

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 16, 2023

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September 16, 2023, 6:25pm ET

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

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

**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 12:15pm ET on September 16. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the September 17 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut direction on September 16 and continued to make gains in the area.** Geolocated footage posted on September 15 confirms that Ukrainian forces have advanced south of Rozdolivka (about 13km northeast of Bakhmut) and in northern Klishchiivka (about 6km southwest of Bakhmut).[1] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar noted that fighting is ongoing near Klishchiivka and Kurdyumivka (12km southwest of Bakhmut) and stated that Ukrainian forces continue to be successful in the Klishchiivka area.[2] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsky posted footage of Ukrainian personnel in Andriivka (8km southwest of Bakhmut) following the Ukrainian liberation of the settlement on September 14.[3]

**Ukrainian advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast have likely forced the Russian command to prioritize the Russian defense there and laterally redeploy elements of a relatively elite formation away from the Russian defense south of Bakhmut.** North Ossetian volunteer battalions "Storm Ossetia" and "Alania," which are operating in western Zaporizhia Oblast, posted an image on September 16 purporting to show a small detachment of the Russian 83rd Separate Guards Air Assault (VDV) Brigade in Nesteryanka (on the western shoulder of the current Ukrainian breach in western Zaporizhia Oblast).[4] Elements of the 83rd Brigade deployed to defend against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations around Klishchiivka in late June and were observed in combat in the area in late August.[5] Elements of the 83rd Brigade were reportedly still operating in the Bakhmut area as of September 11, although elements of the brigade may have been split across two different sectors of the front.[6] Klishchiivka has been a focal point of fighting in the Bakhmut area in recent weeks, and the redeployment of any elements of the 83rd VDV Brigade amid Ukrainian advances near Klishchiivka suggests a deep concern about Ukrainian advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast and the Russian prioritization of the defense there.

ISW has previously assessed that Ukrainian counteroffensive operations along several lines of effort would force the Russian command to prioritize certain sectors of the front and conduct lateral redeployments that offer Ukraine opportunities for exploitation.[7] Ukrainian counteroffensive operations have fixed relatively elite units and formations to the area, including elements of the 98th

VDV Division, the 83rd VDV Brigade, the 11th VDV Brigade, the 31st VDV Brigade, the 106th VDV Division, and the 364th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff Main Directorate).[8] Russian forces have thus far been unwilling to send these relatively elite formations to aid in the critical defensive effort in western Zaporizhia Oblast, and Ukrainian operations around Bakhmut appear to continue preventing the Russian command from doing so at scale. ISW will publish a review of the strategic significance of how Ukrainian operations have fixed Russian forces to the Bakhmut area in an upcoming special edition.

**Ukrainian forces also advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 16 and continued to penetrate the Russian defensive layer that lies ahead of the current extent of Ukrainian advances.** Geolocated footage published on September 16 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced along Russian defensive positions to the west of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv).[9] Additional geolocated footage published on September 15 indicates that Ukrainian infantry advanced further along a series of Russian defensive positions immediately west of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) but likely did not maintain control of these positions.[10] The Ukrainian presence at these Russian defensive positions indicates that Russian forces do not control these positions either and that Ukrainian forces are continuing to operate past the Russian defensive layer that runs northwest of Verbove to north of Solodka Balka (20km south of Orikhiv).

**Ukrainian forces have likely made a significant tactical breach along a section of the current Russian defense layer in the Robotyne area over the past several weeks that they continue to widen.** Ukrainian forces have continued offensive operations past a section of the Russian defensive layer west of Verbove since penetrating it on September 4 and have widened their breach along a 2.6km section of those Russian defensive positions.[11] The continued absence of observed Ukrainian heavy equipment and vehicles past this defensive layer continues to indicate that Ukrainian forces have yet to complete a breakthrough of this defensive layer, however.[12] Ukrainian officials have indicated that the series of Russian defensive positions currently ahead of the Ukrainian advance may be less challenging than the initial Russian defensive layer that Ukrainian forces broke through to the north.[13] Russian forces had concentrated the majority of their combat power at those forward-most Russian defensive positions to defend against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations, and these Russian forces have likely suffered heavy losses and conducted fighting withdrawals to prepared positions behind the current defensive layer.[14] ISW has long assessed that Russian forces lack the manpower to man the entire multi-echeloned Russian defensive fortification systems in southern Ukraine, and the Russian forces defending the current layer of defense are likely elements of formations that have been fighting in the area without operational-level unit rotation since the start of the counteroffensive or elements of formations that laterally transferred from elsewhere along the front.[15]

**Russian ultranationalists continued to complain about endemic lying within the Russian military after Russian State Duma Deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev voiced similar complaints on September 15.** A Russian milblogger posted a statement reportedly from a subscriber on September 16 that concurred with Gurulev's assertion that the culture of lying in the Russian military is the main issue preventing a Russian victory in Ukraine.[16] Another Russian milblogger stated that the issue is a "disaster" and that lies occur at all levels of the Russian military as subordinate commanders are afraid to report the truth about the condition and needs of units and formations.[17] The milblogger stated the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Russian President

Vladimir Putin are likely receiving false reports. The milblogger added that tyranny (bad command culture), fraud, and a lack of military resourcefulness are some of the issues affecting the Russian military in Ukraine and that the main goal of the Russian military should be to minimize personnel losses. A Russian insider source compared Gurulev to deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin in his role as the “front line truth teller.”[18]

