

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 26, 2023

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September 26, 2023, 8:35pm 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.

Correction: We are correcting this report to note that the additional parachute regiment is subordinate to the Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division, based in Ivanovo Oblast. We previously reported that the additional regiment is subordinate to the Russian 106th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division. We apologize for the error.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 3pm ET on September 26. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 27 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The tactical situation in Verbove remains unclear as Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 26. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction and offensive actions in the Bakhmut direction.[1] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces reached the northern outskirts of Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv).[2] Russian sources have still not directly addressed a claim from a source reportedly affiliated with the Russian Airborne (VDV) Forces that Ukrainian forces control half of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) as of September 24.[3] ISW has not observed evidence of such a Ukrainian advance, and the source reporting it has a very small following. It is still noteworthy that other VDV-connected sources have not responded to these claims.

Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA) the "Guards" honorific on September 26.[4] The Russian 58th CAA (Southern Military District) has been responsible for the ongoing Russian defense against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in southern Ukraine.[5]

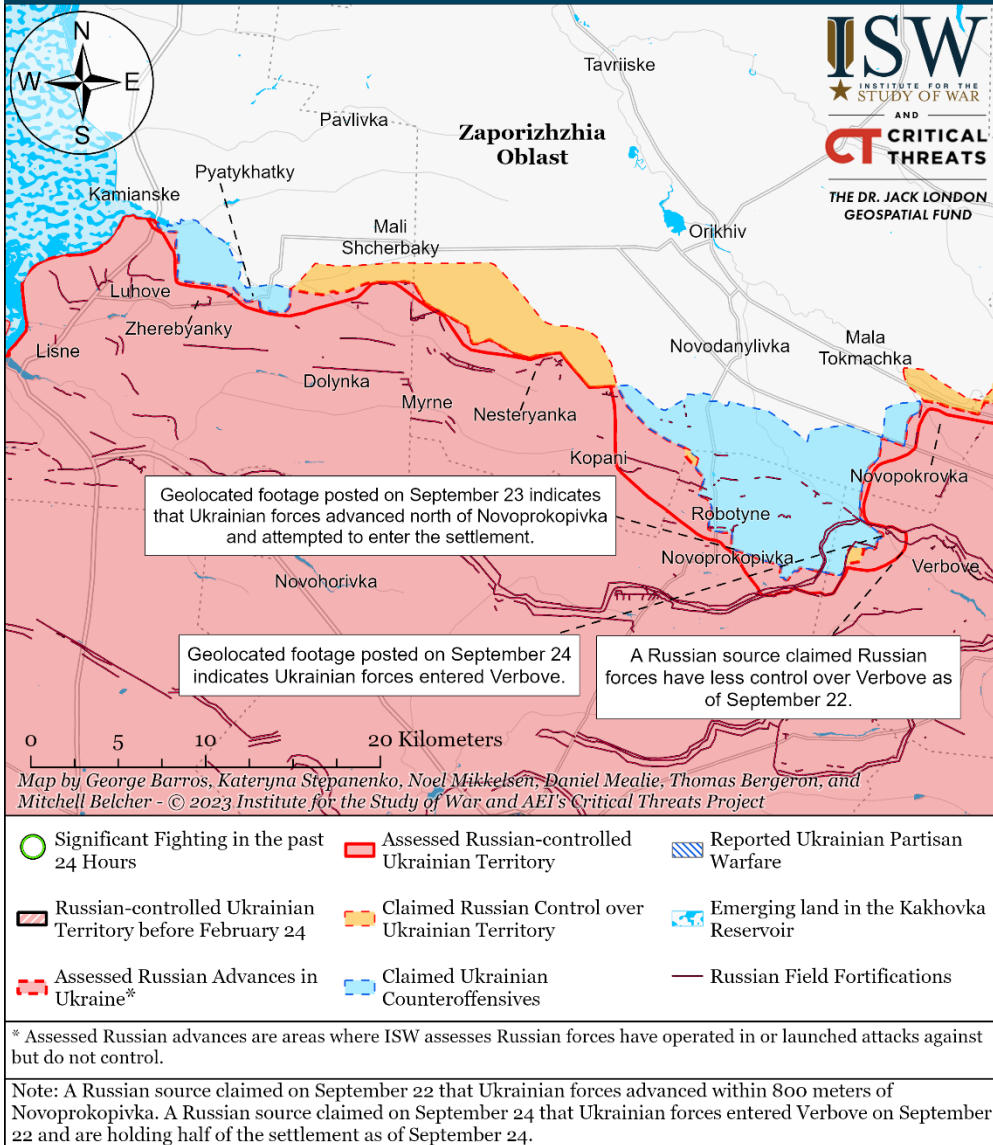
Likely degraded elements of the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division are increasingly counterattacking in the Novoprokopivka area, suggesting that Ukrainian counteroffensive operations may have degraded relatively more elite Russian Airborne (VDV) elements that were responsible for counterattacking in the area. Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division's 70th and 71st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiments have increasingly engaged in limited counterattacks near Novoprokopivka in the past week, and a Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division pushed Ukrainian forces from positions near Novoprokopivka on September 25.[6] Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division's 70th, 71st, and 291st Motorized Rifle Regiments routinely engaged in combat engagements

and counterattacks against Ukrainian forces at the forwardmost Russian defensive positions in the Orikhiv area before withdrawing behind the Russian defensive layer between Verbove and Solodka Balka (20km south of Orikhiv) in mid-to-late August.[7] Russian forces laterally redeployed elements of the more elite 7th and 76th VDV Divisions to the Orikhiv direction in early-to-mid August to counterattack against a widening Ukrainian breach in the area, which may have provided these elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division respite from hostilities.[8] Elements of the 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment may have conducted one of the few unit rotations that ISW has observed on this sector of the front, possibly allowing these elements to partially reconstitute.[9]

The 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments' involvement in counterattacks around Novoprokopivka suggests that Ukrainian counteroffensive operations may have significantly degraded the combat capabilities of elements of the 7th and 76th VDV Divisions and that these VDV elements can no longer conduct all counterattacks along the entire Ukrainian breach in the Orikhiv direction. The Russian command may have committed the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments to defending and counterattacking in the Novoprokopivka area to allow VDV elements to prioritize defensive operations on the western and eastern flanks of the Ukrainian salient in the Orikhiv direction.[10] It is also possible that elements of the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments have held positions near Novoprokopivka since withdrawing from positions further north and are now engaging Ukrainian forces because the Ukrainian advance has reached the outskirts of Novoprokopivka. Roughly a month of respite and possible reconstitution are unlikely to offset the significant degradation that elements of the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments suffered while defending earlier in the counteroffensive. Elements of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade (Black Sea Fleet) similarly defended to hold forwardmost defensive positions earlier in the counteroffensive, and Ukrainian counteroffensive operations recently reportedly rendered these elements combat ineffective.[11] The Russian command risks rendering the already degraded elements of the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments combat ineffective if they heavily commit these elements to counterattacking the Ukrainian advance near Novoprokopivka.

Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division are reportedly deployed as far back as Tokmak, continuing to suggest that the Russian command has not manned the multi-echeloned defense in southern Ukraine in depth. Russian sources reported on September 25 and 26 that elements of the 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment's 3rd Battalion were involved in an altercation with military police from the 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment in occupied Tokmak.[12] The presence of elements of the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments in Tokmak suggests that Russian forces have deployed elements of these regiments throughout the multi-echeloned defense between the current frontline and Tokmak. Russian forces, however, appear to be continuing to deploy most of their combat power in western Zaporizhia Oblast to immediate frontline areas.[13] The deployment of the 70th and 71st Motorized Rifle Regiments as far back as Tokmak suggests that elements of the same Russian formations and units defending at forward positions are holding positions, likely in smaller numbers, in subsequent defensive layers. It is possible that unobserved elements of other Russian units and formations hold positions at rear defensive positions, although the current Russian manpower commitment to holding positions on the frontline indicates that this is unlikely.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Interethnic tensions appear to be sowing division between elements of the Russian 42nd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment defending against the Ukrainian counteroffensive in western Zaporizhia Oblast. Arsen Temiraev, a mobilized serviceman from the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania serving with the 70th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment, posted a video on September 25 alleging that Russian military police of the 70th Regiment beat Temiraev and two other soldiers of the 71st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment's 3rd Battalion in Tokmak on September 24.[14] Temiraev claimed that the military police asked about his ethnicity before telling Temiraev that "Russia is for Russians." Temiraev claimed that the military police beat him and the other servicemen because a Tokmak local alleged that the soldiers had sexually assaulted children, a crime that Temiraev denied having committed. Temiraev complained that he thought the "Nazis were on the other [Ukrainian] side,

[but] it turns out they [the Nazis] are among us.”[15] North Ossetian-Alanian Republic Head Sergey Menyailo responded on September 26, claiming that the elements of the “Storm Ossetia” and “Alania” volunteer battalions in the area verified the incident.[16] Menyailo reported the incident to the Southern Military District command, which informed the commander of the 58th Combined Arms Army, and called the incident unacceptable towards any Russian soldier. Interethnic tensions between Russian units operating in the frontline and near the rear of western Zaporizhia Oblast may threaten the integrity of Russian defenses and unit cohesion amidst recent Ukrainian gains in the area.

Interethnic tensions may also threaten Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov’s broader standing within the Russian political sphere amid an ongoing controversy surrounding Kadyrov’s son. Kadyrov posted footage on September 25 of his son, Adam Kadyrov, beating a detained man accused of burning a Quran, and Ramzan Kadyrov praised his son for the beating.[17] The incident prompted varied condemnation and calls for investigations from Russian officials. Russian Human Rights Council (HRC) Head Valery Fadeev stated that burning the Quran is a serious crime but that officials must follow rules for detaining suspects, while HRC member Eva Merkacheva called for an investigation and called the situation a “challenge to the entire legal system of Russia.”[18] Merkacheva levied a thinly veiled criticism of the Chechen Republic, claiming that “in a particular region [Chechen Republic] they [Chechen officials] have shown that they commit crimes and nothing will happen to them about it.”[19] Other Russian officials, including Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova, called for Adam Kadyrov to answer for his crime in a Russian court.[20] Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly responded to a journalist’s request for a follow up and reportedly claimed that he had not witnessed the attack and that Adam Kadyrov is “independent and temperamental.”[21] Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly praised Adam Kadyrov’s behavior and stated he did not punish his son, but said that Adam Kadyrov will be punished to the fullest extent of Russian law if a Russian court convicts him.[22] ISW has long observed tensions between Chechen and non-Chechen officials and military units, and senior Russian officials’ emotional reactions suggest that Kadyrov’s political standing may be insufficient to protect his son from the consequences of this situation.[23]

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu discussed ongoing Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) efforts to increase Russian Airborne (VDV) Forces’ combat capabilities and add elements similar to those normally found in motorized rifle units to the VDV, likely to better align VDV elements with their current combat roles in Ukraine. Shoigu stated during a speech to the Russian Defense Ministry Board on September 26 that the Russian MoD is implementing measures to increase the Russian VDV’s combat potential by creating new airborne assault formations and increasing the VDV’s reconnaissance, strike, and fire capabilities.[24] Shoigu stated that the Russian MoD has nearly finished forming a fifth Russian VDV division, the 104th Airborne Assault (VDV) Division, and an additional parachute regiment subordinate to the Russian 98th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division, based in Ivanovo Oblast.[25] Shoigu stated that the Russian MoD plans for all Russian VDV divisions to have a logistics brigade and repair and restoration battalions by the end of 2023.[26] Shoigu stated that Russian VDV divisions will be “completed” with an artillery brigade but did not specify a time frame for this addition.[27] These additional elements will bring Russian VDV divisions into closer alignment with the force composition of a typical Russian motorized rifle division.[28] Shoigu did not state that Russian VDV divisions would receive tank regiments, which are common in Russian motorized rifle divisions.[29] These additional units will likely allow the Russian military to use Russian VDV divisions almost interchangeably with motorized rifle divisions in the future, and VDV elements in Ukraine have been increasingly operating as combat infantry similar to motorized rifle divisions.[30] The Russian MoD’s provision of additional elements

to Russian VDV units and formations serving in Ukraine is a recognition of the role Russian VDV forces are currently playing in Ukraine and highlights the non-standard way in which the Russian military is using these forces. These Russian formations have become “airborne” in name only, and it is not clear when the Russian MoD intends for them to take to the skies again.

