Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 12, 2023

Nicole Wolkov, Angelica Evans, Riley Bailey, Christina Harward, and Mason Clark August 12, 2023, 3:45pm 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 cutoff for this product was 12:10pm ET on August 12. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 13 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces are maintaining a presence on the east (left) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast in contrast to previous Ukrainian raids, but ISW does not yet assess that these positions constitute a bridgehead. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed on the evening of August 11 that Ukrainian forces have established positions west of Kozachi Laheri after several days of limited raids across the Dnipro River.[1] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups continue to operate west of Kozachi Laheri, but that the settlement itself is still under Russian control.[2] The milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian reconnaissance groups continue to operate near the Antonivsky Bridge and in the Hola Prystan area and conduct raids across the Dnipro River. [3] Continuing Russian claims that Ukrainian forces maintain a presence on the east bank of the Dnipro River suggest that Russian forces are concerned that Ukrainian forces have established semi-lasting positions across the river.[4] Russian sources continue to describe Ukrainian groups operating on the left bank as small in size and fighting to be primarily between light infantry units. No Russian sources have indicated that Ukrainian forces on the left bank have the heavy equipment or vehicles likely required to establish a bridgehead that would be necessary to enable wider offensive operations into left bank Kherson Oblast.[5] An effective Russian mechanized counterattack could threaten this Ukrainian advance position, but it is unclear if Russian forces possess the mechanized reserves necessary to do so. ISW will continue to offer a conservative assessment of the situation on the east bank of Kherson Oblast until or unless ISW observes visual confirmation of an enduring Ukrainian presence on the east bank of Kherson Oblast, ISW has not yet observed visual evidence that Ukrainian forces have established a permanent position or have deployed a substantial number of personnel near Kozachi Laheri.

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least two sectors of the front on August 12 and reportedly made tactically significant advances along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) and Berdyansk (Zaporizhia-Donetsk Oblast border area) directions.[6] Geolocated footage published on August 11 indicates that Ukrainian forces made marginal gains near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) in the Zaporizhia-Donetsk Oblast border area.[7] Russian milbloggers claimed late on August 12 that Russian forces abandoned their positions in Urozhaine after days of intense fighting, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of these claims.[8]

The "Vostok" volunteer battalion, which is allegedly defending in the Urozhaine area, had earlier expressed concern that Russian forces would lose Urozhaine if the Russian military does not fix persistent issues with Russian counterbattery capabilities.[9] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are effectively using electronic warfare systems to disrupt Russian communications in western Zaporizhia Oblast and retain large artillery and precision munitions stocks to support interdiction efforts against Russian forces there.[10] The milblogger also claimed that Ukrainian forces have significantly reduced the time between target identification and strikes on Russian targets with HIMARS rockets, warning that Russian forces need to move farther than 10km from the frontline in western Zaporizhia Oblast to be safe from Ukrainian strikes.[11]

