

## Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, April 17, 2023

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Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

**Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is seemingly regaining some favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin, likely as a result of the Russian conventional military's inability to accomplish the tasks Putin had set for it during the winter offensive in Donbas.** Wagner forces appear to be receiving reinforcements, ammunition, and political recognition – which is a stark deviation from the Kremlin's previous efforts to expend Wagner forces and Prigozhin in Bakhmut since at least January 2023.<sup>1</sup> Wagner-affiliated sources announced on April 17 that Wagner is training up to three motorized rifle brigades of mobilized personnel to reinforce Wagner's flanks in Bakhmut.<sup>2</sup> Prigozhin also confirmed that Russian airborne forces (VDV) are operating alongside Wagner and indicated that Wagner is actively receiving artillery shells.<sup>3</sup> Prigozhin advocated for Wagner to receive more artillery shells, which indicates that Prigozhin has reestablished his supply of ammunition from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). The Russian State Duma will also consider amendments to the Russian law on veterans' rights to grant veteran status to private military companies (PMCs) and volunteers.<sup>4</sup> Prigozhin had been routinely advocating for Wagner personnel to be recognized as participants of the "special military operation" in Ukraine, and the adoption of this bill would signify that Prigozhin's position in the Kremlin inner circle has improved.

**The extent of Putin's trust and favor for Prigozhin is unclear at this time, but it is likely that Putin halted the Russian MoD's efforts to avenge Wagner by denying Wagner reinforcements and ammunition.**<sup>5</sup> *The New York Times*, citing leaked Pentagon documents, reported that Putin personally attempted to resolve the feud between Wagner and the Russian MoD by holding a meeting between Shoigu and Prigozhin on February 22.<sup>6</sup> Putin can be turning back to Prigozhin after experiencing another disappointment with Russian conventional forces, which did not capture Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts frontlines before the April 1 that Putin had reportedly set for them.<sup>7</sup> Putin is reportedly once again reappointing select Wagner-affiliated commanders such as VDV commander Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, which if true, suggests that he is prioritizing a decisive victory at least in Bakhmut in the near term.<sup>8</sup> Putin likely needs an immediate victory in Bakhmut ahead of Victory Day on May 9 or the rumored "Direct Line" press conference he is preparing to hold in June to assert his authority among domestic audiences.<sup>9</sup>

**Putin's improving relations with Wagner may also be a symptom of his hesitance to increase mobilization and signal a return to crypto mobilization.** Putin increased the annual conscription quota from 134,000 conscripts to 147,000 men for the spring 2023 cycle, and likely is experiencing shortages of trainers to prepare conscripts, remaining mobilized personnel, and volunteers.<sup>10</sup> The Kremlin may be hoping to use Wagner trainers to prepare its mobilized forces. ISW had previously reported that the Kremlin outsourced recruitment of personnel to nationalist groups and is currently carrying out large-scale volunteer recruitment campaigns.<sup>11</sup> Wagner is currently recruiting across Russia, and it is possible that the Kremlin may still see Wagner as a feasible source of combat power.

**An interview with two former Wagner Group fighters on their treatment of Ukrainian children and other civilians and prisoners of war (POWs) further highlights how Wagner has institutionalized systematic brutality as part of its fundamental *modus operandi*.** Russian human rights organization *Gulagu.net* released a video interview on April 17 with two former convicts who finished their

contracts with Wagner and returned to Russia.<sup>12</sup> One Wagner fighter, Azamat Yaldarov, admitted that Prigozhin ordered his unit to kill children while taking control of Soledar, and that he buried 18 children that he killed in Krasnodar Krai and Saratov and Kirov oblasts.<sup>13</sup> Yaldarov emphasized that Prigozhin gave the order for Wagner fighters to "eliminate" everyone in Soledar, and that Yaldarov was specifically ordered to kill children. Another Wagner fighter and commander of a reconnaissance unit, Aleksey Savich, told the interviewer that he fired on his own men for disobedience and that he personally witnessed the executions of 80 Wagner fighters for refusing to follow orders. Savich claimed that Wagner command gave the order to kill all civilians in Bakhmut aged 15 and older, and that his unit killed 23 civilians, 10 of whom were unarmed teenagers. Savich recounted other instances from operations in Bakhmut and Soledar in which he murdered children as young as five years old and other civilians. Savich also claimed that Prigozhin has a personal preference for recording videos of the execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war.

**The extremely graphic atrocities described by Yaldarov and Savich underscore a slate of recent reports of Wagner's systematic use of brutality as a method of waging war.**<sup>14</sup> Prigozhin and Wagner's command may actively encourage active engagement in atrocities in an attempt to build social cohesion and reputation within Wagner units. This type of engrained violence is likely to have escalating domestic impacts on Russian domestic society, especially as Wagner fighters complete their contracts and return to their homes. Russian society will have to increasingly work to handle the normalized brutality committed by its forces as they reintegrate into the domestic sphere, which will likely have generational domestic societal ramifications.

