

Conflict Update # 186

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 54,480 (+230) soldiers killed, 2,210 (+8) enemy tanks, 4,718 (+17) armored combat vehicles, 1,309 (+3) artillery systems, 312 (+0) MLRS systems, 168 (+0) air defense systems, 251 (+0) warplanes, 217 (+1) helicopters, 918 (+7) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 215 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,578 (+7) trucks and tankers, 76 fuel bowsers and 114 (+0) units of specialized equipment.

Key takeaways

Ukrainian forces cross Oskil River - Ukrainian forces have crossed the river. Prior, unconfirmed reports circulated of Ukrainian troops taking the eastern part of Kupiansk.

Earlier, UK intelligence said that the Russian forces have already built a defense line between the eastern bank of the Oskil River and the occupied town of Svatove in Luhansk Oblast. According to the UK Defense Ministry, Russian forces will likely be forced to retreat from the entirety of Kharkiv Oblast east of the Oskil River amid Ukraine's ongoing counter-offensive.

Troops break through Russia's frontline along Oskil river - Ukrainian soldiers have broken through Russia's "new" frontline along the Oskil river, exposing an important supply route and swathes of territory the Kremlin has promised to defend.

Fighting has focused on Kupiansk since Russian forces fled a surprise Ukrainian offensive around Kharkiv in northeast Ukraine last week but now military bloggers from both sides have said Russia's defence has crumbled once again.



"Kupiansk has surrendered. The enemy is on the left bank of the Oskil," the pro-Russian military blogger Vladlen Tatarsky told his 450,000 subscribers last night.

Western commentators confirmed the development. James Rushton, a British military analyst based in Ukraine, said he didn't think Russian forces would be able to hold their defensive line along the Oskil River for much longer.

"The Ukrainians have already crossed it," he said. "Considering they now control all of Kupiansk, half of the city is on the eastern bank, any defensive line the Russians might try to form along the river is already very vulnerable."

Russian forces fled across the Oskil River, which runs north-south from central Russia into Ukraine, after a surprise Ukrainian offensive recaptured about 4,000 sq. km of territory.

Kupiansk and Izyum are the largest and most valuable towns captured by the Ukrainian military. Both were heavily fought over in the opening weeks of the war and the Russian army had used them as logistics bases for supplying its forces in Donbas.

The British Ministry of Defence said a Ukrainian breach of the Russian frontline along the Oskil River would humiliate the Kremlin, which has made capturing and then defending Luhansk a priority and threaten its final logistics hub to Donbas from the Russian city of Belgorod.

"This line sits along the border of Luhansk Oblast, part of the Donbas, which Russia aims to 'liberate' as one of its immediate war aims," it said. "Any substantial loss of territory in Luhansk will unambiguously undermine Russia's strategy."

It added that "Russia will likely attempt a stubborn defence of this area, but it is unclear whether Russia's front line forces have sufficient reserves or adequate morale to withstand another concerted Ukrainian assault."

Ukraine operating behind Russian lines – Reports are surfacing of multiple Ukrainian commando units linking with local partisans and operating effectively behind Russian front lines.

Information coming in indicates that they are causing havoc in Russian supply lines and background troops and command structures.

Russia may be unable to withstand Ukrainian push in Luhansk: UK - Russia is likely to mount a "stubborn defense" of the Luhansk oblast in Ukraine's east although there is doubt over whether its forces have the resources to handle a further push by Kyiv's forces, British defense officials have said.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense (MOD) said Ukraine's forces were continuing with their counteroffensive in the north-east and that Russian troops had established a defensive line between the Oskil River and the town of Svatove along the Luhansk border.

The assessment said that "any substantial loss of territory" in Luhansk will "unambiguously undermine Russia's strategy."

"Russia will likely attempt to conduct a stubborn defense of this area," the officials said, "but it is unclear whether Russia's front line forces have sufficient reserves or adequate morale to withstand another concerted Ukrainian assault."

Ukraine's forces readying for next phase of counteroffensive - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has vowed that there would be no letup in the counteroffensive against Russia's military aggression, despite Russian shells targeting civilian areas over the weekend.

In his nightly video address, Zelenskyy said: "Maybe now it seems to some of you that after a series of victories we have a certain lull."