Russian forces conducted a series of Shahed-131/136 drone strikes on port and military targets in Ukraine on the night of September 25-26. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched 38 drones from Krasnodar Krai and Cape Chauda, Crimea, targeting Ukrainian port and border infrastructure and that Ukrainian air defenses shot down 26 drones.[31] Russian forces hit the Orlivka-Isaccea ferry crossing that connects Odesa Oblast and Romania, and Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk denied speculations that the Russian drones crossed into Romanian territory.[32] Geolocated footage shows that Russian forces destroyed a Ukrainian MiG-29 fighter aircraft at the Kulbakino airfield in Mykolaiv Oblast.[33]

Russian and Western sources largely claimed that Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Admiral Viktor Sokolov is alive after the Russian MoD posted footage of Sokolov allegedly attending a meeting on September 26, although the situation remains unclear at this time. Russian and Western sources largely speculated that footage posted by the Russian MoD on September 26 of Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu’s remarks at the Russian MoD Board meeting purportedly shows Sokolov attending via teleconference.[34] The Ukrainian Special Operations Forces previously reported on September 25 that the Ukrainian strike on the BSF headquarters in Sevastopol on September 22 killed Sokolov, and Russian officials have not yet issued a response confirming or denying reports of Sokolov’s death.[35] The Ukrainian Special Operations Forces stated on September 26 that it was clarifying information about Sokolov’s possible death but that available sources indicate that he is dead.[36] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on September 26 that he had not received any information from the Russian MoD about the matter and that the Kremlin had nothing to say as this is “solely [the Russian MoD’s] prerogative.”[37] ISW is unprepared at this time to make an assessment about the authenticity of the Russian MoD’s footage of Sokolov or about Sokolov’s status on Earth.

The Russian MoD has reportedly recruited some former Wagner Group personnel for MoD-affiliated private military companies (PMCs) fighting in Ukraine, while negotiations between the reported Wagner leadership and the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) have allegedly stalled over disagreements concerning Wagner’s independence and cohesion. A reported Wagner-affiliated source claimed on September 26 that the Wagner Group is still operating in Africa and Belarus and that there are no plans to close the organization.[38] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that former Wagner personnel that left the organization with Andrey Troshev (known under the callsign “Sedoy”) after Prigozhin’s rebellion have joined the MoD-affiliated “Redut” and “Volunteer Corps” PMCs and have begun to redeploy to the Bakhmut area in Ukraine.[39] The milblogger claimed that Troshev is trying to recruit Wagner personnel who are currently operating in Belarus, Africa, and the Middle East for Russian MoD-affiliated PMCs. The milblogger also claimed that Anton Yelizarov (known as “Lotos”) is now the head of Wagner and is negotiating with Rosgvardia about the inclusion of Wagner units within Rosgvardia. Yelizarov is reportedly resisting Rosgvardia’s condition that Wagner personnel sign individual contracts, which the milblogger complained would allow Rosgvardia to divide the Wagner units and send them to various areas. ISW previously reported that Russian State Duma deputies will reportedly

propose a bill allowing Rosgvardia to include volunteer formations, and Yelizarov is likely pushing for Wagner personnel to be considered a distinct Rosgvardia volunteer formation.[40]

Key Takeaways:

- **The tactical situation in Verbove remains unclear as Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 26.**
- **Likely degraded elements of the Russian 58th Combined Arms Army's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division are increasingly counterattacking in the Novoprokopivka area, suggesting that Ukrainian counteroffensive operations may have degraded relatively more elite Russian Airborne (VDV) elements that were responsible for counterattacking in the area.**
- **Elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division are reportedly deployed as far back as Tokmak, continuing to suggest that the Russian command has not manned the multi-echeloned defense in southern Ukraine in depth.**
- **Interethnic tensions appear to be sowing division between elements of the Russian 42nd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment defending against the Ukrainian counteroffensive in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Interethnic tensions may also threaten Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov's broader standing within the Russian political sphere amid an ongoing controversy surrounding Kadyrov's son.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu discussed ongoing Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) efforts to increase Russian Airborne (VDV) Forces' combat capabilities and add elements similar to those normally found in motorized rifle units to the VDV, likely to better align VDV elements with their current combat roles in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of Shahed-131/136 drone strikes on port and military targets in Ukraine on the night of September 25-26.**
- **Russian and Western sources largely claimed that Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) Commander Admiral Viktor Sokolov is alive after the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) posted footage of Sokolov allegedly attending a meeting on September 26, although the situation remains unclear at this time.**
- **The Russian MoD has reportedly recruited some former Wagner Group personnel for MoD-affiliated private military companies (PMCs) fighting in Ukraine, while negotiations between the reported Wagner leadership and the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) have allegedly stalled over disagreements concerning Wagner's independence and cohesion.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and reportedly advanced in some areas on September 26.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 26, 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