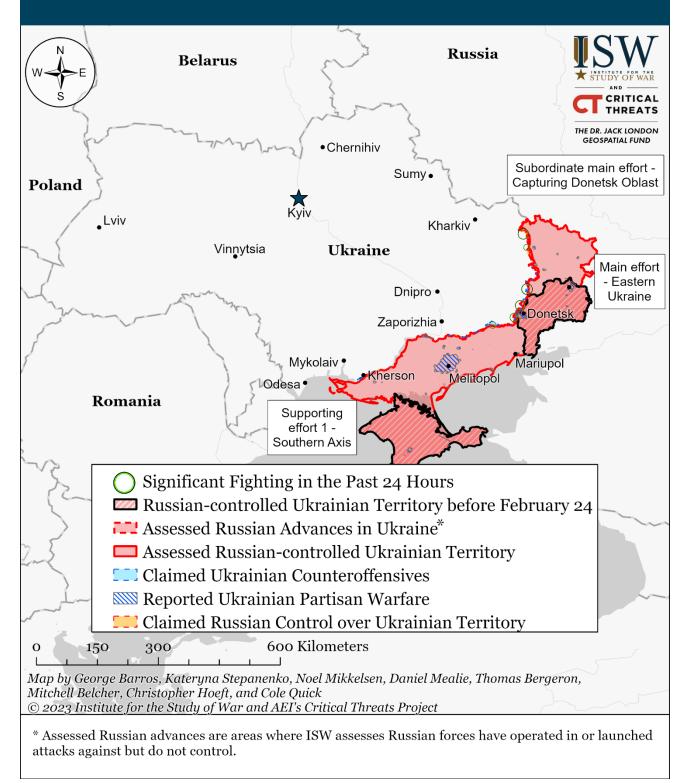
Ukrainian forces reportedly launched two missile strikes targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge and a drone attack targeting occupied Crimea on August 12. Russian authorities claimed that Russian air defenses downed up to three Ukrainian ground attack missiles fired from S-200 systems targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge.[12] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also reported Ukrainian forces targeted occupied Crimea with 20 drones on the night of August 11–12.[13] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian air defenses shot down 14 Ukrainian drones and downed another 6 drones with electronic warfare (EW) systems.[14] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger claimed that Russian air defense units of the 31st Air Defense Division shot down one of the Ukrainian missiles near Kerch in occupied Crimea.[15] Russian sources claimed that Russian authorities stopped traffic on the bridge for several hours following the Ukrainian missile and drone strikes, creating a traffic jam of almost 1,300 cars.[16] Russian sources claimed that Crimean occupation authorities

are initiating tougher criminal liability for publishing photos and videos showing locations of military installations such as air defenses, likely in response to a photo posted today showing the location of a Russian air defense system in occupied Crimea.[17] Ukrainian strikes targeting Russian logistics in Crimea are a part of a deliberate interdiction campaign aimed at setting favorable conditions for larger counteroffensive operations. Previous Ukrainian strikes on bridges along Russian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) between occupied Crimea and occupied Kherson Oblast continue to disrupt Russian logistics.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- Russian milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces are maintaining a presence on the
 east (left) bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast in contrast to previous Ukrainian raids,
 but ISW does not yet assess that these positions constitute a bridgehead.
- Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least two sectors of the front on August 12 and reportedly made tactically significant advances along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts.
- Ukrainian forces reportedly launched two missile strikes targeting the Kerch Strait Bridge and a drone attack targeting occupied Crimea on August 12.
- Russian forces conducted counteroffensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on August 12 and made no confirmed gains.
- The Russian Ministry of Digital Development is preparing an amendment to the law on the conscription age that would increase the military service deferment age for IT specialists from 27 years to 30 years, likely in response to concerns about "brain drain" from Russia.
- Russian authorities are reportedly adjusting propaganda language about the war aimed at Russian schoolchildren in Russia and occupied Ukraine.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 12, 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

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

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kupyansk area but did not make any confirmed gains on August 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations northeast of Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk), north of Kyslivka (22km southwest of Kupyansk), and near Ivanivka (20km southeast of Kupyansk).[19] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Russian offensive operations in the Kupyansk direction aim to draw Ukrainian forces from the Bakhmut direction, supporting ISW's previous assessment that intensified Russian offensive operations in the area hope to draw Ukrainian forces away from more operationally significant areas of the front.[20] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that elements of the Russian Western Grouping of Forces improved their tactical positions in unspecified areas in the Kupyansk direction.[21]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful counterattacks northeast of Kupyansk on August 12. The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Western Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian counterattacks near Pershotravneve (21km east of Kupyansk), Synkivka, and the Mankivka tract (around 15km east of Kupyansk).[22]