**A Ukrainian naval drone strike likely damaged a Russian ship in the Black Sea on September 14.** Ukrainian newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda* published a photo reportedly from a source within the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) that indicates that Ukrainian naval drones struck and damaged a Russian Bora-class corvette near the entrance to Sevastopol Bay in occupied Crimea on September 14.[19] Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov stated on September 16 that Ukraine will conduct more drone attacks on Russian ships in the future.[20] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian ships do not stay at their bases but are constantly moving between naval bases in Russia and occupied Crimea to avoid strikes against them.[21] Russian forces have previously used large ships in the Black Sea to mitigate the damage that Ukrainian strikes have inflicted on other Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) in southern Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces are likely targeting Russian ships in the Black Sea to further damage Russia’s ability to mitigate ongoing logistics complications among other things.[22]

**A Ukrainian official confirmed on September 16 that a civilian vessel used the Ukrainian corridor in the Black Sea to reach a Ukrainian port for the first time.** Ukrainian Minister for Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure Oleksandr Kubrakov announced that civilian bulk carriers flying the Palau flag used the existing Ukrainian corridor to sail towards Chornomorsk, where the vessels will load over 20,000 tons of grain for export to countries in Africa and Asia.[23] The Kremlin previously escalated its posturing in the Black Sea to curtail maritime traffic to Ukraine and increase its leverage to extract maximalist concessions to rejoin the Black Sea Grain Initiative.[24] United Kingdom military aircraft are reportedly conducting patrols over the Black Sea to deter Russian forces from acting aggressively towards civilian vessels.[25] Kubrakov stated that five civilian vessels have traveled from Ukraine along the Ukrainian Black Sea corridor since August 15: *Joseph Schulte*, *Primus*, *Anna-Theresa*, *Ocean Courtesy*, and *Puma*.[26]

**Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met in Vladivostok, where Kim viewed pieces of Russian weapons technology on September 16.** Kim viewed Tu-22MS, Tu-95MS, and Tu-160 strategic bombers; Su25SM3, Su-30SM, and Su-34 fighter-bombers; a MiG-31I missile carrier with Kinzhal missiles; the frigate *Marshal Shaposhnikov*; a Uranus anti-ship missile system; and Kalibr cruise missiles.[27] Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) Commander Lieutenant General Sergey Kobylash told Kim that the Tu-160 strategic bombers received new Kh-BD cruise missiles with a claimed range of over 6,500 kilometers and can carry 12 such missiles.[28] Russia is highly unlikely to provide physical systems or weapons to North Korea due to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s likely concern that this provision may trigger secondary sanctions against Russia, but Putin may be open to other forms of technological and defensive cooperation with North Korea in return for North Korean artillery ammunition.[29]

**The Russian military leadership may be removing ineffective air defense officials on the pretext of corruption charges to avoid admitting the failures of Russian air defenses**

**against increasing drone strikes on Russian cities including Moscow.** Russian outlet *Kommersant* reported on September 16 that the Tula Oblast Venesky District Court sentenced Vladislav Gukov, former head of the MoD Department of State Defense Procurement, to a nine-year prison term for corruption.[30] *Kommersant* noted that the investigation found that Gukov accepted over 15 million rubles (\$154,950) in bribes from various enterprises that were meant to supply the MoD with “urgently needed” X-ray diagnostic systems for KamAZ vehicles.[31] A Russian insider source alleged that Gukov was a close personal friend of Major General Vyacheslav Lobuzko, former commander of a division of the 3rd Separate Air Defense Army and one of the designers of the “Voronezh” cruise and ballistic missile detection system, whom Russian authorities also imprisoned for corruption in May.[32] The insider source additionally claimed that Gukov was personally responsible for signing off on the procurement of air defense systems and complexes.[33]

Gukov’s corruption charge and his role as a prominent Russian air defense official closely mirror the case of the commander of the Moscow-based 1st Special Purpose Air and Missile Defense, Army Major General Konstantin Ogienko, whom Moscow Oblast authorities arrested on similar corruption and bribery charges relating to giving state defense property to an unnamed civilian organization.[34] ISW has no reason to doubt that these air defense officials are complicit in corruption and bribery schemes, but the recent trend of arrests of prominent air defense officials on corruption charges may suggest that higher echelons of the Russian military wish to remove these air defense officials from their positions without having to admit that the Russian domestic air defense system is failing.[35]

**Russian military officials continue efforts to solidify Russia’s relationship with African states amidst changing dynamics on the continent resulting from the Russian MoD’s efforts to subsume the Wagner Group.** Russian milbloggers and Malian national broadcaster *ORTM* reported that Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov arrived in Bamako, Mali on September 16 and met with the Malian and Nigerien defense ministers and Malian junta head Assimi Goita.[36] Russian milbloggers speculated that Yevkurov and the Malian and Nigerien ministers discussed military-technical cooperation, the implications of the coup in Niger, and increased Russian MoD support for the Malian junta against Tuareg rebels in northern Mali.[37] One Russian source suggested that the MoD seeks to take over Wagner Group remnants in northern Mali, which is consistent with ISW’s previous observation that the Russian MoD has recently made efforts to assume control of Wagner’s operations on the African continent.[38] Yevkurov notably visited multiple African countries including Burkina Faso, Libya, and Syria in early September to replace “private military companies” with MoD elements.[39] The Ukrainian Resistance Center relatedly reported on September 16 that the Russian MoD is increasingly sending representatives to Algeria, Mali, and Sudan to convince remaining Wagner fighters to sign contracts with a structure affiliated with and supervised by the MoD.[40]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut direction on September 16 and continued to make gains in the area.**
- **Ukrainian advances in western Zaporizhia Oblast have likely forced the Russian command to prioritize the Russian defense there and laterally redeploy elements of a relatively elite formation away from the Russian defense south of Bakhmut.**

