

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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Note: The data cut-off for this product was 2pm ET on April 22. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the April 23 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The Kremlin is conducting a concerted air and information operation to destroy Kharkiv City, convince Ukrainians to flee, and internally displace millions of Ukrainians ahead of a possible future Russian offensive operation against the city or elsewhere in Ukraine. Kharkiv Oblast Head Oleh Synehubov and the Kharkiv Oblast Prosecutor's Office reported that Russian forces struck a TV tower in Kharkiv City possibly with a Kh-59 cruise missile on the afternoon of April 22 and that the strike disrupted TV signals in the area.[1] Ukrainian and Russian media and Russian milbloggers widely amplified footage and images of the damaged TV tower, which broke in half and partially collapsed as a result of the strike.[2] Russian state media and milbloggers attempted to justify the strike by claiming that Ukrainian forces installed unspecified air defense communication and coordination equipment on the tower.[3] Russian milbloggers praised the accuracy of the Russian strike and insinuated that Russian forces had tried and failed to down the Kharkiv City TV tower and other TV towers in Sumy and Chernihiv oblasts several times, including in March 2022.[4] Russian forces notably struck a TV tower in Kyiv City on March 1, 2022, shortly after Russian forces launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[5] Kremlin may intend to invoke the memory of the March 2022 Kyiv City strike and the early weeks of Russia's invasion of Ukraine to create panic among Ukrainians during another challenging moment of the war.

Kremlin mouthpieces are seizing on concerns about a future Russian offensive operation against Kharkiv City to conduct a likely coordinated information operation in an effort to create outsized panic among Ukrainians. ISW assesses that the likelihood of a successful Russian ground offensive against Kharkiv is very low if Ukraine receives renewed US military aid rapidly. The Ukrainian Center for Combatting Disinformation warned as early as February 2024 that Russian Telegram channels are spreading claims that Ukrainian officials were fleeing Kharkiv City, and Russian sources claimed in early April that there is a "mass exodus" of civilians from Kharkiv City.[6] The Ukrainian Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security recently identified a Russian information operation claiming that Ukrainian officials prevented civilians from leaving Kharkiv City and noted that Russian forces are seizing on concern about a possible Russian offensive operation against Kharkiv City to sow panic and a feeling of "impending, inevitable catastrophe" in Ukraine.[7] Russian state TV propagandist Vladimir Solovyov claimed on March 28 that Russian forces should destroy Kharkiv City "quarter by quarter" and suggested offering Ukrainian civilians 48 hours to leave the city, presumably before being killed in Russia's destruction of the city.[8] Russian neo-nationalist publication *Tsargrad* amplified claims from several unspecified military sources on April 16 that a Russian offensive operation to capture Kharkiv City is inevitable and that the situation in Kharkiv City will become "worse than Bakhmut and Avdiivka." [9] *Tsargrad* claimed that there is "no doubt" that Russian forces will seize Kharkiv City but that "blockade tactics," such as "cutting off electricity, gas, and water" for civilians, are the most reasonable way for Russian forces to seize the city and avoid large-scale losses. A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russia's April 22 strikes against Kharkiv City are an indication that Ukrainian civilians should leave Kharkiv City "while they still can" and that it does not make sense for civilians to hide in and protect their apartments if Ukrainian forces are "hiding in the basement," implying that Russian forces may deliberately target residential infrastructure.[10] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainians should abandon Kharkiv City before their "neighbors" kill them, likely referring to Russian forces.[11] **Ukrainian officials have previously discussed the possibility that Russian forces might launch a ground operation against Kharkiv city later this summer, and ISW continues to assess that the Russians lack the forces necessary to seize the city as long as Ukrainian forces defending it are adequately supplied, as they will be if the US restarts military assistance soon.**

Russia is intensifying strike and information operations against Ukrainians in Kharkiv City to exploit ongoing constraints on Ukrainian air defenses and heightened tensions in Ukraine in the likely relatively brief window before the anticipated arrival of US military assistance to frontline areas. Ukrainian officials have recently warned about a possible future Russian offensive operation to seize Kharkiv City, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov signaled Russia's interest for such an operation on April 19, claiming that Kharkiv City "plays an important role" in Russian President Vladimir Putin's idea of establishing a demilitarized "sanitary zone" in Ukraine to supposedly protect Russian border settlements from Ukrainian strikes.[12] Russia's envisioned "sanitary zone" could represent a range of on-the-ground conditions from the seizure of Kharkiv City and the surrounding areas to the creation of an uninhabitable, razed "no man's land" that neither side controls. ISW previously assessed that a Russian offensive operation aimed at seizing Kharkiv City would be an extremely ambitious undertaking that would pose significant challenges to Russian forces and that the Russian military command will likely have to reconsider its objectives for its forecasted

summer 2024 offensive effort to account for better equipped and manned Ukrainian forces.[13] The Russian military command may attempt to destroy Kharkiv City with air, missile, and drone strikes and prompt a large-scale internal displacement of Ukrainian civilians if the Russian military determines that it cannot successfully seize the city with ground operations. Continued timely US and Western military assistance, particularly the provision of air defense systems and missiles, will be critical to Ukraine's defense of Kharkiv City.

Russian forces appear to be aiming to make a wide penetration of Ukrainian lines northwest of Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast, but their ability to do so will likely be blunted by the arrival of US and other Western aid to the frontline. Russian forces have committed roughly a reinforced division's worth of combat power (comprised mainly of four Central Military District [CMD] brigades) to the Berdychi-Novokalynove line northwest of Avdiivka.[14] These forces are pursuing three mutually reinforcing drives — pushing westward of Berdychi; pushing into and westward of Ocheretyne along the O0544 (Keramik-Myrhorod) road; and pushing northwards towards Novokalynove — which are all likely aimed at supporting the Russian operational-level goal of reaching the Donetsk Oblast administrative boundary via Pokrovsk (west of the Avdiivka area). Russian offensive operations in these three areas north and northwest of Avdiivka have succeeded in creating three small salients along a frontline that is about seven kilometers long, but each of these three salients is currently too narrow in isolation to serve as meaningful launch points for further ground offensives that would accomplish a broad encirclement of the general area west of Avdiivka. The force composition, density, and general battlefield geometry of this area suggest that Russian forces currently hope to combine the pushes from all three salients to create a wider breach along the Berdychi-Novokalynove line, predominantly using forces of the CMD.

