### **Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment**

Karolina Hird, Katherine Lawlor, Grace Mappes, Riley Bailey, and Frederick W. Kagan September 28, 7:30pm ET

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

Russian milbloggers discussed Ukrainian gains around Lyman with increased concern on September 28, suggesting that Russian forces in this area may face imminent defeat.¹ Several Russian milbloggers and prominent military correspondents claimed that Ukrainian troops advanced west, north, and northeast of Lyman and are working to complete the envelopment of Russian troops in Lyman and along the northern bank of the Siverskyi Donets River in this area.² Russian mibloggers stated that Ukrainian troops are threatening Russian positions and lines of communication that support the Lyman grouping. The collapse of the Lyman pocket will likely be highly consequential to the Russian grouping in northern Donetsk and western Luhansk oblasts and may allow Ukrainian troops to threaten Russian positions along the western Luhansk Oblast border and in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area.

Russian military leadership has failed to set information conditions for potentially imminent Russian defeat in Lyman. The Russian Ministry of Defense has not addressed current Russian losses around Lyman or prepared for the collapse of this sector of the frontline, which will likely further reduce already-low Russian morale. Russian military authorities previously failed to set sufficient information conditions for Russian losses following the first stages of the Ukrainian counteroffensives in Kharkiv Oblast, devastating morale and leading to panic among Russian forces across the Eastern axis. The subsequent ire of the Russian nationalist information space likely played a role in driving the Kremlin to order partial mobilization in the days following Ukraine's initial sweeping counteroffensive in a haphazard attempt to reinforce Russian lines. Future Ukrainian gains around critical areas in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast may drive additional wedges between Russian nationalists and military leadership, and between Russian forces and their superiors.

The Kremlin could temporarily postpone announcing the annexation of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory to better prepare the Russian information space and administrative organization, although September 30 remains the most likely date for some kind of annexation announcement. ISW forecasted on September 27 that Russian President Vladimir Putin will likely announce the Russian annexation of occupied Ukrainian territory on September 30 in his planned address to both houses of the Russian parliament.<sup>3</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on September 28 that Russia will "fulfill the aspirations of the residents of the LNR, DNR, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts to be together with Russia" in the "near future."<sup>4</sup> However, Russian State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin announced on September 28 that the State Duma should hold its accession sessions to approve the annexation of occupied Ukrainian territory on October 3 and 4.<sup>5</sup> Latvian-based Russian-language opposition outlet *Meduza* quoted Kremlin sources on September 28 who claimed that the Kremlin decided "not to rush things." Those sources told *Meduza* that "the PR effect from [annexation] will be almost zero" due to broad dissatisfaction with partial mobilization in Russia.<sup>6</sup> *Meduza* reported that the Kremlin conducted a dissatisfactory closed public opinion poll that demonstrated broad Russian discontent and may be attempting to rectify public unhappiness with mobilization before announcing annexation.

Russian-appointed occupation administration leaders of Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts each shared an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin by September 28, asking Putin to recognize their sham referenda and welcome them to Russia. The Russian occupation leaders of each oblast will likely meet with Putin in the coming days to present their requests. Putin could announce those performative accession negotiations, rather than final annexation, in his September 30 speech.

Russian authorities continue to send newly-mobilized and undertrained recruits to directly reinforce severely degraded remnants of various units, including units that were previously considered to be Russia's premier conventional fighting forces. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that newly-mobilized Russian men arrived to reinforce elements of the 1st Tank Regiment of the 2nd Motorized Rifle Division of the 1st Guards Tank Army in unspecified areas of Ukraine with no training at all. Social media footage from September 27 shows a Russian soldier mobilized into the 1st Tank Regiment explaining that he will be sent to fight in Kherson Oblast within two days without any basic training, as ISW reported yesterday. The 1st Guards Tank Army was considered Russia's premier mechanized force prior to February 24, and that fact that its elements are being reinforced with poorly disciplined, untrained men is consistent with ISW's previous assessments that even Russia's most elite units have sustained substantial losses in Ukraine and are therefore increasingly degraded. The addition of newly mobilized forces to elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army is unlikely to lend these units any decisive combat power.