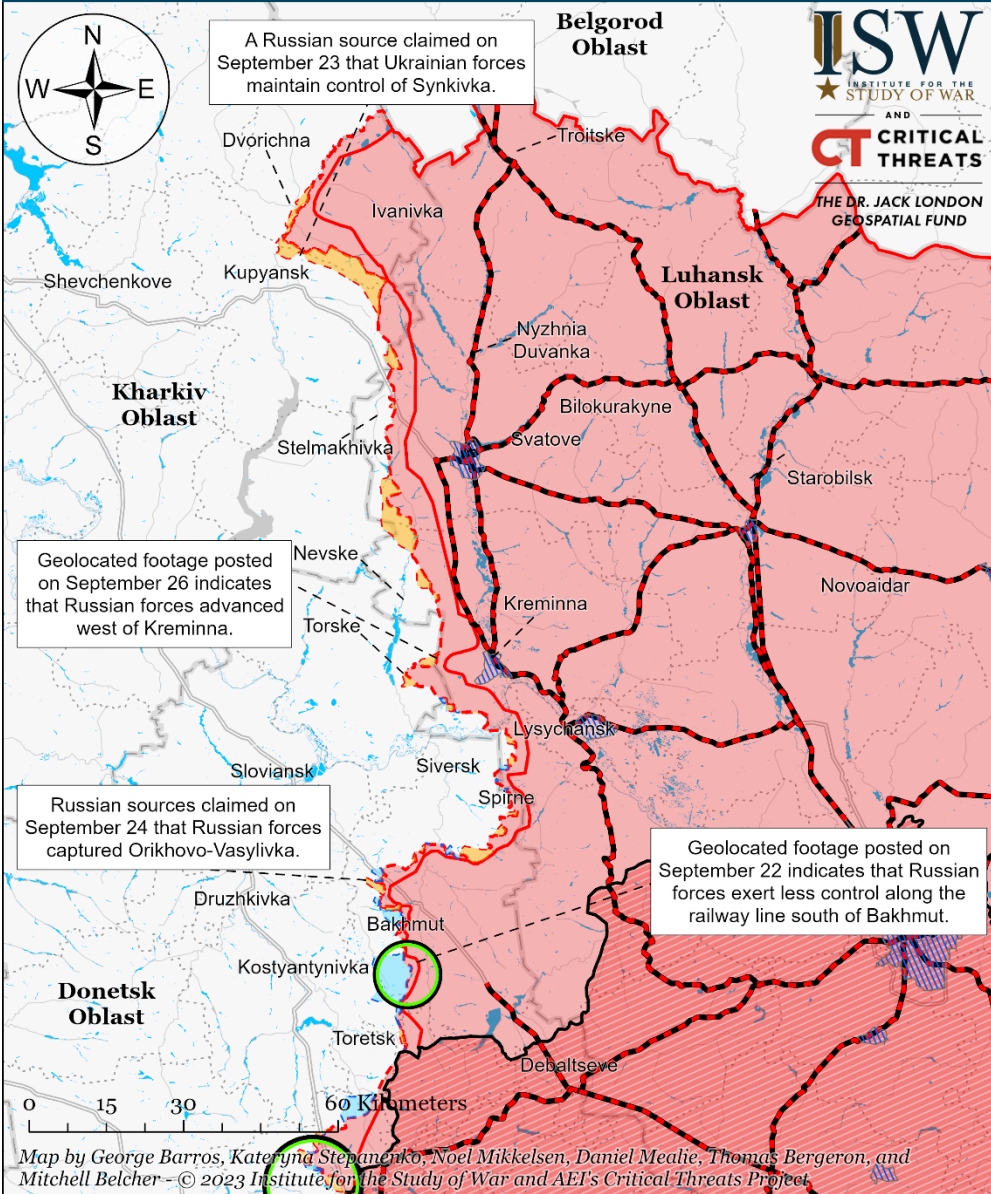
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 sources claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on September 26 but did not make any confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces did not conduct any assaults in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions.[41] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces captured unspecified positions near Kyslivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk) and attacked near Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna) and the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[42] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces attacked near Dvorichna (17km northeast of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (7km east of Kupyansk), Synkivka, Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove), and Bilohorivka (13km south of Kreminna) on September 25.[43]

The Russian MoD claimed on September 26 that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Kuzmyne (3km southwest of Kreminna) and Dibrova.[44] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces also repelled Ukrainian attacks near the Serebryanske forest area on September 25.[45]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

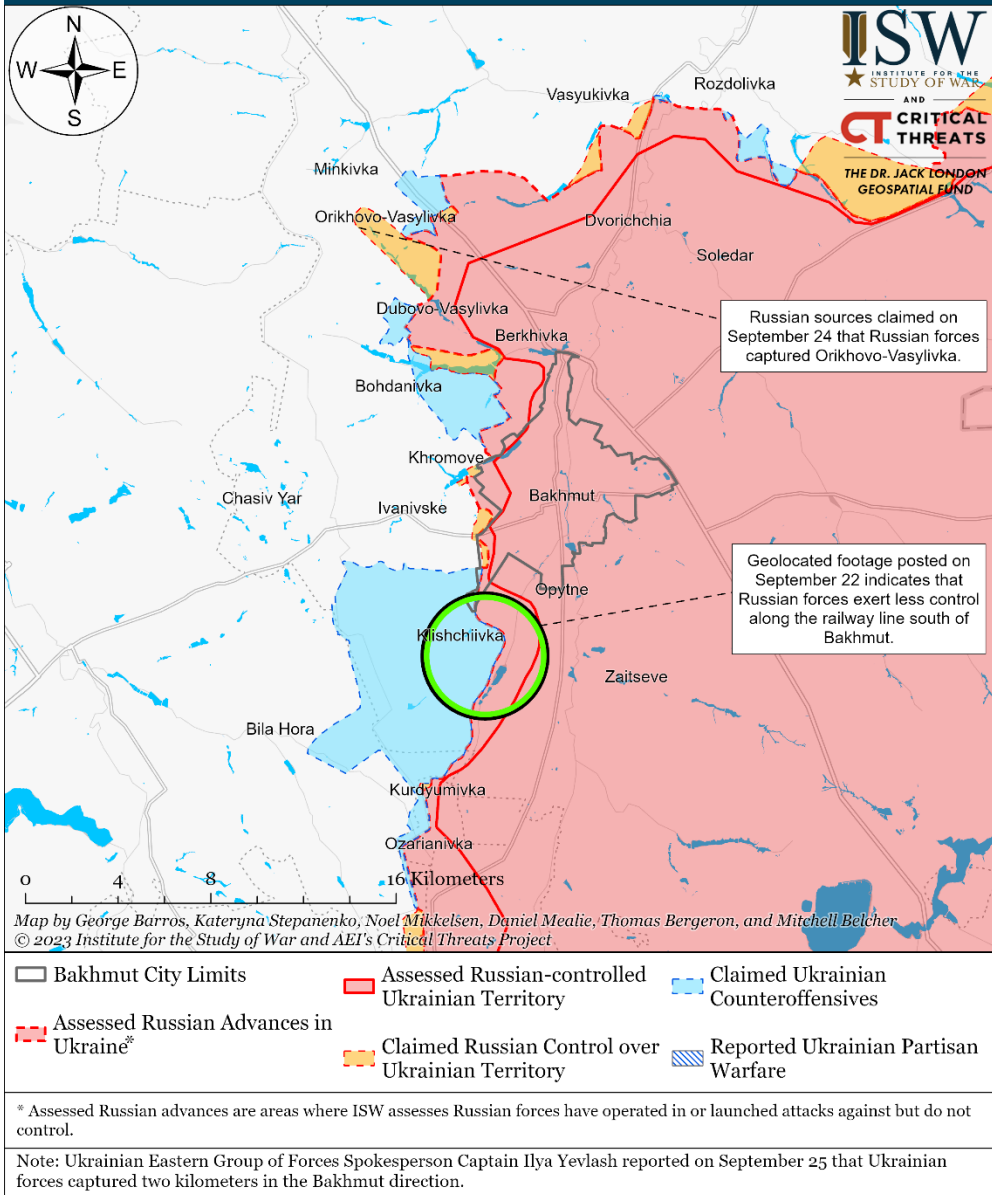
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions in the Bakhmut area on September 26 and reportedly advanced. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive actions in the Bakhmut direction, and Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash stated that Ukrainian forces were successful near Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Odrativka (7km south of Bakhmut), and Zaitseve (20km south of Bakhmut).[46] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued assaults near Klishchiivka and that Russian forces withdrew from positions along a section of the railway line northeast of Klishchiivka.[47] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that small Ukrainian assault groups continue periodic assaults along the entire Klishchiivka-Andriivka-Kurdyumivka line (up to 13km southwest of Bakhmut).[48]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 26 that elements of the Russian 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) operating on Bakhmut’s northern flank are suffering heavy casualties.[49] Elements of the 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade arrived in the Bakhmut area to defend Bakhmut’s northern flank against localized Ukrainian counterattacks following the Russian capture of Bakhmut in May 2023.[50] Ukrainian counteroffensive operations have fixed these elements of the 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade to Bakhmut’s northern flank since the start of the counteroffensive in June 2023.

