

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Click [here](#) 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.

Click [here](#) to see ISW's 3D control of terrain topographic map of Ukraine. Use of a computer (not a mobile device) is strongly recommended for using this data-heavy tool.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cut-off for this product was 1:45pm ET on March 22 (except for information pertaining to attacks on a concert hall near Moscow). ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian forces conducted the largest series of combined drone and missile strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure since the start of the full-scale invasion during the night of March 21-22. Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces launched 151 drones and missiles at Ukraine overnight, including 63 Shahed-136/131 drones from Primorsko Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai; 12 Iskander-M missiles from Belgorod Oblast and occupied Crimea; 40 Kh-101/Kh-55 missiles from strategic bombers over the Caspian Sea; five Kh-22 cruise missiles from bombers over Rostov Oblast; seven Kh-47 Kinzhal missiles from bombers over Tambov Oblast; two Kh-59 cruise missiles from bombers over occupied Zaporizhia Oblast; and 22 S-300/S-400 air defense missiles from Belgorod and Kursk oblasts.[1] Ukrainian officials reported that Ukrainian forces shot down 55 Shahed drones, 35 Kh-101/55 missiles, and two Kh-59 missiles.[2] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces targeted 136 energy facilities in Zaporizhia, Khmelnytskyi, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava, Mykolaiv, Vinnytsia, Lviv, and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts, damaging dozens of these facilities in the largest attack against Ukrainian energy infrastructure since February 2022.[3]

Russian strikes against Ukrainian energy facilities may aim to degrade Ukrainian defense industrial capacity, and Russian forces are likely trying to exploit Ukrainian air defense missile shortages in a renewed attempt to collapse Ukraine's energy grid. Ukrainian officials reported that the Russian strikes temporarily caused power, water, and other outages but that Ukrainian authorities have since restored these services.[4] Intensified Russian strikes in winter 2023-2024 reportedly heavily targeted Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) enterprises, and the Russian strikes on energy infrastructure in early Spring 2024 likely aim to collapse the energy grid in part to stall Ukrainian efforts to rapidly expand its DIB.[5] Russian forces failed to collapse the Ukrainian energy grid on March 22 but may aim to continue intensified strikes on energy infrastructure in subsequent strike series, especially to capitalize on continued delays in Western security assistance

that are reportedly expected to significantly constrain Ukraine's air defense umbrella.[6] Russian forces have steadily degraded some Ukrainian power production capabilities: capturing the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in March 2022, occupying the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP) in February 2022 and subsequently destroying its dam in June 2023, and now significantly damaging the Dnipro Hydroelectric Power Plant (DHPP) in Zaporizhzhia City during the March 22, 2024 strike.[7] The strikes took the DHPP offline, and it will likely take some time to repair.[8] The Russian strikes may also support Russian efforts to sow internal instability in Ukraine as the Kremlin seeks to degrade domestic and international confidence in the Ukrainian government. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command warned on March 22 that Russia is preparing information operations aiming to falsely portray Ukraine as without power.[9]

Russian forces will likely continue offensive operations through Spring 2024 while preparing for an expected offensive effort in Summer 2024, although Russian forces will likely struggle to launch a concerted large-scale offensive operation in multiple operational directions in Ukraine at the same time. Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Lieutenant General Oleksandr Pavlyuk stated on March 22 that Russian forces are currently committing all available resources to the Lyman, Bakhmut, and Avdiivka directions to sustain ongoing offensive operations and retain the advantage of holding the theater-wide initiative in Ukraine.[10] Russian forces have conducted consistent offensive operations throughout eastern Ukraine in order to first seize and then retain the theater-wide initiative and appear to be committing tactical and operational reserves to ongoing offensive operations in hopes of destabilizing Ukrainian defensive lines and preventing Ukraine from getting the respite it would need to contest the initiative.[11] Pavlyuk stated that Russian forces are currently creating force groupings of 100,000 personnel in Ukraine but did not specify in which operational directions.[12] Russian forces have accumulated roughly 100,000 personnel along the Kharkiv-Luhansk axis, roughly 50,000 near Bakhmut (as of fall 2023), over 50,000 near Avdiivka, and are reportedly attempting to accumulate a grouping of roughly 50,000 personnel in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[13] Pavlyuk stated that Russian forces can use these groupings to replenish units that are currently losing combat power but that Russian forces may form a grouping sufficient to conduct an offensive operation in one operational direction in Summer 2024.[14] The Russian military command also appears to be forming reserves capable of sustaining ongoing offensive operations at their current tempo in Ukraine, but these reserves are unlikely to be able to function as cohesive large-scale penetration or exploitation formations ahead of the Summer 2024 offensive effort.[15] Russian forces have previously struggled to conduct large-scale offensive operations in more than one operational direction at the same time, and the Russian military does not appear to have accumulated multiple large groupings of forces or established the "strategic reserves" that would facilitate two or more large-scale offensive operations.[16]

Russian forces likely seek to exploit current Ukrainian materiel shortages while preparing for efforts that will force Ukraine to expend a sizeable portion of the Western security assistance it may receive in the coming months. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ivan Havrylyuk stated on March 22 that he expects that European security assistance will even out disparities between Russian and Ukrainian artillery capabilities in the next month or two.[17] Havrylyuk stated that Russian forces currently have a seven-to-one advantage in artillery ammunition over Ukrainian forces, and current Ukrainian ammunition shortages are constraining Ukraine's ability to prevent gradual tactical Russian gains along the front.[18] Pentagon Spokesperson Sabrina Singh stated on March 21 that Ukrainian forces are having to make difficult decisions to withdraw from certain areas due to continued delays in Western security assistance, and

ISW has previously assessed that materiel shortages will likely force Ukrainian forces to make tough decisions about prioritizing certain sectors of the front over sectors where limited territorial setbacks are least damaging.[19] Russian forces may seek to maintain the tempo of their offensive operations through spring regardless of difficult weather and terrain conditions in an effort to exploit Ukrainian materiel shortages before promised Western security assistance arrives in Ukraine.[20]

Imminent packages of Western security assistance may address Ukraine's pressing immediate shortages, but Russian offensive efforts will continue to force Ukraine to expend materiel in ways that can reproduce similar shortages over time in the absence of more consistent security assistance. The expected large-scale Russian offensive effort in Summer 2024 will require Ukrainian forces to expend materiel that is in short supply, and the Russian command may intend in part for the summer offensive effort to prevent Ukrainian forces from fielding well-provisioned forces for prolonged periods or accumulating materiel for future counteroffensive operations. Ukraine's European partners are expanding their efforts to provide more regular security assistance to Ukraine but will likely not be able to do so, specifically for artillery ammunition, in the coming months as Ukraine defends against expected Russian summer offensive operations and possible Russian offensive efforts in the second half of 2024. **Consistent provisions of Western military assistance in key systems, many of which only the US can provide rapidly at scale, will play a critical role in determining Russian prospects in 2024 and when Ukrainian forces can attempt to contest the theater-wide initiative.**[21]