Russian forces do not have an indefinite timeframe in which to pursue this wider breach, however. European military aid will soon start arriving in Ukraine's arsenal along with renewed US military aid should the US Senate pass the supplemental appropriations bill.[15] European Union (EU) High Commissioner Josep Borrell stated on April 22 that the first deliveries of artillery ammunition sourced through the Czech-led initiative for Ukraine will arrive in country by the end of May to beginning of June.[16] Ukraine's ability to even the ratio of artillery fires in comparison to Russian forces on the battlefield will be essential to Ukraine's ability to deprive Russian forces of the initiative and slow the rate of ongoing Russian advances in areas of the front such as the Avdiivka direction. Russian forces are similarly intensifying the rate of tactical-level gains elsewhere in the theater, namely in the Lyman direction and west and southwest of Donetsk City, to consolidate gains as rapidly as possible. The Russian military command is likely aware of the closing window before more Western aid arrives and is trying to secure offensive gains before the window closes. Russian forces are likely to continue to make tactical gains along the Berdychi-Novokalynove line and elsewhere in theater in the coming weeks as they intensify offensive operations in anticipation of the arrival of Western aid. However, the currently closing window of low Ukrainian resources will likely inhibit Russian forces from being able to translate tactical advances into operationally significant gains for the most part, though some are possible; and Ukraine's receipt of Western aid will likely position Ukrainian forces to receive the upcoming offensives for which Russian forces are preparing.[17]

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported on April 22 that Finland is taking concrete steps to protect itself against Russian hybrid operations weaponizing Russian-manufactured migrant crises on the Russian-Finnish border.[18] WSJ noted that the Finnish government believes that Russia has sent waves of migrants to the Finnish border as part of a wider hybrid operation meant to intimidate Finland and test its security services following Finland's accession into NATO. WSJ reported that in addition to the manufactured migrant crisis in late 2023, Russia has also escalated cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns against Finland. Finnish diplomat and former Finnish Ambassador to Russia Heikki Talvitie told WSJ that recent Russian hybrid efforts against Finland have fundamentally changed the Finland–Russia relationship and that it is now “existential.” The Kremlin explicitly threatened Finland on April 6 and accused Finland of pursuing a “destructive course” in its relationship with Russia in order to undermine Finnish sovereign decision-making and NATO accession.[19] ISW has consistently assessed that such Russian statements against NATO states are meant to force NATO leaders into self-detering against taking concrete actions to protect themselves against Russian hybrid efforts.[20]

The Kremlin appears to be highlighting its relationship with Azerbaijan while downplaying deteriorating Russian–Armenia relations following Russia's failure to prevent Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Moscow on April 22 to discuss “very sensitive” regional security questions.[21] Putin stated that relations between the two countries are at a high level and are continuing to develop. Putin stated that Russian–Azerbaijani trade is increasing and highlighted that Russia has invested \$6 billion in the Azerbaijani economy. Aliyev called Russia a “fundamental country” in ensuring the security of the Caucasus region. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on April 22 that Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan will likely meet in person soon — a repetition of Peskov's similarly vague statement on April 10.[22] Peskov also claimed that Russian peacekeepers, whom the November 2020 Russian-brokered Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire stipulated would remain to the area until 2025, withdrew from Nagorno-Karabakh because the “geopolitical realities” in the region changed “after Armenia recognized Azerbaijan's 1991 borders” and there were no more functions for the peacekeepers to perform.[23] Secretary General of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Imangali Tasmagambetov stated that relations between the CSTO and Armenia are “not going through the best period,” but that

Armenia's activities in the CSTO are continuing.[24] Tasmagambetov stated that Armenia and the CSTO are working on unspecified issues in a "working manner." Pashinyan previously stated that Armenia would leave the CSTO if the CSTO fails to meet certain Armenian expectations.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin is conducting a concerted air and information operation to destroy Kharkiv City, convince Ukrainians to flee, and internally displace millions of Ukrainians ahead of a possible future Russian offensive operation against the city or elsewhere in Ukraine.**
- **Kremlin mouthpieces are seizing on concerns about a future Russian offensive operation against Kharkiv City to conduct a likely coordinated information operation in an effort to create outsized panic among Ukrainians. ISW assesses that the likelihood of a successful Russian ground offensive against Kharkiv is very low if Ukraine receives renewed US military aid rapidly.**
- **Russia is intensifying strike and information operations against Ukrainians in Kharkiv City to exploit ongoing constraints on Ukrainian air defenses and heightened tensions in Ukraine in the likely relatively brief window before the anticipated arrival of US military assistance to frontline areas.**
- **Russian forces appear to be aiming to make a wide penetration of Ukrainian lines northwest of Avdiivka, Donetsk Oblast, but their ability to do so will likely be blunted by the arrival of US and other Western aid to the frontline.**
- **The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on April 22 that Finland is taking concrete steps to protect itself against Russian hybrid operations weaponizing Russian-manufactured migrant crises on the Russian-Finnish border.**
- **The Kremlin appears to be highlighting its relationship with Azerbaijan while downplaying deteriorating Russian-Armenia relations following Russia's failure to prevent Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023.**
- **Russian forces recently advanced near Chasiv Yar, Avdiivka, and Donetsk City and in the Donetsk-Zaporizhia Oblast border area.**
- **The Russian state "Sudoplatov" volunteer drone initiative is reportedly equipping Russian military personnel operating in the Bakhmut direction with cheap and defective first-person view (FPV) drones.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 22, 2024, 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 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.

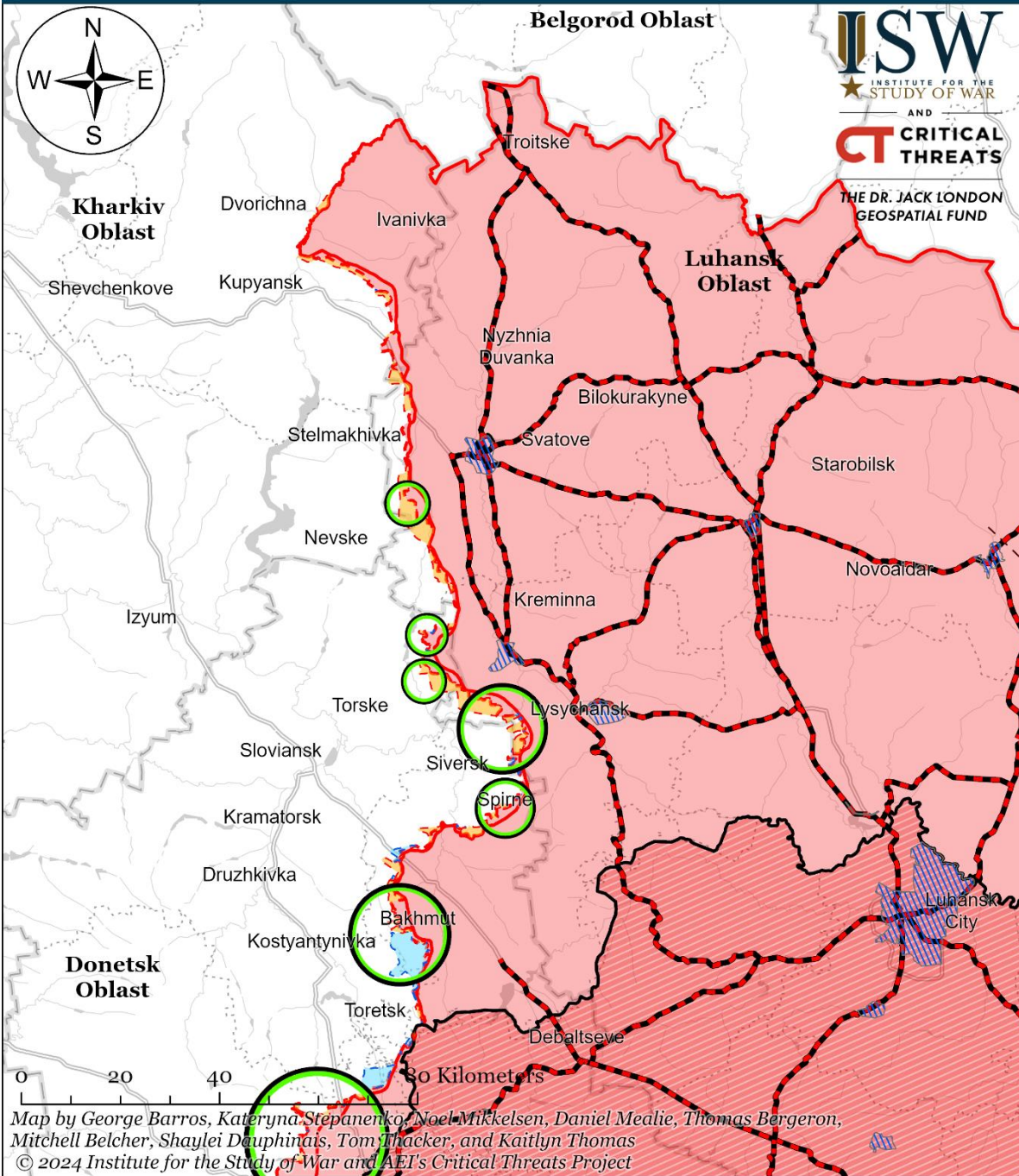
- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety 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 Svatove-Kreminna line on April 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area. Positional engagements continued southeast of Svatove near Novoyehorivka; west of Kreminna near Terny and Torske; southwest of Kreminna near the Serebryanske forest area; and south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka and Hryhorivka.[26]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of April 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

