

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, October 15, 2023

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October 15, 2023, 5:30pm 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 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 12pm ET on October 15. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the October 16 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin may be trying to temper expectations of significant Russian advances around Avdiivka in Donetsk Oblast. Putin claimed in an interview on Russian state television on October 15 that Russian forces are conducting an “active defense” in the Avdiivka, Kupyansk, and Zaporizhia directions.[1] Putin’s characterization of Russian offensive operations near Avdiivka as an “active defense,” instead of “active combat operations” as Russian UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya claimed on October 13, or discussing Russian operations as an “offensive” as some milbloggers have, may be an attempt to temper expectations of significant Russian advances.[2] Russian operations including intensive artillery and airstrikes are likely intended to degrade Ukrainian forces around Avdiivka.[3] Russian forces are unlikely to make significant breakthroughs or cut off Ukrainian forces in the settlement in the near term, and potential advances at scale would likely require a significant and protracted commitment of personnel and materiel.[4]

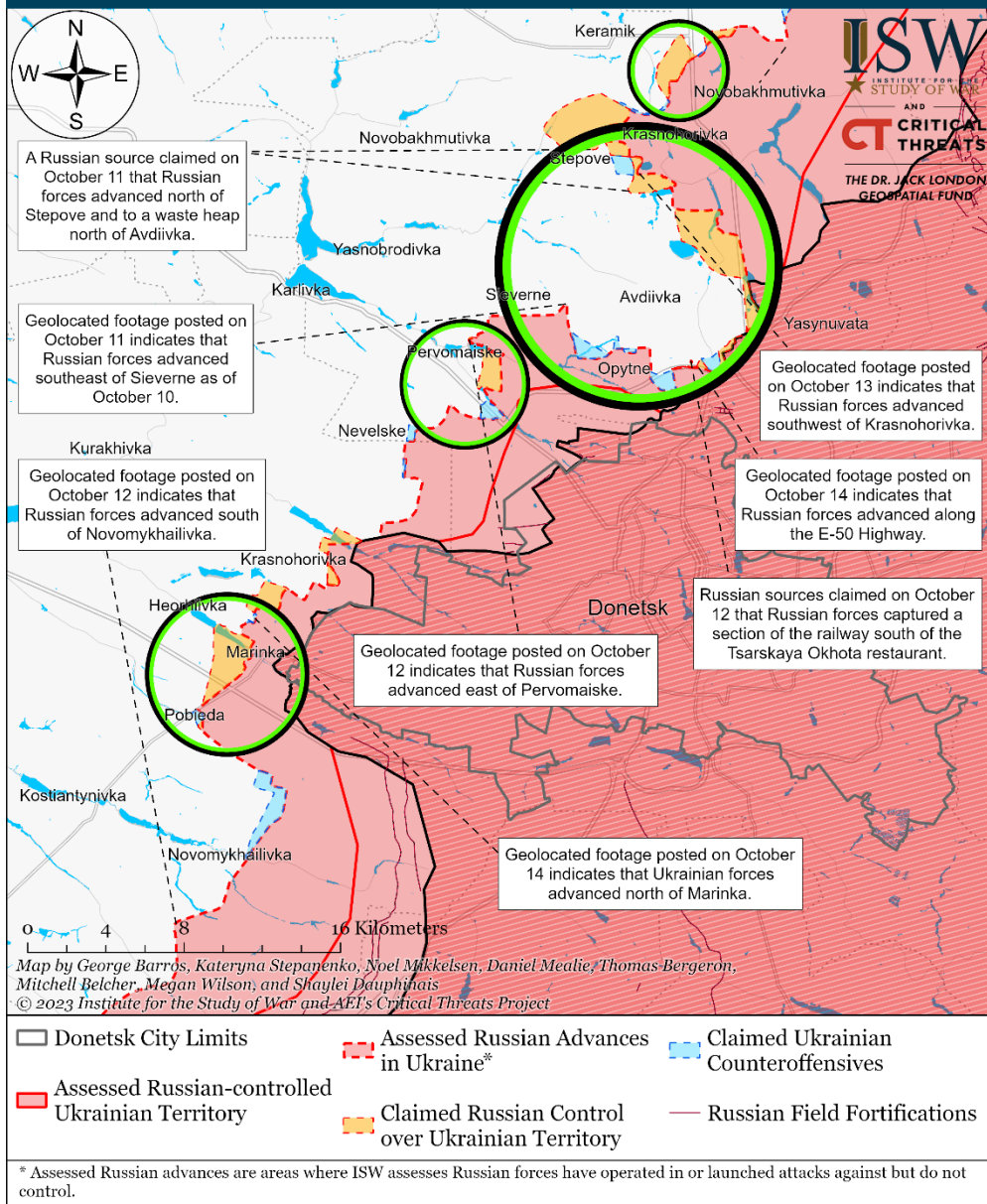
The Russian information space writ large is also metering its initial optimism about the prospects of Russian offensive operations around Avdiivka. Russian milbloggers initially reported maximalist and unverifiable claims of Russian advances over 10km, likely exaggerated the degree of Russian successes near Avdiivka during initial offensive operations, and expressed optimism for rapid Russian advances.[5] Some Russian milbloggers have since acknowledged difficulties in the Russian advance near Avdiivka and noted that Russian forces decreased their pace of offensive operations around the settlement.[6] Russian milbloggers have also begun to claim that intense and attritional fighting is ongoing around Avdiivka.[7] Many Russian milbloggers also continue to self-censor by limiting reports of Russian tactical actions and problems specific to individual sectors of the frontline.[8] A Russian milblogger claimed that unspecified actors, possibly the Russian military leadership and some subset of milbloggers, agreed to stop reporting on the Avdiivka operations, but reiterated complaints about general problems in the Russian military not specific to any sector of the front.[9]

