



Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 4, 2024

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April 4, 2024, 6:35pm 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 4 ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 5 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov claimed that NATO and Russia are in “direct confrontation,” likely as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to intensify existing information operations meant to force the West into self-deterrence. Peskov claimed on April 4 that relations between Russia and NATO have “slipped to the level of direct confrontation” and that NATO is “already involved in the conflict surrounding Ukraine.”[1] Peskov accused NATO of moving towards Russia’s borders, likely referencing Finland and Sweden’s recent accessions to the alliance, and claimed that NATO is expanding its military infrastructure closer to Russia. Russian officials have long attempted to frame NATO and the West as an existential threat to Russia as part of the Kremlin’s justifications for its war in Ukraine.[2] Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed on March 18 that a full-scale war between NATO and Russia is undesirable but possible.[3] Peskov’s repeated claims that NATO and Russia are already in “direct confrontation” represents an intensification of this ongoing narrative but is likely still part of Russia’s reflexive control campaign that uses threatening language to delay and influence important decisions regarding Western support for Ukraine.[4] This Kremlin narrative is also likely an attempt to pose NATO’s defensive activity in response to Russia’s outright aggression as provocative.[5] ISW continues to assess that Russia has been preparing for a potential conventional war with NATO, including through ongoing conventional military reforms and by recreating the Leningrad Military District (LMD) and Moscow Military District (MMD) in western Russia.[6] Russian officials have accused NATO of giving Russia a reason to reconstitute the LMD directly on the border with Finland.[7]

Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov appealed to Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) members to increase cooperation against perceived Western threats as part of the effort to posture against the West. Gerasimov claimed on April 4 at a meeting of the chiefs of the general staffs of CIS member states that CIS countries are currently facing “increasingly real and diverse challenges, which requires [them] to have well-equipped and well-trained armed forces” as the West consistently destroys the “fundamental foundations of strategic stability and international security institutions.”[8] Gerasimov also reiterated false Russian accusations that the West sponsors international terrorism. Gerasimov called on the chiefs of general staff of CIS members to analyze the military-political situation developing in the world and on CIS members’ borders, develop integrated military systems, conduct combat training using member states’ combat experience, and increase multilateral military cooperation. Gerasimov is attempting to frame the West as a wider security threat to the CIS countries to portray Russia as

the leader of an imagined coalition of countries that oppose the collective West. Russia has routinely attempted to posture against the West by casting Russia as the leader of the “world majority,” a group of countries including post-Soviet and non-Western states that Russia intends to rally to oppose the West.[9] CIS countries’ governments apart from Belarus have not expressed open support for Russia’s war in Ukraine and have not recognized Russia’s illegal annexation of occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts in September 2022, although Russia likely uses commerce through CIS countries to evade international sanctions.[10]

The Kremlin leveraged this overall information operation about escalation with NATO to target France specifically, following French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent calls for the West to expand the level and types of security assistance it sends to Ukraine. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu held a phone conversation on April 4, reportedly their first contact since October 2022.[11] Shoigu threatened that the potential deployment of French troops to Ukraine would “create problems for France itself” in response to French President Emmanuel Macron’s March 16 statement that “perhaps at some point” it would be necessary for French troops to operate in Ukraine. Shoigu’s call with Lecornu is likely an attempt to directly influence recent French calls for Europe and the West to provide more military aid and other support to Ukraine. Shoigu likely attempted to single out France since Macron initiated the ongoing conversation about the West removing self-imposed constraints on its support for Ukraine. Shoigu is also likely attempting to deter future attempts from any Western states to increase military aid to Ukraine and intensify support for Ukraine by forcing Western leaders to self-deter out of fear of Russian retaliation. Shoigu had similar calls with senior US, UK, French, and Turkish officials in October 2022 in which he promoted Kremlin information operations threatening nuclear escalation in a likely attempt to deter the West from providing tanks to Ukraine.[12] Shoigu also claimed that he and Lecornu noted a “readiness for dialogue on Ukraine” that could resemble the Russian-Ukrainian peace negotiations that occurred in Istanbul in April 2022, although a French government source told *Reuters* that “at no moment did [France] show any willingness to dialogue on Ukraine or negotiations.”[13] Shoigu’s attempts to threaten France and deter continued Western support for Ukraine while feigning interest in peace negotiations are part of a wider Russian information operation aimed at convincing Western countries to push Ukraine into unfavorable and unequal negotiations on Russia’s terms.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also promoted information operations feigning interest in negotiations, and Lavrov’s and Shoigu’s likely coordinated informational efforts may signal a new round of intensified Russian rhetoric about negotiations.[14] Lavrov used a meeting of dozens of foreign ambassadors from non-Western states to denounce Ukraine’s “peace formula” while claiming that Russia is ready to negotiate on terms favorable to the Kremlin. Lavrov spoke at a “round table” of more than 70 foreign ambassadors at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Diplomatic Academy on April 4 and reiterated several boilerplate narratives claiming that Ukraine was responsible for starting the war in 2014 and about Ukraine’s alleged involvement in the recent terrorist attack in Moscow. Lavrov also used the ambassadorial meeting to criticize Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s “peace formula” and urge the countries present to not support it. Lavrov told journalists following the meeting that Russia thinks it is “not necessary to talk with Zelensky” but that Russia should negotiate instead with the West.[15] Lavrov claimed that the West, however, is not ready for negotiations. Lavrov also claimed that the current situation on the battlefield has created “new realities” and that Russia is ready for “honest talks based on these new realities and on Russia’s security interests.”[16] Russian officials have repeatedly falsely blamed Ukraine and the West for the lack of peace negotiations, despite numerous public Russian statements suggesting or explicitly stating that Russia is not interested in good-faith negotiations with Ukraine.[17] ISW continues to assess that Russia’s maximalist objectives – which are tantamount to full Ukrainian and Western surrender – remain unchanged and that any Russian statements suggesting that Russia is interested in peace negotiations are very likely efforts to force the West to make concessions on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.[18]