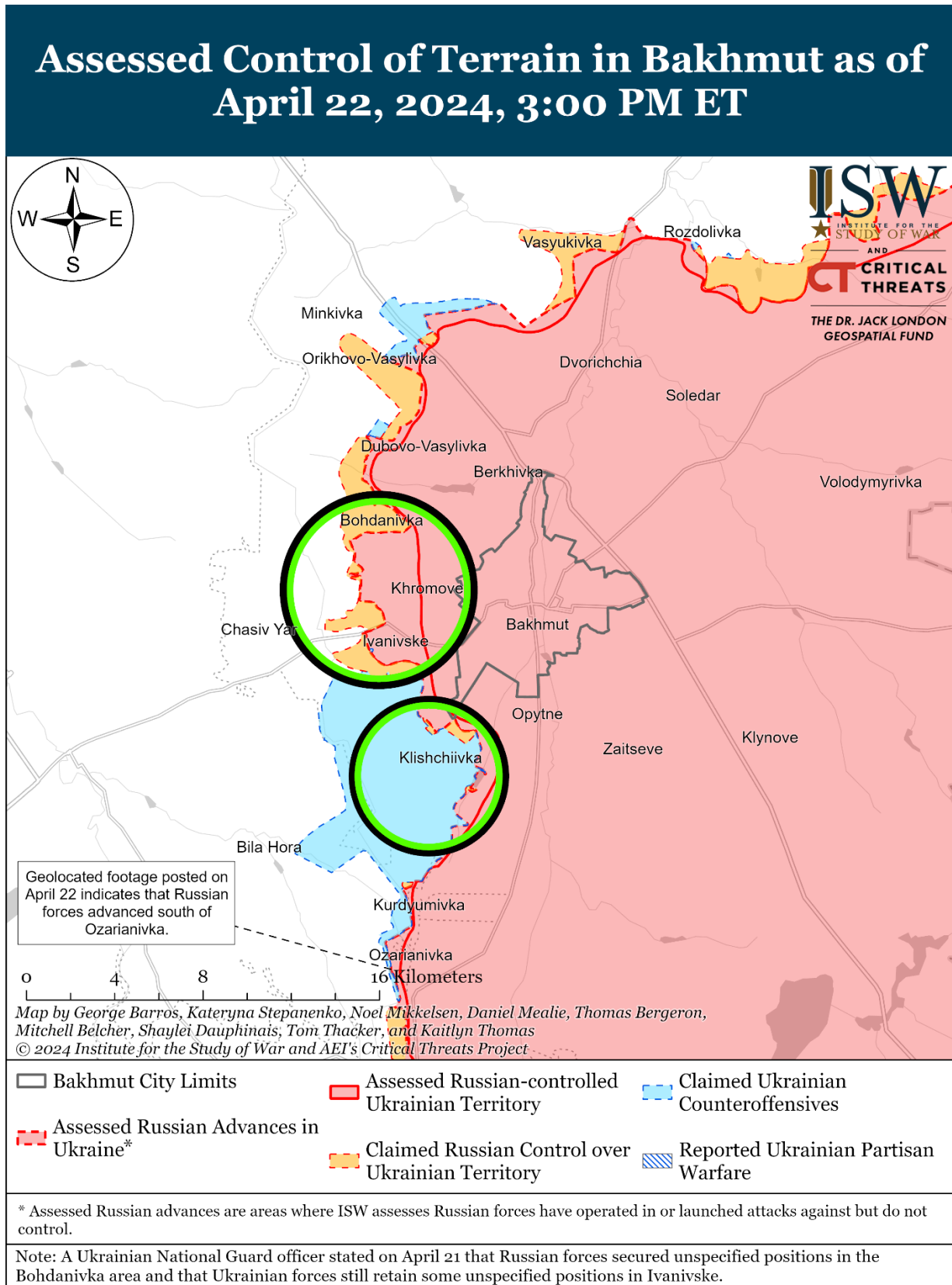


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February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