Russian forces continued offensive operations aimed at encircling Avdiivka on October 15 but have yet to make further gains amid a likely decreasing tempo of Russian operations in the area. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled more

than 15 Russian assaults near Avdiivka, as well as northwest and southwest of the settlement.[10] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of previous claims of Russian advances in the area or geolocated footage of any other Russian gains. Russian sources claimed notably fewer Russian advances in the area on October 15 compared to previous days and described these new alleged advances as marginal.[11] A Russian milblogger acknowledged that Ukrainian forces still maintain a presence at the Avdiivka Coke Plant following conflicting Russian claims about Russian control of the plant.[12]

Both Ukrainian military observers and Russian sources stated that Russian forces did not achieve their desired immediate breakthrough, and Russian forces faced initial high losses and a likely slower than anticipated rate of advance.[13] Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash stated on October 12 that Russian forces conducted assaults with air support in 10 to 12 directions around the settlement, whereas the Ukrainian General Staff reported on October 15 that fighting occurred near only six settlements.[14] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksandr Shtupun stated on October 14 that the pace of Russian offensive operations near Avdiivka declined and that Russian forces have lost more than 300 pieces of military equipment and 3000 personnel since intensifying offensive operations in the area on October 9.[15]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces will likely continue offensive operations at this decreased tempo in the near term, however, and will remain a threat to Ukrainian forces in the area despite being unlikely to achieve a decisive breakthrough or encircle Avdiivka at this time. Any decrease in the tempo of Russian offensive operations may be the result of a temporary adjustment to the tactical situation, and Russian forces may intensify their attempts to encircle Avdiivka in the coming days. A Ukrainian military observer noted that Russian forces have penetrated Ukrainian flanks around Avdiivka and pose a significant threat to Ukrainian positions despite being unlikely to encircle Avdiivka in the near term.[16] Ukrainian military observers indicated that Russian forces had concentrated a significant grouping of forces consisting of elements of 15 motorized rifle regiments

and 11 rifle regiments to the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front and have already executed regiment-size offensive operations in the area (meaning three or more battalions conducting cohesive assaults, a scale beyond that of most Russian or Ukrainian attacks at this stage in the war).[17] This reported Russian grouping will likely be able to sustain offensive operations aimed at encircling Avdiivka if Russian commanders are willing to sustain relatively high losses, despite being insufficient for an immediate breakthrough.

A prominent Russian milblogger and frontline unit commander complained that the Russian military leadership is uninterested in battalion level problems, supplementing other Russian milblogger complaints about general problems in the Russian military.[18] Russian “Vostok” Battalion Commander Alexander Khodakovsky, who has previously complained about problems affecting Russian forces’ ability to conduct effective combat operations, claimed on October 15 that Russian infantry on the front in Ukraine face problems with insufficient counterbattery capabilities, commander competency, medical support, rotations, and supplies.[19] Khodakovsky claimed that a lack of communication between Russian battalions and headquarters is common, so much so that (in an undated and unspecific anecdote) when Ukrainian forces struck a Russian headquarters building, a Russian battalion did not realize that the headquarters had been disabled and continued conducting operations independently. Another Russian milblogger, who said on October 14 that he concurred with the “agreement” to stop any commentary about Russian operations in Avdiivka, complained a few hours later that Russian forces, in general, are experiencing ammunition shortages and continued issues combating Ukrainian drones.[20] These complaints indicate that a wider disdain for the Russian military command persists despite likely top-down attempts to censor discussion about certain areas of the front.

Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on October 15 and slightly advanced south of Bakhmut. Geolocated footage published on October 15 shows that Ukrainian forces marginally advanced towards the railway line north of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), and Russian sources reported continued Ukrainian ground attacks south of Bakhmut on the Klishchiivka-Kurdyumivka-Andriivka line (7-13km southwest of Bakhmut).[21] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces took advantage of recent Russian counterattacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast to gradually advance near Kopani (5km northwest of Robotyne), east of Nesteryanka (10km northwest of Robotyne), and near Verbove (18km southeast of Orikhiv).[22] Ukrainian officials have not yet commented on any recent Ukrainian advances along the Robotyne-Novoprokopivka-Verbove line (20km southwest to 18km southeast of Orikhiv), however. Russian sources reported continued Ukrainian attacks on the Robotyne-Novoprokopivka-Verbove line on October 15.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin may be trying to temper expectations of significant Russian advances around Avdiivka in Donetsk Oblast.**
- **The Russian information space writ large is also metering its initial optimism about the prospects of Russian offensive operations around Avdiivka.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations aimed at encircling Avdiivka on October 15 but have yet to make further gains amid a likely decreasing tempo of Russian operations in the area.**
- **Russian forces will likely continue offensive operations at this decreased tempo in the near term, however, and will remain a threat to Ukrainian forces**

in the area despite being unlikely to achieve a decisive breakthrough or encircle Avdiivka at this time.

- **A prominent Russian milblogger and frontline unit commander complained that Russian military leadership is uninterested in battalion level problems, supplementing other Russian milblogger complaints about general problems in the Russian military.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations near Bakhmut and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on October 15 and slightly advanced south of Bakhmut.**
- **Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line, near Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line, in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area, and in western Zaporizhia Oblast on October 15 and advanced in some areas.**
- **A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have “significant” reserves comprised of new divisions currently located in rear areas, though these formations are highly unlikely to be fully staffed at this time.**
- **The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is sending a reportedly Kremlin-affiliated priest to Crimea, likely as part of continued Russian efforts to persecute religious communities in occupied Ukraine.**

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Megan Wilson, and Shaylei Dauphinais
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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 Information Operations and Narratives
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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)

