

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, August 23, 2023

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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 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 3:30pm ET on August 23. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the August 24 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and founder Dmitry Utkin reportedly died after Russian forces shot down an aircraft transporting senior Wagner commanders over Tver Oblast. The Russian Federal Aviation Agency (Rosaviatsiya) reported on August 23 that all the passengers – Yevgeny Prigozhin, Dmitry Utkin, Sergei Propustin, Yevgeny Makaryan, Alexander Totmin, Valery Chekalov, Nikolai Matyuseev – died in the crash along with all three crew members.[1] Russian opposition outlet *Dossier* reported that Chekalov, who is under US sanctions for transferring munitions to Russia and has acted on behalf of Prigozhin, oversaw Wagner transport logistics and “civilian” projects abroad.[2] A Russian insider source claimed that Chekalov also served as head of Wagner's security services, though another source refuted this claim.[3] *Dossier* also reported that several other passengers joined Wagner between 2015 and 2017 and fought in Syria, although their current positions are unclear.[4] Russian sources amplified footage apparently showing a Russian missile striking an aircraft carrying Prigozhin, Utkin, and other Wagner commanders and the wreckage of the aircraft.[5] An insider source claimed that two S-300 missiles shot down the aircraft.[6] Flight tracking data for an Embraer Legacy 600 jet (registration number RA-02795) registered to the Wagner Group stopped after 6:11pm Moscow time while over Tver Oblast.[7] Russian sources claimed that a second Wagner Group-owned Embraer jet (registration number RA-02748) departed Moscow but turned around and landed at Ostafyevo airport in Moscow around the time of the strike.[8] Flight tracking data showed that this second aircraft arrived in St Petersburg at 6:27pm and flew back to Moscow 20 minutes later arriving at 8:02pm, however.[9]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Kremlin have been destroying the Wagner private military company (PMC) and weakening Prigozhin's authority since the rebellion – and the assassination of Wagner's top leadership was likely the final step to eliminate Wagner as an independent organization. Wagner and Russian insider sources reported that the Russian MoD recently began forming new PMCs to replace Wagner in Africa and the Middle East and started recruiting Wagner personnel.[10] Wagner commanders indicated that two high-ranking Wagner officials joined the Russian MoD, and insider sources claimed that some Wagner personnel began to leave Belarus after Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko refused to finance Wagner when he discovered that Russia would not pay Wagner's costs.[11] Prigozhin's online persona has been largely silenced since the rebellion – possibly as part of the deal between

Lukashenko, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Prigozhin – which may have negatively impacted Wagner’s ability to recruit new personnel amidst the Kremlin’s defamation campaign against Prigozhin. The Russian MoD and the Kremlin had effectively created conditions in which Prigozhin could no longer adequately support the Wagner contingent unless he was able to secure new funding and missions for Wagner personnel in the immediate term. Such conditions could have eventually led Wagner to slowly lose fighters and cause Prigozhin to lose his relevancy and influence.

Prigozhin was likely attempting to counter the Russian MoD’s and the Kremlin’s destruction of Wagner. A Russian insider source with reported ties to Russian security services claimed that Prigozhin’s “hasty” departure to and from Africa was in response to the Main Directorate of the Russian General Staff’s (GRU) plans and measures to undermine Wagner’s presence in Africa.^[12] The source claimed that GRU Deputy Head (Head of the Special Activities Service) Colonel General Andrei Averyanov led the effort to completely block Wagner from operating in Africa and that there were plans to create and train an army corps of more than 20,000 people as Wagner replacements. The source added that Prigozhin was deeply opposed to these efforts and “made every effort to prevent them.” ISW observed that Prigozhin and Wagner’s representatives intensified their efforts to reestablish Wagner in Africa and the Middle East in mid-August, and Prigozhin even published a video of himself in an unspecified African country on August 21 – one of the few published videos of Prigozhin since the rebellion.^[13] This video appeared to have heavy recruitment undertones, and it is possible that Prigozhin had traveled to Africa in hopes of securing further missions for Wagner personnel independent of the Russian MoD and the Kremlin.^[14] Averyanov has reportedly participated in other high-profile assassination attempts such as the poisoning of Sergei and Yuliya Skripal, and it is possible that Russian officials capitalized on Prigozhin’s panic and impulsivity to eliminate Wagner’s top-most leadership.

Wagner PMC’s future without a leader remains uncertain. A Russian news aggregator claimed that the Wagner council of commanders is currently meeting at the time of this publication to prepare a joint statement and announce what will happen to Wagner in the near future.^[15] The aggregator, citing an unnamed source, also claimed that Wagner had long developed a mechanism to mitigate the aftermath of Prigozhin’s and Utkin’s deaths.^[16] The source, however, refused to disclose what such mitigations entail but noted that “in any scenario, [these mitigations] will be bad news.”^[17] Wagner-affiliated channels urged Russian media to refrain from speculations about Prigozhin, Wagner’s fate, and the council of commanders.^[18] A prominent Russian milblogger with reported connections to the Russian State Duma claimed that Wagner personnel are still “at their posts” in Belarus and Africa and denied the claims that Wagner personnel are being evacuated.^[19] Prigozhin and Utkin were undeniably the faces of Wagner, and their assassinations will have dramatic impacts on Wagner’s command structure and the Wagner brand. Wagner commanders and fighters may begin to fear for their lives or become demoralized. The Russian MoD’s and Kremlin’s inroads into Wagner’s operations and the absence of Prigozhin – who would fight for new opportunities for Wagner personnel – may further lead to the degradation of the Wagner grouping.

Putin almost certainly ordered the Russian military command to shoot down Prigozhin’s plane. Elements of the Russian military, especially Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov, would be extremely unlikely to execute Prigozhin without Putin’s order. The entirety of the Russian political and security sphere likely viewed Prigozhin’s continued survival following Wagner’s rebellion as at Putin’s discretion. ISW

will make further assessments based on the assumption that Putin ordered Prigozhin's assassination unless evidence to the contrary emerges. ISW's previous standing assessment that Putin was unlikely to kill Prigozhin for fear of angering Wagner personnel has thus been invalidated.[20]

Putin may have concluded that he had sufficiently separated Prigozhin from Wagner and could kill him without turning Prigozhin into a martyr for the remaining Wagner personnel. Some Wagner commanders recently appeared to betray Wagner for the Russian MoD-affiliated Redut PMC, suggesting that the Kremlin's and Russian MoD's efforts to separate Wagner elements from those loyal to Prigozhin were partially succeeding.[21] Increasing reports of Wagner's financial issues and corresponding reports of Wagner personnel leaving the group due to decreased payments and opportunities to deploy may have resulted in Prigozhin losing favor among the Wagner rank-in-file.[22] The Russian MoD has been setting conditions to replace the Wagner Group with MoD-affiliated PMCs, and Russian sources have claimed that these PMCs are attempting to recruit current and former Wagner personnel.[23] Putin may have decided that Wagner personnel had reached a point where they were sufficiently more interested in payments and deployments with these new PMCS than their continued loyalty to Prigozhin and that he could safely kill Prigozhin.