**The *Gulagu.net* interview with the two former Wagner fighters provides valuable insight into Wagner's force structure and operational prioritization.** Yaldarov claimed that he was the commander of Wagner's 5<sup>th</sup> Assault Detachment and that he trained with a special unit that specifically taught him to kill.<sup>15</sup> Yaldarov stated that the higher Wagner command gave his unit the order to place a flag on likely the Bakhmut administrative building and that he was not allowed to leave Bakhmut until after its capture. Considering the fact that Yaldarov gave the interview from his home in Russia because he was released from his contract, his anecdote about the administrative building may suggest that Wagner considered the capture of the administrative building and the central Bakhmut area to be threshold for announcing the capture of the city. The apparent return of Putin's favor to Prigozhin may have resulted in part from Prigozhin's ability to claim the capture of Bakhmut — his objective — while the Russian MoD's conventional forces failed to achieve any of their objectives. Yaldarov's account of Prigozhin's orders for Wagner troops to massacre civilians and everyone they came across in Soledar in early January additionally indicates that Prigozhin pushed for the quick capture of the settlement and ordered his fighters to take it essentially at any cost. Both Yaldarov and Savich emphasize the way that the Wagner command demands brutal treatment of Wagner dissenters within the ranks and the operational reliance on attritional assaults carried out by convict recruits.

**The Moscow City Court sentenced Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison on the charge of high treason for Kara-Murza's criticism of the Kremlin and the war in Ukraine.**<sup>16</sup> The 25-year sentence is the longest and harshest for an opposition activist to date.<sup>17</sup> Kara-Murza's sentencing comes as the Kremlin has continued to intensify domestic repression of dissenting voices through escalated legislative manipulations.<sup>18</sup> The Russian State Duma previously approved amendments to the Russian Criminal Code on April 13 that will introduce life sentences for high treason and increase prison sentences for terrorist activity.<sup>19</sup> Kara-Murza's high-profile case and sentencing are emblematic of the wider trend in Russia towards total and codified authoritarianism.

**Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on April 16 and pledged to strengthen military exchanges and cooperation between Russia and China.** Li stated that he had arrived in Moscow to implement Chinese President Xi Jinping's agreement with Putin from late March and claimed that Russian-Chinese relations "have already entered a new era."<sup>20</sup> Li noted that China is prepared to work with Russia to "strengthen strategic communication between the two militaries, strengthen multilateral coordination and cooperation, and make new contributions to safeguarding regional and global security for peace."<sup>21</sup> Official Russian and Chinese readouts did not include any mentions of Russia's war in Ukraine. Spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Wenbin reiterated China's intent to

promote peace talks in Ukraine and continuation of cooperation which Xi and Putin agreed upon previously.<sup>22</sup> ISW previously assessed that Putin was unable to secure a no-limits bilateral partnership with China during Xi's visit to Moscow, and it is likely that the meeting between Li and Putin did not further expand the scope of Russian-Chinese cooperation.

**Putin continued efforts to portray Russia as an equal defense partner with China and a Pacific naval power amidst Li's visit.** Putin stated that the Russian military is prioritizing the war in Ukraine but continues to develop the Russian Pacific Fleet during his meeting with the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu on April 17.<sup>23</sup> Shoigu stated that recent Russian combat readiness drills involved 25,000 military personnel, 167 warships and support vessels, and 89 planes and helicopters. Shoigu stated that Russian forces are currently conducting maneuver exercises and are moving to the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk. Shoigu claimed that the final drills will begin on April 18, a day before Li's departure from Russia. ISW assessed on April 14 that the Russian Pacific Fleet's combat readiness checks are likely meant to signal to China that Russia supports Chinese security objectives in the Pacific, especially ahead of the G7 meeting in Japan between May 19 and May 21.<sup>24</sup>

**Former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin's newly formed "Club of Angry Patriots" published its manifesto focused on protecting pro-war factions in the Kremlin from possible "sabotage" and "betrayal."** The "Club of Angry Patriots" published its manifesto on April 17 on its newly created Telegram channel, which emphasizes protecting pro-war factions in the Kremlin instead of efforts to win the war in Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> The manifesto claims that unspecified actors who remain in power in Russia have transferred their money and allegiance to the West and may be preparing for a coup and the "dismemberment" of the Russia Federation. The manifesto likens the Kremlin's pro-war and anti-war factions to the fight between the Reds and Whites in the Russian Civil War following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The manifesto also claims that Russia is currently fighting the war in a mediocre way and is unable to defeat Ukraine in its current state. ISW previously assessed that Girkin and the "Club of Angry Patriots" may be attempting to advance the political goals of unnamed figures in Russian power structures who want to influence Putin's decision making through public discourse.<sup>26</sup>

### Key Takeaways

- **Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin is seemingly regaining some favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin likely as a result of the Russian conventional military's inability to accomplish the tasks Putin had set for it during the winter offensive in Donbas. The extent of Putin's trust and favor for Prigozhin is unclear at this time, but it is likely that Putin halted the Russian MoD's efforts to avenge Wagner by denying Wagner reinforcements and ammunition.**
- **An interview with two former Wagner Group fighters on their treatment of Ukrainian children and other civilians and prisoners of war (POWs) further highlights how Wagner has institutionalized systematic brutality as part of its fundamental *modus operandi*.**
- **The *Gulagu.net* interview with the two former Wagner fighters provides valuable insight into Wagner's force structure and operational prioritization.**
- **The Moscow City Court sentenced Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison on the charge of high treason for Kara-Murza's criticism of the Kremlin and the war in Ukraine.**
- **Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on April 16 and pledged to strengthen military exchanges and cooperation between Russia and China. Putin continued efforts to portray Russia as an equal defense partner with China and a Pacific naval power amidst Li's visit.**
- **Former Russian officer and ardent nationalist Igor Girkin's newly formed "Club of Angry Patriots" published its manifesto focused on protecting pro-war factions in the Kremlin from possible "sabotage" and "betrayal."**

- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks northeast of Kupyansk and south of Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces have made further gains in Bakhmut and continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Russian forces continued defensive preparations in southern Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin's transition to electronic summonses distribution is continuing to complicate Russian conscription procedures.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to discuss the provision of Russian passports in occupied areas of Ukraine.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