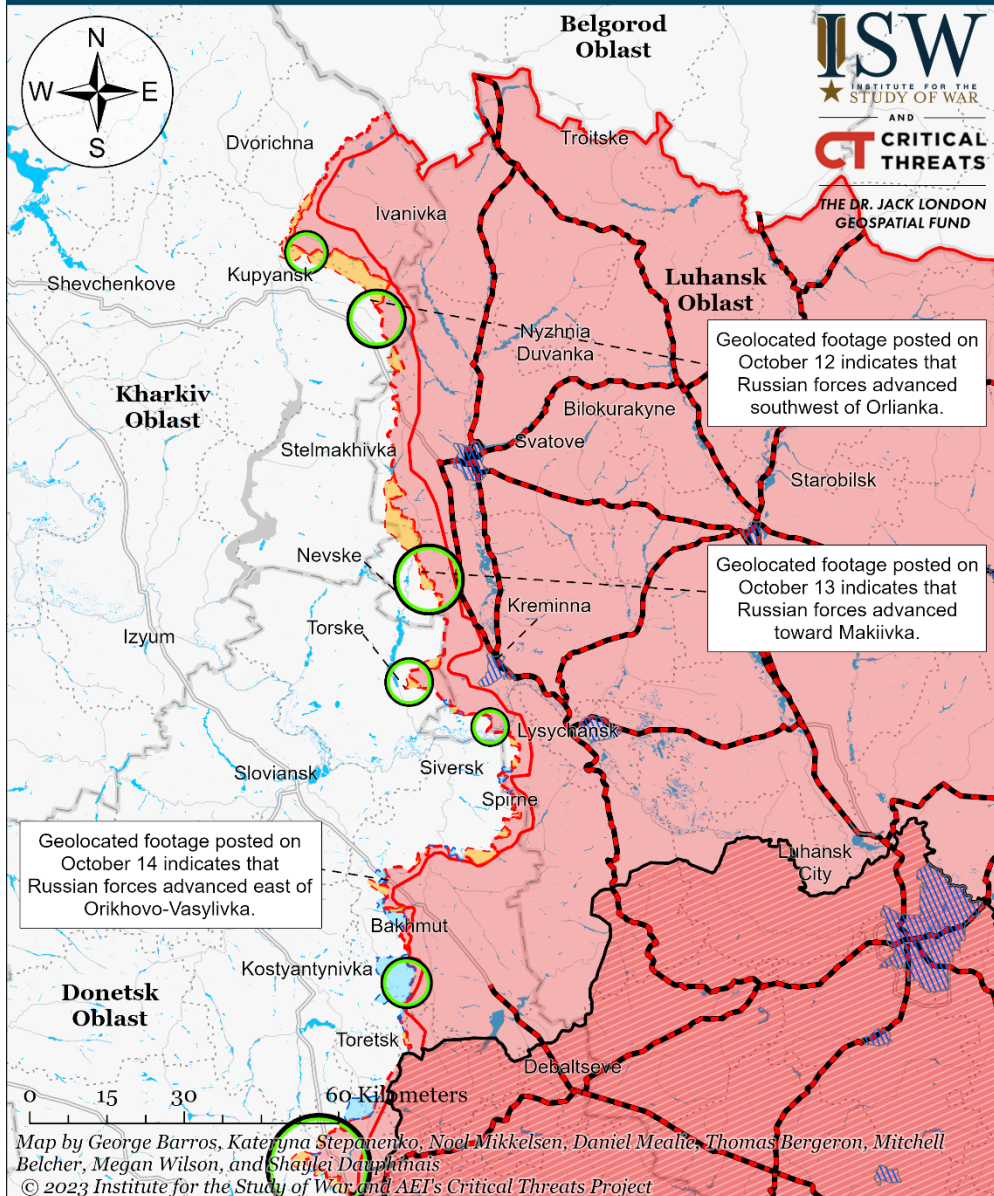
Russian forces conducted offensive operations near Kupyansk on October 15 but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced in an unspecified area near Orlyanka (22km southeast of Kupyansk) and pushed Ukrainian forces out of several unspecified positions near Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk), Lyman Pershyi (12km northeast of Kupyansk), and Stepova Novosilka (17km southeast of Kupyansk).[24] ISW has not observed evidence to support these claims, however. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Synkivka and Ivanivka (19km southeast of Kupyansk).[25] A Russian milblogger claimed that Synkivka is contested, despite some Russian claims that Russian forces captured the settlement.[26] Another prominent milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully tried to enter Synkivka, but ISW has observed no indication that Russian forces have entered the settlement.[27]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on October 15 that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Synkivka in the Kupyansk direction.[28]

Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Svatove-Kreminna line on October 15 but did not make any confirmed advances. A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the newly formed 25th Combined Arms Army advanced up to “several” kilometers in an unspecified area along the Svatove-Kreminna line, though ISW has not observed evidence to support this claim.[29] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Makiivka (20km southwest of Svatove), the Serebryanske forest area (11km south of Kreminna), and Torske (14km west of Kreminna).[30] Footage published on October 15 purportedly shows elements of the 7th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps) operating in the Bilohorivka direction (10km south of Kreminna).[31]

The Russian MoD claimed on October 15 that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Novoyehorivka (16km southwest of Svatove), Makiivka, Dibrova (7km southwest of Kreminna), the Serebryanske forest area, and Yampolivka (17km west of Kreminna) on the Svatove-Kreminne line.[32]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 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.

