

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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July 28, 2023, 7:50 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.

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 12:30 pm ET on July 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**





**Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in at least three sectors of the front and reportedly advanced near Bakhmut on July 28.** Ukrainian military officials stated that Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the northern and southern flanks of Bakhmut, and Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated on July 27 that Ukrainian forces continued advancing south of Bakhmut.<sup>1</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on July 28 that Ukrainian forces advanced near Kurdyumivka and Andriivka.<sup>2</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks along the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) and Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka), and some milbloggers acknowledged that Ukrainian forces captured Staromayorske on July 27.<sup>3</sup> A Ukrainian source claimed that Ukrainian forces have advanced to within 10-12 kilometers of the main Russian defensive line in the Berdyansk direction.<sup>4</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian ground attacks near Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv), Verbove (17km southeast of Orikhiv), and Pyatykhatky (25km southwest of Orikhiv) in western Zaporizhia Oblast.<sup>5</sup> Russian “Vostok” Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky stated that Ukrainian forces can conduct strikes against the full depth of defending Russian forces and that these strikes are killing Russian commanders and degrading Russian command and control.<sup>6</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that the 247th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) refused to go to combat near Staromayorske due to heavy Russian losses and Ukrainian battlefield victories.<sup>7</sup>

**Russian naval posturing in the Black Sea likely aims to impose a de facto blockade on Ukrainian ports without committing the Black Sea Fleet to the enforcement of a naval blockade.** Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported on July 28 that Ukrainian officials have intercepted radio transmissions of Russian forces warning civilian ships in the Black Sea against heading to Ukrainian ports.<sup>8</sup> A Russian milblogger amplified an audio recording purportedly of a Russian warship telling a civilian vessel in the Black Sea that Russian forces would consider the vessel involved in the conflict in Ukraine as a military cargo ship if it sailed towards a Ukrainian port.<sup>9</sup> Russian sources also claimed that Russian authorities announced a nighttime navigation ban for all small vessels near the Kerch Strait due to concerns about Ukrainian naval drones.<sup>10</sup> The Black Sea Fleet conducted exercises on July 27 wherein naval warships launched a missile at a target ship in the Black Sea.<sup>11</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) recently attempted to soften the Russian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) July 19 announcement about viewing civilian ships in the Black Sea as legitimate military targets by claiming that the announcement meant that Russian forces would inspect ships.<sup>12</sup> The Russian MoD itself has not clarified what actions its announcement will allow the Russian military to take and even the Russian MFA’s interpretation would require Russian forces to board and possibly seize foreign civilian vessels. The Russian naval posturing in the Black Sea is likely intentionally ambiguous to generate widespread concern about possible detention by the Russian navy or outright strikes on civilian vessels. The Kremlin likely aims for this posturing to have a chilling effect on maritime activity so that Russian naval assets do not need to enforce an actual blockade of Ukrainian ports. A naval blockade is only mandatory for neutral entities to follow under international law if a belligerent declares the existence of the blockade, and Russia has yet to do so.<sup>13</sup>

**Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to reassure African partner states that Russia will maintain its economic and security commitments during the second day of the Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg.** Putin addressed African heads of state and representatives at the summit’s plenary session on July 28 and highlighted military-technical agreements with 40 African countries and plans to expand Russia’s diplomatic presence in Africa.<sup>14</sup> Putin stated that Russia aims to help train African partners’ military and law enforcement personnel and noted that there are many African personnel at the Russian Ministry of



Defense (MoD) academy.<sup>15</sup> Putin also claimed that between 2022 and 2023 Russia wrote off \$23 billion of debt for African countries.<sup>16</sup> Putin claimed that Russia has sent almost 10 million tons of grain to African countries so far in 2023 and reiterated a pledge to send 25,000 to 50,000 tons of grain to six African countries in the next three to four months free of charge.<sup>17</sup> Putin pointedly stated that Russia will always be a responsible international supplier of agricultural products, likely aiming to reassure African partners concerned about food security following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative.<sup>18</sup>

African Union Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat stated at the summit that disruptions to energy and grain supplies must end, and both Mahamat and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi explicitly called for the revival of the grain deal.<sup>19</sup> Al-Sissi also promoted a Kremlin talking point that Russia quit the grain deal because the grain corridor was not facilitating grain shipments to the poorest of countries, even though Putin himself cited Russian producers' losses at depressed grain prices as a primary reason for leaving the deal.<sup>20</sup> African countries are likely appealing to Russia without fully backing its position concerning the grain deal in hopes of retaining Russian economic and security commitments, in line with their likely primary objective to mitigate the economic fallout from the war in Ukraine affecting their economies.<sup>21</sup>

