

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 21, 2024

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**February 21, 2024, 8:30pm ET**

**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 1:30pm ET on February 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the February 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**Prominent independent Russian milblogger Andrei Morozov reportedly committed suicide on February 21 after refusing the Russian military command's orders to delete his reports about high Russian casualty rates around Avdiivka.[1]** Morozov (also known under the alias Boytsovskiy Kot Murz) was a sergeant in the Russian 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic's [LNR] Army Corps) and an avid critic of the Russian military command and the Ministry of Defense (MoD). Morozov published a lengthy suicide note in which he stated that an unnamed Russian colonel ordered him on February 20 to remove his February 19 report that claimed that 16,000 Russian personnel died in combat during Russian offensive operations in Avdiivka.[2] The colonel reportedly threatened to cut off ammunition and military equipment supplies to Morozov's unit if he did not delete his reports about the Russian military's heavy losses in seizing Avdiivka and told Morozov that he would not be able to change the current situation on the battlefield and that only presidential elections could trigger some changes. Morozov claimed that the colonel was likely following orders from the Russian military command, political leadership, and Russian propagandists such as Vladimir Solovyov, who had sought to eliminate Morozov even prior to full-scale invasion. Morozov proclaimed that he tried to expose the truth about Russian battlefield realities and could no longer serve under this abusive colonel who assumed command over a "decapitated" brigade operating on a critical frontline and whose poor leadership made the situation worse for Russian forces. Morozov also implied that Russian authorities may have conspired to murder or arrest him and noted that he no longer saw the point in continuing his under-resourced fight against the incompetent Russian military bureaucracy.

Morozov used his suicide note to further discuss Russian military failures in Avdiivka and Donetsk Oblast. Morozov accused Russian generals of wastefully sacrificing thousands of servicemen to advance their military careers and implied that most Russian journalists lie about battlefield realities. Morozov also observed that the Russian military command had been increasingly using mobilized

personnel as barrier forces (specialized units that shoot their own forces who retreat or refuse to attack) and amplified a formal complaint from a mobilized Russian serviceman of the 1487th Regiment (a mobilized unit under the command of the 1st Donetsk People's Republic's [DNR] Army Corps), which the Russian military prosecutor's office rejected in early February. The mobilized serviceman complained that the 1487th Regiment was reduced to less than 30 percent of its strength due to the regiment's lack of reinforcements and rotations since the regiment's deployment in mid-January 2023.[3] The serviceman added that the commander of the 1st Army Corps, nicknamed "Krym" (Crimea), transferred 300 servicemen from the 1487th Regiment to the command of the Russian "Veterany" private military company (PMC) in November 2023 – most of whom died or were injured in the Avdiivka direction. The mobilized serviceman accused the "Veterany" PMC – which is reportedly staffed with convicts, drug addicts, and looters – of using mobilized personnel as barrier troops and refraining from participating in assaults. The mobilized serviceman added that his battalion completely lacked grenade launchers, mortars, and vehicles necessary for offensive operations. The mobilized serviceman also observed that Russian military medical staff refused to treat shellshocked servicemen and sent them back to the frontlines without medical examinations and that these issues systematically plague other Russian units.

**The Russian information space, apart from select Russian propagandists and Kremlin-controlled milbloggers, largely mourned Morozov's death and blamed various military and political actors for his demise.** Russian propagandist Yuliya Vityazeva implied that Morozov's suicide was the fault of his friends who failed to help him and are using his death to throw shade at the Russian MoD to profit off social media attention.[4] One Kremlin-affiliated milblogger acknowledged Morozov's humanitarian aid contributions to the Russian military but noted that Morozov's criticism of the Russian military command was so extremely negative that it helped Ukraine.[5] The milblogger added that it is unfortunate that Russia's enemies and "hostile" Telegram channel networks will use the news of Morozov's death to overshadow the Russian capture of Avdiivka. Wagner Group-affiliated milbloggers accused Solovyov and other propagandists of persecuting Morozov and mocking his death.[6] Supporters of the imprisoned Russian officer and ardent critic of the Russian military command, Igor Girkin, also condemned Morozov's harassment and highlighted his years-long commitment to supplying Russian forces with equipment and exposing Russian military failures.[7] Several milbloggers blamed Morozov's suicide on Russia's inability to value and internalize different opinions in pursuit of the common goal.[8]

**Morozov's reported suicide will likely further the Kremlin's and the Russian MoD's efforts to consolidate a monopoly over the Russian information space.** Morozov was one of the few remaining independent ultranationalist milbloggers who openly criticized the Russian military command and government after the Kremlin and the Russian MoD began to consolidate control over prominent Russian milbloggers in July 2023. Morozov, for example, previously warned about severely degraded Russian forces that were around Izyum, Kharkiv Oblast, in May-June 2022 – months prior to a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in the area in September 2022.[9] Russian officials have been increasingly targeting radical milbloggers and have arrested several milbloggers who have expressed critiques similar to Morozov's complaints.[10] ISW observed that many Russian milbloggers have drastically suppressed their critiques against Russian military command since the failed Wagner mutiny and reported pressure against Morozov may encourage more critical milbloggers to refrain from discussing Russian military failures. The Kremlin began an effort to co-opt pliant milbloggers in November 2022.[11]

**A Ukrainian official denied a recent *New York Times* (NYT) report that Russian forces may have captured “hundreds” of Ukrainian soldiers during Ukraine’s withdrawal from Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast.**[12] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Dmytro Lykhovyi acknowledged on February 21 that Russian forces did capture some Ukrainian soldiers during Ukrainian forces’ withdrawal from Avdiivka, but stated that reports about “hundreds” of Ukrainian soldiers being taken prisoner or otherwise being unaccounted for are false.[13] Lykhovyi suggested that the NYT’s February 20 report is an extension of Russian information operations aimed at demoralizing the Ukrainian military and noted that Russian propagandists would have shared footage of large numbers of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) if Russia had actually captured that many Ukrainian soldiers. Lykhovyi noted that Russian media widely shared footage of large numbers of Ukrainian POWs after Russian forces seized Azovstal in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast in 2022.[14] ISW recently noted that “unaccounted for” personnel include those killed, wounded, and missing in action as well as captured, and ISW has still not observed any open-source evidence of Russian forces taking large numbers of Ukrainian forces prisoner.[15] ISW will continue to monitor the information space for evidence and will adjust its assessment as more evidence becomes available.

**Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov claimed that Russian forces seized Avdiivka within a “fairly short time.”** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) published footage on February 21 of Gerasimov presenting state awards to Russian servicemen who distinguished themselves during the seizure of Avdiivka and meeting with Russian Central Grouping of Forces Commander Colonel General Andrei Mordvichev to discuss plans for future Russian operations in the Avdiivka direction.[16] This video is Gerasimov’s first public appearance since December 29, 2023.[17] Gerasimov stated during his briefing with Mordvichev that Russian forces seized Avdiivka “in a fairly short time” that was preceded by a “long period of preparation.”[18] Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu similarly attempted to downplay heavy Russian losses and the difficulty of seizing of Avdiivka during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 20, portraying the seizure of Avdiivka as an astounding success with minimal losses despite the fact that the four-month-long operation resulted in an estimated 16,000 to 47,000 Russian personnel losses.[19] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated on February 21 that Russian forces lost 212 tanks in the Tavriisk direction (Avdiivka through western Zaporizhia Oblast) between January 1 and February 20, and a significant portion of Russian tank losses in the Tavriisk direction are likely the result of the Russian operation of seize Avdiivka.[20] Russian Deputy Defense Minister Viktor Goremykin also presented state awards to members of the Russian 90th Tank Division (41st Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) for their role in the seizure of Avdiivka.[21] Putin credited elements of the 90th Tank Division with seizing Avdiivka under Mordvichev’s leadership on February 17.[22]

**A Ukrainian HIMARS strike against an undefended Russian training ground near occupied Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast likely inflicted significant casualties, triggering a point of neuralgia for the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community.** Ukrainian forces struck the Trudivske Training Ground east of Volnovakha on February 20, where at least three companies of the Russian 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade (29th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) had been training.[23] *BBC Russian Service* reported that the strike killed “dozens” of Russian military personnel and may have killed up to 60 personnel, which is consistent with publicly available photos reportedly documenting the aftermath of the strike.[24] Zabaykalsky Krai Head

Aleksandr Osipov, where the 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade is based, claimed that reports of over 60 dead from the strike are “exaggerated.”[25] Russian ultranationalist milbloggers reiterated their standard complaints about poor Russian decision-making following the strike, criticizing the Russian military command for concentrating Russian military personnel in a near-rear area despite suffering the consequences of previous Ukrainian strikes against Russian military concentrations within Ukrainian strike range.[26]

**Zaporizhia Oblast occupation governor Yevgeny Balitsky openly admitted that Russian authorities are forcibly deporting Ukrainian citizens who oppose Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or “insult” Russia and possibly alluded to Russian occupation forces’ summarily executing Ukrainian citizens.** Balitsky stated in an interview published on February 20 that Russian occupation authorities “expelled a large number of families...who did not support the ‘special military operation’ or who “insulted” Russia, including the Russian flag, anthem, or [Russian President Vladimir Putin].”[27] Balitsky justified these activities, which would constitute war crimes, claiming that the forcible deportation of Ukrainian families was for their own benefit, as occupation authorities would have had to “deal” with them in an even “harsher” way in the future, or other pro-Russian citizens would have killed them. Balitsky stated that occupation authorities “gave [the deported families] the opportunity to leave” but deported some by force after “giving them a water bottle” at the border. Balitsky also stated that occupation authorities had to make some “extremely harsh decisions that [he] will not be talking about” – a possible allusion to Russian occupation forces conducting summary executions of Ukrainian citizens. ISW has extensively reported on Russia’s forced deportation of Ukrainian citizens, including children, and continues to assess that Russia is attempting to eliminate the Ukrainian language, culture, history, ethnicity, and identity, including through activities that appear to violate the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[28] Balitsky’s statements about Russian deportations of Ukrainian citizens critical of the Russian occupation indicate that Russian deportation campaigns in part intend to Russify populations in occupied Ukraine through coercion and fear. Balitsky’s willingness to openly discuss – and even defend – Russian occupation authorities’ unlawful treatment of Ukrainian citizens in a publicized interview highlights the extent to which Russian authorities are supporting and promoting such policies.

**Iranian sources told *Reuters* on February 21 that Iran provided hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) to Russia in early January.**[29] The three unspecified Iranian sources said that Iran provided roughly 400 SRBMs to Russia, including the Fateh-110 and the Zolfaghar. The sources said that Iran has sent at least four SRBM shipments to Russia since Iran and Russia concluded a missile sale agreement in late 2023. One Iranian official said that Iran will continue to ship missiles to Russia because Iran is “allowed to export weapons to any country” it wishes, given the October 2023 expiration of UN missile restrictions on Iran under UNSC Resolution 2231. UNSC Resolution 2231 suspended nuclear-related UN sanctions and established sunset dates for missile and other arms-related sanctions on Iran. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger said on February 21 that Iran began missile shipments to Russia in early January, following the UN missile restrictions expiration.[30]

**Iran’s arms sales to Russia are part of Iran’s efforts to generate revenue to support its deteriorating economy.**[31] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran could seek to acquire cash from Russia in return for supplying Russia with missiles.[32] The Prana Network hacker group published documents on February 4 alleging that Russia is paying Iran roughly \$4.5 billion per year

to import the Iranian Shahed series drones.[33] Iran’s provision of these missile systems could improve Russia’s ability to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed on February 21 that the acquisition of Iranian missile systems enables Russian forces to hit “remote Ukrainian targets.”[34] The Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat said on February 21 that possible Russian acquisition of the ballistic missiles is a “serious threat for Ukraine.”[35] This Russo-Iranian military exchange is part of the deepening military and security relationship between the two states that CTP has covered extensively.[36] The expansion of these ties accelerated especially after Iran began providing military support to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[37]

**Russian authorities detained a dual US-Russian citizen in Yekaterinburg on suspicion of raising money for the Ukrainian war effort.[38]** Kremlin newswire *TASS* released footage of the woman in Russian custody, and the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) described the woman as a 33-year-old resident of Los Angeles, California.[39] Western media reported on February 21 that the woman’s name is Ksenia Khavana and that Russian authorities may have detained Khavana for donating \$51 to a Ukrainian-American 501(c)(3) charity on February 24, 2022.[40]

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Prominent independent Russian milblogger Andrei Morozov reportedly committed suicide on February 21 after refusing the Russian military command’s orders to delete his reports about high Russian casualty rates around Avdiivka.**
- **A Ukrainian official denied a recent *New York Times (NYT)* report that Russian forces may have captured “hundreds” of Ukrainian soldiers during Ukraine’s withdrawal from Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov claimed that Russian forces seized Avdiivka within a “fairly short time.”**
- **A Ukrainian HIMARS strike against an undefended Russian training ground near occupied Volnovakha, Donetsk Oblast likely inflicted significant casualties, triggering a point of neuralgia for the Russian ultranationalist milblogger community.**
- **Zaporizhia Oblast occupation governor Yevgeny Balitsky openly admitted that Russian authorities are forcibly deporting Ukrainian citizens who oppose Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or “insult” Russia and possibly alluded to Russian occupation forces’ summarily executing Ukrainian citizens.**
- **Iranian sources told Reuters on February 21 that Iran provided hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) to Russia in early January.**
- **Russian authorities detained a dual US-Russian citizen in Yekaterinburg on suspicion of raising money for the Ukrainian war effort.**
- **Russian forces made confirmed advances near Avdiivka, Donetsk City, Robotyne, and Krynky.**
- **Belarusian and Kazakh companies are reportedly helping Russia circumvent international sanctions intended to deprive the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) of Western components and machines.**
- **Russian occupation administrations continue to foster patronage networks with Russian federal subjects.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 21, 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