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues attempts to balance the Kremlin’s opposing efforts to set social expectations for a protracted Russian war effort and to assuage Russian society’s concerns about the economic consequences of the war and labor migration. Putin stated during a speech at the 12th Congress of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia in Moscow on April 4 that Russia will experience a high demand for human capital and face labor shortages in the coming years.[19] Putin stated that Russia’s future labor shortage is “absolutely certain” and that it is “critically important” for Russia to increase labor productivity and modernize and automate various economic sectors, such as industrial production, service industries, and the agro-industrial sphere. Putin stated that Russia does not “have much of a choice: either [Russia] needs to import labor from abroad or [Russia] needs to increase labor productivity.” Putin appears to be telling Russia’s xenophobic ultra-nationalist community that Russia must continue to rely on migration to address Russia’s labor shortages, likely to signal to Russian ultranationalist constituents to stop their calls for anti-migrant policies, especially in the wake of the March 22 Crocus City Hall terror attack.[20] ISW previously assessed that anti-migrant policies could worsen Russian labor shortages and degrade Russia’s crypto-mobilization efforts and that Russian authorities are unlikely to fully give into ultranationalist xenophobic demands to drastically reduce – if not eliminate – immigration to Russia at the expense of Russia’s war effort and economic needs.[21]

Putin also claimed that Russia has not transferred its economy to a wartime footing and that Russia’s economy is instead “quite balanced” and fulfilling all social guarantees.[22] Putin did note that the Russian government is concentrating its efforts and administrative and financial resources on developing Russia’s defense industry, however. Putin’s suggestions that the Russian economy either is or is not on a wartime footing depending on the constituency he is addressing is a false binary as Russia has been gradually but effectively mobilizing its defense industry to support its invasion of Ukraine over the past several years.[23] Russia is currently allocating roughly a third or more of its annual federal budget to defense spending, and Polish President Andrzej Duda warned on March 20, citing unspecified German research, that Putin is intensifying efforts to shift Russia to a war economy with the intention of being able to attack NATO as early as 2026 or 2027.[24] The Kremlin has not, and likely cannot, rapidly transition the Russian economy to total economic mobilization as the Soviet Union did during the Great Patriotic War (Second World War), although the Kremlin consistently appeals to the mythos of the Great Patriotic War to suggest that Russia is capable of such an effort.[25] Putin invoked the idea of a wider Russian social and economic mobilization reminiscent of that of the Soviet Union’s total mobilization during a speech to Russian workers on February 2 and may have been gauging domestic reactions to a wider economic or military mobilization.[26] Putin’s claim of a peacetime Russian economy is part of a wider pattern wherein the Kremlin oscillates between appeals to a wider economic mobilization to support its war effort on the one hand and appeals to domestic economic stability to cater to an increasingly apathetic domestic populace on the other hand. The Kremlin’s routine invocations of a wider economic mobilization likely aim to shore up domestic support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and create fear within the West of the Kremlin’s ability to bring to bear a significant amount of materiel in Ukraine.[27] The Kremlin’s efforts to reassure Russian citizens about Russia’s economic and social stability likely aim to avoid generating public discontent over the prospect of future economic disruptions.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- **Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov claimed that NATO and Russia are in “direct confrontation,” likely as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to intensify existing information operations meant to force the West into self-deterrence.**
- **Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov appealed to Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) members to increase cooperation against perceived Western threats as part of the effort to posture against the West.**
- **The Kremlin leveraged this overall information operation about escalation with NATO to target France specifically, following French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent calls for the West to expand the level and types of security assistance it sends to Ukraine.**

- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also promoted information operations feigning interest in negotiations, and Lavrov's and Shoigu's likely coordinated informational efforts may signal a new round of intensified Russian rhetoric about negotiations.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin continues attempts to balance the Kremlin's opposing efforts to set social expectations for a protracted Russian war effort and to assuage Russian society's concerns about the economic consequences of the war and labor migration.**
- **Russian forces conducted a roughly reinforced company-sized mechanized assault towards Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut) on April 4 and advanced up to the eastern outskirts of the settlement.**
- **Russian forces also recently made confirmed advances near Bakhmut and Donetsk City.**
- **An unspecified senior NATO official reportedly told Russian opposition news outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* that NATO intelligence agencies have not observed indications that Russia is preparing for a large-scale partial mobilization wave.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 4, 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.

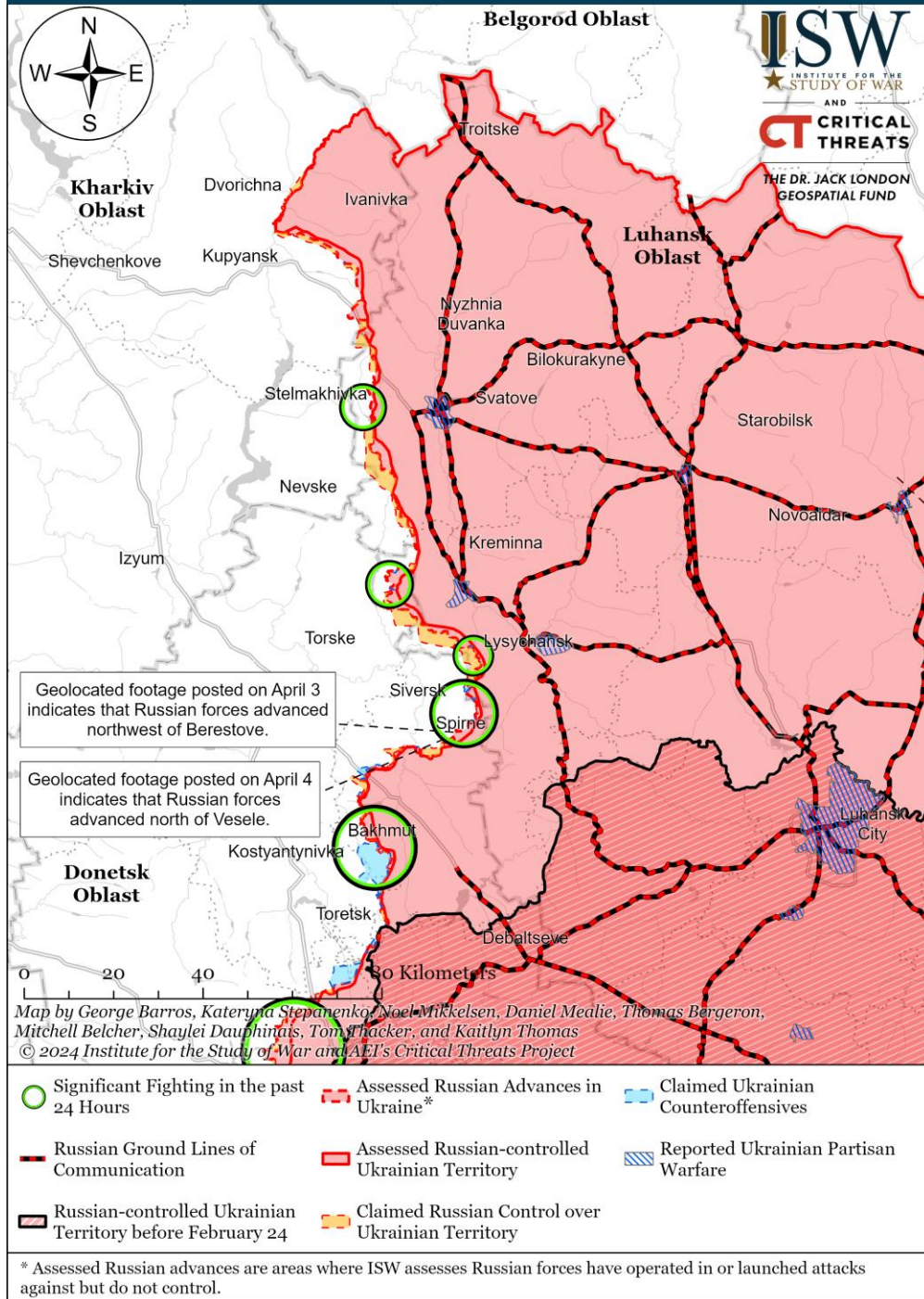
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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 4, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Ukrainian and Russian sources stated that positional engagements continued west of Svatove near Andriivka; west of Kreminna near Yampolivka and Terny; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka.[29] Select Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces entered Terny and that fighting is ongoing on the settlement’s southeastern outskirts, but one of these Russian milbloggers later claimed that these claims are unreliable and that Russian forces have not yet reached the settlement.[30] A Russian source claimed that highly developed Ukrainian aerial reconnaissance capabilities are complicating Russian offensive operations in the Lyman direction.[31]

