

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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April 17, 2024, 5:10pm 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 12:30pm ET on April 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces struck a Russian military airfield in occupied Dzhankoi, Crimea, overnight on April 16 to 17. Geolocated footage posted on April 16 shows explosions at the airfield in Dzhankoi, where the Russian 39th Separate Helicopter Regiment (27th Composite Aviation Division, 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army, Southern Military District) is based.[1] The Atesh Crimean partisan movement reported that its agents confirmed that the strike destroyed a S-400 missile system at the airfield, and severely damaged several other unspecified vehicles.[2] Ukrainian sources posted an image reportedly showing three destroyed S-400 launchers following the strike.[3] Russian forces have deployed Mi-8, Mi-25M, Mi-28, and Ka-52 helicopters to the Dzhankoi Air Base, although ISW has not yet observed visual evidence of damage to any helicopters as a result of the April 16 strike.[4] A prominent Kremlin-affiliated milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces used around 12 MGM-140 ATACMS missiles to strike the airfield.[5] ISW cannot independently confirm at this time the type of ordinance Ukrainian forces used in this strike, nor the extent of damage the strike caused. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel Nataliya Humenyuk noted, however, that the military airfield and affiliated aviation assets are legitimate military targets, tacitly acknowledging the strike.[6] Russian combat and transport helicopters have provided Russian forces with distinct offensive and defensive battlefield advantages, particularly in southern Ukraine, and are legitimate military targets.[7] Ukrainian forces have previously conducted ATACMS strikes against Russian military helicopters at airbases in Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast and Luhansk City, Luhansk Oblast in 2023.[8]

Ukraine’s Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reportedly targeted Russian aviation assets in the Republic of Mordovia, the Republic of Tatarstan, and Samara Oblast on April 17. GUR sources told Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* on April 17 that GUR agents targeted a S9B6 “Container” over-the-horizon radar station at the base of the 590th Separate Radio Engineering Unit in Kovylnino, Mordovia, but did not specify how the GUR conducted the strike or whether the strike successfully damaged the radar station.[9] The “Container” radar station reportedly has a 3,000-kilometer detection range and 100-kilometer detection height and is over 680 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.[10] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian air defense

destroyed a Ukrainian drone over Mordovia, which if accurate, could explain the lack of footage showing the aftermath of a strike in Kovylykino.[11] Ukrainian special services sources additionally told Ukrainian outlet *RBK-Ukraine* on April 17 that the GUR also targeted the Gorbunov aviation plant in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan.[12] Geolocated footage shows that Russian air defense likely downed at least one Ukrainian drone near the Shahed-136/131 drone production plant near Yelabuga, Tatarstan.[13] The GUR also cryptically stated on April 17 that unspecified actors destroyed a Russian Mi-8 helicopter at the Kryaz airfield in Samara Oblast and posted footage of a fire at the airfield, suggesting that the GUR may have also been responsible for a strike in Samara Oblast.[14] Ukrainian strikes against Russian aviation assets in occupied Crimea, as well as within Russia, appear to represent a fairly coordinated and wide-reaching series of strikes specifically targeting Russian aviation, air defense, and radar detection capabilities.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov officially confirmed on April 17 that Russian peacekeeping forces began their anticipated withdrawal from Nagorno-Karabakh, as Russian sources largely blamed Armenian leadership for Azerbaijan’s seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh amid Armenia’s continued efforts to distance itself from political and security relations with Russia.[15] The Azerbaijani Presidential Administration’s Foreign Policy Department Head, Hikmet Hajiyev, stated on April 17 that senior Russian and Azerbaijani leadership decided to prematurely withdraw Russian peacekeepers from Nagorno-Karabakh.[16] The November 2020 Russian-brokered ceasefire that ended a month and a half of fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas stipulated that Russia would deploy peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh until 2025.[17] Russia previously deployed 1,960 Russian peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh including elements of the 15th Motorized Rifle Peacekeeping Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]), 31st Air Assault (VDV) Brigade, and 45th Spetsnaz Brigade.[18] Footage published on April 17 purportedly shows a column of Russian armored vehicles leaving Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russian sources did not specify its destination.[19] The limited amount of manpower and materiel that Russian forces are moving out of Nagorno-Karabakh will not substantially affect Russian combat operations in Ukraine, should the Russian military decide to deploy these forces to Ukraine. Russian milbloggers largely responded to the announcement of Russian peacekeepers’ withdrawal by defending Russian forces for their failure to support Armenia during the fall 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and by blaming Armenian leadership for perceived weakness.[20] A Russian milblogger claimed that Armenian leadership’s and the *de facto* Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh authority’s failure to respond militarily to the fall 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh crisis demonstrates that Armenians deserve “to be deprived of their homeland.”[21] The milblogger further claimed that the current withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from the region will allow Azerbaijan to control all Armenian domestic and foreign affairs. Russian milbloggers’ criticism of Armenian leadership is consistent with ongoing Russian criticism of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s efforts to limit security cooperation with Russia.[22]

The Georgian parliament approved a bill in its first reading similar to Russia’s “foreign agents” law on April 17, which Russian state media seized on to further Kremlin efforts to amplify reports of political discord in Western and former Soviet states. The bill will require non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources to register as “an organization pursuing the interests of a foreign power.”[23] Pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili responded to the vote and stated that she will veto the bill, calling the bill a “Russian strategy of destabilization.”[24] The European Union (EU) also responded to the bill, stating that it could negatively impact Georgia’s EU accession

and is not in line with the EU's norms and core values.[25] Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, a member of the ruling Georgian Dream party, claimed that Georgia will adopt the bill despite Western criticism, however.[26] Kremlin newswire TASS reported extensively on the developments regarding the bill and ongoing protests against the bill.[27] The Georgian parliament passed a similar bill in 2023 but later withdrew the bill from further consideration following widespread public protests.[28] Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitri Peskov continued to deny Russian involvement in the bill's creation and passage, and Peskov and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitri Medvedev insinuated that the West is somehow involved in the protests against the bill.[29] The Kremlin has routinely attempted to portray Ukraine's and other post-Soviet countries' politics as chaotic in an attempt to destabilize target states and make them more susceptible to Russian influence or outright attack.[30]

