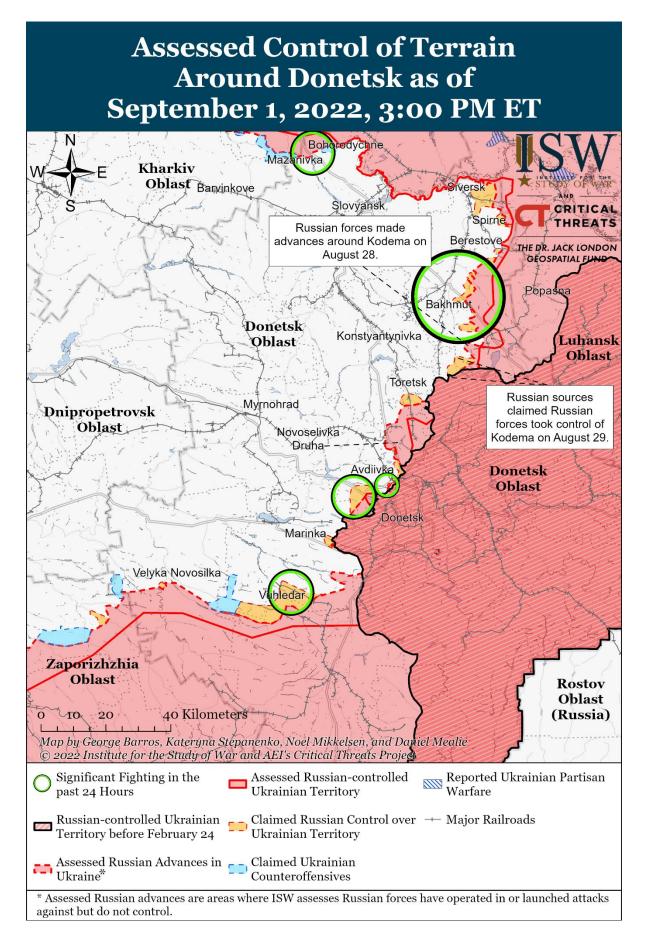
Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack northwest of Slovyansk on September 1. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to advance toward Dolyna, 18km

northwest of Slovyansk along the E40 highway.⁴¹ Russian forces additionally continued routine shelling, airstrikes, and aerial reconnaissance along the Izyum-Slovyansk line and near the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border.⁴² Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks toward Siversk on September 1 and continued routine artillery strikes on Siversk and surrounding settlements.⁴³

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks to the northeast and south of Bakhmut on September 1. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops attempted to advance toward Vesela Dolyna (5km southeast of Bakhmut), Zaitseve (8km southeast of Bakhmut), Soledar (10km northeast of Bakhmut), and Bakhmutske (8km northeast of Bakhmut).⁴⁴ Both Ukrainian and Russian sources indicated that Ukrainian troops may be escalating operations around Bakhmut, potentially to regain lost positions.⁴⁵

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the western outskirts of Donetsk City on September 1. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to improve their positions around Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Optyne, which all lie within 15km of the northwestern corner of Donetsk City.⁴⁶ Russian forces also continued routine air and artillery strikes along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline.⁴⁷