Alternatively, Putin may have decided that Prigozhin had crossed a pre-established redline with his efforts to retain Wagner's access to operations in Africa. Putin, Prigozhin, and Lukashenko may have included an agreement in the deal that ended Wagner's rebellion that required Prigozhin to limit his and Wagner's media presence and/or curtail Wagner's operations in Africa. Prigozhin's August 21 video claiming that Wagner is expanding its presence in Africa and subsequent uptick in Wagner recruitment advertisements may have crossed a pre-established redline if Prigozhin had agreed to silence himself.[24] Prigozhin's alleged repeated attempts to prevent the Russian MoD from completely replacing the Wagner contingent in Africa may have also crossed a pre-established redline restricting Wagner's African operations. Putin may have decided that Prigozhin had violated enough aspects or all of the pre-established deal.

It is possible that Putin has intended to execute Prigozhin for some time and that the downing of Prigozhin's plane on August 23 was coincidental timing, although this is unlikely. Kremlin newswire *RIA Novosti* reported on August 23 that Putin formally dismissed Wagner-affiliated Army General Sergei Surovikin as commander of Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) and replaced him with Colonel General Viktor Afzalov.[25] The official confirmation of Surovikin's dismissal in Russian state media on the same day as Prigozhin's assassination is likely no coincidence. The Kremlin likely intends for both publicized punishments to send a clear message that those who were involved in the June 24 rebellion have been dealt with and that Wagner's challenge to the Russian leadership is a settled affair.

Putin's almost certain order for the Russian MoD to shoot down Prigozhin's plane is likely a public attempt to reassert his dominance and exact vengeance for the humiliation that the Wagner Group's armed rebellion on June 24 caused Putin and the Russian MoD. Putin notably attended a publicly televised concert in honor of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Kursk around the time that Russian air defenses downed Prigozhin's plane. Putin's attendance at the televised concert echoed the memory of Soviet state television showing *Swan Lake* on television in August 1991 as the Soviet Union collapsed.[26] Russian sources noted that it has been exactly two months since the beginning of Wagner's armed rebellion during which Wagner forces shot down several Russian helicopters and killed at least 13 Russian servicemen.[27] The decision to have

Russian air defenses be the method for Prigozhin's assassination allowed the Russian MoD to directly avenge what was one the deadliest days for Russian aviation since the start of the full-scale invasion. Putin had suffered significant humiliation for failing to stop Wagner's rebellion, relying on Lukashenko to stop Prigozhin's march, and failing to punish Wagner servicemen who were responsible for shooting down Russian aircraft on June 24.[28] Putin's behavior during the rebellion reportedly concerned his inner circle about his ability to sustain his regime, and CIA Director William Burns reiterated similar observations about Putin's judgments and detachment from events.[29] Burns also noted that "Putin is the ultimate apostle of payback," and it is likely that Putin was waiting to set proper conditions to finally avenge himself on Prigozhin without appearing impulsive or overreacting.[30] Putin needed to exact ostentatious revenge against Prigozhin not only to prove that he is not a weak leader, but also to support his military – which in the eyes of many Russians did not see justice carried out for the events of June 24.

Specific individuals who may have planned to oppose Putin, the Kremlin, or the MoD have likely taken note of Prigozhin's ultimate fate and other recent measures to reassert the Kremlin's backing for the senior Russian military leadership. Putin notably sidelined Tula Oblast Governor Alexey Dyumin at the recent Army-2023 forum, publicly posturing him as subordinate to Shoigu following suggestions that Dyumin might replace Shoigu.[31] Putin and Gerasimov visited the Southern Military District (SMD) headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, which Wagner forces occupied during the rebellion, likely to publicly demonstrate the Kremlin's backing of Gerasimov.[32] Prigozhin's fate is also likely meant to serve as a deterrent to elements of the Russian military who may try to follow an existing precedent of insubordination that Prigozhin helped establish.[33] Lukashenko notably embarrassed Putin by directly negotiating with Prigozhin to end the rebellion, and Prigozhin's assassination may signal to Lukashenko both a dramatic reduction of his negotiating space with the Kremlin and an implicit threat against his continued attempts to resist Union State integration efforts.[34]

The Kremlin appears to be setting conditions to deflect overt responsibility for Prigozhin's assassination away from Putin and the Russian military. Rosaviatsiya created a special commission to investigate the technical condition of the crashed aircraft, the meteorological conditions on the flight route, and the dispatch services and ground radio equipment.[35] The Russian Investigative Committee has initiated a criminal case on the charge of violating the rules of traffic safety and operation of air transport.[36] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger noted that the Investigative Committee may choose the "erroneous" launch of air defense systems as the main version of the event given the claimed Ukrainian drone strikes on Moscow.[37] A Russian insider source claimed that the crash will likely be framed as a terrorist act that occurred onboard, and Russian State Duma Deputy Yevgeniy Popov already echoed this narrative in the Russian information space.[38] A Wagner-affiliated channel criticized Russian state TV channels for failing to mention the crash during the evening news cycle.[39]

The wider Russian information space refrained from commenting on the reasons behind the crash, with only a few sources tying the incident to the Kremlin and/or the Russian MoD. Many sources observed that the crash occurred exactly two months after the start of Prigozhin's rebellion.[40] Several insider sources claimed that the incident indicated that Putin "has something to be afraid of" and speculated that Putin's system (likely referring to his regime) is undergoing a new wave of changes.[41] Some milbloggers claimed that Prigozhin's assassination will have "catastrophic consequences" and that this incident is a lesson that one must always continue

going until the end – implying that Prigozhin should have continued his march on Moscow.[42] Most milbloggers refused to comment on Prigozhin’s death, citing a lack of available official information.[43] ISW will resume its coverage of milblogger reactions on August 24.

Russian milbloggers will likely focus most of their coverage in the coming days on Prigozhin’s assassination and may report less on the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Russian milbloggers similarly shifted much of their reporting to cover Wagner’s rebellion on June 24 to developments within Russia and it took several days for them to return to their normal reporting on the frontlines in Ukraine.[44] The Kremlin may have decided to ostentatiously kill Prigozhin at this time in part to shift focus in the Russian information space away from the frontlines in Ukraine amidst notable Ukrainian advances. ISW’s coverage of kinetic activity on the frontlines in the coming days may be constrained if Russian reporting is limited.