#### **Key Takeaways**

- Russian military leadership has likely failed to set information conditions for the potential defeat of the Russian grouping in Lyman, despite increasingly concerned discourse among Russian milbloggers regarding the potential for a Ukrainian envelopment of Lyman.
- The Kremlin could temporarily postpone announcing the annexation of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory to better prepare the Russian information space and administrative organization, although September 30 remains the most likely date for some kind of annexation announcement.
- Russian authorities continue to send newly-mobilized and undertrained recruits to directly reinforce severely degraded remnants of various units, including units that were previously considered to be Russia's premier conventional fighting forces.
- Ukrainian forces likely continued to make significant gains around Lyman on September 28, advancing from the north along the Zelena Dolyna-Kolodiazi arc and from the southeast around Yampil.
- Ukrainian military officials largely maintained operational silence regarding specific Ukrainian actions in Kherson Oblast on September 28 but stated that Ukrainian troops are continuing positional battles in unspecified locations to consolidate and improve their positions along the Southern Axis.
- Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast.
- Russian military recruitment officials are openly contradicting the Kremlin's publiclystated guidelines for mobilization to meet quota requirements even as Kremlin propaganda is attempting to change the public perception of partial mobilization.
- Russian authorities are beginning to restrict movement of Russian citizens into Russian border regions to cope with hundreds of thousands of Russian men attempting to flee the country.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of September 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



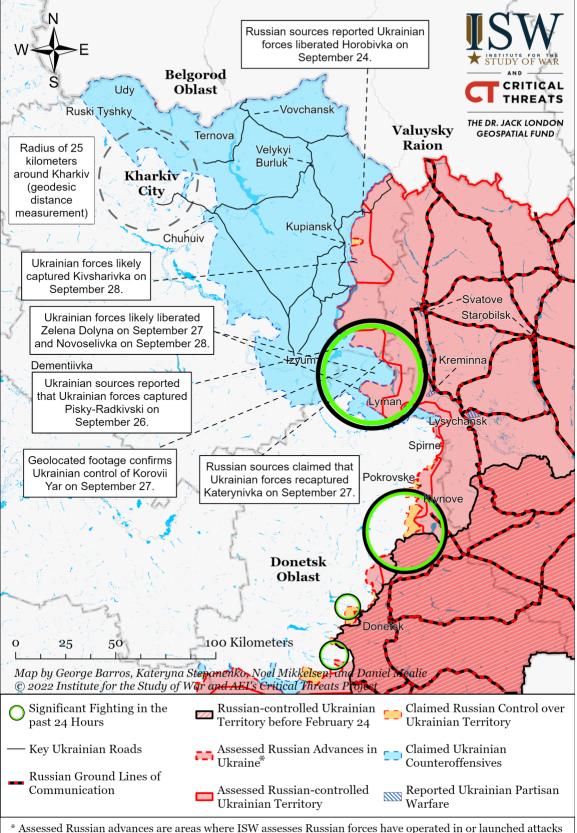
<sup>\*</sup> Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

- Ukrainian Counteroffensives—Southern and Eastern Ukraine
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

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

### Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of September 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Ukrainian forces likely continued to make significant gains around Lyman on September 28, advancing from the north along the Zelena Dolyna-Kolodiazi arc and from the southeast around Yampil. Geolocated combat footage corroborates claims made by Russian milbloggers that Ukrainians took control of Zelena Dolyna (15km north of Lyman) and pushed east to take control of Kolodiazi (11km northeast of Lyman). Several Russian sources indicated that Ukrainian troops pushed southeast of Kolodiazi and are fighting on the outskirts of Torske, just 12km northeast of Lyman. Russian milbloggers also claimed that Ukrainian troops accumulated near Yampil (13km southeast of Lyman) and broke through Russian defensive lines there to push towards Torske from the southwest. Russian sources additionally discussed Ukrainian gains northwest of Lyman and claimed that Ukrainian troops are attacking Shandryholove, about 10km northwest of Lyman. Geolocated footage shows that Ukrainian troops have liberated Novoselivka, just south of Shandryholove and 10km northwest of Lyman. Several Russian milbloggers voiced escalated concern that Ukrainian forces are seeking to take control of the Svatove-Lyman road that is currently a critical ground line of communication (GLOC) for the Russian grouping in Lyman.