***We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and the Ukrainian population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

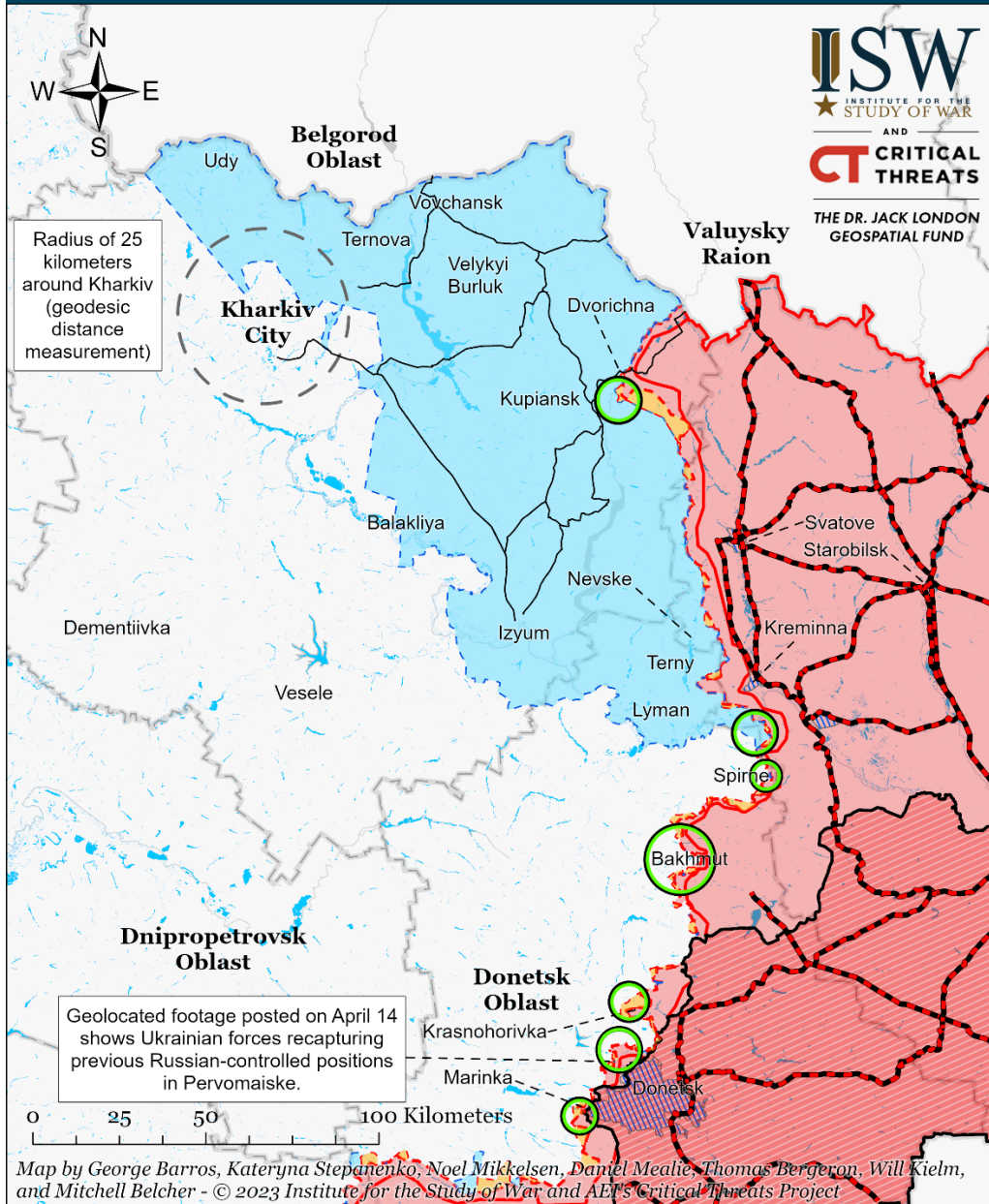
### **Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine**

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

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks northeast of Kupyansk and south of Kreminna on April 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk), Hryhorivka (11km south of Kreminna), and Spirne (25km south of Kreminna).<sup>27</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that fighting occurred near Kolomyichykha (10km west of Svatove) and that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Torske, Terny, Nevske (all 14 to 18km west or northwest of Kreminna) and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna).<sup>28</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on April 16 that Russian forces made limited advances south of Ploshchanka (16km northwest of Kreminna) and that fighting occurred near the Serebrianska forest area (10km south of Kreminna).<sup>29</sup> Footage published on April 17 purportedly shows Russian forces, likely airborne (VDV) elements, using TOS-1A thermobaric artillery systems near Kreminna.<sup>30</sup> A milblogger claimed on April 17 that Russian aircraft made more sorties in the Svatove direction than he “had seen in a long time.”<sup>31</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Key Ukrainian Roads
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