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line on August 12 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations southeast of Andriivka (15km west of Svatove).[23] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces seized the initiative near Karmazynivka (13km southwest of Svatove) and conducted assaults near Nadiya (15km west of Svatove).[24] Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces made unspecified advances near Torske (15km west of Kreminna).[25]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line on August 12. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Novoselivske (15km north of Svatove), Serhiivka (12km southwest of Svatove), and in the Serebryanske forest area south of Kreminna.[26]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of August 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET Belgorod **Oblast** Dvorichna Troitske CRITICAL THREATS THE DR. JACK LONDON Ivanivka GEOSPATIAL FUND Kupyansk Shevchenkove Nyzhnia Duvanka Bilokurakyne Nevske Kreminna Siversk Sloviansk Kramatorsk Druzhkivka Kostyantyniv Toretsk Debaltseve 60 Kilometers 15 30 Map by George Barros, Kateryng Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoeft, and Cole Quick © 2023 Institute for the Study of Wardand AEI's Critical Threats Project Significant Fighting in the Assessed Russian Advances in Claimed Ukrainian past 24 Hours Counteroffensives Reported Ukrainian Partisan Russian Ground Lines of Assessed Russian-controlled Communication Ukrainian Territory Claimed Russian Control over Territory before February 24 **Ukrainian Territory**

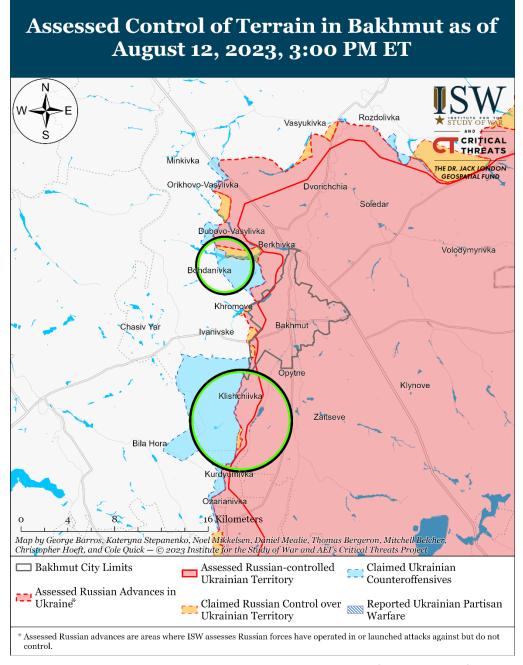
Note: A Russian source claimed on August 8 that Russian forces penetrated two kilometers into Ukrainian defenses near the Serebryanske Forest.

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

<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

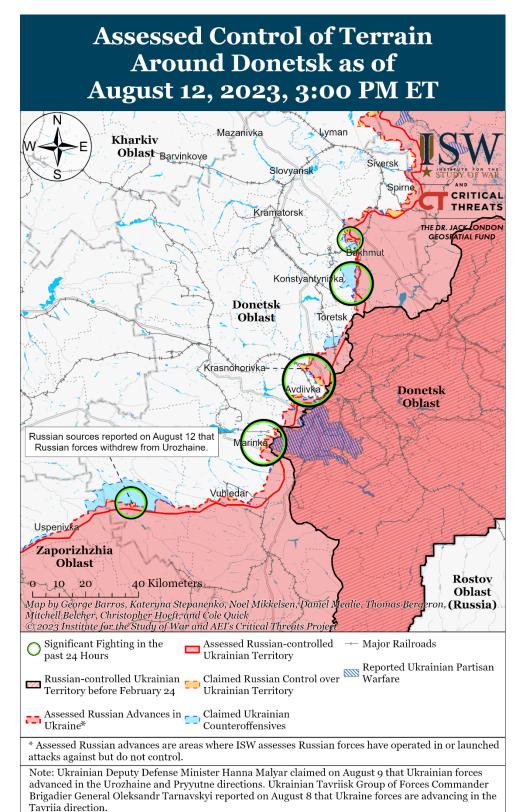
Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted offensive operations around Bakhmut on August 12, but did not make any confirmed or claimed advances. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Yakovlivka (14km northeast of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[27] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces continue to repel Ukrainian attacks from the heights around Klishchiivka despite Russian forces defending lowland positions in the settlement.[28] Russian sources claimed that the area west of Klishchiivka is contested and that intense fighting is ongoing.[29] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Force Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Ukrainian forces continue to hold the initiative around Bakhmut.[30]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks around Bakhmut but did not make any confirmed advances on August 12. A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces counterattacked near Klishchiivka and are gradually advancing.[31] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Bohdanivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka, and Bila Hora (12km southwest of Bakhmut).[32]