US President Joe Biden warned that Russia and its partners pose an increasing threat to NATO and stressed that US security assistance to Ukraine can address the Russian threat. Biden stated in an op-ed published in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 17 that Russia is intensifying its war against Ukraine with military and non-lethal materiel support from China, Iran, and North Korea.[31] Biden called for the US House of Representatives to urgently pass security assistance for Ukraine as Ukrainian forces continue to face ammunition shortages and the prospect of losing more territory.[32] Biden stated that if Russia achieves its objective to subjugate and subsume Ukraine then Russian forces will move closer to NATO.[33] Biden stressed that support for Ukraine can stop Russia from encroaching on America's NATO allies and prevent US involvement in a hypothetical future conventional war between Russia and NATO.[34] ISW assesses that a Russian victory in Ukraine would have devastating consequences for the defense of NATO, whereas a Ukrainian victory would make a successful Russian attack on Poland or the Baltic States harder and riskier for Russia.[35]

The US House of Representatives filed a supplemental appropriations bill on April 17 that would provide roughly \$60 billion of assistance to Ukraine, and will reportedly vote on the measure on April 20.[36] The supplemental appropriations bill largely resembles a previous supplemental bill passed by the US Senate and would offer Ukraine \$48.3 billion in security assistance: \$23.2 billion for replenishing weapons and equipment from the US Department of Defense (DoD) inventory; \$13.8 billion for the purchase of weapons and munitions for Ukraine from US manufacturers; and \$11.3 billion for continued US support to Ukraine through ongoing US military operations in the region.[37] The overwhelming majority of the proposed assistance for Ukraine, if passed, would go to American companies and US and allied militaries.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces struck a Russian military airfield in occupied Dzhankoi, Crimea, overnight on April 16 to 17.**
- **Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reportedly targeted Russian aviation assets in the Republic of Mordovia, the Republic of Tatarstan, and Samara Oblast on April 17.**
- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov officially confirmed on April 17 that Russian peacekeeping forces began their anticipated withdrawal from Nagorno-Karabakh, as Russian sources largely blamed Armenian leadership for Azerbaijan's seizure of**

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- **Russian forces recently made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and Donetsk City.**
- **The Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is preparing a special training course for ROC clergy deployed to combat zones in Ukraine.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 17, 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)

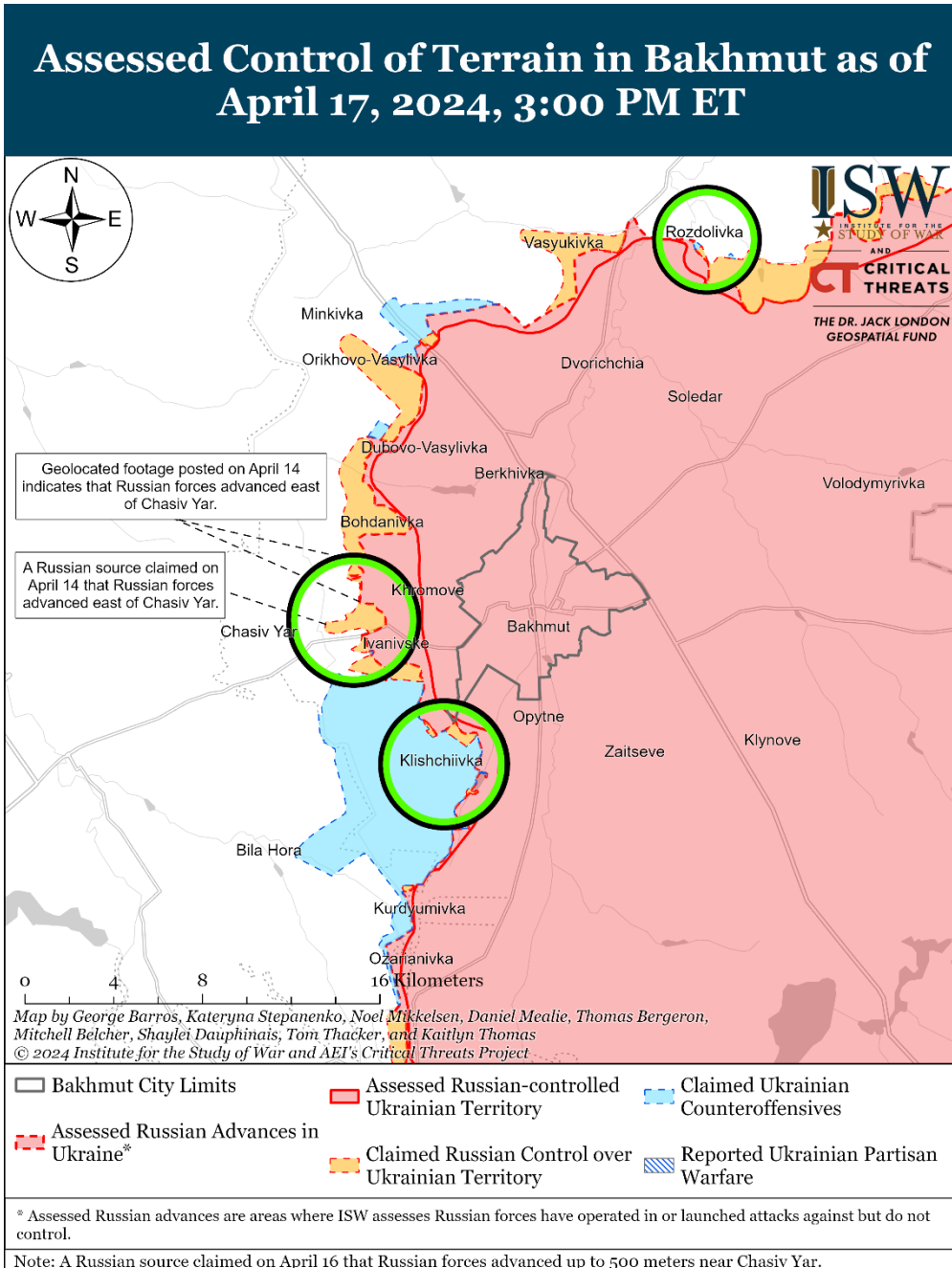
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, 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 engagements continued along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on April 17 but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional fighting continued southwest of Svatove near Novoserhiivka; northwest of Kreminna near Nevske; west of Kreminna near Terny and Torske; and southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova, Hryhorivka, and the Serebryanske forest area.[39] Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets stated that the best equipped elements of the Russian Northern Grouping of Forces (Leningrad Military District [LMD]) are concentrated in the Belgorod Oblast direction and that the Russian military command may need to strengthen its groupings in the Kursk and Bryansk directions ahead of possible future Russian offensive operations against Kharkiv City.[40]