"But this is not a lull. This is preparation for the next phase... Because Ukraine must be free — all of it."

Russian fire killed four medics attempting to evacuate a psychiatric hospital in the Kharkiv region on Saturday. Overnight shelling also hit a hospital in Mykolaiv, a significant Black Sea port. Also, five people died over the past day in Russian attacks in the eastern Donetsk region.

British military says Russia at risk of losing Luhansk - Russia will continue to defend the Luhansk region in Eastern Ukraine, but it is unclear whether its forces have sufficient reserves or adequate morale to prevail, British defense officials said Saturday.

Ukraine continues its counteroffensive in the north-east, while Russian troops have established a defensive line along the Luhansk border, according to the British Ministry of Defense.

"Any substantial loss of territory in Luhansk will unambiguously undermine Russia's strategy," the MOD said.

Ukrainian strikes into Russia's border towns compound Putin's troubles - After a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in the northeast of the country, the messy war that Russian President Vladimir Putin started is now being fought directly on his doorstep, with artillery strikes hitting military targets in Russia and Russian officials in cities and towns along the border ordering hasty evacuations.

Yesterday a new round of strikes hit the Belgorod region in Western Russia, killing at least one person and wounding two.

On Friday, Ukraine reportedly struck the base of the Russian 3rd Motorized Rifle Division near Valuyki, just nine miles north of the Russia—Ukraine border. Russian officials did not acknowledge that a military target was hit but said one civilian died, and the local electrical grid experienced a temporary disruption.

Russia blamed the attacks on Ukraine, but Kyiv did not claim responsibility for striking targets in Russian territory.

Kyiv has assured U.S. officials that donated weapons would not be used to strike targets inside Russia proper. But Ukrainian forces are now so close to the border that they can hit targets using their own less-advanced weaponry.

That Russian citizens are starting to seriously feel the impact of the war directly is another new source of pressure on Putin, who returned home this weekend from a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Uzbekistan where he faced a remarkable public rebuke by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and questions about the war from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Putin using nuke in Ukraine would bring 'consequential' US response: Biden - The United States has issued a stern warning to Russian President Vladimir Putin over the use of nuclear weapons in its continued invasion of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden was interviewed for this Sunday's edition of 60 Minutes, his first appearance on the long-running news program since his election, where he was asked by Scott Pelley about the potential deployment of "chemical or tactical nuclear weapons" by Russia as it suffers embarrassing setbacks in its invasion. Biden's response was blunt.

"Don't. Don't. Don't," the president said. "You will change the face of war unlike anything since World War II."

Pelley then pressed Biden for details about what the U.S. response would be to such actions, to which Biden said that he would not share any details if he knew them. He only stressed that the response would be "consequential."

Russia responds to Biden's warning to Putin not to use nuclear weapons - The Kremlin has given a curt response when asked about Joe Biden's warning that the Russian leader should not resort to weapons of mass destruction in his invasion of Ukraine.

Biden was asked by CBS News about what his message would be to Putin if he felt the best way to retaliate and wrest back the initiative would be to use chemical or tactical nuclear weapons.

The U.S. president replied "don't, don't, don't" adding that such an action would "change the face of war unlike anything since World War Two".

When asked for his response to the exchange Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Saturday, "Read the doctrine. Everything is written there," RIA Novosti reported.

Russia's nuclear doctrine says nuclear weapons use might follow "an aggression against Russia or its ally with the use of mass destruction weapons" or if the country faced aggression "when the very existence of the state is under threat."

'The tipping point.' Ukraine's advance may be the deadliest yet - Weapons are the province of chemistry, ballistics and engineering; strategy is the domain of mathematics, economics and politics. But there is a reason warfare is considered an "art" and not a science by its greatest theorists.

The Ukrainian military has – once again – defied expectations about its limited resources and capabilities, by all accounts achieving a notable victory in the eastern province of Kharkiv – liberating more than 1,200 square miles of occupied territory in just days.

That's an area the size of Yosemite National Park, and the swift advance of Ukrainian forces undid months of Russia's territorial gains that cost thousands of lives on both sides.

Ukraine's advance in Kharkiv is a tangible success that can't be easily brushed off by Russian propagandists. It is a clear victory that meshes well with Kyiv's immediate need to demonstrate progress against Russian forces – and bolster support from international allies. But the battles ahead on the southern front will be much more critical – and difficult – for Ukraine as it fights to liberate occupied territories and end the war.