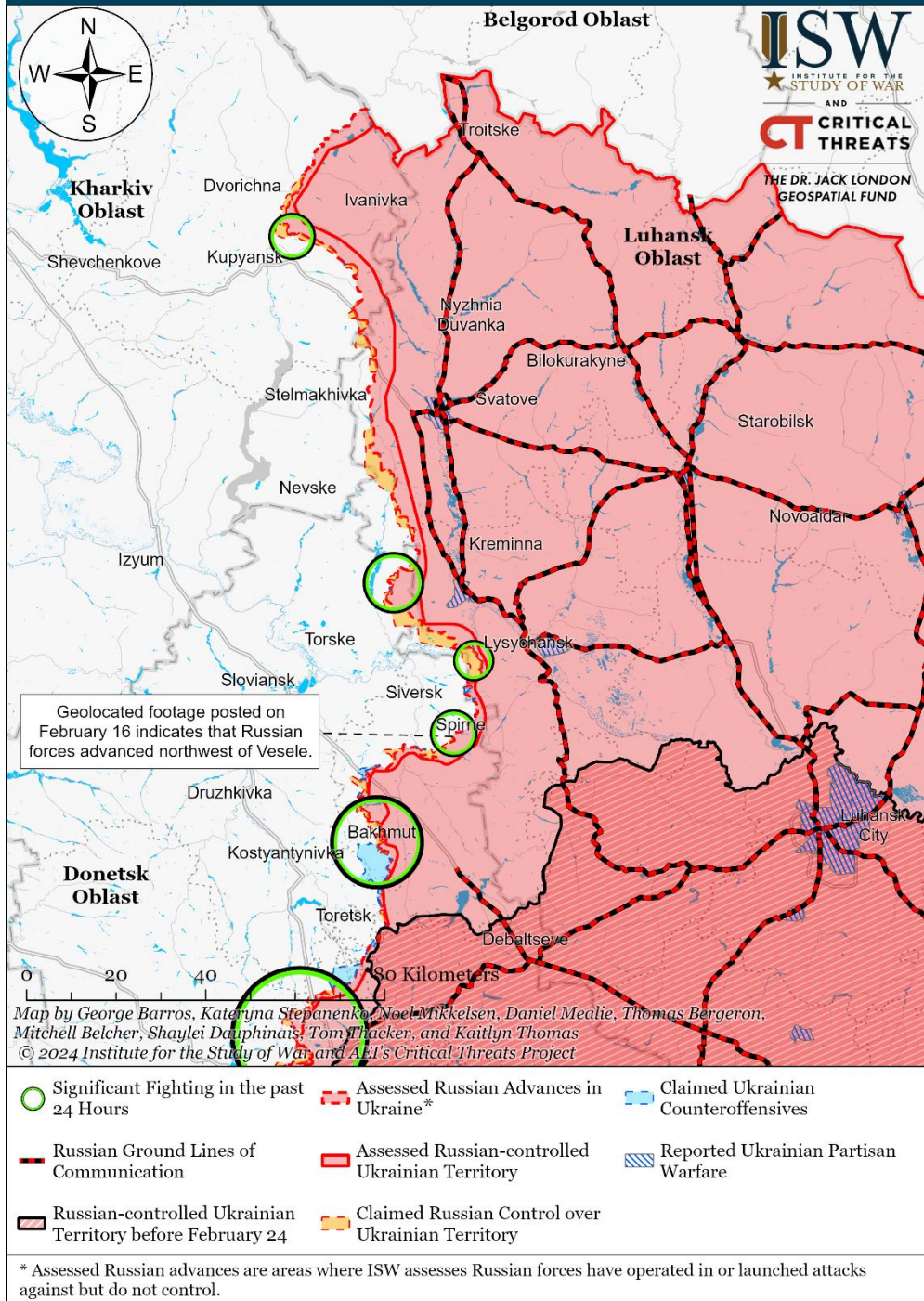
### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

#### **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)**

Positional fighting continued on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on February 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional fighting continued northeast of Kupyansk near Synkivka; southeast of Kupyansk near Tabaivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Torske; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[41] Ukrainian “Steel Border” Border Detachment Spokesperson Ivan Shevtsov stated that Russian forces on the Kupyansk-Lyman line are conducting assaults with armored vehicles, including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and armored personnel carriers due to favorable weather conditions on the axis.[42] Shevtsov stated that there are 40,000 Russian military personnel “opposite [Ukrainian forces] in a powerful grouping of troops” but that this group is failing to advance.[43] Shevtsov did not define the specific sector of the line where Russian forces are failing to advance, however. Shevtsov’s statement is relatively consistent with other Ukrainian statements that place 40,000 Russian personnel in the Kupyansk direction and 57,000 total on the Kupyansk-Lyman line as of February 2.[44] Shevtsov is likely referring to a tactical area of the front that is geographically smaller than other frontline sectors that other Ukrainian officials have discussed. Elements of the Russian 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the “GORB” detachment (both of the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] Army Corps) continue to operate near Bilohorivka.[45]



