Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 24 Karolina Hird, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan September 24, 9 pm ET

Click <u>here</u> to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's declarations about which categories of Russian males will be exempted from partial mobilization may not reflect Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions or orders. A Russian media insider claimed on September 24 that officials of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reprimanded military commissars in person for negligence in carrying out mobilization and sending out summonses in "excess," and contrary to the explicit MoD guidance regarding exemptions for age, disability, or other limiting factors.¹ Another Russian source claimed that certain heads of federal subjects acknowledged that they have mobilized citizens who are technically ineligible.²

Responsibility for the partial mobilization appears to be divided and complex, possibly contributing to confusion, disorganization, and violations of Shoigu's commitments regarding exemptions. The mobilization decree specifies that Russian federal subjects are responsible for executing the mobilization while the MoD sets quotas and deadlines for filling them.³ A Russian milblogger, in fact, criticized the governor of Russia's Belgorod Oblast for not being an active participant in the mobilization process and noted that the mobilization decree places the onus of carrying out mobilization orders on the heads of federal subjects and not on military commissars.⁴ Military commissars likely work for the heads of federal subjects, however, rather than directly for the MoD, making both responsible for mobilization and creating a possible gap between them and the Defense Ministry.

The military commissars are generally acting as if they had received orders to prioritize getting bodies to training centers over adhering to Shoigu's guidelines, and the seemingly confused chains of responsibility for executing the mobilization decree may be responsible for the divergence between Shoigu's statements and commissars' actions. Shoigu emphatically reiterated on September 21 that mobilization is partial and will only rely on those already in the reserve and with combat experience and military experience, but military commissars failed to adhere to Shoigu's guidance, practically from the onset of the mobilization order. 5 Continued reports of military commissars conducting chaotic distribution of mobilization summonses indicate that they feel significant pressure to carry out mobilization as quickly as possible. Ukrainian sources reported that Russian authorities are immediately mobilizing individuals in occupied areas of Ukraine after "rewarding" them with Russian passports for participating in sham referend rather than waiting until annexation makes the mobilization of eligible males in Russian-occupied areas legal under Russian law. This haste suggests that military commissars feel pressure to expedite mobilization which is not reflected in Shoigu's statements. 6 The MoD is evidently not in full control of mobilization, raising questions about which Russian males actually will be mobilized and how effective the mobilized force will be.7

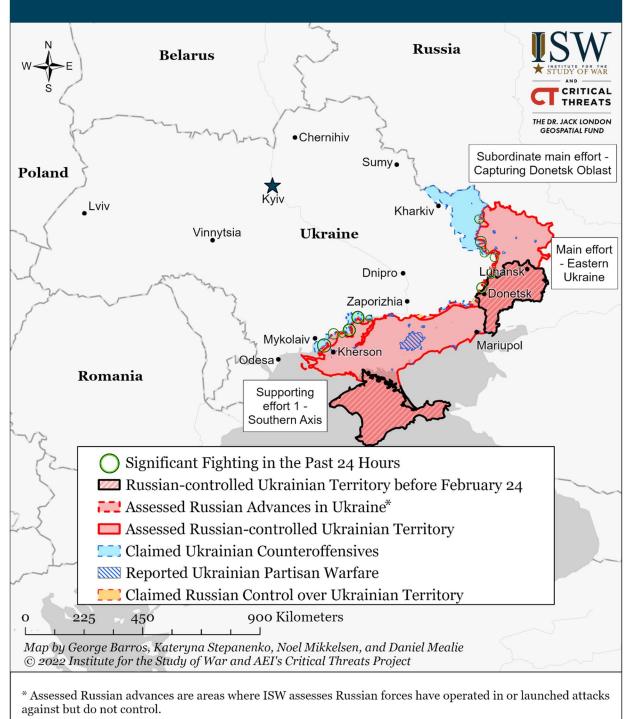
Positions held by senior Russian military leadership are continuing to change hands, suggesting that Russian President Vladimir Putin is continuing to see systemic problems as the result of the personal failings of senior subordinates. The Russian MoD reported on September 24 that Colonel-General Mikhail Mizintsev has been appointed Deputy Defense Minister and will oversee logistics for the Russian Armed Forces, replacing Army General Dmitry Bulgakov. Mizintsev previously acted as head of the Russian National Defense Control Center and served during Russian operations in Syria, notably commanding troops on the operational-tactical level during the encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Mariupol. The replacement of individual senior leaders is very unlikely to fix fundamental structural problems in the Russian military. It reflects Putin's personality-driven approach to leadership and relative disdain for system-building—both factors that contributed to the overall failures of the Russian military in this war.