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

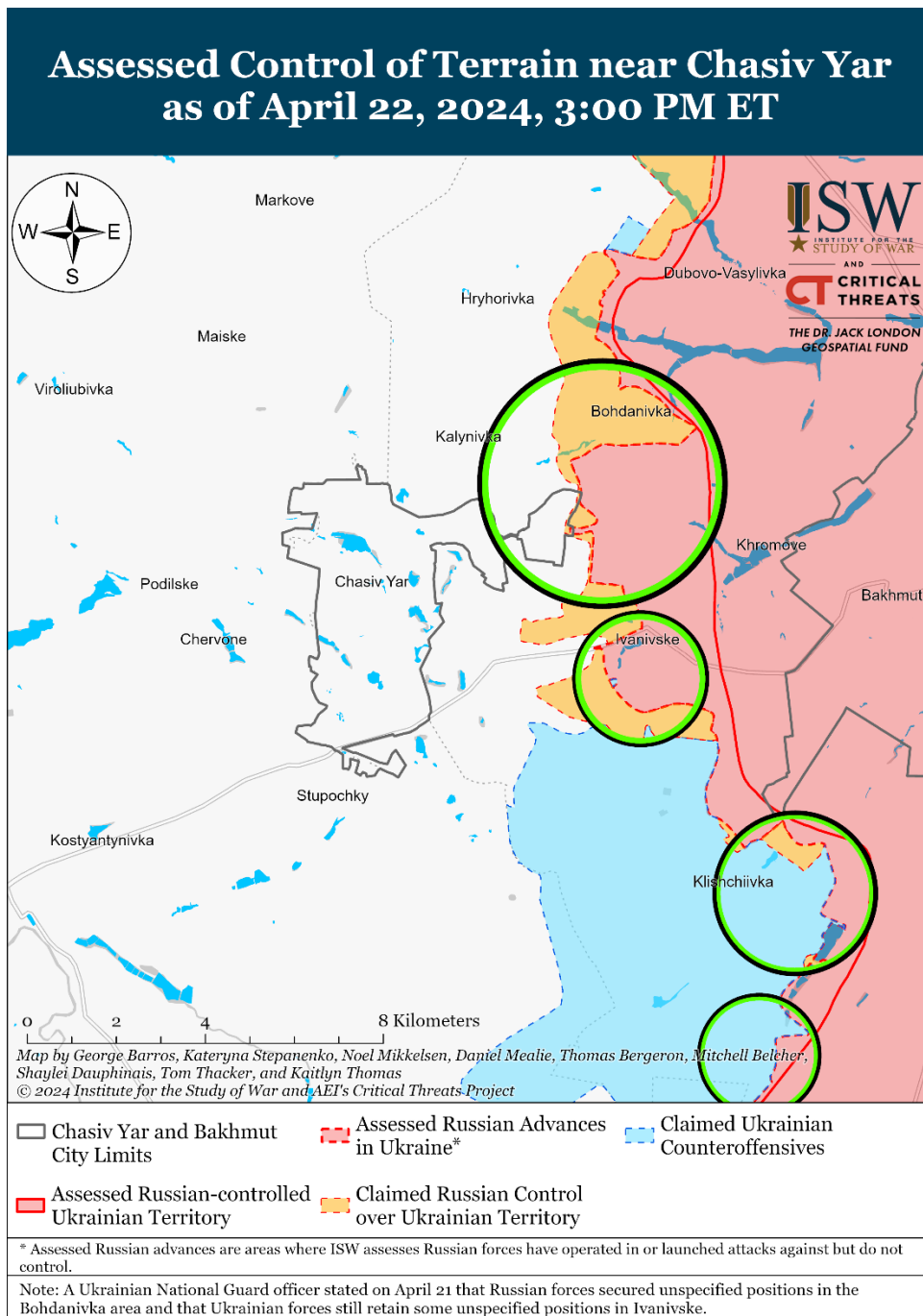
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Siversk direction (northeast of Bakhmut) on April 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled attacks east of Siversk near Zolotarivka and southeast of Siversk near Spirne and Vyimka.[27]



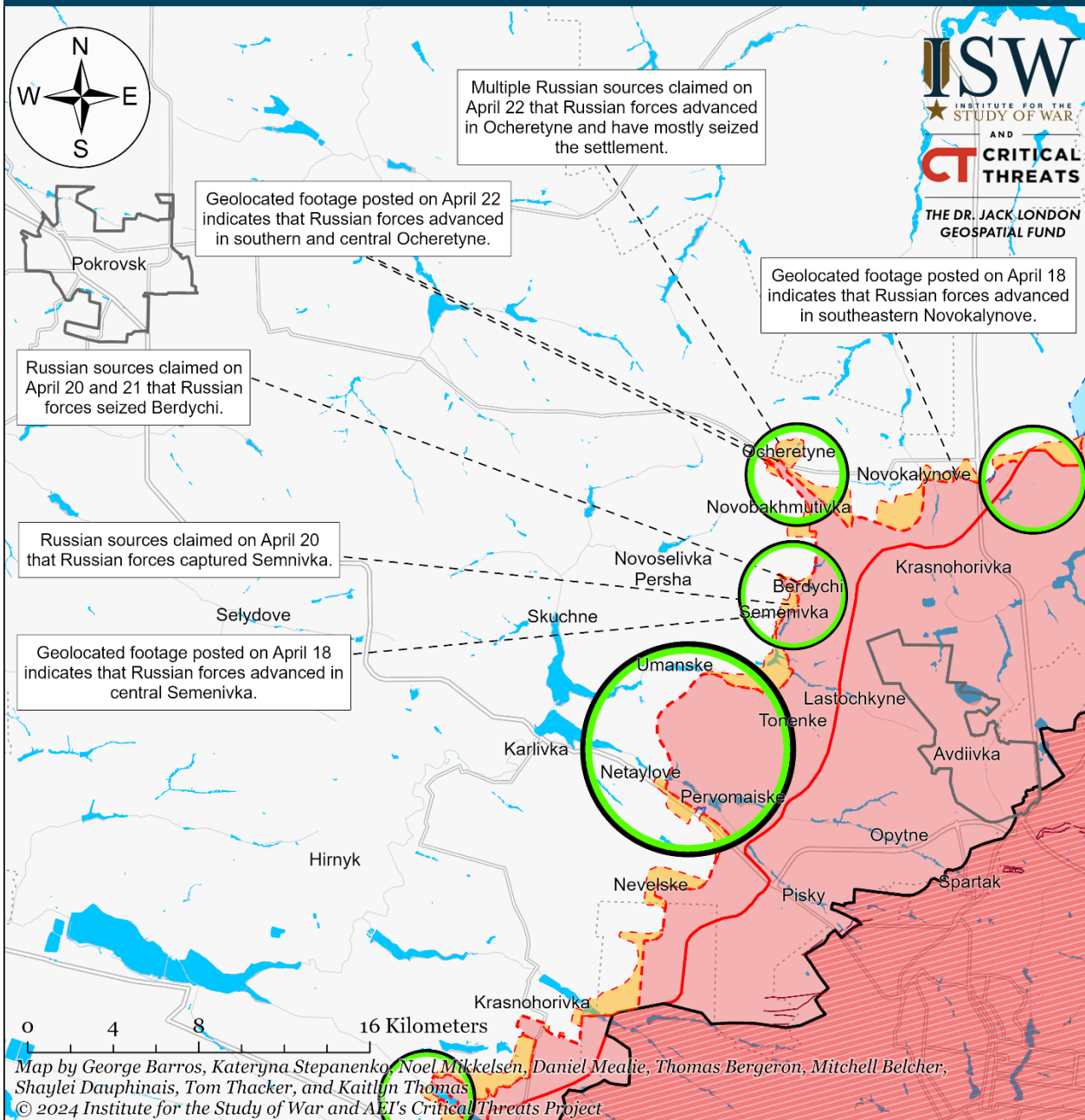
Russian forces continued offensive operations towards Chasiv Yar on April 22, but did not make any confirmed gains. Several Russian milbloggers continued to claim that Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from Bohdanivka (northeast of Chasiv Yar) and that Russian forces completed the seizure of the settlement following the purported Ukrainian withdrawal, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian control over all of Bohdanivka.[28] Ukrainian Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nazar Voloshyn stated on April 22 that between 20,000 and 25,000 Russian personnel are trying to assault the outskirts of Chasiv Yar and noted that elements of the Russian 217th Guards Airborne (VDV) Regiment (98th VDV Division) are particularly active in this effort.[29] Voloshyn also reported that Russian forces are conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations against Ukrainian positions on the outskirts of Chasiv Yar to set conditions for future ground attacks. The Ukrainian General Staff reported continued Russian attacks east of Chasiv Yar near Ivanivske and southeast of Chasiv Yar near Klishchiivka and Andriivka.[30] Elements of the Russian 98th VDV Division’s 331st and 217th regiments, the 11th VDV Brigade, and the “Sever-V” Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) reportedly continue to operate near Chasiv Yar.[31]