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

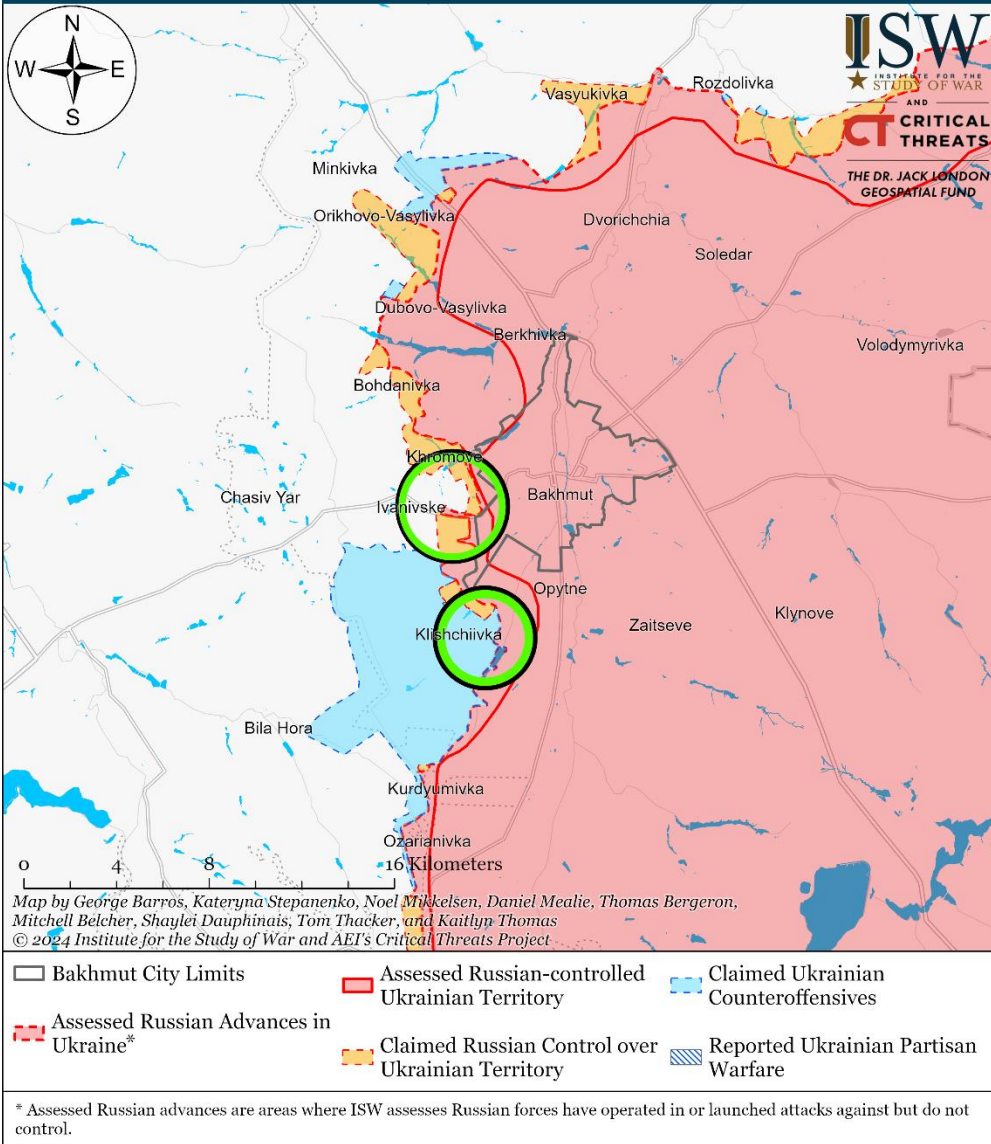


## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**



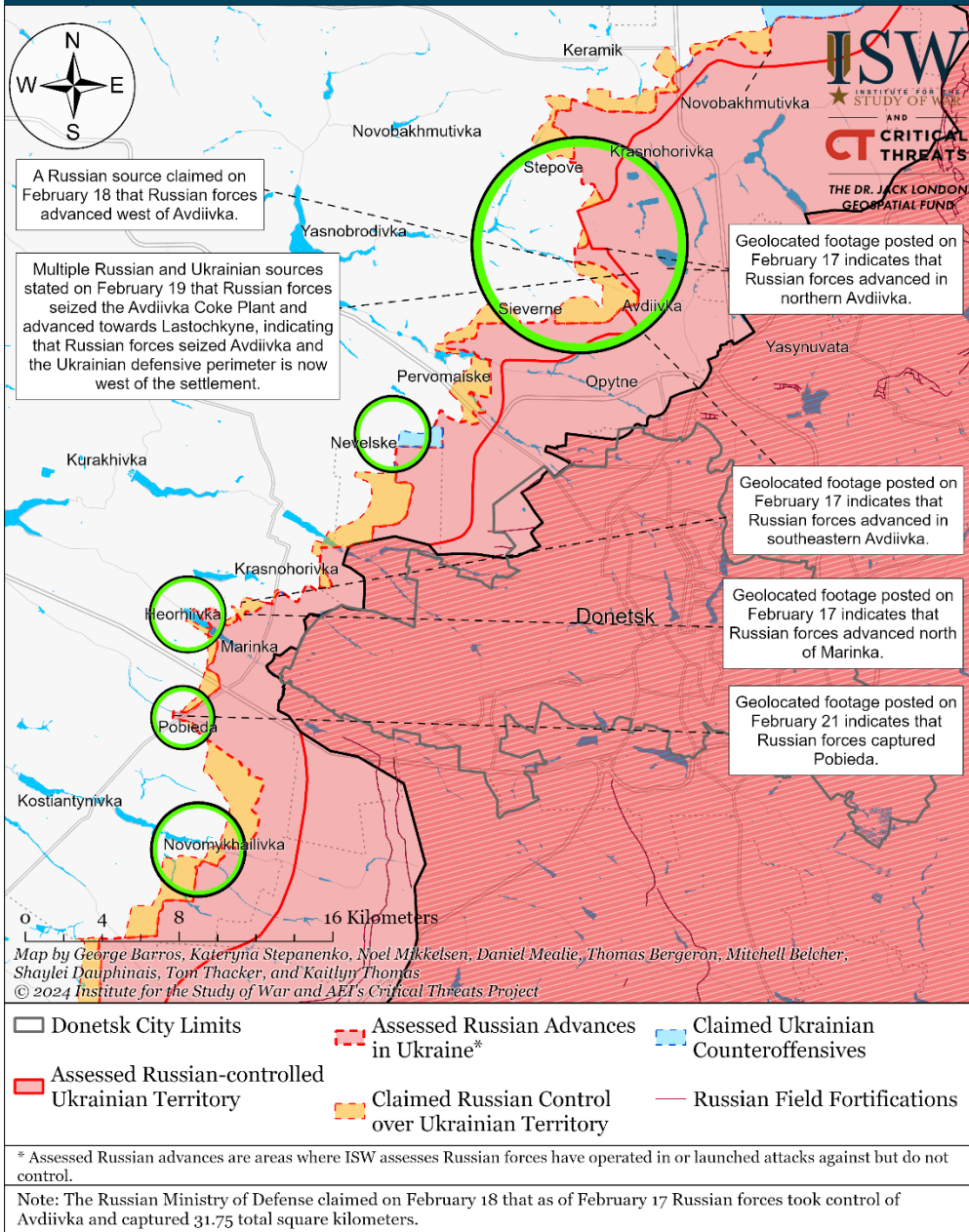
Positional engagements continued near Bakhmut on February 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional engagements continued northeast of Bakhmut near Vyimka, northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka, west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske, and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka.[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced towards Ivano-Darivka (northeast of Bakhmut in the Siversk direction), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[47] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are struggling to seize Ivanivske as the settlement is surrounded by hills in the north and northwest and open terrain in the east and south.[48] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Russian forces are focusing their efforts on the Bohdanivka-Chasiv Yar direction along the O0506 highway and through Bohdanivka, north and northeast of Ivanivske, and around Klishchiivka to bypass the heights north and northwest of the settlement.[49] Mashovets stated that elements of the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are operating near Ivanivske; elements of the 331st and 217th airborne (VDV) regiments (98th VDV Division) are operating in the direction of Bohdanivka and north of Ivanivske; elements of the 1008th and 1194th motorized rifle regiments of the territorial troops (6th Motorized Rifle Division, 3rd Army Corps (AC), Western Military District) and the 83rd and 88th Motorized Rifle Brigades (2nd Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] AC) are operating northwest and east of Klishchiivka and south of Andriivka; and elements of the 106th VDV Division and 123rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] AC) are operating in the direction of Rozdolivka and Vyimka and north and northeast of Soledar. Mashovets stated that Russian forces gradually redeployed elements of the 217th and 299th airborne (VDV) regiments (both of the 98th VDV Division) and elements of the 83rd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd AC) and 88th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd LNR AC) to the Bakhmut direction from the Lyman direction and that the Russian command likely considers the Bakhmut direction to be the next area of focus after. Elements of the 11th VDV Brigade are reportedly operating near Ivanivske, and elements of the 200th Naval Infantry Brigade (Northern Fleet) and the Volunteer Corps are reportedly operating near Bohdanivka.[50]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently marginally advanced northwest of Avdiivka and have likely finished clearing operations in Avdiivka. Geolocated footage published on February 19 shows that Russian forces slightly advanced on the eastern outskirts of Lastochkyne (northwest of Avdiivka).[51] Positional battles continued northwest of Avdiivka near Stepove and Lastochkyne; west of Avdiivka near Sieverne; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske and Nevelske.[52] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are trying to build and stabilize a new line of defense in the Avdiivka direction.[53] Russian sources amplified footage purportedly showing elements of the 114th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1<sup>st</sup> Donetsk People's Republic's [DNR] Army Corps) at the Avdiivka Coke Plant.[54]

# Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

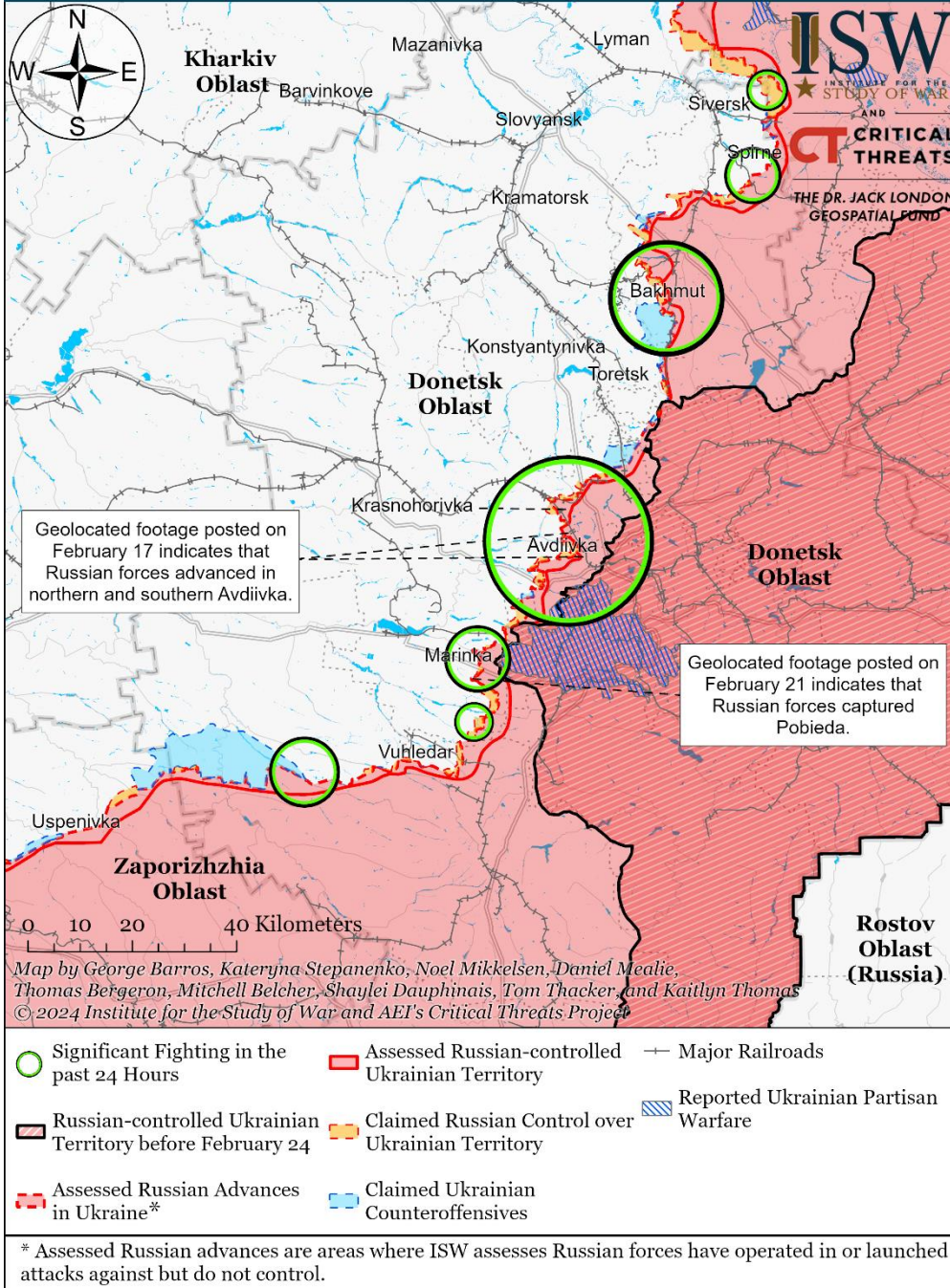


Russian forces seized Pobieda, a small settlement immediately southwest of Donetsk City, no later than February 21.[55] Geolocated footage published on February 21 shows Russian forces raising a flag on a destroyed building in westernmost Pobieda.[56] Russian and some Ukrainian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew from Pobieda on February 20.[57] Russian sources similarly claimed that the Russian 225th Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Guards Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA] Southern Military District [SMD]) seized the settlement after pushing Ukrainian forces from their positions within the settlement.[58] Russian milbloggers

claimed that Ukrainian forces withdrew to positions on the hills west of Pobieda and that Russian forces may decide to attack towards Kostyantynivka (a village 6km southwest of Pobieda, notably not the city southwest of Bakhmut) or towards Heorhiivka (4.5km north of Pobieda) along the N-15 highway.[59] In seizing Pobieda, Russian forces cut the O0532 highway, which runs from recently seized Marinka (immediately west of Donetsk City) via Pobieda towards Kostyantynivka, and Russian forces may attempt to advance towards Kostyantynivka along the highway. Some Russian milbloggers also claimed that the seizure of Pobieda will allow Russian forces to pursue offensive operations in the Vuhledar direction or intercept Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) leading to Vuhledar.[60] Ukrainian officials have not commented on reports of Russian forces' seizure of Pobieda at this time. Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced on the southern outskirts of Krasnohorivka (immediately west of Donetsk City), but ISW has not observed evidence supporting these claims.[61] Positional battles continued west of Donetsk City near Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda and Novomykhailivka.[62] Elements of the Russian 155<sup>th</sup> Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are continuing to operate near Novomykhailivka and elements of the 238th Artillery Brigade (8th CAA, SMD) are operating near Krasnohorivka.[63]

