



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 21, 2024

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April 21, 2024, 8:15 pm 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 April 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

US Senate Intelligence Committee Chairperson Senator Mark Warner reported on April 21 that US provisions of military aid to Ukraine, including long-range ATACMS missiles, will be in transit to Ukraine “by the end of the week” if the Senate passes the supplemental appropriations bill on April 23 and US President Joe Biden signs it by April 24.¹ Warner stated in an interview with *CBS News* on April 21 that the US presidential administration has been prepared to provide long-range ATACMS to Ukraine, as specified in the bill, for the past several months.² Warner emphasized the extensive battlefield impact that Ukrainian forces have achieved using US-provided military assistance, stating that Ukrainian forces have been able to destroy “87 percent of Russian pre-existing ground forces” (potentially in reference to Russia’s pre-full-scale invasion professional force), 67 percent of Russian tanks, and 32 percent of Russian armored personnel carriers (APCs) for the past two years with less than 3 percent of the US defense budget and military aid from the US and Europe. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated on April 20 that the National Security Supplemental that provides support to Ukraine, Israel, and the Indo-Pacific allows about \$50 billion to flow into the US defense industrial base (DIB) and will create jobs in over 30 US states.³ Pentagon Spokesperson Brigadier General Patrick Ryder stated on April 20 that the US Department of Defense (DoD) is considering sending “several additional advisors to augment the Office of Defense Cooperation (OCD)” to the US Embassy in Kyiv.⁴ *Politico* reported on April 20 citing an unidentified individual familiar with the matter that the US advisors in Kyiv will help Ukrainian officials plan to sustain US equipment provided to Ukraine and help US embassy officials in Kyiv coordinate new weapons shipments after the supplemental appropriations bill becomes law, likely as part of an effort to alleviate DoD personnel limitations in documenting certain aid.⁵

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 21 that the swift delivery of US military aid to Ukraine could allow Ukrainian forces to stabilize the frontline and seize the initiative.⁶ Zelensky stated during an interview with *NBC News* that US military support gives Ukraine a chance at victory but warned that Ukrainian battlefield progress will depend on how fast military aid arrives on the frontlines. Zelensky noted that delays in the delivery of military assistance have already contributed to Ukrainian materiel and personnel losses in “several directions.” Zelensky stated that the Ukrainian military is especially anticipating the deliveries of air defense and long-range weapon systems since Ukrainian forces currently lack significant long-range capabilities to prevent Ukrainian casualties on the frontlines. ISW continues to assess that Ukrainian forces may suffer additional setbacks in the coming weeks while waiting for US security assistance that will allow

Ukraine to stabilize the front, but they will likely be able to blunt the current Russian offensive assuming the resumed US assistance arrives promptly.⁷ Russian forces will likely intensify ongoing offensive operations and missile and drone strikes in the coming weeks in order to exploit the closing window of Ukrainian materiel constraints.⁸

Ukrainian forces struck and damaged the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s (BSF) *Kommuna* submarine support ship – the world’s oldest active-duty naval vessel – in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on April 21.⁹ Geolocated footage published on April 21 shows fire and a smoke plume in Sevastopol Bay, and Russian sources claimed that Russian air defenses intercepted a Ukrainian anti-ship missile in the area.¹⁰ Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk confirmed that a Ukrainian strike damaged the *Kommuna* and that while Ukrainian forces are still clarifying the degree of damage, the *Kommuna* is clearly incapable of operating.¹¹ Pletenchuk noted that the *Kommuna* is over 111 years old and that Russian forces modernized it in 2016 to perform deep sea work, including raising submarines and sunken cargo. Pletenchuk stated that the *Kommuna* is the only rescue vessel of its class in the BSF. Pletenchuk reported that the *Kommuna* previously performed rescue operations in the area of the sunken Russian missile cruiser *Moskva* and large landing ship *Tsezar Kunikov* and that Russian forces would be unable to perform similar rescue and retrieval operations without the *Kommuna*. Open-source intelligence analyst HI Sutton noted that the *Kommuna* provides the Russian Navy with “valuable capabilities” and that the ship has frequently participated in sea trials and can conduct seabed warfare.¹² Another maritime intelligence analyst suggested that the strike may limit the BSF’s submarine operations and disrupt Russian submarine Kalibr missile launching operations.¹³

US-sanctioned, pro-Kremlin Moldovan politician Ilan Shor created the new pro-Russian Moldovan Victory electoral bloc on April 21, which plans to run a candidate in the October 20 Moldovan presidential election. Shor led a meeting of Moldovan opposition politicians in Moscow on April 21 and announced that the Shor Party, Revival Party, Chance Party, Alternative Forces of the Salvation of Moldova Party, and the Victoria Party will form the Victory electoral bloc.¹⁴ Shor stated that he will act as the chairperson of the bloc’s executive committee.¹⁵ Yevgenia Gutsul, the governor of Gagauzia, a pro-Russian autonomous region of Moldova, will act as the bloc’s executive secretary.¹⁶ Marina Tauber, a US-sanctioned Moldovan member of parliament and close Shor affiliate, will act as the secretary of the executive committee.¹⁷ Shor stated that the bloc aims to improve Moldova’s relations with Russia and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and advocate against Moldova’s accession into the European Union (EU).¹⁸ The bloc reportedly intends to run a candidate in the October 2024 Moldovan presidential elections and will announce their candidate soon.¹⁹ Shor, Gutsul, and Tauber notably do not meet the minimum age requirement to run for president in Moldova.²⁰

The Victory electoral bloc will likely allow the Kremlin to focus on a unified political effort in Moldova instead of maintaining relations with multiple pro-Russian Moldovan actors and parties, as it has done recently.²¹ The electoral bloc is likely intended to create the impression of widespread support in Moldova for pro-Russian policies and Shor himself, who continues to be the major conduit of Kremlin influence in Moldovan politics even though he lives in exile in Israel. Most of the parties that make up the new Victory electoral bloc are already extensively affiliated with Shor and do not possess widespread influence in the Moldovan political sphere. The Chance Party, previously known as the Ours Party, joined Shor’s “Chance. Duties. Realization.” (S.O.R.) electoral bloc in June 2023 after Moldovan authorities banned the Shor Party.²² Moldovan authorities barred the Chance Party from participating in local elections in November 2023, however.²³ The Alternative Forces of the Salvation of Moldova Party registered as a political party in March 2022 and later joined the S.O.R. electoral bloc in June 2023 but does not currently hold any seats in parliament.²⁴ The Victoria Party is a new party having only registered in late December 2023, and its head, Vadim Groza, was formerly a member of the Socialist Party and is the current mayor of Soldanesti (a city in northeastern Moldova).²⁵ The Revival Party is likely the most influential of the parties that make up the new Victory electoral bloc, but it currently only holds four seats in Moldova’s 101-seat parliament.²⁶ The Revival Party was largely defunct until two Moldovan politicians left the Socialist Party to join the Revival Party in May 2023 after meeting with Russian Liberal