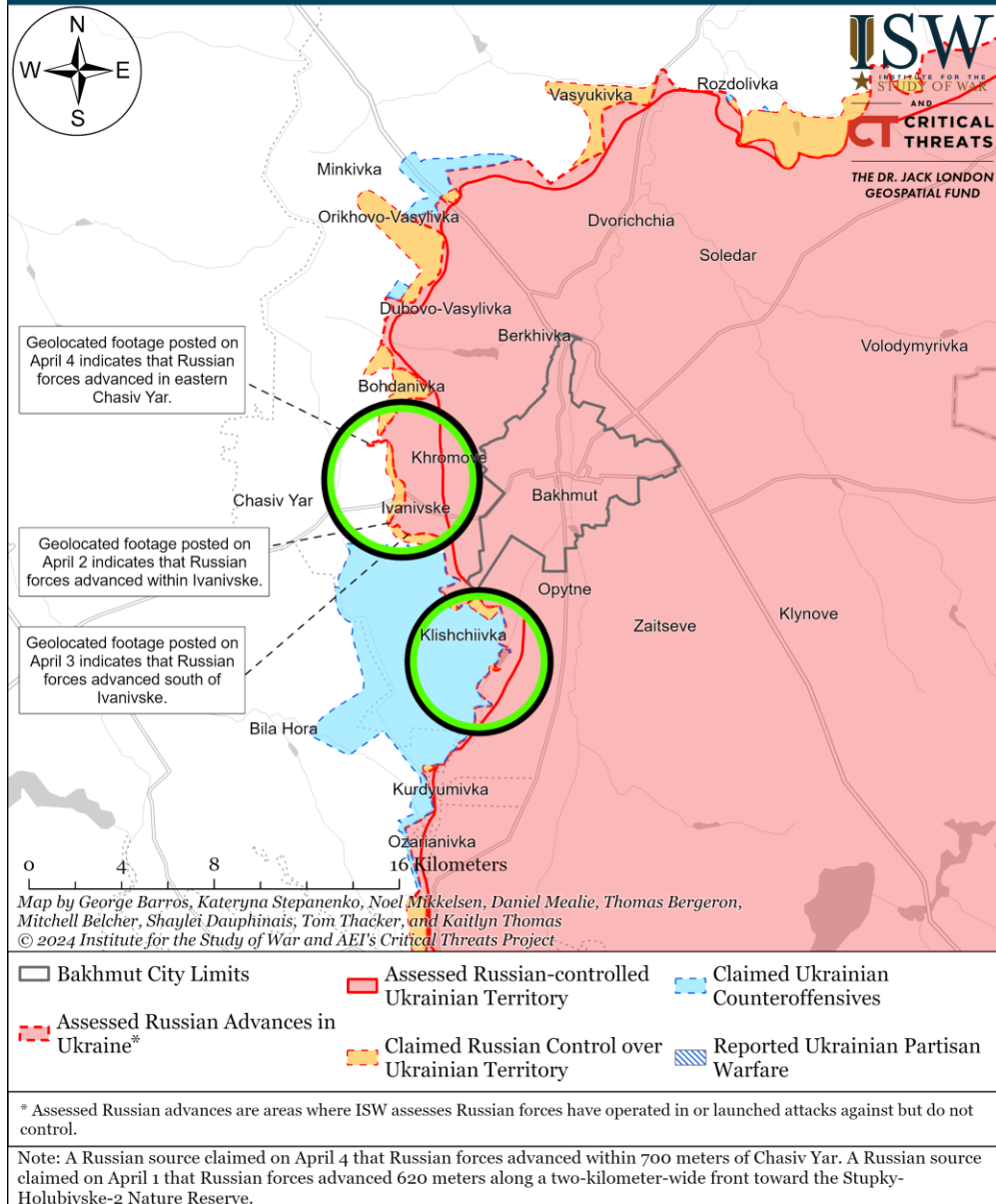
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of April 4, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