## **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 have made further gains in Bakhmut as of April 17. Geolocated footage posted on April 16 shows that Wagner Group forces have advanced north of the T0504 Kostyantynivka–Chasiv Yar–Bakhmut route along the main railway in Bakhmut.<sup>32</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that assault detachments, likely referring to Wagner Group forces, seized two unspecified quarters in northwestern and central Bakhmut.<sup>33</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner forces advanced in northern Bakhmut, are attempting to gain a foothold between Bakhmut and Khromove (2km west of Bakhmut), and are fighting for control of the railway in central Bakhmut.<sup>34</sup> The milblogger also claimed that conventional Russian forces are engaging in positional battles north of Bakhmut.<sup>35</sup> Another milblogger claimed that Wagner forces continue to conduct ground attacks in northern, western, and southern Bakhmut.<sup>36</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted ground attacks in Bakhmut, northwest of Bakhmut near Khromove, and southwest of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (3km southwest) and Predtechyne (12km southwest).<sup>37</sup> Other milbloggers claimed that Russian Airborne (VDV) forces and 2<sup>nd</sup> Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps personnel have formed a continuous line of defense along Wagner’s northern flank on the Zalizhnyanske-Sakko i Vanzetti-Mykolaivka-Yakovlivka-Berestove line, and that the Russian 106th VDV Division is operating on this line near Soledar.<sup>38</sup>

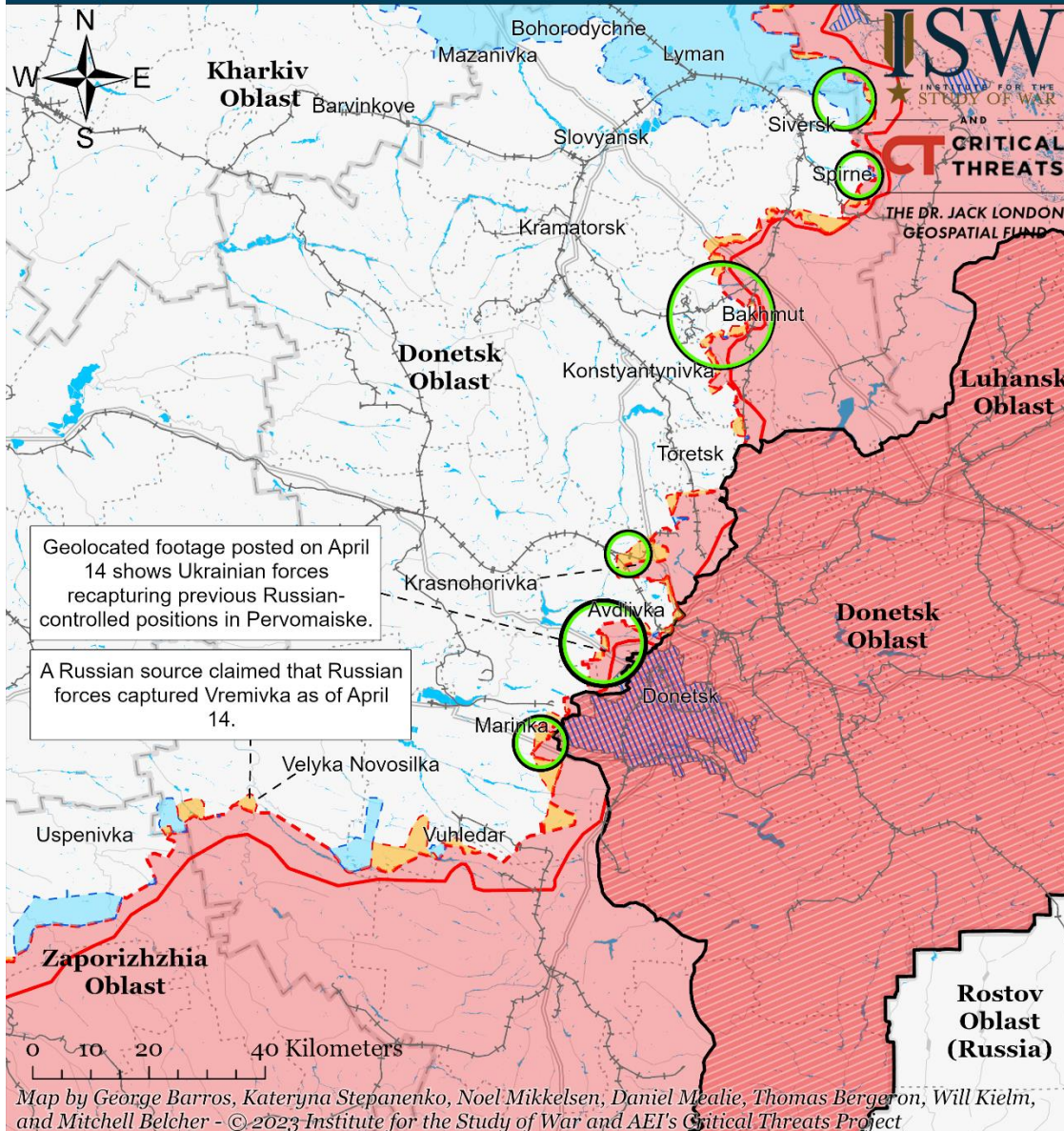
Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin attempted to justify slow Wagner advances within Bakhmut on April 17, likely in an attempt to pressure the Russian MoD into providing Wagner with a consistent and adequate supply of artillery shells. Prigozhin claimed that Wagner forces need at least 6,000 shells, over an unspecified period of time, to advance more than 100-200 meters per day.<sup>39</sup> Prigozhin claimed that Wagner forces would sustain fewer casualties if they receive more shells.<sup>40</sup> Prigozhin has previously criticized the MoD for failing to provide Wagner with enough artillery shells and called on the information space to pressure the MoD into providing more.<sup>41</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka–Donetsk City line on April 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Novokalynove (8km north of Avdiivka), Sieverne (5km west of Avdiivka), Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Nevelske (6km northwest of Donetsk City), and in Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka).<sup>42</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks towards Avdiivka from the immediate south near Opytne and immediate east from Kruta Balka.<sup>43</sup> Former Russian officer Igor Girkin claimed that several unspecified Russian assault companies sustained significant casualties in the Avdiivka direction during ineffective “meat assaults,” which Girkin claimed Russian forces have conducted for well over a year.<sup>44</sup> Ukrainian Joint Press Center of the Tavriisk Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskiy stated that Russian forces withdrew two unspecified VDV units from the Marinka direction to unspecified areas to recover from casualties.<sup>45</sup>