- **Ukrainian forces also advanced in western Zaporizhia Oblast on September 16 and continued to penetrate the Russian defensive layer that lies ahead of the current extent of Ukrainian advances.**
- **Ukrainian forces have likely made a significant tactical breach along a section of the current Russian defense layer in the Robotyne area over the past several weeks that they continue to widen.**
- **Russian ultranationalists continued to complain about endemic lying within the Russian military after Russian State Duma Deputy and former Deputy Commander of the Southern Military District (SMD) Lieutenant General Andrei Gurulev voiced similar complaints on September 15.**
- **A Ukrainian naval drone strike likely damaged a Russian ship in the Black Sea on September 14.**
- **A Ukrainian official confirmed on September 16 that a civilian vessel used the Ukrainian corridor in the Black Sea to reach a Ukrainian port for the first time.**
- **Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met in Vladivostok, where Kim viewed pieces of Russian weapons technology on September 16.**
- **The Russian military leadership may be removing ineffective air defense officials on the pretext of corruption charges to avoid admitting the failures of Russian air defenses against increasing drone strikes on Russian cities including Moscow.**
- **Russian military officials continue efforts to solidify Russia's relationship with African states amidst changing dynamics on the continent resulting from the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) efforts to subsume the Wagner Group.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia on September 16 and advanced in some areas.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in at least two sectors of the front on September 16 and advanced near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian milbloggers continue complaining about the role of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) in perpetuating issues affecting Russian military personnel.**
- **Russian occupation officials continue efforts to resettle residential areas of occupied Ukraine with Russians.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



***We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

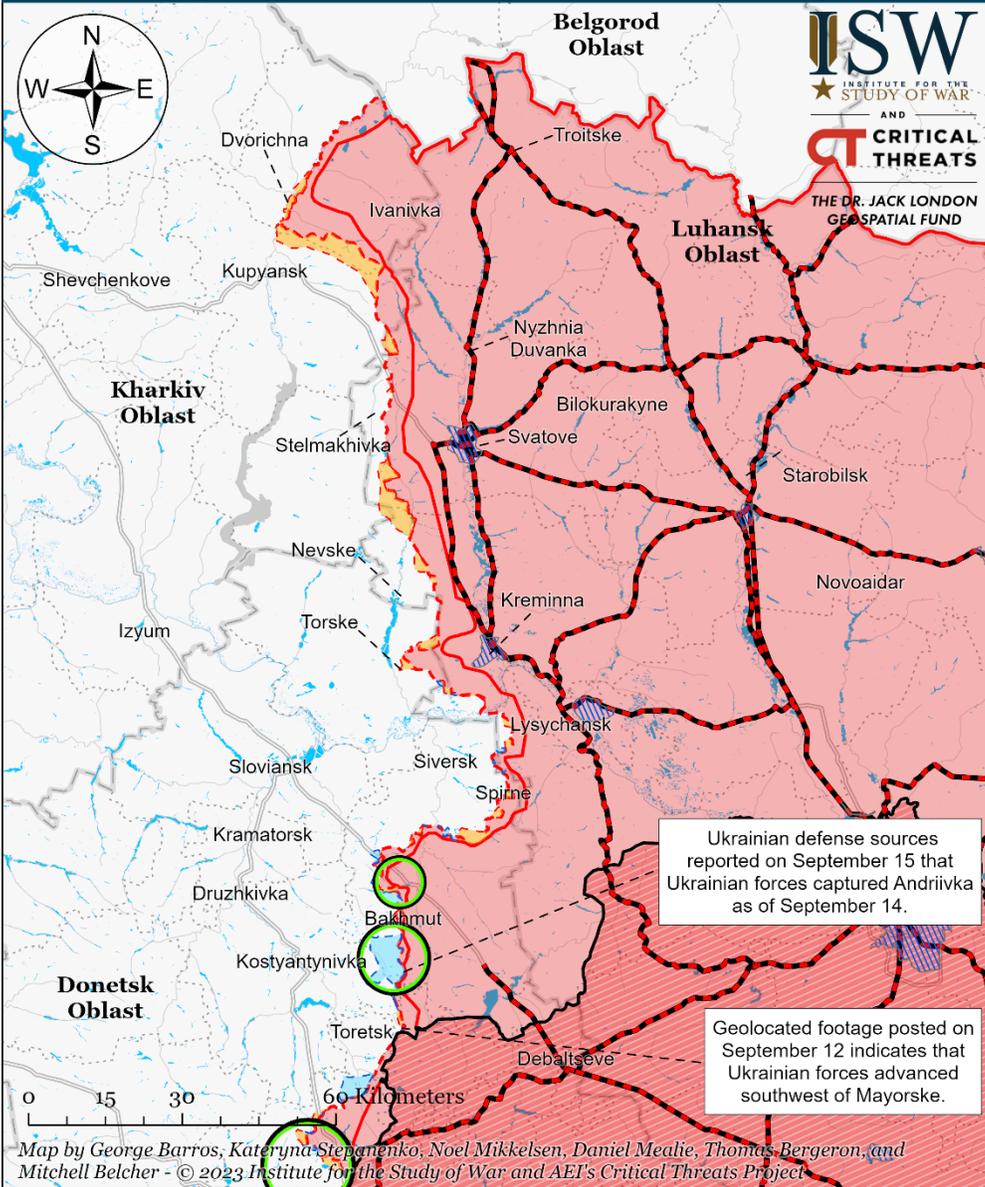
### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