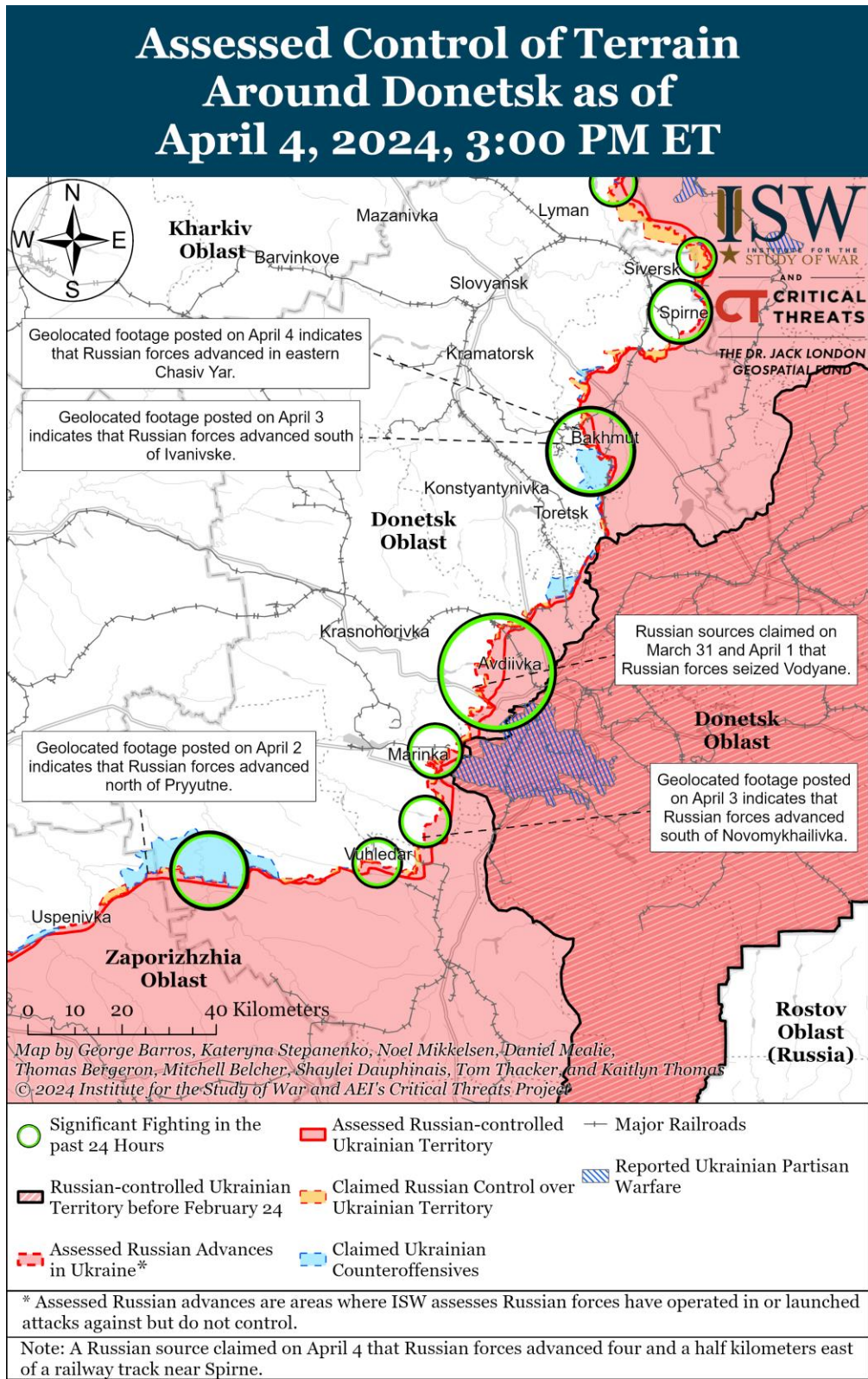
Russian forces conducted a roughly reinforced company-sized mechanized assault towards Chasiv Yar (west of Bakhmut) on April 4 and advanced up to the eastern outskirts of the settlement. Geolocated footage published on April 4 shows Russian forces conducting a roughly reinforced company-sized mechanized assault against Chasiv Yar.[32] The footage indicates that the Russian mechanized column advanced along a section of the T-0506 (Khromove-Chasiv Yar) highway to the eastern outskirts of the Kanal micro-district (the easternmost part of Chasiv Yar) before Ukrainian forces prevented Russian forces from making further advances into Chasiv Yar.[33] A Ukrainian soldier stated that Ukrainian forces destroyed 11 out of the 25 Russian armored vehicles that participated in the mechanized assault, although Ukrainian officials have yet to provide more details on the assault.[34] Russian forces are currently increasing the tempo and size of their mechanized assaults throughout eastern Ukraine and may be intensifying the overall tempo of their offensive operations in Ukraine.[35] Russian forces conducted a battalion-sized mechanized assault near Tonenke (west of Avdiivka) around March 30 and a roughly reinforced platoon-sized mechanized assault near Terny (west of Kreminna) around April 3, and the size of these recent mechanized assaults may indicate that the Russian military is currently prioritizing offensive operations in the order of the Avdiivka, Bakhmut, and Lyman directions[36]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of April 4, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Russian forces recently advanced elsewhere northeast and west of Bakhmut amid continued positional fighting in the area. Geolocated footage published on April 4 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced north of Vesele (northeast of Bakhmut).[37] Geolocated footage published on April 3 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced northwest of Berestove (northeast of Bakhmut) and also seized a large portion of southern Ivanivske (west of Bakhmut).[38] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces completely out of Ivanivske, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of this claim and currently assesses that Russian forces do not yet control parts of southwestern and northwestern Ivanivske.[39] Positional fighting continued northeast of Bakhmut near Verkhokamyanske, Vyimka, and Spirne; northwest of Bakhmut near Bohdanivka; west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske and Stupochky; and southwest of Bakhmut near Klishchiivka