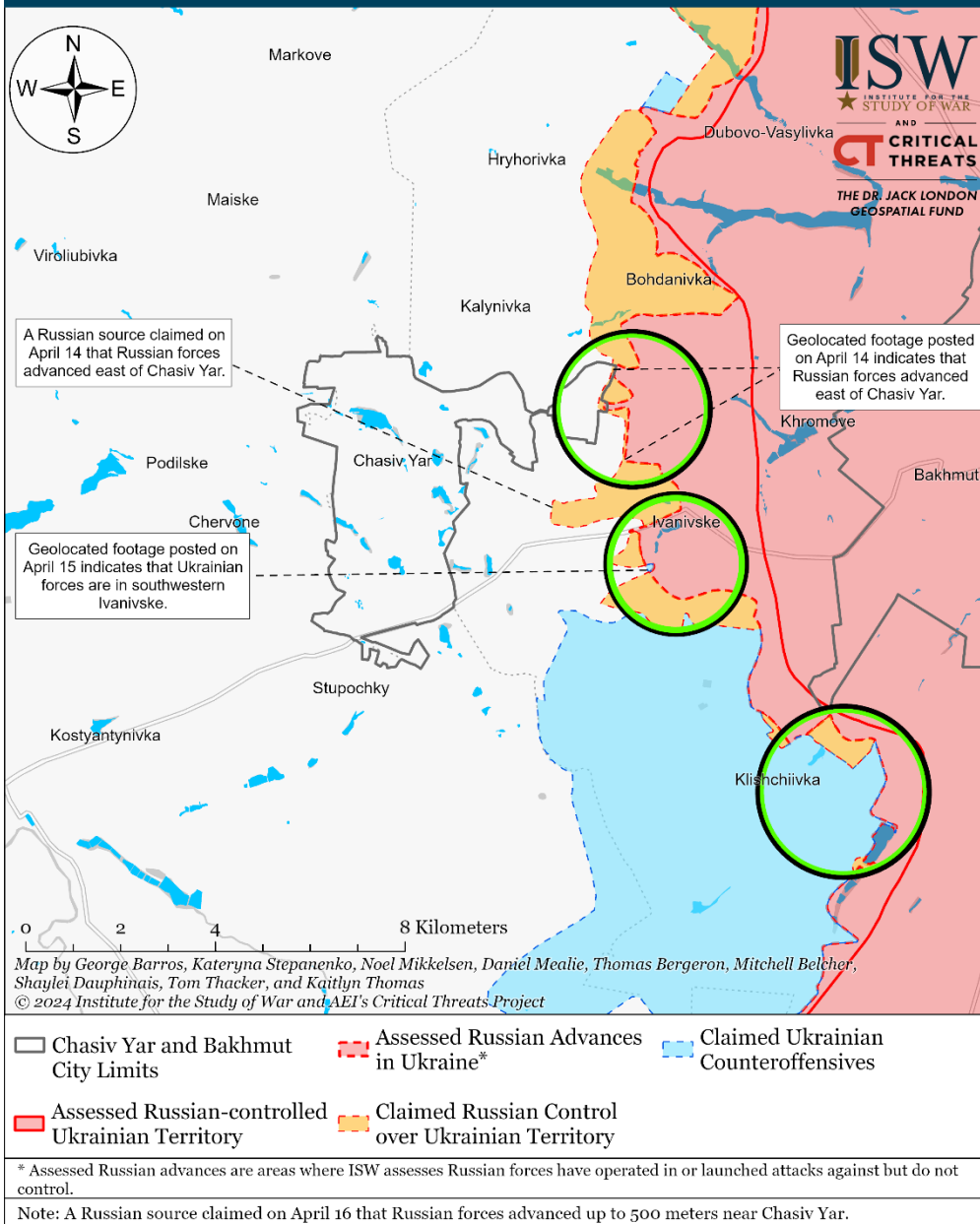
Siversk near Vyimka; and south of Siversk near Rozdolivka.[41] Ukrainian military observer Yuriy Butusov stated on April 17 that Ukrainian forces recently destroyed four Russian T-80 tanks and six MT-LB infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) during Russian attempts to break through Ukrainian defenses east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanka and Zolotarivka.[42] Butusov's reporting suggests that Russian forces may have recently conducted a company-sized mechanized assault in the area, assuming Ukrainian forces did not destroy all the vehicles committed to the attack. ISW has not yet observed visual or official Ukrainian confirmation of such mechanized assaults. Russian forces intensified the tempo and size of mechanized assaults throughout Donetsk Oblast in March and April 2024 but have yet to do so northeast of Bakhmut in the Siversk direction.[43]



Russian forces reportedly advanced northeast of Chasiv Yar and continued offensive operations in the area on April 17. Russian milbloggers claimed on April 16 and 17 that Russian forces have seized all of