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed or claimed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on April 17. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled three Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups near Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).<sup>46</sup>



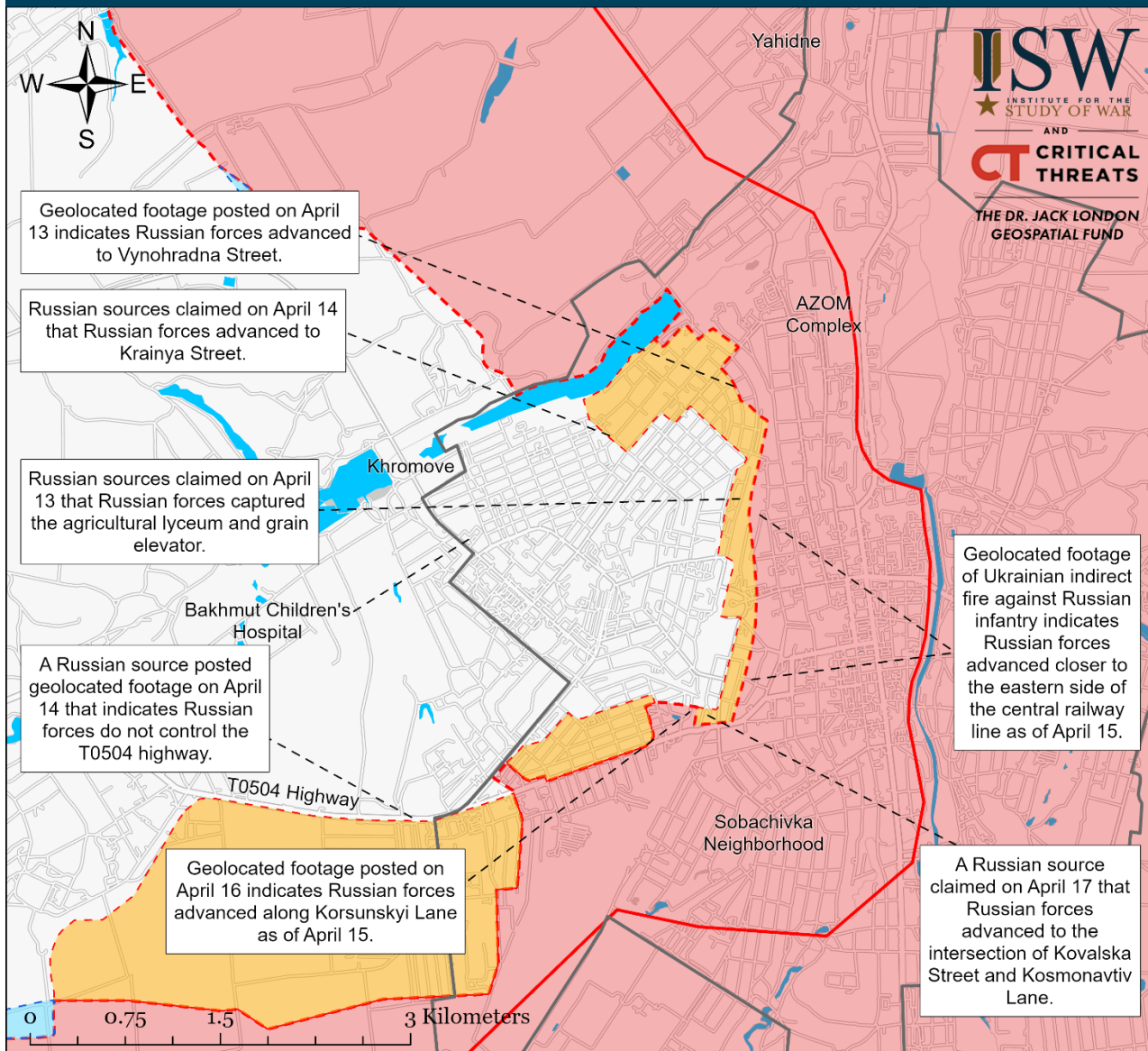
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

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

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher  
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- Bakhmut City Limits
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