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

Russian forces continued fighting along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on September 16 and reportedly made marginal advances. A Russian news aggregator claimed that Russian forces advanced south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka and Berestove (32km south of Kreminna) on September 16.[41] The Russian MoD claimed on September 16 that Russian forces improved their tactical positions in the Kupyansk direction in the past week.[42]

Ukrainian forces reportedly continued ground attacks on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and did not advance on September 16. Russian military officials claimed that Russian forces repelled two Ukrainian attacks in the directions of Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk) and Vilshana (15km northeast of Kupyansk) and five Ukrainian attacks near Torske (14km west of Kreminna) and the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[43]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- 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

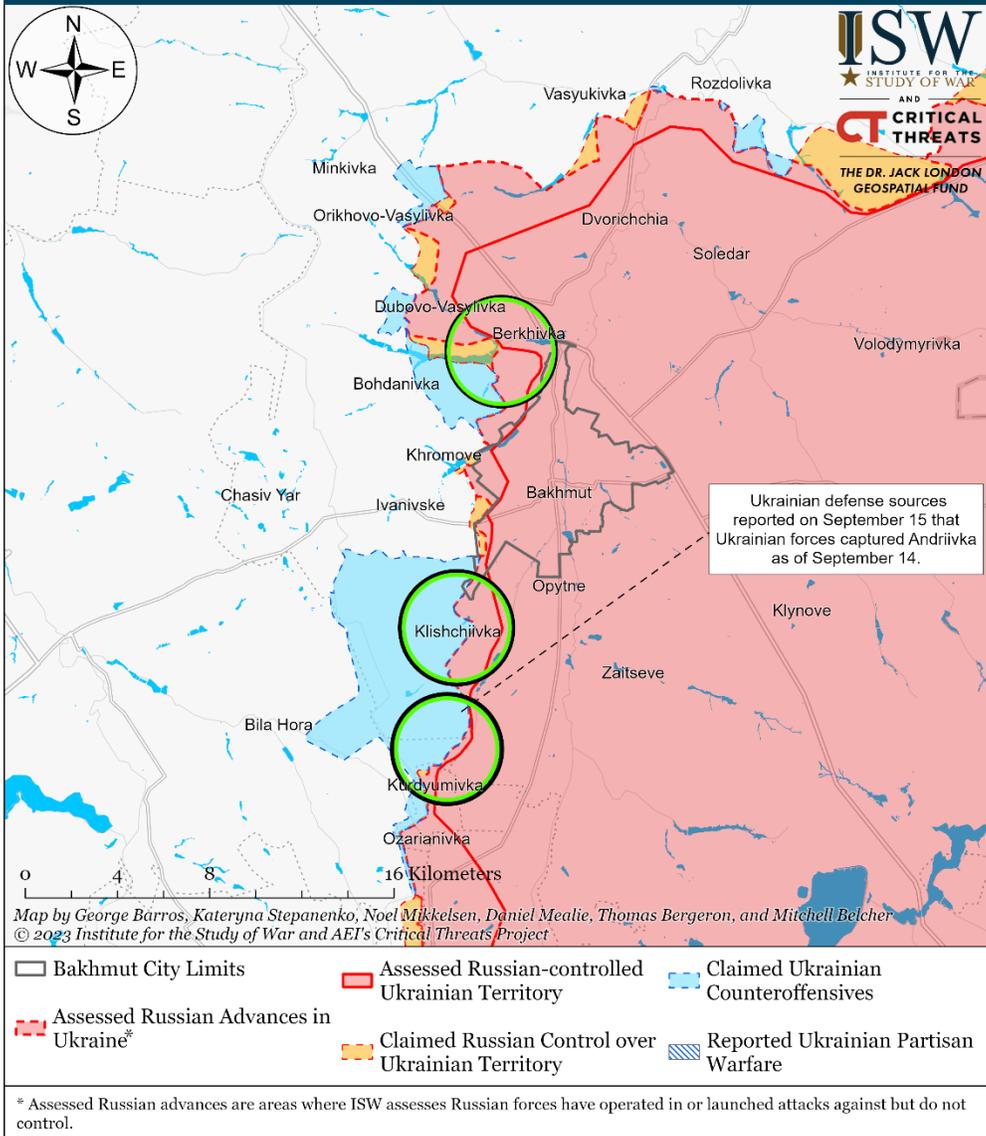
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