The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on August 12. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (14km southwest of Donetsk City), and Nevelske (13km southwest of Avdiivka).[33]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on August 12, but did not make any confirmed or claimed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Avdiivka and Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[34]



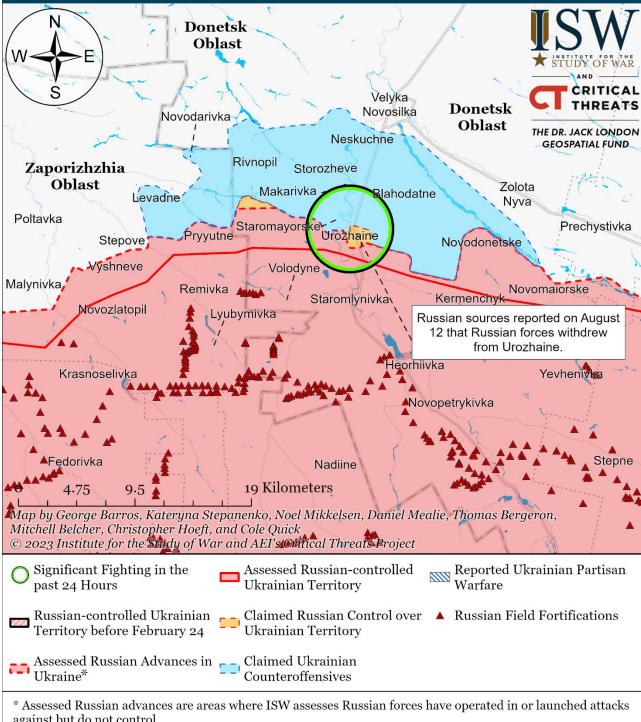
<u>Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis</u> (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on August 12 and reportedly made tactically significant advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces abandoned their positions in Urozhaine on August 12 after days of intense fighting and several statements earlier in the day that Russian forces were struggling to hold their positions in the settlement, but ISW cannot independently confirm these reports at this time.[35] Geolocated footage published on August 11 shows that Ukrainian forces made marginal gains near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[36] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of Urozhaine on the night of August 11–12 after Ukrainian forces briefly took control of the northern part of the settlement earlier in the day on August 11.[37] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed early on August 12 that elements of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces repelled two Ukrainian attacks near Urozhaine.[38]

Several Russian sources reported Ukrainian advances and difficult fighting in Urozhaine prior to the late-breaking unconfirmed reports of a Russian withdrawal from the settlement. The "Vostok" volunteer battalion, which is allegedly defending in the Urozhaine area, stated early on August 12 that Russian forces were losing their positions in the settlement and that the Russian loss of the entire settlement was likely.[39] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces entered the northern part of Urozhaine earlier on August 12, and that fierce fighting is ongoing in the area.[40] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces were struggling to hold positions in Urozhaine due to Ukrainian fire from three sides.[41] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled a small Ukrainian attack near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and that elements of the 127th Motorized Rifle Division (5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) destroyed a Ukrainian sabotage group north of Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[42]

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances on August 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Urozhaine.[43]

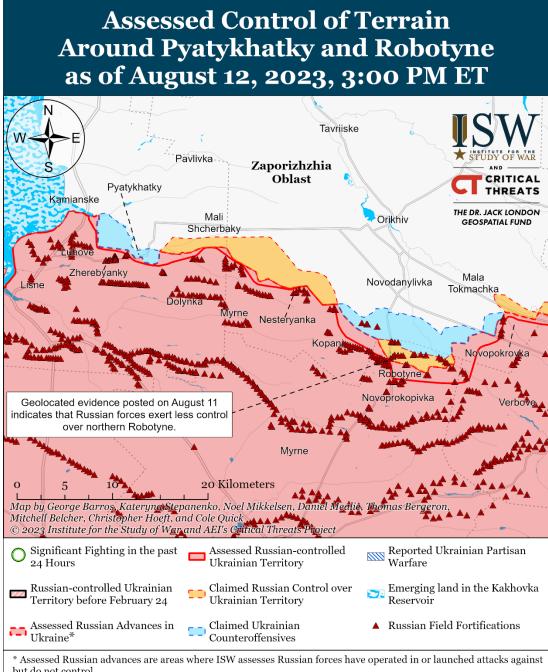
Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of August 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



against but do not control.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine and Pryyutne directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskyi reported on August 8 that Ukraine forces are advancing in the Tavriia direction.