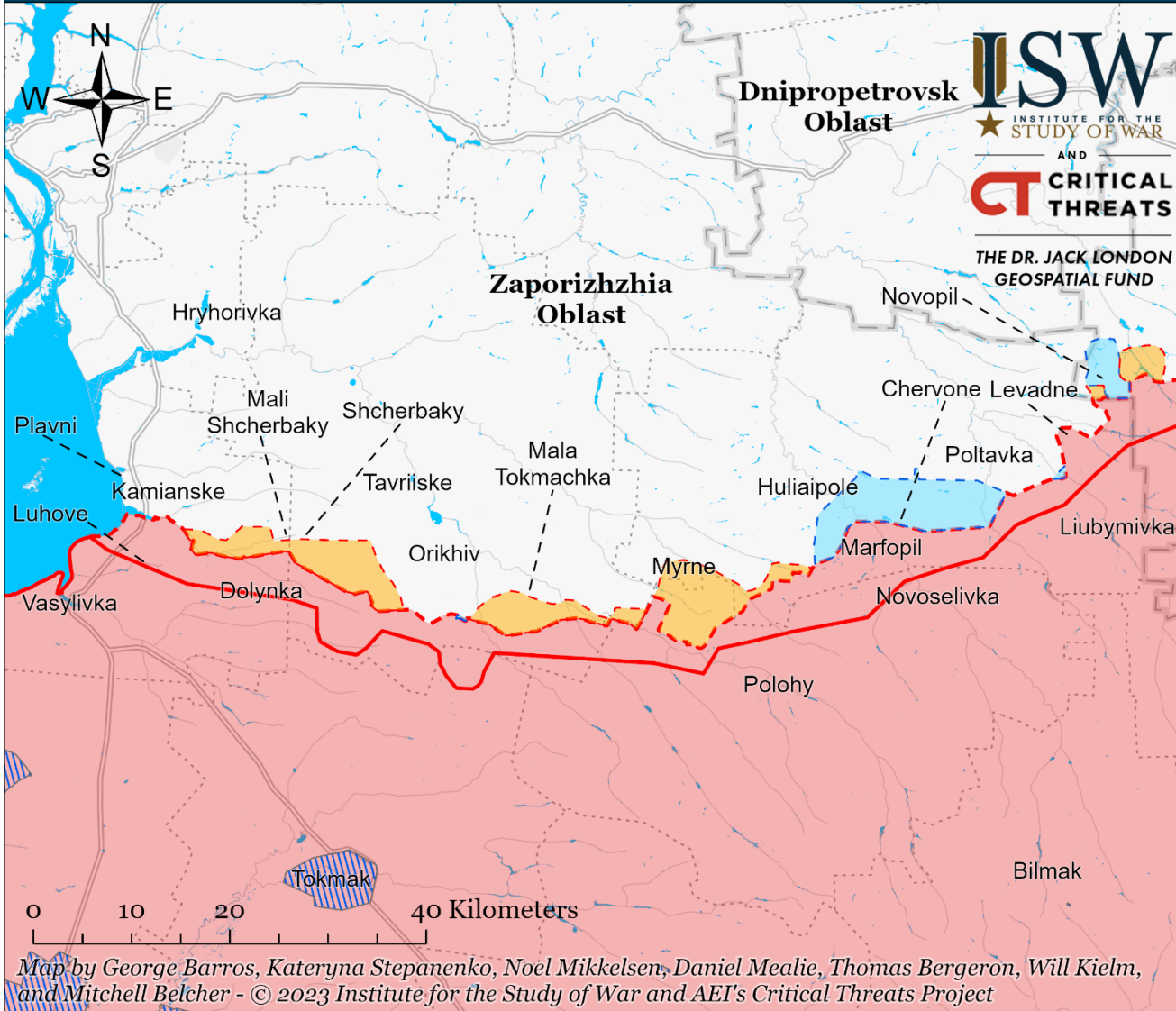
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

Russian forces continued defensive preparations in southern Ukraine on April 17. Ukrainian military sources stated that Russian forces are building fortifications and defensive lines in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts.<sup>47</sup> Russian milbloggers warned that Ukrainian forces are preparing for counteroffensive actions in the Kherson and Zaporizhia directions, and one Russian source noted that Russian forces are “uneasy” and regrouping out of concern for Ukrainian attacks.<sup>48</sup> Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command noted that Russian forces added another surface missile carrier to the Black Sea ship grouping and that there is now a total of 16 Kalibr missiles in the Black Sea.<sup>49</sup> Russian forces continued routine shelling along the southern frontline.<sup>50</sup>



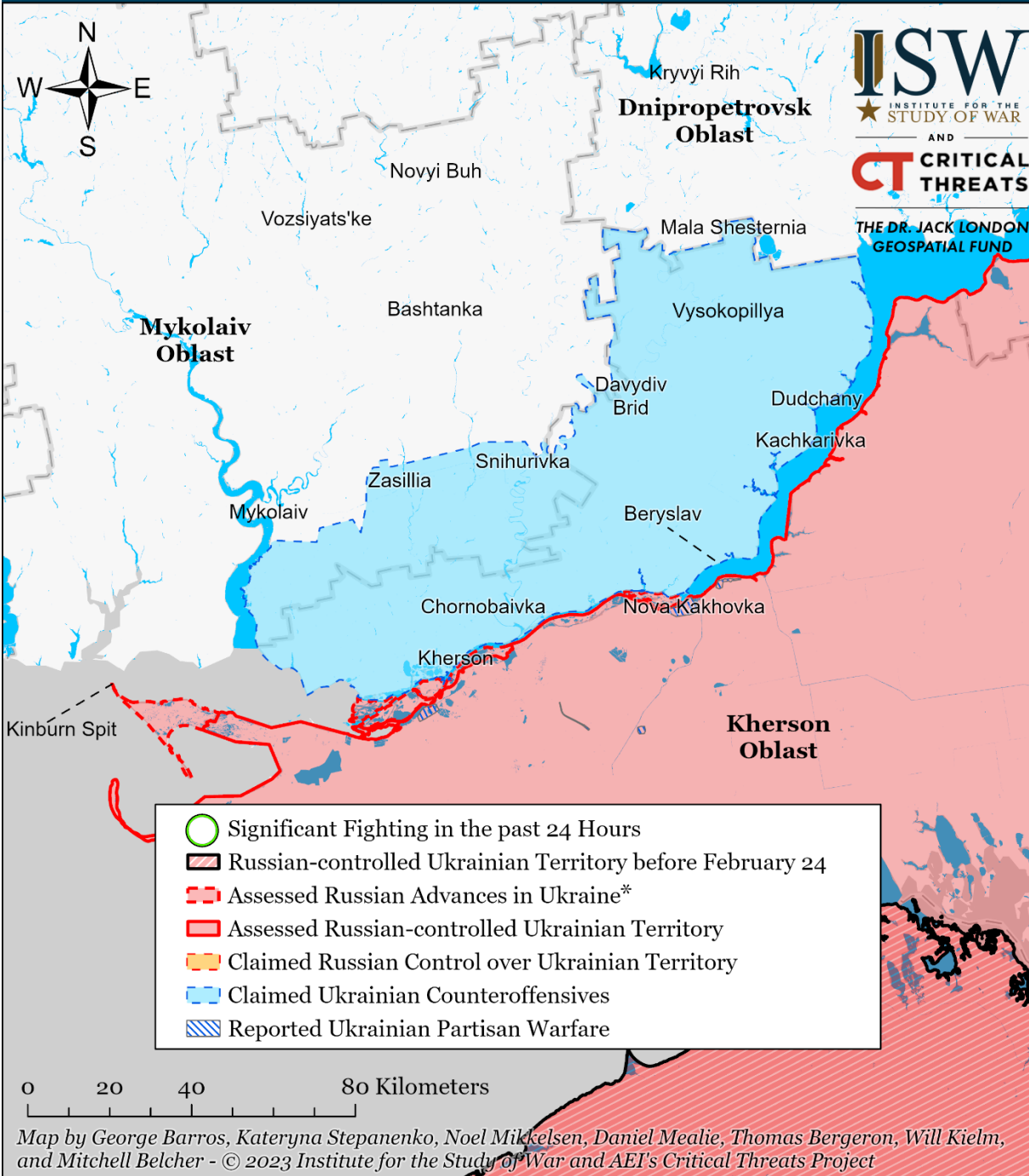
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- 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.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