The Ukrainian military command appears to be prioritizing rotations for frontline units but will have to address additional manpower challenges if Ukrainian forces are to seize the initiative even on a localized basis in 2024 as Ukrainian senior military officers say they hope to do. Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi announced on March 22 that the Ukrainian military is currently optimizing its military organization structures to simplify and maximize the quality and efficiency of Ukraine's force management.[22] Syrskyi stated that some Ukrainian force groupings will be "reformatted" and that this effort aims to improve the management and distribution of Ukrainian personnel. Syrskyi stated that conducting rotations for frontline units is a key priority, and Syrskyi had observed on March 14 that unspecified Ukrainian units that have been deployed to the frontline for a long time have started conducting rotations.[23] Pavlyuk stated on March 22 that the Ukrainian military has started regrouping and withdrawing a number of brigades from unspecified positions to restore their combat capability.[24] Pavlyuk stated that Ukraine is transferring forces and resources to "recovery areas" in order to give servicemen time to rest, recover, and resupply and allow Ukrainian forces to launch "new actions with new forces." ISW previously assessed that the reported beginning of Ukrainian rotations suggests that the Ukrainian command believes that the situation on whatever unspecified sector(s) of the frontline where the rotations have or will occur has stabilized sufficiently for Ukrainian troops to rotate.[25]

Pavlyuk stated that Ukraine can seize the initiative if the tempo of Russian offensive operations in Ukraine decreases.[26] Russia's theater-wide initiative allows Russia to determine the location, time, intensity, and requirements of fighting along the frontline and allows the Russian military command to reprioritize efforts dynamically to take advantage of perceived opportunities created by Ukrainian materiel shortages or other factors.[27] ISW previously assessed that it would be unwise for Ukraine to cede the advantage of the theater-wide initiative to Russia for longer than is necessary, although it is unclear when Ukraine could be able to challenge Russia's control of the initiative given Ukraine's manpower challenges and delays and uncertainty in the provision of US military

assistance.[28] Analyst Michael Kofman told the *Washington Post* on March 15 that the US supplemental aid package would allow Ukrainian forces to "buy time" but that Ukraine must also fix the "structural problem" related to its manpower.[29] The need for rotations is only part of Ukraine's manpower "structural problem."

Russian authorities reportedly intend to significantly expand crypto-mobilization efforts starting in Spring 2024 amid reports about significant decreases in the number of voluntary recruits. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on March 22 that high-ranking sources from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), presidential administration, and regional governments stated that the Russian MoD plans to increase force generation starting in the spring and that Russia may intend to generate an additional 300,000 personnel within an unspecified time frame.[30] *Verstka's* sources reportedly stated that the Russian military will first focus on recruiting reservists who have signed contracts with the MoD to join the "personnel mobilization reserve" that undergoes military training twice a year. An officer from an unspecified military unit in Trans-Baikal Krai reportedly told *Verstka* that Russian authorities are currently recruiting such reservists in ways similar to those used before partial mobilization in 2022, but that it is unclear if Russian authorities will order another mobilization wave. *Verstka* reported that presidential administration sources stated that Russian authorities aim to persuade and even coerce conscripts whose service term will end in April 2024 or has already ended in 2023 to sign military contracts. *Verstka* reported that sources indicated that military registration and enlistment offices started to issue more deferment certificates to employees of state enterprises and some defense enterprises at the end of February but that the reason for this phenomenon is unclear. *Verstka* reported that sources differed on whether recent activity in the Moscow Mayor's office, including the resumption of work by employees who had previously helped military registration and enlistment offices during the fall 2022 mobilization wave and the creation of a new center for conscripts, is related to the upcoming biannual spring conscription cycle or something else.

Verstka reported that employees of the military recruitment center in Moscow indicated that the pace of Russian voluntary recruitment "dropped sharply" starting in October 2023 with the number of visitors to the Unified Contract Hiring Center in Moscow decreasing from 500-600 per day to 20-30 per day.[31] Russian forces' ability to replenish their significant losses in recent months has been crucial for their ability to maintain the tempo of their offensive operations throughout eastern Ukraine, particularly offensive operations near Avdiivka that began in October 2023.[32] Should Russian authorities be unable to recruit the quantity of personnel needed to replenish losses and maintain the current tempo of offensive operations in Ukraine through intensified volunteer recruitment efforts, Russian authorities would likely intensify other crypto-mobilization methods, such as the coercive mobilization of convicts and migrants, to sustain offensive operations before deciding to do so by conducting another unpopular wave of mobilization.

A Russian Storm-Z instructor noted that Russian authorities must consider the conflicting interests of the Russian military command, various groups of military personnel in Ukraine, and Russian society when deciding whether to conduct another wave of mobilization or not. The instructor claimed that Russian authorities have resorted to recruiting volunteer military personnel since they are concerned that another mobilization wave would likely spark social tension in Russia and lead to another mass exodus from the country. The instructor claimed that volunteers' recruitment prospects in the post-election period are "ambiguous" and that another mobilization wave would be "fairly logical" to fill both the active army and the strategic reserves. The instructor highlighted, however, that Russian authorities

must consider various problematic factors when deciding whether to call for another mobilization. The instructor stated that if Russian authorities were to conduct another mobilization without demobilizing those already called up in Fall 2022, there would be tension between the newly mobilized and previously mobilized personnel; if Russian authorities conduct a larger-scale mobilization than the one in the fall of 2022 and replace those previously mobilized, there would be tension with volunteer recruits who have open-ended contracts; and if Russian authorities do not conduct another mobilization wave, there would be increased tension among the military personnel who have been on the front for a long time. The instructor claimed that Russian authorities can avoid a possible mobilization if Russian forces systematically improve their reconnaissance-fire complexes (RFC) and reconnaissance-strike complex (RSC) in coordination with offensive actions. The instructor also suggested that Russian “meat assaults” are aggravating Russian forces’ personnel problems and complained that Russian authorities praise “meat assault” commanders who “amuse” Russian authorities with “beautiful” but untrue frontline reports.

***Verstka* reported that select Russian officials stated that the Russian military command hopes that increased force generation will allow Russian forces to conduct a future offensive operation to encircle Kharkiv City. Such an operation would pose significant challenges both to the Russian forces responsible for the effort and to the wider Russian campaign in Ukraine, however.** *Verstka* reported that its sources stated that conscripts called up in the spring conscription cycle and “incompetent” reservists will go to Russia’s southern border in support roles or as border troops as part of efforts to free up more experienced military personnel for an attack on Kharkiv City.[33] A Russian presidential administration source reportedly told *Verstka* that the Russian military needs 300,000 additional personnel in order to launch an operation to encircle Kharkiv City and that Russian forces hope to seize the city without turning it into a “second Mariupol.”[34]

A Russian offensive operation to encircle Kharkiv City would be an extremely ambitious undertaking that would require long drives across open terrain that Russian forces have not conducted since the start of the full-scale invasion.[35] Russian forces are currently conducting an offensive operation along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line that aims to reach the Oskil River in Kharkiv Oblast, but even if that ongoing effort achieves its intended goal, the prospects for Russian advances into Kharkiv Oblast from the east bank of the Oskil River are as challenging as the prospects of advancing elsewhere along the international border with Belgorod Oblast if not more so.[36] Russian forces have committed relatively minimal forces to protect Russia’s international borders, and these elements would be insufficient for an operation to encircle Kharkiv City.[37] The reported plan to generate 300,000 new personnel could allow Russian forces to free up relatively combat-effective elements along the frontline in Ukraine for an operation to encircle Kharkiv City, but at the expense of offensive operations in sectors of the front that the Russian military command has been prioritizing for over a year and a half of campaigning in Ukraine. ISW has previously assessed that Russian forces may intend to conduct limited offensive operations along the international border with Kharkiv Oblast to draw and fix Ukrainian forces and that Kremlin officials may be engaging with ultranationalists’ calls to push Ukrainian forces away from the border with Belgorod Oblast to divert Ukrainian attention away from the ongoing Russian offensive operation along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast axis.[38] ISW has yet to observe any indicators that Russian forces are currently preparing for an offensive operation to encircle Kharkiv City.

This Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for a mass shooting and bombing at a concert venue in the suburbs of Moscow on the evening of March 22. Russian authorities reported that three to five attackers in camouflage opened fire with automatic weapons and detonated explosives during an event at the “Crocus City Hall” concert venue in Krasnogorsk on the northwestern outskirts of Moscow City, killing at least 40 and injuring at least 100.[39] The attackers reportedly fled the scene.[40] Russian reports suggest that up to 6,200 people had gathered at the Crocus concert venue for a sold-out concert, and eyewitnesses reported and posted footage of gunfire, explosions, casualties, and civilians fleeing the venue.[41] The explosions caused a significant fire at the Crocus venue, engulfing roughly 13,000 square meters of the building, causing the roof to cave in, and destroying the top floor.[42] Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) forces, Rosgvardia’s Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR) and Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) forces, and firefighters deployed to the Crocus concert hall to help fight the fire, evacuate civilians, secure the area, and search for suspects.[43] Russian authorities have detained at least one unspecified individual, though it is unclear if this individual is a suspected attacker or was detained for another reason in the aftermath of the attacks.[44]

Russian authorities have not yet reported on the identities or affiliations of the attackers but IS claimed responsibility for the attacks.[45] US officials told the *Washington Post* that the US has “no reason to doubt” the IS claim.[46] The *Washington Post* cited US officials as saying that the American and British embassies in Russia issued warnings on March 8 of possible terrorist attacks at mass gatherings in Moscow and St. Petersburg in part due to reports of IS-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) operating in Russia.[47] *CNN* Chief National Security Correspondent Alex Marquardt reported that sources informed him that the US has had “fairly specific” intelligence about IS-KP plans for an attack in Russia and that the US informed Russia of the intelligence.[48]

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that Russian authorities informed Putin about the attack within several minutes and that Putin is receiving updates from all the relevant services.[49] Russian authorities responded to the attack by canceling public events and issuing “high alert” warnings throughout Russia.[50] Russian authorities also announced increased security measures throughout Moscow Oblast and at Russian airports and rail stations.[51] The Russian Investigative Committee opened a criminal case into the attack and deployed an investigative team to the concert venue shortly after Russian security forces secured the scene.[52] Russian officials and milbloggers threatened punishments and retaliation against the attackers and baselessly suggested that Ukraine was involved in the attack.[53]

Advisor to the Head of the Ukrainian President’s Office Mykhaylo Podolyak stated that Ukraine had nothing to do with the attack in Moscow.[54] The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated that it rejected all accusations that Ukraine was involved in the attack.[55] US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby stated that there is no indication that Ukraine was involved in the attack.[56]

NATO Military Committee Chairperson Admiral Rob Bauer highlighted the ways in which Russia has prompted NATO’s refocus on collective security and the applicability of Ukrainian naval drone operations in other theaters during an interview on March 22. Bauer stated that NATO has been tracking the possibility of a conflict with Russia since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and that Russian aggression has made it necessary for NATO to return to focusing on collective security after focusing on “crisis response” over the last 20 to 30 years.[57] Bauer stated that NATO understands that “time is not on our side” in terms of collective security because “the

enemy decides when and where they attack and how long the conflict lasts.” Bauer stated on March 21 that “Russia’s war against Ukraine has never been about any real security threat coming from either Ukraine or NATO,” which is consistent with ISW’s assessment that Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 to weaken and ultimately destroy NATO – a goal that he still pursues.[58] Bauer also highlighted Ukrainian naval drone operations against Russia’s Black Sea Fleet as an “extraordinary example of innovation.”[59] Bauer stated that drones will continue to play an important role on land and at sea and that the role of drones in combined missile strikes will increase. Bauer noted that there is an important question about how naval drones can be used in other oceans and seas as effectively as Ukrainian forces have used naval drones in the Black Sea. CTP-ISW has previously reported on similar but unsuccessful efforts by the Houthis to strike vessels in the Red Sea.[60]

US-sanctioned, pro-Kremlin Moldovan politician Ilan Shor is reportedly in Moscow, his second visit in the last two months, as the Kremlin appears to be intensifying efforts to set information conditions to justify a variety of Russian hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing Moldova. Shor stated on March 22 that his current trip to Russia is aimed at building a “clear plan” for future Russian and Moldova cooperation.[61] Shor stated that his goal is the “total resignation of the current pro-Western regime” that acts against the interest of the Moldovan people and claimed that the West is attempting to turn Moldova into “some kind of battlefield.”[62] Shor noted that he plans to attend the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 5-8 2024.[63] Shor last visited Russia on February 7 and met with Russian Duma official Leonid Kalashnikov, the chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Eurasian Integration, and Relations with Compatriots Abroad.[64] Shor and Kalashnikov reportedly discussed the “negative impact of the collective West on the lives of ordinary citizens of Moldova.” ISW previously assessed that Shor is a prominent Kremlin political proxy in Moldova and that Shor’s February 7 meeting with Kalashnikov was a notable inflection. Shor’s meeting with Kalashnikov was followed by the February 28 Seventh Congress of Deputies from pro-Russian Moldova breakaway region Transnistria, in which Transnistrian officials requested unspecified “zashchita” (defense/protection) from Russia, and governor of pro-Russian Moldovan autonomous region Gagauzia Yevgenia Gutsul’s meetings with Kremlin officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, in early March.[65] Shor may have played a role in orchestrating these events and is almost certainly a significant actor within the Kremlin’s efforts to destabilize Moldova.

