

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 20, 2023

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September 20, 2023, 8:30pm ET

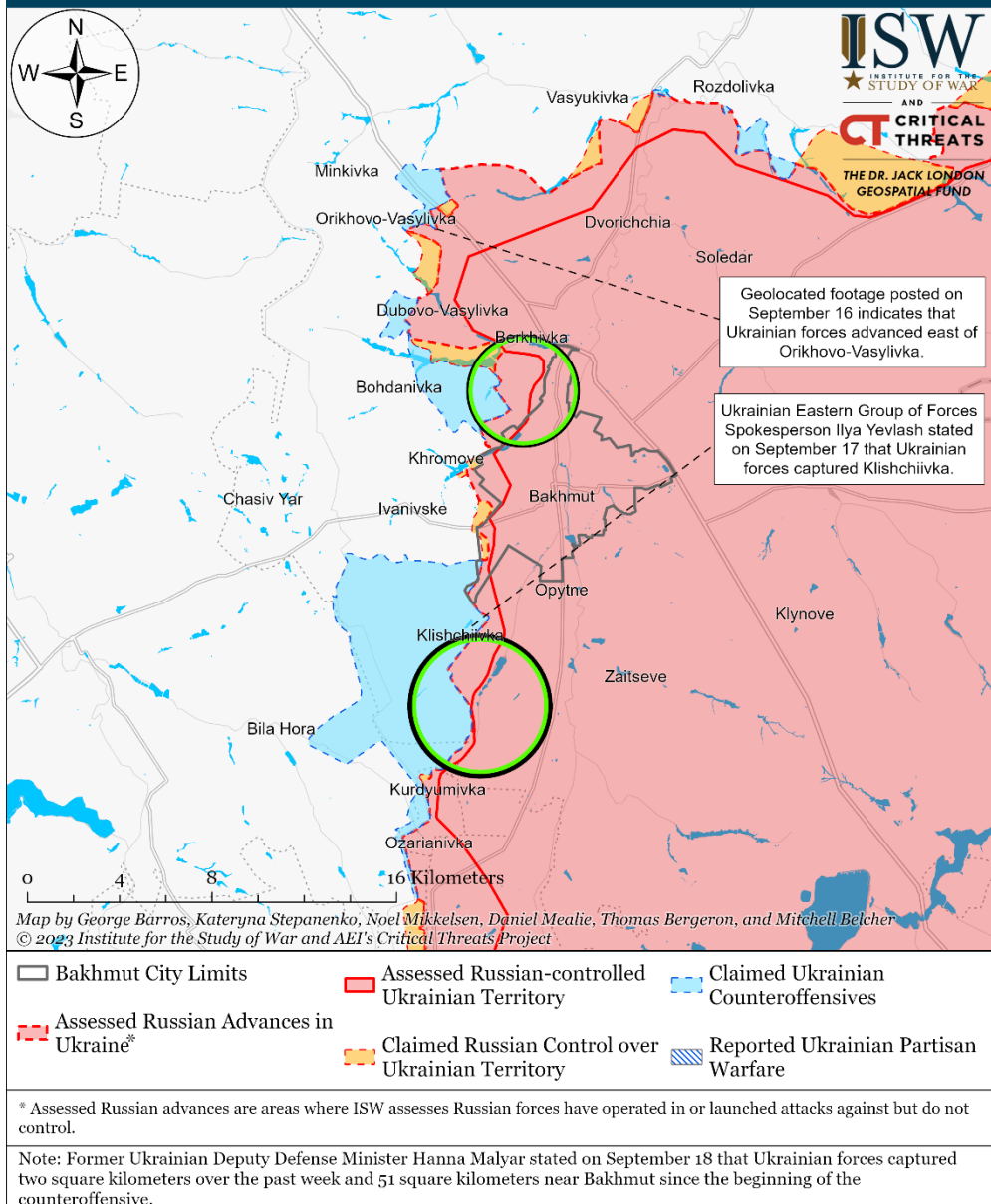
Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

**Note:** The data cut-off for this product was 2:00pm ET on September 20. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 21 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

**Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 20.** The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations and inflicted significant losses on Russian manpower and equipment in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[1] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions in the Bakhmut direction and are consolidating in newly secured lines.[2] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) assessed that Ukrainian forces secured positions in Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) and that Russian redeployments of airborne (VDV) forces from Bakhmut to the Zaporizhia direction have weakened Russian defenses around Bakhmut.[3] ISW had previously observed elements of the 83rd Separate Air Assault Brigade operating in Zaporizhia, although it is unclear how large a proportion of that unit was redeployed from Bakhmut.[4] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated that Ukrainian forces are preparing defensive positions before Russian forces renew their assaults in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction.[5]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



**Russian servicemen and milbloggers revealed that the Russian military command orders Russian troops to carry out “ill-conceived and unsupported” counterattacks on Bakhmut’s southern flank to urgently regain lost ground.[6]** Elements of Altai Krai’s 1st Battalion of the 1442nd Regiment (a mobilized unit) published a video appeal in which the soldiers claim that they abandoned their military equipment in the Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) area after receiving an order from the Russian military command to form an assault group and attack in the Bakhmut direction.[7] The servicemen noted that the Russian military command began deploying different types of personnel to the frontlines — including soldiers who are currently resting

in the rear — without providing them with enough functional artillery shells. The servicemen noted that their shells do not explode when fired, which is likely a symptom of Russia's defense industrial base's (DIB) efforts to speed up the production of shells and skipping quality assurance measures to do so.[8] The servicemen added that the unit is suffering from low morale after hearing reports that Ukrainian forces destroyed most of an unspecified Russian regiment and almost an entire retreating assault group in the area. The servicemen also claimed that they do not have prepared defensive positions and have to rely on small arms whereas the Ukrainians have artillery. Relatives of the personnel in the 1442nd Regiment had previously appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin after the Russian military command beat the troops for refusing to carry out an assault on September 14.[9]

A Russian milblogger also accused the Russian military command of ordering Russian troops to recapture Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) and the surrounding area without setting proper conditions for such counterattacks.[10] The milblogger claimed that the Russian military command was planning “weak” counterattacks and failed to provide accurate intelligence to Russian assault units. The milblogger observed that Russian forces also lack artillery support, while “hysterical” counterattacks are depleting Russian resources and reserves. The milblogger also claimed that Russian defenses on the adjacent heights in the Andriivka area had collapsed, and it is likely that the Russian military command's efforts to regain lost positions are preventing Russian forces from preparing new defensive positions on Bakhmut's southern flank.