Russian forces may be preparing to forcibly mobilize Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) to fight for Russia, which would constitute a violation of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War. Russian state media reported on September 24 that Ukrainian POWs detained at the Olenivka prison camp orally "requested" Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) authorities to allow them to fight in the DNR's volunteer "Bohdan Khmelnitsky" Cossack Battalion. ¹⁰ If Russian or Russian proxy forces coerced Ukrainian POWs into combat, it would be a violation of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, which stipulates that "no prisoner of war may at any time be sent to or detained in areas where he may be exposed to the fire of the combat zone" and shall not "be employed on labour which is of an unhealthy or dangerous nature."¹¹

Key Takeaways

- Local military commissars are carrying out mobilization orders in a way that suggests a possible disconnect between Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's guidelines for partial mobilization and Russian President Vladimir Putin's demands for haste.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely continuing to address systemic issues in Russian senior command by replacing individual senior subordinates.
- Russia may be preparing to forcibly mobilize Ukrainian prisoners of war in what may constitute a violation of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War.
- Ukrainian forces likely continued to make gains along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border and northwest of Lyman.
- Ukrainian military officials indicated that the continued Ukrainian interdiction campaign in southern Ukraine is degrading Russian combat capabilities.
- Russian sources identified three locations where Ukrainian troops conducted ground operations in Kherson Oblast-northern Kherson Oblast, western Kherson Oblast near the Inhulets River, and northwest of Kherson City near the Mykolaiv-Kherson Oblast border.
- Russian forces conducted ground attacks around Bakhmut, Donetsk City, and in western Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian authorities continue to coerce residents of occupied Ukrainian territory into voting in sham referenda.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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—Southern and Eastern Ukraine
- 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—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

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

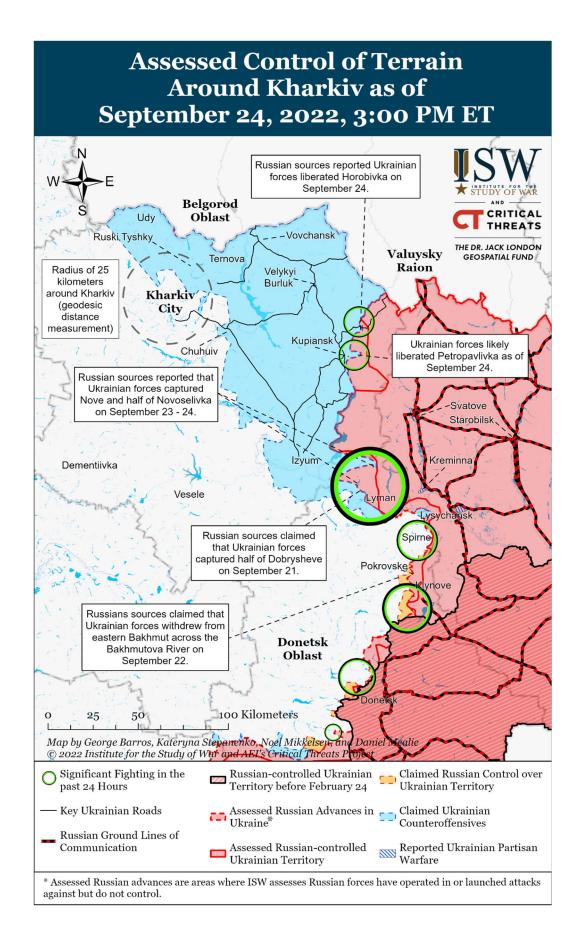
Eastern Ukraine: (Vovchansk-Kupyansk-Izyum-Lyman Line)

Ukrainian forces likely continued to make localized gains along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border on September 24. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian assault detachments occupied the settlements of Hrianykivka and Horobivka in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast (about 70km east of Chuhuiv). Russian sources additionally indicated that Ukrainian forces are continuing positional battles further south along the Oskil River near Kupyansk. These Russian claims are consistent with a statement made by the Ukrainian General Staff that Ukrainian troops repelled a Russian attack on Petropavlivka, 7km east of Kupyansk, which indicates that Ukrainian forces have made further gains east of Kupyansk. Geolocated combat footage posted on September 23 showing Ukrainian forces destroying a Russian tank just east of Petropavlivka supports this assessment.

Voice of America reported that recent rainfall has slowed Ukrainian attempts to advance further east of positions along the Oskil River because muddy cross-country terrain makes it difficult to effectively transport heavy weapons and equipment. The recent weather patterns in northeastern Kharkiv Oblast may explain why recent Ukrainian advances near the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border have largely been along existing roadways to the east, which allows Ukrainian troops to threaten Russian positions without having to risk traversing muddy terrain under Russian artillery fire. To the extent that Ukrainian advances are confined to roadways, however, the limited effective Russian forces in the area are more able to concentrate to slow their advances. The fact that Ukrainian forces continue to make gains nevertheless suggests that Russian troops on this axis are weak and vulnerable.