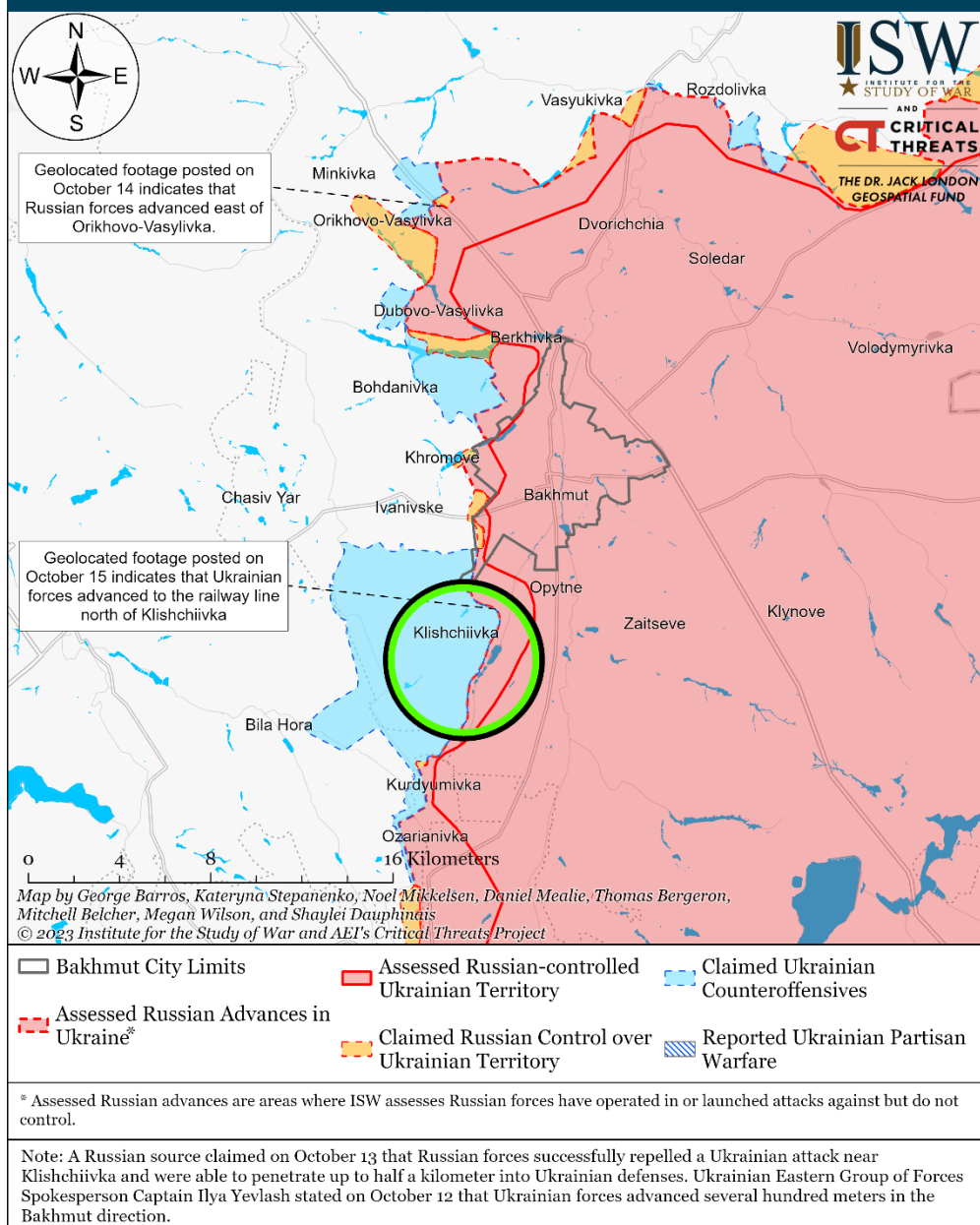
Note: A Russian source claimed on October 13 that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Klishchiivka and were able to penetrate up to half a kilometer into Ukrainian defenses. A Russian source claimed on October 11 that Russian forces advanced approximately 1.5 kilometers in the Ivanivka and Kyslivka directions.

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 counteroffensive operations around Bakhmut on October 15 and made marginal gains. Geolocated footage published on October 15 shows elements of the 4th Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Brigade (2nd Army Corps, Southern Military District) striking Ukrainian positions at the railway line north of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), indicating marginal Ukrainian gains in the area.[33] A Russian news aggregator claimed that Ukrainian forces made unspecified advances towards the railway line near Klishchiivka and Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut) on October 14.[34] The Russian MoD claimed on October 15 that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces repelled Ukrainian assaults near Klishchiivka, Dubovo-Vasylivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut), and Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut).[35] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked near Kurdyumivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut) but did not specify an outcome.[36] The milblogger claimed that fighting also occurred near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[37] A Russian milblogger posted footage on October 15 purporting to show elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) operating in the Bakhmut area.[38]

The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled four Russian assaults south of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka and Andriivka on October 15.[39]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



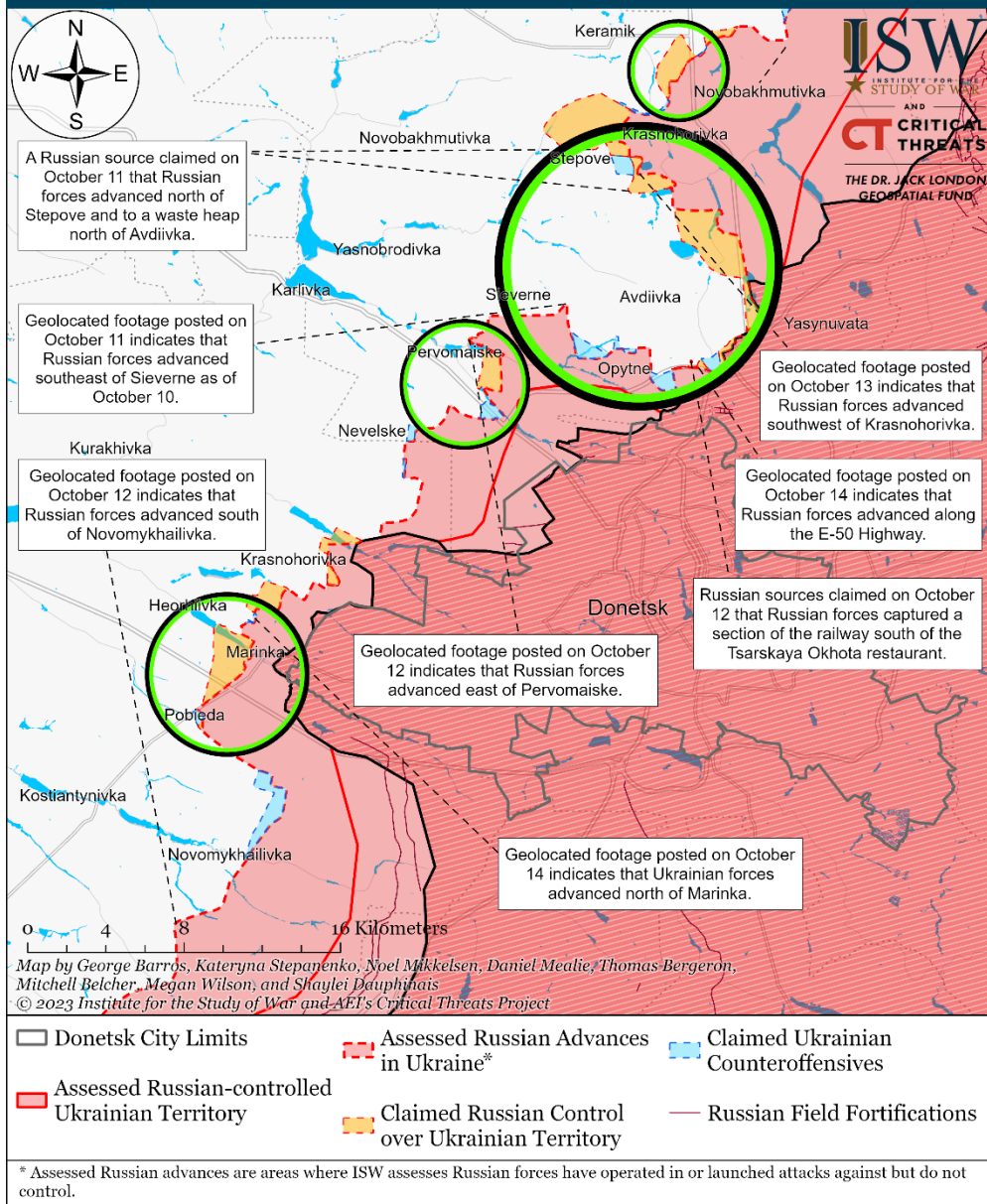
Russian forces continued offensive operations around Avdiivka on October 15 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled more than 15 Russian assaults near Avdiivka; north of Avdiivka near Stepove and Keramik (up to 13km northwest of Avdiivka); and southwest of Avdiivka near Tonenke, Sieverne, and Pervomaiske (up to 11km southwest of Avdiivka).[40] Russian milbloggers claimed on October 14 and 15 that Russian forces advanced near Novokalynove (13km north of Avdiivka) and that Ukrainian forces retreated from unspecified strongholds in the Avdiivka area.[41] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are focusing on securing positions near Avdiivka that are least vulnerable to Ukrainian artillery fire to