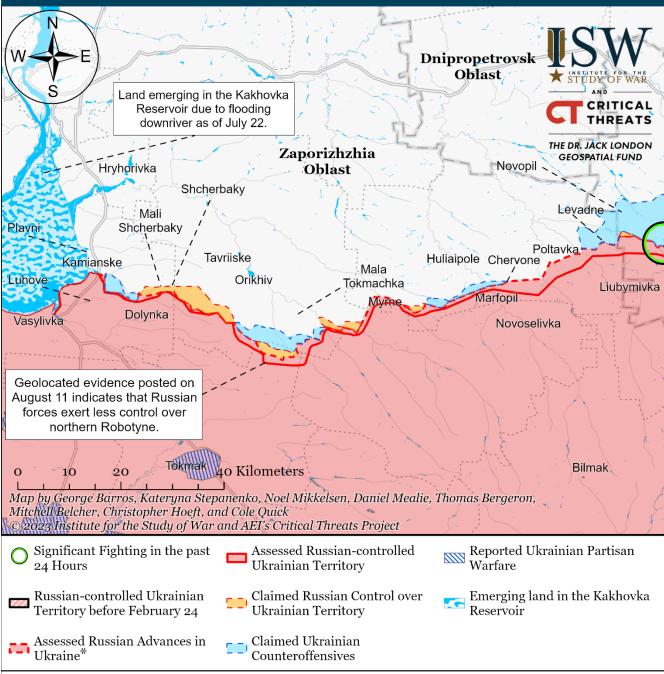
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and did not make any confirmed advances on August 12. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[44] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled three Ukrainian attacks near Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv). [45] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian infantry groups attacked Robotyne but did not specify the outcome of those attacks. [46] Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces achieved partial success near the settlement.[47] Elements of a volunteer battalion from North Ossetia-Alania reportedly defending near Pyatykhatky (25km southwest of Orikhiv) and Zherebyanky (26km southwest of Orikhiv) claimed that there is active fighting in the area.[48] Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Zherebyanky.[49]



but do not control

Note: A Russian source claimed on August 11 that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Robotyne slightly along a six kilometer wide front. A Russian source claimed on August 10 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces one and a half kilometers away from Robotyne. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine, Pryyutne, and Verbove directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Serhii Kuzmin claimed on August 8 that Ukrainian forces advanced hundreds of meters near Robotyne.

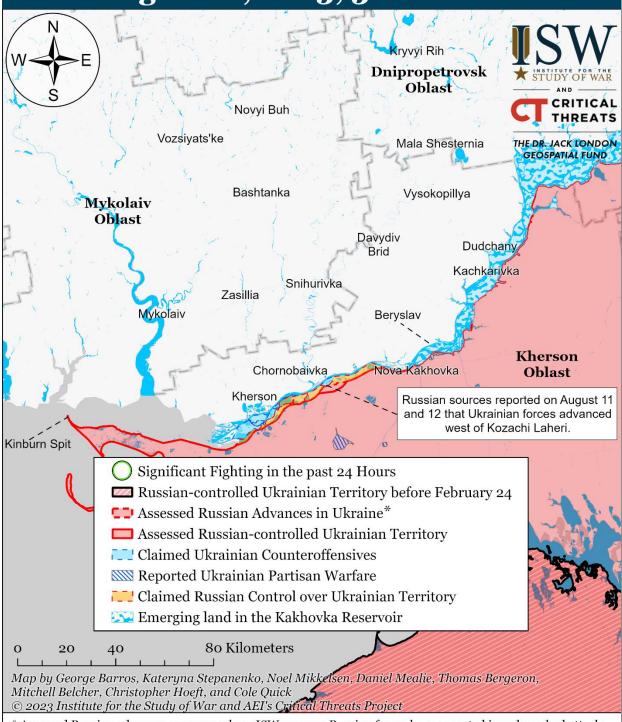
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of August 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: A Russian source claimed on August 11 that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Robotyne slightly along a six kilometer wide front. A Russian source claimed on August 10 that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces one and a half kilometers away from Robotyne. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 9 that Ukrainian forces advanced in the Urozhaine, Pryyutne, and Verbove directions. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Serhii Kuzmin claimed on August 8 that Ukrainian forces advanced hundreds of meters near Robotyne. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskyi reported on August 8 that Ukraine forces are advancing in the Tavriia direction.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of August 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