**The Kremlin continues to display little interest in an unspecific peace plan focused on eliminating disruptions to international trade proposed by African heads of state.** Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso, Senegalese President Macky Sall, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, and Mahamat all appealed to Putin to consider a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> A delegation representing seven African states proposed a generalized peace plan focused on resuming international trade to Putin on June 17.<sup>23</sup> Putin responded to renewed calls to engage with this peace plan at the summit by stating that Russia is respectfully and carefully considering the proposal.<sup>24</sup> Putin has yet to address the feasibility of the peace plan and instead reiterated boilerplate rhetoric that Ukraine and the West are preventing negotiations from taking place.<sup>25</sup> The Kremlin is likely trying to portray itself as considering the peace plan to promote ongoing Russian information operations that feign interest in a negotiated settlement while aiming to slow Western security assistance to Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> The Kremlin is also likely using the proposal to pursue strengthened bilateral and multilateral engagement with African states as part of an overall effort to present itself as a more attractive ally than the collective West.<sup>27</sup> The Kremlin has not demonstrated any intent to engage with any peace process meaningfully.

**Russian authorities may be increasingly concerned about how the Russian electorate views the war ahead of regional elections in September 2023 and the Russian presidential election in 2024.** A Russian insider source and independent Russian opposition news outlet *Verstka* both claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense's (MoD) initiative to increase the maximum conscription age from 27 to 30 years old caused a heated discussion among Kremlin officials.<sup>28</sup> The sources claimed that the Russian Security Council urged the Presidential Administration not to support the MoD's initiative over concern that the initiative would cause public backlash and affect Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval ratings.<sup>29</sup> The sources reported that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu pushed the initiative through and maintained Putin's support, despite the Security Council's concerns.<sup>30</sup> *Verstka* claimed that Putin supported the MoD's initiative after listening to Shoigu's arguments about the shortage of soldiers in Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> *Verstka* also reported that sources stated that United Russia officials are afraid to use the war in Ukraine in their election campaigns in upcoming regional and local elections because they are concerned about how voters will react to it.<sup>32</sup> *Verstka's* sources claimed that United Russia intends to highlight and appeal to local issues instead of highlighting the war in Ukraine. *Verstka*



claimed that it has reviewed United Russia's election materials and stated that the war is not a main theme.<sup>33</sup> The concern among elements of the Kremlin and United Russia indicates concern over domestic support for the war and fears that the Kremlin's perceived electoral legitimacy could weaken in upcoming elections - though to be sure this loss of support primarily presents United Russia with a greater need to falsify election results and the possibility of local losses to other "managed opposition" parties, not a legitimate threat to its dominance of Russian politics.

**Politico reported that the first batch of refurbished US Abrams tanks will likely arrive in Ukraine in September.** *Politico* cited six US officials as saying that the US plans to deliver six to eight Abrams (two platoons) to Germany in August for refurbishment before shipping the tanks to Ukraine in September, and that the US will send a total of 31 Abrams (roughly an understrength armored battalion, at most one-third of a full Ukrainian brigade) to Ukraine.<sup>34</sup>

#### Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in at least three sectors of the front and reportedly advanced near Bakhmut on July 28.**
- **Russian naval posturing in the Black Sea likely aims to impose a de facto blockade on Ukrainian ports without committing the Black Sea Fleet to the enforcement of a naval blockade.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted to reassure African partner states that Russia will maintain its economic and security commitments during the second day of the Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg.**
- **The Kremlin continues to display little interest in an unspecific peace plan focused on eliminating disruptions to international trade proposed by African heads of state.**
- **Russian authorities may be increasingly concerned about how the Russian electorate views the war ahead of regional elections in September 2023 and the Russian presidential election in 2024.**
- **Politico reported that the first batch of refurbished US Abrams tanks will likely arrive in Ukraine in September.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on July 28 and made advances in certain areas.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 28 and have reportedly advanced along the Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, and along the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border.**
- **The Russian Federation Council approved measures allowing the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) to receive heavy military equipment and increasing the upper limit of the conscription age range from 27 years old to 30 years old.**
- **Russian authorities continue to deport Ukrainian teenagers to Russia under the guise of summer camp programs.**