**Russian forces conducted another round of Shahed drones strikes against Ukraine overnight on September 19-20.** Ukrainian military officials reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 17 of 24 launched Iranian-made Shahed 136/131 drones in Sumy, Poltava, Kirovohrad, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts and that some of the drones struck an oil refinery in Poltava Oblast.[11] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reiterated that Russian forces have predictably increased the use of drones against Ukraine because Russia can obtain, manufacture, or assemble more drones domestically.[12] Ihnat stated that Russian forces have not changed their drone tactics and continue attempts to bypass Ukrainian air defenses.

**A Russian milblogger outlined Russian reconnaissance groups' drone operator training and operation tactics in Ukraine.** The milblogger claimed that most Russian reconnaissance groups have two types of drone operators — a Mavik drone operator who carries out reconnaissance operations and a first-person viewer (FPV) drone operator who conducts attacks.[13] The milblogger noted that Mavik drone operators usually adjust fire and direct ground and drone attacks, while FPV drone operators strike targets that the Mavik drone operators identify.[14] The milblogger claimed that competent Mavik operators will train for up to six months while FPV drone operators train for three months, but noted that the battlefield effectiveness of drones is contingent upon their operators' skill.[15] The milblogger noted that Russian reconnaissance group commanders do not need approval from senior commanders to strike targets.[16] The milblogger also claimed that the Russian military is training fewer FPV drone operators due to the time and money needed for FPV drone repair, assembly, and operator training.[17] ISW has not observed a decrease in reconnaissance and FPV drone usage, however. The milblogger may be claiming that the Russian military is decreasing drone usage due to high costs in order to generate monetary and drone donations.[18]

**Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that unspecified saboteurs damaged Russian strategic aircraft at Chkalovsky airfield near Moscow on**

**September 18.[19]** The GUR reported on September 20 that the saboteurs planted explosives on an An-148 and an Il-20 aircraft subordinate to the Russian 354th Special Purpose Aviation Regiment and an Mi-28N helicopter that Russian forces use to repel Ukrainian drones. The GUR stated that the explosions severely damaged the aircraft, including the Mi-28N's tail, and inflicted minor damage on a second An-148 nearby. Russian authorities have not yet reported an attack at the Chkalovsky airfield as of September 20.

**Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed on September 20 that he is in good health amidst continued speculations about his possible illness or death.** Ramzan Kadyrov directly addressed speculations about his health in a social media post on September 20 claiming that he remains alive and in good health.[20] Kadyrov claimed to not understand why speculations of his health necessitate “fuss” and stated that publications that speculate on his health are untrustworthy. Kadyrov included a video of himself visiting his uncle Magomed Kadyrov in the hospital.

**Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu met with Iranian Chief of the General Staff Mohammad Bagheri in Tehran, Iran to discuss Russian-Iranian military cooperation on September 19, a day after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi denied Iran’s provision of drones to Russia.** Raisi denied that Iran provides drones to Russia during his speech to the United Nations on September 18.[21] Shoigu and Bagheri visited an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force facility where Shoigu saw Iranian-made drones, air defense systems, missiles; and tactical, medium, and long-range missile systems on September 20.[22] Shoigu stated that Russia and Iran plan to implement a range of unspecified activities in spite of Western sanctions, likely in order to evade the sanctions.[23]

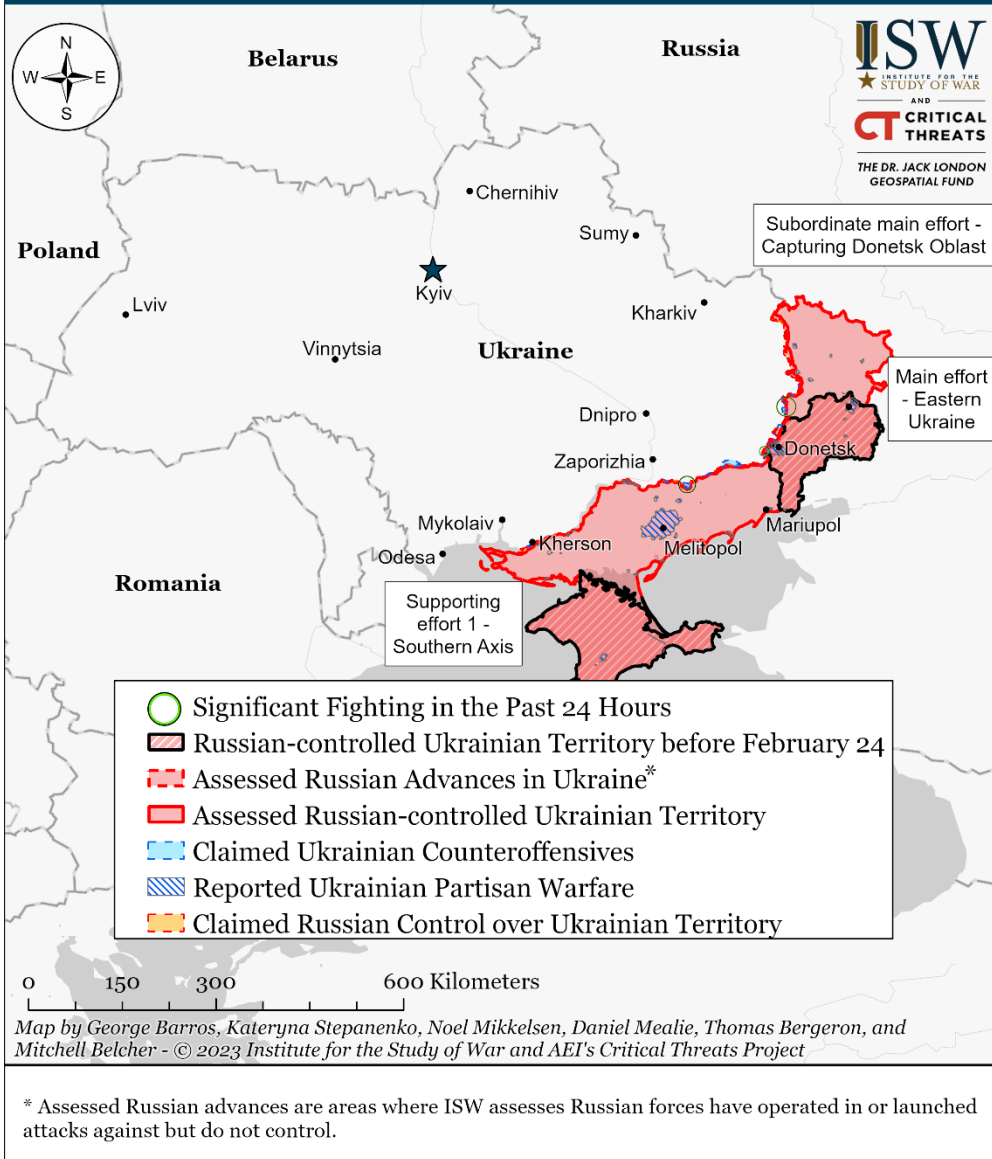
**Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized Russian peacekeepers’ humanitarian actions in Nagorno-Karabakh as the Russian information space continues to observe that Russia is losing influence in Armenia.** The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities accepted a Russian peacekeeper-mediated ceasefire agreement with Azerbaijan on September 20 and reported that Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani officials will meet in Yevlakh, Azerbaijan on September 21 to discuss “reintegration” and “ensuring the rights and security of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.”[24] Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that Armenian authorities were not involved in the ceasefire agreement and that Armenian forces were not present in Nagorno-Karabakh.[25] Putin emphasized on September 20 Russian peacekeepers’ roles in protecting civilians and claimed that Russia is in constant contact with Armenian, Azerbaijani and Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.[26]