Further tactically significant Ukrainian gains in and around Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast are widening the Ukrainian breach of Russian defensive lines in the area and threatening Russian secondary lines of defense. Geolocated footage published on August 22 and 23 indicates that Ukrainian forces have advanced further in Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and control most of the settlement and have made further gains west of Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[45] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces achieved unspecified success in the direction of Novopokropivka (13km south of Orikhiv) and Novodanylivka (5km south of Orikhiv).[46] Russian forces had likely hoped to use their positions in and around Robotyne as a launching point for counterattacks against the western flank of the Ukrainian advance east of the settlement, where Ukrainian forces appear to be widening their penetration through Russian first lines of defense. The Ukrainian advance through Robotyne itself and the potential liberation of the settlement will deprive Russian forces of positions near the western flank of the Ukrainian breach and therefore give Ukrainian forces more maneuver space to launch offensive operations against the Russian secondary line of defense that runs south of Robotyne to the western outskirts of Verbove. A successful deep penetration of Russian defensive lines likely requires a widening of the initial penetration to prevent Russian forces from cutting off a too-narrow thrust. Ukrainian advances have now brought Ukrainian forces within roughly two kilometers of the secondary lines of Russian defense, a relatively more continuous set of field fortifications consisting of anti-tank ditches and dragon's teeth anti-tank obstacles. The extent of minefields in the area is unclear, although areas in front of these secondary lines of defense may be less heavily mined to give Russian forces north of the lines the ability to retreat. ISW previously assessed that these secondary lines of defense may be relatively weaker than the first Russian defensive lines in the area due to a lack of uncommitted Russian forces in the area and further lateral deployments from other sectors of the front.[47]

Ukrainian forces likely struck a Russian S-400 air defense system in Crimea on August 23. The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) announced and posted footage of a strike on a Russian S-400 long and medium-range anti-aircraft missile system near Olenivka, Crimea (116km northwest of Sevastopol and about 140km south of Kherson City).[48] GUR reported that the strike destroyed an air defense installation, an unspecified number of missiles, and killed nearby Russian military personnel, though the footage only shows part of the installation exploding.[49] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger suggested that Ukrainian forces likely used a Harpoon, Neptune, or Brimstone II missile to strike the air defense system.[50] Russian milbloggers expressed concern that Ukrainian forces were able to operate a drone and record footage of the strike roughly

120km behind the current frontline.[51] A Ukrainian strike on a Russian air defense installation deep within the Russian rear indicates a number of Russian tactical failures, particularly that Russian forces were seemingly unprepared to intercept the missiles with the air defense system or operate electronic warfare jamming to prevent Ukrainian forces from operating a drone in the area. These tactical failures, though surprising and serious, may not be indicative of wider systemic issues within Russian air defenses, however.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Pentagon Spokesperson General Patrick Ryder notably pushed back on an alleged US intelligence assessment that the Ukrainian counteroffensive will fail to meet its objectives. Sullivan stated on August 22 that the United States does not assess that the war in Ukraine “is a stalemate.”[52] Sullivan stated that the United States continues to support Ukraine in its counteroffensive efforts and noted that Ukrainian forces continue to take territory.[53] Sullivan noted that the United States will continue to support Ukrainian forces as they operate according to their tactics and timetable and proceed according to the strategic and operational decisions of their commanders and leadership.[54] Ryder stated on August 23 that it is “inappropriate” to draw any conclusions about the Ukrainian counteroffensive while fighting continues across the frontline and that Ukrainian forces continue to advance.[55] Sullivan’s and Ryder’s statements are a notable response to the *Washington Post*’s August 18 report that the US intelligence community has assessed that Ukraine’s counteroffensive will fail to reach Melitopol in western Zaporizhia Oblast and will not achieve its principal objective of severing the Russian land bridge to Crimea.[56]

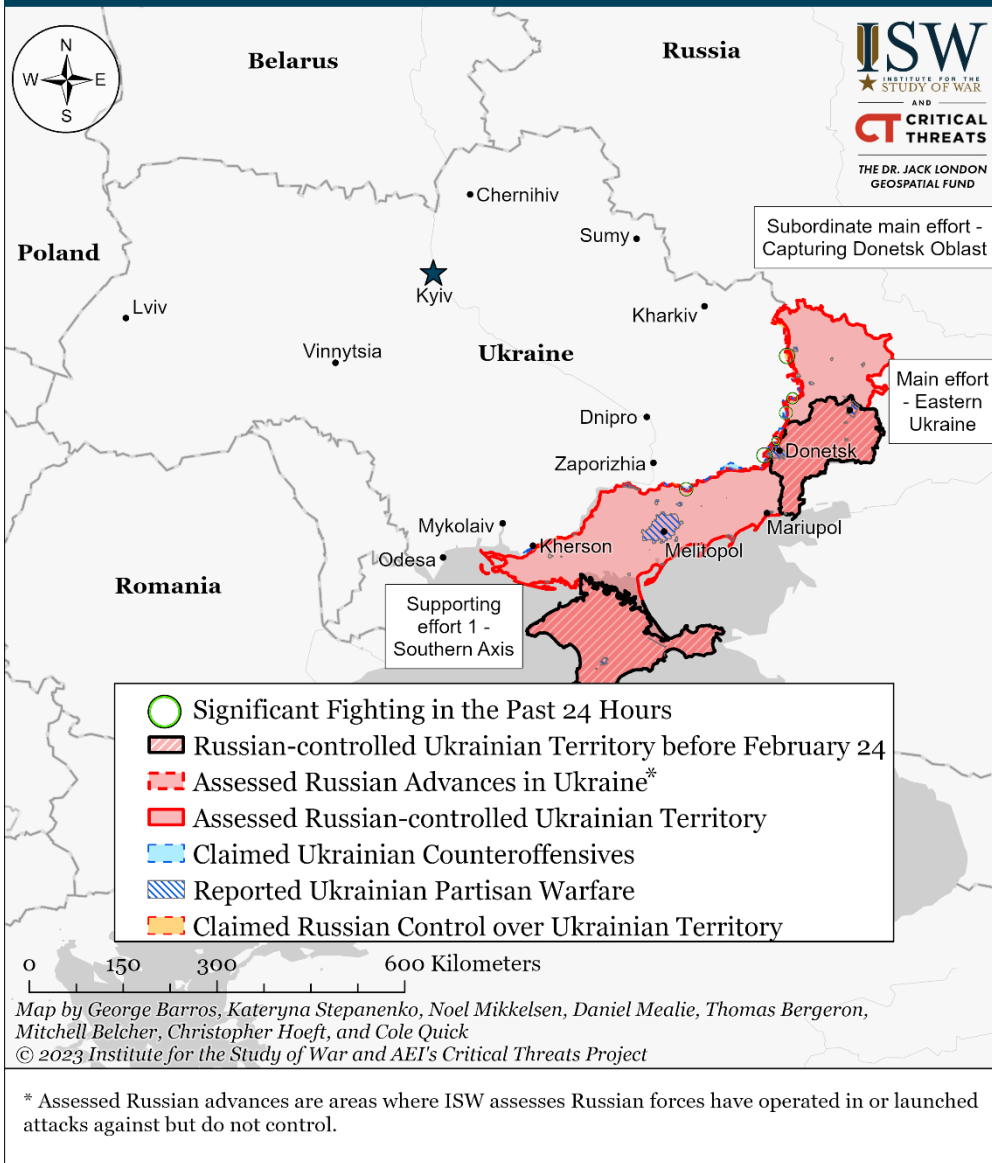
Russian forces conducted a series of drone and missile strikes across Ukraine on the night of August 22 to 23 and destroyed grain infrastructure at the port in Izmail, Odesa Oblast. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces launched nine missiles and up to 20 Shahed-131/136 drones and that Ukrainian forces destroyed 11 drones, including nine over Odesa Oblast.[57] Ukrainian Minister for Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure Development Oleksandr Kubrakov reported on August 23 that the Russian drone strike on the port of Izmail destroyed over 13,000 tons of grain intended for Egypt and Romania.[58] Kubrakov reported that Russian strikes have destroyed 270,000 tons of grain since Russia’s withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative on July 17.[59] The Russian destruction of additional Ukrainian grain infrastructure comes less than a day after Putin attempted to mitigate dissatisfaction from African countries at Russia’s withdrawal from the grain deal during the BRICS Business Forum in South Africa.[60]