As reports began to spread that the Ukrainian military was making sizable gains in Kharkiv province, I checked in with a government source and asked if he could update me on how things were going.

"Not bad," was his laconic reply.

Could he summarize the situation? Yes, he said: "Our army has success in the east."

That's the typical mildly fatalistic, non-answer you get from Ukrainian military officials – but it was easy to see what he meant by "success." Videos and pictures were surfacing showing triumphant Ukrainian forces dashing through village after village and town after town being greeted by newly liberated civilians with hugs, food and flowers: even the Russian ministry of defense acknowledged Ukrainian forces were advancing in Kharkiv. Soon, Russian military commentators began describing the event as a "catastrophe."

What was particularly surprising is that before this apparent success in the east, all eyes were focused on Ukraine's southern front, where Kyiv's forces were focused on liberating the city of Kherson.

Prior to the surprising collapse of Russian defenses in Kharkiv, this debate over whether the "Kherson counteroffensive" was succeeding or failing obscured a fundamental truth about this stage of the conflict. After the failure by the Kremlin's forces to capture Kyiv and oust President Volodymyr Zelensky and his democratically elected government, and after the assault by Russian forces in the south and east was fought to a standstill by the defenders and the frontlines had been stabilized, it is now Ukraine that has the initiative – and the ability to dictate where it chooses to fight.

Russia must react to its enemy's moves. And that's a problem for the Kremlin.

Amid what the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz described as war's "clouds of great uncertainty," there was something refreshing in seeing this Ukrainian advance acknowledged by their enemies.

Meanwhile, the Russian defense ministry portrayed the retreat of their forces from Kharkiv as a strategic "redeployment."

From the perspective of the information war, it is irrelevant whether Russia intended to withdraw from Kharkiv or was ousted by force: either way, it is clear that Ukraine achieved a breakthrough – and demonstrated that its military has the ability to negate Russia's strategy of grinding attrition.

The Ukrainians will need more of this kind of creativity and cunning in the months ahead.

After weeks of public declarations that Ukraine was preparing to conduct a massive counteroffensive in the south of the country, since mid-August the country's military carried out a concerted campaign to "corrode" and degrade Russian logistics and supplies in the area around the southern city of Kherson using long-range artillery rockets supplied by the U.S. and its allies. All of this activity convinced Russian commanders – and outside observers – that the main Ukrainian effort before the onset of winter was aimed at this area.

But all warfare is based on deception, as Sun Tzu wrote. So even as Russia pulled 25 Battalion Tactical Groups – as many as 15,000 combat troops or more – out of the east to reinforce soldiers defending the territories it had seized in the south, Ukraine was cobbling together an ad hoc fighting force in the east designed for maneuver warfare – rapid movement to dislocate and disrupt the enemy's ability and will to fight – successfully hiding it from the eyes of Russian drones and reconnaissance.

Thus, within a week of Ukraine announcing that it was carrying out major operations in the area around Kherson, along the southern front, it began a major thrust 700 miles away to the northeast, near Kharkiv.

"Swiftness of action along major lines of communications – Ukrainian forces covered 75 kilometers [about 47 miles] toward Kupyansk in three days – led to the complete collapse of the Russian front line and unorganized withdrawal of units," as Mykola Bielieskov, a research fellow at Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote. "The offensive's accomplishments are especially impressive in light of the fact that Ukrainian forces are still grappling with a deficit of critical artillery and armor and lack air superiority, which is considered an essential requirement for any successful offensive operation."

This area was the scene of intense combat I witnessed with a Ukrainian air assault reconnaissance company in June; Ukraine has now retaken several of the cities that had fallen in that fighting.

The timing of the liberation of dozens of urban areas in Kharkiv is propitious for Ukraine, which needs to achieve visible and substantial victories on the battlefield to bolster flagging and increasingly fractious Western support. With soaring energy prices promising a hard winter across Europe, solidarity with Ukraine could well fall victim to public anger over heating bills.