*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

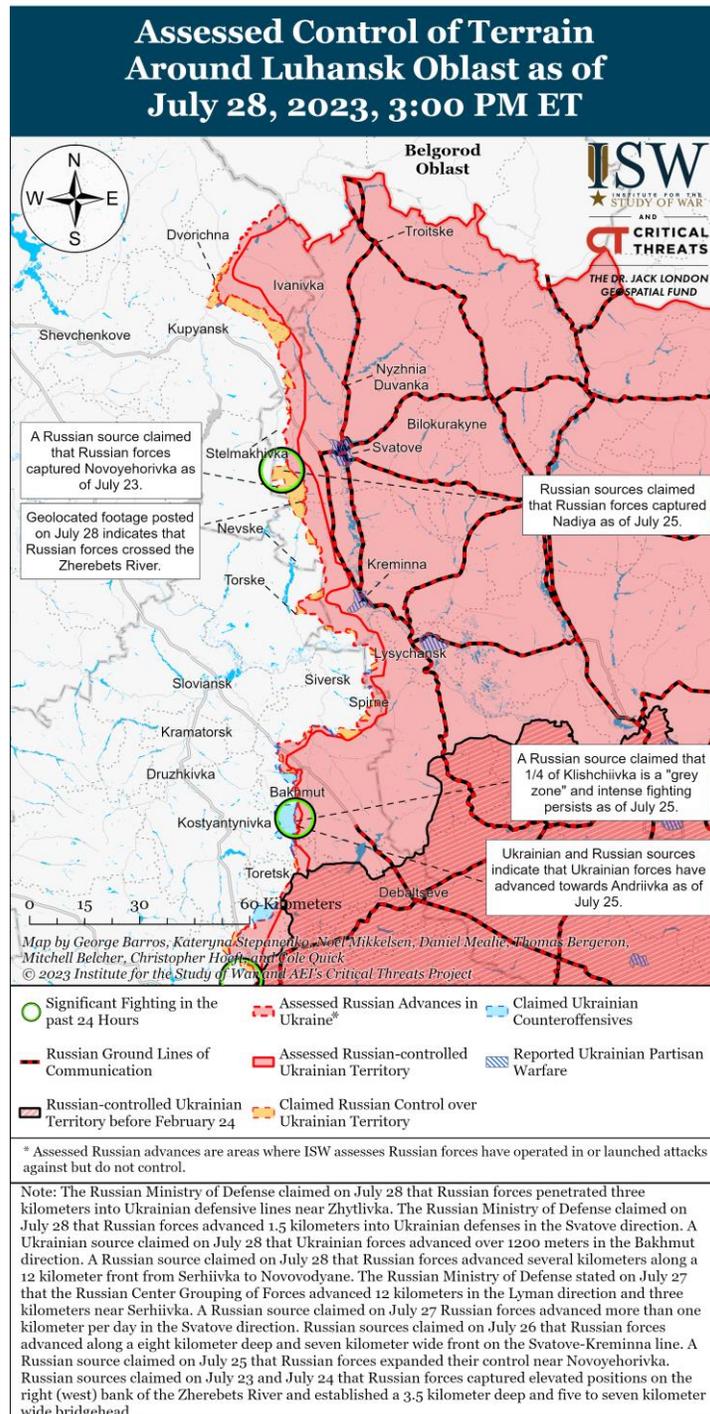
### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