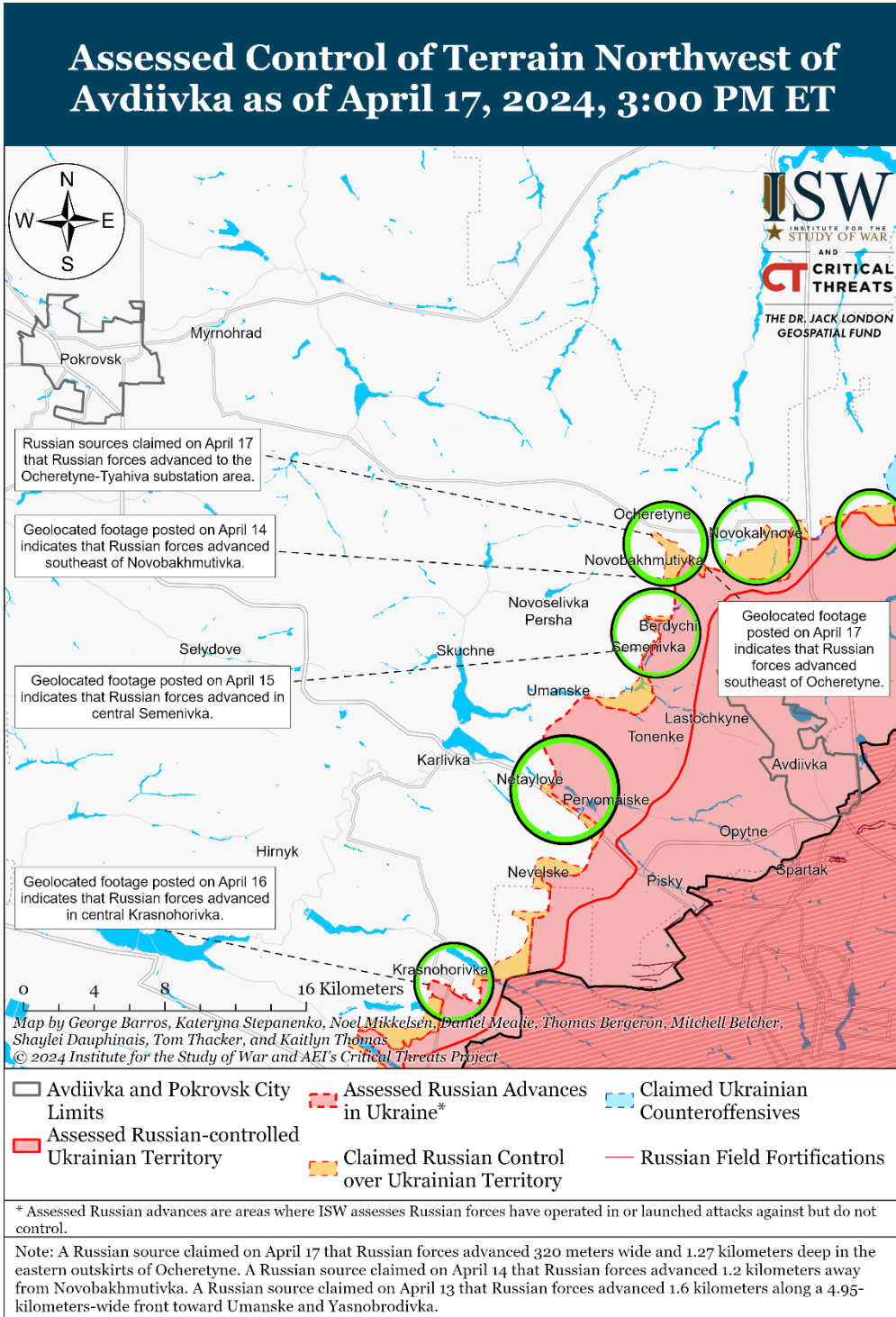
Bohdanivka (northeast of Chasiv Yar), advanced closer to Kalynivka (north of Chasiv Yar), and advanced up to 500 meters in depth in dacha areas north of the Novyi Microraion (eastern Chasiv Yar).[44] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these Russian claims. Fighting continued northeast of Chasiv Yar near Bohdanivka; near Chasiv Yar and the Novyi Microraion; east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske; and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka.[45] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated that Russian forces are attacking with small assault groups in the Chasiv Yar area and are using ATVs to quickly transfer and unload infantry in combat areas.[46] The commander of a Ukrainian battalion operating in the Chasiv Yar area stated that Russian forces lose between 40 and 70 percent of their equipment during assaults.[47] The battalion commander stated that Ukrainian forces are using first person view (FPV) drones to stop Russian armored vehicles from advancing and that Ukrainian forces use roughly 50 FPV drones to strike between 20 and 25 Russian targets each day.[48] Elements of the Russian 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Leningrad Military District [LMD], formerly Northern Fleet) are reportedly operating near Bohdanivka and elements of the 83rd Airborne (VDV) Brigade are reportedly operating in the Bakhmut direction.[49] Elements of the 98th VDV Division, including its 331st VDV Regiment; the 11th VDV Brigade; and the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating on the outskirts of Chasiv Yar.[50]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Chasiv Yar as of April 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



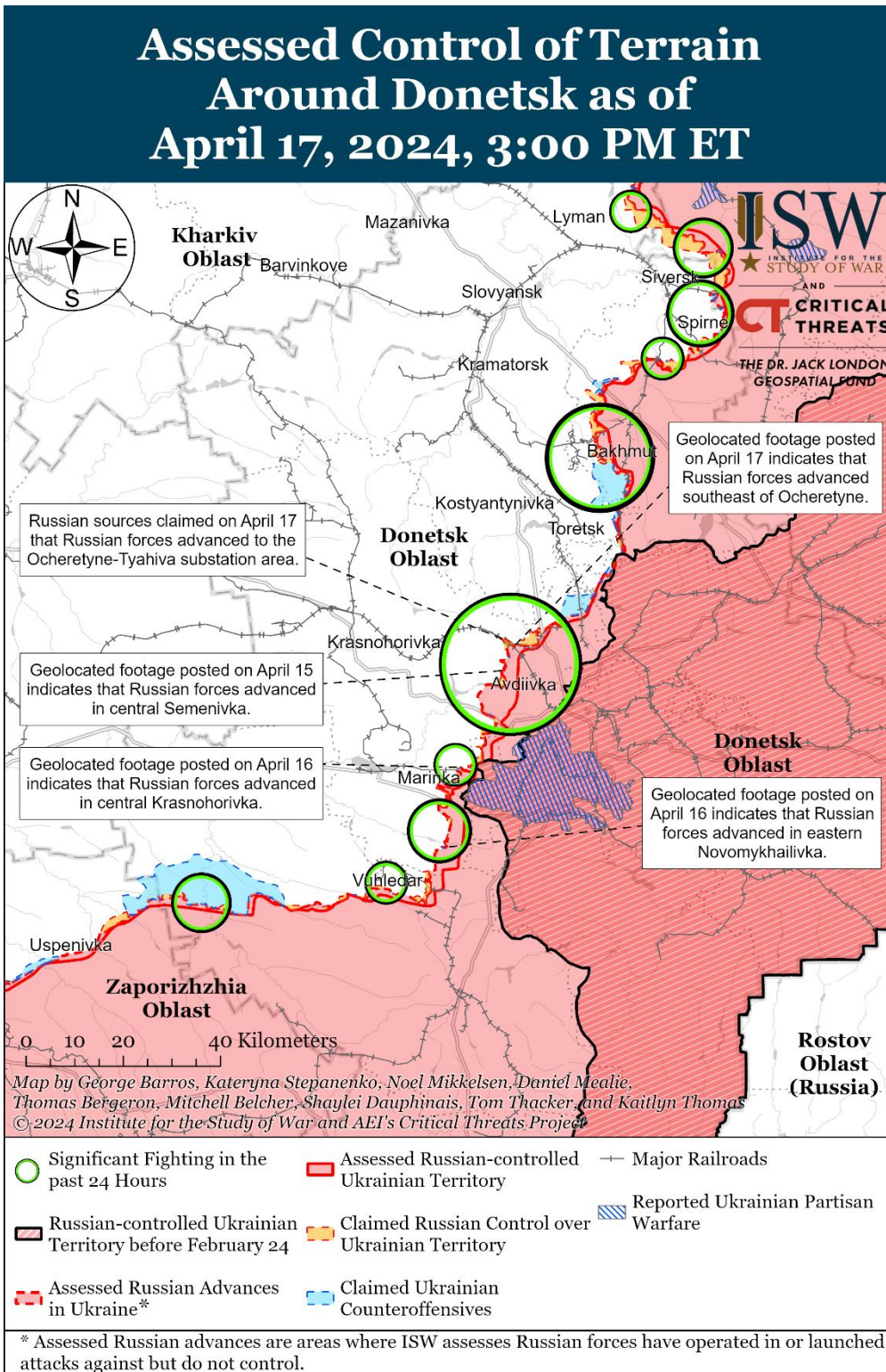
Russian forces recently advanced west of Avdiivka and continued offensive operations in the area on April 17. Geolocated footage published on April 17 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced along a railway line southeast of Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka).[51] Geolocated footage published on April 14 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced within western Orlivka (west of Avdiivka).[52] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced to the southeastern outskirts of Ocheretyne and entered the northern outskirts of Netaylove (southwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[53] Fighting continued northwest of Avdiivka near Ocheretyne, Novobakhmutivka, Novokalynove, and Berdychi; west of Avdiivka near Semenivka and Umanske; and southwest of Avdiivka near Netaylove and Pervomaiske.[54] Elements of the