The Russian MoD reported that Azerbaijani small arms fire killed Russian peacekeeping personnel driving in Nagorno-Karabakh and that Russian and Azerbaijani investigative authorities are working to clarify the incident.[27] Several milbloggers noted that the Russian military did not respond when Azerbaijani forces shot down a Russian Mi-24 helicopter during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and expressed irritation at the assumption that the Russian military would similarly ignore these deaths.[28] Russian milbloggers continue to lament Russia’s waning influence in Armenia.[29] Russia’s role as a security guarantor for Armenia may be declining as Russia continues to prioritize its military operations in Ukraine at the same time as the Armenian government increasingly expresses its dissatisfaction with its security ties to Russia.[30]

## **Key Takeaways:**

- **Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 20.**
- **Russian servicemen and milbloggers revealed that the Russian military command orders Russian troops to carry out “ill-conceived and unsupported” counterattacks on Bakhmut’s southern flank to urgently regain lost ground.**
- **Russian forces conducted another round of Shahed drone strikes against Ukraine overnight on September 19-20.**
- **A Russian milblogger outlined Russian reconnaissance groups’ drone operator training and operation tactics in Ukraine.**
- **Ukraine’s Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that unspecified saboteurs damaged Russian strategic aircraft at Chkalovsky airfield near Moscow on September 18.**
- **Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed on September 20 that he is in good health amidst continued speculations about his possible illness or death.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu met with Iranian Chief of the General Staff Mohammad Bagheri in Tehran, Iran to discuss Russian-Iranian military cooperation on September 19, a day after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi denied Iran’s provision of drones to Russia.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized Russian peacekeepers’ humanitarian actions in Nagorno-Karabakh as the Russian information space continues to observe that Russia is losing influence in Armenia.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast but did not make confirmed gains.**
- **The Russian Red Cross (RKK) indicated that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, particularly partial mobilization efforts in autumn 2022, caused a decline in mental health among many Russians.**
- **Russian and occupation authorities continue efforts to deport Ukrainian children to Russia and integrate Ukrainian children into Russian culture.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



***We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian 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 two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

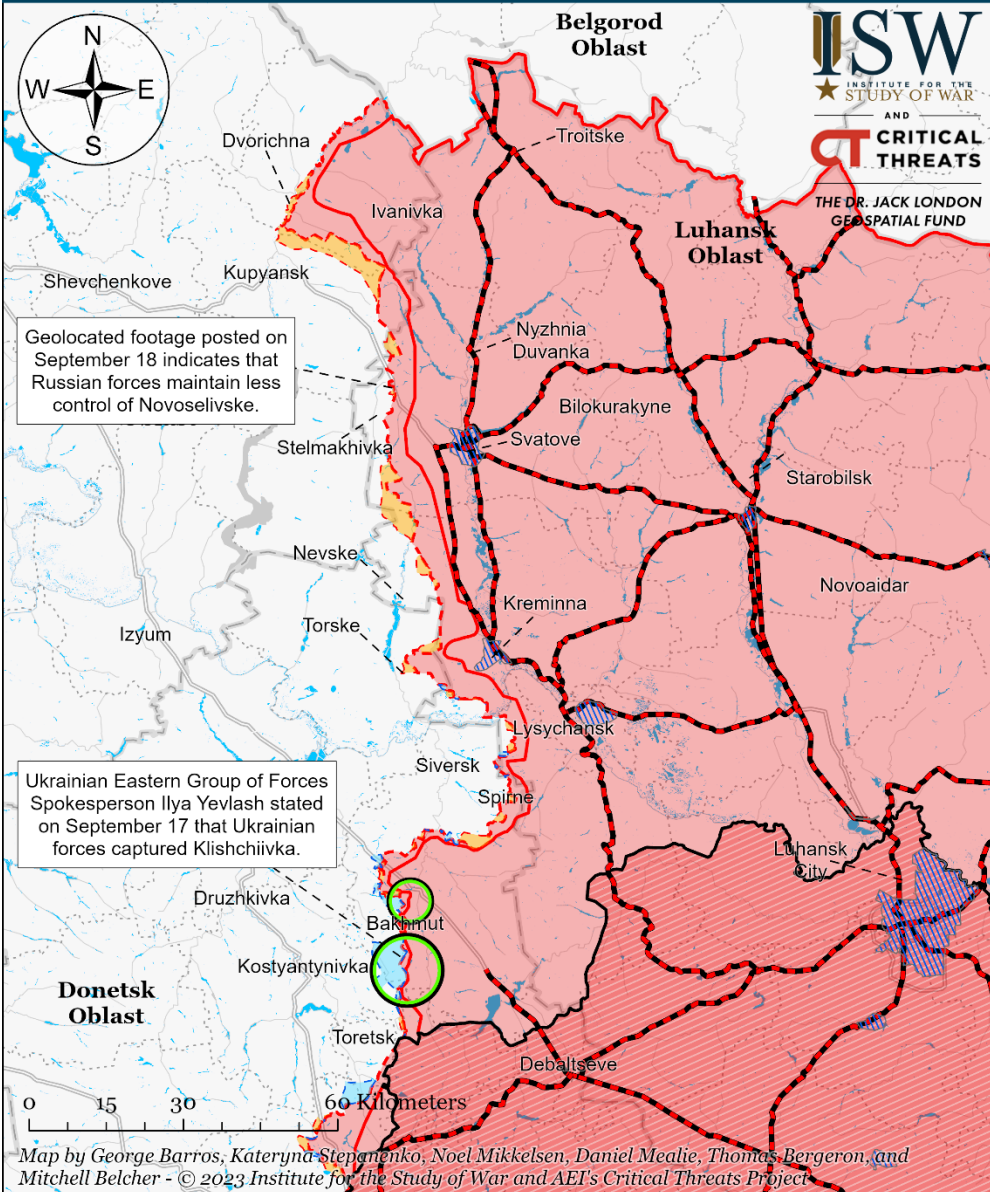
## **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line on September 20 but did not make confirmed advances. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove) and established control over operationally significant heights near the settlement.[31] ISW has not observed evidence of this claim, however. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk) and Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk).[32] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated on September 20 that Russian forces have infrequently conducted assaults in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction over the past week.[33] Yevlash also stated that 110,000 Russian frontline, rear, and support personnel are located in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction and that Russian forces accumulated this number of troops in an attempt to pin Ukrainian forces on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna frontline.[34] Footage published on September 20 purportedly shows artillery elements of the Russian 25th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (6th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) operating in the Kupyansk direction and elements of the Russian 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment (90th Guards Tank Division, Central Military District) operating near Kreminna.[35]