Geolocated footage posted on April 22 shows that Russian forces recently advanced south of Ozaryanivka (about 17km southeast of Chasiv Yar and 10km north of Horlivka).[32]



Russian forces recently made confirmed gains in Ocheretyne (northwest of Avdiivka) amid continued fighting near Avdiivka. Geolocated footage posted on April 22 shows Russian forces raising a Russian flag over the Ocheretyne Military-Civilian Administration building in central Ocheretyne, suggesting that Russian forces captured the railway station, crossed the railway line, and advanced northward into the central part of the settlement.[33] Additional geolocated footage posted on April 22 shows that Russian forces have also advanced to another building in southern Ocheretyne.[34] One Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have “almost completely” seized Ocheretyne and that Ukrainian forces only hold positions in the brick factory in western Ocheretyne.[35] ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian control over all of Ocheretyne. Russian milbloggers also claimed that Russian forces have pushed Ukrainian forces out of Semenivka (northwest of Avdiivka), although ISW has not yet observed evidence to confirm that Russian forces control northwestern Semenivka.[36] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st Donetsk People’s Republic Army Corps [DNR AC]) made marginal tactical gains west of Pervomaiske near Netaylove (both southwest of Avdiivka).[37] Another Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced up to 400 meters deep on the southern outskirts of Pervomaiske, although ISW has not yet observed visual confirmation of Russian advances in this area.[38] Elements of the Russian 433rd Motorized Rifle Regiment (27th Motorized Rifle Division, 2nd Combined Arms Army [CAA], Central Military District [CMD]) are reportedly fighting for Ocheretyne, and elements of the 74th Motorized Rifle Brigade (41st CAA, CMD) are reportedly operating near Berdychi (northwest of Avdiivka).[39]

Assessed Control of Terrain Northwest of Avdiivka as of April 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET

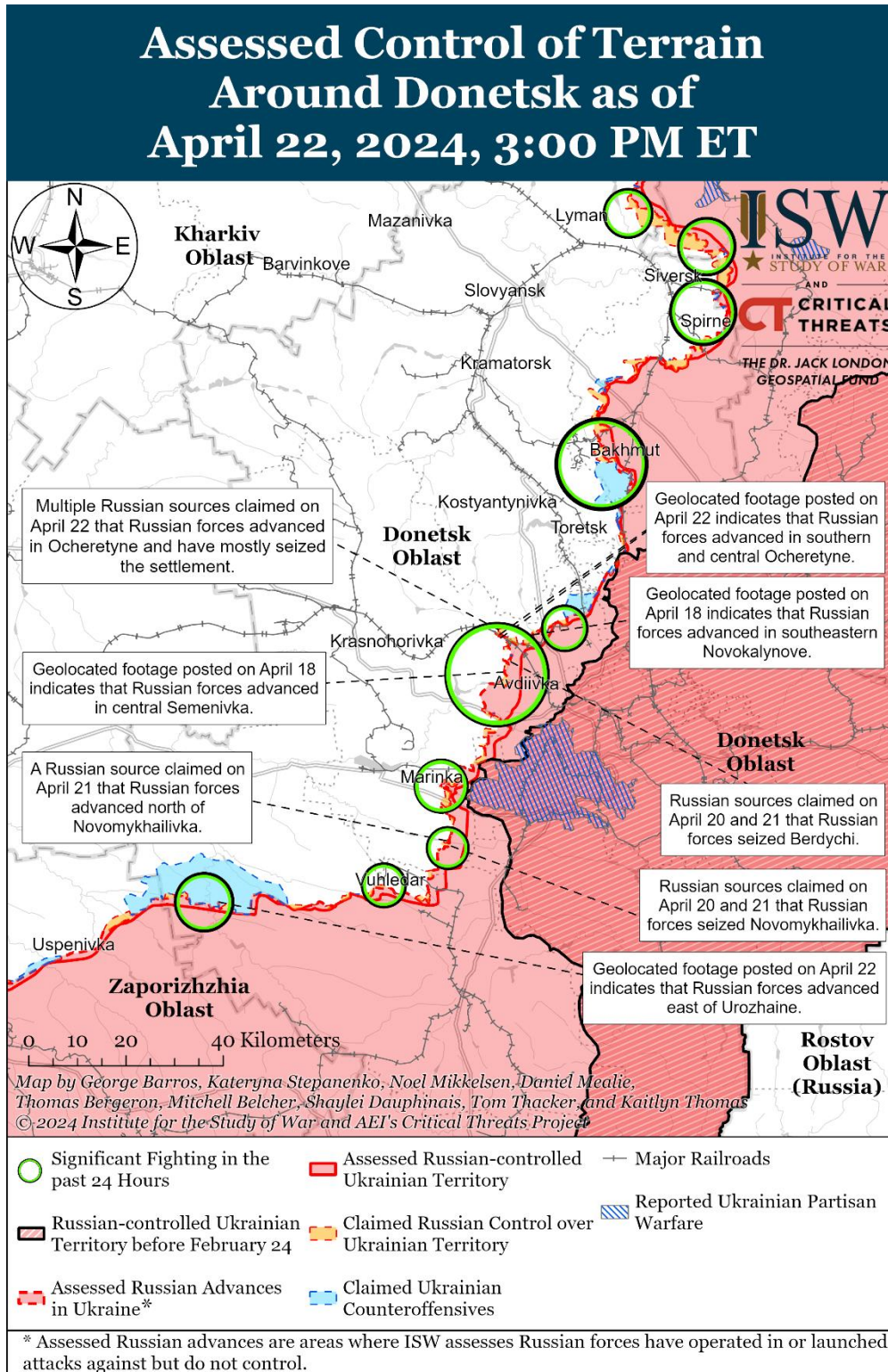


- Avdiivka and Pokrovsk City Limits
- ▭ Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- ▭ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- ▭ Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▭ Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- ▭ Russian Field Fortifications