Russian 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People's Republic [DNR] Army Corps [AC]) are reportedly operating near Pervomaiske.[55]



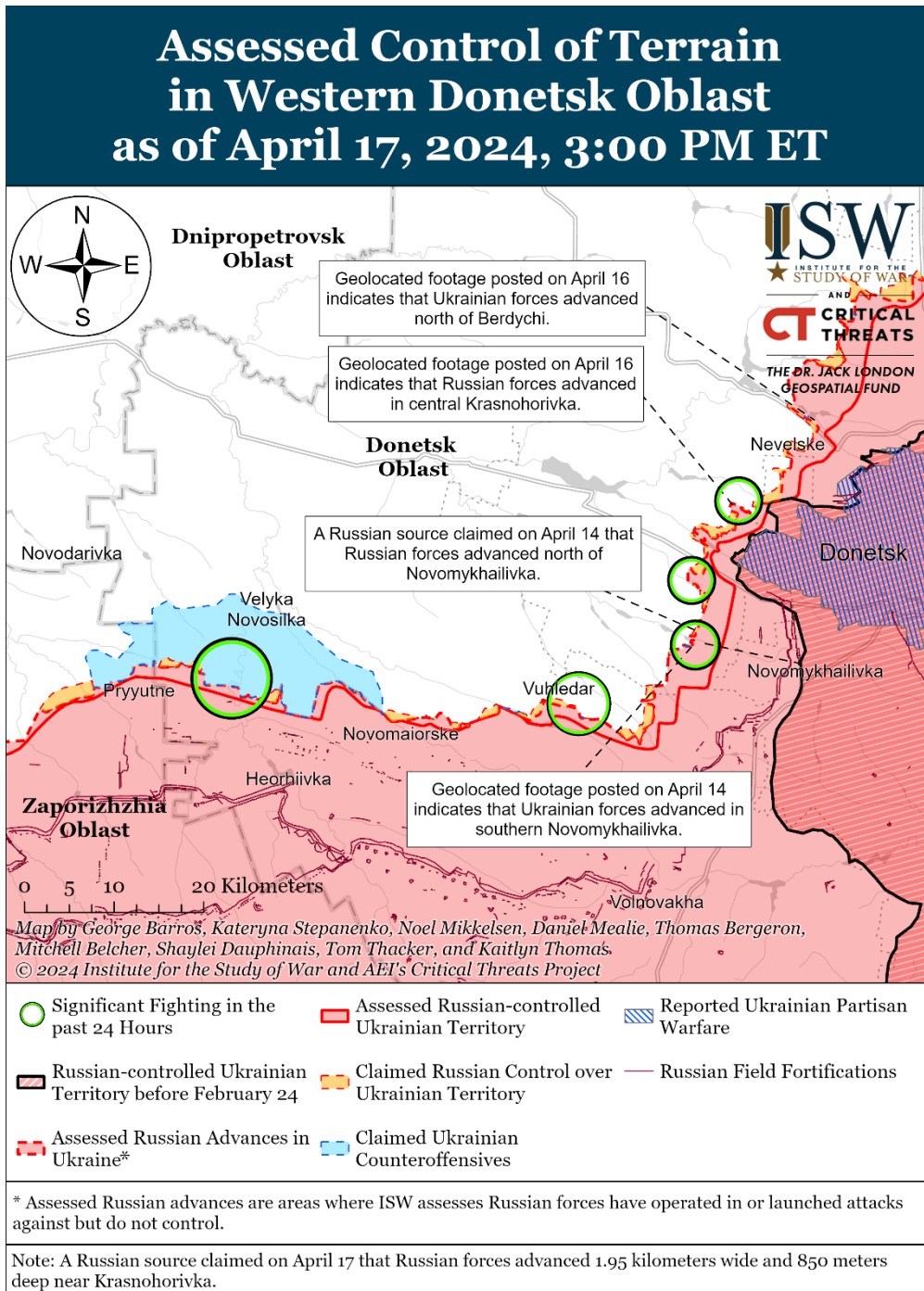
Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City and continued offensive operations west and southwest of Donetsk City on April 17. Geolocated footage published on April 16 indicates that elements of the Russian 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) advanced up to the Krasnohorivka brick factory, and Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces made further advances within Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[56] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced several hundred meters within Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City) and that Ukrainian forces

only control one remaining position on the settlement's western outskirts.[57] Fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Novomykhailivka, Pobieda, and Vodyane.[58]



Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area on April 17. Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured a stronghold near Volodymyrivka (southeast of Vuhledar), pushed Ukrainian forces away from positions near Mykilske (southeast of Vuhledar), and advanced several