Even as early as June, polling in European countries indicated that 35 percent of citizens in EU countries wanted a peace deal to end the war in Ukraine, while only 22 percent wished for an outright defeat of Russia – and 43 percent either had no opinion or couldn't decide. Against this ambivalence, politicians who believe it is in their country's interest to continue providing arms and other aid to Kyiv will have a much easier time justifying economic sacrifices if the perception is that Ukraine is winning the war.

All of that being said, it is too early for a victory parade, no matter how many superlatives analysts use to describe Ukraine's ouster of Russian forces in Kharkiv province. The newly liberated area is only about 2.5 percent of the more than 46,600 square miles of territory that Russia has seized since 2014 – one fifth of all of Ukraine.

The battlefield in Ukraine is over 1,500 miles long, stretching from Kharkiv in the north, along a wide crescent sweeping east and then south through Donbas, then west toward Kherson in the south-central portion of the country. Six months of continuous battle have sapped the strength and resources of invader and defender alike.

“It is very difficult for us,” acknowledged General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the top officer in Ukraine’s military. “But we are moving forward.”

That appears to be true. There is even evidence of Ukrainian soldiers advancing to the border of Russia itself, although they said they stopped short of crossing into Belgorod province despite encountering no armed opposition.

Still, “moving forward” in battle costs lives and equipment: while Ukrainian defense officials understandably choose to highlight videos of hugs and flowers, in this conflict there is no such thing as a bloodless victory – even if the price being paid is not publicly disclosed. No reliable accounting of the dead from this war currently exists, but even conservative estimates indicate that tens of thousands of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers and civilians have been slain to date. Ukrainian officials said in late August that at least 9,000 soldiers and more than 2,000 civilians had been slain; they also claimed to have killed more than 50,000 Russian soldiers.

And there will be more bloodshed.

In Kharkiv, Russian forces have been pushed back to the Oskil River – a major natural barrier, as true for the defenders as for the attackers. While Ukrainian forces have taken control of key logistics and transport hubs like Izyum and Kupyansk that allow them to threaten Russian forces in Luhansk and Donetsk, it isn’t clear that Kyiv has sufficient forces to further exploit these gains.

The military governor of Luhansk province, Serhiy Hayday, was blunt in his assessment: “The Kharkiv rapid scenario will not be repeated. We will have to fight hard for our oblast [province].”

Ukraine will need every trained soldier it can muster if it hopes to continue liberating territory seized by Russia. Although thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are now being rotated through training in the United Kingdom with a coalition of NATO personnel, and with more specialized training being conducted or considered in the United States and in Europe, over the summer I witnessed multiple instances in which individual soldiers and units up to battalion-strength with minimal training were being sent as replacements to battle-scarred brigades on the front lines.

“You can’t just take a guy and throw him on the line after four weeks of training,” Dr. Richard D. Hooker Jr., a retired U.S. Army airborne infantry commander and former senior director for Europe and Russia on the National Security Council, told me. “You’ve just gotta bite the bullet and fully train these guys. Throwing hordes of hastily trained soldiers onto the battlefield is not the way to do that.”

In June, Oleksii Danilov, the top official on Ukraine’s national security and defense council, estimated that six new brigades – about 25,000 well-equipped, professional soldiers – would be required to liberate all of the territory currently under Russian control.

These soldiers will also need weapons and munitions, and while Western goodwill may be strengthened by the perception of progress, Western stockpiles of key munitions and weapons are beginning to run low.

Of course, there is plenty of data that Russia is facing the same pressures in terms of manpower and supply of munitions, and this is why it actually does matter whether its forces fell apart in Kharkiv or conducted a “strategic withdrawal” – no matter how messy – abandoning land it had conquered in order to consolidate its lines. It’s an easily understood dynamic: the less territory Russia is holding, the more troops it will have available to defend them with greater concentrations of firepower. And that will mean even more casualties for Ukraine as it claws back its lands, and slower progress in liberating further territories.

But President Volodymyr Zelensky and his military leadership seem to understand that they are up against the clock, which is why they pushed to make something happen before winter. The liberation of eastern cities solidifies Ukrainian morale and boosts faith in the military's ability to win the conflict in the long-term. It also demonstrates to foreign allies that their weapons and aid matter – that they are backing not merely a moral cause, but a winning one. But it doesn't change the fact that Ukraine needs more trained soldiers and Western weapons to win.