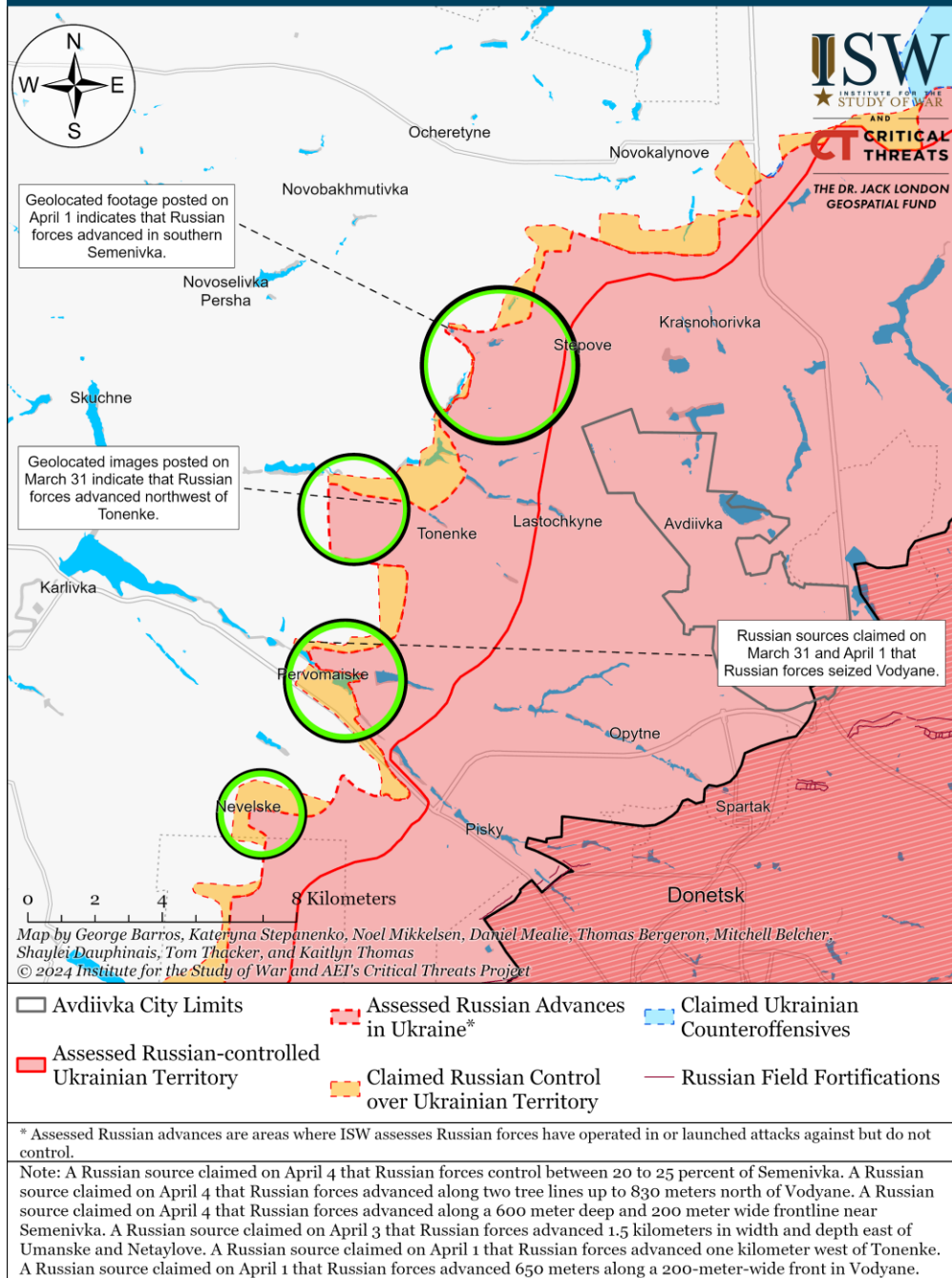
and Andriivka.[40] Elements of the Russian 98th Airborne (VDV) Division are reportedly operating on Chasiv Yar's eastern outskirts.[41]



Positional fighting continued west of Avdiivka on April 4. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 830 meters in depth southeast of Umanske (west of Avdiivka) and up to 600 meters in depth near Semenivka (west of Avdiivka).[42] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces control 20 to 25 percent of Semenivka, although ISW has only observed visual evidence of Russian forces maintaining a presence in southernmost Semenivka.[43] Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces are partially withdrawing from Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka), Semenivka, and Pervomaiske (southwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not observed any evidence of Ukrainian withdrawals from these areas.[44] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted several mechanized counterattacks near Tonenke (west of Avdiivka), Umanske, Vodyane (southwest of Avdiivka), and Pervomaiske on April 3 and 4.[45] Positional fighting also occurred west of Avdiivka near Yasnobrodivka and southwest of Avdiivka near Nevelske.[46] The spokesperson for a Ukrainian brigade operating in the Avdiivka direction stated that Russian forces are trying to advance in the area as long as weather conditions allow, likely referring to ground conditions that will become less conducive to mechanized maneuver as spring progresses and the ground becomes muddier.[47]

Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on April 4 that Russian forces conducted mechanized assaults near Tonenke with up to 50 armored vehicles between March 29 and 31.[48] Voloshyn stated that the Russian mechanized assaults occurred over several days and that Russian forces conducted more than one assault.[49] Ukrainian forces repelled a roughly battalion-sized Russian mechanized assault near Tonenke on March 30 and destroyed at least 12 Russian tanks and eight infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs).[50] Voloshyn's reporting suggests that Russian forces conducted a larger mechanized tactical offensive effort in the area than initially reported but that the assaults did not all occur at once. A Russian Storm-Z instructor similarly claimed on April 1 that the mechanized assault occurred in multiple waves over several days.[51]

Assessed Control of Terrain near Avdiivka as of April 4, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