## **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 conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut on September 16 and advanced. Geolocated footage published on September 15 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced southeast of Rozdolivka (17km northeast of Bakhmut) and in northern Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[44] The Ukrainian General Staff and Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on September 16 that Ukrainian forces conducted successful assault operations near Klishchiivka and that fighting is ongoing near Klishchiivka and Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut).[45] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Ilya Yevlash reported that Ukrainian forces are gradually pushing Russian forces out of their positions and forcing them to retreat in the Bakhmut direction, and Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported that Ukrainian forces continue to advance in the Bakhmut direction.[46] A Russian milblogger acknowledged Ukrainian control over Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) but another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces control only part of Andriivka and that most of the settlement is a contested "gray zone." [47] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces control southern and central Klishchiivka but a Russian news aggregator claimed on September 15 that the settlement is a contested "gray zone" and Ukrainian forces have not gained a foothold in the settlement.[48] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked on the Klishchiivka-Kurdyumivka line north of Bakhmut and that fighting is ongoing near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[49]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Bakhmut and reportedly advanced on September 16. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces successfully counterattacked in northeastern Klishchiivka and near Andriivka.[50] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces control the railway immediately east of Andriivka, northeastern Klishchiivka, and Kurdyumivka.[51] The Ukrainian General Staff and Malyar reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut) and Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[52] **The Ukrainian 3rd Separate Assault Brigade published footage and reported that Russian artillery fired on Russian soldiers, likely of the 72nd Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Army Corps), surrendering to Ukrainian forces in Andriivka.**[53]

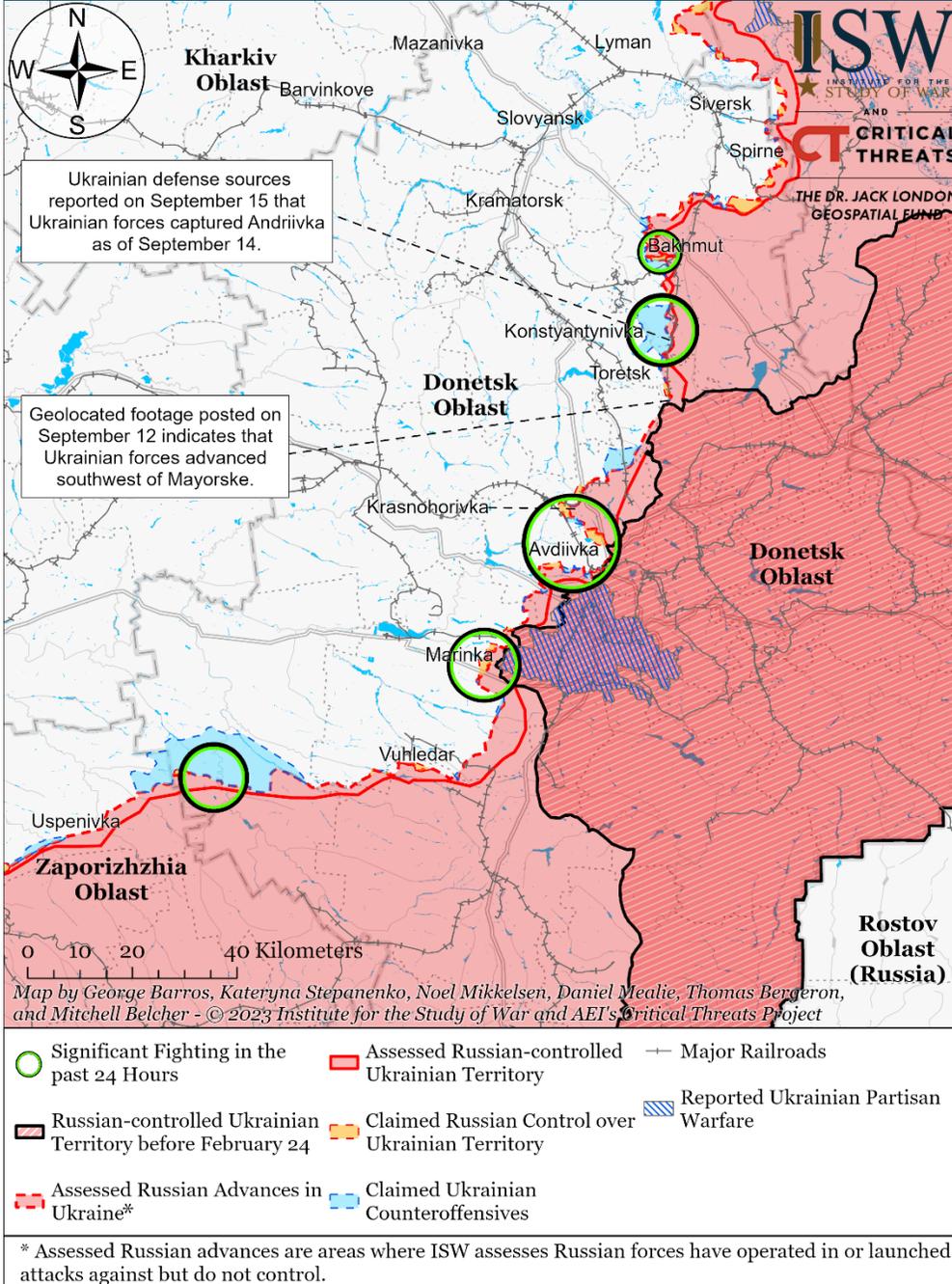
# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Malyar reported that Ukrainian forces along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line are holding their positions in the Avdiivka and Marinka (on the western outskirts of Donetsk City) directions.[54]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line but did not advance on September 16. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka) and Marinka.[55] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces attacked from the direction of Opytne (3km southwest of Avdiivka) and on the southern outskirts of Avdiivka but did not specify an outcome.[56]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