Democratic Party (LDPR) Head Leonid Slutsky in Russia in March 2023 and with Shor in Israel in May 2023.²⁷ The Revival Party orchestrated a large-scale protest in Chisinau in February 2024 that called for Moldovan President Maia Sandu to step down.²⁸ The Moldovan Constitutional Court recently reversed a ruling that banned politicians who were previously members of the Shor Party from running in Moldovan elections, and ISW assessed at the time that the Kremlin would likely more directly exploit and promote Shor Party affiliates before the upcoming Moldovan presidential election.²⁹ The Kremlin is likely engaged in hybrid operations aimed at destabilizing Moldovan society, attacking Moldova's democratic government, and preventing Moldova's accession to the EU, as ISW has extensively reported.³⁰

The Russian and Chinese navies signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation on April 21 amid recent reports of China's increased support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Alexander Moiseev signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation with Chinese Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Hu Zhongming regarding naval search and rescue operations during Moiseev's visit to China.³¹ Moiseev and Hu also discussed Russian and Chinese naval cooperation, and Moiseev will participate in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium in Qingdao on April 22-23, where he will meet with China's and other unspecified countries' senior navy officials.³² Moiseev's visit to China notably precedes US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's travel to China from April 24 through April 26.³³

The Kremlin blocked domestic access to the website of the French non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF), depriving Russians of access to independent assessments of Russian freedom of speech and press. Independent Russian non-governmental organization Roskomsvoboda reported on April 21 that the RSF website was blocked in Russia alongside other resources that publish information about Russia's war in Ukraine.³⁴ Roskomsvoboda noted that the official Russian register of blocked sites did not include the federal agency responsible or the official reason for blocking RSF and assessed that the Russian Prosecutor General's Office was the likely responsible party.³⁵ RSF publishes an annual "Freedom Index," in which it scores and ranks 180 countries based on a quantitative analysis of abuses against media and qualitative analyses of journalists' answers to a survey that gauges five contextual indicators: political, economic, and sociopolitical contexts, legal framework, and safety. The Freedom Index ranked Russia between 148 and 150 out of 180 between 2015 and 2020 before sharply downgrading to 155 in 2022 and 164 in 2023 due to the 2022 censorship laws criminalizing "fake" or "discrediting" information about the Russian military, ongoing disinformation campaigns, and declaring almost all independent media organizations as "foreign agents" or "undesirable organizations" since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.³⁶ The Kremlin has been slowly increasing its physical and informational control over the Russian information space, including by arresting journalists and other opposition voices, implementing laws depriving certain media organizations and figures of their income, and forcing international telecommunications operators to comply with Russian data laws.³⁷ Blocking the RSF's site now deprives Russian citizens of a resource to evaluate the impact of such measures on freedom of speech and press in Russia.

Key Takeaways:

- **US Senate Intelligence Committee Chairperson Senator Mark Warner reported on April 21 that US provisions of military aid to Ukraine, including long-range ATACMS missiles, will be in transit to Ukraine "by the end of the week" if the Senate passes the supplemental appropriations bill on April 23 and US President Joe Biden signs it by April 24.**
- **Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated on April 21 that the swift delivery of US military aid to Ukraine could allow Ukrainian forces to stabilize the frontline and seize the initiative.**
- **Ukrainian forces struck and damaged the Russian Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) *Kommuna* submarine support ship – the world's oldest active-duty naval vessel – in occupied Sevastopol, Crimea on April 21.**

- **US-sanctioned, pro-Kremlin Moldovan politician Ilan Shor created the new pro-Russian Moldovan Victory electoral bloc on April 21, which plans to run a candidate in the October 20 Moldovan presidential election.**
- **The Victory electoral bloc will likely allow the Kremlin to focus on a unified political effort in Moldova instead of maintaining relations with multiple pro-Russian Moldovan actors and parties, as it has done recently.**
- **The Russian and Chinese navies signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation on April 21 amid recent reports of China's increased support for Russia's war in Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin blocked domestic access to the website of the French non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF), depriving Russians of access to independent assessments of Russian freedom of speech and press.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Kreminna and Avdiivka and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.**
- **Russian forces have increased their use of small, lightweight, off-road vehicles along the frontline.**

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

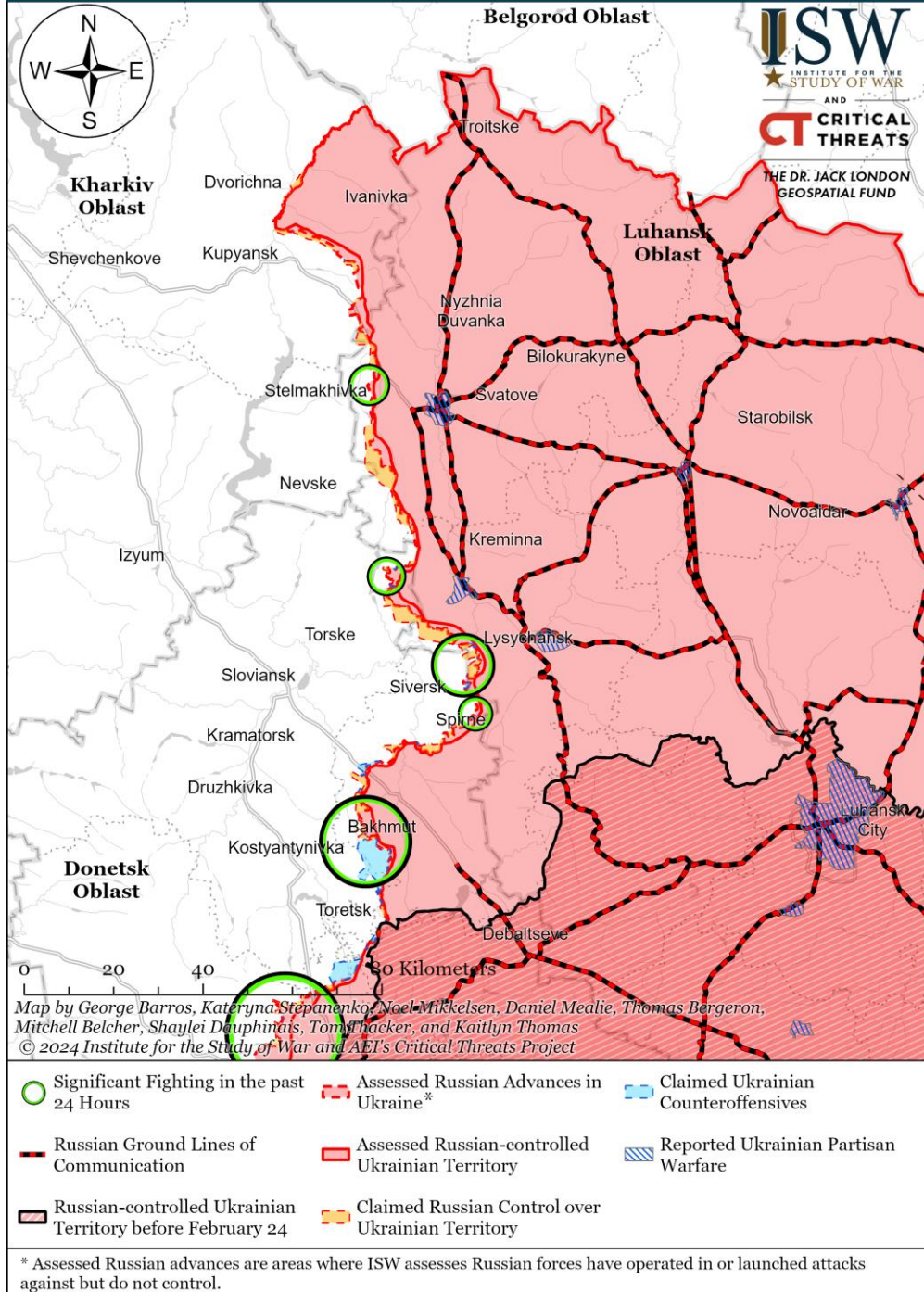
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Air, Missile, and Drone Campaign
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Russian Technological Adaptations
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas
- Ukrainian Defense Industrial Base Efforts
- Russian Information Operations and Narratives
- Significant Activity in Belarus

Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

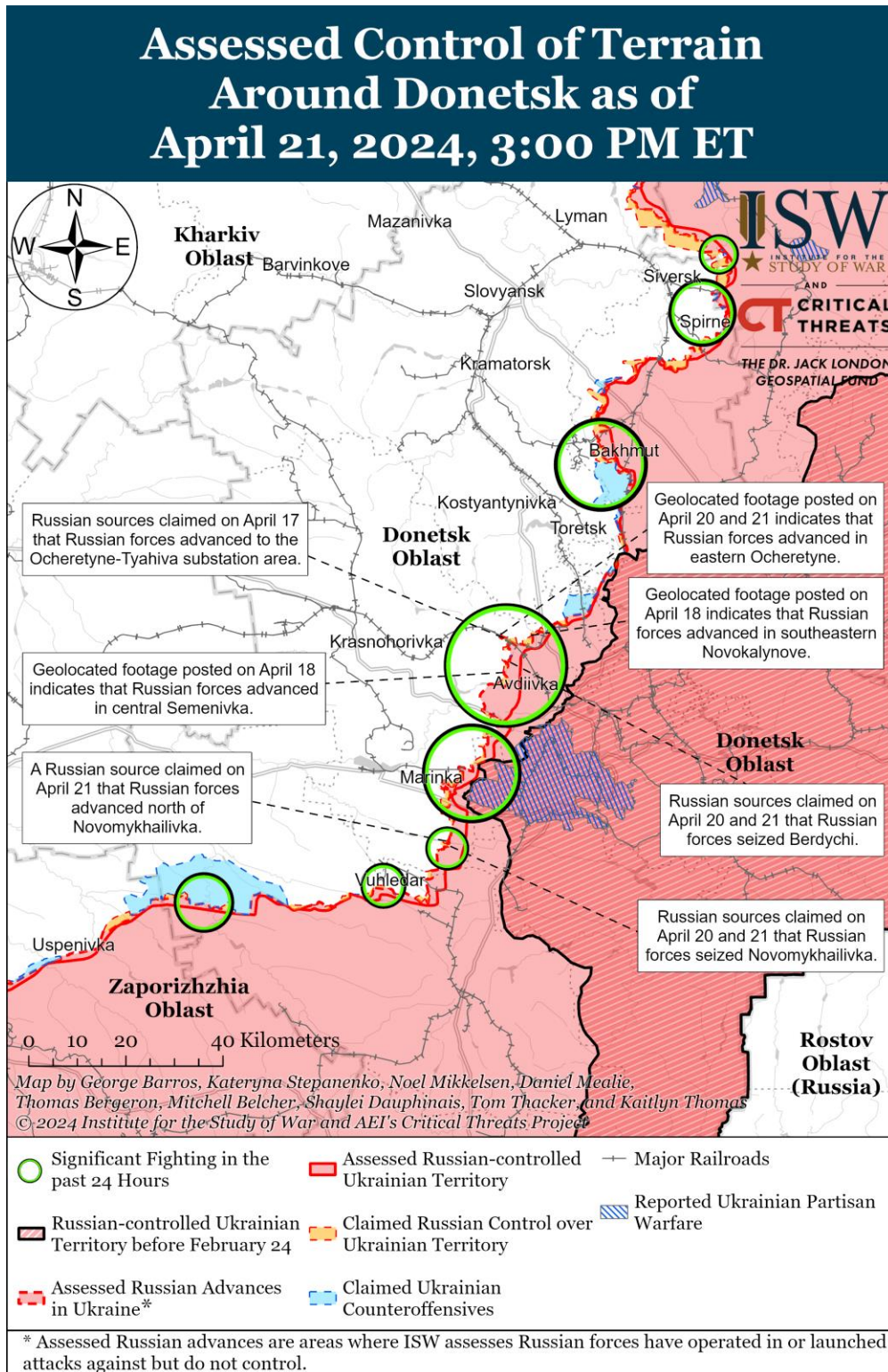
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces recently marginally advanced west of Kreminna amid continued positional fighting on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on April 21. Geolocated footage published on April 19 shows that Russian forces marginally advanced east of Yampolivka (west of Kreminna).³⁸ Positional fighting continued northwest of Svatove near Stelmakhivka; west of Kreminna near Terny; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.³⁹ Elements of the Russian 1st Guards Tank Army (Moscow Military District [MMD]) reportedly continue operating in the Kupyansk direction, and elements of the Russian 2nd Artillery Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) reportedly operate near Bilohorivka.⁴⁰