The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna).[36]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

Note: Former Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated on September 18 that Ukrainian forces captured two square kilometers over the past week and 51 square kilometers near Bakhmut since the beginning of the counteroffensive.



## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

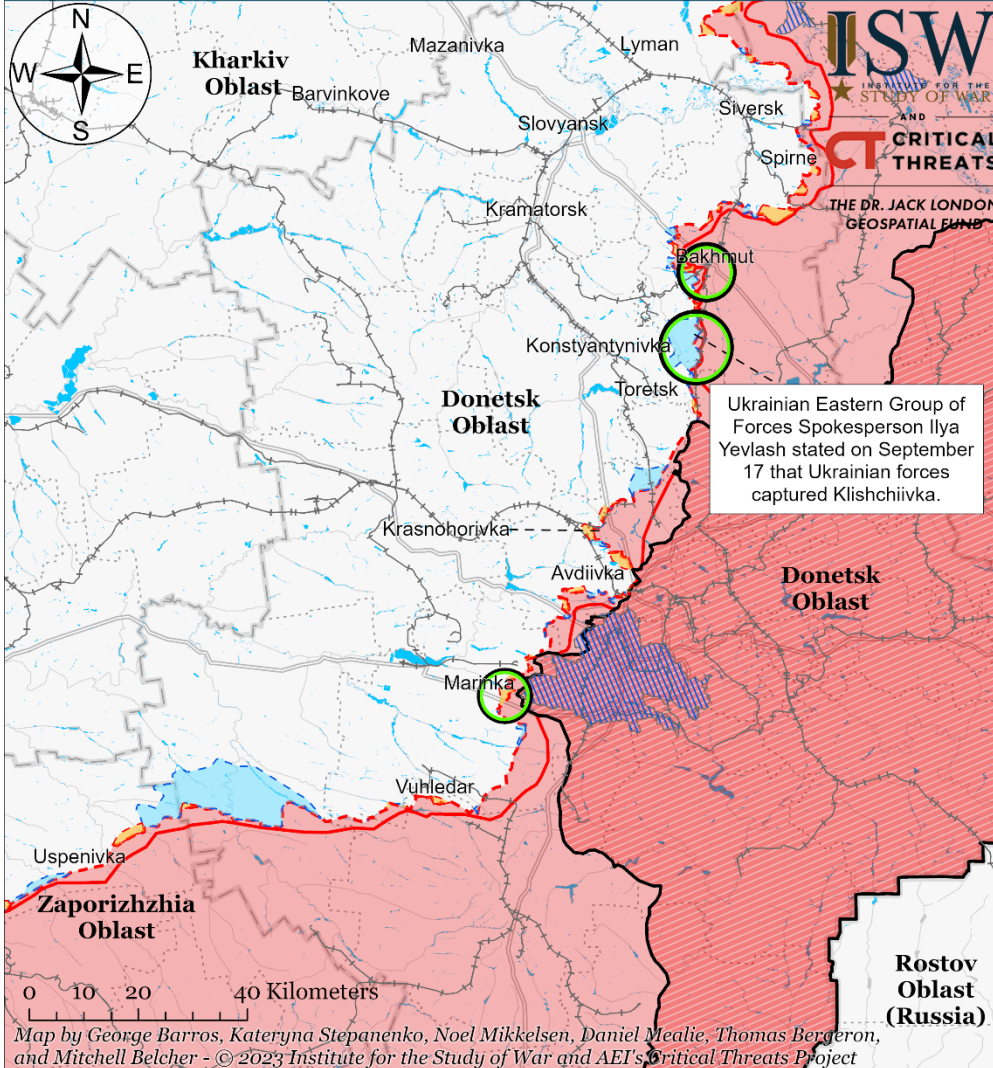
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in Bakhmut but have not made confirmed territorial gains on September 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces are continuing to assault Russian positions south of Bakhmut and are entrenching themselves on newly achieved lines.[37] The UK Ministry of Defense (MoD) assessed that Ukrainian forces had secured Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), while Russian forces still control the railway line located between Klishchiivka and the T0513 highway to the east of the settlement.[38] The UK MoD added that recent redeployments of Russian VDV forces from the Bakhmut area to the Zaporizhia Oblast may have weakened the Russian defenses around Bakhmut. The Ukrainian 3rd Separate Mechanized Brigade reported on September 19 that Ukrainian forces were clearing the approaches to Andriivka.[39]

The Russian “Hispaniola” Volunteer Reconnaissance Assault Brigade – a volunteer formation composed of Russian radical soccer fans and operating in the Bakhmut direction – reported that Ukrainian forces struck the brigade’s headquarters near Svitlodarsk (20km southeast of Bakhmut City).[40] The “Hispaniola” Brigade added that the strike resulted in the destruction of the headquarters, the loss of several vehicles, and casualties. The “Hispaniola” Brigade claimed that it continues to fight in the Bakhmut direction, is deploying additional personnel, and is recruiting more volunteers.