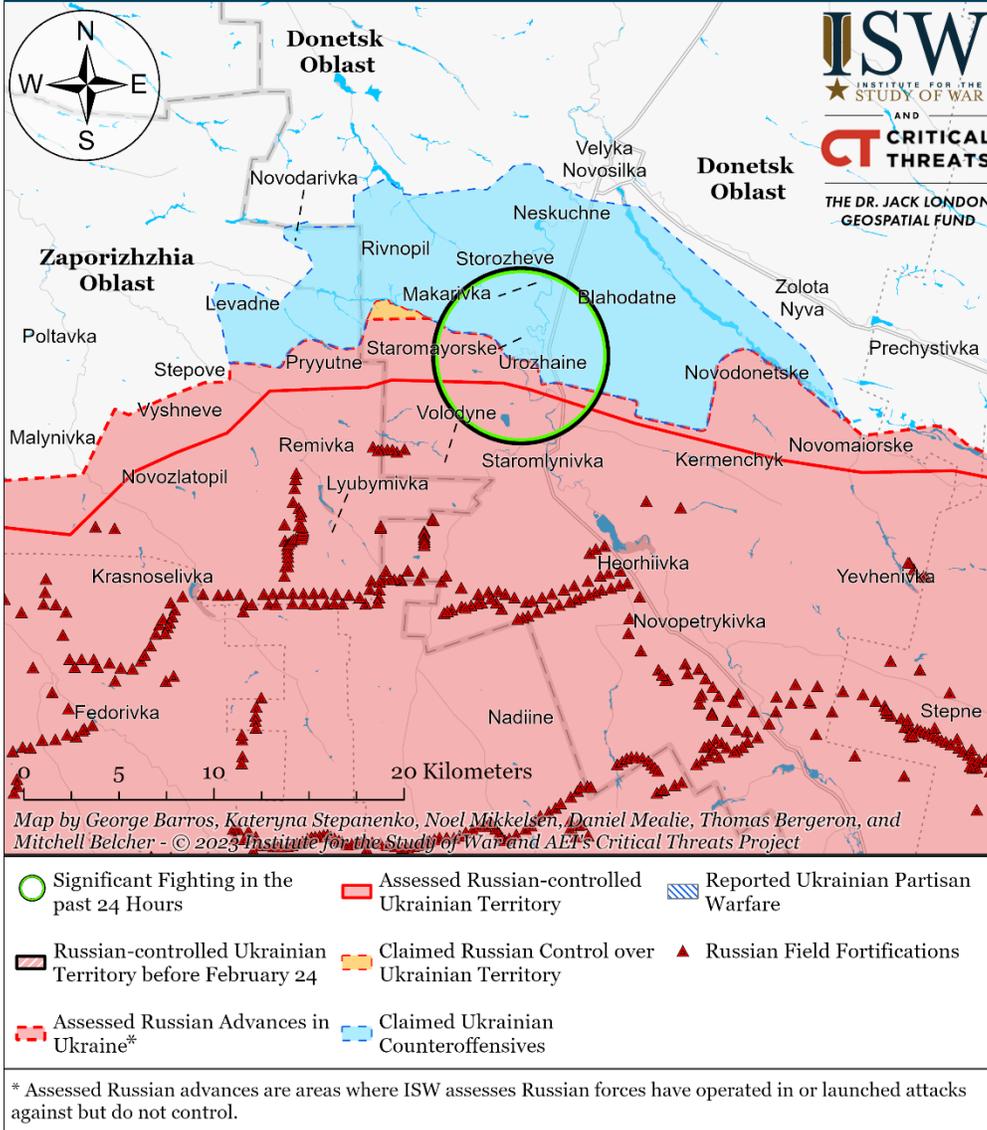


## **Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Ukrainian forces continued assaults along the administrative border between Donetsk and Zaporizhia oblasts on September 16 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces are conducting assaults in the Shakhtarske direction in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.[57] The Russian “Vostok” Battalion, which operates in the area, claimed that the tempo of Ukrainian operations has declined over the past three days.[58] A Russian news aggregator claimed that elements of the Russian 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade (36th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) repelled a Ukrainian attack near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) on September 15.[59] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled eight Ukrainian assaults in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and in western Donetsk Oblast during the previous week.[60]

Russian forces counterattacked in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on September 16 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Urozhaine and suffered significant manpower and equipment losses.[61] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 5th Combined Arms Army (Eastern Military District) pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions north of Pryyutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and occupied an unspecified stronghold.[62]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