set conditions for further offensive operations.[42] Russian sources widely claimed that Russian forces are now able to interdict all Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs) into Avdiivka, although a prominent Russian milblogger stated that these claims are premature.[43] Russian milbloggers previously claimed in July and August 2023 that elements of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Pyatnashka" International Brigade established fire control over Ukrainian GLOCs in the Avdiivka area.[44] ISW has not observed any indications that these persistent Russian claims about Russian fire control over Ukrainian GLOCs in the Avdiivka area are true, however.

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces successfully counterattacked near Avdiivka and made marginal gains on October 15. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces recaptured unspecified positions near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdivika) and Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka).[45] Russian sources, including the Russian MoD, claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful counterattacks near Pervomaiske and on the northeastern outskirts of Avdiivka near the Avdiivka Coke Plant.[46] One Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conduct counterattacks in the Avdiivka area with small assault groups of up to 15 personnel.[47]

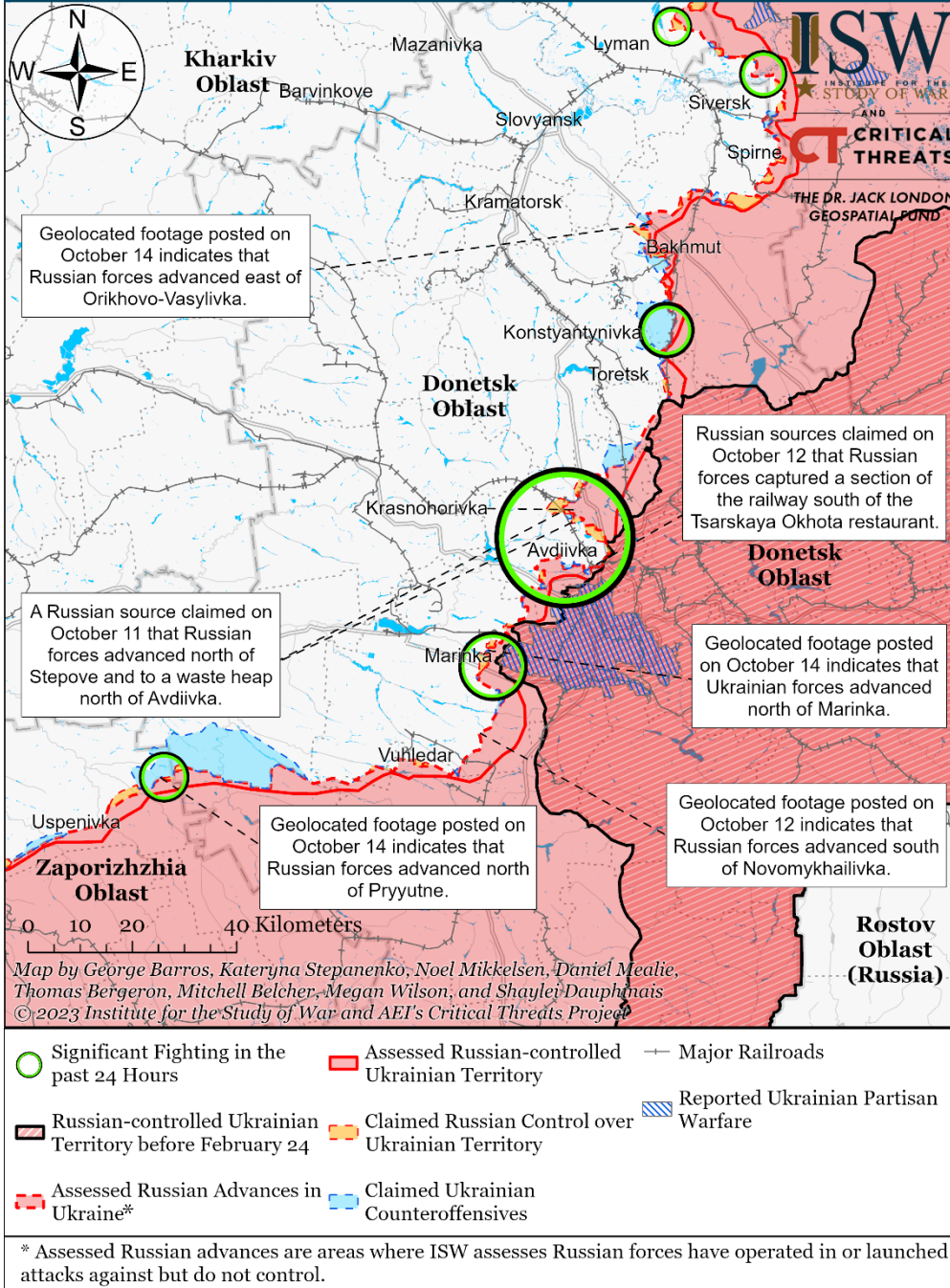
Russian forces continued offensive operations near Donetsk City on October 15 but did not make any confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled over 15 Russian assaults near Marinka (just west of Donetsk City).[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced near Novomykhailivka (10km south of Marinka) and recaptured positions near Solodke (17km south of Marinka) that Russian forces lost during the summer of 2023.[49] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.

