Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 2

Kateryna Stepanenko, Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros, and Mason Clark
September 2, 9:00 pm ET

Russian independent polling organization Levada posted survey results on September 1 indicating that while the majority of Russians still support military operations in Ukraine, public support for the war may be gradually declining. Levada stated that the overall support for Russian forces in Ukraine has not changed significantly over the summer, with 76% of the survey's respondents in favor of the action of Russian forces in Ukraine (46% strongly supporting and 30% generally supporting).¹ Levada also noted that 48% of respondents believe that it is necessary for Russian operations in Ukraine to continue.² The polls showed that 44% of respondents were in favor of peace negotiations and that a majority of Russia's younger segments of the population (18-39-year-olds) favor negotiations.³ In March of 2022, Levada found that 53% of respondents strongly support Russian military actions in Ukraine but that the percentage of respondents in this category declined to 46% by August.⁴ This is a minor deterioration and will not fundamentally impair the Kremlin's ability to conduct the war. However, declining support and war weariness will likely increasingly impede Russian recruitment and force generation efforts.

Russian and proxy officials are solidifying their narratives surrounding the Ukrainian counteroffensive to amplify false claims that the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast is detrimental to Ukraine's continued existence. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu claimed on September 2 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky planned the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kherson Oblast solely to create an illusion among "Western curators" that Ukrainian forces can conduct an effective counteroffensive. 5 Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Deputy Interior Minister Vitaly Kiselyov claimed that Ukrainian forces' engagement in the counteroffensive was (referring to the offensive in past tense) "collective suicide" and suffered high casualties.6 Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko claimed on September 1 that internal Ukrainian divisions will soon force the military conflict to end.7 Russian milbloggers increased their amplification of these narratives on September 1-2 as the information space around the success and tempo of the Ukrainian counteroffensive remained murky.8 Russian sources will likely continue propagating these false information narratives to exploit Ukrainian operational silence. As ISW has previously noted, complex counteroffensives cannot be resolved overnight or in a matter of days, and the Russian presentation of an immediate Ukrainian failure due to a lack of constant Ukrainian claims of territorial gains is a deliberate obfuscation of reality.9

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.

Key Takeaways

- Independent polling showed that a majority of Russians still support the Russian war in Ukraine.
- Russian and proxy officials are solidifying their narratives surrounding the Ukrainian counteroffensive to claim it will debilitate the Ukrainian military.
- Ukrainian officials reported that positional battles are underway in unspecified areas of Kherson Oblast and that Ukrainian forces are continuing to strike Russian ground lines of communications (GLOCs), logistics nodes, and reinforcement efforts throughout southern and central Kherson Oblast.
- Russian forces conducted ground attacks south and northeast of Bakhmut and along the western and northern outskirts of Donetsk City.

- Russian forces continued targeting Ukrainian rear areas along GLOCs and may be reinforcing the Southern Axis by reallocating equipment from Russian rear areas in Donbas and Crimea.
- Ukrainian sources claim that Russia can pull an additional 300,000-350,000 military personnel from support units in Russia, Syria, Armenia, Tajikistan, Nagorno Karabakh, and Kazakhstan. These figures do not accurately represent the fact that support units placed into combat roles will not generate substantial combat power and are necessary for supporting combat, training, and other operations.

