STUDENT HANDOUT

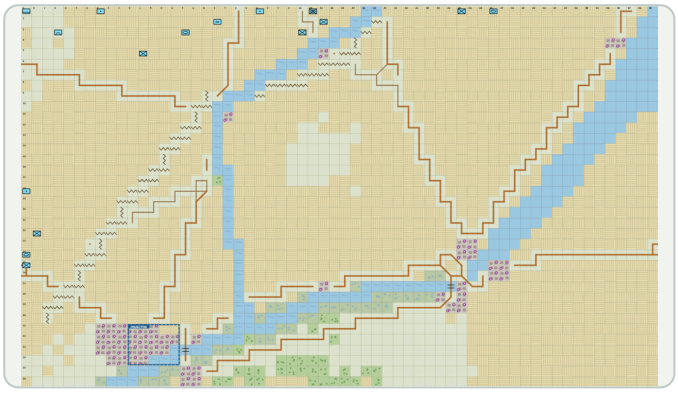
The Kherson Counteroffensive

Kherson, Snihurivka, Davydiv Brid and Beryslav, Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts, Ukraine · 29 August to 11 November 2022

Information as of September 2026



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

Learning objectives

- Compare source accounts of crossing disruption with the authored supply-counter losses. The run's cutoff mechanism depends on supply counters; it does not simulate ferry or pontoon carrying capacity or demonstrate the historical effect of each bridge strike.
- Compare otherwise matching runs with and without the player's drones, using losses, elapsed time and objective progress in each authored stage. The option leaves enemy drone activity in place and does not remove all observation from the battlefield.
- Compare the effects of the authored Orlan-10, Lancet and Shahed arrivals on observed contacts and losses. Artillery movement and firing are automatic; discuss proposed battery relocation separately from the run's available launch and standing-order controls.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 7 minutes 20 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Take Kherson by the end of the operation. Use your guns and drone spotters to break the Russian line at the Inhulets bridgehead, Snihurivka and Kyselivka, push down the Dnieper toward Beryslav, and clear every Russian combat unit from the city zone. More brigades arrive in October and November.

The Kherson Counteroffensive: Take Kherson by the end of the operation. Use your guns and drone spotters to break the Russian line at the Inhulets bridgehead, Snihurivka and Kyselivka, push down the Dnieper toward Beryslav, and clear every Russian combat unit from the city zone. More brigades arrive in October and November. Occupy the

marked zone with at least one combat unit and no opposing combat unit for 8 continuous simulation seconds. The authored limit is 440 simulation seconds across 4 stages. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

Atrocity notice

The UN Commission found war crimes by Russian authorities, including killings, torture and sexual violence, and a small number of violations by Ukrainian forces. Its March 2023 findings are context, including for later scenarios.

These reports describe the wider conflict. They do not establish that every crime occurred in this modeled battle.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2023-03-16 · UN Commission of Inquiry: war crimes in Ukraine

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

Historical source notes

Ukraine fought the Russian force on the right bank through its supply lines as much as through its front. HIMARS strikes on the Antonivka Road Bridge, the Kakhovka Dam crossing and the Darivka bridge forced Russia onto ferries and pontoons, and US officials assessed in November that the Russian force was poorly supplied and largely cut off because of the loss of the bridges (Wikipedia).

Attacks across open steppe in late August and September were slow and costly. The breakthrough came in early October in the north, when Russian units along the Dnieper fell back toward Dudchany to avoid encirclement. ISW assessed that the long public discussion of a Kherson offensive also drew Russian troops away from the Kharkiv front, where Ukraine broke through in September.

Drones in 2022 were mostly sensors. Quadcopters and Orlan-10s found targets for artillery, and the side that found the other's guns first could destroy them. Shahed-136 and Lancet drones appeared in the south during this operation, early signs of the strike drone war that followed. The Bayraktar TB2, prominent in the first weeks of the war, had become less effective against Russian air defence by summer 2022 (BBC, cited by Wikipedia).

