

President of Ukraine announces the creation of Assault Forces. Day 1308 of the war

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 The situation on the frontline

Russian forces continue their offensive on the border between the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, where they have taken control of four more towns. They are also attacking in the south-western part of Pokrovsk and, according to some sources, they have already captured several neighbourhoods there. As a result of dislodging the defenders from their last positions in the Serebryansky forest (fighting has been going on there since 2022) and strengthening their positions on the outskirts of Yampil, they have flanked Siversk from the north. The Ukrainians are still holding on to the key town of Shandryholove, which is hindering Russia's further advance towards Lyman to cut off the main railway line connecting Kharkiv with Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. However, Russia has made further progress east of the Oskil River, where, as a result of the fighting in Kupiansk, Ukraine is experiencing increasing problems with supplies.

On 18 September, Volodymyr Zelensky announced a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the direction of Donetsk. Since the beginning of the operation, the defenders in the vicinity of Pokrovsk and Dobropillia have liberated 160 km² with seven settlements and have "cleared the Russian presence" in a further 170 km² with nine settlements. A day later, the president's words were repeated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Oleksandr Syrskyi, who announced an operation "in the Dobropillia direction" and added that the troops had advanced 3–7 km into territories previously occupied by Russia (which would mean an advance on the front line several dozen kilometres wide). On 20 September, Zelensky returned to the subject of the counteroffensive, announcing that 330 km² of territory had been brought back under the control of the defenders in the Dobropillia direction and in the Pokrovsk area. Two days later, Syrskyi reported on further progress, stating that a total of 164.5 km² had been liberated and 180 km² had been cleared of Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups.

The reports by Zelensky and Syrskyi regarding the ongoing counteroffensive are not confirmed by the situation on the front line. The topic has not been addressed by Ukrainian OSINT sources and local commanders, who, in line with previous practice, have publicised minor Ukrainian tactical successes. The situation stabilised after the Russian breakthrough near Dobropillia in mid-August and, according to the DeepState map, approximately 40 km² of territory returned to Ukrainian control at that time. In mid-September, Ukraine's

counterattacks led to the recapture of another 10 km² in the area newly occupied by the enemy earlier that month. In the Pokrovsk area, on the other hand, the Ukrainians have suffered only territorial losses in recent weeks. Most likely, the repetition of messages about the achievements of the counteroffensive by the president and commander-in-chief was intended to boost declining morale by arousing enthusiasm similar to that which accompanied actual successes on the front (most recently, the entry of Ukrainian troops into Kursk Oblast in August 2024).

Russian air attacks

On 20 September, Russia carried out another massive air strike targeting Ukraine's logistical and industrial facilities. Drones and/or missiles struck Dnipro (including the Pivdenmash plant) and Pavlohrad (mechanical plant). One civilian was killed and 36 were wounded in the attacks. Damage was also caused in Mykolaiv and the Khmelnytskyi, Kyiv (including a fuel and lubricant depot in Boryspil) and Odesa oblasts. In the afternoon of the same day, enemy drones struck transport infrastructure in Chernihiv, and multiple rocket launchers fired on the industrial area in Sumy, resulting in a temporary power outage.

On 17 September, one of the most serious attacks on Ukrainian railway infrastructure took place. Power substations supplying traction in the Cherkasy and Kirovohrad regions were hit, resulting in nearly two days of disruption to train traffic towards Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Kropyvnytskyi and 44 other towns in Kirovohrad Oblasts were also periodically without power. NASA FIRMS images show that large fires broke out at the railway junctions of Smila in Cherkasy Oblast and Kalinovka near the Vasylkiv airport in Kyiv Oblast. A day later, as a result of a strike on a power substation near Myrhorod, train traffic in Poltava Oblast was periodically suspended, while on 23 September, another attack in Kirovohrad Oblast paralysed the railways.

Russian drones and missiles continue to target Ukraine's rear in eastern and southern Ukraine. In addition to the above, attacks were carried out on businesses in the Poltava region (17, 21 and 23 September), Pavlohrad (19 September), Kryvyi Rih (21 and 23 September), Mykolaiv (22 September), Odesa and its surroundings (22 and 23 September), Sumy (22 September) and Chernihiv (as a result of an attack on critical infrastructure on 23 September, electricity supplies were temporarily cut off) and in the Kyiv (18 and 22 September, including factories and a logistics centre in Boryspil) and Chernihiv (on 19 September, a fire broke out at a fuel depot there). On 22 and 23 September, Zaporizhzhia was attacked three times. It was hit by guided aerial bombs and, most likely, at least one ballistic missile. According to some sources, the target may have been units moving to the front in Zaporizhzhia Oblast. A total of four civilians were killed and four more were wounded in the attacks on the city. According to the Air Force Command and the General Staff of the Ukrainian Army, between the evening of 16 September and the morning of 23 September, Russia used a total of 1,222 strike drones and their imitators (of which the defenders neutralised 1,075) and at least 50 missiles (of which 29–31 were shot down; all on 20 September).

On 18 September, Ukrainian drones attacked Gazprom's petrochemical complex in the city of Salavat in Bashkortostan, 1,400 km away, setting another range record (the previous one was 100 km shorter). A fire broke out at the facility and, according to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the oil purification installation was damaged. On the same day, a refinery in Volgograd was also attacked. Two days later, drones struck refineries in Novokuybyshevsk in Samara Oblast, where a fire broke out, and in Samara. According to Ukrainian sources, the joint operation by the SBU and Special Operations Forces also targeted the Kuibyshev-Tikhoretsk pipeline facilities (mainly pumping stations) on that day, but there is no information to suggest that significant damage was caused. A massive Ukrainian attack, including on Moscow, on the evening of 22 September using the largest number of drones since spring (according to Russian sources, 339 were shot down) did not have any significant effect.

Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR) reported further strikes on enemy military targets in Crimea. On 21 September, and most likely the day before (the date was not specified), a radar station, three Mi-8 helicopters (a video confirming the destruction of one of them was published on the Ukrainian internet) and, for the first time in history, as emphasised in the announcement, two Be-12 amphibious aircraft were reportedly hit. Also on 21 September, unmanned aerial vehicles are thought to have attacked the Foros sanatorium near Yalta, where, according to Ukrainian sources, representatives of the Russian authorities may have been staying.

Latvia has delivered a second batch of Patria 6×6 wheeled armoured personnel carriers to Ukraine, as announced by the Latvian Ministry of Defence on 16 September. The first batch of vehicles manufactured in Latvia was delivered in July this year, and Kyiv will ultimately receive 42 of them. On the same day, Reuters reported that **Donald Trump's administration had approved the first two support packages under the** Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) **mechanism**, with a total value of \$1 billion.

On 20 September, President Zelensky announced the creation of the Assault Forces. He noted that within 7–10 days, the creation of a new type of military unit would be officially announced – the second to be created in wartime, after the unmanned systems forces. This is to be another remedy for the difficult situation on the front line, following the transition to a corps structure that began in the spring. Two days later, the General Staff clarified that this did not involve changes to the Airborne Assault Forces, but rather the placement of existing assault regiments and assault subunits in brigades under specialised command. The Assault Forces will be used to break through enemy defences and secure the entry of main forces into combat, but they will not participate in defensive operations. The creation

of a new type of troops will facilitate, from a formal point of view, the trend observed for over a year and which is currently intensifying, of using the best subunits, bypassing their permanent subordination in the role of a kind of fire brigade, and freely transferring them to the most threatened sections of the front.

According to a survey published on 16 September by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, **54% of adult Ukrainians (both men and women not covered by military service) declare their readiness to join the Ukrainian Defence Forces** if necessary – 23% of respondents are definitely ready, 31% are somewhat ready, 15% are somewhat not ready, and 23% are definitely not ready). In a similar survey conducted in 2023, 62% of respondents expressed their readiness to fight.

On 18 September, **President Zelensky signed a law on the Military Ombudsman**. The Ombudsman will identify cases of violations of soldiers' rights and their causes, examine complaints, develop methods to prevent and eliminate violations, prepare recommendations for the military command authorities, and analyse data, complaints and reports concerning the situation of soldiers. The head of the new body is Olha Reshetylova, the former representative of the head of state for the protection of soldiers' rights.

A day later, **the president announced that Ukraine was launching a "controlled export" of weapons. This step is aimed at raising funds for the development and mass production of modern weapons needed on the front lines**. The export will include naval drones, anti-tank weapons and other types of military equipment not specified. Zelensky added that his concept will be presented within two weeks, specifically three new export platforms: the first for exports and cooperation with the US, the second for trade with European partners, and the third for sales to other partners around the world who are interested in Ukrainian weapons and from whom Kyiv has received some form of support. Ukrainian arms manufacturers have long sought the opportunity to export, but until now the state authorities have not granted their consent. The decision is intended to provide a boost to the development of the domestic defence industry. It is expected that the proceeds from this will be used primarily for the development of drone technology and other unmanned systems.

Russia's military potential

According to information disclosed on 19 September by an anonymous representative of the Ukrainian secret services, **Russia, in cooperation with Iran, is conducting large-scale recruitment operations aimed at attracting mercenaries from the Middle East** to participate in the war against Ukraine. These are mainly citizens of Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen, including former ISIS fighters. They are promised remuneration of between \$3,000 and \$8,000 and Russian citizenship after six months of service.

Russian operations against Ukraine

The Coordination Staff for the Treatment of Prisoners of War has warned that **Russian special services are conducting activities against the families of Ukrainian prisoners of**

war and soldiers declared missing. Russian agents contact the families, posing as friendly individuals, and then offer help and information about their loved ones. After initial polite communication, pressure and blackmail escalate. Relatives are forced to photograph military facilities or carry out special tasks in exchange for promises of information about the fate of prisoners or improved conditions of detention. Victims of this practice are subjected to psychological pressure, which often leads to emotional breakdown. As a result of manipulation and blackmail, some of these people are forced to spread Russian disinformation narratives discrediting the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The situation in the occupied territories

On 16 September, American researchers from the Yale School of Public Health published a report indicating that **the Russians had established at least 210 institutions for the “re-education” of Ukrainian children in the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.** The aim of these activities is to instil pro-Russian ideology and provide military training. These institutions include cadet schools, medical facilities, orphanages, universities, recreation centres, military bases and even monasteries. In at least 39 facilities, children aged 8–17 participate in military training in the use of drones, medical tactics, shooting and grenade throwing. In 2025 alone, the Russians took nearly 11,000 minors from occupied Ukraine.

According to information provided on 17 September by the Ukrainian government’s Centre for Countering Disinformation (CPD), **the Russians have begun a new wave of mobilisation in occupied Melitopol.** The occupying authorities have announced measures to ensure the compulsory attendance of residents at military registration offices, medical examinations and the military registration of persons residing in the occupied territories. CPD recalled that earlier promises by the Kremlin that those living in Zaporizhzhia Oblast would be “exempt from conscription for at least five years” had turned out to be a lie. The mobilisation is part of a broader strategy by Russia, which treats the Ukrainian population solely as a reservoir for their own armed forces.