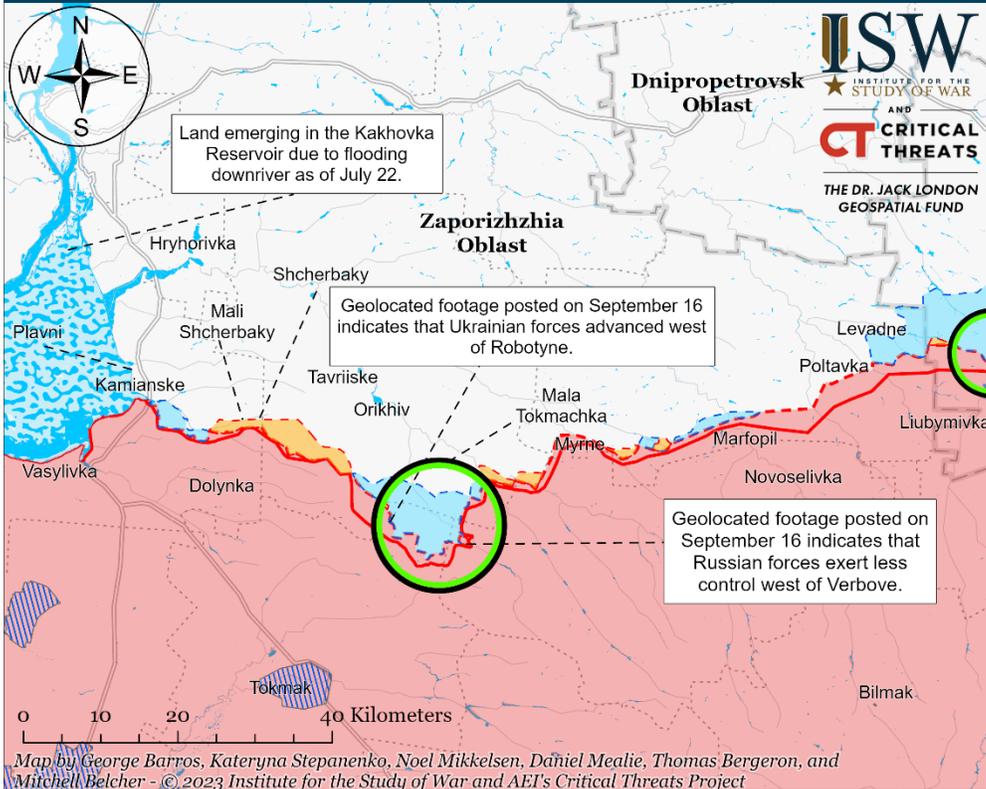
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast and advanced on September 16. Geolocated footage published on September 16 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced along Russian defensive positions to the west of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv).[63] Additional geolocated footage published on September 15 indicates that Ukrainian infantry advanced further along a series of Russian defensive positions immediately west of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv) but likely did not maintain control of these positions.[64] The Ukrainian presence at these defensive positions suggests that Russian forces do not control these positions either. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces achieved unspecified partial success near Verbove and Novoprokopivka (13km south of Orikhiv).[65] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations towards Novoprokopivka from the

northwest, suggesting an expanded Ukrainian presence west or southwest of Robotyne.[66] Other Russian sources claimed that small Ukrainian groups conducted unsuccessful assaults without heavy equipment near Robotyne and Verbove.[67] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled 18 Ukrainian attacks near Robotyne and Verbove in the previous week.[68]



Russian forces counterattacked in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast but did not make confirmed gains on September 16. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces counterattacked from Kopani (12km southwest of Orikhiv) and Novopropivka but did not specify an outcome.[69]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



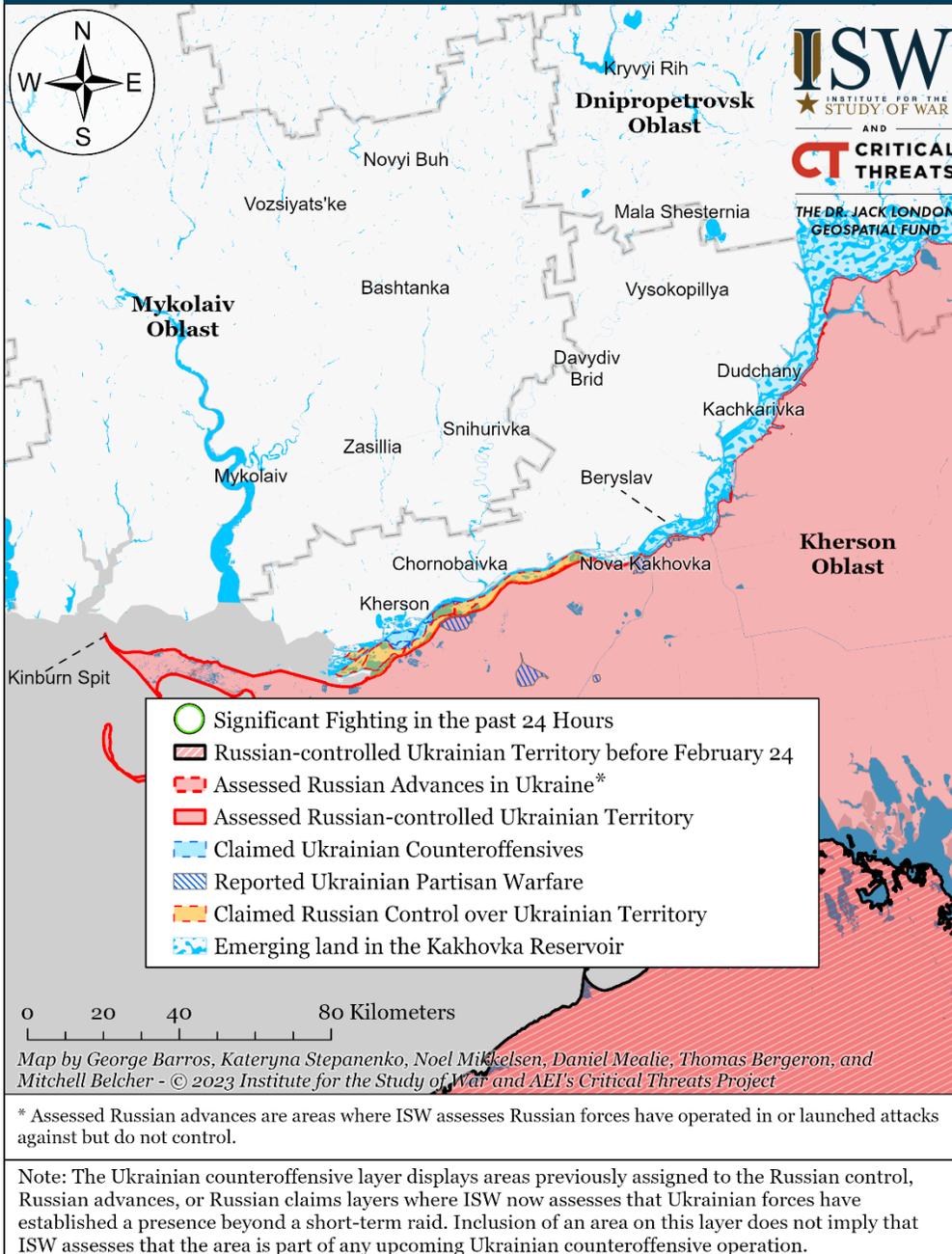
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