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

The Russian Ministry of Digital Development is preparing an amendment to the law on the conscription age that would increase the military service deferment age for IT specialists from 27 years to 30 years, likely in response to concerns about "brain drain" from Russia.[50] The changes, if approved, are expected to go into effect before the spring 2024 conscription cycle and will correlate with the recent amendments that increased the upper conscription age limit from 27 to 30 starting in January 2024.[51]

<u>Activities in Russian-occupied areas</u> (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian authorities are reportedly adjusting propaganda language about the war aimed at Russian schoolchildren in Russia and occupied Ukraine. Russian authorities will reportedly introduce a new history textbook for all 10th and 11th graders in Russia and in occupied territories in Ukraine starting on September 1.[52] Ukrainian sources, including Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko, indicated that Russian authorities are likely increasing their propaganda efforts in schools because television — the channel through which the Kremlin has traditionally spread its propaganda narratives — is less popular among younger Russian generations.[53] Russian Presidential Aide Vladimir Medinsky allegedly stated that the new textbooks will refer to Ukraine not as a "Nazi state" but as an "ultranationalist state."[54] This change in rhetoric may indicate that the Kremlin is concerned that using divisive labels such as "Nazi" to educate schoolchildren will make future assimilation of occupied territories difficult.

Russian opposition media outlet *Verstka* reported on August 11 that the United Russia party's candidate list for the September 2023 regional elections in occupied territories includes Russian occupation officials and Kremlin officials.[55] *Verstka* reported that United Russia's candidate list for elections in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) include DNR head Denis Pushilin and current deputies from the "People's Council of the DNR."[56] The list also includes Artyom Perekhrist, who is reportedly the head of a department within the Kremlin's internal policy administration that monitors the occupied territories in Ukraine and participates in the appointment of high-level occupation officials.[57] *Verstka* reported that there were only three active Russian servicemen and volunteers on the United Russia candidate list for the DNR, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's promises to nominate "members of the special military operation" to political positions.[58] The absence of United Russia candidates with military experience is likely due to the lack of political experience among prospective candidates with military experience, as previously reported by ISW, as well as Ukrainian voters' negative attitudes towards the war, as reported by *Verstka* in July 2023.[59]

<u>Significant activity in Belarus</u> (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.

[1] https://t.me/rybar/50635

[2] https://t.me/rybar/50635; https://t.me/dva_majors/23394

[3] https://t.me/rybar/50635; https://t.me/dva majors/23405

[4] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-9-2023; https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-8-2023

[5] https://t.me/dva_majors/23394; https://t.me/Separ13_13/17343;https://t.me/osetin20/6909; https://t.me/SALDO _VGA/1059; https://t.me/romanov_92/41082; https://t.me/romanov_92/41080; https://t.me/dva_majors/23145; https://t.me/dva_majors/23148; https://t.me/dva_majors/23149; https://t.me/batalyon15/2545

- [6] https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbido2Z8S8cY9aHh1srNNHzNTAfsNn6M2M7WkDAmqVsK62CeXLxkBaMgvKn19TBCiBLXk8l
- [7] https://t.me/ChDambiev/24959; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050913740693506?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050918597697537?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050921265274885?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050921265274885?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050924343894026?s=20
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- [31] https://t.me/readovkanews/64121
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- [36] https://t.me/ChDambiev/24959; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050913740693506?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050918597697537?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050921265274885?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050921265274885?s=20; https://twitter.com/vosintt/status/1690050924343894026?s=20
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