Russian forces continued to counterattack Ukrainian positions on Bakhmut’s northern and southern flanks but did not advance on September 20. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian counterattacks northeast of Andriivka, near Yahidne just north of Bakhmut, and west of Zaitseve (it’s unclear if the Ukrainian General Staff was referring to the Zaitseve 6km southeast of Bakhmut or the Zaitseve 13km south of Bakhmut).[41] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger also claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully counterattacked near Andriivka and Klishchiivka.[42] Russian sources claimed that fighting is ongoing near Klishchiivka and that certain segments of the settlement remain contested as of September 20.[43] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces carried out a successful counterattack in Klishchiivka and pushed Ukrainian forces from an unspecified part of the settlement but did not provide visual confirmation to support this claim.[44]

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces made limited advances on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line. A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the “Yugra” battalion – composed of mobilized personnel from the Khanty-Mansi Okrug – seized unspecified Ukrainian positions in the Donetsk direction and were fiercely fighting in order to advance by 100 to 300 meters.[45] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued to unsuccessfully attack Ukrainian positions in the Marinka area, just west of Donetsk City.[46]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- +— Major Railroads
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

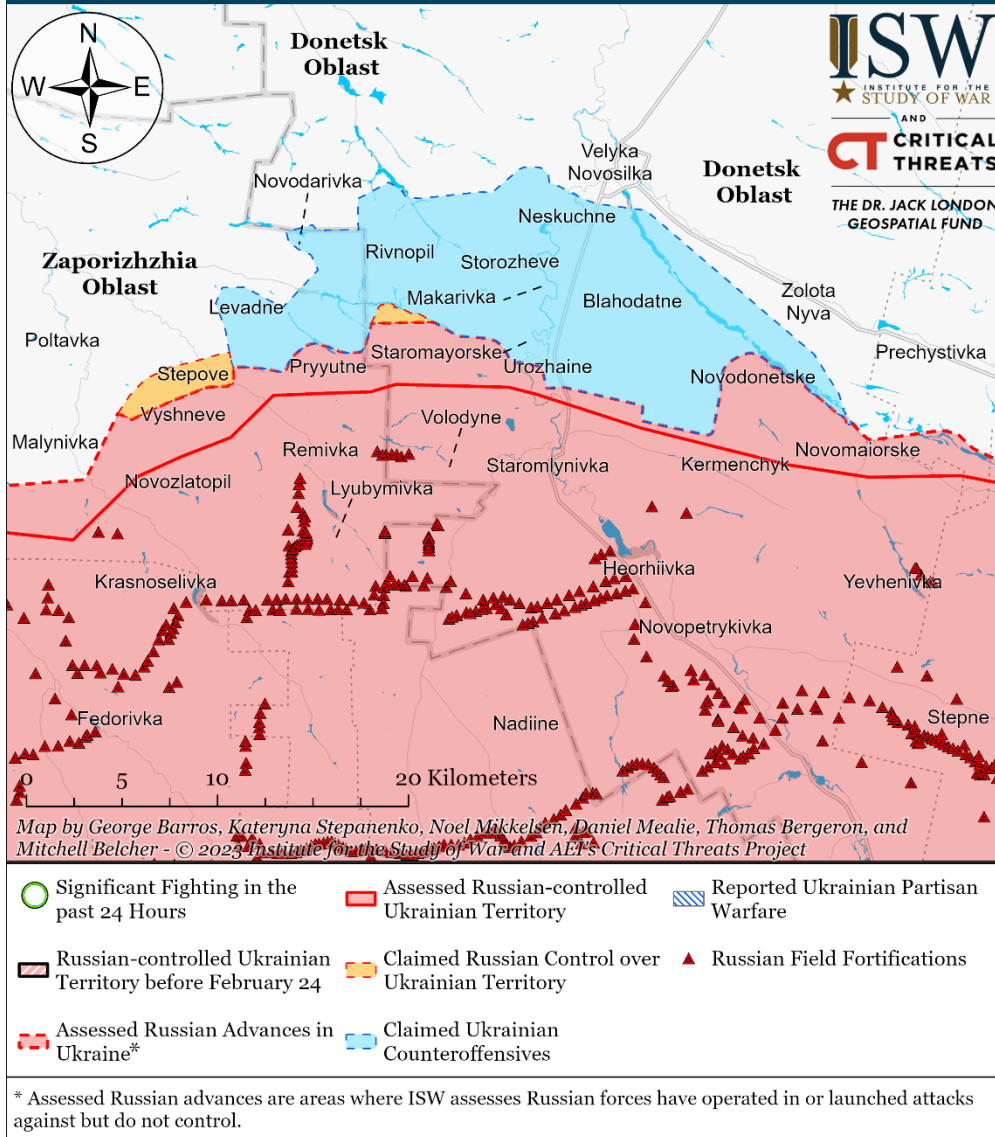
Note: Former Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated on September 18 that Ukrainian forces captured two square kilometers over the past week and 51 square kilometers near Bakhmut since the beginning of the counteroffensive.

**Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

A Russian milblogger posted footage on September 20 claiming to show elements of the Russian 14th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade operating in the Vuhledar direction.[47]

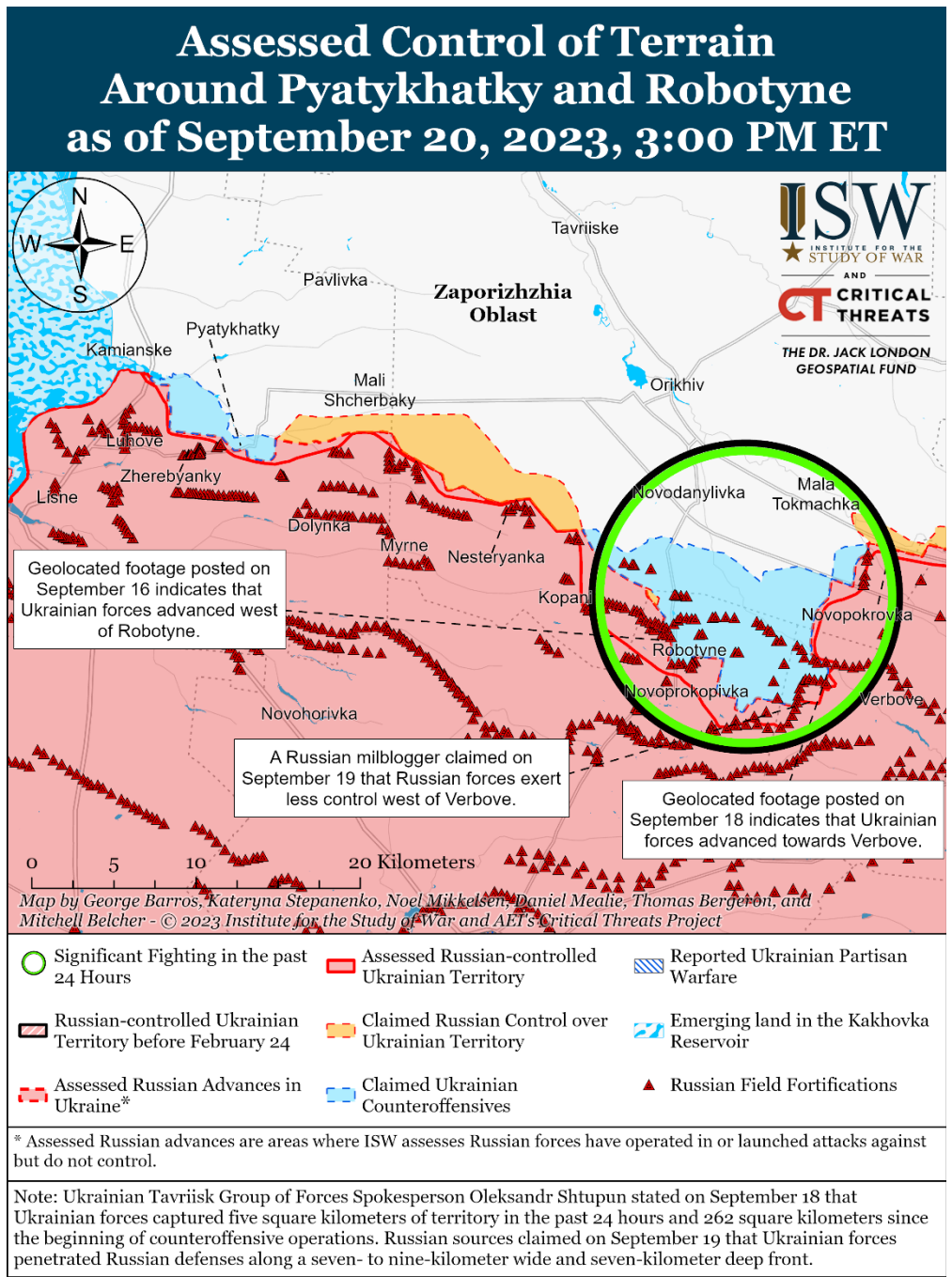
Ukrainian forces reportedly continued assaults in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on September 20 but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled a Ukrainian attack in the direction of Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and stopped a Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance group near Novodonetske (12km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that small groups of Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks north of Pryyutne and near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and retreated under Russian artillery fire.[49] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew from the outskirts of Staromayorske, likely reporting on the same Ukrainian retreat in the area.[50] Another Russian milblogger claimed on September 19 that Ukrainian forces are regrouping in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[51] The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 20 that Ukrainian forces continued defensive operations that caused Russian forces to suffer manpower and equipment losses in the Shakhtarske operational direction, presumably referring to the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[52]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on September 20 but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations and inflicted significant losses on Russian manpower and equipment in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhzhia Oblast) direction.[53] Russian sources, including the Russian MoD, claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Robotyne (12km south of Orikhiv) and Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) and in the direction of Novoprokopivka (16km south of Orikhiv) and Kopani (12km southwest of Orikhiv).[54] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces skirmished on Verbove’s western outskirts.[55] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Robotyne on the night of September 19 to 20.[56] North Ossetian “Storm Ossetia” and “Alania” volunteer battalions, which are operating in