Russian forces continued limited counterattacks in the Bakhmut area on September 26 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled five Russian counterattacks near Klishchiivka.[51] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces also counterattacked near Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) and advanced near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut), although several milbloggers denied Russian claims that Russian forces recently captured the settlement.[52] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian “Storm-Z” units recently advanced into Andriivka under the assumption that Russian Airborne (VDV) forces would provide support, but that VDV elements failed to reach their positions.[53] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated on September 18 that Ukrainian forces destroyed the combat capabilities of elements of the 31st Guards VDV Brigade and the 83rd Guards VDV Brigade during the liberation of Andriivka and Klishchiivka.[54] VDV elements south of Bakhmut may be failing to perform combat tasks due to this reported destruction of combat capabilities.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

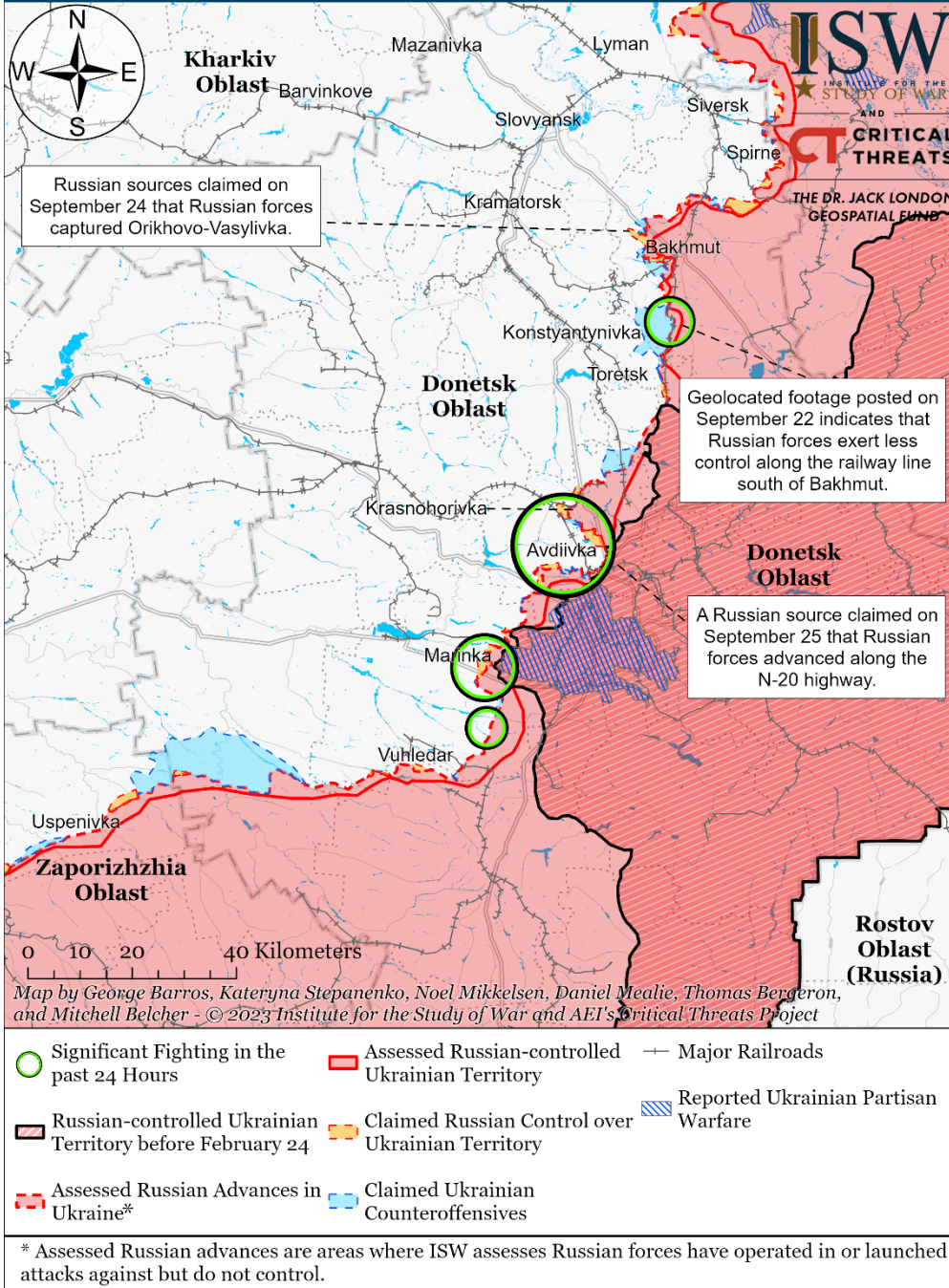


Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted limited unsuccessful ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on September 26. The Russian MoD reported that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Krasnohorivka (unclear whether the settlement 11km north of Avdiivka or the settlement 22km southwest of Avdiivka) and Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[55] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Russian 20th Guards Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) repelled a Ukrainian assault near Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka).[56] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces have repeatedly tried to break through Russian defenses near Opytne (4km south of

