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 1pm ET on March 24. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the March 25 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces struck a Black Sea Fleet (BSF) communications center in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea, and reportedly struck an oil depot and at least partially damaged two BSF landing ships on the night of March 23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 24 that Ukrainian forces successfully struck the BSF's Yamal and Azov Ropucha-class landing ships, a BSF communications center, and several unspecified BSF infrastructure facilities in Sevastopol.[1] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces launched over 40 Storm Shadow and Neptune missiles, ADM-160 decoy missiles, and drones during the strike.[2] Geolocated footage published on March 24 shows a missile strike on the BSF communications center, and satellite imagery published on March 24 shows significant damage to the building.[3] Russian opposition outlet Astra posted footage reportedly of an explosion at an oil depot in occupied Hvardiiske (northeast of Sevastopol) and reported that its sources stated that three tanks of petroleum products and a warehouse burned as a result of the drone strike.[4] Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated that Ukrainian officials initially confirmed that the *Yamal* and *Azov* landing ships sustained fire damage but are still assessing the extent of the damage to the ships.[5] Pletenchuk noted that the BSF currently has only five landing ships and that only three will remain operational if the Ukrainian strike seriously damaged the *Yamal* and *Azov*. ISW previously assessed that Ukrainian strikes against BSF assets caused the BSF to move some ships away from its main base in Sevastopol and hampered its ability to operate in the western part of the Black Sea.[6] Ukrainian officials have recently reported that other BSF bases are structurally inferior to the one in Sevastopol and that Russian forces must still perform some tasks, such as reloading Kalibr missile systems on ships and submarines, in Sevastopol as other bases lack the capacity to handle such missiles.[7] The latest Ukrainian strikes targeting BSF ships, regardless of the extent of the damage caused, will likely continue to deter Russian forces from redeploying ships to Sevastopol and the western Black Sea and complicate the BSF's ability to maximize its combat capabilities.

Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of February 23 to 24, mainly targeting southern and western **Ukraine.** The Ukrainian Air Force reported on March 24 that Russian forces launched 29 Kh-101/Kh-555 missiles from Tu-95MS strategic aircraft and 28 Shahed-136/131 drones from Primorsko-Akhtarsk, Krasnodar Krai and occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea.[8] Ukrainian air defenses reportedly downed 18 Kh-101/555 missiles and 25 Shahed drones over Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Sumy, Kyiv, Volyn, and Lviv oblasts.[9] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian forces launched two waves of Shahed drones and that Russian drone strikes primarily targeted port infrastructure along the Danube River, a branch of whose delta forms the Ukraine-Romania border, and energy facilities in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[10] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces struck Mykolaiv Oblast with unspecified cruise and ballistic missiles on the evening of March 23 and the night of March 23 to 24.[11] Lviv Oblast officials reported that Russian forces struck a critical infrastructure facility with two Kinzhal missiles on the morning of March 24, and Ukrainian state-owned oil and gas company Neftogaz Chairperson Oleksiy Chernyshov stated that Russian forces struck an underground gas storage facility and damaged technical equipment in Lviv oblast.[12] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces also struck Myrnohrad, Donetsk Oblast with four S-300 missiles.[13] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian strikes damaged infrastructure in western Ukraine, residential buildings in Myrnohrad, Donetsk Oblast, and energy infrastructure in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and Kharkiv City.[14] Polish Operational Command reported that a Russian cruise missile violated Polish air space on the morning of March 24 for 39 seconds before presumably returning into Ukrainian airspace.[15]

Russian forces are reportedly approaching the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, Donetsk Oblast but are unlikely to threaten the settlement with encirclement or seizure in the coming months. ISW assesses that Russian forces have advanced within 1.5 kilometers of Chasiv Yar based on available visual evidence, and Russian milbloggers claimed on March 24 that Russian forces recently advanced further towards and up to the outskirts of the settlement.[16] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on March 23 that Russian forces seized Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut and immediately east of Chasiv Yar), although ISW has not observed confirmation of Russian forces seizing Ivanivske or advancing up to the outskirts of Chasiv Yar.[17] Russian forces began a localized offensive operation in the Bakhmut direction in November 2023 that aims to recapture territory that Ukraine liberated during the summer 2023 counteroffensive and to seize Chasiv Yar.[18] Russian forces have only achieved marginal tactical gains northwest and west of Bakhmut in the past four months, however. Select Russian sources have described Russian offensive activity in the Bakhmut area in recent months as conditions setting for a potential intensified offensive operation to encircle and seize Chasiv Yar.[19]