Ukrainian troops also continued offensive operations around Kupyansk on September 28. Geolocated footage shows Ukrainian troops raising Ukrainian flags over Kivsharivka, about 10km southeast of Kupyansk.<sup>17</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian troops took control of the Kupyansk-Uzlovaya station, 8km southeast of Kupyansk on the outskirts of Kivsharivka.<sup>18</sup> Russian sources suggested that Ukrainian troops are attempting advances to the northeast of Kupyansk along the Pervshyi Lyman-Tavilzhanka line.<sup>19</sup> A prominent Russian military correspondent claimed that all Russian units entirely withdrew from Kupyansk on September 28, although it is unclear where those units are redeploying to.<sup>20</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of September 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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

#### **Southern Ukraine:** (Kherson Oblast)

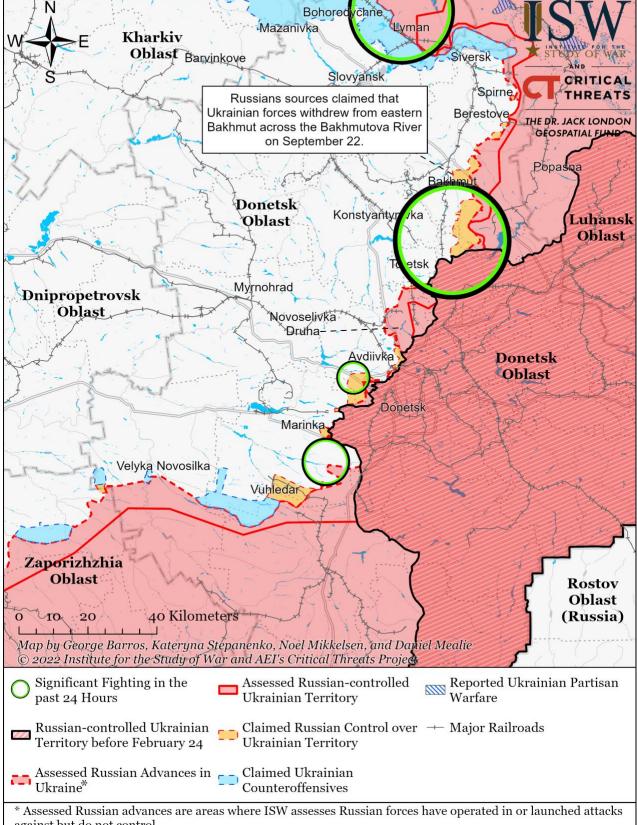
Ukrainian military officials largely maintained operational silence regarding specific Ukrainian actions in Kherson Oblast on September 28 but stated that Ukrainian troops are continuing positional battles in unspecified locations to consolidate and improve their positions along the Southern Axis.<sup>21</sup> Ukrainian military officials also reiterated that Ukrainian troops are continuing an interdiction campaign to target Russian logistics, military, and transportation assets, as well as concentration areas, in Kherson Oblast.<sup>22</sup> Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated that Russian forces are pulling reserves from the Crimean direction to reinforce the current southern frontline against Ukrainian counteroffensive operations.<sup>23</sup>

Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian forces hit two main areas in Kherson Oblast as part of Ukraine's continuing interdiction campaign on September 27 and 28: around Kherson City and near Beryslav, about 70km east of Kherson City. Geolocated footage shows the aftermath of a reported Ukrainian HIMARS strike on Oleshky, 8km southeast of Kherson City.<sup>24</sup> Russian sources also posted imagery of the aftermath of a Ukrainian strike on Kherson Polytechnical College in Kherson City, where Russian troops reportedly were residing.<sup>25</sup> Ukrainian sources also stated that Ukrainian forces hit Russian concentration areas near Beryslav.<sup>26</sup>

Ukrainian sources reported that Ukrainian troops conducted limited ground maneuvers in western Kherson Oblast on September 27 and 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian troops repelled a Russian attack on Bezimenne, 15km southwest of Davydiv Brid and near the Inhulets River that runs along the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command additionally noted that Russian troops attempted to attack Bezimenne from positions in Chkalove, 7km southeast of Bezimenne. Russian sources discussed various Ukrainian troop rotations northwest of Kherson City near Posad-Pokrovske and in western Kherson Oblast near Andriivka. Herson Oblast near Andriivka.

Russian Main Effort-Eastern Ukraine

### **Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of** September 28, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



against but do not control.