#### **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)**

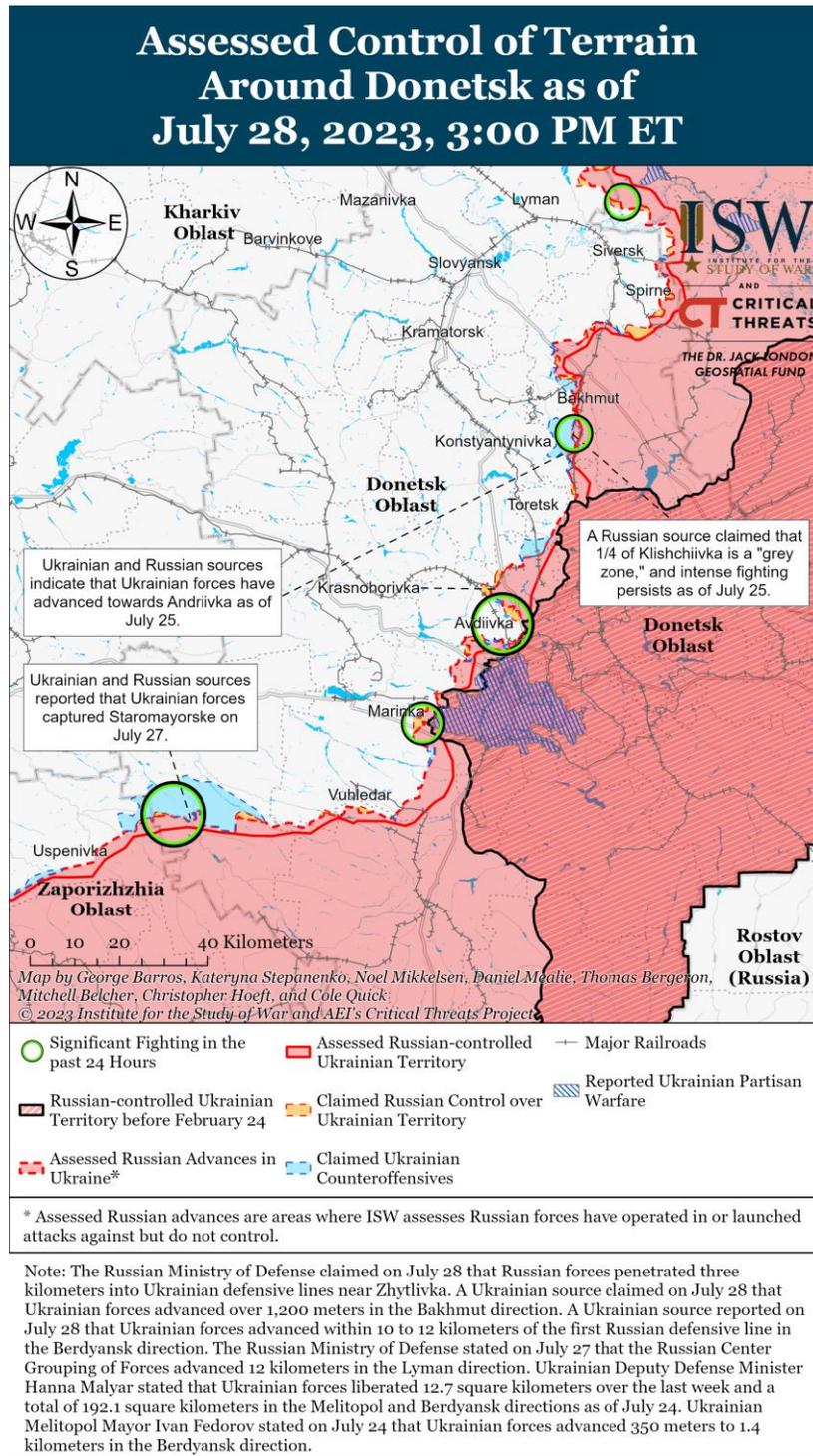
Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line on July 28 and made further advances in some areas. Geolocated footage published on July 28 shows Russian elements of the 21st Motorized Rifle Regiment (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) crossing the Zherebets River southwest of Karmazynivka (12km southwest of Svatove).<sup>35</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted an unsuccessful assault near Nadiya (15km west of Svatove).<sup>36</sup> Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Oleksandr Syrskiy stated that some of Russia's most professional units are constantly attacking Ukrainian positions along the Svatove-Kreminna line but that Ukrainian forces maintain all their positions in the area.<sup>37</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment (11th Army Corps, Baltic Fleet) continued offensive operations west of Kuzemivka (15km northwest of Svatove) and made unspecified gains.<sup>38</sup> The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) advanced 1.5km in depth into Ukrainian defenses near Serhiivka (13km west of Svatove).<sup>39</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are continuing offensive operations along a 12km front from Serhiivka to Novovodyane (17km southwest of Svatove) and advanced several kilometers along this front.<sup>40</sup> A Ukrainian source reported that Russian forces deployed their main reinforcements to offensive operations near Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove) and Novoselivske (16km northwest of Svatove) but stated that Ukrainian forces still hold their positions.<sup>41</sup> The Russian MoD also claimed that "Storm" detachments of the 252nd and 752nd motorized rifle regiments (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) advanced 3km into Ukrainian defenses near Zhytlivka (2km northwest of Kreminna).<sup>42</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted assaults in the Serebryanske forest area south of Kreminna and near Dibrova (6km southwest of Kreminna).<sup>43</sup> ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian claims of extensive advances along the Svatove-Kreminna line, and the Russian MoD may be exaggerating claims of advances to draw attention away from Ukrainian counteroffensives elsewhere.<sup>44</sup>