Available imagery, which ISW will not present or describe in greater detail at this time to preserve Ukrainian operational security, shows that Ukrainian forces have established significant fortifications in a ring shape in the Chasiv Yar area, and Russian forces will likely struggle to break through these defenses at their current offensive tempo in the area.[20] Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that Russian forces planned to transfer forces to the Bakhmut area from the Avdiivka direction following their seizure of Avdiivka in mid-February, but that the opportunity to exploit tactical Ukrainian vulnerabilities immediately west of Avdiivka incentivized Russian forces to maintain the tempo of offensive operations in the area and may have prevented the Russian command from accumulating more forces in the Bakhmut direction.[21] It is unclear if the Russian elements that have been operating in the Bakhmut area since the start of the Ukrainian summer 2023 counteroffensive are sufficient for a potential intensified effort to seize Chasiv Yar, or if Russian forces will need to accumulate more forces

near Bakhmut if they wish to pursue such an effort. Russian tactical gains east of Chasiv Yar have not set conditions for an encirclement or envelopment of the settlement, and Russian forces would likely have to make notable tactical gains southeast and northwest of Chasiv Yar before pursuing an envelopment or encirclement of the settlement. Russian forces have previously struggled to conduct significant operational encirclements but have shown the ability to conduct gradual envelopments or turning movements that have posed tactical threats to Ukrainian forces, as seen with the Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka.[22] The Russian military command may believe that Russian forces will be able to conduct a successful operational encirclement while continued delays in Western security assistance constrain Ukrainian capabilities.[23]

The seizure of Chasiv Yar would offer Russian forces limited but not insignificant operational benefits if they could achieve it. The Russian seizure of Chasiv Yar and surrounding areas would further secure the southwestern flank of the Russian frontline in the Bakhmut-Soledar area, which has long been a wide salient. A Russian seizure of Chasiv Yar and advances north and south of the settlement would push Ukrainian forces further away from Russian ground lines of communication (GLOC) in the Bakhmut area. A Russian seizure of Chasiv Yar would likely push Ukrainian forces out of tube artillery range of a section of the E40 highway east of Bakhmut, and Ukrainian forces would likely have to deploy tube artillery in immediate frontline areas to interdict Russian logistics along most of the T-05-13 (Soledar-Bakhmut-Horlivka) highway. Chasiv Yar would also offer Russian forces routes of advance to Kostyantynivka, the southern edge of a major urban agglomeration in Donetsk Oblast that Russia has long viewed as a major operational objective in Ukraine.[24] Advances through Chasiv Yar provide a more immediate route to this urban agglomeration than possible routes of advance from the south along the H-20 highway from Avdiivka or from the southwest from the Toretsk area. Russian forces attempted and failed to conduct a wide sweeping operational encirclement of Ukrainian forces in Donetsk Oblast in spring 2022 that focused on seizing the Ukrainian stronghold of Slovyansk (one of the largest cities in this urban agglomeration).[25] The Russian command may intend to reattempt a wide-sweeping maneuver in 2025 or beyond, and advances west of Chasiv Yar would set further conditions for this possible larger offensive operation.[26] ISW offers these observations to present the assessment that a Russian seizure of Chasiv Yar would be more operationally significant than the Russian seizure of Avdiivka but reiterates that ISW does not forecast that Russian forces will take Chasiv Yar rapidly if they can take it at all.