Civilians stayed in the battle area throughout. Kherson had about 279,000 residents at the start of 2022 and about 80,000 when Ukrainian troops entered; Russia relocated about 70,000 people to the left bank in late October, which Ukrainian authorities called deportations (Wikipedia). Human Rights Watch documented torture and enforced disappearances of civilians in the occupied south.

Civilian harm

Human Rights Watch reported that Russian forces had tortured, unlawfully detained and forcibly disappeared civilians in the occupied areas of southern Ukraine, including Kherson region.

Human Rights Watch reported that Russian forces ran a torture centre in Kherson during the occupation.

An international human rights report, reported by CNN, found that Russian troops tortured nearly half of the people held in detention centres in Kherson region.

Russia moved about 70,000 civilians to the east bank of the Dnieper, which Russian authorities called an evacuation and Ukrainian authorities called deportations. About 80,000 of Kherson's roughly 279,000 prewar residents remained when Ukrainian troops entered.

Local officials reported that Russian forces shot and killed at least 20 civilians in Chornobaivka during the occupation.

The retained secondary account reports bridge destruction, loss of essential services and deaths from mines after withdrawal. Exact bridge and casualty totals remain outside the verified scope here; crossing disruption and civilian movement are addressed by the separately scoped RUSI and Reuters accounts.

Evidence for learning objectives

RUSI's retrospective study describes Russian resupply constrained across contested Dnipro crossings and links supply pressure with withdrawal. It also records continuing effective Russian defence, rather than a simple total cutoff.

RUSI describes early UAV strike opportunities changing as EW and air defence improved. The exercise models reconnaissance and engagement opportunities; it does not reproduce a verified historical sensor-to-shooter sequence for every gun.

Reuters observed civilians arriving by boat from Kherson at Oleshky on22 October 2022. This establishes movement and civilian concerns, without settling the packet's population totals or every person's consent.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 10, complete the run with a pause at each authored wave within 30 minutes, and review for 20. For 90 minutes, add a run without drones and compare the reviews. For 180 minutes, give syndicates different drone-observation priorities on the authored approaches and one syndicate the Russian side, then compare the class results. Ground-axis changes are classroom proposals, not individual unit controls.

Session	Plan
45 minutes	Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min
60 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min
90 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min
180 minutes	Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min

Staff roles

commander
Set the pre-run posture and available standing orders, allocate drone flights across the authored approaches, and report progress toward Kherson and remaining time. Individual ground-axis changes and unit movement are automatic.

intelligence
Track which Russian guns, air defence and reserves have been found, report each Orlan-10 over your forces, and say when Russian units fall back.

fires
Observe the batteries and HIMARS counter's automatic engagements and ammunition, recommend available artillery standing orders, and report Lancet exposure. The run does not offer individual battery movement or gun-target assignment.

droneOps
Plan where each quadcopter flies, keep spotters over the next objective ahead of the troops, and report every drone lost and how.

Opposing staff objective

Hold Kherson through every wave. Your units on the right bank depend on crossings under rocket attack, so use Orlan-10 spotters, Lancets and Shaheds to slow the Ukrainian advance and keep a combat unit in the city zone until the end.

Decision points

- At the opening on 29 August: you attack on four axes with few drones. Where do you send your quadcopters first, toward the bridgehead at Andriivka, Snihurivka, or the guns behind Kyselivka, and why?
- In the authored October stage, observe where new brigades arrive automatically and compare drone observation along the Dnieper approach with observation around the modeled Beryslav guns. Individual brigade advance or waiting orders are unavailable.
- When a modeled Lancet threatens an artillery counter, compare available drone launches and artillery standing orders. Discuss a proposed battery withdrawal as a classroom option outside the run's individual movement controls.