The Kremlin's transition to electronic summonses distribution is continuing to complicate Russian conscription procedures. The Russian Ministry of Digital Development stated on April 17 that there are no legal grounds for the distribution of electronic conscription summons though the Russian "Gosuslugi" state services portal as the law digitizing military records does not specify that "Gosuslugi" would send summonses.<sup>51</sup> The Ministry added that the Russian government must establish a method of sending summonses through a separate bill that has not been adopted at this time. The Ministry's statement followed an announcement by Moscow City military recruitment officer Maksim Lokteyev, who noted that the city will be electronically distributing summonses for the spring 2023 conscription cycle via the "Gosuslugi" platform, SMS messages, and phone calls.<sup>52</sup> Russian State Duma Chairman of the Defense Committee, Andrey Kartapolov, previously stated that the law on digitizing military records would not affect the current spring conscription cycle.<sup>53</sup>

Russian officials are continuing crypto-mobilization and volunteer recruitment campaigns across Russia. Omsk Oblast officials are recruiting Rosgvardia (Russian National Guard) personnel to serve in occupied Donetsk Oblast.<sup>54</sup> Khabarovsk Krai began advertising volunteer recruitment on the NTV federal channel.<sup>55</sup> Republic of Bashkortostan Prime Minister Andrey Nazarov stated that Bashkortostan's volunteer battalions are competing against military recruitment for an unspecified reason and discouraged the continuation of such a rivalry.<sup>56</sup>

Russian opposition outlets are continuing to calculate the total decline of the Russian prison population following the Wagner Group's expansive prisoner recruitment campaign since summer of 2022. Russian opposition outlet *Mediazona* reported that the prisoner population across 35 Russian regions decreased by 17,248 prisoners towards the beginning of 2023.<sup>57</sup> *Mediazona* reported that the most prisoners disappeared in Samara, Chelyabinsk, and Kirov oblasts, and in the Republic of Tatarstan of the 35 regions.<sup>58</sup> *Mediazona* reported that Russian Federal Penitentiary Service indicated the disappearance of 32,890 prisoners across Russia.

Wagner is continuing to create burial grounds in the Russian fields and forests likely because it lacks official permission to bury deceased fighters in local cemeteries. A Russian independent outlet published a video showing a Wagner burial ground near Irkutsk City with 57 graves for convicts from Zabaykalsky Krai, Republic of Buryatia, and Irkutsk Oblast.<sup>59</sup> A former Wagner commander told the Russian human rights organization *Gulagu.net* that Wagner buries empty coffins in the fields because Wagner servicemen are unable to retrieve or identify corpses.<sup>60</sup>

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

Russian occupation authorities continue to discuss the provision of Russian passports in occupied areas of Ukraine. The Kakhovka, Kherson Oblast occupation administration claimed on April 17 that its passport specialists received 90 applications for Russian passports from residents of the area.<sup>61</sup> The Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Military Administration noted that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) ordered Russian occupation authorities to submit lists of Russian passport-holders in occupied areas to military enlistment offices by April 18.<sup>62</sup> Russian officials will continue to push passportization measures in order to consolidate administrative control of occupied territories and to expand the military mobilization pool within occupied Ukraine.