The Islamic State's (IS) Amaq News Agency published footage on March 23 purportedly filmed from the perspective of the attackers involved in the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack.[27] The footage further supports ISW's assessment that IS is very likely responsible for the Crocus City Hall attack, despite continued efforts by Kremlin mouthpieces to baselessly tie Ukraine to the attack.[28]

Russian officials proposed more anti-migrant policies in response to the Crocus City Hall attack. Russian State Duma Deputy from occupied Crimea Mikhail Sheremet proposed on March 24 that Russia limit the entry of migrants into Russia during the war in Ukraine and claimed that Western intelligence targets migrants to conduct terrorist attacks in Russia and destabilize Russia.[29] Sheremet also claimed that Russia does not have the bandwidth to determine which migrants have "good intentions" since all of Russia's efforts and means are focused on the war. Russian State Duma Deputy Chairperson and recent New People Party presidential candidate Vladislav Davankov also proposed introducing several harsher measures against migrants including introducing

a "zero tolerance" policy for migrants who commit any level of offense in their first year in Russia, enforcing "digital control" over migrants, and developing a "migrant replacement" program wherein Russia attempts to expand industrial automation to reduce dependence on labor migrants.[30] Russian force generation efforts and anti-migrant policies, an increasingly prominent ultranationalist movement that espouses xenophobic rhetoric, and an increasingly ultranationalist Kremlin that stresses the importance of Russian Orthodoxy in public life are likely further alienating migrant communities and generating animosities that Salafi-Jihadi groups can exploit in recruitment efforts.[31]

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov expressed concerns about Russian ultranationalist reactions to the Crocus City Hall attack. Kadyrov claimed that the scale of the Crocus City Hall attack is "much larger and deeper" than solely the attack itself because Russia's enemies are trying to undermine Russia through promoting nationalism.[32] Kadyrov claimed that Russia has always been a multiethnic and multiconfessional country but that "false patriots" are trying to play on people's emotions and "call for fascist methods." Kadyrov also threatened to have a "short conversation" with instigators of ethnic conflict. Kadyrov is likely attempting to address Russian ultranationalists who used the Crocus City Hall attack to express animosity toward non-ethnic Russian minorities and migrants within Russia.[33] Kadyrov has previously been at the center of high-profile interethnic and religious scandals, which has likely disrupted his attempts to balance between upholding Chechnya's Islamic values and supporting an increasingly ultranationalist Kremlin.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- Ukrainian forces struck a Black Sea Fleet (BSF) communications center in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea, and reportedly struck an oil depot and at least partially damaged two BSF landing ships on the night of March 23.
- Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure on the night of February 23 to 24, mainly targeting southern and western Ukraine.
- Russian forces are reportedly approaching the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, Donetsk Oblast but are unlikely to threaten the settlement with encirclement or seizure in the coming months.
- The seizure of Chasiv Yar would offer Russian forces limited but not insignificant operational benefits if they could achieve it.
- The Islamic State's (IS) Amaq News Agency published footage on March 23 purportedly filmed from the perspective of the attackers involved in the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack.
- Russian officials proposed more anti-migrant policies in response to the Crocus City Hall attack.
- Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov expressed concerns about Russian ultranationalist reactions to the Crocus City Hall attack.
- Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City amid continued positional fighting along the entire line of contact on March 24.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on March 23 establishing a legal basis for enrolling members of the All-Russian Cossack Society into the Russian military's mobilization reserve, likely as part of ongoing cryptomobilization and military formalization efforts.



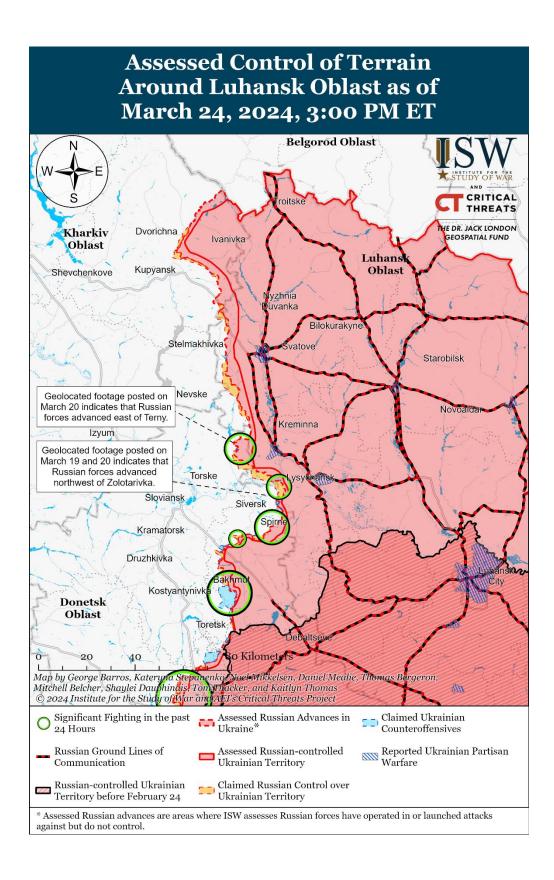
We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military 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