Avdiivka) and Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka) in recent weeks but that elements of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) 1st Slavic Brigade recaptured lost positions near Opytne.[57]

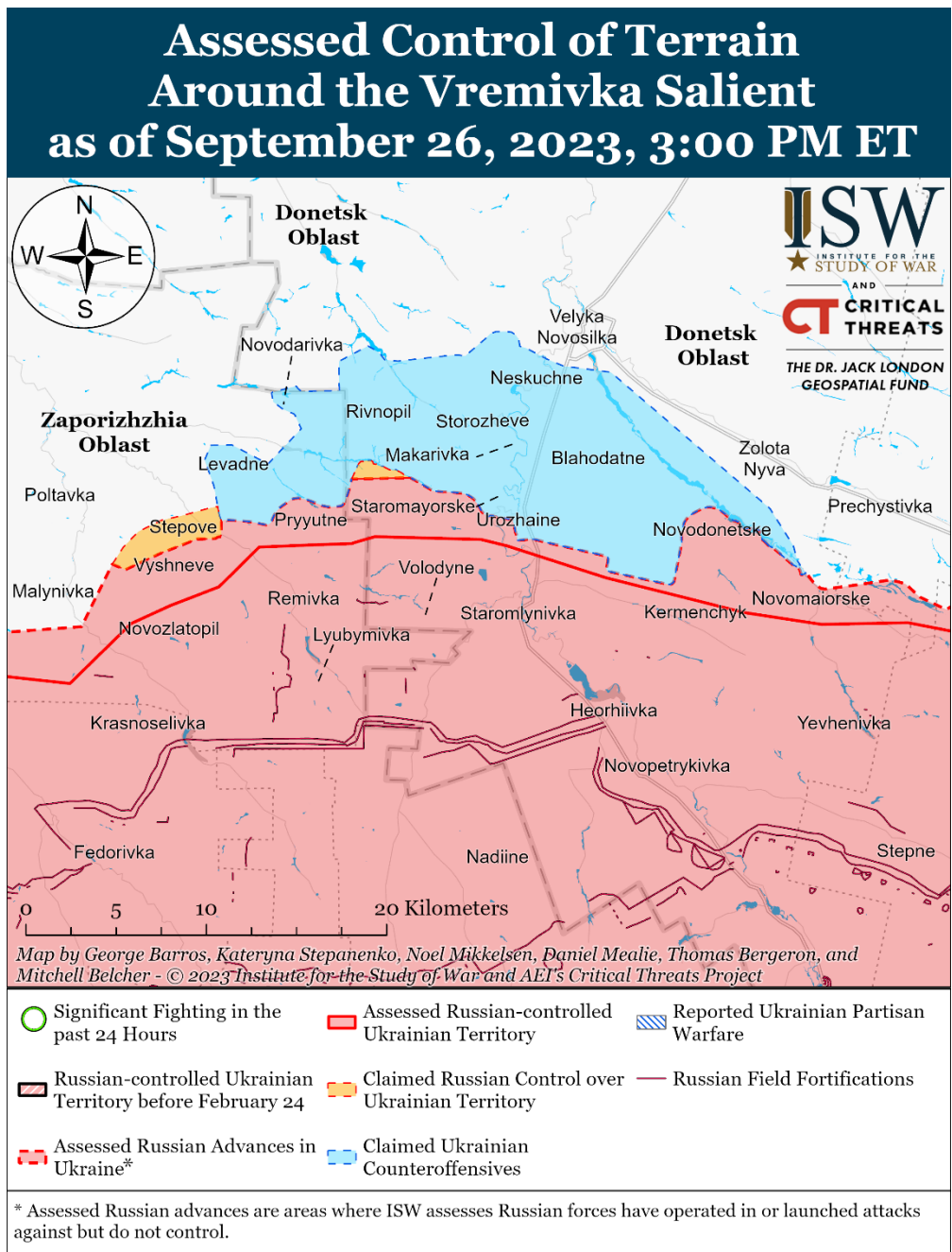
Russian forces continued limited offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on September 26 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Avdiivka, southeast of Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), and near Marinka.[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian “Storm-Z” units captured several Ukrainian strongpoints near Opytne but suffered heavy losses.[59]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area but did not advance on September 26. The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[60] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and in the direction of Zavitne Bazhannya (12km south of Velyka Novosilka).[61]