Liberating the southern city of Kherson is an obvious immediate strategic goal for the Ukrainian military, and a necessary precursor to any efforts to reclaim occupied territory further south.

"If the city falls, they've had success," Dr. Hooker, the former NSC official, told me. "It might be the tipping point where people now start to think 'Yeah – Ukraine has a real chance to win this.'"

Kherson, a regional economic and administrative capital, is a port city that sits on the upstream end of the Dnipro River estuary as it flows into the Black Sea. Its pre-war population was around 290,000 – nearly half of which has fled since the fighting began in February. Having fallen to Russian forces in early March, Kherson is the only major city held by Russia on the western side of the winding Dnipro, the major waterway that divides Ukraine in a wide arc, from the border with Belarus in the north, to the Black Sea west of the Crimean Peninsula in the south.

Grasping this geography is essential to understanding the challenges and goals of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in southern Ukraine, as well as the Russian defensive strategy.

The Dnipro River to the south of Kherson, and the Inhulets River to the east of it, form formidable natural barriers to the rapid movement of men and material around the city. The key crossing of the Dnipro from Russian held-territory into the area around Kherson is the Antonivsky Bridge, a three-quarters-of-a-mile long span that carries the main regional highway north-south, from one bank to the other. (Rolling Stone).

Russia accused of abandoning injured troops as Putin heads toward total 'failure' - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a mammoth failure that has only bolstered the country's adversaries, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, professional head of the British armed forces, said in an interview with the BBC on Sunday.

"Putin is failing on all of his military strategic objectives. He wanted to subjugate Ukraine. That's not going to happen...He wanted to break the international resolve. Well, actually, that's strengthened over this period," he said.

Radakin further declared that pressure on the Russian president is intensifying. "His problems are mounting," he said. "He hasn't got sufficient manpower. His forces are thin on the ground."

The statements come during a brutal month for the Russian military, after Ukrainian forces recaptured more than 3,000 square miles of land in the country's northeast.

Low morale continues to plague Russia's troops, and Ukraine claims that multiple Russian units have been "trying to negotiate with the Ukrainians on surrender and transfer under the auspices of international law."

Ukrainian intelligence further claimed on Sunday that some Russian military hospitals have refused to treat so-called "volunteers" who have been fighting on Russia's behalf, since they do not have regular armed forces classification. Other volunteer fighters were "left behind... without any support or help," as Russian forces retreated from occupied territories, according to Ukrainian intelligence.

Sanctions

Poland, Baltic states reportedly close borders for Russian tourists on Sept. 19. Kristi Raik, director of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, tweeted that Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would temporarily restrict Russian

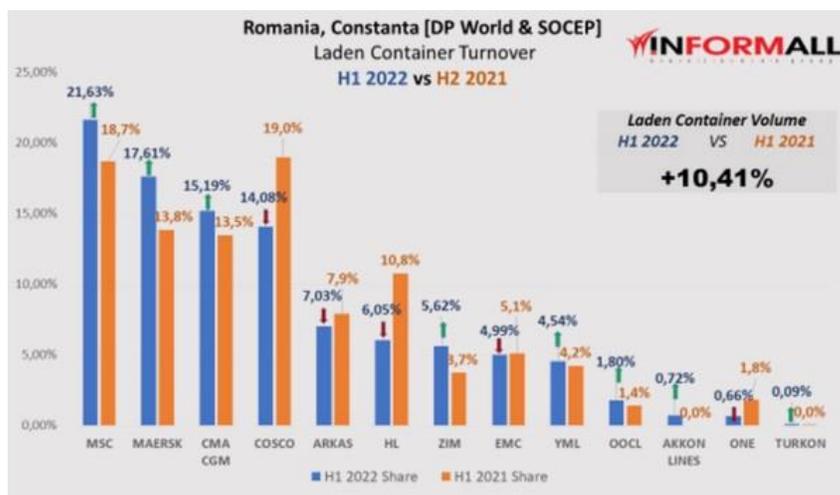
citizens holding EU visas from entry due to security threats amid Russia's war against Ukraine. According to Raik, only some categories – family members and holders of EU residence permits – will be able to enter the countries.

Impact

Ukraine war drives container growth of Port of Constanta

The Port of Constanta in Romania, located at the crossroads of the trade routes linking markets of the landlocked countries of Eastern Europe with the Caucasus, Middle East and Central Asia, has become a true cargo-transit hub for all kinds of transport.