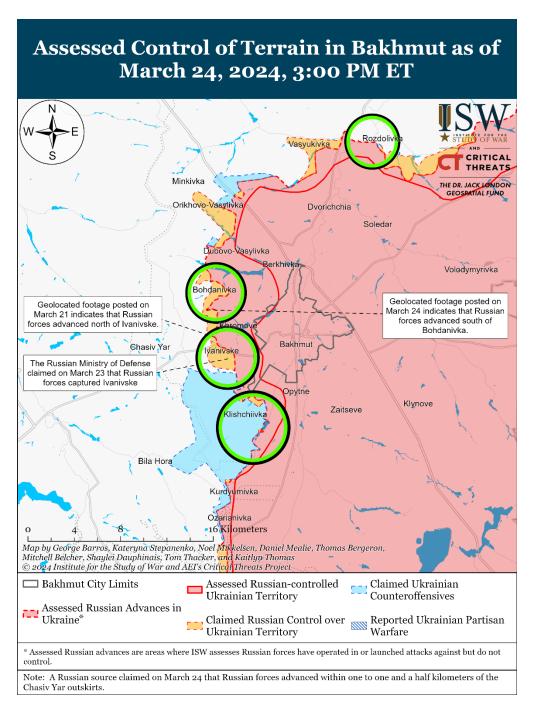
<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Positional fighting continued along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on March 24. Positional fighting occurred northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Yampolivka; and south of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).[35]



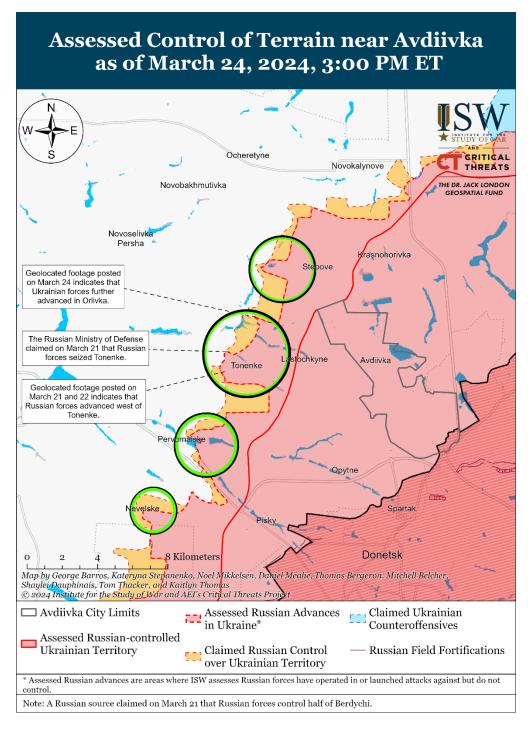
<u>Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast</u> (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia's proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces recently made confirmed advances northwest and southwest of Bakhmut amid continued positional fighting near Bakhmut on March 24. Geolocated footage published on March 24 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced south of Bohdanivka (northwest of Bakhmut) and north of Klishchiivka (southwest of Bakhmut).[36] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing closer to Chasiv Yar from Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut).[37] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks northeast of Bakhmut near Rozdolivka, Vesele, and Spirne; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[38] Elements of the Russian "GORB" Detachment and the 6th Motorized Rifle Brigade (both of the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Spirne (northeast of Bakhmut).[39]