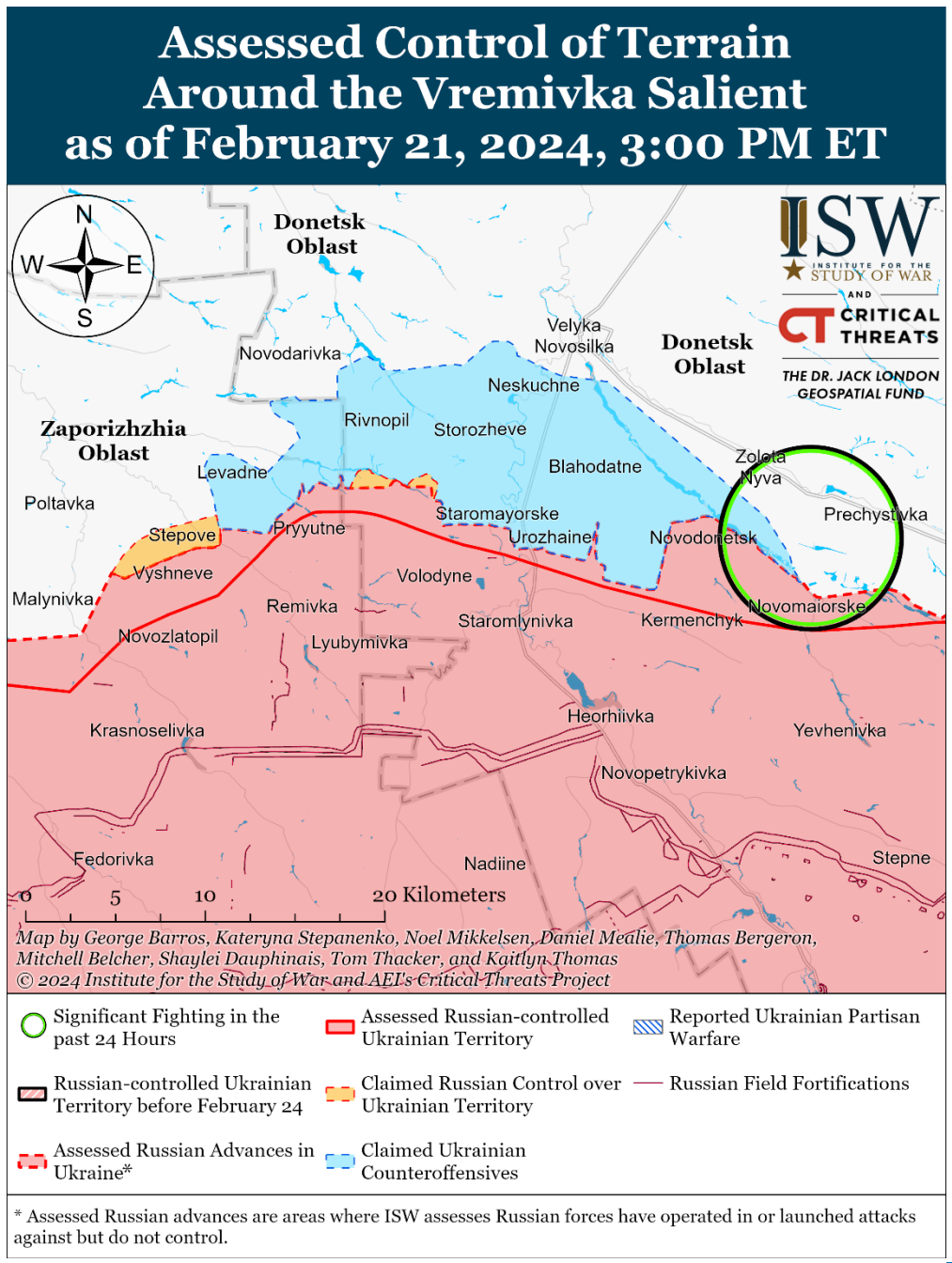


# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on February 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional engagements occurred southeast of Velyka Novosilka near Prechystivka and Zolota Nyva and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Novozlatopil.[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Novodonetske (southeast of Velyka Novosilka), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[65]

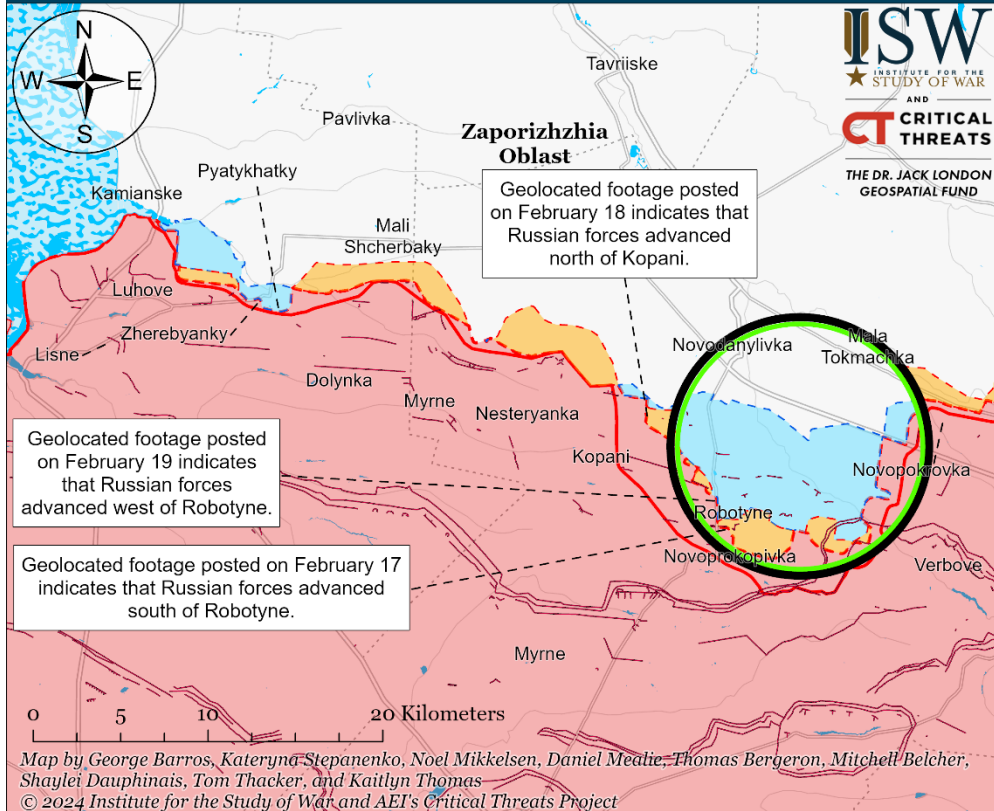


Russian forces recently made confirmed advances in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces advanced in western Robotyne.[66] Additional geolocated footage published on February 21 indicates that Russian forces also advanced west of