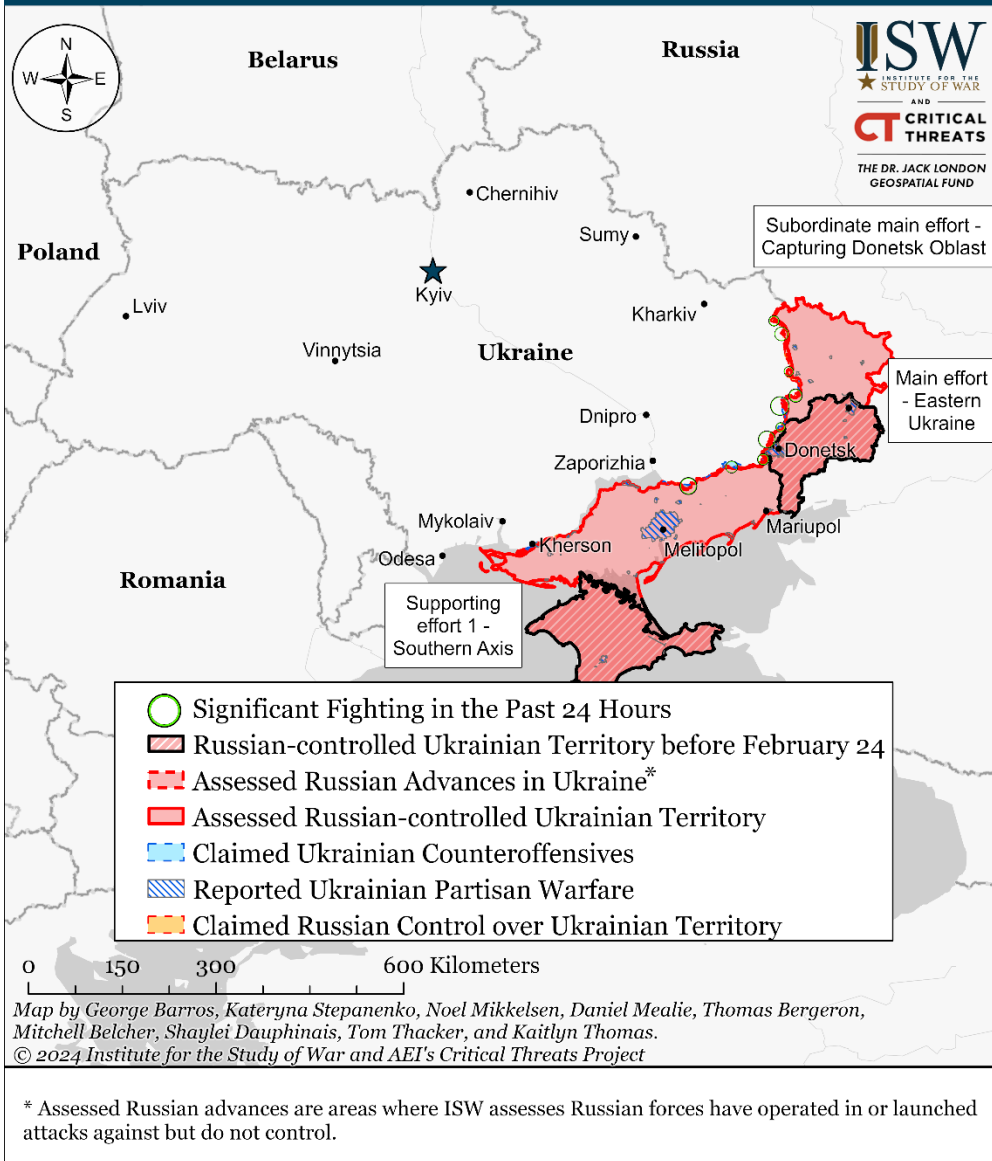
US sanctions have seemingly prompted India to significantly decrease the amount of crude oil it imports from Russia, likely further constraining Russian attempts to skirt the G7 oil price cap. *Bloomberg* reported on March 22 that all of India’s private and state-run oil refineries are refusing to accept Russian crude oil transported on Russian PJSC Sovcomflot tankers due to US sanctions.[66] *Bloomberg* noted that the Indian refineries are increasingly scrutinizing which tankers are carrying the Russian oil and that Sovcomflot tankers account for 15 percent of Russian oil shipments to India.[67] *Bloomberg* also recently reported that two tankers carrying Russian crude oil have been idling off the Indian west coast since February 29.[68] *Bloomberg* previously reported that Indian oil buyers have turned away tankers carrying Russian crude oil priced above the G7’s \$60 per barrel price cap and that India wants to distance itself from Russia due to the war in Ukraine.[69]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian forces conducted the largest series of combined drone and missile strikes targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure since the start of the full-scale invasion during the night of March 21-22.**

- **Russian strikes against Ukrainian energy facilities may aim to degrade Ukrainian defense industrial capacity, and Russian forces are likely trying to exploit Ukrainian air defense missile shortages in a renewed attempt to collapse Ukraine's energy grid.**
- **Russian forces will likely continue offensive operations through Spring 2024 while preparing for an expected offensive effort in Summer 2024, although Russian forces will likely struggle to launch a concerted large-scale offensive operation in multiple operational directions in Ukraine at the same time.**
- **Russian forces likely seek to exploit current Ukrainian materiel shortages while preparing for efforts that will force Ukraine to expend a sizeable portion of the Western security assistance it may receive in the coming months.**
- **The Ukrainian military command appears to be prioritizing rotations for frontline units but will have to address additional manpower challenges if Ukrainian forces are to seize the initiative even on a localized basis in 2024 as Ukrainian senior military officers say they hope to do.**
- **Russian authorities reportedly intend to significantly expand cryptomobilization efforts starting in Spring 2024 amid reports about significant decreases in the number of voluntary recruits.**
- ***Verstka* reported that select Russian officials stated that the Russian military command hopes that increased force generation will allow Russian forces to conduct a future offensive operation to encircle Kharkiv City. Such an operation would pose significant challenges both to the Russian forces responsible for the effort and to the wider Russian campaign in Ukraine, however.**
- **This Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for a mass shooting and bombing at a concert venue in the suburbs of Moscow on the evening of March 22.**
- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kreminna, Avdiivka, Donetsk City, and the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area amid continued positional engagements along the entire line of contact.**
- **Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on March 22 that Ukrainian authorities helped return another nine Ukrainian children to Ukrainian-controlled territory from occupied Ukraine and Russia.**
- **The Moscow military registration and enlistment office has reportedly begun to issue electronic summonses for the Spring 2024 Russian conscription cycle.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

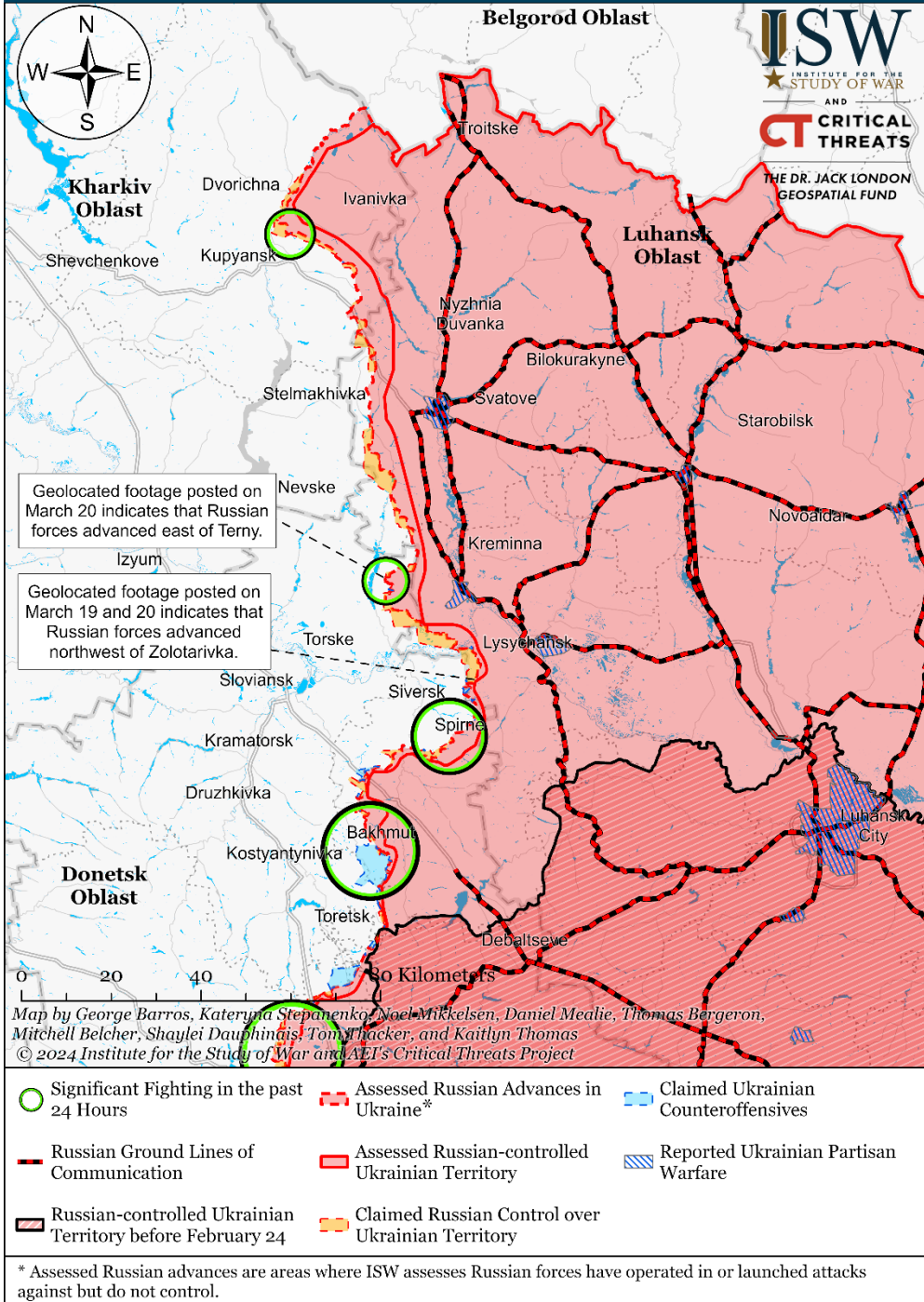
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Kreminna amid continued positional engagements along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 22. Geolocated footage published on March 21 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced east of Terny (west of Kreminna).[70] Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka, southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaiivka and Berestove, west of Kreminna near Terny, and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[71] Elements of the Russian 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Bilohorivka.[72] The deputy commander of a Ukrainian brigade operating along the Kharkiv-Luhansk axis stated that the situation in the Kupyansk direction is dynamic as the intensity of daily Russian assaults varies, but that Russian forces are constantly conducting a large number of attacks in the Lyman direction.[73] The deputy commander stated that Ukrainian forces have not observed Russian forces accumulating additional forces in the Kupyansk and Lyman directions and that the Russian command is only committing new forces to the area to replace daily losses.

