Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 30
Kateryna Stepanenko, Katherine Lawlor, Grace Mappes, Riley Bailey, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan
September 30, 8:30 pm 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.

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not threaten an immediate nuclear attack to halt the Ukrainian counteroffensives into Russian-occupied Ukraine during his speech announcing Russia’s illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. ISW analysts broke down Putin’s speech in a separate September 30 Special Report: “Assessing Putin’s Implicit Nuclear Threats after Annexation.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the illegal Russian annexation of four Ukrainian territories on September 30 without clearly defining the borders of those claimed territories. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov declined to specify the borders of the newly annexed territories in a September 30 conversation with reporters: "[the] Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics [DNR and LNR] were recognized by Russia within the borders of 2014. As for the territories of Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts, I need to clarify this. We will clarify everything today.”¹ DNR head Denis Pushilin added that even the federal district into which the annexed territories will be incorporated remains unclear: “What will it be called, what are the borders—let's wait for the final decisions, consultations are now being held on how to do it right.”² Russian officials may clarify those boundaries and administrative allocations in the coming days but face an inherent problem: Ukrainian forces still control large swathes of Donetsk and Zaporizhia and some areas of Luhansk and Kherson oblasts, a military reality that is unlikely to change in the coming months.

Putin likely rushed the annexation of these territories before making even basic administrative decisions on boundaries and governance. Russian officials have therefore not set clear policies or conditions for proper administration. Organizing governance for these four forcibly annexed oblasts would be bureaucratically challenging for any state after Russian forces systematically killed, arrested, or drove out the Ukrainian officials who previously ran the regional administrations. But the bureaucratic incompetence demonstrated by the Kremlin’s attempted partial mobilization of Russian men suggests that Russian bureaucrats will similarly struggle to establish governance structures over a resistant and unwilling population in the warzone that is Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory.

Putin announced that Russia’s usual autumn conscription cycle will start a month late on November 1, likely because Russia’s partial mobilization of Russian men is taxing the bureaucracy of the Russian military commissariats that would usually oversee the semi-annual conscription cycle.³ Putin’s September 30 decree calls for 120,000 Russian conscripts—7,000 fewer than in autumn 2021. Neither Putin’s decree nor subsequent official statements clarified whether Ukrainian civilians of conscription age (18-27) in Russia’s newly-annexed occupied Ukrainian territories will be liable for conscription. A representative of Russia’s Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate, Rear Admiral Vladimir Tsimlyansky, claimed that no autumn 2022 conscripts would fight in the “special operation” in Ukraine, a promise Putin also made (and broke) about the autumn 2021 and spring 2022 conscripts.⁴ Russian conscripts are not legally deployable overseas until they have received at least four months of training unless Putin were to declare martial
law. Russia’s illegal annexation of occupied areas in Ukraine likely removes this problem within the framework of Russian Federation law, which may be part of the reason for Putin’s rush in announcing the annexation.

**Russian officials could re-mobilize last year’s conscripts when their terms expire on October 1.** Tsimlyansky emphasized on September 30 that all Russian conscripts whose terms have expired—meaning those conscripted in autumn 2021—will be released from service and returned to their residences “in a timely manner.”6 Once released, autumn 2021 conscripts will technically become part of the Russian reserves, making them legally mobilizable under Putin’s September 21 partial mobilization order.

Putin invited some Russian milbloggers and war correspondents who have previously criticized the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) for a lack of transparency about Russian progress in Ukraine to attend his annexation speech in Moscow.7 Russian state media has been increasingly featuring some milbloggers on federal television channels as well, which likely indicates that Putin is attempting to secure the support of these nationalist and pro-war figures rather than censor them. The milblogger presence in Moscow may also explain why several prominent Telegram channels had limited or no coverage of daily frontline news on September 29.

**Key Takeaways**

- Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the illegal Russian annexation of four Ukrainian territories on September 30 without clearly defining the borders of those claimed territories.
- Putin announced that Russia’s usual autumn conscription cycle will start a month late on November 1, likely because Russia’s partial mobilization of Russian men is taxing the bureaucracy of the Russian military commissariats that would usually oversee the semi-annual conscription cycle.
- Russian officials could re-mobilize last year’s conscripts when their terms expire on October 1.
- Ukrainian forces will likely capture or encircle Lyman within the next 72 hours.
- Ukrainian military officials maintained operational silence regarding Ukrainian ground maneuvers in Kherson Oblast but stated that Ukrainian forces continued to force Russian troops into defending their positions.
- Russian troops continued ground assaults in Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian authorities continued efforts to coerce Russian participation in mobilization efforts, but will likely struggle to coerce participation as Russians continue to flee Russia for border states who welcome them.
- Russian officials are accepting bribes and engaging in other preferential treatment to prevent or ease the economic burden of mobilization on the wealthy.
- Russian authorities are continuing to deploy mobilized personnel to Ukraine without adequate training or equipment, and personnel are unlikely to be able to afford to provide their own supplies.
- Russian forces conducted a missile strike on a Ukrainian humanitarian convoy and attempted to blame the Ukrainian government.
Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Significant Fighting in the Past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