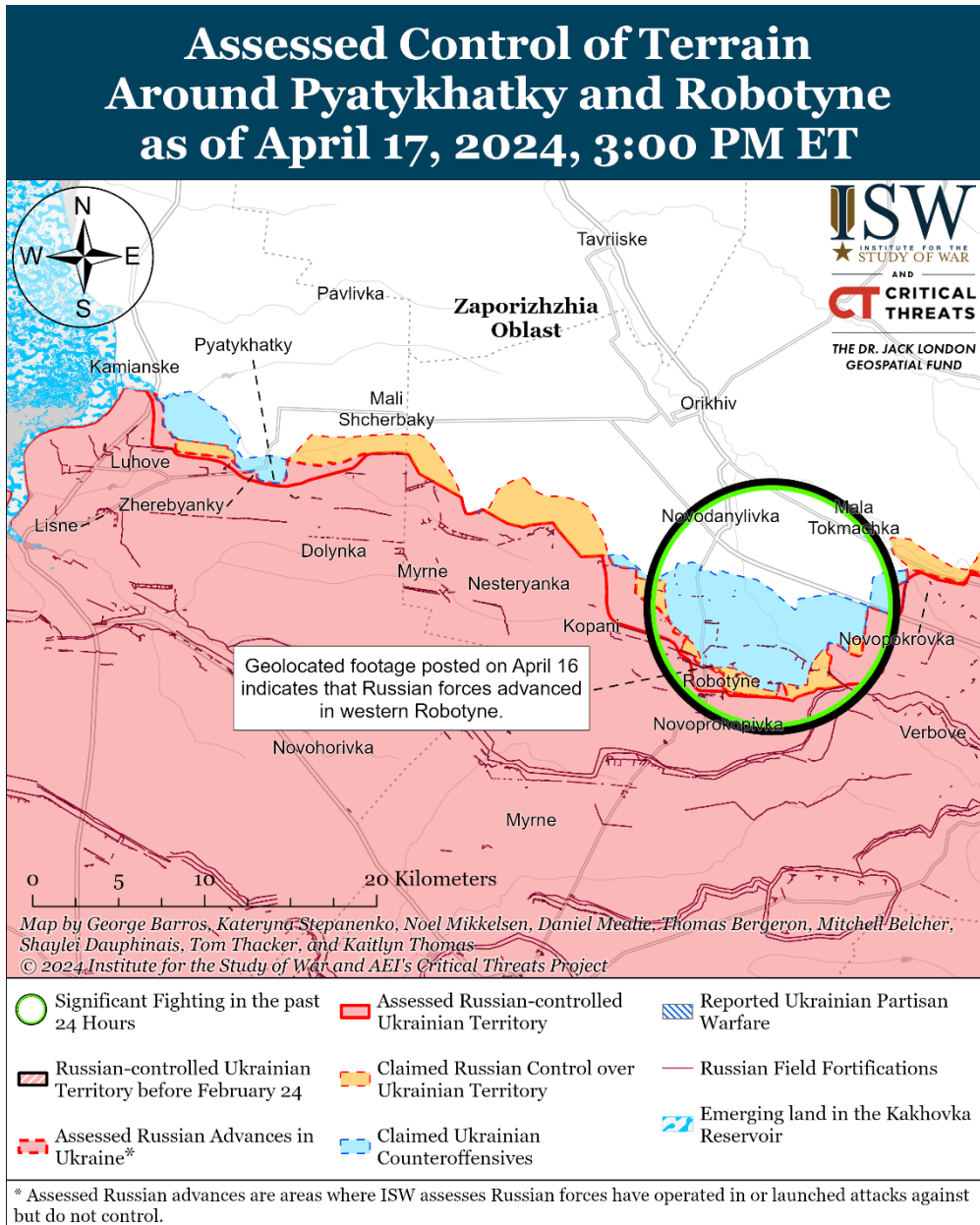
hundred meters near Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka).[59] ISW has not observed any confirmation of these claims. Positional fighting also continued near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka).[60]



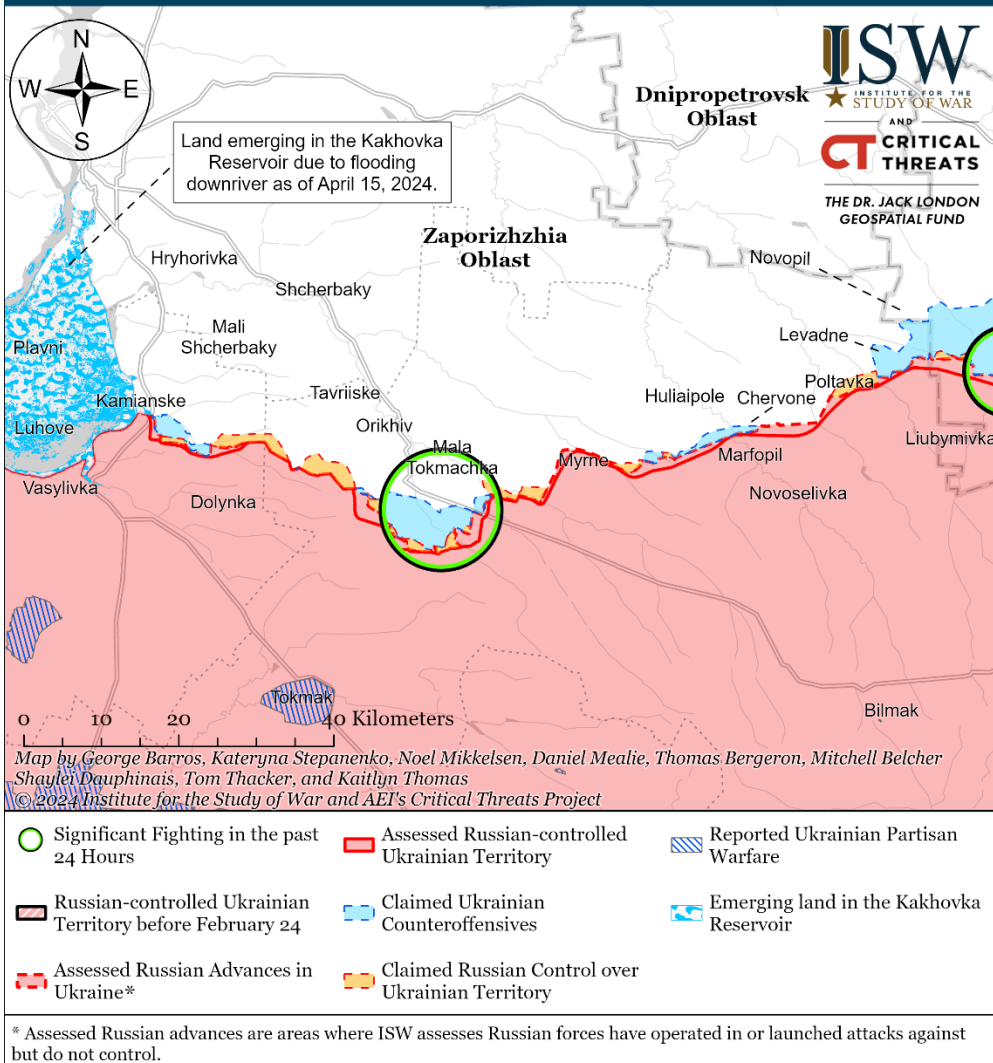
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on April 17, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne, northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne) and near Mala Tokmachka (northeast of Robotyne).[61] Former Roscosmos