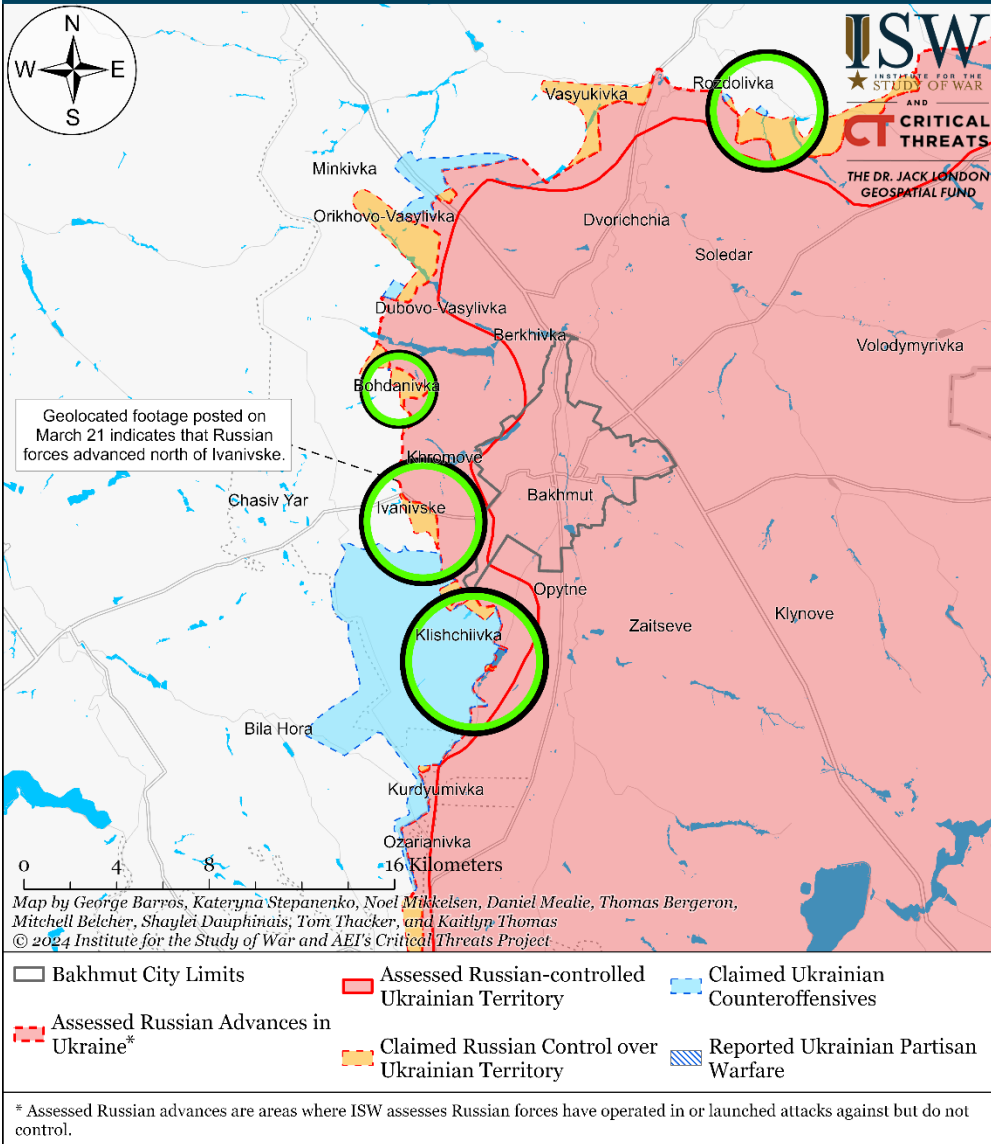
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