Assessed Control of Terrain near Donetsk City as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



A Ukrainian military observer stated that Russian forces may be preparing for attacks near Vuhledar to push Ukrainian forces out of firing distance of a rail line that Russia seeks to restore to support logistics in southern Ukraine.[50] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets also stated that elements of the Russian 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th Army Corps, Eastern Military District) tried to push Ukrainian forces back from Novomykhailivka (10km south of Marinka and 19km northeast of Vuhledar) by attacking from Solodke (6km south of Novomykhailivka) and Slavne (5km southeast of Novomykhailivka) but only captured a few footholds near Solodke.[51]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Ukrainian forces continued limited offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on October 15 but did not advance. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka) on October 14 and 15.[52]

Russian forces continued limited offensive operations in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area on October 15 and recently advanced. Geolocated footage published on October 14 shows elements of the Russian 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) capturing a Ukrainian position northwest of Pryutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[53] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack north of Pryutne.[54]

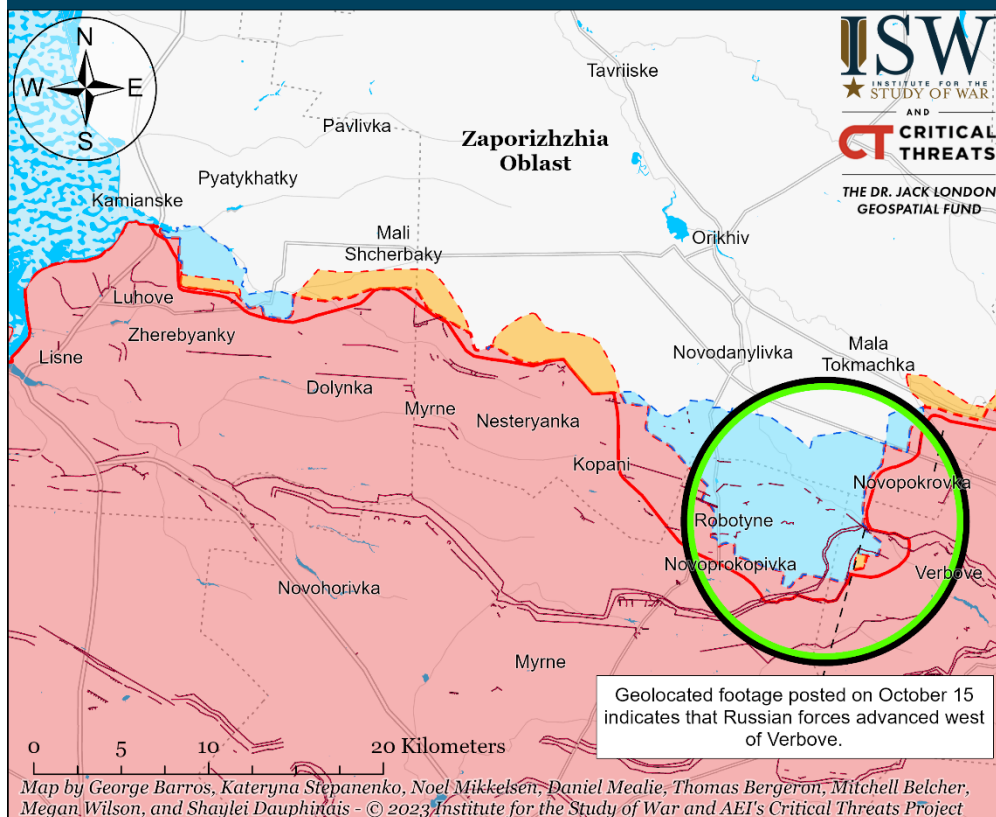


Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on October 15 and reportedly recently advanced. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in the Melitopol (western Zaporizhia Oblast) direction.[55] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attacks along the Robotyne-Novoprokopivka-Verbove line (10km south to 18km southeast of Orikhiv).[56] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed on October 14 that Ukrainian forces slightly advanced west of Kopani (5km northwest of Robotyne) but retreated to positions northwest of Kopani after Russian forces shelled the advancing Ukrainian forces.[57]

Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces are taking advantage of recent Russian counterattacks to advance in western Zaporizhia Oblast. Mashovets stated that Ukrainian forces likely advanced towards Verbove after Russian counterattacks in the area in recent days.[58] Mashovets also stated that Ukrainian forces began gradually advancing near Kopani and east of Nesteryanka (10km northwest of Robotyne) from the north after elements of the Russian 104th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (76th VDV Division) counterattacked from these areas. Mashovets also stated that elements of the Russian 71st Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th CAA, SMD) withdrew from northern to central Novoprokopivka (16km south of Orikhiv) following counterattacks and that northern Novoprokopivka is now a contested “gray zone.”