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line on July 28 and made marginal advances. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled two Ukrainian attempts to regain lost positions in the Svatove direction and a Ukrainian assault on positions of the 228th Motorized Rifle Regiment (90th Tank Division, eastern Military District) near Dibrova.<sup>45</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled three Ukrainian attacks along the Raihorodok-Karmazynivka line (12km west to 12km southwest of Svatove) and that Ukrainian forces regained unspecified positions in the

Novoyehorivka area.<sup>46</sup> The Russian MoD also claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Bilohorivka, Donetsk Oblast (33km south of Kreminna).<sup>47</sup>



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





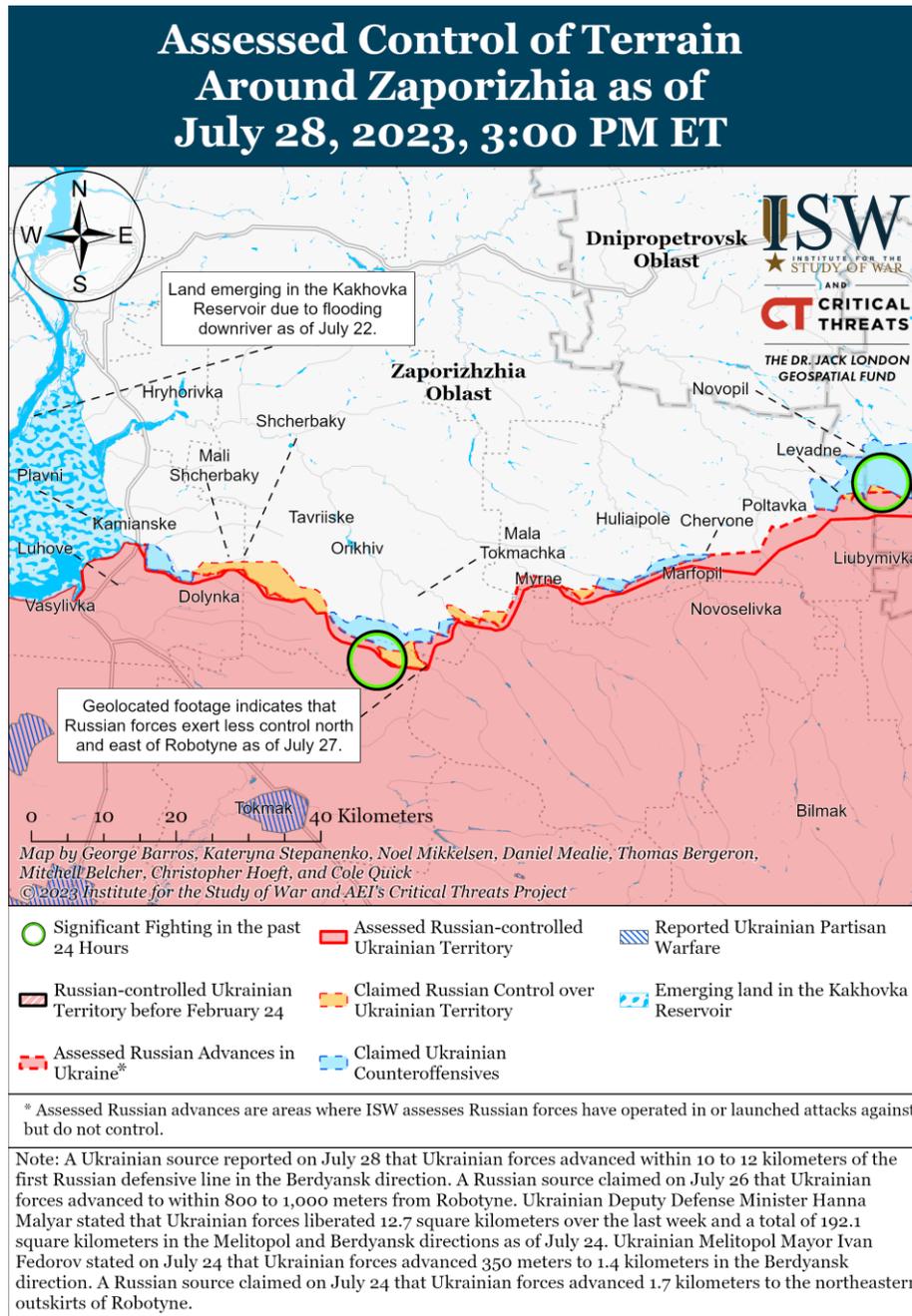
Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut and reportedly advanced on July 28. A Ukrainian source claimed on July 28 that Ukrainian forces advanced over 1,200 meters in the Bakhmut direction.<sup>48</sup> Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 27 that Ukrainian forces continued advancing south of Bakhmut, and the Ukrainian General Staff reported on July 28 that fighting is ongoing north of Bakhmut and south of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka, Kurdyumivka, and Andriivka (all 5-11km south of Bakhmut).<sup>49</sup> Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian forces are focusing on counterbattery fire against significant Russian artillery concentrations near Klishchiivka, Kurdyumivka, and Andriivka.<sup>50</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces made some advances near Kurdyumivka and Andriivka.<sup>51</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that heavy fighting continues near Klishchiivka and that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).<sup>52</sup> Geolocated footage posted on July 27 shows a Ukrainian drone striking a Russian TOS-1A thermobaric artillery system in Zaitseve (7km southeast of Bakhmut).<sup>53</sup>