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

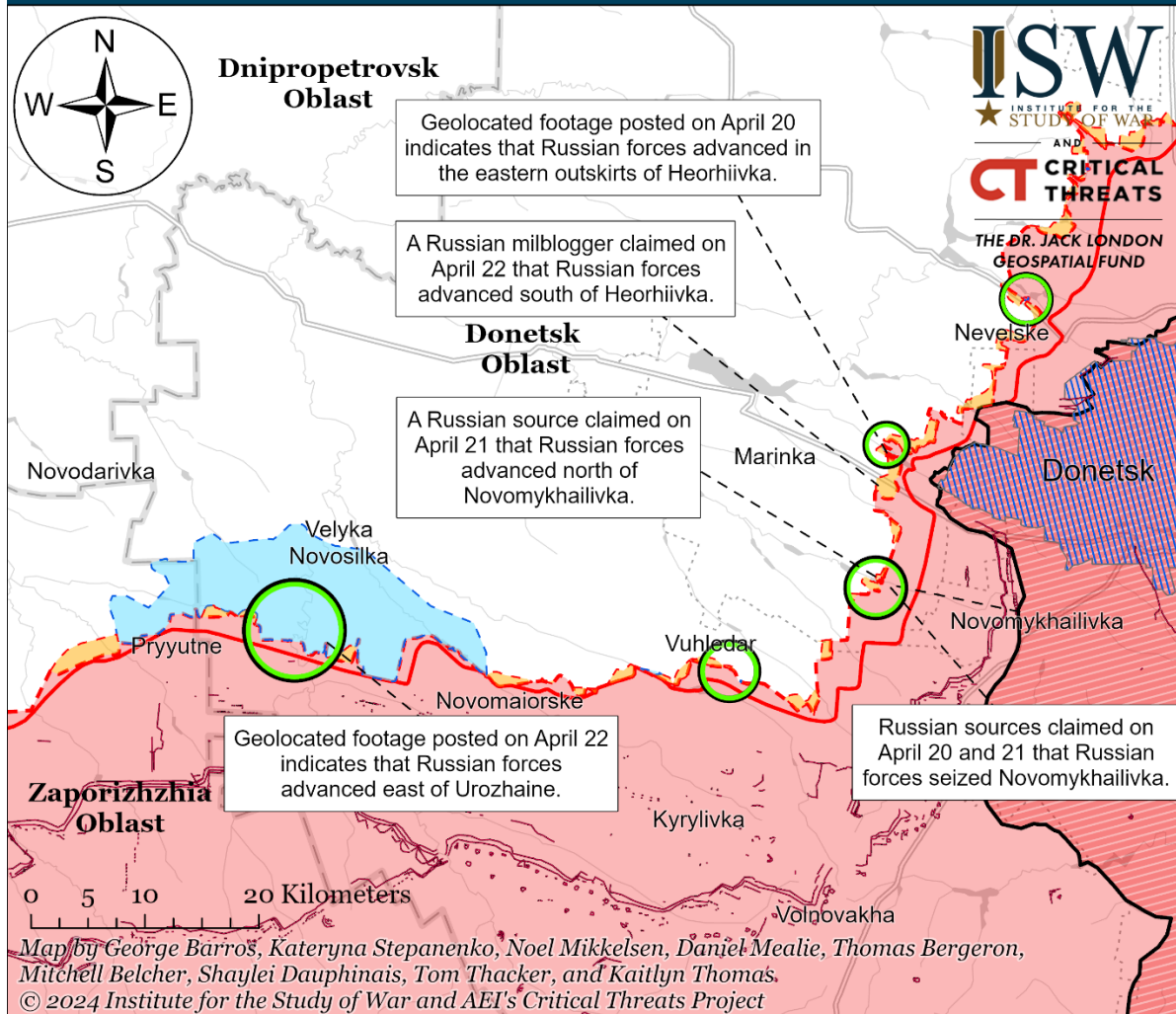
Note: A Russian source claimed on April 21 that Russian forces advanced 400 meters deep in the southern outskirts of Pervomaiske. A Russian source claimed on April 19 that Russian forces advanced 250 meters near eastern Novokalynove, 100 meters toward the outskirts of Novobakhmutivka, and 200 meters in Novokalynove. Russian sources claimed on April 18 that Russian forces advanced along a two and a half kilometer wide and 1.67 kilometer deep frontline toward Novokalynove.

Russian forces recently advanced west of Donetsk City. Geolocated footage posted on April 20 shows that Russian forces advanced on the eastern outskirts of Heorhiivka (west of Donetsk City).[40] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on April 22 that Russian forces seized Novomykhailivka (southwest of Donetsk City), but several prominent Russian milbloggers reported that Ukrainian forces maintain positions on the western outskirts of the settlement, particularly in the dacha area.[41] Ukrainian 79th Air Assault Brigade Commander Colonel Yevhen Shmatalyuk noted that Ukrainian forces still have fire control over Novomykhailivka despite heavy fighting and constant Russian assaults by roughly two brigades and eight regiments worth of Russian forces.[42] Elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) are reportedly operating in Novomykhailivka, and elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th CAA, Southern Military District [SMD]) and 5th Motorized Rifle Brigade (1st DNR AC) are reportedly operating near Heorhiivka and Krasnohorivka (west of Donetsk City).[43]



Russian forces recently advanced in the Donetsk-Zaporizhzhia Oblast border area. Geolocated footage posted on April 22 of a Russian friendly fire incident involving a Russian tank and MT-LB armored fighting vehicle shows that Russian forces have advanced east of Urozhaine (south of Velyka Novosilka).[44] Positional engagements also continued near Staromayorske (also south of Velyka Novosilka).[45] Elements of the Russian 14th Spetsnaz Brigade (subordinate to the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate) and 11th Air Force and Air Defense Army (Russian Aerospace Forces and Eastern Military District) reportedly continue to operate in this direction.[46]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Donetsk Oblast as of April 22, 2024, 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
- Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