Informall BG, a cargo analytical bureau in the Black Sea region, states that under normal market conditions, the annual container turnover growth rate of Constanta is at 2-3%. However, recent data shows that Constanta increased its laden container volume in H1 of 2022 by 10,4% YoY.



Ukraine farmers may cut winter grain sowing by at least 30% - Ukrainian farmers are likely to cut the winter grain sowing area by at least 30% because of a jump in prices for seeds and fuel combined with a low selling prices of their grain, the Ukrainian Agrarian Council (UAC) has said.

Ukraine has already started 2022 winter grain sowing and the agriculture ministry said last month it expects the winter wheat sowing area could shrink to 3.8 million hectares (9.3 million acres) from 4.6 million a year earlier.

Winter Wheat

Ukraine sowed more than 6 million hectares of winter wheat for the 2022 harvest, but a large area was occupied during the Russian invasion that began in February and only around 4.6 million hectares of wheat would be harvested in Ukrainian-controlled territory.

'The main reasons that encourage agricultural producers to reduce sown areas are the high cost of fertilizers, problems with the sale of grain, as well as too low purchase prices for agricultural products,' the UAC said in a statement.

The council represents thousands of small and medium-sized agriculture producers across Ukraine.

"We will reduce the sowing of winter crops by almost half. I consider it impractical to sell wheat today at cost price and still sow when there is no sale. I am looking for a sales market. In order to sow now, the farm needs to sell 500-700 tonnes," the UAC quoted farmer Valery Martyshko from the Kyiv region as saying.

Grain Exports

Ukrainian grain exports have slumped since the start of the war because its Black Sea ports, a key route for shipments, were closed off, driving up global food prices and prompting fears of shortages in Africa and the Middle East.

Three Black Sea ports were unblocked at the end of July under a deal between Moscow and Kyiv, brokered by the United Nations and Turkey.

Top US general urges vigilance as Russia weighs Ukraine setbacks - The top US general cautioned on Sunday it remained unclear how Russia might react to the latest battlefield setbacks in Ukraine and called for increased vigilance among US troops as he visited a base in Poland aiding Ukraine's war effort.

The remarks by US Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were a reminder of the risks of escalation as the United States and its Nato allies aid Ukraine from a distance as Kyiv wages a so-far successful counter-offensive against Russian forces.

"The war is not going too well for Russia right now. So it's incumbent upon all of us to maintain high states of readiness, alert," Milley said in Warsaw after the base visit. Reporters travelling with him were asked not to publish the name of the base or describe its location.

Power restored to over 18,000 Ukrainians on Sept. 18. Ukraine's Energy Ministry reported that around 18,800 consumers in Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Mykolaiv oblasts have regained power. However, around 793,300 consumers remain cut off due to ongoing hostilities.

Humanitarian

EU presidency calls for war crimes tribunal over Russia's mass killings of civilians - "Putin is responsible" The Czech statement amplifies Thursday's comments by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen: Putin must lose this war and must face up to his actions, that is important to me. We support the collection of evidence. That is the basis of our international legal system, that we punish these crimes. And ultimately, Putin is responsible.

Survivors of Russian occupation: 'You say something wrong – you get a sack on your head' - Russian forces reached Verbivka, located 100 kilometers deep in Ukraine's territory, within two weeks of the full-scale invasion.

Many local women start weeping as they talk about what has been happening over the last seven months. Verbivka had almost seven months of fear, humiliation, violence, and looting under Russian occupation.

The Verbivka story is typical among other Ukrainian towns under the Russian occupation. Until Sept. 6, the town was occupied by units with Russia's 11th Army Corps, special police, and militant forces, which would later sustain heavy losses in the sudden Ukrainian strike.

According to residents, the closer it was to the front line, the more relentless Russian looting was.

"They took all they could from many houses," says Tetyana Sinovoz, a 59-year-old local milk factory worker.

"When they saw a nice household, they would sometimes force the owners out, just like that, let them have their passports only."

For the people of Verbivka, it was a time of fear.

"The worst thing is that you know anything could happen to you," says Sinovoz.

"They could come to anyone for any reason and do anything to you. And there was absolutely nothing to stop them."