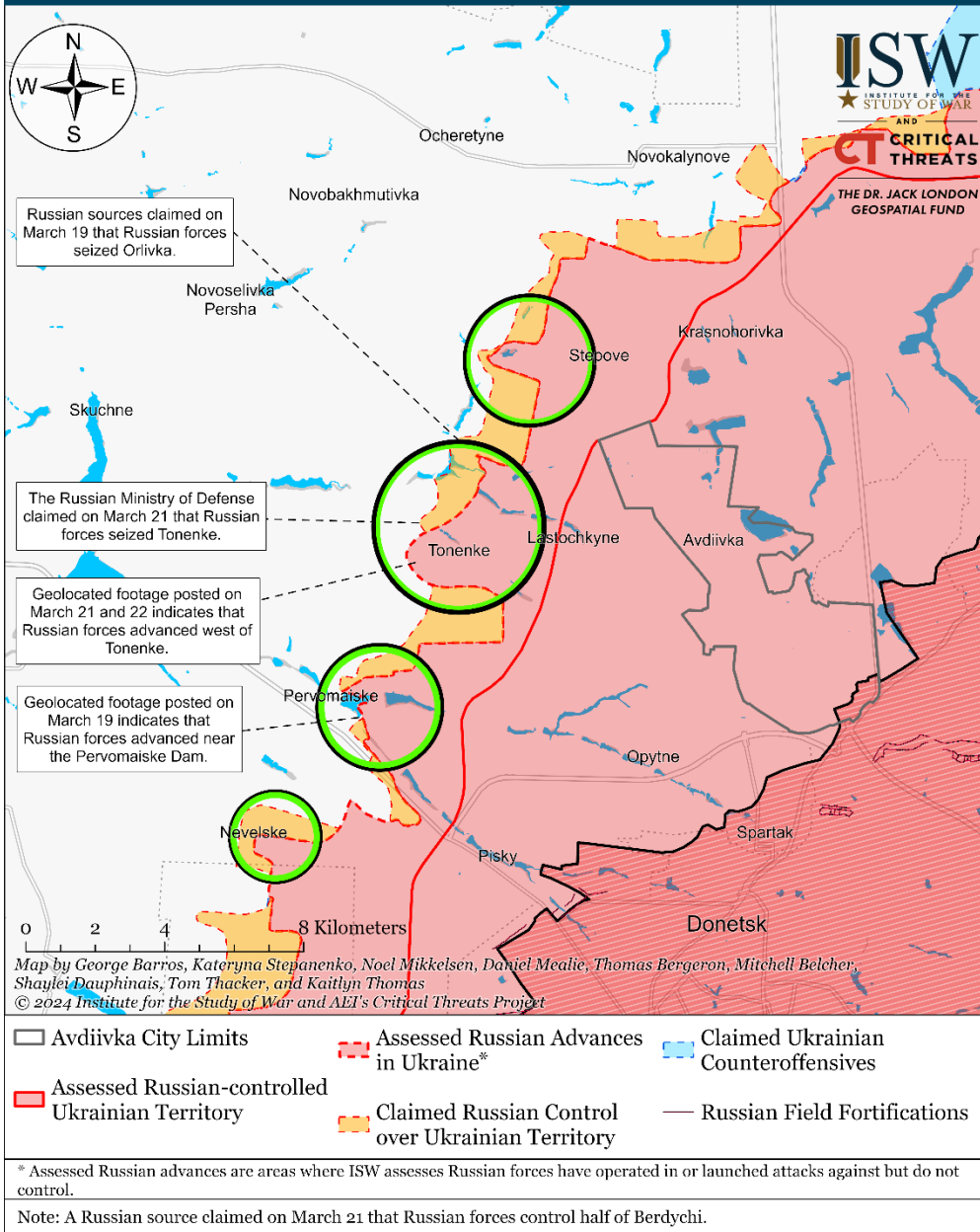
Positional fighting continued near Bakhmut on March 22 but there were no changes to the frontline in the area. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division advanced in forest areas north of Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[74] Positional fighting continued northeast of Bakhmut near Spirne and Bilohorivka; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka; and south of Bakhmut near Pivdenne.[75] Elements of the Russian 6th Motorized Rifle Division (3rd Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut direction.[76]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



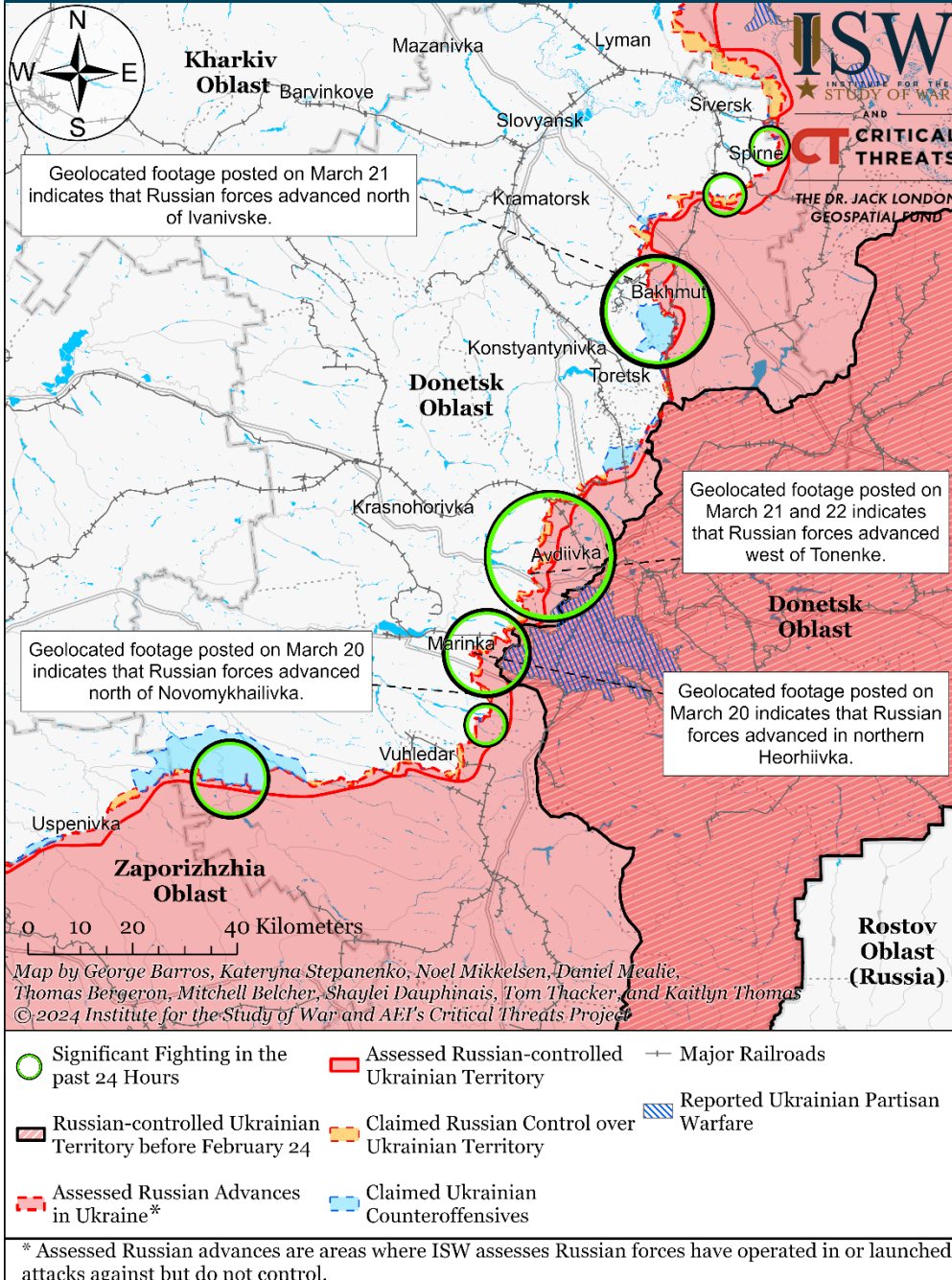
Russian forces recently advanced west of Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on March 22. Geolocated footage published on March 21 and 22 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced within Tonenke (west of Avdiivka).[77] Positional fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka, Berdychi, and Semenivka; west of Avdiivka near Orlivka and Tonenke; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske.[78] A Ukrainian soldier operating in the Avdiivka area stated that the composition and quality of Russian forces in the area suggests that Russian forces are continuing to prioritize offensive operations in the Avdiivka direction.[79]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Avdiivka as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