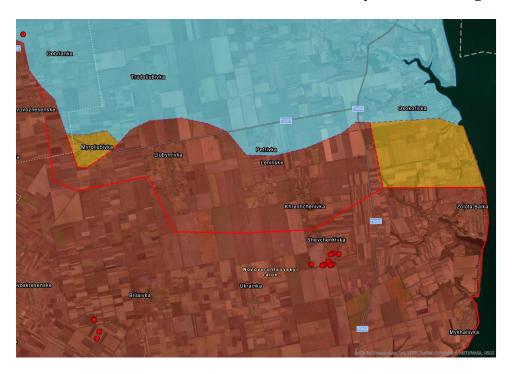
Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 2, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Ukrainian military officials reported that positional battles continued in unspecified areas of Kherson Oblast, but maintained operational silence on the progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive on September 2.¹⁰ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched an unsuccessful ground assault in the direction of Potomkyne (just south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border), and notably launched airstrikes on Khreshchenivka in northern Kherson Oblast.¹¹ ISW previously assessed that Russian forces controlled Khreshchenivka, but Russian airstrikes in the area suggest Ukrainian forces could have advanced nearby. Russian milbloggers amplified a claim that Russian forces encircled Ukrainian troops in Petrivka, corroborating indications that Ukrainian forces likely entered Petrivka.¹² NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) remotely sensed data for September 2 showed fires south of Khreshchenivka, which may further corroborate a Ukrainian advance in the area. ISW previously reported that FIRMS data showed fire activity in Petrivka (north of Khreshchenivka) on August 31 before Russian milbloggers reported on a Ukrainian presence in Petrivka the following day.¹³ The Ukrainian General Staff also recorded airstrikes near the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River, notably in Sukhyi Stavok.¹⁴ ISW reported that many milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced to Sukhyi Stavok on August 29.¹⁵



[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System over northern Kherson, September 2 and Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community]

Ukrainian military officials reiterated that Ukrainian forces are continuing to target Russian GLOCs, reinforcements, and ammunition depots. ¹⁶ The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian ferry crossings across the Dnipro River in Lvove (west of Nova Kakhovka) and Kozatske (north of Nova Kakhovka). ¹⁷ Ukrainian military officials also reported striking a Russian military equipment concentration point in Tariisk (east of Nova Kakhovka) and destroyed an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations center in Pravdyne (about 33km due northwest of Kherson City), indicating that the August 29 *CNN* report about Ukrainian forces' capture of Pravdyne was likely inaccurate. ¹⁸ The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces destroyed three Russian

artillery systems, an ammunition depot, and a Russian company in the vicinity of Enerhodar and Kherson with precision strikes.¹⁹ It is unclear how close the Ukrainian strike "near Enerhodar" was to Enerhodar City. Ukrainian military officials also noted that Ukrainian forces destroyed five ammunition depots in the Bashtanskyi, Beryslavsky, and Khersonsky raions, and nine command posts in unspecified areas.²⁰ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed (likely falsely) to have intercepted 14 rounds of HIMARS rockets over Kherson City and Nova Kakhovka.²¹ Geolocated footage showed Ukrainian forces continuing to strike Russian forces on the eastern bank of the Inhulets River in Novohrednyeve.²²

Visual evidence from social media footage shows that Ukrainian forces continued striking Russian positions and GLOCs in central and southern Kherson Oblast on September 1 and September 2. Satellite imagery and geolocated photos from September 1 show a fire burning around the Kozats'ke grain terminal near Nova Kakhovka.²³ Social media footage from September 2 reportedly showed rocket plumes near Nova Kakhovka.²⁴ Local residents reported that Ukrainian forces may have struck a Russian pontoon crossing near the Antonivsky Railroad Bridge and footage showed smoke clouds rising near the bridge area.²⁵ Social media users also reported that Ukrainian forces struck Russian military equipment awaiting the ferry near the railway bridge in Oleshky (about 9km southeast of Kherson City), and the pontoon crossing in Darivka.²⁶ It is unclear if social media users witnessed a new strike on a crossing in Darivka, or repeated reports about the confirmed strike on the crossing on September 1.²⁷ Geolocated footage also showed the aftermath of a strike on the Kherson City branch of the Odesa State University of Internal Affairs where Ukrainian social media users claimed that Russian forces quartered their troops.²⁸ Combat footage published on September 1 and 2 showed Ukrainian forces using Bayraktar TB2 armed drones to provide Ukrainian forces tactical air support on September 1 and August 31.²⁹

Russian milbloggers claimed that fighting continued in four directions, but ISW cannot independently verify all of these claims. Several milbloggers claimed that fighting continued east and west of Vysokopillya south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border, southeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead over the Inhulets River, around Snihurivka about 65km east of Mykolaiv City, and north of Kherson City.