(Russian space agency) head and ultranationalist figure Dmitry Rogozin claimed on April 17 that Russian forces have established electronic warfare (EW) systems in trenches that are able to successfully suppress Ukrainian drones controlled via Starlink in the Zaporizhia direction.[62] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian BARS-10 unit (Russian Combat Army Reserve) (58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are operating in the Zaporizhia direction.[63]

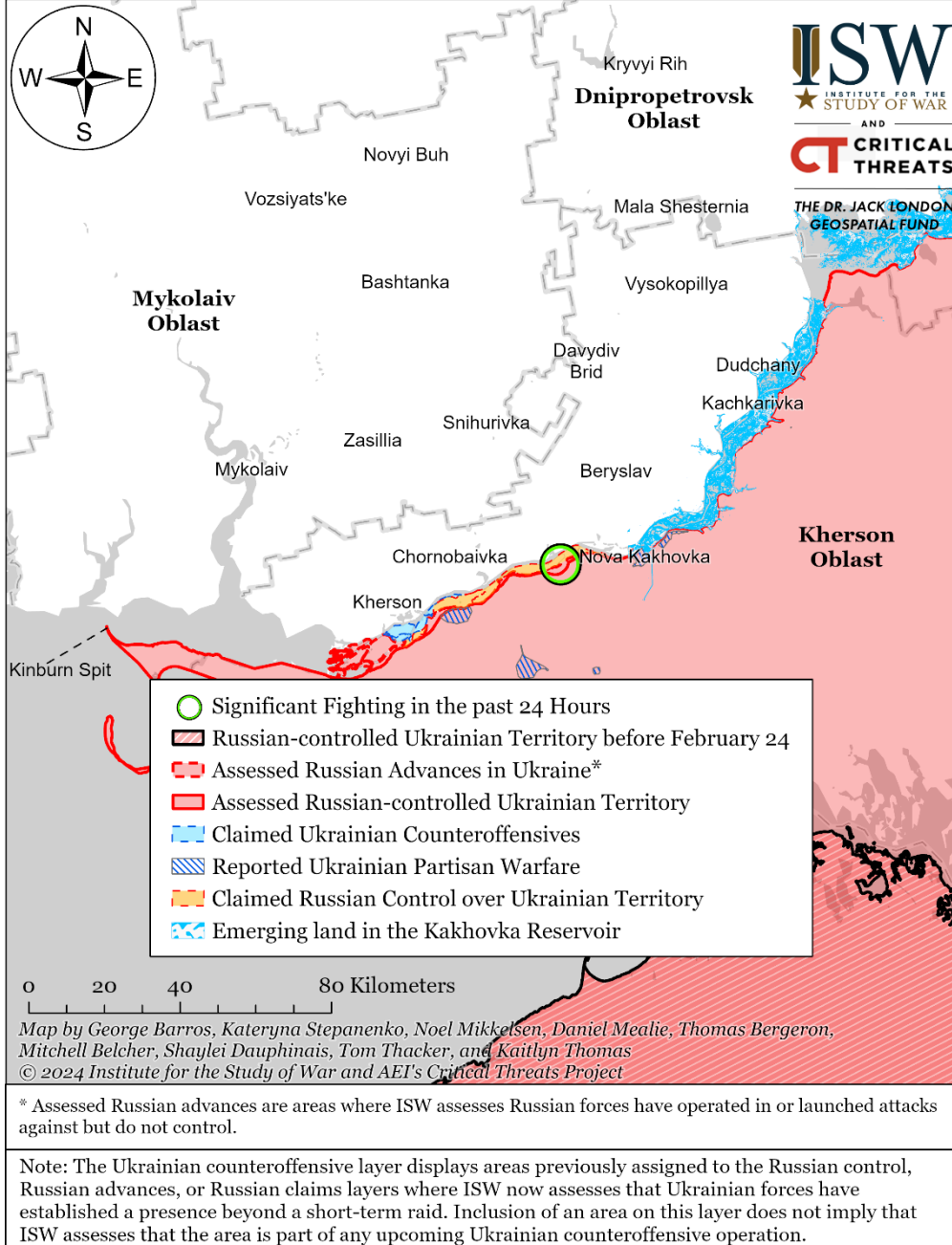


Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of April 17, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on April 17, including near Krynky, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline.[64] Kherson Oblast occupation administration head Vladimir Saldo claimed on April 17 that Russian forces have increased the number of EW and mobile air defense systems in east bank Kherson Oblast to counter increasing Ukrainian attacks, likely referring to Ukrainian drone strikes.[65]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 17, 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)

Russian forces conducted missile strikes against Chernihiv City and Odesa Oblast on the morning of April 17. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Russian forces struck infrastructure in Odesa Oblast with an unspecified number of ballistic missiles.[66] Chernihiv Oblast Military Administration Head Vyacheslav Chaus stated that three unspecified Russian missiles struck civilian infrastructure in Chernihiv City, killing 14 people and injuring 61.[67] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces launched Iskander-M missiles against Chernihiv City.[68]

Kharkiv City Mayor Ihor Terekhov told the *Guardian* in an article published on April 17 that Russian forces are attempting to destroy the city's power supply and intimidate its 1.3 million residents with ongoing strikes.[69] Terekhov stated that Kharkiv City residents experienced several hours of unscheduled power outages due to Russian strikes against energy infrastructure. *Bloomberg* reported on April 26 that unspecified Ukrainian and Western officials assess that Russia likely intends its increased missile and glide bomb strikes against Kharkiv City to force residents to evacuate the city.[70]

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

The Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is preparing a special training course for ROC clergy deployed to combat zones in Ukraine.[71] The Educational Committee of the ROC reported on April 16 that Patriarch Kirill held a meeting of the Supreme Church Council of the ROC and discussed the activities of ROC clergy in the combat zone in Ukraine and a draft document on a special education course entitled “fundamentals of training clergy for serving in a combat zone.”[72] The ROC's “chief military priest in the special military operation zone” Dmitry Vasilenkov told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on April 16 that the new course will train priests to work in combat conditions alongside military personnel, administer “spiritual care” to Russian personnel in combat zones, and survive dangerous combat conditions.[73] The ROC has consistently ideologically and materially supported the Kremlin's aims in Ukraine and appears to be increasingly preparing chaplains to serve in Ukraine.[74]