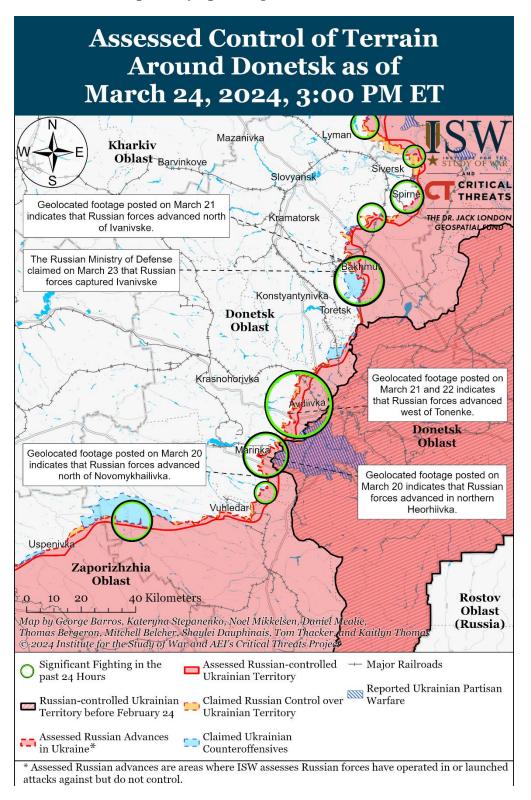
Russian forces recently made confirmed marginal advances near Avdiivka amid continued positional fighting in the area on March 24. Geolocated footage published on March 24 indicates that Russian forces recently made confirmed advances west of Tonenke (west of Avdiivka).[40] Geolocated footage published on March 24 indicates that Ukrainian forces maintain positions near or on the western outskirts of Orlivka (west of Avdiivka), despite recent Russian claims of Russian advances west of Orlivka.[41] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces are advancing towards Semenivka (northwest of Avdiivka) and Umanske (west of Avdiivka), near Nevelske (west of Avdiivka), and within Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka).[42] Positional engagements continued near Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka) and Yasnobrodivka (west of Avdiivka).[43] A Ukrainian military officer operating in the

Avdiivka direction stated that Russian assaults in the Avdiivka direction have become less intense and that Russian forces have increased their use of reconnaissance drones in this direction.[44]

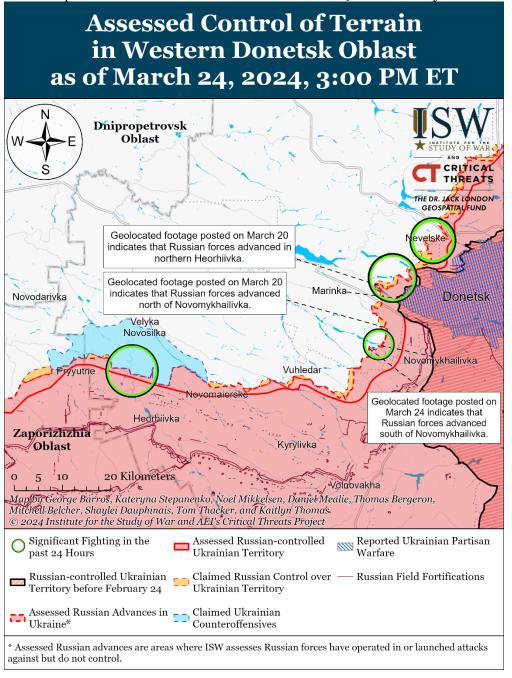


Russian forces recently marginally advanced southwest of Donetsk City amid continued positional fighting west and southwest of Donetsk City on March 24. Geolocated footage published on March 24 indicates that Russian forces recently marginally advanced south of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City).[45] Positional engagements continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka, Pobieda, and

Kostyantynivka.[46] Elements of the Russian 14th Artillery Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[47]