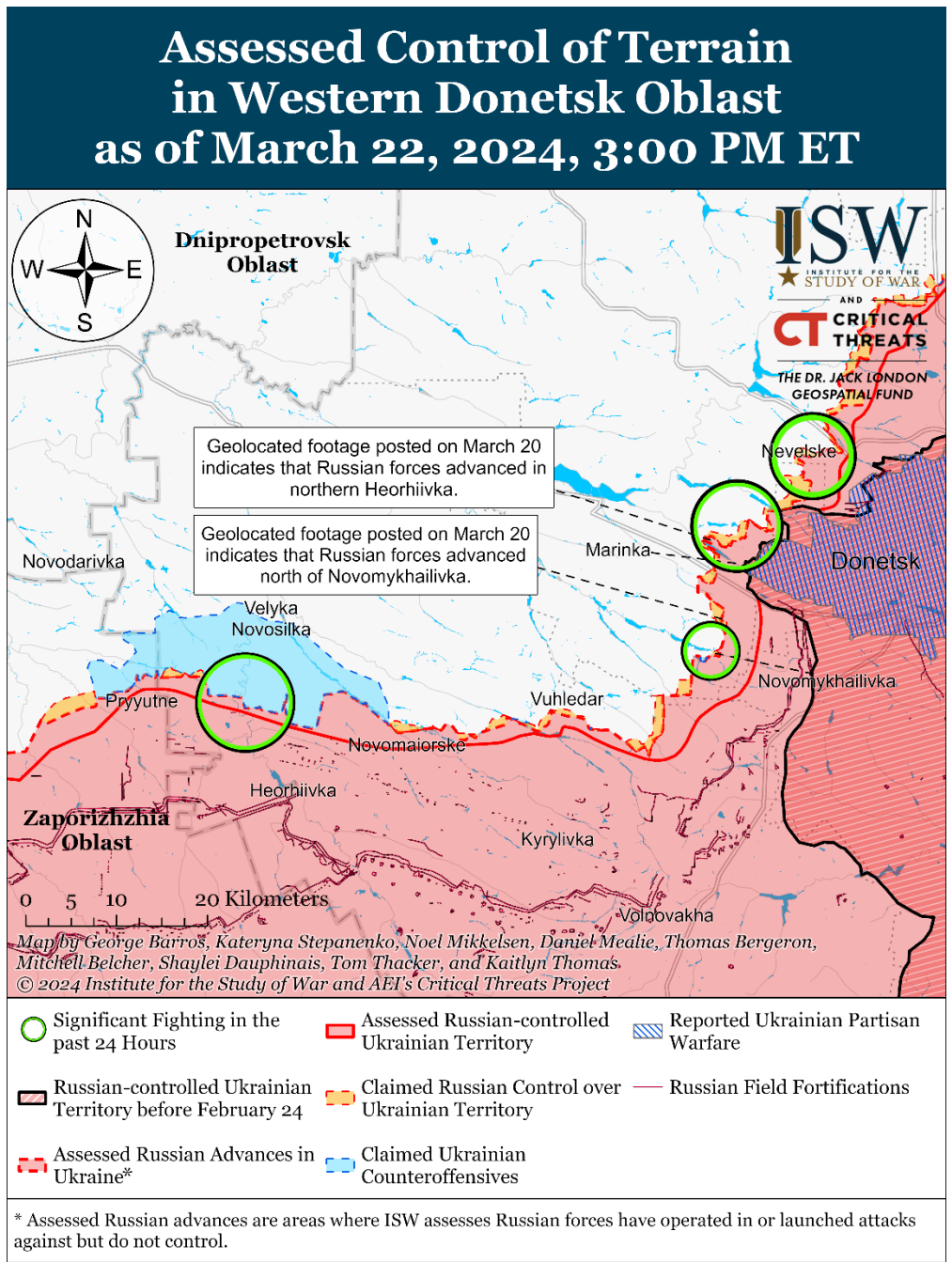
Russian forces recently advanced southwest of Donetsk City amid continued positional fighting west and southwest of Donetsk City on March 22. Geolocated footage published on March 22 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in southern Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[80] Positional fighting occurred west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka and Vodyane.[81] Elements of the Russian 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Pobieda (southwest of Donetsk City).[82]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area. Geolocated footage published on March 21 indicates that elements of the Russian 394th Motorized Rifle Regiment (127th Motorized Rifle Division, 5th CAA, Eastern Military District [EMD]) recently advanced west of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka).[83] Positional fighting continued southeast of Velyka

Novosilka near Volodymyrivka and south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske and Urozhaine on March 22.[84] Elements of the Russian 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (Russian General Staff's Main Directorate [GRU]) are reportedly operating in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area.[85]



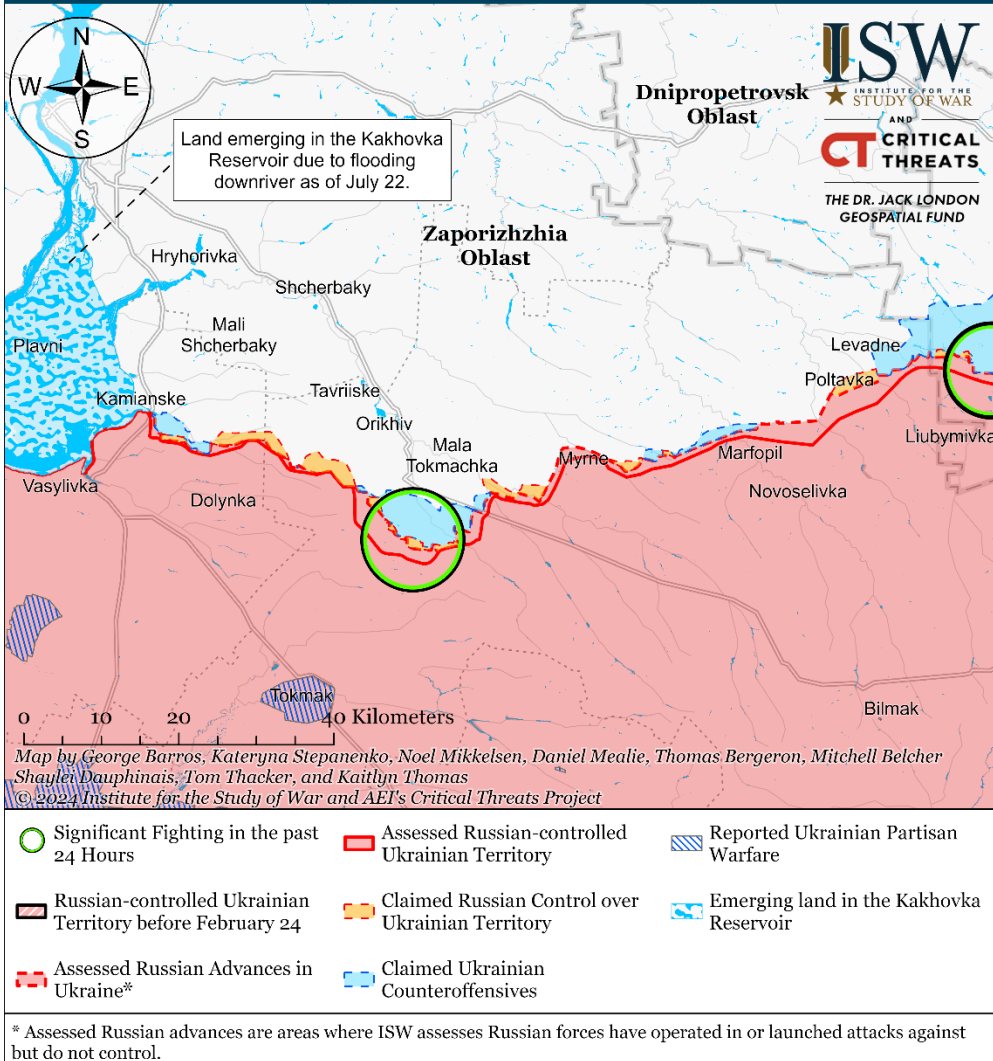
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on March 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne), while other sources claimed that

positional engagements continued near both settlements.[86] Elements of the Russian 247th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating near Verbove and elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are operating near Robotyne.[87]