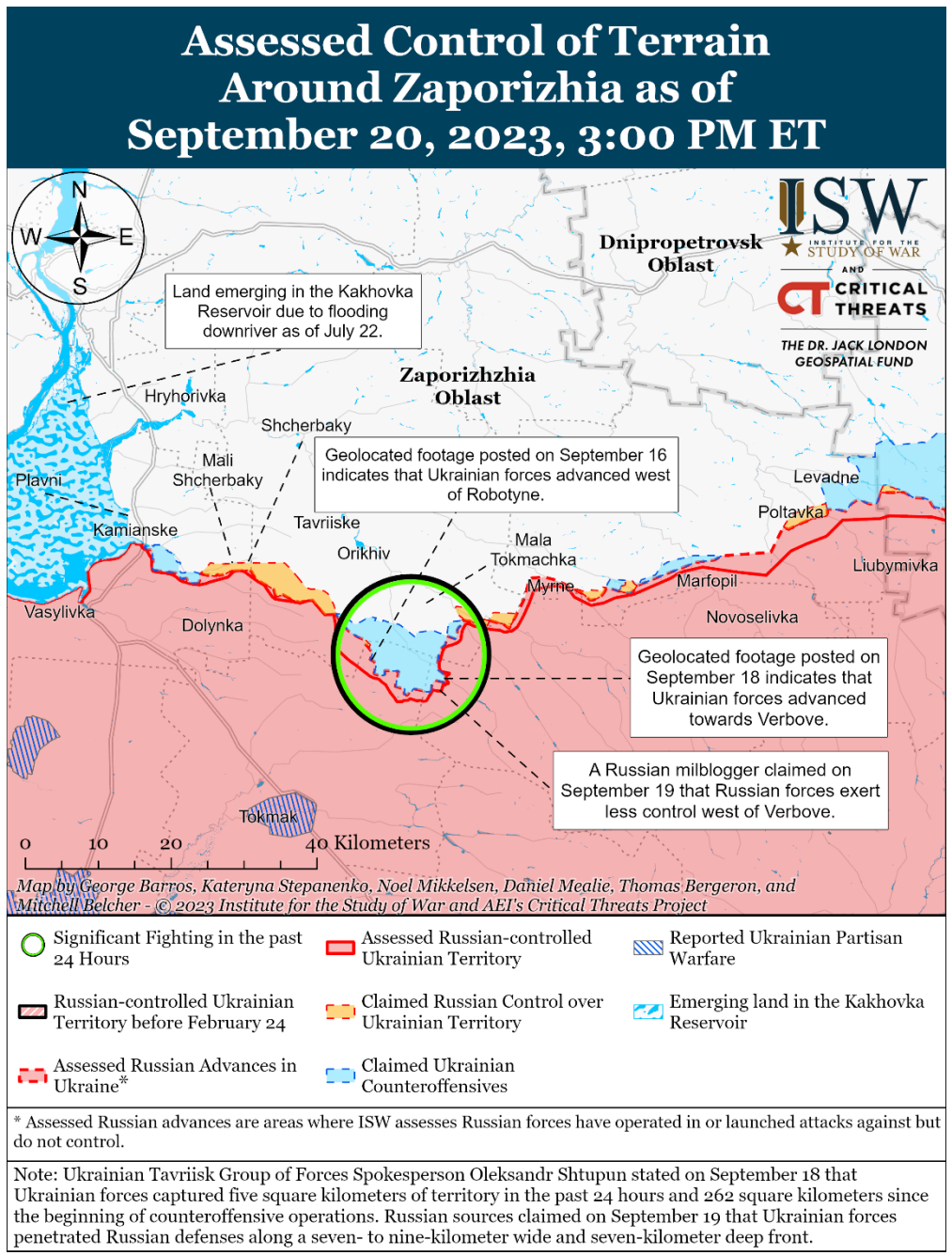
western Zaporizhzhia Oblast, claimed that the intensity of fighting decreased by the morning of September 20 near Robotyne and Verbove.[57] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces were advancing through the lowlands because Russian forces controlled the heights in this area.[58]



Russian forces continued ground attacks in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on September 20 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Mala Tokmachka (7km southeast of Orikhiv), Novodanylivka (5km south of Orikhiv), and Robotyne.[59] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces counterattacked near Robotyne’s southern outskirts but did not specify an outcome.[60] North Ossetian “Storm Ossetia”

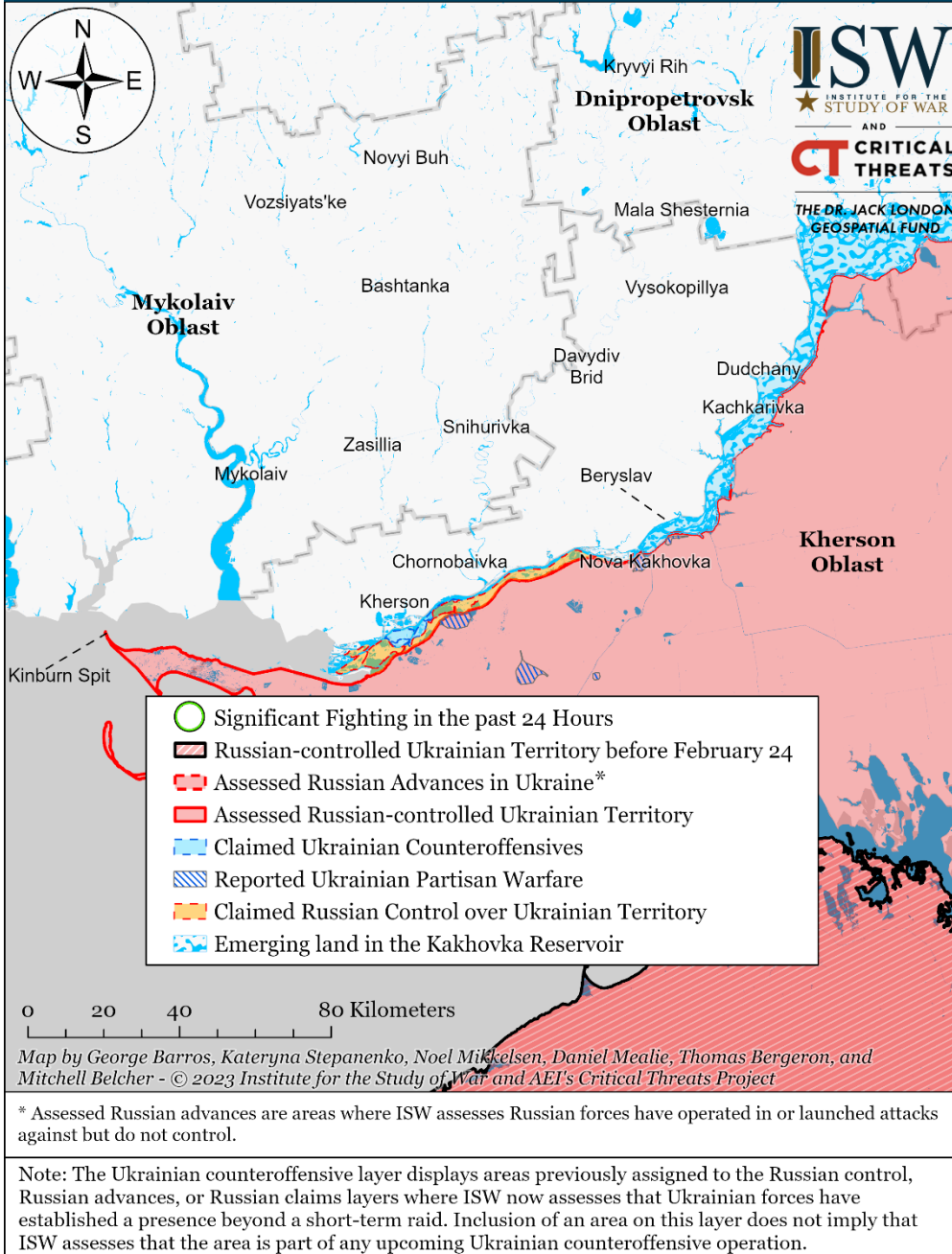
and “Alania” volunteer battalions claimed that elements of the Russian 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) captured a Ukrainian position west of Verbove on September 19.[61] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.