Russian forces continued counterattacks to stymie ongoing Ukrainian offensive operations near Bakhmut and reportedly advanced on July 28. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces back from Klishchiivka and that Russian forces fully control the settlement.<sup>54</sup> One milblogger claimed that Klishchiivka is currently contested, however.<sup>55</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks west and south of Klishchiivka.<sup>56</sup> A milblogger claimed that Russian forces also conducted an unsuccessful ground attack near Khromove (immediately west of Bakhmut).<sup>57</sup> A Ukrainian source assessed that Russian forces are preparing for counterattacks on the Klishchiivka-Kurdyumivka-Andriivka line in order to buy time to build additional defensive fortifications rather than withdraw to prepared defensive positions further behind the front line.<sup>58</sup>

Russian and Ukrainian forces continued limited offensive operations on the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and did not advance on July 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Avdiivka and Marinka (immediately southwest of Donetsk City).<sup>59</sup> Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted a counterattack near Avdiivka and two counterattacks near Marinka.<sup>60</sup>

Ukrainian forces continued targeting Russian military assets in rear areas in Donetsk Oblast. The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of using a loitering munition to strike an oil depot in Shakhtarsk, Donetsk Oblast on July 28 (50km behind the front line on the N21 highway).<sup>61</sup> Geolocated footage shows a large fire at the oil depot.<sup>62</sup> A Russian milblogger accused Ukrainian forces of striking the oil depot with HIMARS rockets.<sup>63</sup>

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



Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations along the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border and reportedly advanced on July 28. A Ukrainian source claimed that Ukrainian forces have advanced to within 10-12 kilometers of the main Russian defensive line in the Berdyansk direction.<sup>64</sup> Multiple Russian sources claimed



that Ukrainian forces attacked Russian forces near Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka), and some Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces encircled the settlement.<sup>65</sup> The Russian information space largely acknowledged Ukrainian forces' control over Staromayorske, but one prominent milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces retreated to the north and northwestern outskirts of the settlement and that most of Staromayorske is currently a “gray zone.”<sup>66</sup> Russian milbloggers have consistently identified settlements in areas of Ukrainian counteroffensive advances as contested “gray zones” likely to downplay Ukrainian gains, as ISW has previously assessed.<sup>67</sup>

Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area and did not advance on July 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to recapture lost positions near Rivnopil (10km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Makarivka (7m south of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>68</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces counterattacked against Ukrainian forces near Staromayorske but did not specify an outcome.<sup>69</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian personnel, particularly from the 247th Guards Air Assault (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division), refused to participate in combat missions near Staromayorske due to significant Russian casualties and Ukrainian military victories.<sup>70</sup> Personnel from the 247th Guards Air Assault Regiment have previously publicly complained about equipment and supply shortages.<sup>71</sup>

Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and did not make any confirmed advances on July 28. Multiple Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked Russian forces near Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv).<sup>72</sup> A Ukrainian source claimed that Ukrainian forces began attacking Russian positions near Verbove (20km southeast of Orikhiv) - likely referencing observed attacks from July 27.<sup>73</sup>

A Ukrainian official indicated that Russian forces on the Kinburn Spit struggle with morale and discipline issues. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian forces have mined the outskirts of settlements on the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast preventing residents from leaving.<sup>74</sup> Humenyuk stated that morale is low among Russian forces on the Kinburn spit and that the Russian military is not conducting rotations in the area.<sup>75</sup> Humenyuk reported that Ukrainian forces continue conducting precision strikes against Russian artillery positions when Russian artillery units deploy to firing positions on the Kinburn Spit.<sup>76</sup>

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

The Russian Federation Council approved a bill allowing the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) to receive heavy military equipment.<sup>77</sup> The bill changes the legal language within the existing regulations for Rosgvardia to specify that Rosgvardia elements are authorized to use military weapons and equipment.<sup>78</sup> The bill also proposes regulations that would allow Rosgvardia to use military equipment to free hostages; protect citizens, officials, and military personnel; ensure security during riots; suppress the activities of illegal armed groups; and in other unspecified situations.<sup>79</sup> Russian news outlets reported that the new legislation brings the current legal norms “in line with reality” (as Rosgvardia forces have engaged in heavy fighting in Ukraine) and will clarify existing legal gaps.<sup>80</sup> The Russian State Duma adopted this bill in its first reading on July 19.<sup>81</sup> The Kremlin has been steadily expanding Russia’s internal security capabilities following the Wagner Group’s armed rebellion on June



24 and ISW has observed Russian sources suggesting that recent measures expanding the authority of Rosgvardia will allow the organization to posture as an alternative Russian military formation.<sup>82</sup>

The Russian Federation Council also approved an amendment to previously passed legislation that will increase the upper limit of the conscription age range from 27 years old to 30 years old but will not change the lower limit of 18 years old, rather than raising the minimum to 21 as in the original bill.<sup>83</sup> Russian opposition news outlet *Meduza* estimated that the new amendment will increase the number of eligible conscripts by more than two million men than would have been eligible under the existing legislation by 2030.<sup>84</sup>

Russian milbloggers continue to raise alarm over the possibility Russia may conduct a new wave of mobilization following the recent passage of legislation regarding mobilization, conscription, and martial law. A Wagner-linked Russian milblogger suggested that Russian authorities might conduct a new wave of mobilization around mid-September 2023 if Russian authorities do not recruit enough contract servicemen.<sup>85</sup> The milblogger suggested that Russian forces do not have enough manpower to conduct a large-scale offensive in multiple directions at this time and that a second mobilization wave could ameliorate Russia's lack of combat power. The milblogger also suggested that Russian authorities might conduct a new wave of mobilization to support a rotation of soldiers who were mobilized in 2022 who were never relieved.<sup>86</sup>

Russian authorities appear concerned about corruption within Russia's defense industrial base (DIB). Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers conducted a search of the "Signal" defense plant, a subsidiary of Rostec that produces ammunition and pyrotechnics, on July 28 in Chelyabinsk, Chelyabinsk Oblast, Russia.<sup>87</sup> FSB officers reportedly searched the office of the plant's General Director Lev Uvarov in association with a fraud criminal case against the company's managers, who are accused of selling an estimated ten million rubles (approximately \$108,600) worth of pyrotechnic products to affiliated legal entities at a price two times lower than the cost.<sup>88</sup>

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

Russian authorities continue to deport Ukrainian teenagers to Russia under the guise of summer camp programs. A Russian journalist posted footage on July 27 claiming to show teenage boys from Milove Raion (occupied Luhansk Oblast) on a "vacation" at the Russian "V Army" field training camp in Kostroma Oblast, Russia.<sup>89</sup> The footage showed the boys in military uniforms, carrying weapons and learning various tactical military skills.<sup>90</sup> ISW has previously reported on Russian occupation officials using children's camps as a guise to deport Ukrainian children to Russia, though rarely have the camps been so blatantly depicted.<sup>91</sup>

Russian authorities are continuing efforts to economically integrate the occupied territories into Russia. Chair of the Kherson Oblast occupation government Andrey Alekseyenko claimed that the Russian federal law creating a free economic zone in Kherson Oblast has come into force and will remain in effect until 2050.<sup>92</sup> Alekseyenko claimed that the free economic zone includes preferential taxation conditions, reduced insurance rates, simplified land purchasing procedures, a customs-freezone, access to investment opportunities, and long-term economic stability for development.<sup>93</sup>