Key Takeaways:

- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin and founder Dmitry Utkin reportedly died after Russian forces shot down an aircraft transporting senior Wagner commanders over Tver Oblast.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Kremlin have been destroying the Wagner private military company (PMC) and weakening Prigozhin’s authority since the rebellion – and the assassination of Wagner’s top leadership was likely the final step to eliminate Wagner as an independent organization.**
- **Prigozhin was likely attempting to counter the Russian MoD’s and the Kremlin’s destruction of Wagner and Wagner’s future remains uncertain.**

- **Putin almost certainly ordered the Russian military command to shoot down Prigozhin's plane.**
- **Putin's almost certain order for the Russian MoD to shoot down Prigozhin's plane is likely a public attempt to reassert his dominance and exact vengeance for the humiliation that the Wagner Group's armed rebellion on June 24 caused Putin and the Russian MoD.**
- **Specific individuals who may have planned to oppose Putin, the Kremlin, or the MoD have likely taken note of Prigozhin's ultimate fate and other recent measures to reassert the Kremlin's backing for the senior Russian military leadership.**
- **The Kremlin appears to be setting conditions to deflect overt responsibility for Prigozhin's assassination away from Putin and the Russian military.**
- **Further tactically significant Ukrainian gains in and around Robotyne in western Zaporizhia Oblast are widening the Ukrainian breach of Russian defensive lines in the area and threatening Russian secondary lines of defense.**
- **Ukrainian forces likely struck a Russian S-400 air defense system in Crimea on August 23.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, in the Bakhmut area, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on August 23 and did not make any confirmed advances.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of August 23, 2023, 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 these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and 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 Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

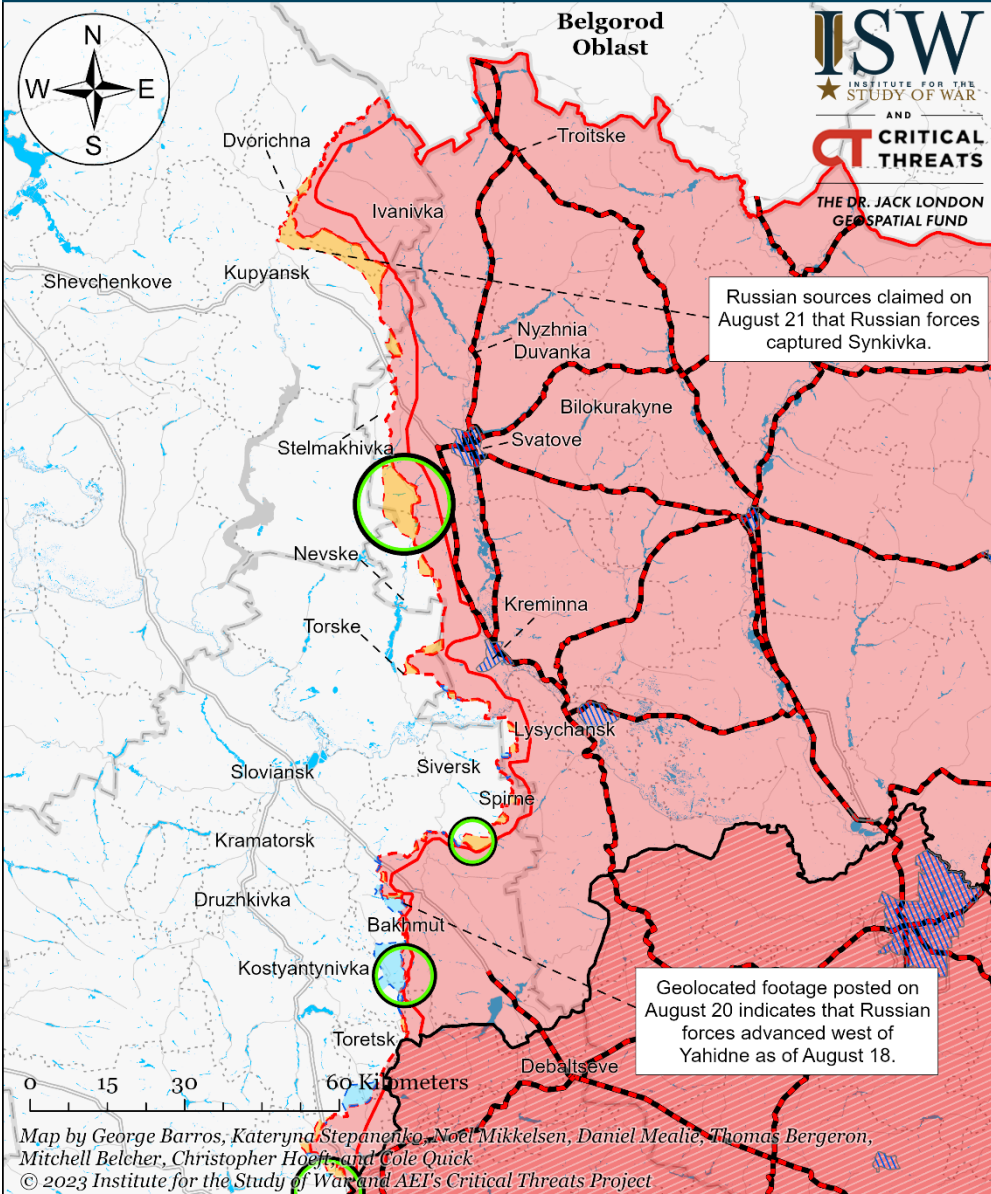
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 continued limited offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on August 23 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove).[61] Russian Western Grouping of Forces Press Officer Yaroslav Yakimkin claimed that Russian forces continued offensive operations near Vilshana (13km northeast of Kupyansk) and captured a Ukrainian stronghold and two Ukrainian observation posts.[62] A Russian milblogger claimed that unspecified Russian volunteer battalions are conducting assaults near Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna) and are semi-encircling Ukrainian forces in the settlement, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of Russian positions in the area consistent with a threat of encirclement.[63]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on August 23. The Russian MoD and Yakimkin claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Synkivka (9km northeast of Kupyansk), Petropavlivka (6km east of Kupyansk), Vilshana, Novoyehorivka, and Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove).[64] The Russian MoD and the Russian Central Grouping of Forces Spokesperson Alexander Savchuk stated that elements of the Russian Central Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna), Torske (15km west of Kreminna), Dibrova (6km southwest of Kreminna), and the Serebryanske forest area south of Kreminna.[65]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory

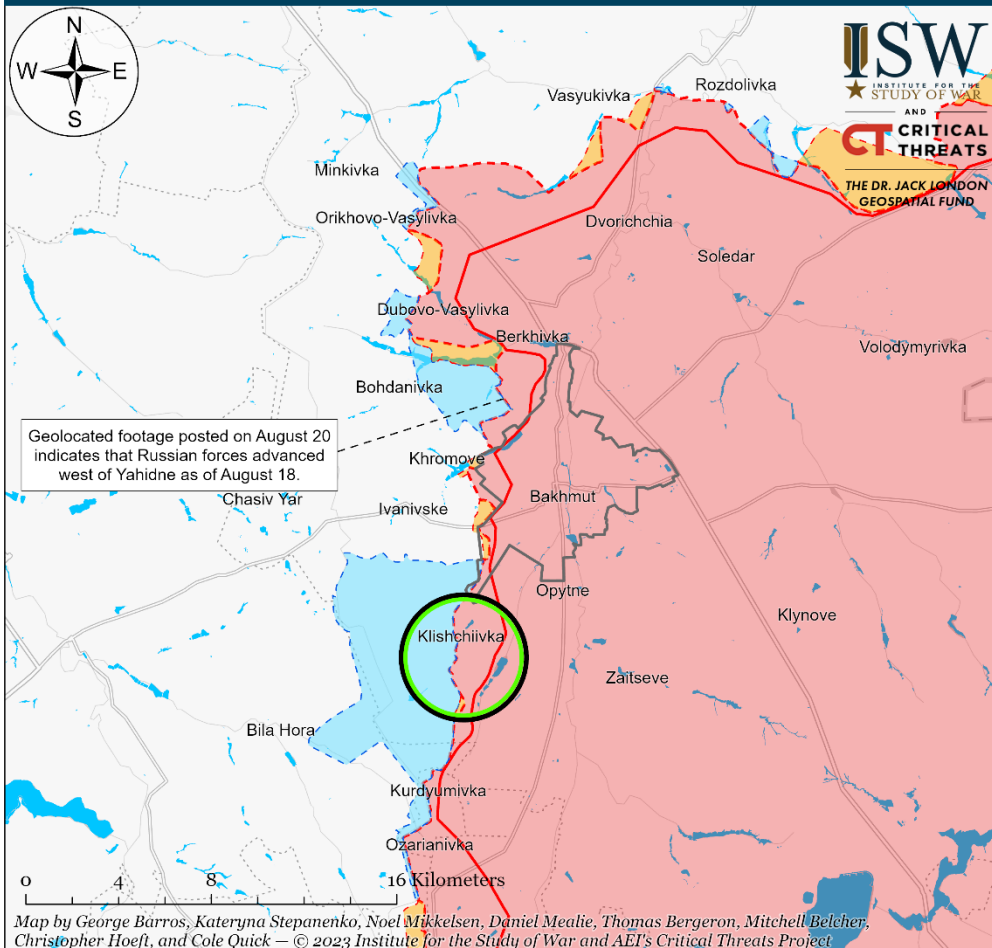
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Bakhmut area on August 23, but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations south of Bakhmut.[66] The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) and Mayorske (21km southwest of Bakhmut).[67] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces with armored vehicle support attacked near Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut).[68] The milblogger claimed that Russian and Ukrainian forces skirmished in the southern part of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[69]

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Bakhmut area on August 23 but did not advance. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Vesele (20km northeast of Bakhmut) and Klishchiivka.[70] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces counterattacked near Klishchiivka but did not specify an outcome.[71] The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) People’s Militia posted footage claiming to show elements of the Russian 85th Brigade (LNR 2nd Army Corps) striking Ukrainian positions in the Bakhmut direction.[72]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



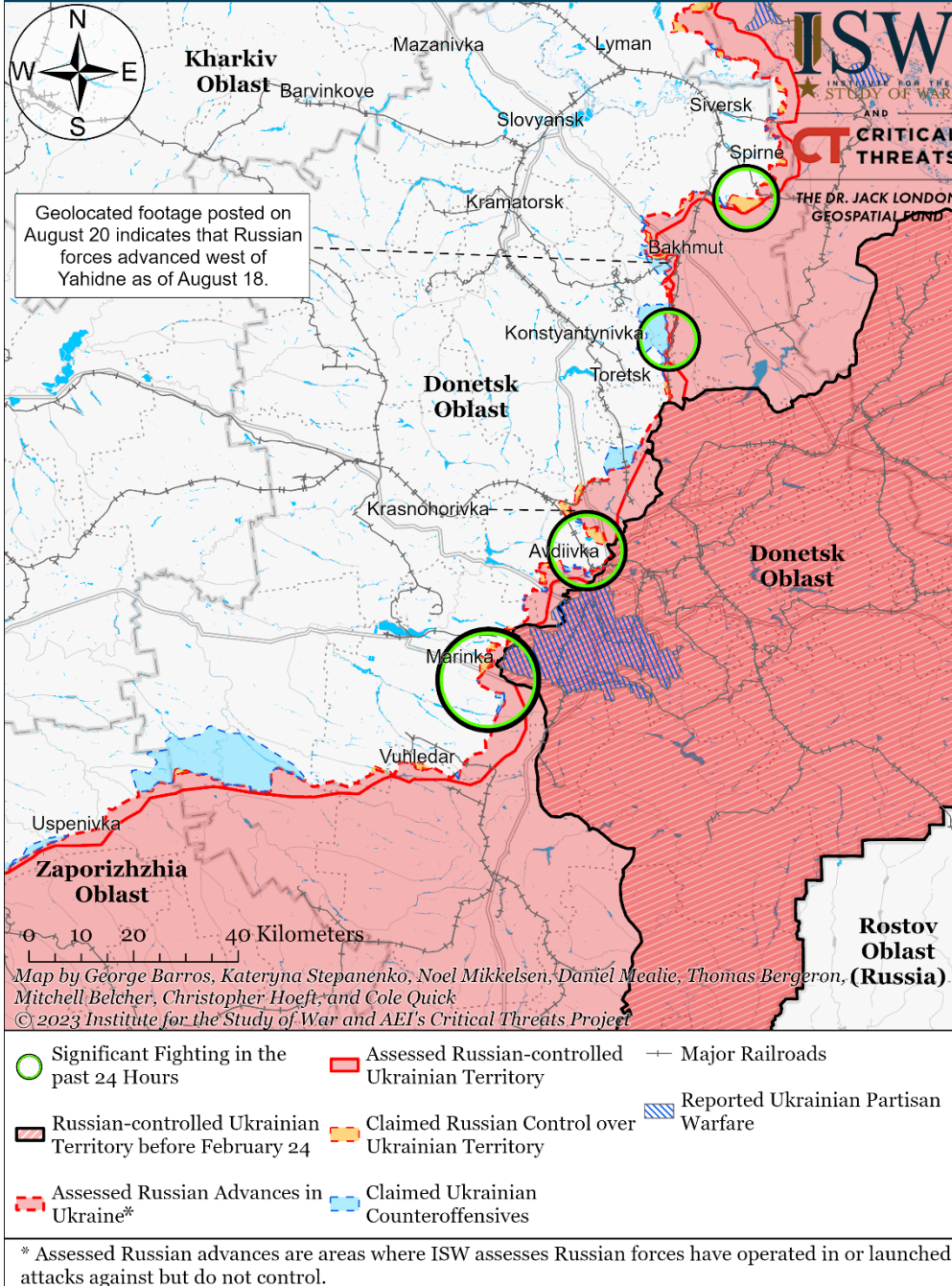
Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar claimed on August 21 that Ukrainian forces captured three square kilometers over the past week and 43 square kilometers since beginning offensive operations in the Bakhmut direction.