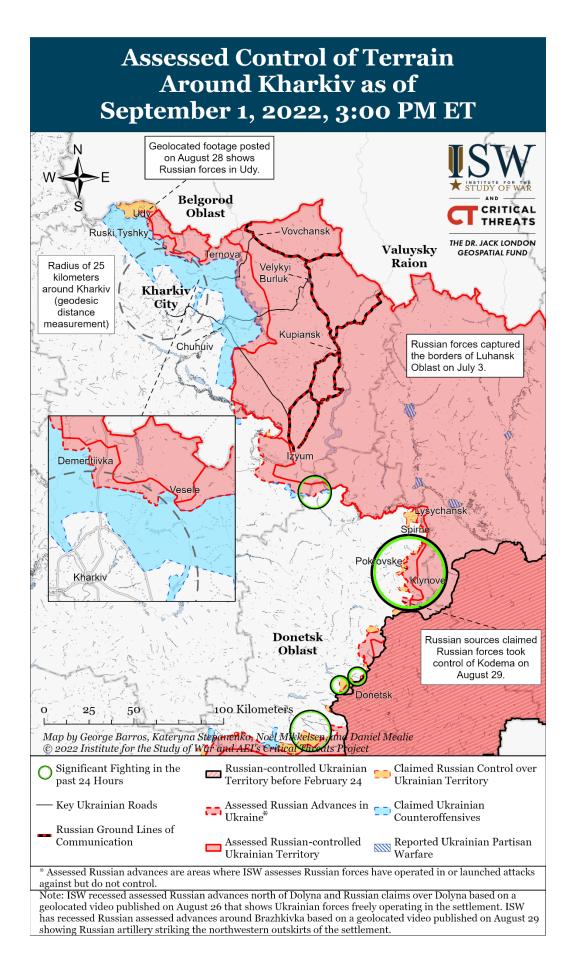
Russian forces also conducted a limited ground attack southwest of Donetsk City on September 1. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops attempted to improve their positions around Vodyane, about 35km southwest of Donetsk City and near the road that runs from Vuhledar into Marinka.⁴⁸ Russian forces continued routine shelling and airstrikes on Ukrainian positions in the area between Donetsk City and the Zaporizhia Oblast border.⁴⁹



<u>Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City</u> (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 confirmed ground attacks along the Kharkiv City Axis on September 1. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued conducting aerial reconnaissance using UAVs near settlements along the frontlines.⁵⁰ Russian forces continued using tank, tube, and rocket artillery to shell settlements to the north and northeast of Kharkiv City.⁵¹

The Russian Defense Ministry (MOD) claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian offensive near Ruski Tyshky, approximately 20km northeast of Kharkiv City, on September 1. ISW is not able to independently verify this claim, however.

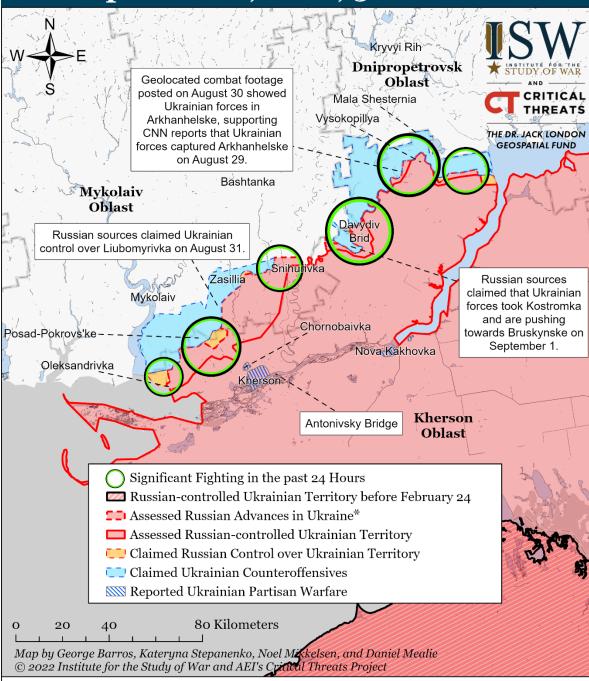


<u>Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Russian forces did not conduct offensive operations in Kherson or Zaporizhia Oblasts and continued routine shelling along the line of contact.⁵² The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces have intensified their airstrikes in Kherson Oblast and remotely mined their positions to defend themselves against Ukrainian advances.⁵³ Russian forces launched missile strikes against Odesa Oblast and continued to fire MLRS systems and heavy artillery at Nikopol and Kryvyi Rih Raions. Satellite imagery reportedly showed Russian forces moving another S-400 air defense system near Belbek, Crimea.⁵⁴ Russian forces are likely continuing to undertake measures to strengthen air defenses in Crimea.