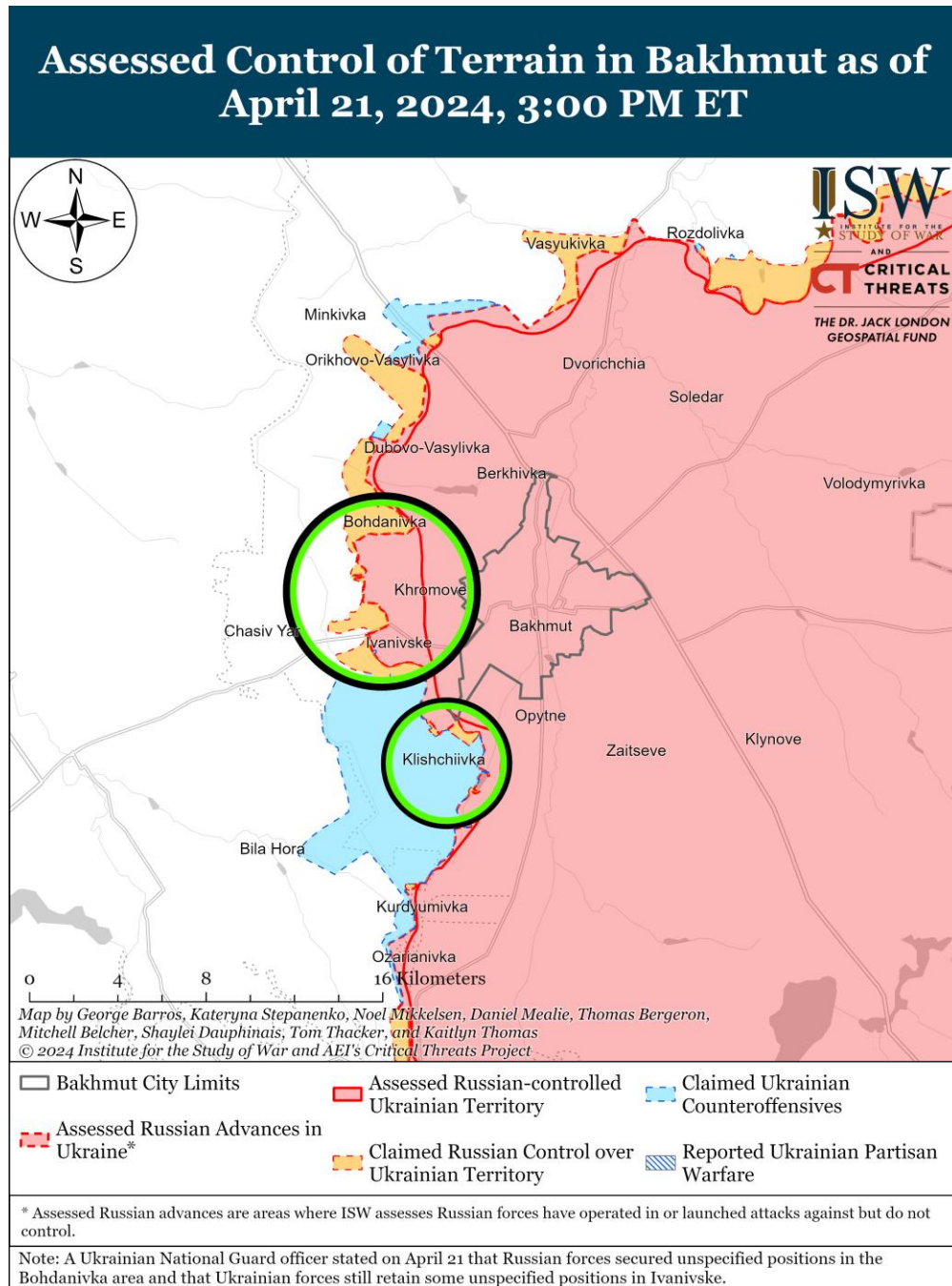
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of April 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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



Russian forces continued to attack in the Siversk (northeast of Bakhmut) direction on April 21 but did not make any confirmed advances. Ukrainian military sources reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked east of Siversk near Verkhokamyanske and southeast of Siversk near Spirne.⁴¹ Elements of the Russian 2nd Artillery Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic [LNR] Army Corps [AC]) reportedly continue to operate near Spirne, and elements of the Russian 106th Guards Airborne (VDV) Division reportedly continue to operate in the Siversk direction.⁴²