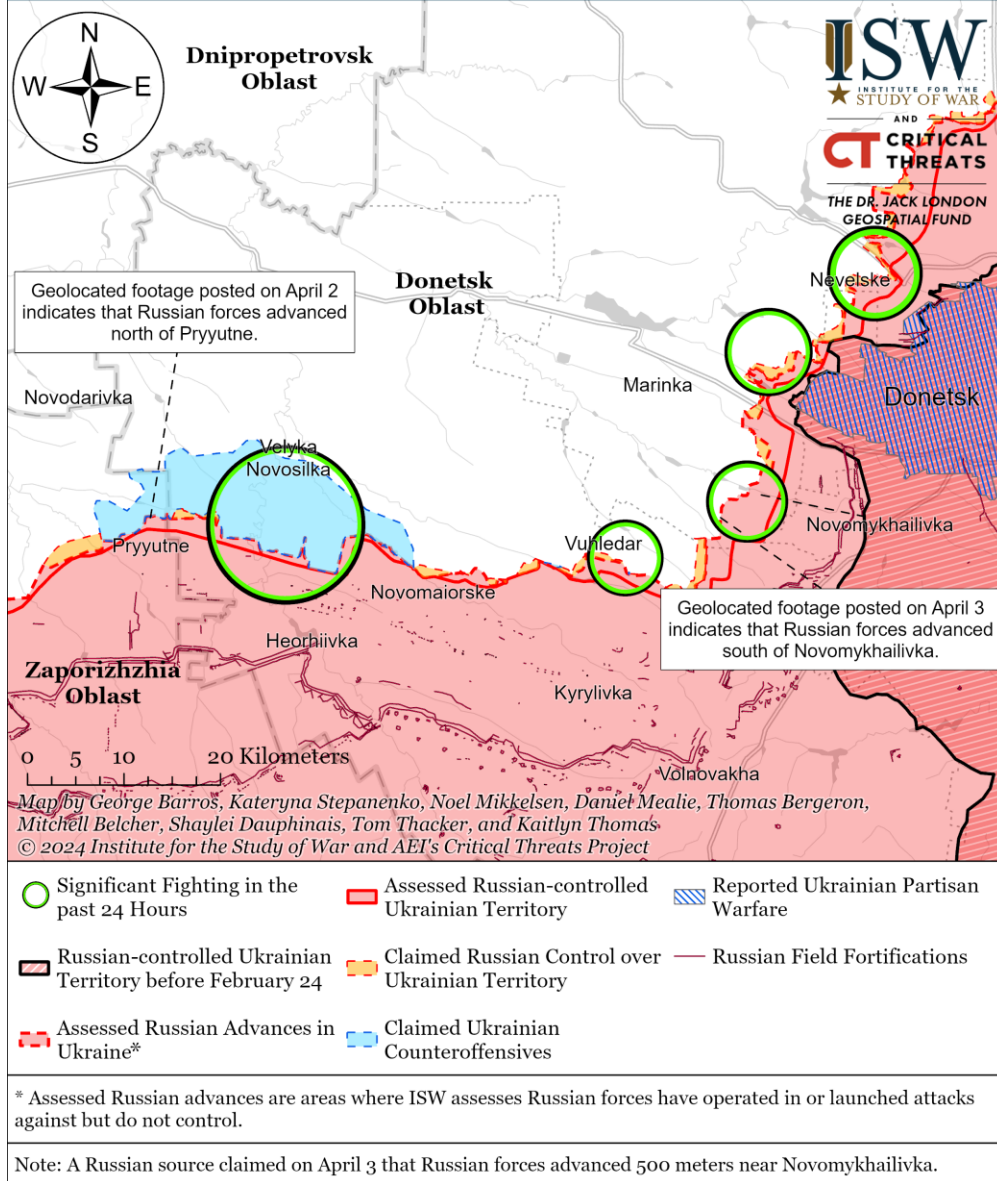


Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City amid continued positional fighting west and southwest of Donetsk City on April 4. Geolocated footage published on April 1 indicates that Russian forces recently advanced southeast of Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[52] A Russian milblogger claimed on April 3 that Russian forces have seized the majority of Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City), but that Ukrainian forces maintain positions on the western outskirts of the settlement.[53] Positional fighting continued west of Donetsk City near Krasnohorivka and Heorhiivka and southwest of Donetsk City near Pobieda, Novomykhailivka,

Kostyantynivka, and Vodyane on April 4.[54] A Ukrainian officer stated that Russian forces continue to conduct assaults with small infantry groups west and southwest of Donetsk City.[55] Elements of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) "Pyatnashka" international volunteer brigade are reportedly operating in the Donetsk City area, elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet, Eastern Military District [EMD]) are reportedly operating near Novomykhailivka, and elements of the Russian 238th Artillery Brigade (8th Guards Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Krasnohorivka.[56]

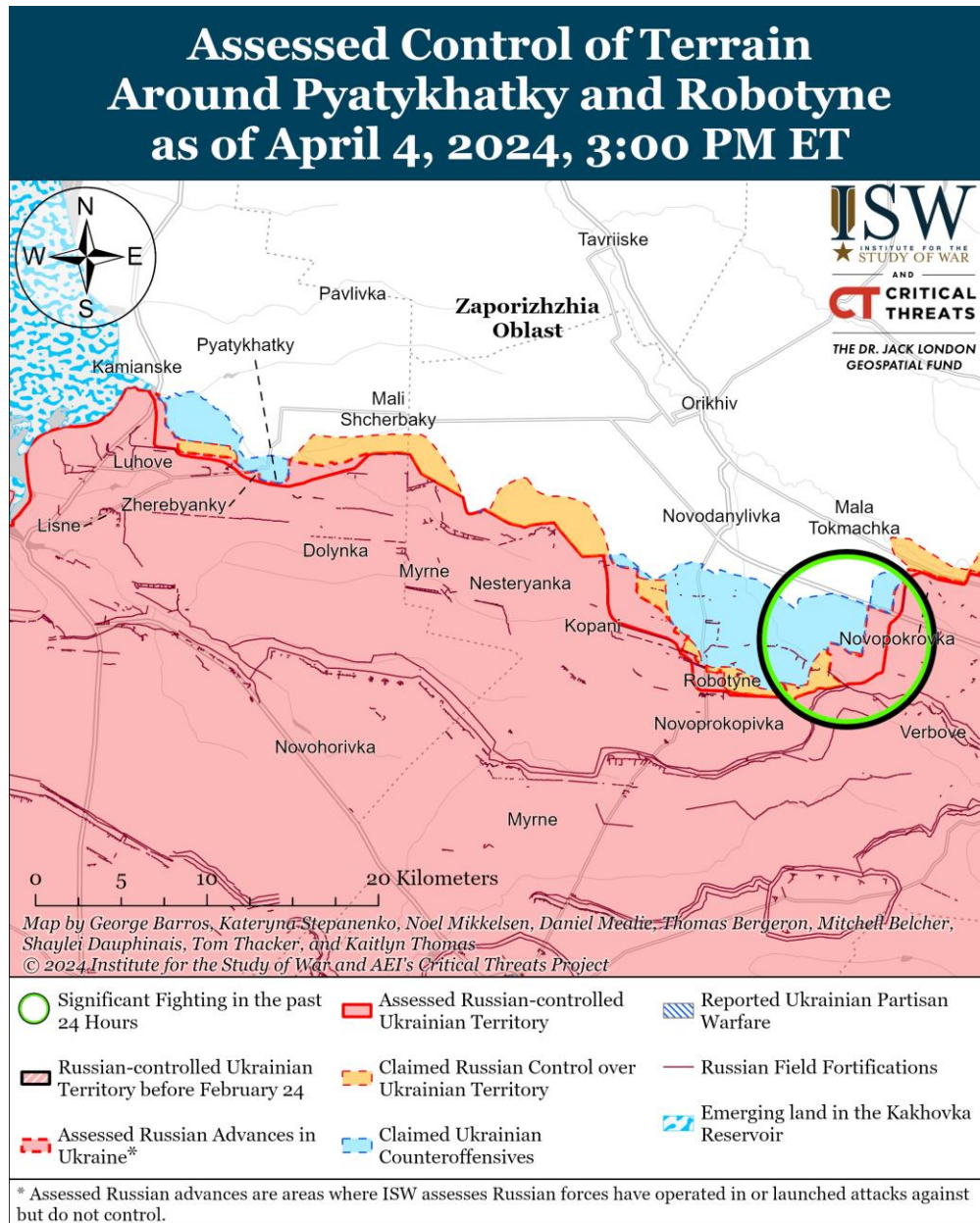
Positional fighting continued in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area south of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske and Urozhaine on April 4.[57]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of April 4, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