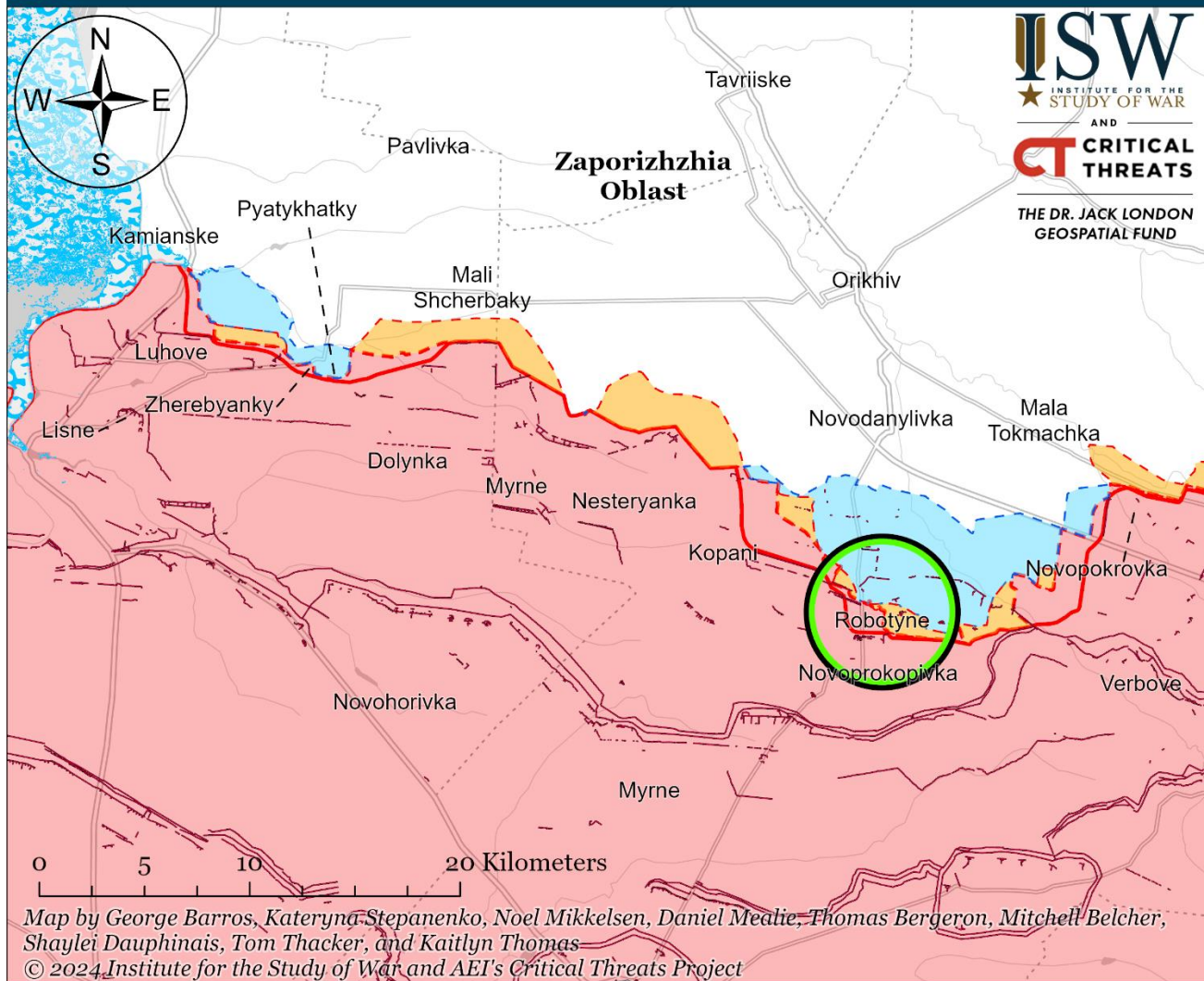
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

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

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 22, but there were no confirmed advances in the area. Positional engagements continued near Robotyne and northwest of Verbove (east of Robotyne).[47] Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting regular drone strikes against the T0401 Tokmak-Polohy highway and Russian military equipment in the area.[48]

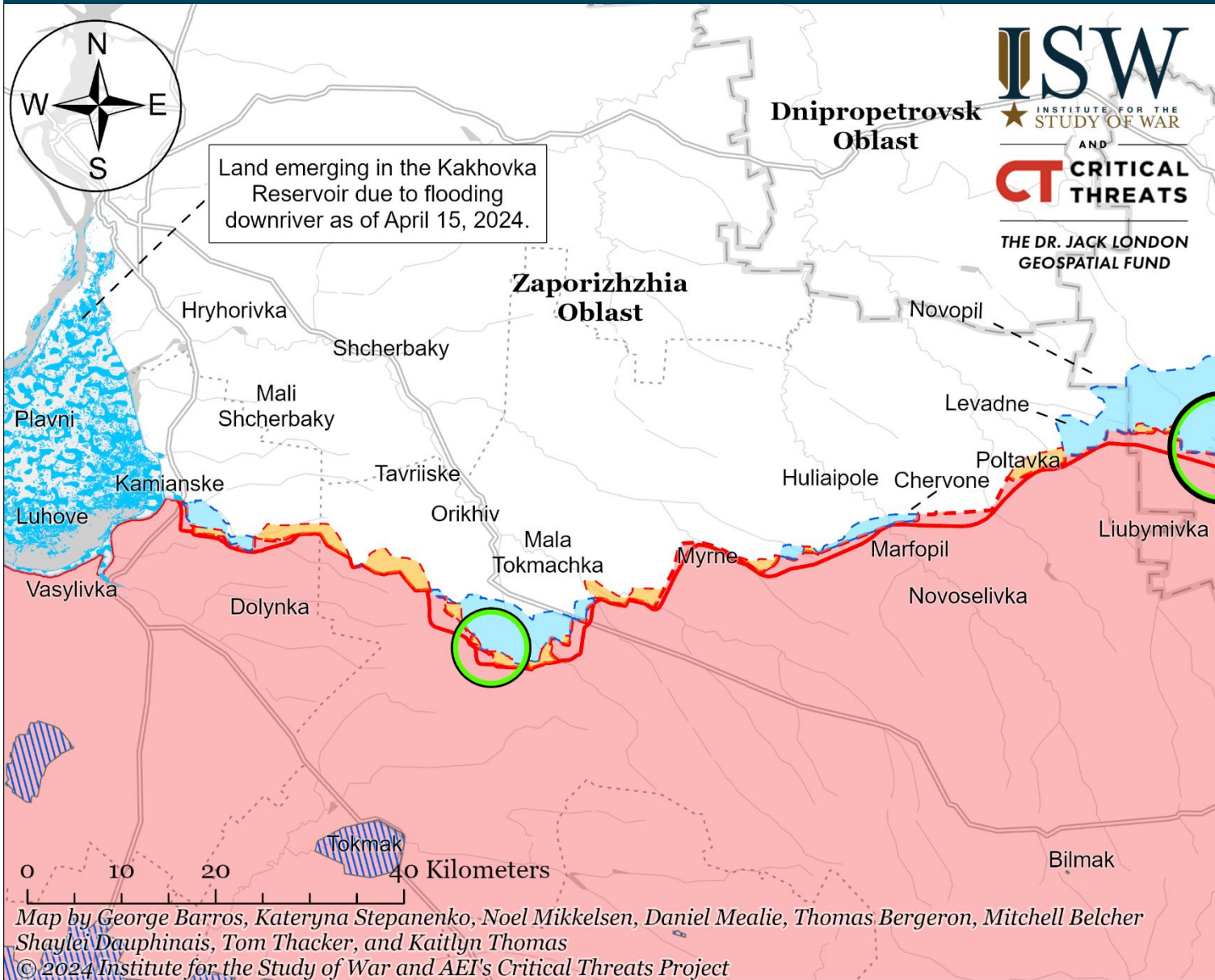
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of April 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 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 | Russian Field Fortifications |
| Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine* | Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives | Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir |

* 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 Zaporizhzhia as of April 22, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Positional engagements continued on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast, including near Krynky and the Antonivsky roadway bridge (north of Oleshky), on April 22, but there were no confirmed changes to the frontline in this area.[49]



Ukrainian Navy Spokesperson Captain Third Rank Dmytro Pletenchuk reported on April 22 that the Russian Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) *Kommuna* submarine support ship was carrying naval drones when Ukrainian forces struck the ship on April 21.[50] Pletenchuk stated that the BSF will likely not be able to compensate for the loss of the *Kommuna* because the Russian Navy does not have any comparable ships that can join the BSF in the Black Sea.[51]