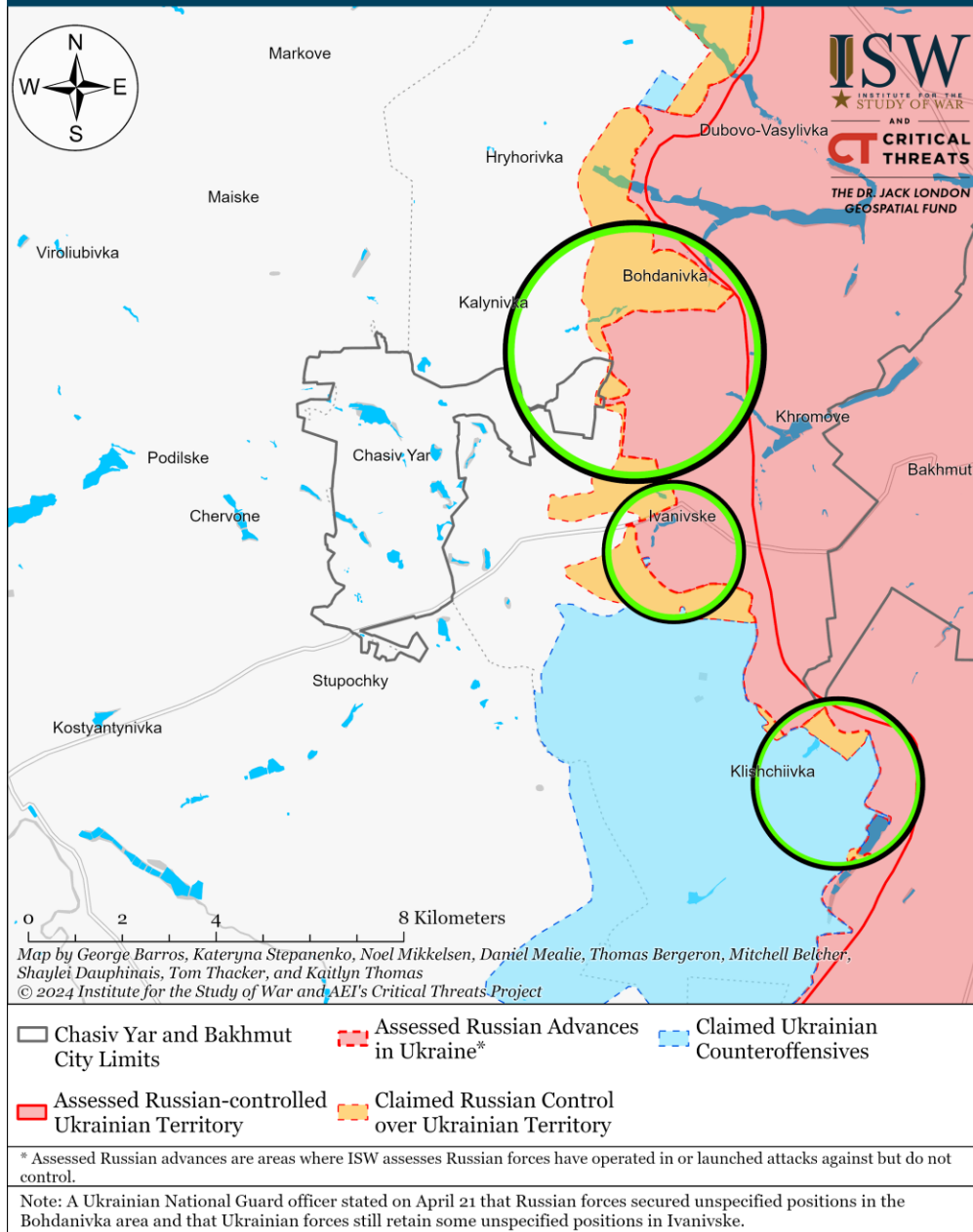


The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on April 21 that elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces seized Bohdanivka (northeast of Chasiv Yar), but ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming this claim.⁴³ A prominent Russian milblogger similarly claimed that Ukrainian forces recently withdrew from their

remaining positions in the southwestern part of Bohdanivka but did not provide visual evidence to confirm this claim.⁴⁴ A Russian VDV-affiliated source claimed that Ukrainian forces still control dominant tactical heights north and northwest of Bohdanivka, and that the frontline situation is complex in the area.⁴⁵ A Ukrainian National Guard officer stated on April 21 that Russian forces managed to secure positions in the Bohdanivka area, where they transferred significant materiel and established well-prepared defensive positions.⁴⁶ The Ukrainian National Guard officer did not specify if Russian forces control Bohdanivka and assessed that Russian forces may attempt to use Bohdanivka to surround Chasiv Yar from the north and to seize Ivanivske (southeast of Chasiv Yar) to threaten Chasiv Yar from the south.

Russian forces continued to attack Chasiv Yar and the surrounding area on April 21 but did not advance. Positional battles continued near Chasiv Yar, including near the Novyi and Kanal Microraions; northeast of Chasiv Yar near Bohdanivka; southeast of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske, Klishchiivka, and Shumy; and south of Chasiv Yar near Pivdenne, Niu York, and Oleksandropil.⁴⁷ Ukrainian military officials reported that Russian forces have not entered Chasiv Yar itself, and Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated that Russian forces actively use combat vehicles, aviation, and infantry to attack in the Bakhmut direction.⁴⁸ The Ukrainian National Guard officer observed that Ukrainian forces can still defend Chasiv Yar itself, unlike its eastern outskirts that have been “long uninhabited and unfit for defense” as they were “practically destroyed a year ago” and do not have strong fortifications.⁴⁹ The Ukrainian National Guard officer added that Russian forces do not fully control Ivanivske and are attempting to advance through the lowlands north of Ivanivske. The Ukrainian National Guard officer implied that although Ukrainian forces can observe slow Russian advances through the lowlands north of Ivanivske towards Chasiv Yar, Ukrainian forces are unable to exploit Russian vulnerabilities because Ukrainian forces are preoccupied with constant Russian airstrikes and frontal assaults. The Ukrainian National Guard officer assessed that Russian forces are using glide bombs, artillery, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) before launching ground assaults on Chasiv Yar to set favorable assault conditions by destroying Ukrainian shelters and defensive positions. The Ukrainian National Guard officer added that the Russian military command is serious about seizing Chasiv Yar because Russian forces have successfully trained new mobilized personnel, transferred the most combat-ready units to the Chasiv Yar direction, and are constantly forming reserves to replace heavy losses sustained in assaults on the settlement. The Ukrainian National Guard officer added that Russian VDV elements are leading the assaults on Chasiv Yar, and Russian milbloggers have consistently indicated that elements of the Russian 98th VDV Division are operating near Chasiv Yar.⁵⁰ Elements of the Russian 58th Spetsnaz Battalion (1st Donetsk People’s Republic [DNR] AC) are also reportedly operating in the Chasiv Yar direction.⁵¹