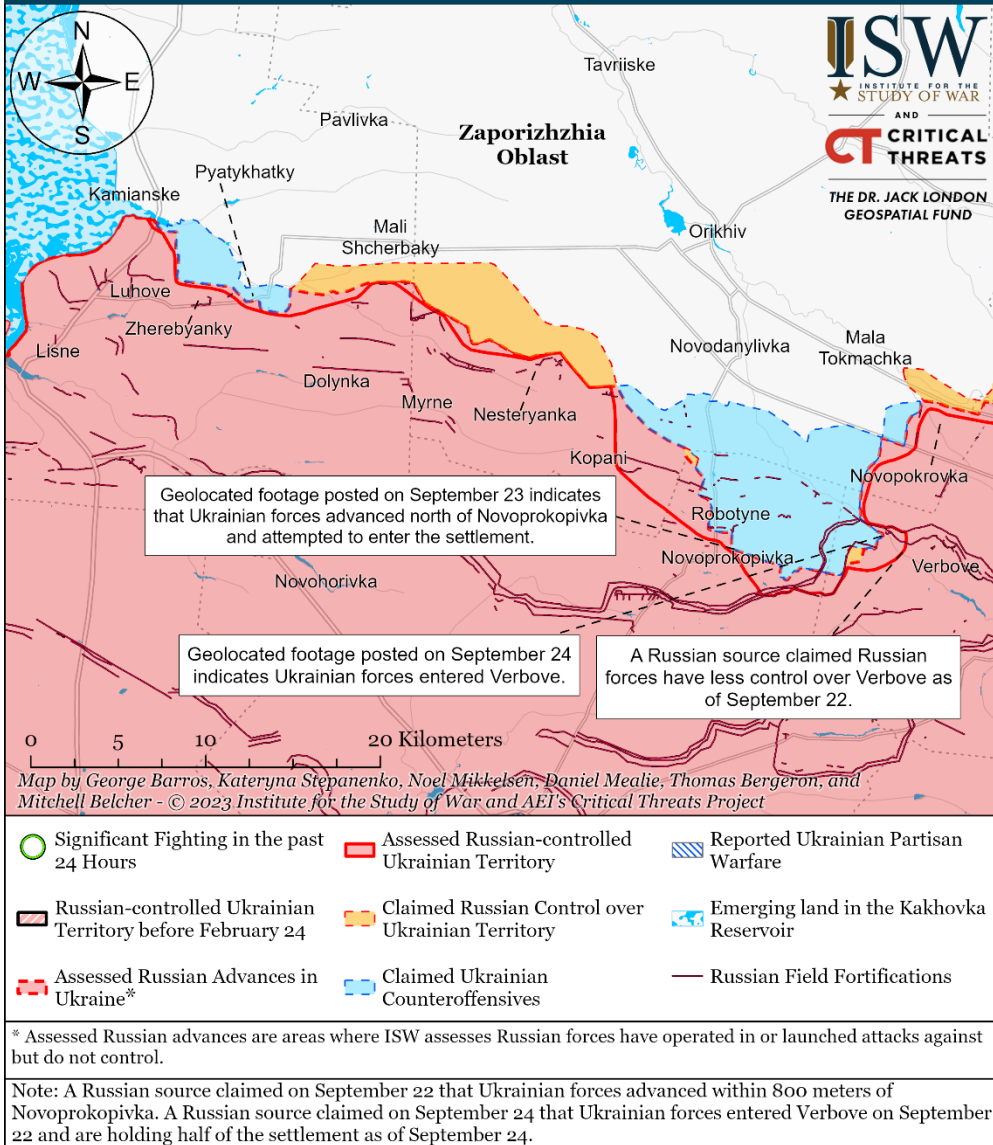


Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast and reportedly advanced on September 26. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces reached the northern outskirts of Novopropkivka (13km south of Orikhiv).[62] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian

forces marginally advanced northwest of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) and have advanced two kilometers in this area in the past three weeks.[63] Russian sources, including the Russian MoD, claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Verbove and in the direction of Novoprokopivka.[64]

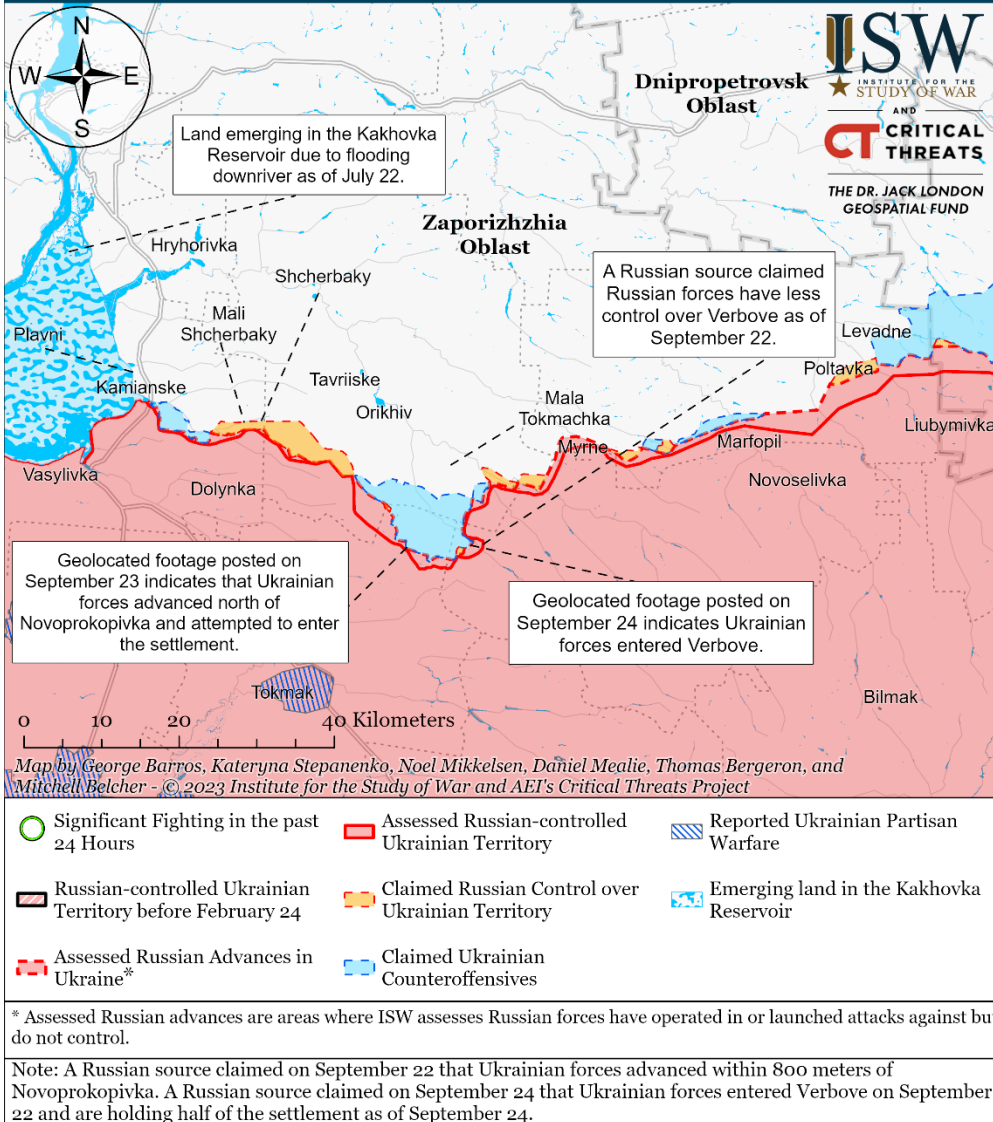
Russian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and reportedly advanced on September 26. A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) counterattacked and pushed Ukrainian forces from unspecified positions near Robotyne.[65] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated on September 25 that Russian forces continue to mine and build fortifications in the depth of their defenses in the Tavriisk direction.[66]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