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on August 23, but did not advance. The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Nevelske (directly west of Donetsk City).[73]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



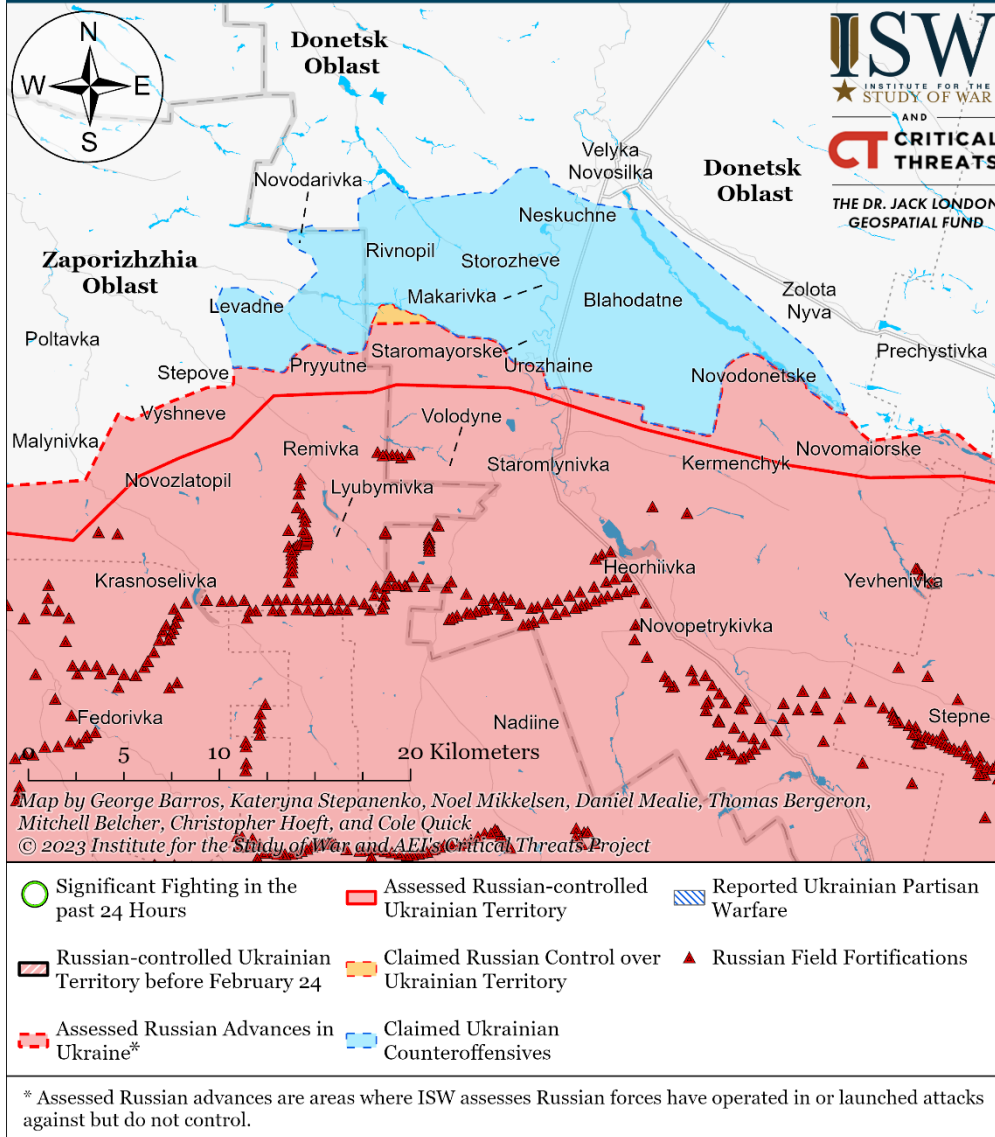
Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on August 23, but did not make any claimed or confirmed advances. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continue to defend against Russian attacks near Avdiivka and Marinka (on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[74] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully

attacked near Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka), in Marinka, and on the southern approaches to Avdiivka.[75] Russian milbloggers amplified footage claiming to show elements of the Russian 68th Army Corps (Eastern Military District) operating near Novomykhailivka.[76]