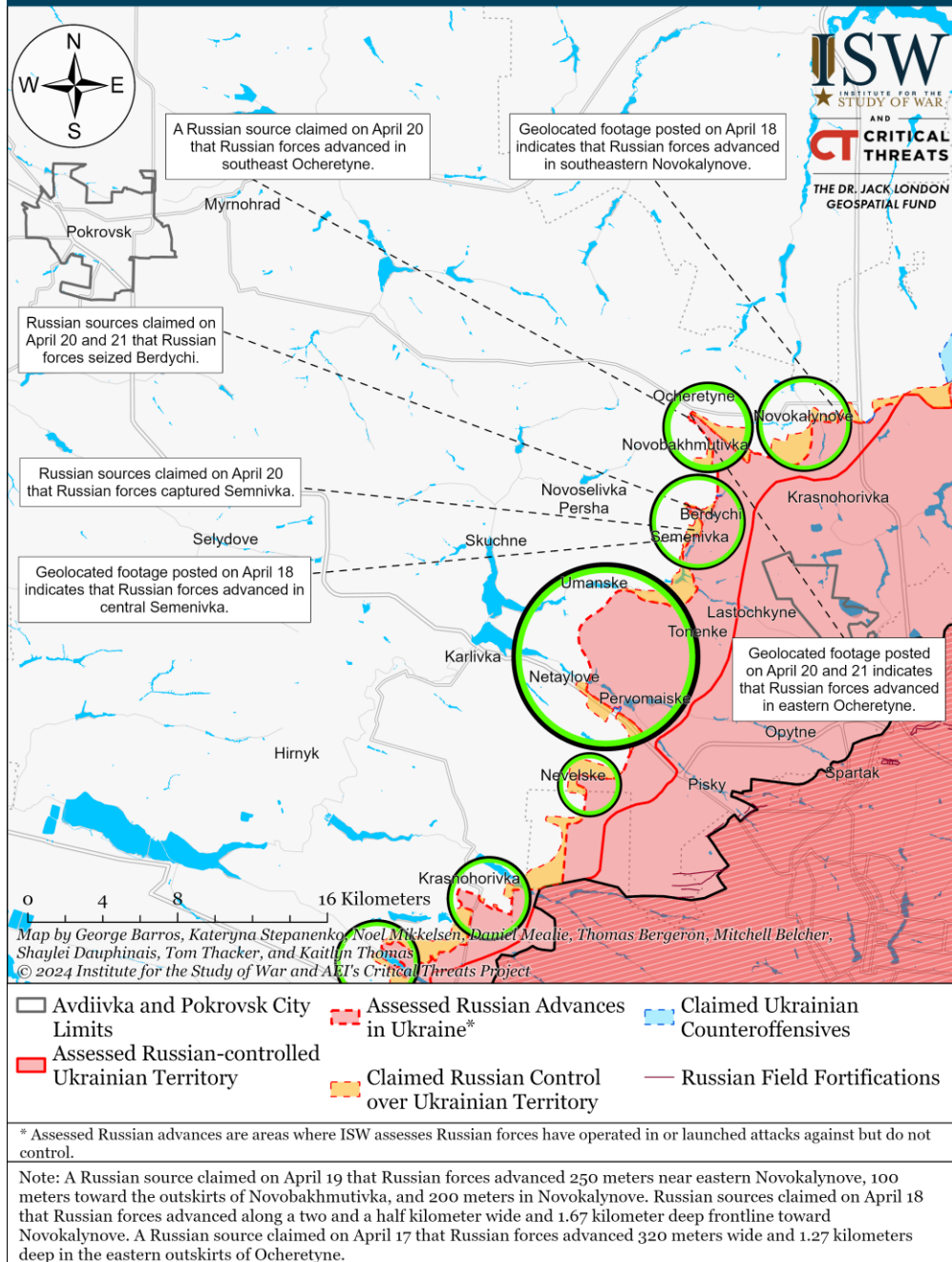
Assessed Control of Terrain near Chasiv Yar as of April 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently marginally advanced in eastern Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka). Geolocated footage published on April 20 and April 21 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced in eastern Ocheretyne, and Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces advanced in southeastern Ocheretyne.⁵² Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces seized Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka), but ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming this claim.⁵³ Positional battles continued northwest of Avdiivka near Ocheretyne, Berdychi, Novokalynove, and Novobakhmutivka; west of Avdiivka near Umanske, Yasnobrodivka, and Semenivka; and southwest of Avdiivka near Pervomaiske, Netaylove, and Nevelske.⁵⁴ A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces are conducting an “operational pause” (likely referring to a tactical pause)

near the Domakha gully on the Pervomaiske-Nevelske line likely due to “difficult” Ukrainian minefields and Ukrainian drone operations in the area.⁵⁵ Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets assessed that the Russian military command is attempting to sustain the tempo of offensive operations in this direction and is re-deploying elements of the 41st Combined Arms Army [CAA], (Central Military District [CMD]) to the area after removing them from combat to restore combat capability.⁵⁶ Mashovets noted that elements of the Russian 35th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA) redeployed to reinforce elements of the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd CAA, CMD) and 132nd Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC), which are already fighting in the Novokalynove direction as part of efforts to seize Novobakhmutivka and Ocheretyne. Mashovets added that Russian forces also committed elements of the 74th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA) near Berdychi. Mashovets noted that the Russian Central Grouping of Forces, which operates in the Pokrovsk and Toretsk directions (northwest and northeast of Avdiivka), has over 86,000 personnel, no more than 280 tanks, no less than 760 armored vehicles, and around 1,100 tube and rocket artillery systems.⁵⁷ ISW cannot independently verify these estimates.

Assessed Control of Terrain Northwest of Avdiivka as of April 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

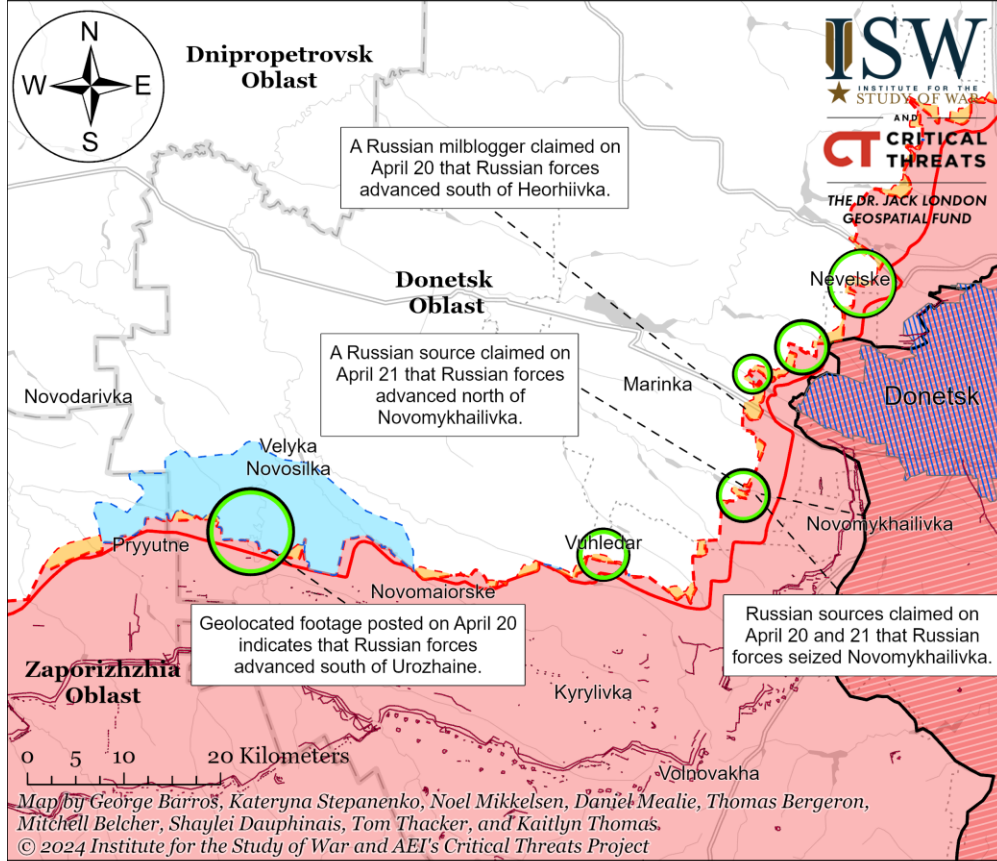


Some Russian sources claimed that Russian forces captured Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City) amid continued positional fighting west and southwest of Donetsk City on April 21. Russian milbloggers widely claimed on April 20 and 21 that elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) and the BARS-22 “Tigr” Volunteer Detachment (Russian Combat Army Reserve) completed the seizure of Novomykhailivka and amplified footage of Russian forces allegedly raising a flag on the western outskirts of the village.⁵⁸ A prominent Russian milblogger claimed on April 20 and 21, however, that Russian forces have not yet