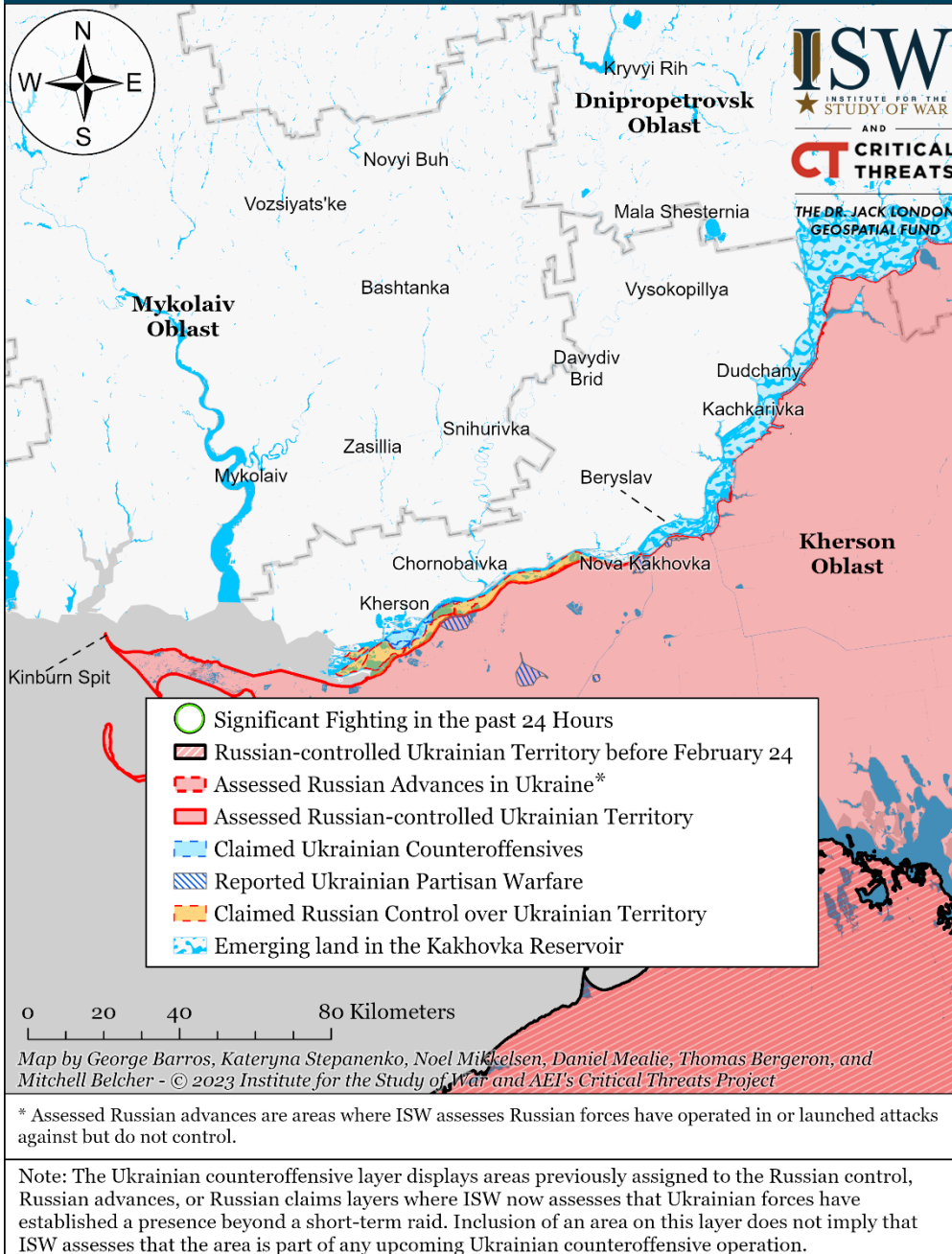
Ukrainian forces conducted a HIMARS strike against a Russian military headquarters in occupied Kherson Oblast on September 18. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reported on September 26 that sources within the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) stated on September 26 that a September 18 Ukrainian HIMARS strike hit the headquarters of the Russian 24th Motorized Rifle regiment (70th Motorized Rifle Division) near Kherson City, killing eight officers and wounding seven.[67] Geolocated footage of the strike from SBU indicates that the headquarters is located in Radensk (24km southeast of Kherson City).[68]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



A Russian milblogger claimed on September 26 that Ukrainian forces continue to operate on the islands in the Dnipro River delta and are trying to expand their zone of control in the area.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 26, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Senior Russian officials continue to present Russian crypto-mobilization efforts as highly successful, likely to signal their lack of intent to conduct another mobilization wave. Russian Security Council

Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev claimed on September 26 that Russia has recruited over 325,000 contract personnel since January 1, 2023, updating Russian President Vladimir Putin's claims of 280,000 personnel on September 12 and 300,000 personnel on September 15.[70]

A Russian opposition outlet indicated that reduced immigration to Russia and ethnic tensions are exacerbating ongoing domestic labor shortages.[71] Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported that migration has decreased from 5.9 million in the first half of 2022 to 3.5 million in the first half of 2023.[72] *Verstka* also reported that migrants are increasingly emigrating from Russia to their home countries or other countries due to political and social discrimination, depreciation of the ruble, and fear of mobilization. *Verstka* reported that there are shortages in transportation and delivery services, construction, and catering as a result and that ethnic Russians are not interested in these professions.

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 strengthen ground lines of communication (GLOCs) connecting occupied southern Ukraine with Russia. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation Minister of Economic Development Yuri Guskov announced on September 26 that Russia has begun developing plans for a railway that will connect Melitopol and Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast with Rostov Oblast through occupied Crimea and Krasnodar Krai, likely to alleviate some pressure from the Kerch Strait rail and road bridges.[73]

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)

Belarusian military and territorial defense forces completed a series of training exercises on September 26. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that Belarusian forces completed bilateral training exercises that began on September 22 to improve Belarusian command and control bodies at the tactical and operational levels.[74]

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.

[1] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoVaAQ5MbGc8jPKFYr2WXohMXmpCW EBR3xce8adc6g70oxNz4z45WXCmScFCqdczZcl>

[2] <https://t.me/wargonzo/15284>

[3] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-24-2023>

[4] https://t.me/mod_russia/30831

[5] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091823> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar090823>

[6] <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/53654> ; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/98609 ; https://t.me/voin_dv/5150 ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar092323> ; <https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/1234> ; https://t.me/voin_dv/5105 ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-24-2023>

[7] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091823>

[8] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091823>

[9] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091823>

[10] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-24-2023>

[11] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar092323>

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