"I am old; they had no problems with me. But I was really worried about my niece. She's 17, and she was here in this mess," Sinovoz said. "We managed to take her away from here secretly."

"As for us — we were always afraid, trying to stay indoors for as long as possible, not to catch their eyes. A man with a gun is always scary."

As pretty much anywhere, there were collaborators.

Those mainly were locals seeking power over their fellow townspeople and a chance to put their hands on local businesses and properties or join the embezzlement of Russian funds.

Collaborators did a lot of harm, reporting on Ukrainian retired war veterans and their families.

Russians would haunt young, strong males suspected of being prone to armed resistance.

Those detained in improvised Russian jails were beaten and interrogated.

Some were released, but others were not.

Thus, according to the people of Verbivka, a local resident Oleh Skomorokha was detained by Russians in March. To this day, no one knows if the man is still alive.

“They would take people off the streets,” says Volodymyr Vynnyk, an elderly local resident.

“You sneeze the wrong way, or you say something wrong — you get a sack on your head, and they take you to a house they use as a jail. You know what they did to people in those jails.”

“I personally saw Russians take two men with sacks on their heads into the school. We have no idea who those men were and if they ever left the building alive,” he said.

Putin

Putin: Russian government is trying to end the Ukraine invasion - Putin declared that the Russian government is doing everything it can to end the war in Ukraine as quickly as possible. His remarks came in conversation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him not to prolong the conflict since Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

The conversation took place at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit this week in the city of Samarkand in the Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan, itself a former republic within the Soviet Union. The event was attended by the Russian and Indian leaders as well as their counterparts in the region, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Putin losing his grip, Ukraine liberates Iziom, Russian propaganda in agony - The Ukrainian Armed Forces liberate cities in the Kharkiv region, while Russia is “regrouping troops” to achieve the goals of the “special military operation.” A mass burial site with over 400 graves is discovered in liberated Iziom. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin opens a Ferris wheel in Moscow, and later heads to Uzbekistan, where SCO leaders call for an end to the war.

Putin's new Ukraine problem: Even the war's biggest supporters are growing dissatisfied - For more than two decades now, Putin’s expanding grip on power has been predicated on his portrayed strength and justified as essential to Russia’s existence. Over time, as the political opposition and the independent media were gradually whittled away, Kremlin propagandists fostered a sense of inevitability underpinning his continued stewardship.

From the start, Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has been presented to the Russian public — and the country’s political elite — in very similar terms: This war was necessary to secure Russia’s future existence, it was well-planned and executed, and it will be won. And with near-total control over the information space at home, there has been very little chance for these narratives to be challenged.

All of that has changed over the past week.

Ukraine has conducted twin counteroffensives to retake territories occupied by Russia — and achieved success that appeared to stun outside observers as well as the Kremlin.

The scale of the Russian military's and political leadership's setbacks in Ukraine have become too vast for even state media and pro-war activists to ignore.

"The special military operation has completely failed," Igor Girkin, who gained notoriety as one of the main leaders of Russia's initial efforts in eastern Ukraine back in 2014, said in a video this week. "Since March, we have had a full-fledged war. But until now, Russian authorities, the defense ministry, and general staff have behaved as if there's no war."

Last week, he declared the war "already lost," and warned his audience of nearly half a million viewers that the war would continue until Russia's total defeat.

Girkin is himself a controversial figure among the marginal but increasingly vocal group of right-wing pro-war bloggers and activists who have thrived on the Telegram messaging service since the start of the war. Their views have traditionally run parallel to official state media messaging but are not firmly under the Kremlin's control. With Russian forces on the retreat, more and more they are accusing the leadership of betraying the troops.

"The Kremlin is worried about this panic sentiment," said Tatiana Stanovaya, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The pro-war activists are seen as allies, they are part of the broad pro-Putin consensus in Russia, the disagreement is just about tactics. So, the Kremlin actually has limited means to deal with this camp. They can't turn against them and suppress them the same way they did the liberal opposition."

Even soldiers who have fought in what the Kremlin insists on calling its "special operation" are returning home, refusing to go back to the front, and challenging the official narrative surrounding the war. As Ukraine retakes territory, videos are appearing online appearing to show massive amounts of equipment abandoned by retreating Russian soldiers.

