



## Russian Military Begins Month-Long Combined Arms Exercises across Southern Russia

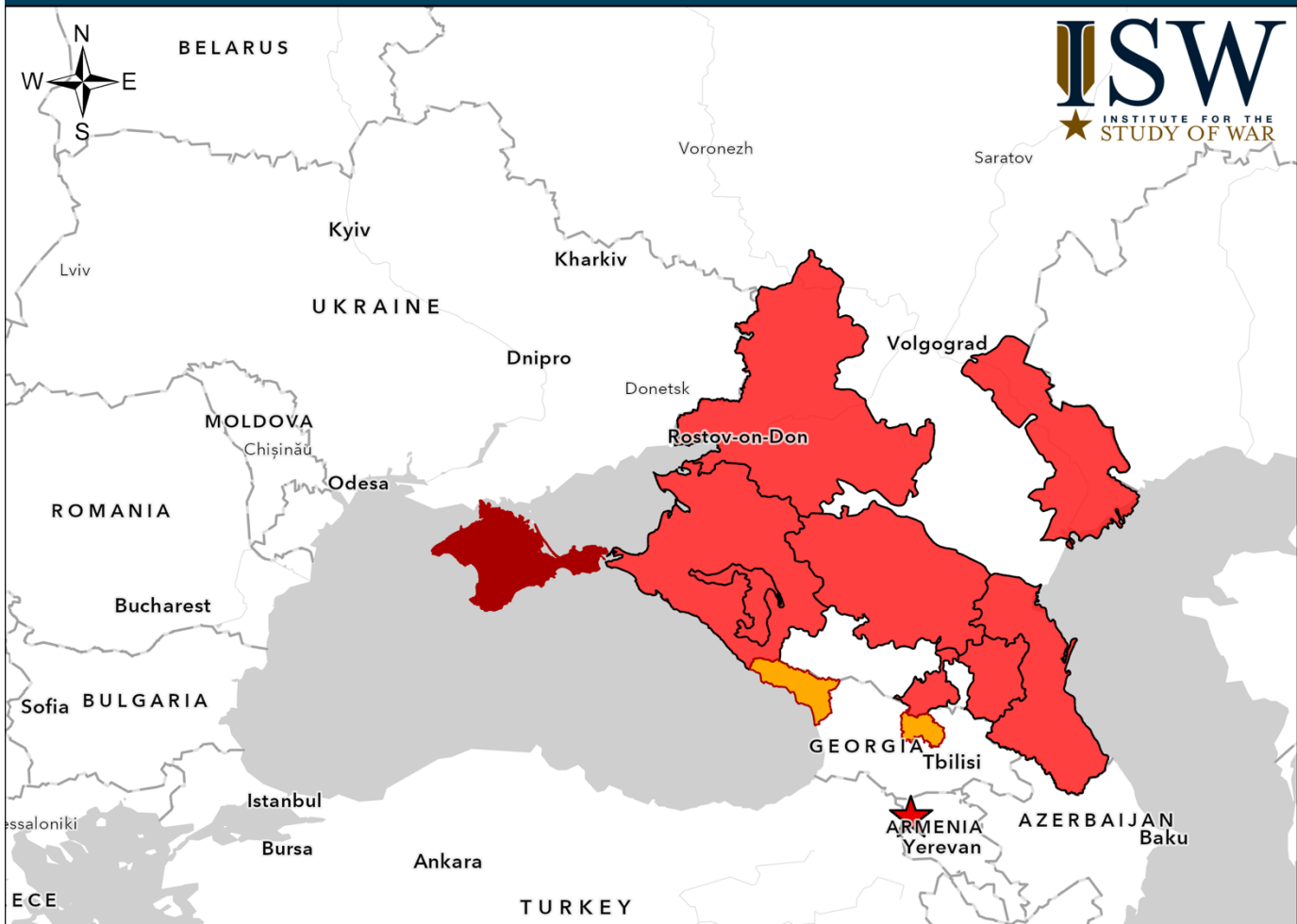
By George Barros

August 11, 2021

***Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) announced on August 8 that it is conducting district-wide exercises practicing combined arms operations from August 9 to September 15.*** The commander of the SMD, General Alexander Dvornikov, said the exercises will contain tactical tasks between motorized rifle, tank, and artillery battalions of the SMD and attached specialized units. The attached specialized units include chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense (CBRN), engineering, electronic warfare, reconnaissance, logistics, medical, military police, army aviation, and transport aviation units.<sup>1</sup> Warships from the Caspian Flotilla and the Black Sea Fleet, naval infantry, and at least 80 fixed and rotary wing aircraft are also participating.<sup>2</sup> SMD Commander Dvornikov will directly oversee the exercises. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) did not state that these exercises were preplanned and did not discuss the exercises before August 8.