Before and after questions

1. **In RUSI's retrospective account, why did contested Dnipro crossings matter for Russian troops near Kherson?**

   A. Crossing disruption primarily reduced opportunities for observing Ukrainian troop movement
   B. Crossing disruption primarily affected withdrawals rather than continuing resupply needs
   C. Contested Dnipro crossings constrained Russian resupply rates while effective Russian defence still continued
   D. Stored supplies justified disregarding the remaining capacity of contested crossings

2. **In this model, what does locating opposing artillery provide?**

   A. An opportunity to engage the located guns
   B. Confidence that the located guns remain stationary
   C. Confidence that return fire no longer threatens observers
   D. Confidence that the contact needs no further confirmation

3. **Which constraints does RUSI describe on Ukrainian strike UAVs as Russian coverage improved in 2022?**

   A. Aircraft allocation to maritime missions principally restricted strike access inland
   B. Seasonal weather rather than hostile coverage principally restricted strike access
   C. Reduced ground advances rather than hostile coverage principally restricted strikes
   D. Russian electronic warfare and air defence restricted strike access

4. **What civilian movement did Reuters directly observe at Oleshky on22 October 2022?**

   A. Families returned by boat into Kherson after warnings were lifted
   B. People arrived by boat from Kherson with personal belongings
   C. Civilian departures had ended before the occupation authorities renewed warnings
   D. Authorities organised inland movements without using the river boat crossings

5. **What reason did General Surovikin give on 9 November for withdrawing Russian troops to the left bank?**

   A. Civilian relocation had removed the need for defence
   B. A local agreement required abandoning the remaining positions
   C. Artillery shortages had removed the force's defensive capability
   D. The right-bank force could not be supplied

Discussion

- Which Russian unit or crossing did you find first, how long did it take, and how did that change your plan for the next wave?
- Compare your run with drones and a run without them. How did losses, timing and ground gained differ, and in which wave did the drones matter most?
- ISW's 11 November 2022 assessment described footage of civilians greeting Ukrainian troops in Kherson. What civilian-protection concerns should an after-action review examine beyond taking the city, and which are absent from this run's model?
- If you had commanded the Russian side, what would you have changed in posture, air defence or the use of Orlan-10s and Lancets to hold the right bank longer?

Debrief rubric

Strong
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

Adequate
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

Weak
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

Published readings

1. ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 29 August 2022
2. ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 4 October 2022
3. ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 11 November 2022

Complete source list

Wikipedia: 2022 Kherson counteroffensive
Wikipedia: Antonivka Road Bridge
Wikipedia: Bridges in the Russo-Ukrainian war
Wikipedia: Liberation of Kherson
Wikipedia: Southern front of the Russo-Ukrainian war (2022–present)
Wikipedia: Russian occupation of Kherson Oblast
Wikipedia: Davydiv Brid
Wikipedia: Dudchany
Wikipedia: Darivka, Kherson Raion
Wikipedia: Snihurivka
Wikipedia: Kherson
Wikipedia: Sukhyi Stavok
Wikipedia: Andriivka, Beryslav Raion, Kherson Oblast
Wikipedia: Kyselivka, Kherson Oblast
Wikipedia: Beryslav
Wikipedia: Nova Kakhovka
Wikipedia: Inhulets River
Wikipedia: ZALA Lancet
Wikipedia: HESA Shahed 136
Wikipedia: STC Orlan-10
Wikipedia: Bayraktar TB2
Wikipedia: AeroVironment Switchblade
ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 29 August 2022
ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 4 October 2022

ISW (via Critical Threats): Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 11 November 2022
Washington Post: How Ukrainians, targeting by drone, attacked Russian artillery in Kherson (8 October 2022)
Ukrinform: Ukrainian forces destroy Russia's Mi-24, two Orlan-10s in Kherson region (2022)
Ukrinform: Ukrainian forces destroy four Iranian kamikaze drones in Mykolaiv region (2022)
Naval News: Loitering munition strikes Ukrainian gunboat, a first in naval warfare (November 2022)
Kyiv Independent: Explainer, Iran's cheap, effective Shahed drones and how Russia uses them in Ukraine
Human Rights Watch: Ukraine, Torture, Disappearances in Occupied South (22 July 2022)
Human Rights Watch: Ukraine, Russian Torture Center in Kherson (13 April 2023)
CNN: Kherson detention centers, Russian troops tortured nearly half of those held, international human rights report finds (2 August 2023)