Several milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to launch counteroffensives from the Kryvyi Rih direction and noted that Russian forces are using rocket artillery and aviation to repel Ukrainian attacks on settlements east of Vysokopillya.³⁰ Milbloggers also claimed that Ukraine's main objective is to reach Beryslav (just north of Nova Kakhovka).³¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed that Russian forces continued to shell Ukrainian troops along the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border.³² A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are attempting to accumulate enough forces to gain control over Vysokopillya, and another noted that Russian drones have been directing artillery fire at advancing Ukrainian military equipment in the vicinity of Vysokopillya.³³ The Russian Ministry of Defense also reported striking Ukrainian positions northwest of Vysokopillya.³⁴ Milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced south of Kostromka (10km southeast of the Ukrainian bridgehead) to Bezimenne, after failing to advance to Shchastlyve (west of Bezimenne and in the direction of the T2207 highway).35 Milbloggers additionally stated that Russian forces continued to use aviation to drop over a dozen FAB-500 500kg bombs on Ukrainian forces in Bezimenne.³⁶ The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed to have destroyed Ukrainian weapons in Bila Krynytsia (between the Ukrainian bridgehead and Davydiv Brid), inadvertently admitting to some Ukrainian advances in the area.³⁷ A milblogger stated that Ukrainian forces lost two infantry fighting vehicles after unsuccessfully attempting to launch an assault on Blahodatne (west of Snihurivka).³⁸ Milbloggers noted that Russian forces regained control over Zeleny Hai and Ternovi Pody (approximately 25km north of Kherson City), while Ukrainian forces maintained positional defenses in Myrne (approximately seven kilometers west of Zeleny Hai) and Lyubomyrivka (just north of Ternovi Pody).³⁹ Some milbloggers noted that Russian forces are preparing a strike group, increasing artillery and multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) fire, and are requesting air support in the direction of Posad-Pokrovske (about 27km northwest of Kherson City).⁴⁰

The Russian Ministry of Defense maintained that Ukrainian forces continued to launch unsuccessful counteroffensive operations in the Mykolaiv-Kryvyi Rih direction.⁴¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense added that Russian forces captured two Ukrainian prisoners of war, and some milbloggers reposted interrogation footage of a claimed Ukrainian POW.⁴² Pro-Kremlin radio channel "Komsomolska Pravda" interviewed Russian military expert Vladislav Shuryhin who likely falsely claimed that Ukrainian forces decided to launch a counteroffensive in the south out of fear of the newly-forming Russian 3rd Army Corps.⁴³ Russian forces likely instead accelerated the formation of the 3rd Army Corps to reinforce Russian positions around Izyum and eastern Zaporizhia Oblast and to replace Russian forces redeployed from other axes to reinforce Kherson Oblast before the Ukrainians announced their August 29 counteroffensive.⁴⁴

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
- 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 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

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv and Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Note: We have revised our organization of Russian lines of effort to include Russian operations in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast as part of the Donetsk Oblast effort due to recently observed force allocations indicating the Russian grouping east of Hulyaipole, previously grouped with the Southern Axis, will support efforts southwest of Donetsk City.