Verbove (east of Robotyne).[67] A Russian milblogger, claiming to cite unspecified Ukrainian analysts, claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 2.02 kilometers wide and 650 meters in depth near Novoprokopivka (just south of Robotyne), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim.[68] Positional engagements continued near Verbove, Robotyne, and Mala Tokmachka (northeast of Robotyne and southeast of Orikhiv).[69] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Commander Brigadier General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy stated that Russian forces in the Orikhiv direction are trying to move in small infantry groups and on high-speed all-terrain vehicles, but Russian attacks in this direction are unsuccessful.[70] Elements of the Russian 70th Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[71]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

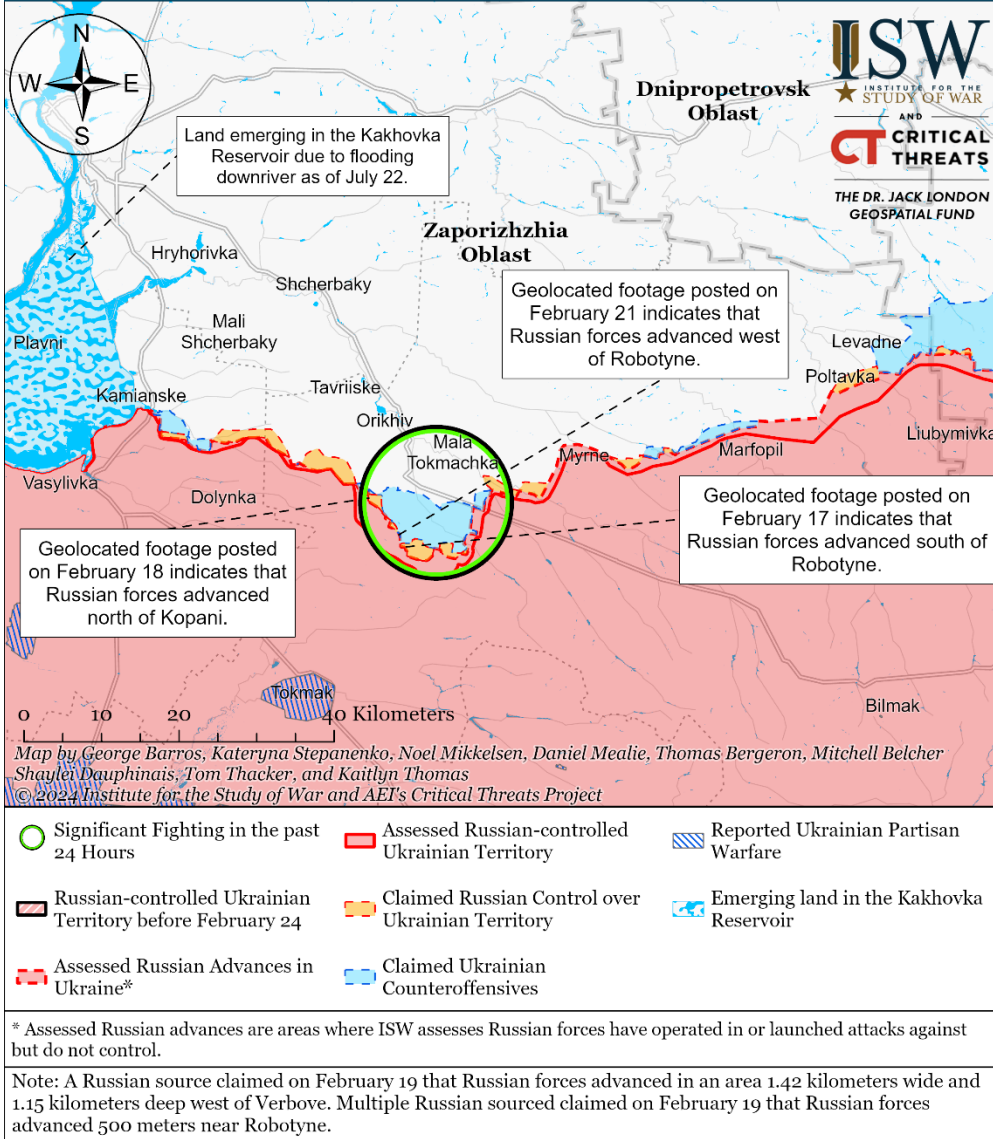


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Field Fortifications

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

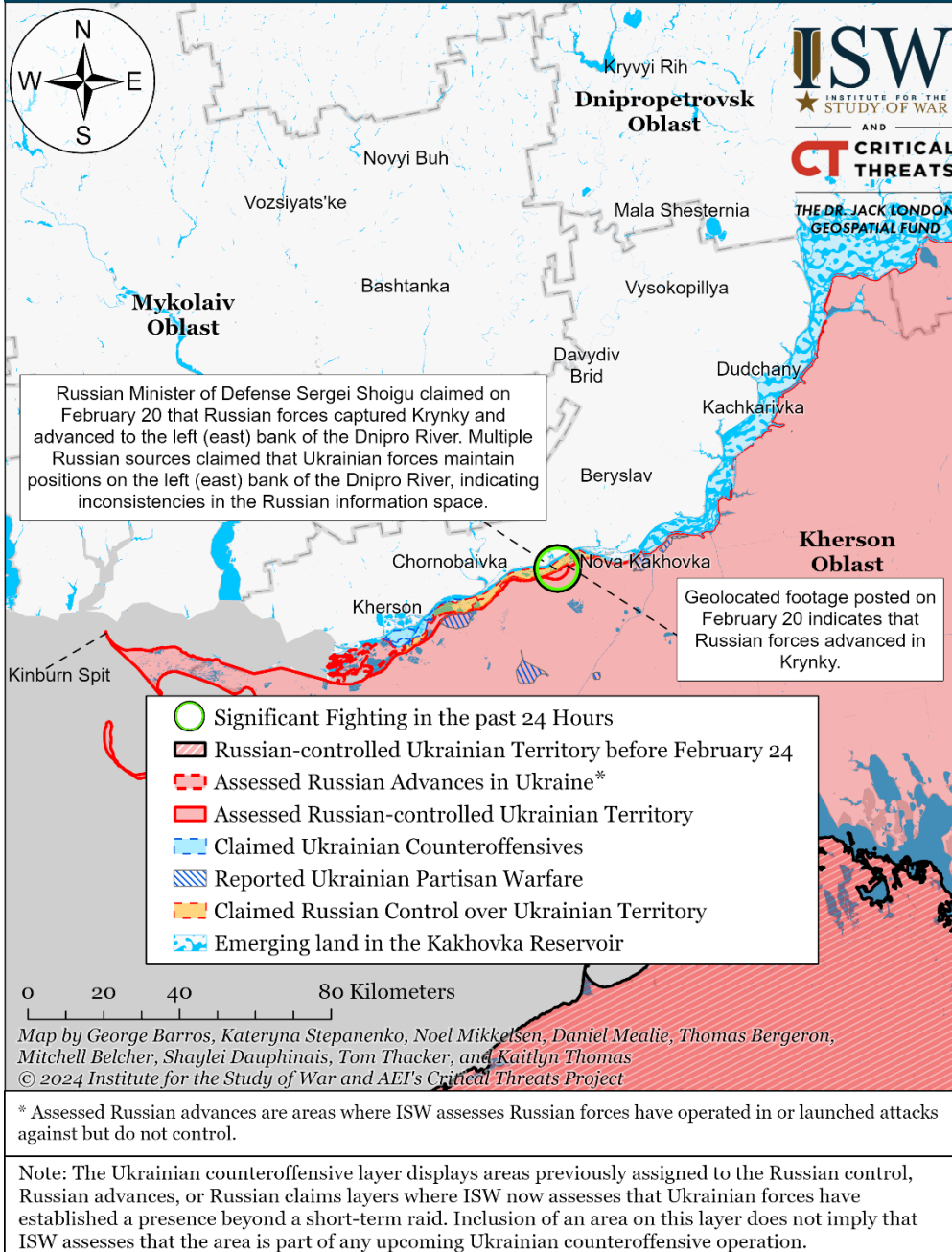
Note: Russian sources claimed on February 20 that Russian forces penetrated between 700 meters and 1.5 kilometers deep into Ukrainian defenses and advanced up to two kilometers along the Robotyne-Verbove front. A Russian source claimed on February 19 that Russian forces advanced in an area 1.42 kilometers wide and 1.15 kilometers deep west of Verbove. Multiple Russian sourced claimed on February 19 that Russian forces advanced 500 meters near Robotyne.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently made a confirmed advance in Krynky in the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast, as Russian milbloggers continued to deny Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu’s recent claim of full Russian control of the settlement. Geolocated footage published on February 20 indicates that Russian forces advanced in Krynky.[72] Russian sources largely claimed that Ukrainian forces maintain positions in Krynky and that Russian forces do not yet fully control the settlement.[73] Select Russian sources criticized Shoigu for lying to Russian President Vladimir Putin.[74]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukrainian military officials reported on February 21 that Russian forces launched an S-300 missile and four Kh-22 missiles from Rostov Oblast, a Kh-59 missile from Belgorod Oblast, and 19 Shahed-