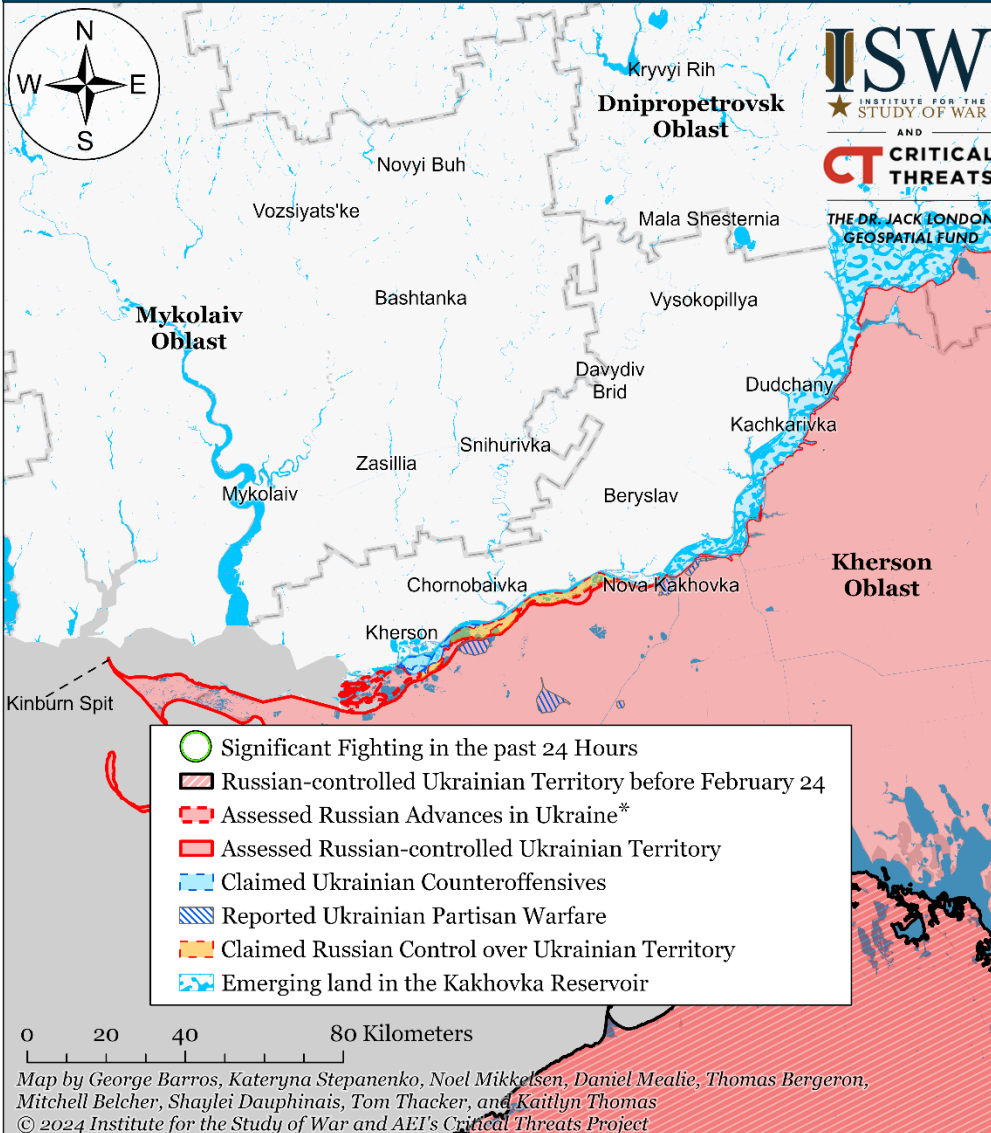


Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



A Russian milblogger claimed on March 22 that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky and the Antonivsky roadway bridge area.[88]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign (Russian Objective: Target Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure in the rear and on the frontline)

See topline text.

Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)

The Moscow military registration and enlistment office has reportedly begun to issue electronic summonses for the Spring 2024 Russian conscription cycle. Russian opposition sources reported on March 22 that Moscow registration and enlistment offices are issuing summonses through SMS text messages, and one claimed that the summonses instructed the individual to clarify documents with the office on April 8.[89] Members of a movement of conscientious objectors told Russian opposition outlet *Meduza* that Russian authorities are likely sending these summonses *en masse* as part of a broader effort to digitize conscripts' personnel files.[90] Russian State Duma Defense Committee Head Andrey Kartapolov recently stated that Russian military registration and enlistment offices will test issuing electronic summonses during the Spring 2024 conscription cycle.[91]

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Nothing significant to report.

Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts (Ukrainian objective: Develop its defense industrial base to become more self-sufficient in cooperation with US, European, and international partners)

ISW is not publishing coverage of Ukrainian defense industrial efforts today.

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets reported on March 22 that Ukrainian authorities helped return another nine Ukrainian children to Ukrainian-controlled territory from occupied Ukraine and Russia.[92] Lubinets reported that four of the children returned to Ukraine from occupied Crimea and the other five recently returned to Ukraine from Russia thanks to mediation by Qatari authorities.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report on March 19 detailing consistent Russian violations of human rights and international law from February 2022 to December 2023.[93] The UN OHCHR interviewed more than 2,300 witnesses and residents of occupied Ukraine, who reported on Russian efforts to enforce and expand Russian language, citizenship, laws, court systems, and education in occupied Ukraine while suppressing Ukrainian culture and identity. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk noted that the international community should support Ukraine's efforts to ensure accountability and reparations after future Russian de-occupation. ISW's Karolina Hird has extensively reported on Russian human rights and international law violations in occupied Ukraine.[94]

Russia continues to build infrastructure projects aimed at integrating occupied Ukraine into Russia and creating alternative ground lines of communication (GLOCs) for Russian military purposes. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin stated on March 21 that Russia will build an expressway between Krasnodar, Temryuk, and the Kerch Strait Bridge and the "Azov Ring" road that will connect

occupied Crimea and Rostov Oblast and Krasnodar Krai in 2024.[95] Russian President Vladimir Putin stated on March 18 that Russia has restored the railway between Rostov-on-Don and occupied Donetsk City, Mariupol, and Berdyansk and that Russia will also build a railway to occupied Sevastopol, which will serve as an alternative land route to the Kerch Strait Bridge.[96] The Russian Federal Agency for Rail Transport (Roszheldor) stated on March 19 that the railway between Rostov-on-Don and occupied Crimea will be fully operational by the end of 2024.[97]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Senior Russian officials escalated rhetoric supporting a boilerplate information operation aimed at falsely portraying Russia’s war against Ukraine as a war against the West. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on March 22 that “we [Russia] are at war” and that this war began after Western states started providing military assistance to Ukraine.[98] Peskov notably walked back this claim on March 22, stating that the legal status of Russia’s “special military operation” has not changed but that Russia is simply “de facto” at war.[99] Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vitaly Nebenzya absurdly claimed that Russia has “practically achieved” its goal of “demilitarizing” Ukraine because Ukraine is relying on Western-provided weapons, echoing Peskov’s claims to the same effect from June 2023.[100]

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks and Wagner Group activity in Belarus)

Belarusian authorities may have constructed a nuclear warhead storage site for Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. The Federation of American Scientists reported on March 14 that satellite imagery shows that Belarusian authorities began upgrading a military depot near Asipovichy with a quadruple-fence security perimeter, a roof-covered guarded access point, and possibly underground cables and sensors between February 2023 and January 2024.[101] The Federation of American Scientists assessed that these upgrades closely resemble protections on Russian nuclear warhead storage sites.

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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