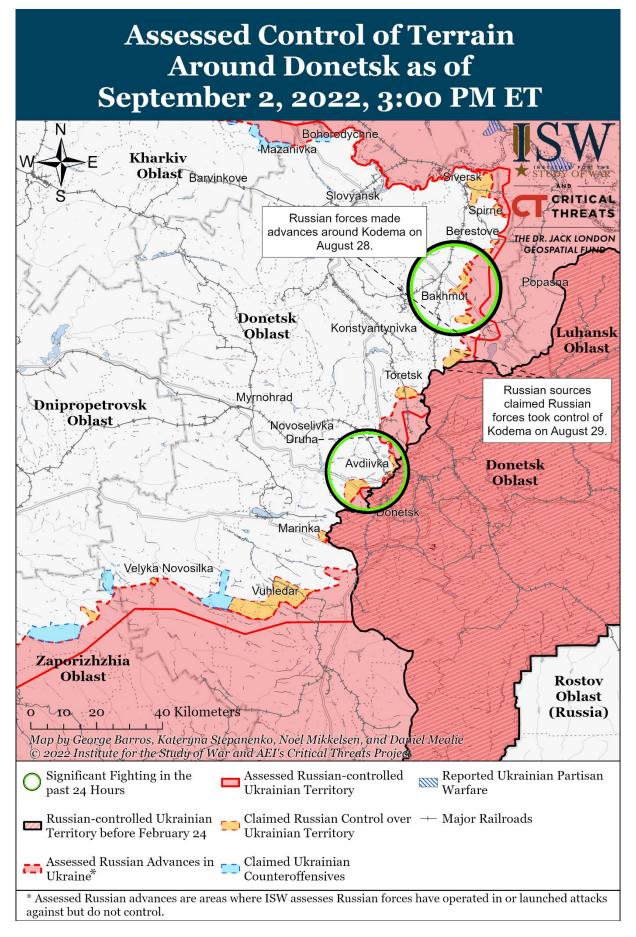
Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks along the Izyum-Slovyansk axis or toward Siversk on September 2 and continued routine shelling in these areas.⁴⁵

Russian forces continued ground attacks south and northeast of Bakhmut on September 2. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops attempted to advance toward Vesela Dolyna (5km

southeast of Bakhmut) and that Chechen units conducted attacks around Zaitseve and Mayorsk, both about 20km southwest of Bakhmut on the outskirts of Horlivka.⁴⁶ Russian troops also reportedly continued ground assaults northeast of Bakhmut in the Soledar-Bakhmutske area.⁴⁷ Russian sources indicated that Wagner Group fighters and units of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) are active to the northeast and south of Bakhmut.⁴⁸

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the northern and western outskirts of Donetsk City on September 2. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops attempted to advance toward Opytne, Pervomaiske, and Nevelske, all within 10km of the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City.⁴⁹ Russian sources claimed that Russian and proxy forces, including the 11th DNR regiment, are using recently captured positions in Pisky to push westward of Donetsk City and establish strongholds around Pervomaiske.⁵⁰ Russian troops also reportedly continued offensive operations in the Avdiivka-Krasnohorivka area, about 5km north of Donetsk City's outskirts.⁵¹

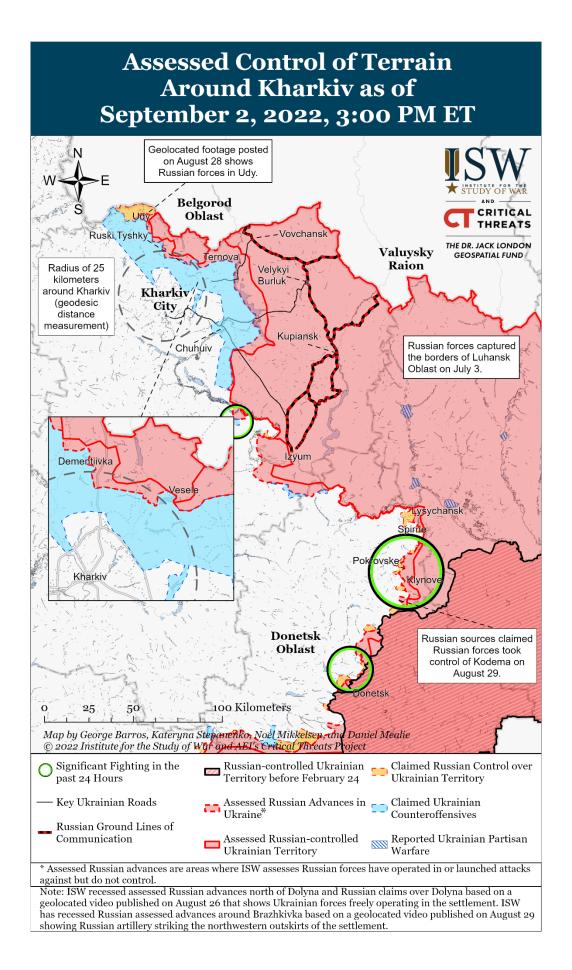
Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks southwest of Donetsk City or in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast on September 2 and continued routine artillery strikes in these areas.⁵²