## **Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.)**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent**

**attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.**

Belarusian forces continued combat exercises in Belarus on April 17. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that Belarusian Airborne troops practiced landing techniques jumping out of Il-76 aircraft in Brest Oblast.<sup>63</sup> The Belarusian MoD also reported that the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Group of Forces continues training in Belarus.<sup>64</sup>

Belarusian outlet *Zerkalo* reported on April 17 that the employees of the Belarusian State Security Committee (KGB) are inspecting the homes of Ukrainians permanently residing in Belarus and asking them questions about communication with family in Ukraine, which side they support in the war, and their opinions on Belarusian authorities.<sup>65</sup>

**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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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-12-2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://t.me/brussinf/5870>; [https://t.me/z\\_arhiv/20374](https://t.me/z_arhiv/20374)

<sup>3</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/770](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/770)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ura\\_dot\\_news/news/1052641820](https://ura_dot_news/news/1052641820)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-12-2023>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/europe/russia-intelligence-leaks.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=ovNFu2wYygsV7K\\_JVxx6tnrYwRPwo9tFZ9jAQNHWvYzHbTuLhtVNiNOj6SkBEf9RYh-P\\_O6g6fvLXLjO57kwif6zHUje8LG7eMzikQYHDrO9QtSckylVroJW3cXez9c8TeqcH8MOYMBZNVJ4UxsQzexMIKpFzSooVSqITXVsFU8dKiCr3OGedbyXcHQu1NGJWLUSq9Qu169D5q5OobFIFCQbf9vYJgHz6SyoHDCD1imVbgi5wKxJqna1e1vk-ZzYAPyO3K-dUYc3DbXo5dVgwWOJwvLkXrS35AzdJeUkorc-CZEcqC69CkXz9dTOWY92BIiLJ4W9go7Usp1\\_6TjiurPiZ114BA&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/europe/russia-intelligence-leaks.html?unlocked_article_code=ovNFu2wYygsV7K_JVxx6tnrYwRPwo9tFZ9jAQNHWvYzHbTuLhtVNiNOj6SkBEf9RYh-P_O6g6fvLXLjO57kwif6zHUje8LG7eMzikQYHDrO9QtSckylVroJW3cXez9c8TeqcH8MOYMBZNVJ4UxsQzexMIKpFzSooVSqITXVsFU8dKiCr3OGedbyXcHQu1NGJWLUSq9Qu169D5q5OobFIFCQbf9vYJgHz6SyoHDCD1imVbgi5wKxJqna1e1vk-ZzYAPyO3K-dUYc3DbXo5dVgwWOJwvLkXrS35AzdJeUkorc-CZEcqC69CkXz9dTOWY92BIiLJ4W9go7Usp1_6TjiurPiZ114BA&smid=url-share)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-1-2023>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-16-2023>

<sup>9</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-14-2023>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-30-2023>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-26-2023>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx_8)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx_8)

<sup>14</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021323>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar041223>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYqds09Hx_8)



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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/04/17/world/russia-ukraine-news?smid=url-share#vladimir-kara-murza-a-fierce-putin-critic-is-handed-a-25-year-prison-sentence>;  
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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-17/putin-critic-jailed-for-25-years-in-harsh-anti-war-ruling-yet?srnd=politics-vp&leadSource=verify%20wall>

<sup>18</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar041023>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar013123>

<sup>19</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar041023>

<sup>20</sup> <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70941>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/16/china/china-defense-minister-visit-russia-vladimir-putin-li-shangfu-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.fmprc dot gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/202304/t20230417\\_11060585.html](https://www.fmprc dot gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202304/t20230417_11060585.html)

<sup>23</sup> <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70942>

<sup>24</sup> <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-14-2023>

<sup>25</sup> <https://t.me/KRPRus/2>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-8-2023>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0ouT5L5hWGcgyiwXZrb1RHVg9XxG4EaMUSH9BoFf5BQYEJiMyZwswsjzjqcmJLgQQsl>;  
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<sup>28</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11995>

<sup>29</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/45892>

<sup>30</sup> <https://t.me/milinfo/99378>; <https://t.me/moscowcalling/23020>

<sup>31</sup> <https://t.me/vysokygovorit/11331>

<sup>32</sup> [https://t.me/WarArchive\\_ua/776](https://t.me/WarArchive_ua/776);  
<https://twitter.com/JagdBandera/status/1647679407257952262> ;  
<https://twitter.com/neonhandrail/status/1647988787660865536?s=20> ; <https://t.me/umftteam/84>

<sup>33</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/25731](https://t.me/mod_russia/25731)

<sup>34</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/45892>; <https://t.me/rybar/45916>

<sup>35</sup> <https://t.me/rybar/45916>

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<sup>38</sup> [https://t.me/boris\\_rozhin/83203](https://t.me/boris_rozhin/83203); [https://t.me/rlz\\_the\\_kraken/57773](https://t.me/rlz_the_kraken/57773);  
<https://t.me/epoddubny/15584>; <https://t.me/wargonzo/12011>; <https://www.kp dot ru/daily/27490.5/4749268/>; <https://t.me/sashakots/39341>

<sup>39</sup> [https://t.me/concordgroup\\_official/770](https://t.me/concordgroup_official/770)

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- <sup>40</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-20-2023>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-20-2023>
- <sup>42</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0ouT5L5hWGcgyiwXZrb1RHVg9XxG4EaMUSH9BoFf5BQYEJiMyZwwsjzjqcmJLgQQsl;>  
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- <sup>43</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/11995>
- <sup>44</sup> <https://t.me/strelkovii/4560>
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- <sup>46</sup> [https://t.me/mod\\_russia/25732](https://t.me/mod_russia/25732)
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- <sup>48</sup> [https://t.me/rybar/45890;](https://t.me/rybar/45890) <https://t.me/wargonzo/11995>
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- <sup>50</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid0ouT5L5hWGcgyiwXZrb1RHVg9XxG4EaMUSH9BoFf5BQYEJiMyZwwsjzjqcmJLgQQsl;>  
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