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

Belarusian authorities may have constructed a facility to store nuclear-capable Russian Iskander ballistic missile launchers in Belarus. The Federation of American Scientists shared satellite imagery on July 27 purportedly showing a completed garage facility for Russian Iskander launchers in Asipovichy City.<sup>94</sup> The Federation of American Scientists reported that construction at the facility began in October 2022 and was completed in April 2023.<sup>95</sup> A Maxar satellite image collected on July 4, 2023, apparently shows four Iskander launchers outside the garage.<sup>96</sup> Belarusian authorities may upgrade a nearby Belarusian weapons depot 11 km east of Asipovichy – the 1405th Artillery Ammunition Base (military unit 42707) – to store tactical nuclear warheads. Russia has long fielded nuclear weapons that are able to strike any target that tactical nuclear weapons launched from Belarus could also hit, and ISW continues to assess that Putin is extraordinarily unlikely to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

Wagner Group personnel continue to arrive in Belarus. Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project reported that a 12th and 13th Wagner convey arrived in Belarus on July 27 and 28, respectively.<sup>98</sup> The convoys reportedly contain more cars, trucks, and “shchuka” armored vehicles.<sup>99</sup> The shchuka (also known as the “Wagner wagon”) is an anti-mine-protected vehicle built on a modified Ural-4320 truck’s chassis.<sup>100</sup> The shchuka is not an armored fighting vehicle and does not provide the significant firepower or maneuver capabilities necessary for mechanized warfare.

**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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<sup>1</sup> <https://t.me/annamaliar/969>; <https://t.me/militarymediacenter/2681>;

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0rFN9GwwjWJj2FcsqeaAXGdfNsr4hgtNHRU99c3YhBbJJW6us7uDY3gYjMD9Q6S2LI>

<sup>2</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/14049>

<sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/22347](https://t.me/dva_majors/22347) ; <https://t.me/wargonzo/14049>; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/49467> ; <https://t.me/batalyon15/2435> ; [https://t.me/aleksandr\\_skif/2812](https://t.me/aleksandr_skif/2812) ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/50093> ; [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/93332](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93332)

<sup>4</sup> <https://t.me/resurgammm/1141>

<sup>5</sup> [https://t.me/negumanitarnaya\\_pomosch\\_Z/9153](https://t.me/negumanitarnaya_pomosch_Z/9153) ; <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/49467>; <https://t.me/rybar/50156>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/14049> ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/22347](https://t.me/dva_majors/22347) ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/22347](https://t.me/dva_majors/22347) ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/63289> ; <https://t.me/resurgammm/1141>

<sup>6</sup> [https://t.me/aleksandr\\_skif/2812](https://t.me/aleksandr_skif/2812)

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0vjHWMJDM2HnmEcNe4A7k7hxaMXwmW5oa41NaJDZs7NZH4JTRaSc1oMfVQBcSVWSrl>

<sup>8</sup> [https://armyinform.com\\_dot\\_ua/2023/07/28/rosiyany-hovayut-svoyu-tehniku-za-budynkamy-chyvilnyh-meshkancziv-i-minuyut-okolytchi-selyshh-nataliya-gumenyuk/](https://armyinform.com_dot_ua/2023/07/28/rosiyany-hovayut-svoyu-tehniku-za-budynkamy-chyvilnyh-meshkancziv-i-minuyut-okolytchi-selyshh-nataliya-gumenyuk/)

<sup>9</sup> [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/22377](https://t.me/dva_majors/22377)

<sup>10</sup> <https://t.me/astrapress/33639> ; <https://t.me/readovkanews/63325> ;

[https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/93335](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/93335) ; <https://t.me/rusbrief/140645>

<sup>11</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/28679](https://t.me/mod_russia/28679)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-21-2023>

<sup>13</sup> [https://casebook.icrc.org/a\\_to\\_z/glossary/blockade](https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/blockade)

<sup>14</sup> [http://kremlin\\_dot\\_ru/events/president/news/71826](http://kremlin_dot_ru/events/president/news/71826)

<sup>15</sup> [http://kremlin\\_dot\\_ru/events/president/news/71826](http://kremlin_dot_ru/events/president/news/71826)

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