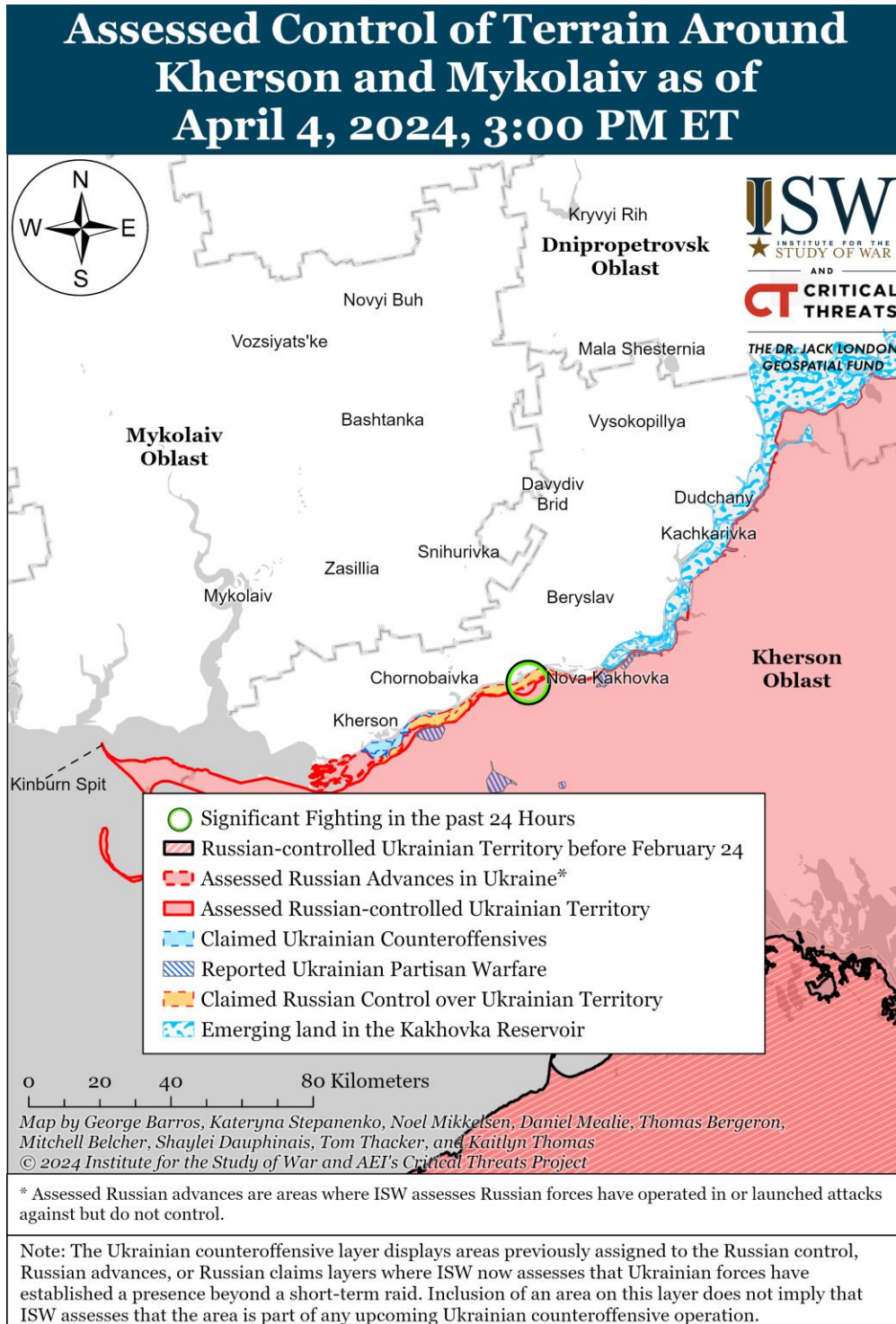
Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

Positional engagements continued in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on April 4, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced up to half a kilometer near Robotyne and Verbove (east of Robotyne), but ISW has not observed any confirmation of this claim.[58] Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove.[59] Elements of the Russian 429th Motorized Rifle Regiment (19th Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]) are reportedly operating near Robotyne and Verbove, and elements of the Russian 42nd Motorized Rifle Division (58th CAA, SMD) are reportedly operating near Robotyne.[60]



Positional engagements continued in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast on March 4, likely near Krynky where Ukrainian forces maintain positions.[61] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Colonel

Nataliya Humenyuk stated that a larger number of small Russian infantry groups are attacking Ukrainian positions on the left bank from different directions in an attempt to further spread out Ukrainian units in the area.[62] Humenyuk noted that Russian forces have significantly intensified assaults on Ukrainian positions in east bank Kherson Oblast in the past two days.