Ukrainian troops also likely continued offensive operations around Lyman on September 24. A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian troops took control of Nove (18km due north of Lyman) and are continuing to push south of Lyman from the Ridkodub-Nove line.¹⁷ Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops also took control of half of Novoselivka, 10km northwest of Lyman.¹⁸ Russian forces identified the Russian defenders of Lyman to BARS-13 and BARS-16 detachments (the

latter of which is Russian reservist	known as the "Kub s from the Russiar	oan" detachment n Special Comba	t), which are sub t Army Reserve	o-battalion forma	ations comprised of



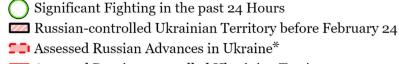
Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Ukrainian military officials maintained operational silence regarding Ukrainian ground maneuvers in Kherson Oblast on September 24 but reiterated that the current Ukrainian interdiction campaign in southern Ukraine is continuing to have tangible impacts on Russian capabilities on this axis. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command noted that Russian units are attempting to rotate units and conduct limited ground maneuvers in unspecified areas and are setting up new defensive lines that are further removed from the current frontline.²⁰ These statements suggest that Russian forces are trying to restore and preserve current combat capabilities by rotating likely exhausted units and moving further back into rear areas in the face of continued Ukrainian strikes on Russian concentration areas. Unit rotation suggests that the Russians will be unable to add additional forces to this axis since it implies removing exhausted units likely on a one-for-one basis with relatively fresher units.

Social media footage provides visual evidence that corroborates both Ukrainian and Russian claims of strikes comprising the continued Ukrainian interdiction campaign in Kherson Oblast. Residents of Nova Kakhovka (60km east of Kherson City) reported explosions on September 23 to 24, which corroborates Russian and Ukrainian claims that Ukrainian strikes hit Nova Kakhovka and the nearby Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant and Bersylav district. Footage from Kherson City shows damage to the Antonivskyi Bridge following consistent Ukrainian strikes on the bridge and other Russian transportation assets and concentration areas in the Kherson City area. A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces struck Russian positions south of the Dnipro River in the Henichesk area (about 170km southeast of Kherson City and 40 km north of Crimea), which is consistent with a statement made by Ukraine's Southern Operational Command that Ukrainian forces hit a Russian control point near Henichesk.

Russian sources identified three locations where Ukrainian troops conducted active ground operations in Kherson Oblast on September 23 and 24—northern Kherson Oblast, western Kherson Oblast near the Inhulets River, and northwest of Kherson City near the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops are preparing to push south of Novovoznesenske (about 16km south of the Dnipropetrovsk-Kherson Oblast border) and are pulling forces to Osokorivka (25km northeast of Novovoznesenske) to continue efforts to push southwards. Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops are continuing to fight in northern Kherson Oblast near Olhyne and Arkhanhelske. Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian troops are fighting in western Kherson near the Inhulets River and continuing positional battles near Sukhyi Stavok. Russian milbloggers additionally indicated that Ukrainian troops are continuing ground maneuvers and positional battles northwest of Kherson City in the Posad-Pokrovske area and pulling reserves from Mykolaiv City to reinforce positions along the Mykolaiv-Kherson Oblast border.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET Kryvyi Rih Dnipropetrovsk **Oblast** CRITICAL Mala Shesternia Novyi Buh THREATS Vysokopillya Vozsiyats'ke THE DR. JACK LONDON GEOSPATIAL FUND Bashtanka Mykolaiv **Oblast** Davydiv Brid Zasillia Mykolaiv Beryslav Chornobaivka Posad-Pokrovs'ke Nova Kakhovka Oleksandrivka Kherson Kherson Antonivsky Bridge **Oblast**



Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory

Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

80 Kilometers

40

20

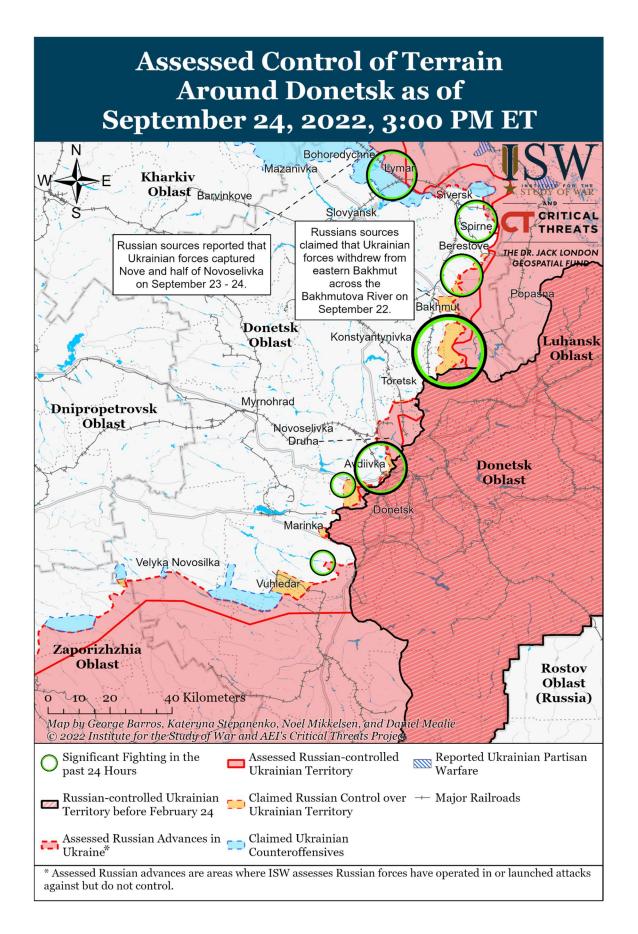
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Mealie Esti, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Criateal Threats Project

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

Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

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

Russian troops continued ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on September 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attacks northeast of Bakhmut near Soledar and Bakhmutske, and south of Bakhmut near Odradivka, Kurdyumivka, Zaitseve, and Mayorsk. Russian sources claimed that Wagner Group fighters are attacking Ukrainian fortifications in Zaitseve (8km southeast of Bakhmut) and that Wagner detachments are fighting within Bakhmut itself, although ISW cannot independently confirm these claims. Russian forces also continued routine ground assaults along the western outskirts of Donetsk City and attempted attacks on Kamyanka, Avdiivka, Opytne, and Nevelske. Russian sources claimed that the 5th Brigade of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) repelled a Ukrainian assault on Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City). The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported that Russian troops conducted a limited ground assault on Novomykhailivka, about 25km southwest of Donetsk City. Russian forces otherwise continued routine shelling throughout Donetsk Oblast and in eastern Zaporizhia Oblast.



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

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks west of Hulyaipole on September 24 and continued routine strikes in Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts.³⁴ Ukrainian sources reported that Russian troops launched Kh-31 missiles at port infrastructure in Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast, and continued rocket strikes on Zaporizhzhia City and Mykolaiv City.³⁵ Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated that Russian forces shelled the coast of the Kakhovske Reservoir near Chervonohryhorivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (just across the water from Enerhodar).³⁶ This strike is a likely continuation of a recent Russian campaign to target Ukrainian hydrotechnical assets, which the UK Ministry of Defense assessed is unlikely to significantly impact Ukrainian operations due to the distance between these hydrotechnical assets and frontline combat zones.³⁷ Geolocated social media footage confirmed the location of an Iranian Shahed-136 drone attack on Odesa on September 23.³⁸

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

The Kremlin's "partial mobilization" continues to hastily press thousands of men across Russia into military service but remains unlikely to generate effective combat power.³⁹ Russian sources state that some mobilized men will receive 1-2 months of training.⁴⁰ Others may receive even less. Mobilization has drafted men in their upper 50s with serious medical conditions to fight in Ukraine.⁴¹ Social media videos posted on September 24 show mobilized personnel receiving badly maintained and rusted small arms unfit for service.⁴² Social media videos of mobilized men show they have low morale and are undisciplined and unruly.⁴³ Russian civilians continued protests against military mobilization and conducted arson attacks against polling stations in Russia on September 24.⁴⁴

<u>Activity in Russian-occupied Areas</u> (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow's choosing)

Russian occupation forces continue coercively conducting sham referenda in occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson Oblasts on September 24.45 The Kremlin presented a few "international observers" it managed to attract to occupied Ukraine (including Stefan Schaller - the managing director of German energy company Energie Waldeck-Frankenberg GmbH) in an effort to imbue the referenda with a thin veneer of legitimacy.46 Armed Russian occupation forces continue harassing Ukrainian citizens by going door-to-door to collect referenda votes.47 Russian occupation forces are reportedly counting dead persons' votes in the referendum in Alchevsk, Luhansk Oblast.48 Ukrainian partisans are reportedly providing Ukrainian forces with targeting information for referenda voting stations despite increased security in occupied territories.49

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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²² https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1573548223691722754;

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²⁴ https://t.me/rybar/39314

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²⁹ https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/40770; https://t.me/wargonzo/8439

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³²https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0iPZsZcdMHJ6vS6fau718zQWqBKrYwrxt1f1T6uusHrqxmaNRg SXWqaLAZjmWRzWCl

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³⁷ https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1573552903821959168

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³⁹ https://t.me/mod_russia/20147; https://t.me/mod_russia/20147; https://t.me/mod_russia/20135; https://t.me/mod_russia/20135; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/rybar/39309; https://t.me/mod_russia/20135; https:

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