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

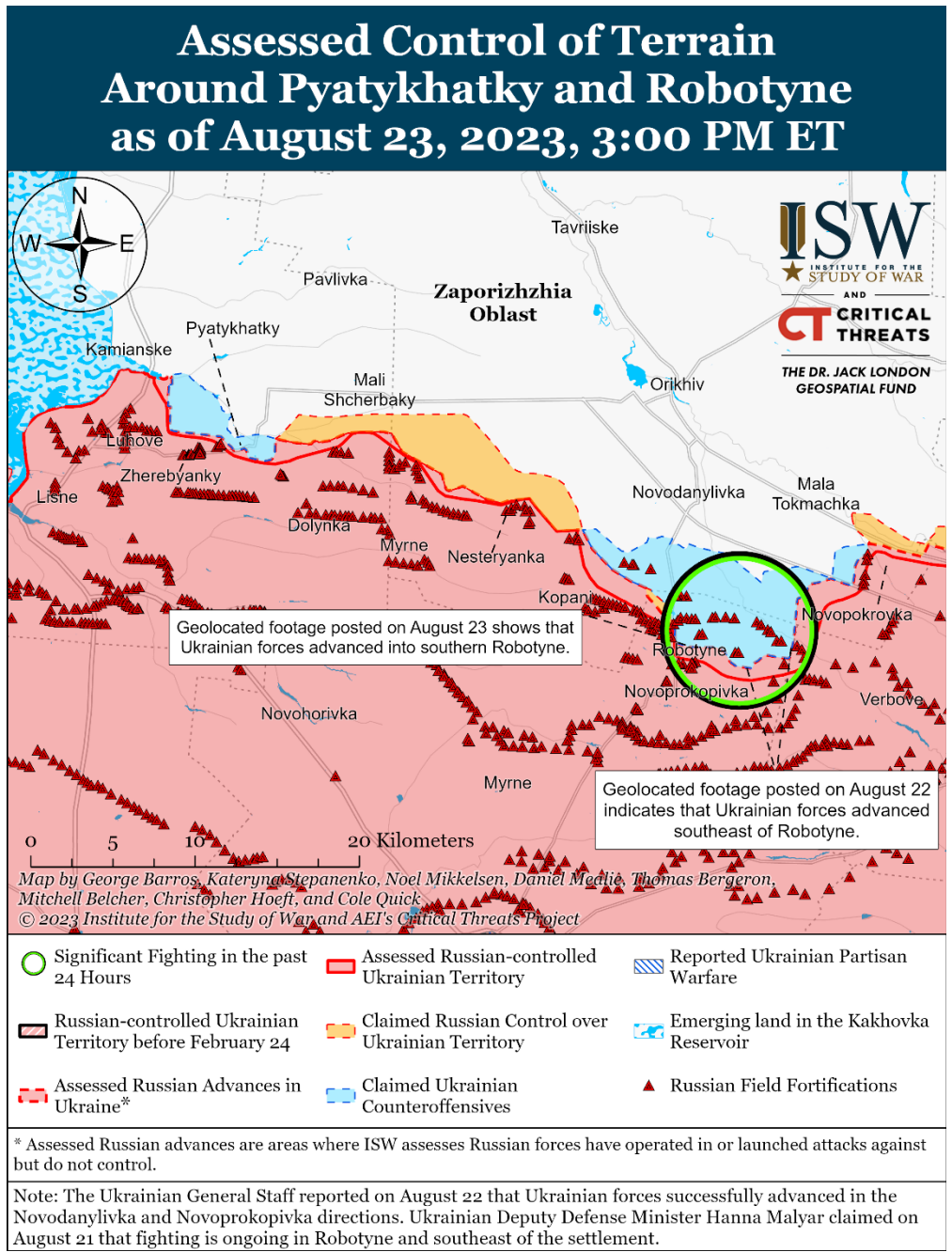
Ukrainian forces reportedly continued limited offensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast border area and did not make any confirmed or claimed advances on August 23. Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks near Pryutne (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) and Urozhaine (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[77] The Russian “Vostok” Battalion which is operating in the area claimed that Ukrainian forces attempted to find a gap in Russian defensive lines near Novodonetske (12km southeast of Velyka Novosilka).[78]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around the Vremivka Salient as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

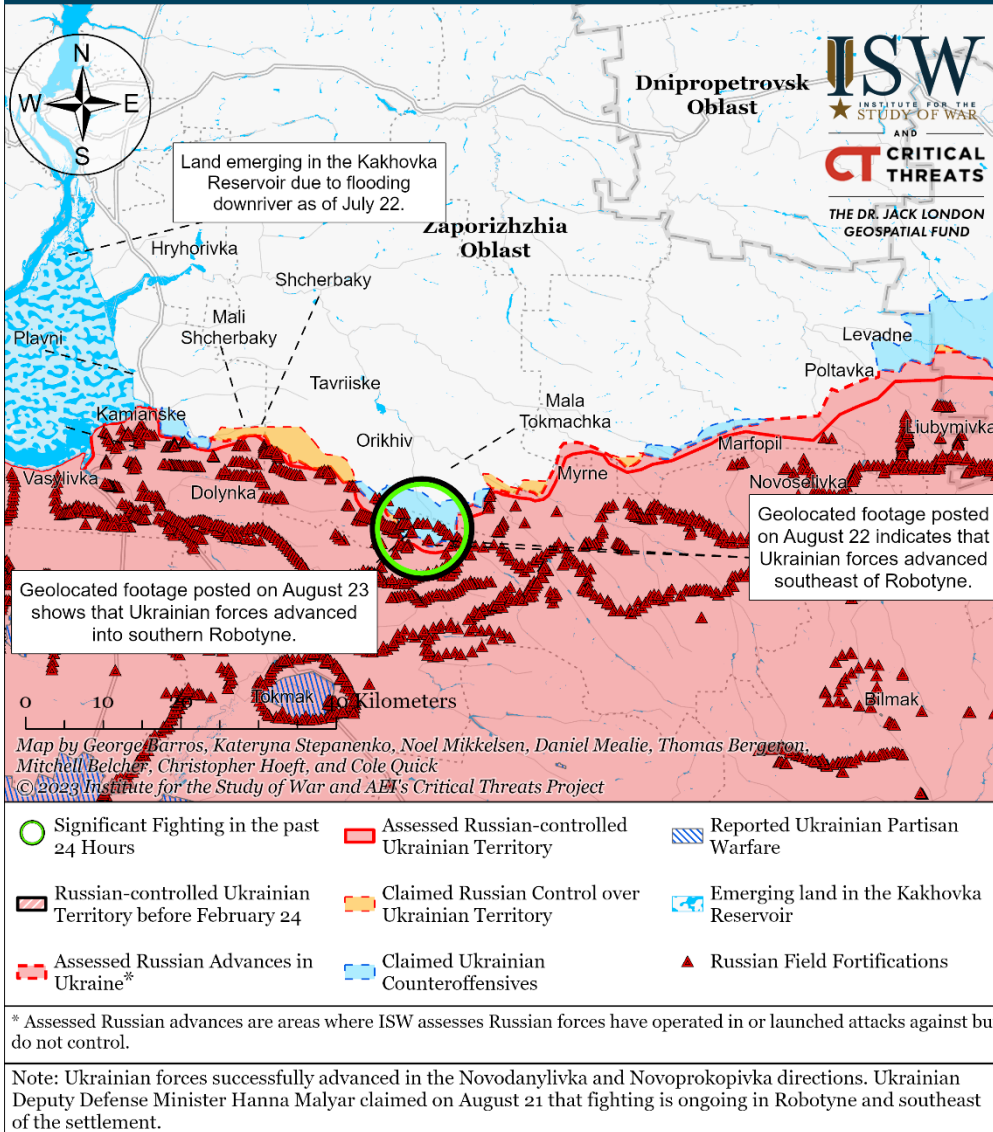


Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations and made tactically significant gains in the western Zaporizhzhia Oblast area on August 23. Geolocated footage published on August 22 shows that Ukrainian forces advanced southeast of Robotyne (10km south of Orikhiv) and northwest Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[79] Geolocated footage published on August 23 by Ukrainian sources, including Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief General Valery Zaluzhnyi, shows that Ukrainian forces erected a flag in southern Robotyne, indicating that Russian forces likely have limited remaining positions in the village.[80] The Ukrainian General Staff reported unspecified Ukrainian successes in the directions of Novodanylivka (5km south of Orikhiv) and Novopokropivka (13km southeast of Orikhiv).[81] Russian milbloggers largely claimed that fighting is ongoing for control of the Robotyne and that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks in and near the settlement.[82] Some milbloggers

claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from central to northern Robotyne and that Russian forces maintain control over southern Robotyne.[83]