<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 in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast on September 2 and continued routine shelling of Kharkiv City and its environs.⁵³ Russian sources claimed on September 2 that Russian forces repelled a 12-person Ukrainian reconnaissance group that attempted to break Russian defensive lines near Dementiivka (20km north of Kharkiv City) on September 1.⁵⁴ A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces defeated the beginning of an unspecified Ukrainian attack near Ruska Lozova on September 1.⁵⁵ ISW cannot independently verify these claims, however.

The Ukrainian General Staff notably reported that Ukrainian forces struck a Russian warehouse in Novoosynove, about 100km southeast of Kharkiv City along the Russian-controlled ground line of communication (GLOC) that runs into Kupyansk.⁵⁶



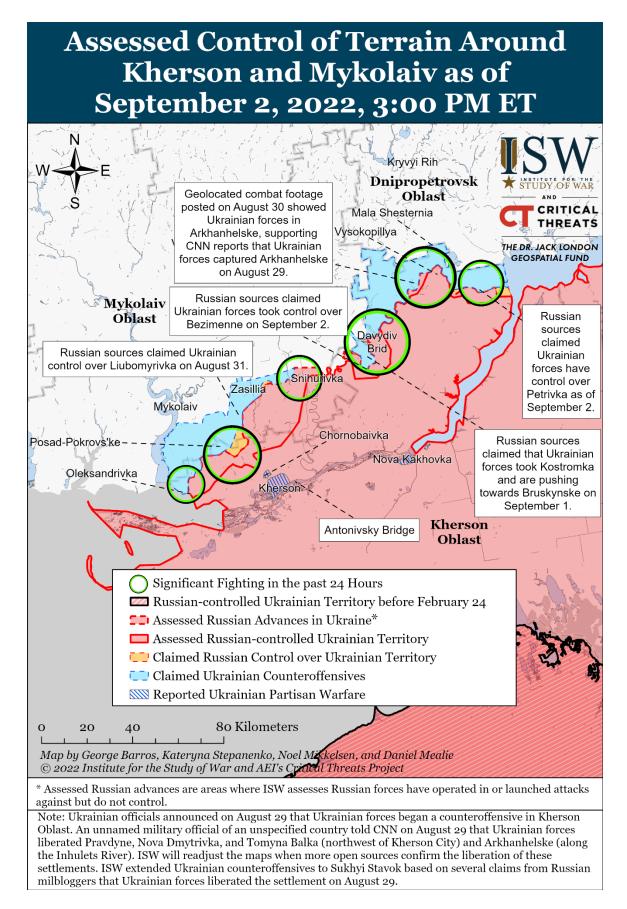
<u>Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces targeted rear areas along Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCS) in Mykolaiv and Odesa Oblasts on September 2. The Russian Defense Ministry (MoD) claimed that Russian forces struck several settlements heading towards Kryvyi Rih, including Bashtanka (near the N11 GLOC), Berenezhuvate (on the R81 highway), and Dobre (on the T1509 highway).⁵⁷ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces conducted airstrikes in Mykolaiv City and areas northeast of the city.⁵⁸ Odesa Oblast Military Administration Spokesman Serhiy Bratchuk reported that Russian forces struck Odesa City with Onyx cruise missiles on September 2.⁵⁹

Russian forces did not conduct any ground attacks west of Hulyaipole and continued routine shelling along the line of contact in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 2.60 Russian sources claimed that Russian anti-tank mines stopped a Ukrainian advance near Orikhiv (at the intersection of the To408, To803, To812, and To815 highways) on an unspecified date.61 A different Russian source posted footage of a Russian armored personnel carrier exploding after driving over a Ukrainian mine in the Zaporizhia direction on an unspecified date.62