completely seized Novomykhailivka and still need to advance in the western and southern outskirts of the settlement.⁵⁹ The milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced further west into Novomykhailivka than previously observed and claimed that Russian forces captured the Mashinostroitel community garden immediately north of the settlement. ISW has not observed visual evidence confirming the claimed seizure of Novomykhailivka. Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced westward along a section of the Solodke-Vodyane road (southwest of Donetsk City), but ISW has also not observed visual evidence of Russian advances in this area.⁶⁰ Positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Vodyane (northeast of Vuhledar).⁶¹ Elements of the Russian 40th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet), 57th Motorized Rifle Regiment (6th Motorized Rifle Division, 3rd AC, Moscow Military District [MMD]); 1472nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (68th AC, Eastern Military District [EMD]); and 39th Motorized Rifle Brigade (68th AC) are reportedly fighting for Novomykhailivka.⁶²

Russian forces recently marginally advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area amid continued positional fighting on April 21. Geolocated footage published on April 20 shows that Russian dismounted infantry seized a building south of Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka).⁶³ A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces captured up to one square kilometer of ground near Urozhaine, but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of a one-kilometer advance.⁶⁴ Another milblogger claimed that Russian forces are conducting limited assaults to gauge Ukrainian defenses near Urozhaine.⁶⁵ Positional fighting also continued near Staromayorske (south of Velyka Novosilka).⁶⁶ Elements of the Russian 36th CAA (EMD) reportedly continue to conduct TOS-1A thermobaric artillery strikes against Ukrainian positions in the south Donetsk direction.⁶⁷

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of April 21, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barroš, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Shaylei Dauphinais, Tom Thacker, and Kaitlyn Thomas.
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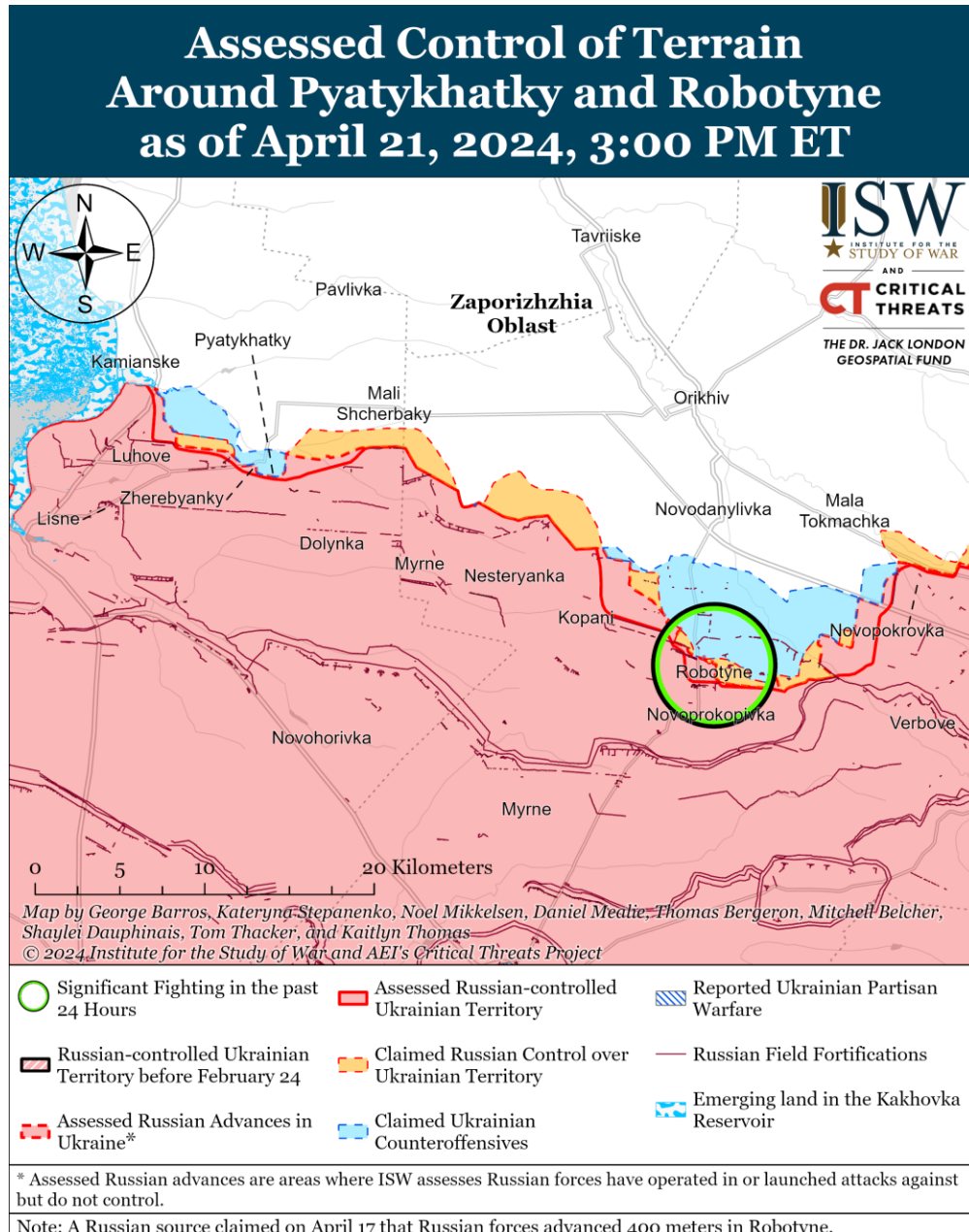
Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24	Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory	Russian Field Fortifications
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives	

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

Note: A Russian source claimed on April 21 that Russian forces advanced 1.3 kilometers deep and 1.2 kilometers wide near Novomykhailivka. A Russian source claimed on April 17 that Russian forces advanced 1.95 kilometers wide and 850 meters deep near Krasnohorivka.