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

Ukrainian military sources reported on April 4 that Russian forces launched 20 Shahed-136/131 drones at Ukraine from Kursk Oblast on the night of April 3 to 4 and that Ukrainian mobile fire groups destroyed 11 of the Shahed drones.[63] The Ukrainian Ministry of Energy reported that Russian drones damaged an energy facility in Kharkiv Oblast and a solar power plant in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast.[64] Ukrainian officials reported that Russian drones also struck civilian infrastructure and residential buildings in Kharkiv City.[65] Kharkiv Oblast Military Administration Head Oleh Synehubov reported later on April 4 that Russian forces launched a total of 20 Shahed drones at Kharkiv City and that 15 of the drones struck residential and civilian infrastructure.[66] Synehubov reported that the Russian drone strikes killed Ukrainian emergency workers who were responding to the aftermath of earlier drone strikes, indicating that Russian forces likely launched a subsequent wave of drone strikes targeting Kharkiv City.

Ukrainian officials reported that Russia will likely continue its ongoing strike campaign against Ukrainian energy infrastructure and is employing recent strike adaptations against such critical targets. The head of the Ukrainian state electricity transmission operator Ukrenergo, Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, noted that Russian forces are increasingly using combined strike packages comprised of missiles and Shahed drones to target Ukrainian energy infrastructure and that Russia forces are using an increased number of drones in these combined strike packages.[67] Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson Major Ilya Yevlash stated that Russian forces are launching up to 100 drone and missile strikes per day but are saving an unspecified number of missiles in Russia's strategic reserves and that Ukrainian forces expect Russian strikes against critical infrastructure to continue.[68] Ukrainian military intelligence previously estimated that the Russian military is trying to maintain its missile stockpile at around 900 missiles and that Russian forces temporarily pause strikes in order to stockpile missiles to maintain the 900 missile mark.[69]

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

An unspecified senior NATO official reportedly told Russian opposition news outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* that NATO intelligence agencies have not observed indications that Russia is preparing for a large-scale partial mobilization wave.[70] *Vazhnye Istorii* reported on April 4 that the unspecified senior NATO official stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to postpone any large-scale mobilization because he wants to “demonstrate strength and confidence” after the March 2024 Russian presidential election and has “many” other domestic problems to solve. The unspecified NATO official stated that the Kremlin aims to conduct a normal conscription cycle without another wave of mobilization and assessed that Russia lacks the amount of ammunition and maneuver units needed to launch a “successful major offensive.” ISW continues to assess that Russian authorities would likely intensify crypto-mobilization efforts before deciding to conduct another unpopular wave of mobilization.[71]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued to claim that the March 22 Crocus City Hall attack has caused a significant increase in Russian contract service applicants amid reports that Russia is intensifying crypto-mobilization efforts. The Russian MoD claimed that there has been a significant increase in the past week and a half in Russian contract service applicants in Moscow Oblast, Primorsky Krai, Vladivostok, and St. Petersburg.[72] The Russian MoD claimed that over 800 Moscow Oblast residents have signed Russian military contracts in the past week and a half and that over 4,500 Moscow Oblast residents have signed contracts since the beginning of 2024, in comparison to the 14,000 Moscow Oblast residents whom Russian authorities claimed to have signed contracts in all of 2023. The Russian MoD similarly claimed that over 500 Vladivostok residents signed Russian military contracts in the past week and a half and that over 2,600 Vladivostok residents have signed contracts since the start of 2024, in comparison to the 9,000 Vladivostok residents who signed contracts in all of 2023. The Russian MoD additionally claimed that over 450 St. Petersburg residents have signed Russian military contracts in the past week and a half. These reports are consistent with recent polling showing that the Kremlin information operation baselessly blaming Ukraine for the March 22 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack

may be increasing military recruitment.[73] The Russian MoD may alternatively be running a simultaneous information operation about alleged increased recruitment rates in response to the Crocus City Hall attack in order to encourage more contract recruitment.[74]

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on April 4 that the Russian military launched a training program for strike drone operators in Belgorod Oblast.[75] A Russian drone instructor claimed that military personnel can learn to become drone operators after one month of training. The instructor claimed that the Russian military is constantly modernizing their drones and the methods of their operation and that instructors go to the frontline in Ukraine to learn how to improve the training programs.

Russia continues efforts to procure weapons and weapons components from Iran. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Alexander Fomin met with Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali to discuss bilateral military and military-technical cooperation.[76] Russia likely continues to rely on Iran for key technological components for weapons such as Shahed drones.[77]

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

Bashkortostan Republic Prime Minister Andrei Nazarov stated on April 4 that the interregional drone production group in Bashkortostan, which consists of 13 companies, will accelerate the production of anti-drone protection and electronic warfare (EW) systems to protect Russian industrial facilities from drone strikes.[78] Nazarov stated that the problem of possible Ukrainian drone strikes has become “particularly acute,” likely in response to Republic of Tatarstan Head Rustam Minnikhanov’s call for Russian companies and local authorities to defend themselves against Ukrainian drone strikes following Ukrainian strikes on Russian military production and oil refinery infrastructure in Tatarstan on April 2.[79]

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

Russian milbloggers criticized multiple post-Soviet states for moving away from Russia’s sphere of influence. Russian milbloggers continued to criticize Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s policies distancing Armenia from Russia and claimed the Armenian government is destabilizing relations with Azerbaijan.[80] A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger also accused Western organizations of trying to “oust Russia from its usual spheres of influence” in Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova.[81] Several Russian milbloggers criticized Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for increasing their cooperation with NATO and individual NATO member states, claiming this cooperation is tantamount to loss of sovereignty.[82] A Russian milblogger also criticized Kazakhstan for not appreciating its “shared history” with Russia.[83]

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)

Belarusian Chief of the Belarusian General Staff Major General Viktor Gulevich discussed the development of the Russian-Belarusian Unified Regional Air Defense System during a meeting of the chiefs of general staffs of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Moscow on April 4.[84]

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 dot ru/20240404/nato-1937791012.html>

[2] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-7-2024> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-2-2024> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-26-2024> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-28-2024>

[3] <https://iz dot ru/1667005/2024-03-18/putin-dopustil-vozmozhnost-konflikta-rf-i-nato>

[4] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar032824> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/denying-russia%E2%80%99s-only-strategy-success> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-22-2024>

[5] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar011924>

[6] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-20-2024> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-26-2024>

[7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-26-2024>

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