Russian forces are likely reallocating military assets from rear areas to the Southern Axis. Ukrainian Adviser to the Mayor of Mariupol Petro Andryushchenko stated that Russian forces transported 10 tanks through Mariupol toward Berdyansk and noted that Russian forces have intensified the movement of military equipment west from Donetsk Oblast, through Mariupol, and towards Berdyansk over the last several days. ⁶³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Crimean branch Krym Realii posted footage of a Russian military convoy heading north from the Kerch Bridge toward the Ukrainian mainland, likely to reinforce Russian units in Kherson Oblast. ⁶⁴

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Secretary General Rafael Mariano Grossi said on September 2 that there is evidence of violations of the physical integrity of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (but did not specify an actor) and that the IAEA is establishing a continued presence at the ZNPP.⁶⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces removed all military equipment from the grounds of the ZNPP ahead of the IAEA delegation's arrival, transporting 100 pieces to the Atomenergomash plant in central Enerhodar and distributing the remaining equipment among nearby settlements.⁶⁶ There were more reports of shelling around the ZNPP on September 2.⁶⁷ The Russian MoD and Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu accused Ukrainian forces of committing "nuclear terrorism" and endangering the ZNPP, supporting ISW's prior assessment that Russian authorities will likely step up their efforts to portray Ukrainian forces as a danger to the international IAEA observers.⁶⁸ Ukrainian nuclear energy agency Energoatom reported that nuclear reactor No. 5 came back online on September 2 after Russian shelling reportedly caused it to disconnect on September 1.⁶⁹



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

Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Vadym Skibitskyi stated that the Russian military can deploy an additional 300,000-350,000 personnel to Ukraine from units within Russia, Syria, Armenia, Tajikistan, Nagorno Karabakh, and Kazakhstan. While Skibitsky's statement may be technically correct in that Russia has over 300,000 personnel in uniform in these locations, the vast majority of these personnel are support personnel not employable in direct combat roles, are required to maintain permanent positions, and would not generate effective combat power. Some elements that Skibitsky mentioned—such as Russian elements in Syria and Nagorno Karabakh—reportedly already deployed to Ukraine several months ago, and these figures may be distorted. Russian authorities remain unlikely to generate substantial combat power for deployment into Ukraine.

Russian federal subjects (regions) are continuing to recruit and deploy volunteer battalions to Ukraine. Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* reported on September 2 that the Nizhny Novgorod-based "Kuzma Minin" tank battalion is deploying to Ukraine in pieces, a report consistent with ISW's previous assessment that some volunteer battalions are deploying elements without their full complement.⁷² *Kommersant* reported that the "Kuzma Minin" tank battalion generated about 400 volunteers, a dramatic increase from a previous August 16 report stating that the unit only generated 30 out of 160 desired recruits.⁷³ It is unlikely the battalion's recruitment rate dramatically increased by that margin in two weeks, and Nizhny Novgorod authorities may be intentionally inflating or misrepresenting recruitment numbers. The Russian-appointed governor of occupied Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, stated on September 2 that over 1,200 Crimean volunteers are fighting in Ukraine, the first public Russian statement about Crimean volunteer soldiers.⁷⁴ It is unclear what formations these volunteer soldiers are fighting in. Aksyonov claimed that an additional 100 Crimeans will deploy to the frontlines in Ukraine by September 12.⁷⁵



Russian force generation efforts are placing additional financial strain on Russian federal subjects. Russian Oryol City officials approved adjustments to the Oryol City budget to allocate 6.2 million rubles (approximately \$103,000) to the "special military operations" in the "shortest time possible." The Oryol Oblast budget previously allocated only 2 million rubles (approximately \$33,000) for the war. Deputy Mayor of Oryol City Aleksei Stepanov stated that 41 Oryol residents have enlisted into the 3rd Army Corps after Oryol Oblast had previously introduced a one-time bonus of 100,000 rubles for those who enlist with the 3rd Army Corps, in addition to the standard enlistment bonus of 200,000 rubles.

Russian officials continued mobilizing citizens from occupied territories into the Russian military.⁷⁹ Ukrainian sources in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, posted images of summons calling Zaporizhzhia Oblast residents who received Russian passports to conscription centers.⁸⁰

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)

Nothing significant to report.

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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