Ukrainian forces may have struck Russian rear military infrastructure in occupied Zaporizhzhia Oblast on September 20. Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated that unspecified actors conducted strikes on Russian military infrastructure near Melitopol, Tokmak, and Polohy.[62] Fedorov stated that locals reported smoke coming from a Russian military headquarters and barracks near Melitopol.[63]



Russian and Ukrainian forces reportedly continue to operate on the islands in the Dnipro River delta in Kherson Oblast. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces destroyed four Ukrainian Special Forces sabotage and reconnaissance groups near Kozatske (northwest of Nova Kakhovka) and the “Aleshkinsky” and “Pereyaslavsky” islands, likely referring to islands with different names in an unspecified sector of the Dnipro River delta.[64] Other Russian sources claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces are operating on unspecified islands in the Dnipro River delta in Kherson Oblast.[65]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 20, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian forces reportedly struck a Russian command post near Verkhnosadove (15km northeast of Sevastopol) in occupied Crimea on September 20. Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications (UA StratCom) reported that Ukrainian forces successfully struck a Russian Black Sea Fleet command post near Verkhnosadove, but did not specify the weapons used in the strike.[66] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian aircraft launched eight Storm Shadow missiles over Crimea and that Russian air defenses downed five missiles.[67] The milblogger claimed that three



Ukrainian-launched Storm Shadows ‘fell’ near Verkhnosadove.[68] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhayev claimed that Ukrainian forces also launched an unspecified number of drones during the missile strikes.[69] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andriy Yusov stated that Ukrainian forces are continuing their planned operations in occupied Crimea and that the Ukrainian General Staff will release additional information later.[70]

### **Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)**

The Russian Red Cross (RKK) indicated that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, particularly partial mobilization efforts in autumn 2022, caused a decline in mental health among many Russians. The RKK told Russian newswire *RBK* that it has recorded an increase in the number of Russians with symptoms of depression since February 2022.[71] The RKK reported that over 28,500 people contacted the RKK’s mental health hotline for support since February 2022 and over 500 people have requested “individual psychological support” since October 2022, coinciding with the start of partial mobilization in Russia. The RKK reported that 61 percent of callers were relatives of Russian military personnel and mobilized personnel. The RKK noted that Russians reported feeling an increase in aggressive sentiment and a decrease of anxiety and fear after fall 2022.

The Russian MoD reportedly continues to recruit personnel from penal colonies to support the war effort. Udmurtia-based activist movement “Udmurtiya Protiv Korruptsii” (Udmurtia Against Corruption) reported on September 19 that Russian MoD representatives visited penal colonies in the Republic of Udmurtia to recruit prisoners by promising them pardons after returning from Ukraine to Russia and 100,000 ruble (\$1,036) monthly salaries.[72] “Udmurtiya Protiv Korruptsii” reported that the MoD representatives did not have the penal recruits go through medical or psychological evaluations prior to signing contracts with the MoD.

Russian and occupation authorities are reportedly set to open the Donetsk Higher Combined Arms Command School in occupied Donetsk Oblast by the end of 2023. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the Donetsk Higher Combined Arms Command school will open by December 1, 2023, and will support over 3,500 employees and cadets.[73] Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed a decree on August 17 establishing the new Donetsk command school likely to further integrate the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) proxy formations into the conventional Russian military structure, while simultaneously preventing DNR and LNR servicemen from leaving to Russia amidst full-scale invasion.[74]

### **Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

Russian and occupation authorities continue efforts to deport Ukrainian children to Russia and integrate Ukrainian children into Russian culture. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on September 20 that Russian authorities are offering Russian citizens increased social benefits for taking guardianship of Ukrainian children and that Russian authorities plan to assimilate many Ukrainian children into Russian populations instead of returning the children to Ukrainian relatives.[75] The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that Russian authorities are bringing

Russian student teachers to teach Ukrainian children in occupied areas to teach Russian language and history.[76]

**Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)**

Nothing significant to report.

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.**

**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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[1] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoUQtKMPvCAxR9Porrg4SRvnMfJTQ7Hbop4RTdWx6iKcKU82mjMbcAVDEZqZuXoDHdl> ; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/post/s/pfbido2vnGE7Zy1UEpFbDAtWfbwt9Ja2umSip1pNDmxLHw2021XMVYdnxr8RYqohBRbvhEal>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidouSwf84sdmsUMtzjaAuKQpyNDLgjqU8a2ggm1UpViaVx4bNRTnVTkUTyqC2C8Ra2l> ; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoUQtKMPvCAxR9Porrg4SRvnMfJTQ7Hbop4RTdWx6iKcKU82mjMbcAVDEZqZuXoDHdl> ; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2vnGE7Zy1UEpFbDAtWfbwt9Ja2umSip1pNDmxLHw2021XMVYdnxr8RYqohBRbvhEal>

[3] <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1704367760162054234>; <https://x.com/DefenceHQ/status/1704369933923103039?s=20>; <https://x.com/DefenceHQ/status/1704370035400073584?s=20>; <https://x.com/DefenceHQ/status/1704370090194481184?s=20>; <https://x.com/DefenceHQ/status/1704370153738190994?s=20>

[4] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091623>

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hns12gYNRqo> ; <https://suspilne dot media/576207-pidsumki-ramstajnu-radbez-oon-zberetsa-na-zasidanna-573-den-vijni-onlajn/>

[6] [https://t.me/philologist\\_zov/525](https://t.me/philologist_zov/525)

[7] <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1704536073647333524> ; <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1704537077688222102>

[8] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-8-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-5-2023> ;

[9] <https://www.sibreal.org/a/rodstvennitsy-mobilizovannyh-iz-altayskogo-kraya-pozhalovalis-putinu-na-otsutstvie-rotatsii-na-peredovoy/32595426.html>

[10] [https://t.me/philologist\\_zov/525](https://t.me/philologist_zov/525); <https://t.me/wehearfromyanina/2696>

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<https://t.me/astrapress/38181>; <https://t.me/bbcrossian/52620>;  
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