A Russian insider source claimed that Russian politicians and public figures and their relatives are using special military detachments to secure benefits earned through service despite the fact that they are not participating in direct combat.[75] The insider source previously claimed in March 2023 that Russian elites formed the “BARS-Kaskad” volunteer detachment to allow Russian elites and their families to receive the status of participants in combat activities and the associated monetary benefits without facing the risks of frontline combat.[76] The Russian insider source claimed that the son of Russian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Lieutenant General Andrei Averyanov, Albert Averyanov, is serving in a special detachment called the “BARS-25 Anvar” volunteer detachment.[77] Russian elites, particularly politicians and military officials, may use their service in such special detachments to attempt to soothe domestic discontent over ongoing mobilization efforts by claiming their family members are fighting in Ukraine without risking danger that a real frontline unit does.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited the “Patriot” convention and exhibition center in Moscow Oblast on April 17 and highlighted Russian developments in robotic and weapons systems and personnel provision.[78] Shoigu heard reports from various Russian deputy defense ministers and Russian central command bodies on ongoing scientific and technological developments in logistics systems, and observed wheeled and tracked robotic vehicles transporting supplies, simulating evacuation of wounded personnel, and mounting weapons. Shoigu frequently visits Russian defense enterprises to present the Russian armed forces as a modernized and effective fighting force by highlighting ongoing technological innovations.

The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on April 17 that Russian authorities are compelling Russian high school-aged children to produce Shahed drones at the Alabuga Polytechnical College in the Republic of Tatarstan.[79] The Resistance Center cited documents reportedly obtained by the Ukrainian “Cyber Resistance” hacker group that show a list of 1,209 Russian teenagers who have enrolled at the Alabuga Polytechnical College—670 students who have general industrial and production “internships” at the college, and 539 students who are working on the “boat” project, which

is the Russian code name for Shahed production. The Resistance Center noted that the majority of the teenagers are minors and in the 9th to 11th grades, and that one of the teenagers is a Ukrainian girl who Russian authorities deported from an unspecified place in Ukraine.

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

Russian forces continue efforts to protect armored equipment against Ukrainian first-person view (FPV) drone strikes. A Twitter aggregator posted an image on April 17 reportedly showing a Russian BMP-1 amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) covered in thin metal “pins” intended to protect it against drone strikes.[80] Several Russian sources also posted footage on April 16 of a “turtle tank” of the 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic Army Corps ([DNR AC]) equipped with large metal anti-drone armor plating and electronic warfare (EW) jamming system operating near Krasnohorivka, Donetsk Oblast.[81] Russian milbloggers noted that Russian forces have started welding large metal plating onto tanks to protect them against drone strikes and claimed that such “turtle tanks” are effective on the battlefield.[82]

Russian forces continue to integrate robotic systems into frontline formations. Footage posted by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and a Russian milblogger on April 16 shows personnel of the 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) using a radio-controlled robotic car along the Kurakhove road west of Donetsk City.[83] The robotic car can reportedly evacuate wounded personnel, can travel up to 12 kilometers, carry a payload of up to 150 kilograms, and move at a speed of 20 kilometers per hour.

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

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

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

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

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

The Kremlin may attempt to promote Telegram as a new information platform in the West to launch information operations targeting Western audiences. Telegram founder Pavel Durov, in an interview with an American media personality on April 16, positioned Telegram as a preferable alternative to US-based social media platforms.[84] Durov emphasized throughout the interview that the Kremlin does not own Telegram and claimed that he fled Russia after refusing to obey the Russian government’s orders to censor Russian social media VKontakte (later renamed to VK), which he founded in the early 2000s. Durov also claimed that he refused to cooperate with US security and law enforcement agencies, accused Apple and Google of imposing guidelines that promote censorship, and advertised Telegram as a “neutral platform” that would not take sides. Durov has regularly advertised Telegram as a privacy-oriented, independent, and uncensored platform since its founding in 2013.[85] Russian state media and Kremlin officials commented on Durov’s interview on April 17 to promote two narratives aimed at

Russia's domestic audience and English-speaking audiences. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov issued a thinly veiled threat against Telegram, claiming that the Kremlin has routinely asked Durov and Telegram leadership to undertake careful and "necessary measures" to ensure that Telegram does not "turn into a tool in the hands of terrorists." [86] Peskov made similar threats towards Durov following the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack but claimed that Russia is not considering banning Telegram at this time. [87] These statements likely intend to pressure Durov to cooperate with Russian censorship measures under the threat of the Kremlin blocking Telegram in Russia. [88] Russian state media outlets such as *RT* and *Sputnik*, which specialize in targeting English-language and international audiences, promoted Telegram to Western audiences as a preferable social media platform by highlighting Durov's pitch about Telegram's supposed neutrality and how Western governments and technology companies have attempted to censor Telegram. [89] English-language Russian state media also downplayed Durov's statements about the Kremlin's efforts to coopt Telegram and may have aimed to promote Telegram to their audiences. The Kremlin may support Durov's efforts to popularize Telegram in the US and the West to amplify the spread and reach of Kremlin information operations through Telegram, regardless of Telegram's ownership. The Kremlin has increasingly used Telegram for its own messaging after abruptly unbanning Telegram in 2020, and the uncensored nature of the platform allows Russian officials to expand their reach to other audiences abroad. [90]

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is reportedly engaged in an information campaign aimed at weakening the West and leveraging a supposed future Russian victory in Ukraine to create a new global order. The *Washington Post*, citing a classified Russian foreign policy document from April 2023, reported on April 17, 2024 that the Russian MFA is systematically searching for "vulnerable points" in the foreign and domestic policy of Western countries and exploiting these points for Russia's benefit. [91] The classified document claims that the US is leading a coalition of "unfriendly countries" aimed at weakening Russia because of the threat that Russia supposedly presents to the West and that the outcome of the war in Ukraine will determine the framework of a future world order. The Kremlin likely intends for the supposed Russian-led "world majority," a group of countries including post-Soviet and non-Western states that Russia intends to rally to oppose the West, to form the basis of this future world order. [92]

The Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) warned on April 17 that the Kremlin is preparing another information operation to discredit the Ukrainian military and government and undermine further Western military aid to Ukraine. The GUR reported that the Kremlin plans to accuse Ukrainian special forces of using US-made weapons in Sudan and leak fabricated photos of "trophy" weapons supposedly taken from Ukrainian forces in Sudan to Russian and Libyan media. [93] The GUR noted that the Kremlin aims to discredit Ukraine and its Western allies by accusing Ukraine of misusing Western-provided weapons and sowing discord within Ukrainian society by criticizing Ukrainian special forces for fighting in Africa while fighting continues in Ukraine.

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.

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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