136/131 drones from occupied Crimea.[75] Ukrainian forces intercepted and destroyed the Kh-59 missiles over Poltava Oblast and destroyed 13 Shahed drones over Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Donetsk oblasts. An unspecified number of additional Shaheds did not strike their intended targets.

Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported on February 21 that Ukrainian forces shot down another Russian Su-34 fighter aircraft.[76] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuri Ihnat highlighted that Ukrainian forces have downed seven Russian Su-34s and Su-35s over the past five days.[77]

Ihnat stated, in response to recent Ukrainian reports that Russian forces deployed 48 Iskander missile launchers on the Russian-Ukrainian border, that the more important issue is how many Iskander missiles Russian forces have and can use against Ukraine.[78] Ihnat stated that Russian forces used 1,100 Iskander missiles against Ukraine during winter 2022-2023 and that Russian forces currently have a limited supply of Iskander missiles, but are looking for new ways to source missiles from other countries.

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

Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on February 21 that Belarusian and Kazakh companies are helping Russia circumvent international sanctions intended to deprive the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) of Western components and machines.[79] *Verstka* reported that Russian, Belarusian, and Kazakh companies have transported components produced in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, the US, and other European countries to support Russia's production of missiles, drones, and other weapons for use in Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that Russia's DIB may struggle in the near term and that Russian efforts to increase sanctions evasion through partnerships with states including China and North Korea may help compensate for existing DIB shortcomings in the medium to long term.[80]

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

Russian Lancet drone manufacture and Kalashnikov Concern subsidiary ZALA Aero claimed on February 20 that Zala is developing new multifunctional optical-electric systems for drones and manned rotary-winged aircraft.[81] Zala stated that the systems will include a high-definition video camera and thermal imagers to conduct aerial reconnaissance from helicopters in difficult weather conditions and a three-axis electromagnetic gyro-stabilized platform to provide a high level of image stabilization.

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

Ukraine continues efforts to bolster its domestic drone production and acquisition of foreign-produced drones. Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov announced on

February 21 that Ukraine's domestic drone manufacturing capacity exceeds one million drones per year and emphasized that Ukraine must also supply adequate ammunition, distribute drone radio signals across a wider range of radio frequencies, and provide drone operators with sufficient antennas and connectors to ensure that these drones are also high quality.[82]

### **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 administrations continue to foster patronage networks with Russian federal subjects (regions). Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin stated on February 20 that the DNR administration signed a cooperation agreement with Kemerovo Oblast Head Sergei Tsivilev to develop the industrial potential of occupied Donetsk Oblast as well as business connections between occupied Donetsk Oblast and Kemerovo Oblast.[83]

Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lyubinetz announced on February 21 that 11 Ukrainian children whom Russian authorities forcibly deported to Russia have returned to Ukraine.[84] Lyubinetz credited UNICEF, the Ukrainian Border Service, Ukrainian authorities, and Qatar with facilitating the children's return.[85]

### **Russian Information Operations and Narratives**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated Russia's maximalist objectives in Ukraine and continued to blame the West and Ukraine for the continuation of the war. Lavrov claimed in an interview with Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* published on February 21 before his trip to Brazil for the G20 summit that Ukraine and the West are not interested in resolving the war in Ukraine, so Russia has "no choice" but to continue the war until securing its objectives – which Lavrov reiterated include Ukraine's "demilitarization," "denazification," and neutrality.[86] ISW continues to assess that Russia's maximalist objectives in Ukraine are tantamount to Ukrainian and Western full capitulation.[87]

Kremlin mouthpieces continue to set information conditions aimed at justifying possible future Russian aggression in Moldova. A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian officials are trying to open a Ukrainian consulate in Transnistria in order to organize provocations in the Russian-occupied breakaway region and that the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) has repeatedly attempted to conduct unspecified provocations.[88]

Russian officials are accusing the West of using government-affiliated organizations to conduct intelligence operations like Russia does abroad. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that organizations connected to the British government are gathering intelligence in occupied Ukraine.[89] Moldovan and Ukrainian officials have previously warned that Russian officials use Russian cultural centers (Russia house - *Russkii dom*) to promote Russian propaganda and conduct "subversive work" abroad.[90]



## **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)**

Ukraine-based open-source organization Frontelligence Insight reported on February 21 that Russian forces' presence in Belarus is limited, with the exception of a small number of former Wagner Group personnel focused on training the Belarusian Internal Forces.[91] Frontelligence Insight stated that it does not expect the conventional Russian force grouping in Belarus to increase in size in the near future and assessed that a second attempt by Russian forces to attack Kyiv from the north is currently unlikely, which is in line with ISW's current assessment of the threat. Frontelligence reported that Russia maintains two S-400 battalions, augmented with several Pantsir-S1 units, at the Prybytki and Velikii Bokov air bases in southern Belarus.[92]

**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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