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

Russian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks in Donetsk Oblast on September 28. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks south of Bakhmut near Zaitseve, Mayorsk, Mykolaivka Druha, Odradivka, and Zalizne (all within 15km of Bakhmut), and west of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske.<sup>30</sup> A Russian source claimed that Wagner Group forces fought in Odradivka and advanced on Ukrainian positions in Zaitseve.<sup>31</sup> Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that Chechen "Akhmat" special forces and other Russian and proxy forces control Spirne (25km northeast of Bakhmut) and repelled a Ukrainian ground attack on the settlement on September 28.<sup>32</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces conducted failed ground assaults southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda, Novomykhailivka, and Pavlivka.<sup>33</sup> A Russian source expressed continued concern that Ukrainian forces may launch ground attacks towards Vuhledar in the coming days.<sup>34</sup>

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

Russian forces continued routine artillery, air, and missile strikes west of Hulyaipole and in Mykolaiv and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts on September 28.<sup>35</sup> Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Mykolaiv City and Zaporizhzhia City.<sup>36</sup> Ukrainian sources reported that Russian heavy artillery and Grad rocket strikes damaged critical infrastructure in Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.<sup>37</sup> Ukrainian sources also claimed that Ukrainian air defense systems shot down Russian Kh-59 cruise missiles over Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and Odesa on September 28.<sup>38</sup>

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

Russian military recruitment officials are openly contradicting the Kremlin's publicly-stated guidelines for mobilization to meet quota requirements. Novosibirsk Oblast Military Commissar Yevgeny Kudryavtsev told a Siberian news outlet on September 28 that Russian officials will "naturally" mobilize men who are not reservists in order to meet military requirements.<sup>39</sup> Kudryavtsev said that commissars will start by mobilizing people with certain experience and within a certain age range, but that when that round of mobilization does not meet all of their requirements (likely referencing Kremlin-dictated quotas), commissars will then mobilize men with no military experience or who would violate other restrictions on mobilization. Those restrictions include current students, parents of four or more young children, retirees, and people with disabilities.

The Kremlin is likely ordering its officials to change the public perception of mass mobilization, however. The Russian governor of occupied Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhaev, announced on September 27 that he is taking personal interest in cases of mistakenly-mobilized men in Sevastopol and asserted that his administration will return mistakenly mobilized men to their homes.<sup>40</sup> The Kremlin's media outlets and voices are increasingly sharing individual stories in which military recruitment centers released some men who were unfit for service following the involvement of local officials or with the help of Kremlin state media to suggest that errors are being corrected when called to the Kremlin's attention, as ISW reported on September 26.<sup>41</sup> To that end, Kremlin propaganda outlet *RT* announced that its charity "We Will Continue to Act" will cover the stories of and support men who believe they have been wrongfully mobilized, an initial attempt at government accountability that the Kremlin will likely use to further accuse bureaucrats of incompetence for meeting quotas dictated by the Kremlin.<sup>42</sup>

Russian authorities are beginning to restrict the movement of Russian citizens into Russian border regions to cope with hundreds of thousands of Russian men attempting to flee the country. The Associated Press reported

that over 197,000 Russians have already fled through land borders to Georgia, Finland, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia between September 21 and 28, causing miles-long traffic jams at border crossings.<sup>43</sup> The governor of the Russian Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Sergey Menyailo, declared a "high alert regime" on September 28 that restricted the entry of cars into North Ossetia, which borders Georgia. Menyailo also ordered the establishment of food, shelter, and hygiene facilities for citizens waiting in miles-long traffic jams at the Russian-Georgian border.<sup>44</sup> Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin addressed rumors that unspecified entities required Russians who made it across the Georgian border to sign a document recognizing Russian aggression and occupation of Georgian territories. Volodin threatened all Russians who sign such documents with punishment if they ever return to Russia.<sup>45</sup>

Russian occupation officials continued to set conditions to forcibly mobilize or conscript Ukrainian civilians in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine. The People's Militias of the Russian proxy Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) shared information about stricter Russian penalties for desertion, insubordination, surrender, and avoiding mobilization on September 28.46 The DNR militia called on its followers to "make up your minds—are you a defender of the motherland, or a deserter?" and warned that the penalties for desertion will be "significantly tightened" in line with Russian law as soon as the DNR joins Russia.<sup>47</sup> The DNR and LNR have forcibly mobilized their populations to varying degrees since 2014 and have not commented on whether their populations will be subject to Russian mobilization.