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

Positional engagements continued near Robotyne in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on April 21, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area.⁶⁸ Elements of the Russian 56th and 108th airborne (VDV) regiments (7th VDV Division) are reportedly operating in the Zaporizhzhia direction.⁶⁹



Positional engagements continued near Krynky in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on April 21.⁷⁰ Elements of the Russian "Dnepr" Cossack Volunteer Brigade are reportedly operating near the Kinburn Spit in Mykolaiv Oblast.⁷¹



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

Russian forces continued missile strikes against Ukraine during the day on April 21. Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces fired an unspecified missile at Zaporizhzhia City and unspecified ballistic missiles at port and logistics infrastructure in Odesa City and Odesa Oblast during the day on April 21.⁷² The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two Kh-59 missiles during the day.⁷³

Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Ilya Yevlash stated that Russian forces are currently intensifying strikes to take advantage of Ukraine's air defense shortages before Ukraine receives critical military assistance from the US and other Western partners.⁷⁴ Yevlash stated that Russia has accumulated a large stockpile of some unspecified missiles while Russian forces strike Ukraine with other newly produced unspecified missiles. Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Deputy Chief Major General Vadym Skibitskyi stated on April 2 that Russian forces will likely temporarily pause strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in order to replenish low missile stockpiles.⁷⁵ Skibitskyi stated that Russian forces had about 950 high-precision operational-strategic and strategic-level missiles with a range of or exceeding 350 kilometers as of April 2 and that Russia aims to prevent this stockpile from falling below 900 missiles.⁷⁶

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

Russian forces have increased their use of small and lightweight off-road vehicles along the frontline. Ukrainian military analyst Petro Chernyk stated on April 21 that the Russian military has been using small two- and four-seat buggies to transport Russian military personnel to the frontline to make up for a shortage of military transport vehicles.⁷⁷ Chernyk noted that international sanctions are limiting Russia's ability to manufacture battery parts for military transport vehicles. Ukrainian National Guard Spokesperson Ruslan Muzychuk stated on April 16 that there is plenty of footage showing Russian forces using small vehicles to transport infantry to assaults because the vehicles allow Russian forces to quickly transport infantry to favorable positions, setting conditions for the next echelon of Russian infantry to secure the position.⁷⁸ Muzychuk noted that these small vehicles offer little protection for Russian infantry, however, and footage published in recent weeks shows Ukrainian forces extensively targeting small vehicles transporting infantry and supplies with first-person view (FPV) drones.⁷⁹ Ukrainian sources also amplified drone footage showing Russian forces using vehicles similar to golf carts to transport infantry to the battlefield.⁸⁰

The Russian military is reportedly advertising increased salaries in occupied Ukraine in an effort to coerce Ukrainian civilians to sign voluntary military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), likely as part of ongoing crypto-mobilization efforts. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the Russian military is offering a salary of at least 500,000 rubles (\$5,325) per month to civilians in occupied Ukraine who sign Russian military contracts for volunteer service.⁸¹ *Bloomberg* recently reported that Russian regional one-time payments for signing a contract have increased by 40 percent to an average of 470,000 rubles (\$4,992), and a Russian insider source claimed that some Russian authorities are offering one million rubles (\$10,622) for people to sign military contracts.⁸² Russian authorities may be concerned about decreasing recruitment rates and are attempting to mitigate low recruitment with increased economic incentives, particularly targeting occupied areas of Ukraine. Russia's occupation has severely degraded the economies and infrastructure of occupied Ukraine, so mobilization efforts in these areas are targeting especially vulnerable populations.

Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk stated on April 21 that Russian forces in occupied Crimea have trained dolphins to push potential "underwater saboteurs" (likely meaning special forces divers) to the surface.⁸³ ISW has previously observed reports that Russian forces are using trained dolphins to defend naval bases in Crimea against special forces divers.⁸⁴

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

Russian defense industrial base (DIB) enterprise Kalashnikov Concern presented the new “Kolizyey-RU” drone at the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School in Ryazan City on April 19.⁸⁵ The Kolizyey-RU drone is a multipurpose hexacopter, which reportedly can conduct reconnaissance operations during the day and at night, deliver cargo, and perform other unspecified tasks.

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

Kremlin officials and Russian milbloggers responded to the US House of Representatives passing the supplementary appropriations bill on the provision of assistance to Ukraine on April 20 by promoting narratives intended to deter American policymakers from finalizing the aid and to degrade Western and Ukrainian expectations about the impact of the aid on the battlefield. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the US aid will be harmful for Ukrainians and baselessly alleged that the US is a “direct sponsor” of terrorism.⁸⁶ Peskov also attempted to discourage the US from seizing frozen Russian assets with claims that this will damage America’s reputation, and a prominent Russian milblogger expressed concerns that the US seizure of frozen Russian assets will encourage the European Union (EU) to undertake similar measures.⁸⁷ Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev promoted the longstanding Kremlin narrative that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people” to claim that US aid will continue the “civil war” between Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine.⁸⁸ The Kremlin consistently uses this narrative to falsely portray its invasion of Ukraine as a regional conflict and to deliberately misrepresent all Western aid provisions as efforts to prolong the war.⁸⁹ Medvedev also explicitly emphasized that he wishes that a civil war would break out in the US to “collapse” the US government. Several Russian milbloggers also aimed to paint the aid as futile, while some noted that Western military aid to Ukraine is bound to significantly impact the frontline situation.⁹⁰ ISW assessed on April 20 that Russian officials will likely intensify information operations aimed at weakening US and Western support for Ukraine and promoting Western self-deterrence in the wake of the US House of Representatives passing the aid bill for Ukraine.⁹¹

Zakharova denied that Russia artificially created a migrant crisis on the Russian-Finnish border in late 2023 as part of its hybrid operations.⁹² Zakharova claimed that Western statements about the migrant crisis are “unfounded” and provocative. ISW assessed that Russia created a migrant crisis on the Finnish border in late 2023 by funneling migrants to the Russian-Finnish border as a hybrid warfare tactic meant to destabilize NATO and the EU.⁹³

The Kremlin is re-injecting its longstanding false narratives about “neo-Nazism” in Ukraine on state media channels that specifically target international audiences, likely as part of Russian efforts to convince Western decisionmakers to self-deter and not provide military assistance to Ukraine. The Russian MFA stated that Russian state media outlet *RT* will air a “documentary” about Nazis in Ukraine during the Second World War and in contemporary Ukraine.⁹⁴

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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⁹⁰ <https://t.me/rybar/59344> ; https://t.me/boris_rozhin/120864 ; <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/66567> ;

<https://t.me/RVvoenkor/66569> <https://t.me/sashakots/46214>

⁹¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-20-2024>

⁹² https://t.me/MID_Russia/38884

⁹³ <https://isw.pub/UkrWar120623> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar112923>

⁹⁴ https://t.me/MID_Russia/38891