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

Note: Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Oleksandr Shtupun reported on September 12 that Ukrainian forces advanced 300 to 500 meters south and southeast of Robotyne.

Russian sources continue to report Ukrainian activity in the Dnipro River delta. A Russian milblogger claimed on September 16 that fighting is ongoing on and near islands in the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast.[70] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces in the Kherson direction focused on preventing Ukrainian forces from landing on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast as well as islands in the Dnipro River during the past week.[71]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 16, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian forces in occupied Crimea are reconfiguring their air defense umbrella. Humenyuk stated on September 15 that the Ukrainian strike on a Russian S-400 “Triumf” system near Yevpatoria, Crimea on September 14 is forcing Russian forces to rearrange the locations of their air defense systems and that Russian forces have found significant gaps in air defense coverage in Crimea.[72]

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

Russian milbloggers continue complaining about the role of the Russian MoD in perpetuating issues affecting Russian military personnel. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger complained that the Russian MoD's June 2023 initiative to provide legal combat veteran status to Russian personnel operating in the Russian border areas and occupied Crimea has fallen short and failed to improve the situation for the military personnel.[73] The milblogger complained that these rear area personnel receive less pay and that the personnel in Crimea receive no housing allowances despite frequent Ukrainian shelling of Russian border areas and strikes against occupied Crimea. Another prominent milblogger complained on September 16 that Russian military inspectors have been detaining Russian military personnel operating on the Robotyne-Verbove line in western Zaporizhia Oblast for operating military vehicles without license plates or documents.[74] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces lost the documents for some vehicles while fighting on the front line and that these detentions prevented frontline personnel from transferring from the frontline to rear areas after completing combat missions.

### **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 occupation officials continue efforts to resettle residential areas of occupied Ukraine with Russians. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on September 16 that Russian soldiers and occupation officials in occupied Kherson Oblast were taking private houses from local residents and settling in these homes, while forcibly resettling the Ukrainian residents and conducting filtration measures against them.[75] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko similarly noted that Russian occupation officials are forcibly evicting Mariupol residents from apartment buildings and relocating Russians into those homes.[76] The Fourth Geneva Convention holds that it is unlawful for an occupying power to transfer its own population to a territory that it occupies, and ISW continues to assess that Russia is undertaking a campaign of forcibly de-populating areas of Ukraine and resettling these spaces with Russian citizens.[77]

The Crimea-based Atesh partisan group stated that one of its agents destroyed two Russian trucks with an improvised explosive device (IED) in occupied Henichesk, Kherson Oblast, on September 15.[78]

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

Nothing significant to report.

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

**Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.**

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[1] <https://x.com/GermanObserver1/status/170280203346236228?s=20>; <https://x.com/GermanObserver1/status/1702802035920236662?s=20>; <https://x.com/GermanObserver1/status/1702802481422413826?s=20>; <https://t.me/voenacher/52078>; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/53155>; <https://x.com/moklasen/status/1702802067314618639?s=20>

[2] <https://t.me/annamaliar/1076>

[3] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar091523>

[4] <https://t.me/batalyon15/2920>

[5] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoZo4p1Wj7Gg31eEpz2U1WrXrqgvUXD8wWjfXQE1xk7A7UoL7djRpEFQs2aRaGvsYtl> ; [https://t.me/ok\\_spn/26331](https://t.me/ok_spn/26331); [https://twitter.com/Military\\_oO/status/1696442573991149585?s=20](https://twitter.com/Military_oO/status/1696442573991149585?s=20);

[6] [https://t.me/voin\\_dv/4859](https://t.me/voin_dv/4859)

[7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-11-2023>

[8] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar082623> ; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbidoZo4p1Wj7Gg31eEpz2U1WrXrqgvUXD8wWjfXQE1xk7A7UoL7djRpEFQs2aRaGvsYtl> ; [https://t.me/ok\\_spn/26331](https://t.me/ok_spn/26331); [https://twitter.com/Military\\_oO/status/1696442573991149585?s=20](https://twitter.com/Military_oO/status/1696442573991149585?s=20); <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-3-2023>

[9] <https://x.com/moklasen/status/1702993971335586047?s=20>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/15076>; <https://twitter.com/moklasen/status/1702993971335586047>

[10] <https://x.com/moklasen/status/1702747841444081699?s=20>; <https://x.com/moklasen/status/1702747843620991310?s=20>; <https://t.me/btr80/10618>

[11] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar090423>

[12] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar090423>

[13] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar090323>

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