Subordinate main effort - Capturing Donetsk Oblast
Supporting effort 1 - Southern Axis

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Mealie
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* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.
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

**Ukrainian Counteroffensives** (Ukrainian efforts to liberate Russian-occupied territories)

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

Ukrainian forces will likely capture or encircle Lyman within the next 72 hours. Russian forces continued to withdraw from positions around Lyman on September 30 as Ukrainian forces continued to envelop Russian troops in the area. The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) officials and Russian war correspondents stated that Russian forces still control Lyman but have withdrawn from their positions in Drobysheve (around 6km northwest of Lyman) and Yampil (about 13km southeast of Lyman). Russian sources claimed that Russian forces still control one road from Lyman to Torske, while Ukrainian forces have cut off the Drobysheve-Torske road in the Stavky area. Russian sources also noted the increasing activity of Ukrainian reconnaissance and sabotage groups on the Svatove-Torske highway northeast of Lyman after reportedly crossing the Zherebets River. Geolocated footage also showed Ukrainian artillery striking withdrawing Russian forces near Torske. Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces have crossed the Siverskyi Donets River in Dronivka and are now operating in the forests south of Kreminna. Russian sources uniformly noted that Ukrainian artillery continues to interdict Russian forces’ single remaining egress route on the Kreminna-Torske road.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are bringing additional reserves to reinforce Russian positions near Lyman, but some milbloggers criticized the Russian military command for failing to learn from its mistakes in Kharkiv Oblast. DNR Head Denis Pushilin claimed that Russian forces continued to deploy additional reserves to hold Lyman on September 30. Russian milbloggers also reported that Russian forces deployed elements of the 503rd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 58th Combined Arms Army near Torske in an effort to break the encirclement in the area, noting that the unit is at least in part composed of newly-mobilized men. Other milbloggers noted that elements of the Western and Central Military districts (WMD and CMD) are operating in the Lyman area alongside the Russian proxy republic units. Many milbloggers claimed that the Russian withdrawal from Lyman resembles the chaotic retreat from Balakliya, Kharkiv Oblast, in its poor coordination and lack of artillery support. Others stated that the Russian military command did not send necessary
reinforcements and are instead firing rockets at Mykolaiv Oblast rather than helping the defense of Lyman. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) only reported striking Ukrainian forces north of Lyman in Ridkodub and did not mention striking Ukrainian forces to the west, east, or south of Lyman.

Ukrainian forces likely continued to make incremental advances around Kupyansk on the eastern bank of the Oskil River on September 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces shelled Petropavlivka (seven kilometers east of Kupyansk), which may indicate that Ukrainian forces are operating in the area.

Ukrainian forces continued to strike Russian military targets in Luhansk Oblast on September 30. Geolocated footage showed the aftermath of Ukrainian reported HIMARS strikes on a television tower and a radio repeater in Starobilsk and at the asphalt plant near Alchevsk that reportedly housed Russian forces.
Assessed Control of Terrain
Around Kharkiv as of
September 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Shtatko, Noel Mikkelson and Daniel Stabile
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Southern Ukraine: (Kherson Oblast)

Ukrainian military officials maintained their operational silence regarding the progress of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in southern Ukraine on September 30. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces are continuing to force Russian troops to defend their positions. The Ukrainian General Staff added that Russian forces are continuing to evict civilians in Kherson City to quarter additional Russian reinforcements. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command noted that Russian forces are attempting to restore the operations of the Antonivsky Bridge and are bringing additional construction materials and repair equipment to the bridge.

Ukrainian forces continued their interdiction campaign on September 29 and September 30, primarily striking Russian ground lines of communications (GLOCs), positions, and ammunition depots in northern and central Kherson Oblast. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command stated that Ukrainian forces struck Russian military convoys in Nova Kakhovka, a command post in Beryslav Raion, and six Russian concentration areas in Kherson City, Nova Kakhovka, Dariivka, and Nova Kardashinka. Ukrainian military officials added that Ukrainian forces targeted an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) control center in Davydiv Brid on the eastern bank of the Inhulets River. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that a Ukrainian strike on Kherson City killed Russian-appointed Kherson Oblast Deputy Occupation Administration Head Aleksei Katerinchev. Local Telegram channels reported witnessing explosions in Nova Kakhovka, and Ukrainian strikes on the Elektromash factory in Nova Kakhovka and the area of the Kherson City shipyard.