***The exercises will occur across several training grounds in southern Russia, Armenia, and Russian-occupied Crimea and Georgia.*** The MoD stated that the exercises will occur at 20 combined arms training grounds in Astrakhan, Rostov, Stavropol, Kuban, Adygea, Dagestan, North Ossetia, and Chechnya as well as in Russian-occupied Crimea and at Russian military bases in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.<sup>3</sup> These locations include the permanent bases of the Russian 100<sup>th</sup> and 127<sup>th</sup> reconnaissance brigades; 25<sup>th</sup> Spetsnaz Regiment; 810<sup>th</sup>, 414<sup>th</sup>, and 727<sup>th</sup> naval infantry brigades; 70<sup>th</sup>, 71<sup>st</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup>, 103<sup>rd</sup>, and 291<sup>st</sup> motorized rifle regiments; 19<sup>th</sup>, 136<sup>th</sup>, and 205<sup>th</sup> motor rifle brigades; and 68<sup>th</sup> and 163<sup>rd</sup> tank regiments.<sup>4</sup>

# Locations of Russian Military Exercises August 9 to September 15, 2021



0 412.5 825 1,650 Kilometers

Spatial Reference: WGS 1984 Web Mercator (auxiliary sphere)

- Russian Province with Training Grounds Hosting Exercises
- Russian-Occupied Abkhazia & South Ossetia with Training Grounds Hosting Exercises
- Russian-Occupied Crimea with Training Grounds Hosting Exercises
- Russian Military Base in Armenia Hosting Exercises

Map by George Barros  
Institute for the Study of War © 2021

***The Russian military is framing the exercises as testing the ability of Russian officers to use attached assets and demonstrate creative decision-making.*** The MoD announcement said the exercises seek to improve company and battalion-level commanders' ability to execute combined arms tactical tasks and their ability to manage and coordinate attack aviation, reconnaissance, and other specialized units.<sup>5</sup> SMD Commander Dvornikov said participating officers must make "independent decisions" and demonstrate "personal choice," rather than follow doctrinal templates.<sup>6</sup> The language of the exercise announcement mirrors that of regular Russian tactical exercises intended to practice joint operations and test officer initiative, two key Russian learning priorities drawn from experience in Syria.<sup>7</sup> The MoD framed these exercises as tactical, rather than as operational or strategic staff exercises, but the exercises' full size and posture are unclear. The MoD stated that approximately 10,000 Russian servicemen per day are participating in these exercises but did not provide a total number of participants.<sup>8</sup>

***These SMD exercises will coincide with Zapad-2021, Russia's capstone annual military exercise in the Western Military District (WMD) and Belarus in September.*** The Russian military holds an annual capstone military exercise every September, rotating between Russia's four military districts – East, Center, South, and West. Zapad-2021 will occur in the Western Military District and Belarus from September 10-16. Russian units began deploying to Belarus for Zapad-2021 in late July.<sup>9</sup> It is unclear how these newly announced SMD exercises and Zapad-2021 will interact, if at all. ISW will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide updates.

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<sup>1</sup> ["The Scale of Battalion Tactical Exercises in the Southern Military District Will Expand with the Actions of All Branches of the Military,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 8, 2021, <https://structure.mil dot ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews>; ["Subdivisions of the Southern Military District for Combating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Worked out to Cover Command Posts,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 10, 2021, [https://function.mil dot ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews](https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews); ["More than 500 Marines of the Caspian Flotilla Take Part in Large-Scale Exercises of the Southern Military District,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 10, 2021, [https://function.mil dot ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12376443@egNews](https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12376443@egNews).

<sup>2</sup> ["The Scale of Battalion Tactical Exercises in the Southern Military District Will Expand with the Actions of All Branches of the Military,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 8, 2021, <https://structure.mil dot ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews>; ["Subdivisions of the Southern Military District for Combating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Worked out to Cover Command Posts,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 10, 2021, [https://function.mil dot ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews](https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews); ["More than 500 Marines of the Caspian Flotilla Take Part in Large-Scale Exercises of the Southern Military District,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 10, 2021, [https://function.mil dot ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12376443@egNews](https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12376443@egNews).

<sup>3</sup> ["The Scale of Battalion Tactical Exercises in the Southern Military District Will Expand with the Actions of All Branches of the Military,"] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 8, 2021, <https://structure.mil dot ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews>

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Harris and Fredrick Kagan, “Russia’s Military Posture: Ground Forces Order of Battle,” *Institute for the Study of War*, March 2018,

[http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Ground%20Forces%20OOB\\_ISW%20CTP\\_o.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Ground%20Forces%20OOB_ISW%20CTP_o.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> [“The Scale of Battalion Tactical Exercises in the Southern Military District Will Expand with the Actions of All Branches of the Military,”] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 8, 2021, [https://structure.mil dot ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews](https://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews)

<sup>6</sup> [“The Scale of Battalion Tactical Exercises in the Southern Military District Will Expand with the Actions of All Branches of the Military,”] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 8, 2021, [https://structure.mil dot ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews](https://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12376138@egNews)

<sup>7</sup> Mason Clark, “The Russian Military’s Lessons Learned in Syria,” *Institute for the Study of War*, January 2021, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/russian-military%E2%80%99s-lessons-learned-syria>.

<sup>8</sup> [“Subdivisions of the Southern Military District for Combating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Worked out to Cover Command Posts,”] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, August 10, 2021, [https://function.mil dot ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12376449@egNews).

<sup>9</sup> Mason Clark, “Russia in Review: July 21 – August 3, 2021,” *Institute for the Study of War*, August 5, 2021, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia-review-july-21-august-3-2021>.