Russian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on October 14 and recently marginally advanced. Geolocated footage published on October 14 and 15 shows elements of the 247th VDV Regiment (7th VDV Division) capturing Ukrainian positions west of Verbove on the northern tree line of the Robotyne-Verbove road.[59] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from several positions along the Robotyne-Verbove line on October 14.[60] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces counterattacked along the Kopani-Robotyne-Novoprokopivka-Verbove line and surrounded several Ukrainian positions near Verbove on October 14 and continued counterattacks on October 15.[61]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

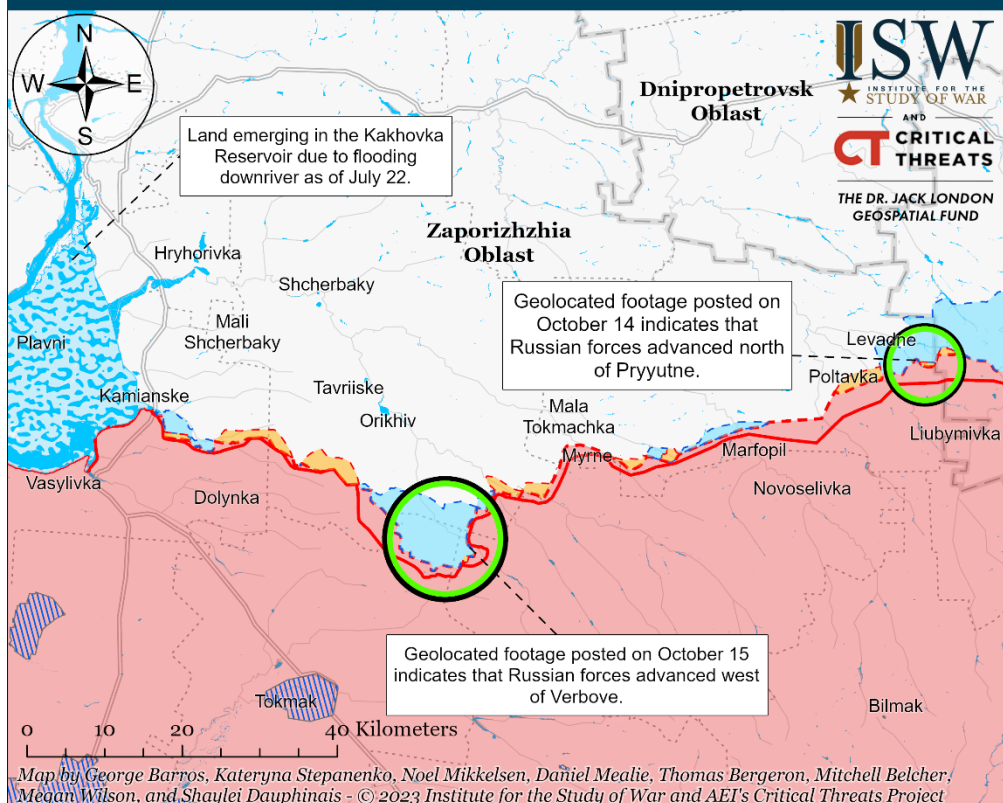


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|---|--|---|
| Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours | Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory | Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare |
| Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24 | Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian 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 October 11 that Russian forces advanced several hundred meters in the Zherybyanky and Pyatykhatky directions.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



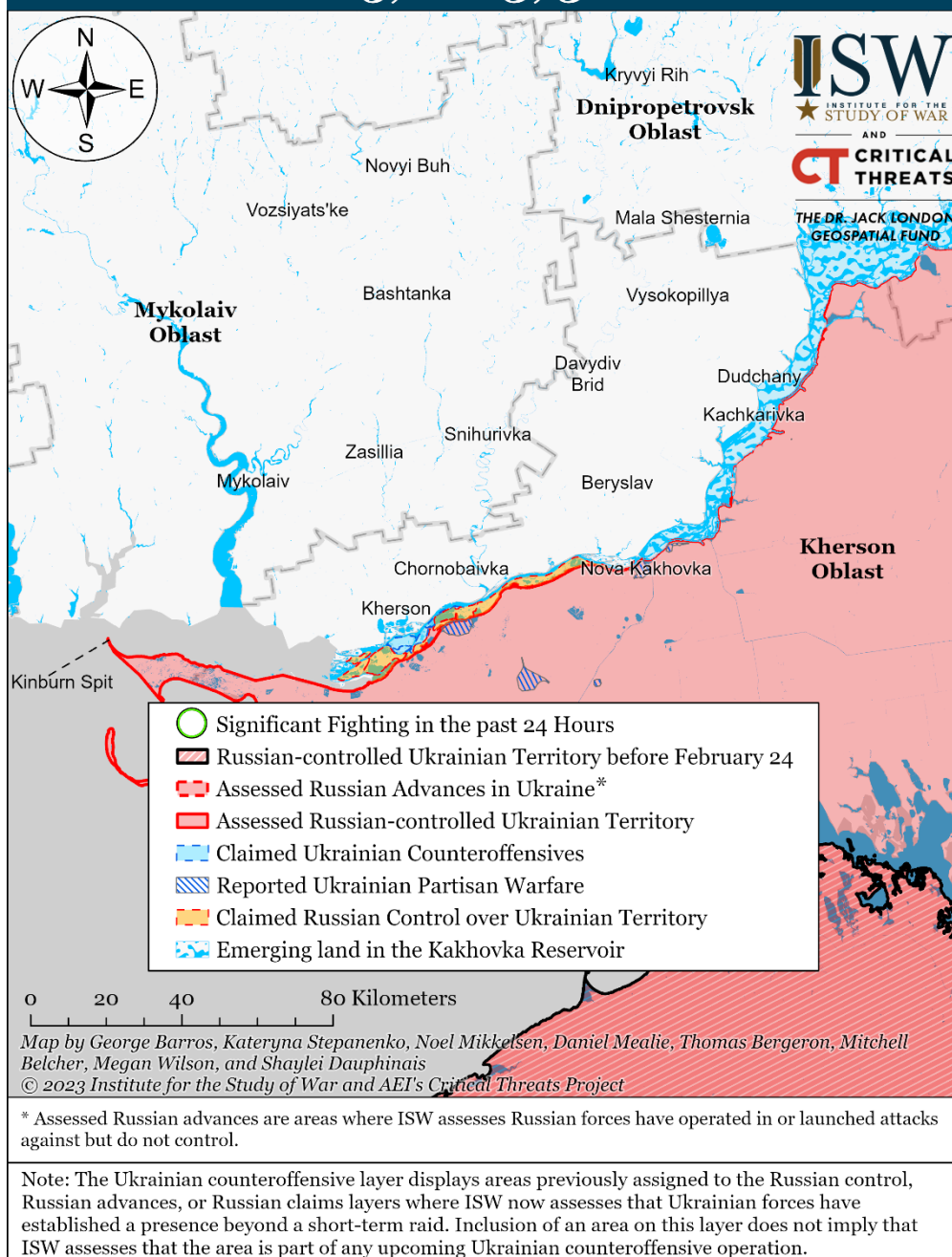
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian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

* 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 October 11 that Russian forces advanced several hundred meters in the Zherebyanky and Pyatykhatky directions.