Ukrainian and Russian sources identified two areas of kinetic activity on September 30: south of the Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast border and around the Ukrainian bridgehead over Inhulets River. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces discovered and repelled a small Russian sabotage and reconnaissance group in Osokorkivka (on the T0403 highway in northern Kherson Oblast), and the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian forces continued to strike Ukrainian positions in Osokorkivka. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command also noted conducting unspecified “successful actions in the area of Davydiv Brid and noted that Ukrainian forces “suppressed a Russian stronghold,” but this language is vague and can mean that Ukrainian troops conducted a ground attack in the area or inflicted bombardment damage on Russian positions. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted a spoiling attack in anticipation of a Ukrainian attack on Davydiv Brid. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on Bezimenne (southeast of the bridgehead).
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Morkelsen, and Daniel Mealio
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* 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

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

Russian forces continued ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on September 30 but did not make any confirmed territorial gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults northeast of Bakhmut near Bakhmutske and south of Bakhmut near Vesela Dolyna (6km southeast of Bakhmut), Zaitseve (8km southeast of Bakhmut), Otradivka (9km south of Bakhmut), and Mayorsk (20km south of Bakhmut). 33 Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks in Bakhmut itself and near Soledar. 34 Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces continued routine artillery, air, and missile strikes throughout the line of contact in Donetsk Oblast. 35
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 30, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

- Russian forces reported that Ukrainian forces captured Slavky on September 30.
- Russians sources claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew from eastern Bakhmut across the Bakhmutova River on September 22.
- Geolocated footage confirms Ukrainian forces captured Stavky on September 30.
- Geolocated footage confirms Ukrainian control of Yampil on September 30.

Map by George Barros, Katerina Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, and Daniel Medalie © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI’s Critical Threats Project

Legend:
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- 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 in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Russian forces continued artillery, air, and missile strikes west of Hulyiapole, and in Mykolaiv and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts on September 30. Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that Russian forces struck Mykolaiv City, Zaporizhzhia City, Dnipro City, Nikopol, and Kryvyi Rih on September 30. Ukrainian sources also reported that Russian forces fired Smerch multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) rockets near Ochakov, Mykolaiv Oblast. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces struck and destroyed a Russian command post and a Russian S-300 system in Melitopol and struck Russian positions in Tokmak on September 30.

Russian forces continued to use Iranian-made drones to target Ukrainian positions and cities in Southern Ukraine on September 30. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces conducted two Shahed-136 drone attacks on an administrative building and a critical infrastructure facility in Mykolaiv City. Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command also reported that Ukrainian air defenses shot down three Russian Shahed-136 drones in Mykolaiv Oblast and two unspecified loitering munitions—likely also Shahed136 drones—in Odesa Oblast.

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

Russian authorities continued efforts to coerce Russian participation in mobilization efforts. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on September 30 that simplifies the citizenship process for foreigners who serve in the Russian military, further incentivizing foreigners to volunteer for military service. A Russian source stated on September 30 that Russian authorities instituted a travel ban for Russian law enforcement and government personnel who have access to state secrets and are forcing these personnel to surrender their passports. The source also stated that the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs is increasing target practice for its personnel to weekly, indicating Russian efforts to deploy more security service personnel to Ukraine, likely to act as security in occupied territories. Duma deputies from the Republic of Bashkortostan submitted a draft bill to the Russian State Duma on September 30 that would legalize Russian military recruitment efforts in prison for the “special military operation,” taking 10 days off each prisoner’s sentence for each day served in Ukraine. A Russian source reported that Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel began detaining operators of Telegram channels that call for protests and trigger unrest and have likely coerced protest organizers in the Republic of Dagestan to issue public apologies for inciting protests.

Russia will likely struggle to coerce participation in mobilization as Russians continue to flee Russia for border states that welcome them. The Financial Times reported that Kazakh and Georgian officials have expressed willingness to welcome Russians fleeing to Kazakhstan and Georgia from forced mobilization, indicating that Russian influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus has degraded. The Kremlin likely cannot leverage its influence to coerce Kazakhstan and Georgia to return fleeing mobilized personnel to Russia. Russians continue to flee Russia for Georgia and Kazakhstan, leaving behind their vehicles and even their families to escape mobilization. Israeli officials reportedly called all Israeli military personnel who are dual citizens of Russia to return to Israel immediately, indicating international fear that Russia may mobilize people with dual Russian citizenship.
Russian officials are accepting bribes and engaging in other preferential treatment to prevent or ease the burden of mobilization on the wealthy. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that officials in charge of the selection and preparation of mobilization in Khabarovsk Krai established a 100,000 ruble “tariff” for mobilized individuals to avoid mobilization, but this amount is unattainable for most Khabarovsk Krai residents. The Russian Duma passed a law on September 30 that allows mobilized businessmen to apply for deferred loan payments, extensions on business transaction terms, and free account maintenance from their banks.

