

Donbas “people’s republics,” occupied territories in Kherson & Zaporizhzhia regions call referendums on accession to Russian Federation. Putin endorses referendums, orders partial mobilization.



Source: Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 19 September)

BBC

Over the past several weeks, Ukraine has launched offensives that have taken back a substantial amount of territory – some 3,000 square miles by Kyiv’s estimate – in eastern and southern Ukraine that had been taken by Russia in the war that began on February 24. Earlier this month, in an offensive that evidently took Russia by surprise, Ukraine took back virtually all of Kharkiv region in the northeast that’s adjacent to the Donbas area in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine has also thwarted a move westward by Russian forces that had previously taken Kherson region in southern Ukraine and mounted an offensive to take back that region as well as the portion of Zaporizhzhia region Russia had taken. And in the Donbas, Ukraine has thwarted Russia’s effort to complete its so-called “liberation of the Donbas” by preventing it from taking the substantial portion of Donetsk region still held by Ukraine.

Recalling the old adage about the best defense being a good offense, it was perhaps not surprising, and indeed quite predictable, that, in the wake of the Ukrainian successes, Russia would arrange for the officials of the Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics created by pro-Russian separatists in 2014 and formally recognized as independent states by Russia in February and the occupation authorities in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to hold referendums on becoming constituent entities of the Russian Federation. On Monday, Denis Pushilin, the leader of the DPR, addressed a post on social media to Russia President Vladimir Putin asking if, in the event there were a “positive decision in a referendum,” the DPR could be considered asap for membership in the Russian Federation. Russia quickly responded favorably and by yesterday the

civic authorities in the LPR and DPR and the occupation authorities in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia had agreed to hold referendums on September 23-27 to approve their requests that the territories be incorporated into the Russian Federation. Incorporating those territories into the Russian Federation would, of course, give Russia all of the Donbas plus a very wide land corridor between the Donbas and Crimea, which it annexed in the spring of 2014.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who now serves as deputy chair (to Putin) of Russia's important Security Council, publicly endorsed the idea, alluding to both the immediate advantage that would provide Russia in its war with Ukraine and the longer-term strategic benefit: "Encroachment onto Russian territory is a crime which allows you to use all the forces of self-defense. This is why these referendums are so feared in Kyiv and the West. They would completely change the vector of Russia's development for decades. And not just of our country. The geopolitical transformation of the world would be irreversible once the new territories were incorporated into Russia." And, he said, "after the amendments to the constitution of our state, no future leader of Russia, no official, will be able to reverse these decisions." Vyacheslav Vorodin, the speaker of the Russian Duma, said he would support the Donbas entities becoming members of the Russian Federation, making approval of their incorporation a formality.

This morning, in a pre-recorded message, Putin addressed the nation on the situation in the Donbas and the course of the "special military operation" to "liberate it from the neo-Nazi regime, which seized power in Ukraine in 2014 as the result of an armed state coup." Speaking of "our brothers and sisters in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions and other areas that have been liberated from the neo-Nazi regime," he said "the issue concerns the necessary, imperative measures to protect the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Russia and support the desire and will of our compatriots to choose their future independently, and the aggressive policy of some Western elites, who are doing their utmost to preserve their domination and...weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country." Claiming that "we cannot, we have no moral right to let our kin and kith be torn to pieces by butchers; we cannot but respond to their sincere striving to decide their destiny on their own," and noting that "the parliaments of the Donbass people's republics and the military-civilian administrations of the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions have adopted decisions to hold referendums on the future of their territories and have appealed to Russia to support this," he stated, "I would like to emphasise that we will do everything necessary to create safe conditions for these referendums so that people can express their will. And we will support the choice of future made by the majority of people in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions."

Turning to the military situation and noting, in particular, that the line of contact between the Russian and Ukrainian forces is more than 1000 kilometers in length, Putin announced that he supported the proposal of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff for a partial mobilization in the Russian Federation. The partial mobilization will involve, he said, "only military reservists, primarily those who served in the armed forces and have specific military occupational specialties and corresponding experience." Before being sent to their units, those called up for active duty "will undergo mandatory additional military training based on the experience of the

special military operation.” He said he had already signed an Executive Order declaring the partial mobilization and that it took effect today. In a television broadcast today, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said 300,000 reserve troops will be called up.

In concluding his address, Putin had some alarming words for the West: “The West has gone too far in its aggressive anti-Russia policy, making endless threats to our country and people. Some irresponsible Western politicians are doing more than just speak about their plans to organize the delivery of long-range offensive weapons to Ukraine, which could be used to deliver strikes at Crimea and other Russian regions... Washington, London and Brussels are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory. They openly say that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield by any means... They have even resorted to the nuclear blackmail. I am referring not only to the Western-encouraged shelling of the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant, which poses a threat of a nuclear disaster, but also to the statements made by some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO countries on the possibility and admissibility of using weapons of mass destruction – nuclear weapons – against Russia. I would like to remind those who make such statements regarding Russia that our country has different types of weapons as well, and some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff.”

Yesterday, French President Emmanuel Macron, in New York for the meeting of the UN General Assembly, no doubt spoke for many when he said, in regard to the proposed referendums, “I think what Russia announced is a travesty.” He called it a “new provocation” that “will have no consequence on our own position... The very idea of organizing referendums in regions witnessing war, which are suffering bombings, is the height of cynicism.” He’s right, of course. But there’s no reason to think his condemnation, and all the others that have followed, will have any effect in changing the outcome. Only one thing will change the outcome: Ukraine taking back those territories.

David R. Cameron
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