Russian sources continued to discuss Ukrainian activity on the Dnipro River delta islands in Kherson Oblast. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces from unspecified islands in the Dnipro River delta.[62] Russian milbloggers continued to express concern about a potential future Ukrainian operation into the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast.[63]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of October 15, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



A Ukrainian official indicated that Russian forces may be altering their force posture in the Black Sea as a result of Ukrainian strikes against Black Sea Fleet assets. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk stated that Russian naval vessels are no longer trying to block Ukrainian ports but that Russian tactical aviation is constantly active in the Black Sea and is disrupting sea transport routes near Snake Island.[64] Humenyuk stated that the

Russian naval group currently in the Black Sea consists of 12 vessels and that Russian vessels withdrawn to Novorossiysk are still able to strike Ukraine with long range missiles and drones.

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

A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have “significant” reserves comprised of new divisions currently located in rear areas, though these formations are highly unlikely to be fully staffed at this time.[65] The milblogger claimed that these new divisions are partly composed of expendable personnel but that the senior officers have “extensive” combat and leadership experience. The milblogger also claimed that more than half of the new formations are equipped with the “latest technology.” ISW previously assessed that the Russian MoD’s recently announced nine training regiments can possibly also serve as in extremis operational or strategic reserves, and it is possible these regiments are part of the “significant” reserves the Russian milblogger was referencing.[66] The reported existence of Russian reserves in the rear does not indicate that these reserves are operating at scale or combat ready, however. ISW previously assessed that the newly-formed 25th Combined Arms Army was hurriedly deployed ahead of its intended deployment date and is therefore likely understaffed, poorly trained, or both.[67] It is conceivable that the Russian MoD has already stood up the administrative and command backbones of several on-paper divisions as part of Defense Minister Shoigu’s announced force restructuring goals in January 2023, but these formations are highly unlikely to be fully staffed or combat ready.

A Russian insider source claimed on October 15 that Rosgvardia has been negotiating with the Wagner Group since Wagner’s June 24 rebellion to increase Rosgvardia’s power inside Russia.[68] The insider source claimed that negotiations between Rosgvardia Head Viktor Zolotov and the now-deceased Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin began immediately after the rebellion but fell through as Zolotov was not prepared to fund Wagner. The insider source claimed that negotiations resumed with Prigozhin’s son, Pavel, after Prigozhin’s death. The insider source also claimed on October 13 that Rosgvardia was interested in using Wagner personnel in the war in Ukraine in order to avoid having to commit Rosgvardia personnel to combat.[69] The insider source claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin is allowing Zolotov to pursue these objectives in order to create a system of “checks and balances” between political elites after Prigozhin’s death left Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu’s influence unchecked. ISW is unable to verify any of these insider sources’ claims, although they are consistent with continued Russian information space speculation about the future of the Wagner Group following Prigozhin’s death.

A Russian Governor indicated that Russian regional governments continue to struggle to support the material needs of the war in Ukraine. The Governor of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug-Yugra, Natalya Komarova, responded to a local resident’s complaint about the lack of equipment for soldiers in Ukraine on October 14, saying that “we as a whole did not prepare for this war, we do not need it.”[70] Komarova stated that there are “certainly...some inconsistencies and unresolved issues.” A member of the Obereg Center for Public Control, Yuri Ryabtsev, sent a statement to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs accusing Komarov of “discrediting” the Russian military and demanding criminal charges be brought against her.[71]

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)

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is sending a reportedly closely Kremlin-affiliated priest to Crimea, likely as part of continued Russian efforts to persecute religious communities in occupied Ukraine. Russian opposition media outlet *Meduza* reported on October 15 that the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church appointed Pskov Metropolitan Tikhon (Georgii Shevkunov) as the head of the Crimean Metropolitanate.[72] *Meduza* reported in 2015 that Shevkunov is allegedly Putin's personal confessor and reportedly has ties with Russian government officials.[73] Shevkunov compared his relocation to Crimea to historical exiles of religious figures to Kolyma in the Russian Far East.[74] ISW previously reported that Russian authorities are reportedly installing ROC representatives in independent Orthodox of the Church of Ukraine (OCU) communities in occupied Ukraine in order to collect information on non-ROC parishioners and clergy members and provide information to Russian special services.[75] ISW has long assessed that Russian authorities have conducted systemic religious persecution against OCU dioceses and religious minorities in occupied Ukraine since the start of the war.[76]

Russian Information Operations and Narratives:

Russian President Vladimir Putin restated boilerplate rhetoric threatening military escalation with the West, likely in an attempt to deter Western support for Ukraine. Putin claimed during an interview on Russian state television on October 15 that a “hot” conflict between the West and Russia would be a “completely different war” and not limited to the framework of the “special military operation.”[77]

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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[1] <https://ria.ru/20231015/ukraina-1902867872.html> ; <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/925939> ; <https://tass.ru/politika/19017079>

[2] <https://tass.ru/politika/19008301> ;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-13-2023>

[3] https://t.me/vdv_ZA_teplinsky/146 ; <https://t.me/frontbird/4025> ;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-11-2023>

[4] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-12-2023>

[5] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-12-2023>

[6] <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1713241085118500998>
; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-13-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-october-14-2023>

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