Russian authorities are continuing to deploy mobilized personnel to Ukraine without adequate training or equipment. A Russian source reported on September 29 that mobilized personnel from Sverdlovsk Oblast stayed at a training center for one day before deploying to Russia’s border areas and did not indicate if these personnel would receive further training. Russian authorities will likely redeploy personnel from border regions to areas in Ukraine as Russian efforts to advance and Ukrainian counteroffensives shift over time. A Russian source reported that Russian military authorities detained a Russian soldier who posted footage showing mobilized personnel from Perm Krai camped in a field in Volgograd Oblast without equipment necessary to weather the outdoors, but that Russian officials denied the detention. Russian sources posted footage of mobilized personnel at training centers in occupied Donetsk Oblast with Soviet-era weapons and equipment. The UK Ministry of Defense reported that Russia’s provision of medical supplies to mobilized personnel and personnel already in Ukraine is worsening and assessed that Russian forces likely have poor awareness of medical and first-aid training, exacerbating low Russian morale.

Russian military personnel, especially newly mobilized personnel, are unlikely to be able to afford to provide their own supplies. A Russian source reported that prices for body armor in Russia have increased ten times since the partial mobilization announcement on September 21. The source reported that mobilized personnel have purchased commercial body armor because they believe it to be more reliable than Russian military-issued equipment. The Russian Anti-Monopoly Service ordered the tightening of price controls on military equipment and uniforms on September 30 to combat high equipment prices. Russian authorities’ decision to combat high costs of commercially-available equipment rather than provide quality equipment to Russian military personnel further emphasizes the ad hoc nature of Russian mobilization and the Russian government’s failure to plan or provide for the sudden influx of personnel.

Regional Russian authorities continue to try to fix problems that result in the calling up of individuals ineligible for mobilization. A Russian source reported that Moscow Oblast authorities canceled some mobilization summons for wrongly mobilized men and have dedicated special groups in military recruitment offices to canceling the improper summonses. Altai Krai authorities indefinitely postponed the dispatch of newly mobilized personnel originally scheduled to depart on September 30. A local news outlet reported that Altai Krai authorities also created a commission for wrongly mobilized personnel and will resume mobilization efforts in mid-October.

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

Russian forces conducted a missile strike on a Ukrainian humanitarian convoy and attempted to blame the Ukrainian government on September 30. Russian forces struck the humanitarian convoy outside
Ukrainian-controlled Zaporizhzhia City, killing 28 civilians and wounding 88. The convoy was reportedly waiting at a Russian checkpoint to enter Russian-occupied territory in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, possibly to transport Ukrainian civilians out of occupied territories. The Russian-appointed head of the Zaporizhzhia Occupation Administration, Evgeny Balitsky, and other occupation officials claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted the attack in “revenge” for the Russian annexation of Zaporizhzhia Oblast and claimed the convoy was fleeing to Russian-occupied territory. Russian forces may hope to restrict the movement of Ukrainian civilians in occupied areas; the Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on September 30 that occupation administration officials intend to prevent all movement into Ukrainian-held territory on October 1 and will introduce an unspecified system of temporary travel permits.

Russian occupation officials continued efforts to mobilize Ukrainian civilians in occupied Ukrainian territories by force. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 30 that occupation authorities in Kherson City have increased their arbitrary detentions of fighting-age men, whom Russian forces then force into units that will soon be deployed to the frontlines. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that additional Rosgvardia units deployed to Berdyansk to suppress expected unrest as occupation officials forcibly mobilize Berdyansk industrial workers. The Ukrainian mayor of Mariupol, Petro Andryuschenko, said on September 30 that Russian military officials stop men on the street to check their documents, and men registered in Donetsk Oblast are immediately mobilized and sent to the frontlines. The Ukrainian mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, said on September 30 that Russian occupation officials opened a military commissariat in Melitopol and intend to forcibly mobilize 3,000 “volunteers” from the city by October 10. Fedorov reported that if a “volunteer” refuses conscription, he must bring another man to take his place.

Russian occupation officials intensified their efforts to eliminate Ukrainian influence and coerce citizens to cooperate with Russian administrators following Putin’s illegal annexation of occupied Ukrainian territories. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 30 that Russian occupation officials are forcing Ukrainian residents to obtain Russian citizenship and passports and are threatening to fire teachers who refuse to exchange their Ukrainian passports. Russian officials are reportedly confiscating Ukrainian passports and have threatened to deport those Ukrainian citizens who do not accept Russian citizenship by October 1.

Occupation officials in Donetsk Oblast announced the confiscation of property from 144 Ukrainian officials from the Donetsk Oblast Administration and from various companies in Donetsk on September 30. Occupation officials will likely either nationalize the property or distribute it to Kremlin-selected favorites as a reward for their support of Russia’s illegal annexation of the oblast.

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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