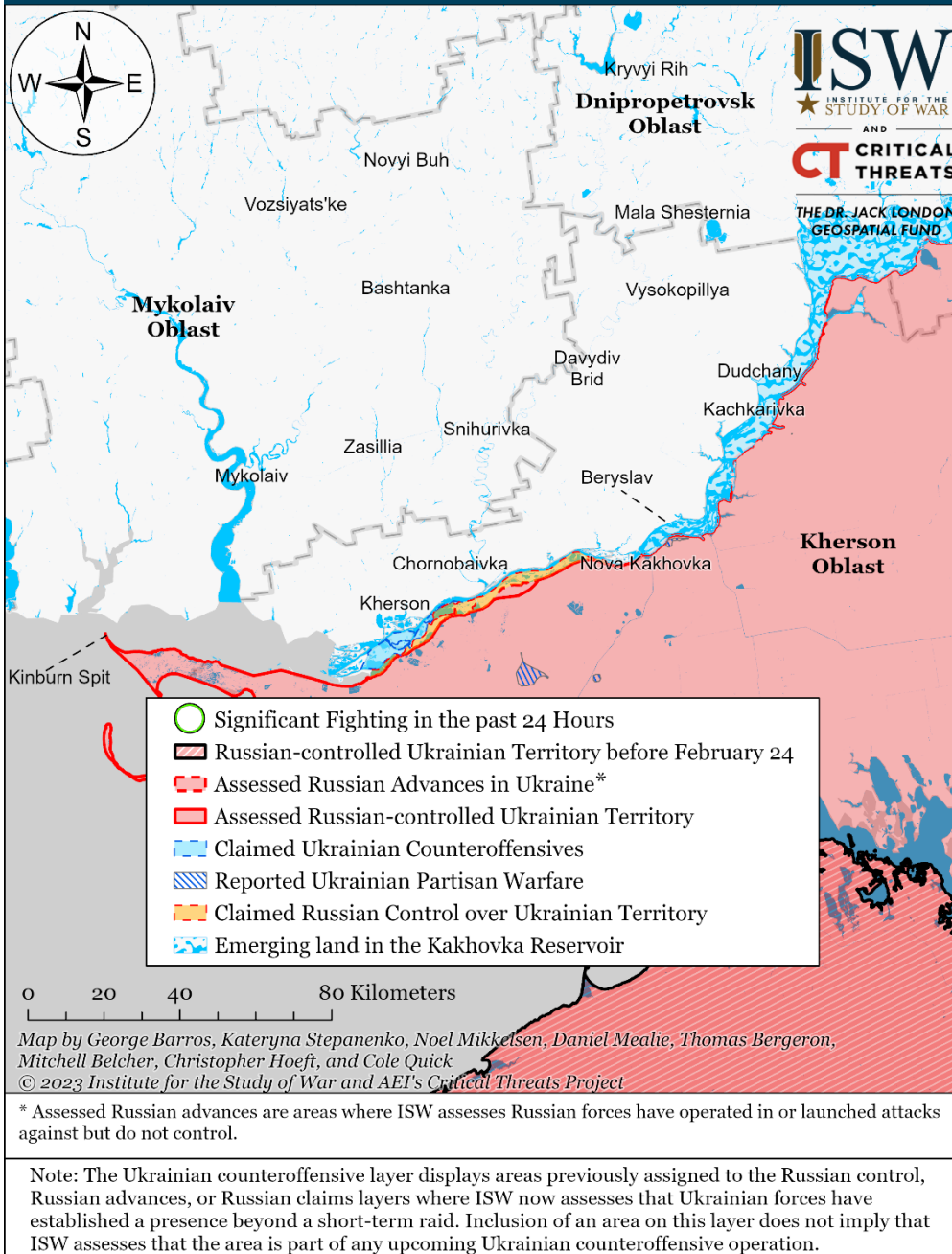


Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces continue efforts to cross the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast. One milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces continue attempts to gain a foothold near Oleshky but that the Russian 81st Separate Spetsnaz Brigade (a likely volunteer formation that is subordinate to the “Dniepr” Group of Forces and has recently recruited and received aid from occupied Crimea) are defending in the area.[84] Another milblogger complained that Russian forces do not react quickly enough to Ukrainian personnel transports across the river.[85]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of August 23, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

A Russian opposition outlet reported that Russian authorities pardoned numerous Wagner Group fighters previously convicted of violent crimes and who later committed more crimes after returning

to Russia from the frontlines.[86] The outlet reported that pardoned Wagner fighters are suspected of killing at least 12 people and raping four since returning from Ukraine.[87]

Reuters reported that Russian customs records show that Russia continues to purchase Western-made aircraft parts through intermediary countries and is actively circumventing Western sanctions.[88] Russian Ural Airlines reportedly imported over 20 US-made aircraft parts since February 2022, and *Reuters* analysis of the customs records shows that Russian airlines obtained at least \$1.2 billion worth of Western parts between May 2023 and June 2023. Russian customs data indicated that Russia avoids sanctions by importing parts from Tajikistan, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, China, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Russian MoD claimed that Russia is constructing new military hospitals in Russia's western border regions likely to address servicemen's complaints about lack of adequate medical support. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov reportedly visited the construction sites of military hospitals in Bryansk, Belgorod, and Kursk oblasts.[89] The Russian MoD claimed that Russian authorities will commission six hospitals as early as November 2023 and claimed that the Russian MoD is additionally building new medical facilities in the Republic of Dagestan, Ryazan Oblast, and occupied Sevastopol. ISW previously observed numerous complaints from Russian servicemen about the Russian military command failing to provide adequate medical assistance and reports about Russian forces using civilian hospitals in occupied areas to treat wounded personnel.[90]

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) Russian occupation officials met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 23 to discuss strengthening the integration of Russian-occupied Ukraine into Russia. Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik informed Putin that LNR authorities completed restructuring its executive bodies in accordance with Russian federal legislation.[91] Putin and Pasechnik also discussed the upcoming September 10 regional elections, Russian federal government infrastructure assistance, and Russian regional patronage programs.[92] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky presented Putin with a 10-year program for increasing industrial production and investment in occupied Zaporizhia.[93]

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)

Nothing significant to report.

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

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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