Ukraine's National Resistance Center reported on September 28 that the heads of Kherson's and Zaporizhia's occupation administrations are planning the partial mobilization of Ukrainian civilians as soon as Russia annexes those oblasts.<sup>48</sup> However, Kherson Occupation Administration Head Vladimir Saldo alleged that no Kherson Oblast residents will be mobilized when Kherson Oblast joins Russia and that the oblast would provide only volunteer battalions to fight against Ukraine.<sup>49</sup> It remains unclear whether Saldo will remain in charge of Russia's occupation of Kherson Oblast after the Kremlin annexes Kherson Oblast. The Ukrainian advisor to Ukraine's Kherson Oblast Military Administration, Serhiy Klan, reported that Russian forces unexpectedly began allowing men between the ages of 18 and 35 to leave Kherson again on September 28 after closing the border to men of fighting age on September 25.<sup>50</sup> ISW had previously assessed that Russian forces may have prevented men of fighting age from fleeing occupied Ukraine to preserve forces for forced mobilization or conscription after the Kremlin formalizes its annexation of occupied Ukrainian territories.<sup>51</sup>

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

See the topline text.

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>35</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0M9u4uLZiAXMUVJNr8PDc2hKyczCozQemLanzWwazWkZnzQeqPBCpjkep SMBkJ7Afl; https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502801491662108; https://t.me/mod russia/20296;

 $https://t.me/stranaua/66608; https://t.me/stranaua/66611; https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977; https://t.me/vilkul/1966; https://t.me/spravdi/17982; https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502801491662108; https://t.me/mod_russia/20296; https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502801491662108; https://t.me/spravdi/17991$ 

<sup>36</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0M9u4uLZiAXMUVJNr8PDc2hKyczCozQemLanzWwazWkZnzQeqPBCpjkep <u>SMBkJ7Afl</u>; https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502801491662108; https://t.me/mod\_russia/20296;

https://t.me/stranaua/66608; https://t.me/stranaua/66611; https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977; https://t.me/vilkul/1966; https://t.me/spravdi/17982; https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502801491662108

#### https://t.me/stranaua/66542

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=416432020597727; https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/19481

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0v3ufKPBKYt4utocRRHABH7SahgtaHyTdA72gNW9UMVis5nJcKE5mRxLg6i R876iel;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=416432020597727

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> https://t.me/rybar/39493; https://t.me/rybar/39491; https://t.me/rybar/39486

<sup>31</sup> https://t.me/rybar/39465

<sup>32</sup> https://t.me/kommunist/10011; https://t.me/RKadyrov 95/2891

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup>ttps://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0M9u4uLZiAXMUVJNr8PDc2hKyczCozQemLanzWwazWkZnzQeqPBCpjkepS MBkJ7Afl;

<sup>34</sup> https://t.me/rybar/39510

<sup>37</sup> https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977 ; https://t.me/vilkul/1966 ; https://t.me/spravdi/17982

<sup>38 &</sup>lt;a href="https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/19472">https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/19485</a>; <a href="https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977">https://t.me/Bratchuk Sergey/19485</a>; <a href="https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977">https://t.me/dnipropetrovskaODA/1977</a>; <a href="https://t.me/vilkul/1966">https://t.me/vilkul/1966</a>

<sup>39</sup> https://tayga dot info/179280

<sup>40</sup> https://t.me/razvozhaev/1114

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-26

<sup>42</sup> https://t.me/act\_next/1674

<sup>43</sup> https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-estonia-kazakhstan-d851fdd9e99bedbf4e01b98efd18d14b

<sup>44 &</sup>lt;a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/42763">https://t.me/readovkanews/42764</a>; <a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/42764">https://t.me/readovkanews/42763</a>; <a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/42764">https://t.me/readovkanews/42764</a>; <a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/42764">https://t.me/readovkanews/42764</a>; <a href="https://t.me/readovkanews/42764">https://t.me/readovkanews/42764</a>; <a href="https://t.me/stranaua/66566">https://t.me/stranaua/66566</a>;

<sup>45</sup> https://t.me/stranaua/66542

<sup>46</sup> https://t.me/millnr/9512

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> https://t.me/nm dnr/9121

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> https://sprotyv.mod dot gov.ua/2022/09/28/rosiyany-nezabarom-ogolosyat-chastkovu-mobilizacziyu-na-okupovanomu-pivdni/

<sup>49</sup> https://t.me/VGA Kherson/3689

<sup>50</sup>https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid022xbmPjfKu8GiGufe2zjXNNZPkeizpn53h7EkcEFxySPXumoWmvS8grPh6mfnz QPbl

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-26