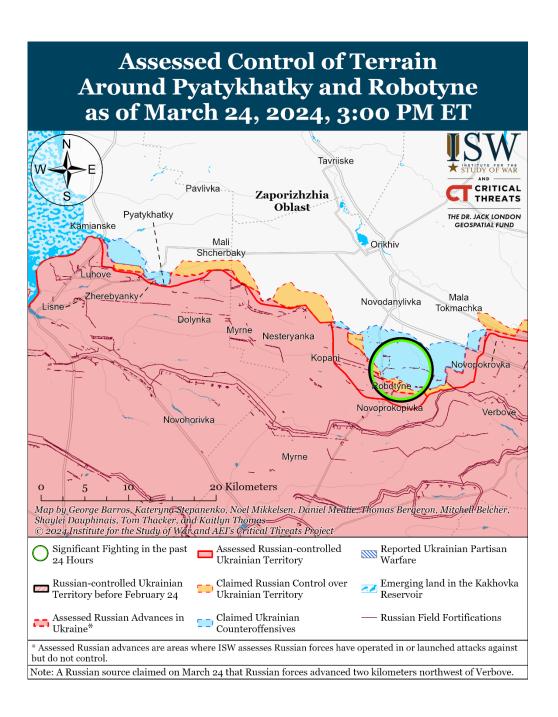


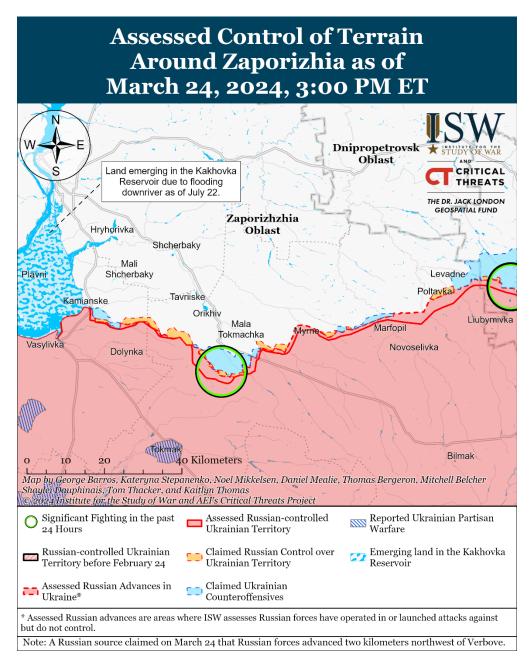
Positional engagements continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on March 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced west and southwest of Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka), although ISW has not observed visual evidence of this claim.[48] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack near Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka).[49]



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

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhia Oblast on March 24, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued near Robotyne and Verbove (east of Robotyne).[50] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to two kilometers northwest of Verbove over the past few days, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[51] Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated on March 24 that Russian forces increased first-person view (FPV) drone use by 40 percent along the frontline in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts on March 24.[52] Elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]), including its 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment, and elements of the 234th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhia direction.[53]





Ukrainian officials stated that Russian infantry unsuccessfully attacked near Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on March 24.[54]



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

See topline text.

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

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on March 23 establishing a legal basis for enrolling members of the All-Russian Cossack Society into the Russian military's mobilization reserve, likely as crypto-mobilization and military formalization efforts. ongoing newswire TASS reported that the law will allow members of the All-Russian Cossack Society who are in the Russian military, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), or Federal State Security Service (FSB) reserves to join the mobilization reserve. [55] TASS stated that the All-Russian Cossack Society will sign an agreement with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to define the duration of service for Cossacks in the mobilization reserve, the terms for termination of service, and the number of personnel in the Cossack mobilization reserve. Russian Cossack armed formations signed contracts with the Russian MoD in June 2023 as part of larger formalization efforts to integrate irregular forces into MoD structures.[56]

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

Nothing significant to report.

<u>Ukrainian Defense Industrial Efforts</u> (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.

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

ISW is not publishing coverage of activities in Russian-occupied areas today.

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova continued to tie Ukrainian and Western actors to the Crocus City Hall attack without evidence. Zakharova repeated false claims that the West and Ukraine support terrorism and claimed that Russia will consider "any phrase from Washington" about Ukraine's lack of involvement as evidence of potential Western and Ukrainian support for the terrorist attack until Russia has completed its investigation.[57] US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby stated on March 22 that there is no indication that Ukraine was involved in the attack.[58]

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

Nothing significant to report.

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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