While the television has told the public that they've been fighting a good, clean war, soldiers are telling their friends, families and fellow citizens stories of a chaotic, unclear and troubled operation.

"Russian society, just as the Russian army, is decaying and falling apart because of corruption," Pavel Filatyev, a Russian soldier who has published a scathing memoir of the first two months of the war, told NBC News. "So the Russian army often is not acting carefully, they are acting unprofessionally, and a lot of mistakes are being made."

He fled Russia last month after publishing his 141-page account of the war on the Russian social media network VKontakte. NBC News interviewed him in Paris, where he is now seeking asylum. He said that he was stationed in Crimea on exercises before the start of the war Feb. 24, and his unit was sent into the southern Kherson region without sufficient supplies and ammunition.

"Everyone steals as much as they can at each and every level," Filatyev said when asked about the reason for equipment shortages. "On paper, everything is amazing. Our soldiers should be well-fed and happy. But in practice, somewhere along the line the extra food was stolen and sold, same with boots and even bulletproof vests."

Accounts such as Filatyev's cast doubt on the Kremlin's ability to do one thing that many in Russia now seem to agree is necessary to win the war: mobilization of some form.

Over the past few days, this sentiment has started spilling over from marginal radical Telegram channels into the official sanctioned discourse on Russian television. One noteworthy incident took place on a Sunday talk show in which guests openly criticized the war and its goals, with some panelists claiming that Russia will now lose the war unless Putin calls for a full mobilization of the Russian military, which is made up of a mix of paid soldiers and conscripts.

But the Kremlin understands this would be an unpopular decision among the pacified and apathetic Russian public.

It said this week that mobilization was not yet in the cards and openly warned those who are seen as patriotic dissenters from crossing the line.

Containment

Germany approves sale of RCH-155 howitzers to Ukraine - The \$216 million deal includes 18 RCH-155 howitzers and spare parts for them, manufactured by Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW). First delivery is expected in 2025, as KMW was reluctant to begin production before Berlin confirmed the howitzers could be sold to Ukraine.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov discussed the sale of modern German-made weapons with his German counterpart Christine Lambrecht in July.

Ukraine's Ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, announced Germany's approval of RCH-155 sale on Sept. 16.



"This will be a major contribution to the might of the Ukrainian army," Melnyk said.

According to the ambassador, the deal could potentially expand to include up to 100 of KMW's howitzers.

RCH-155 is a highly-mobile self-propelled howitzer with the range of 54 kilometers, capable of covering 700 kilometers of distance with the top speed of 100 km/h.

Marles looks to more Australian support for war torn Ukraine - Australia will continue sending military support to Ukraine to add to the delivery of armored vehicles and howitzers but is yet to decide the additional ways to help the country fight the Russian invasion.

Defence Minister Richard Marles said empower Ukraine to resolve the and was looking at ways to add to delivery of Bushmasters and other armored equipment over the past six months.

Australia wanted to help conflict on its terms the



GeoMilitary

Kyrgyzstan reports 36 people killed in clashes with Tajikistan - Kyrgyzstan's health ministry has reported 36 people killed in the clashes on the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border.

A total of 129 people were injured. According to Kyrgyzstan's emergencies ministry, 177 tonnes of humanitarian aid have been delivered to the Batken region. Another 160 tonnes are expected from Bishkek.

Tensions on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border escalated on 14 September. According to Kyrgyzstan, Tajik border guards "took combat positions in an undocumented section of the border in violation of previously reached agreements between the sides." In response to the demand to leave the territory, the Tajik border guards opened fire, the Kyrgyz State Committee for National Security stated. This led to a shootout.

Taliban, Pakistan forces clash at border over alleged building of military post - Clashes broke out between Afghanistan's Taliban and Pakistani forces this week on the border between the two nations, in an incident the Taliban claims was ignited by Pakistan building a military post.

The clashes took place on the border at Afghanistan's Paktia province and Pakistan's Kurram region earlier this week, reportedly leading to an unclear amount of casualties on both sides.

According to a statement on Wednesday by Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi, "Pakistan forces tried to erect a military post near the line", after which Afghan authorities attempted to approach and talk to the Pakistani officials. They were apparently fired upon, however. "Both sides exchanged fires, which may have resulted in the loss of lives," Karimi said.