Russian authorities escalated attempts to claim Ukrainian forces threaten both the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) and newly arrived International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) personnel on September 1. Ukrainian and Russian sources both confirmed the IAEA observer mission arrived at the plant on September 1. Ukrainian and Russian sources accused each other of shelling the agreed-upon route of the IAEA team to the ZNPP. Ukrainian government and local sources reported that Russian shelling in Enerhodar forced the ZNPP's fifth power unit to shut down.⁵⁵ The Russian MoD claimed that two Ukrainian sabotage groups of up to 60 people landed on the coast of the Nova Kakhovka reservoir, 3km east of the ZNPP and that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack to capture the plant.⁵⁶ It is highly unlikely that a small group of Ukrainian forces launched an unsupported attack to recapture the ZNPP. Russian authorities will likely step up their efforts to portray Ukrainian forces as a danger to the international IAEA observers. Russian authorities will likely step up their efforts to portray Ukrainian forces as a danger to the international IAEA observers.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 1, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



 $^{^{\}ast}$ Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian officials announced on August 29 that Ukrainian forces began a counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast. An unnamed military official of an unspecified country told CNN on August 29 that Ukrainian forces liberated Pravdyne, Nova Dmytrivka, and Tomyna Balka (northwest of Kherson City) and Arkhanhelske (along the Inhulets River). ISW will readjust the maps when more open sources confirm the liberation of these settlements. ISW extended Ukrainian counteroffensives to Sukhyi Stavok based on several claims from Russian milbloggers that Ukrainian forces liberated the settlement on August 29.

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

Russian military authorities continued forming and deploying volunteer units to Ukraine to compensate for personnel losses in Ukraine. A local veterans' organization in Buryatia announced it generated an additional 30 volunteers to fight in Ukraine on September 1.⁵⁷ Deputy Chief of the Ukrainian Main Operational Department Oleksiy Gromov stated that Russian military authorities decided to disband the 31st Separate Airborne Assault Brigade and the 22nd Separate Special Purpose Brigade due to significant losses, claiming that less than 20% of personnel in each brigade survived operations in Ukraine. Beth brigades fought in battles where Russian forces suffered heavy attrition. Elements of the Russian 31st Separate Airborne Assault Brigade participated in combat operations in Hostomel, Kyiv Oblast, and in Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast. Belements of the 22nd Separate Special Purpose brigade fought in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.

CNN amplified two anonymous US officials' claims on August 31 that Russia is facing "severe" shortages of military personnel in Ukraine and is searching for new ways to generate personnel for battle. The report amplified one unidentified official's claims that the Russian MoD is attempting to recruit contract service members to compensate for personnel losses by "compelling wounded soldiers to reenter combat, acquiring personnel from private security companies, and paying bonuses to conscripts." The officials also noted that the US has "credible reporting" that Russia's MOD is "likely to begin" recruiting convicted criminals in Ukraine "in exchange for pardons and financial compensation."

<u>Activity in Russian-occupied Areas</u> (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)

Ukrainian sources are increasingly reporting that Russian occupation authorities are likely acknowledging their own inability to hold large-scale referenda in occupied Ukrainian territories due to Russian military failures to capture desired territory and the pressure of local resistance within occupied territories. The Ukrainian Resistance Center stated on September 1 that the Kremlin anticipated holding the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia Oblasts by the summer of 2022 and that the Russian military's inability to take control of these territories has undermined the Kremlin's prospects at staging large-scale referenda across occupied regions. ⁶³ The Resistance Center added that Russian authorities will continue to propagate the concept of large-scale referenda across the information space but that occupation officials fundamentally understand that even staged voting may not occur at all due to the tandem effects of Russian military failings and pressure levied by Ukrainian partisan and civil resistance. ⁶⁴ ISW has previously assessed that Russian occupation authorities are unlikely to be able to stage sham referenda in occupied regions by the supposed early September deadline.

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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<sup>23</sup> https://t.me/hueviyherson/25165; https://t.me/hueviyherson/25159; https://t.me/hueviyherson/25155;
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²⁸ https://t.me/hueviyherson/25131

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