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

Russian forces conducted a limited drone and missile strike series against Ukraine overnight on April 21 to 22. Ukrainian Air Force Commander Lieutenant General Mykola Oleshchuk reported that Russian forces launched seven Shahed-136/131 drones from occupied Cape Chauda, Crimea and three S-300/400 air defense missiles from occupied Donetsk Oblast and that Ukrainian forces shot down five of the drones over Odesa Oblast.[52] Ukrainian officials stated that Russian drones damaged agricultural infrastructure in Odesa City.[53]

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

The Russian state "Sudoplatov" volunteer drone initiative is reportedly equipping Russian military personnel operating in the Bakhmut direction with cheap and defective first-person view (FPV) drones. A Russian milblogger (who has previously fought in occupied Ukraine) summarized feedback from Russian servicemen who received training and drones as part of the Sudoplatov drone initiative.[54] The milblogger observed that Sudoplatov drone operators undergo "primitive" training near the active frontline and implied that Russian forces lack motivation to make use of available simulators to learn how to operate FPV drones. The milblogger reiterated that Sudoplatov drones operate on one wavelength, which makes them vulnerable to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) systems. The milblogger also claimed that Russian manufacturers use cheap components to produce Sudoplatov drones, resulting in many defects and causing nearly one third of drones simply to fall to the ground after launch. The milblogger added that the battlefield effectiveness of these drones has sharply declined since fall 2023 after Ukrainian forces adapted to repelling these drones and noted that Russian forces need to launch many Sudoplatov drones in order to reach one target.

The milblogger observed that Russian military command's poor understanding of technology is degrading Russian forces' ability to effectively operate small attack drones in the Bakhmut direction.[55] The milblogger claimed that the Russian military command has developed several misunderstandings about drone operations, resulting in the command ordering drone operators to carry out impractical tasks. The milblogger claimed that the Russian military command often appoints drone operators who lack proper motivation and necessary technical literacy and observed that there are no systemic mechanisms that would improve coordination between Russian EW and drone units. The milblogger added that Russian drone operators are unable to directly support ground assault groups due to the lack of coordination and that the Russian military command has excessively formalized drone operations.

Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov claimed on April 22 that 41,722 Chechen servicemen have deployed to Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, of whom 17,079 are volunteers.[56] Kadyrov claimed that there are currently over 9,000 Chechen servicemen fighting in Ukraine. ISW cannot independently verify Kadyrov's claims.

Russian convicts who previously fought in Ukraine are continuing to commit additional crimes upon their return from the battlefield. Russian opposition outlet *Astra* reported that a former Wagner Group fighter, who had previously served a 12-year sentence for murder, murdered a woman in Leningrad Oblast.[57] The Wagner fighter returned from the frontlines in Ukraine to Russia in the summer of 2023. Russian regional officials, however, are continuing to parade convicts as veterans to incentivize further recruitment and promote "patriotic" values. *Astra* reported that a Russian convict, who was released from his six-year prisoner sentence for encouraging teenagers to commit suicide after volunteering to fight in Ukraine, presented a "patriotic lecture" at a Russian school.[58]

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

Russian drone manufactures are reportedly using modernized Shahed-136/131 drones in Ukraine and are expanding Russia's domestic production of Shahed drones. A Russian milblogger published alleged classified data from the Russian Shahed drone production facility in the Alubuga Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on April 21 and claimed that the facility increased the payload of domestically produced Shahed drones to 90 kilograms and is developing high-explosive fragmentation incendiary and thermobaric warheads for Shahed drones.[59] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces used two Shahed drones equipped with 90 kilogram warheads and eight Shahed drones equipped with thermobaric warheads to strike targets in Ukraine on March 13 and claimed that Russian specialists installed Ukrainian SIM cards in the drones to power Global Systems for Mobile Communications (GSM) signal trackers, enabling Russian forces to track the

drone's location in real time. The milblogger claimed that the Alabuga Shahed drone production facility is considering purchasing 10,000 trackers and additional unspecified drone production equipment by the end of 2024.

General Director of the Russian "Geran" Research and Production Enterprise Oleg Zhukov told Kremlin newswire *TASS* on April 22 that Russian specialists have developed a portable anti-drone jammer equipped with artificial intelligence (AI), called the "Gyurza" jammer, and that Russian forces are already using the jammer in unspecified areas of the frontline.[60] Zhukov claimed that the "Gyurza" jammer's AI is capable of independently determining if a drone is operating on a Ukrainian or Russian frequency and only jamming the isolated frequencies that Ukrainian drones are operating on. This innovation is likely an effort to address recent claims that Russian electronic warfare (EW) systems frequently interfere with Russian drone operations when Russian forces try to down Ukrainian drones by jamming all frequencies in the vicinity of the system, as opposed to attempting to only jam isolated frequencies in one area.[61]

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

Ukraine's European partners continue to provide aid to Ukraine. Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren stated on April 19 that the Netherlands will contribute 150 million euros (about \$159 million) to the German-led initiative to supply Ukraine with air defense systems and will purchase 60 million euros (about \$64 million) worth of short-range air defense equipment for Ukraine to combat drone strikes.[62] German Minister of Economic Affairs and Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck and Head of Diehl Defense Helmut Rauch announced on April 18 that Germany will deliver an additional IRIS-T air defense system to Ukraine in a few weeks.[63] Latvian Defense Minister Andris Spruds stated on April 22 that Latvia is prepared to give Ukraine a short-range air defense system.[64] Denmark announced on April 16 that it will allocate 2.2 billion Danish kroner (about \$314 million) worth of military assistance to Ukraine, including funds to strengthen Ukraine's naval capabilities, purchase ammunition and drones, and produce missile components.[65] Denmark announced that it would allocate 200 million Danish kroner (about \$28 million) of this package to buy materiel for the Ukrainian military from Ukrainian manufacturers, becoming the first country to commit to this system of Western aid procurement for Ukraine.[66] A crowdfunding campaign in Slovakia to support the Czech initiative that began on April 16 has raised \$3.4 million as of April 22.[67] The Office of the President of Ukraine stated on April 18 that Ukraine and the Czech Republic have begun negotiations on a bilateral security agreement.[68] German State Secretary of Economic Affairs and Climate Action Sven Giegold stated on April 19 that Germany approved 5.2 billion euros (about \$5.5 billion) worth of military equipment exports in the first quarter of 2024, of which about 3.8 billion euros (about \$4 billion) went to Ukraine.[69] Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Kateryna Pavlichenko stated on April 18 that Ukrainian authorities have not found a single case of smuggling arms outside of Ukraine.[70]

The Ukrainian defense industrial base (DIB) is continuing to increase domestic production and is successfully deploying new Ukrainian-produced weapons to the frontlines. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on April 18 that Ukraine had increased the production of Ukrainian Bohdana self-propelled howitzers, producing 10 Bohdana howitzers in April 2024.[71] Members of the US Congress' National Defense Strategy Commission Jane Harman, Mara Rudman, and Roger Zakheim recently assessed that Ukraine will "increase tenfold" the number of Neptune missiles it is manufacturing in 2024 and that the Neptune will have an increased range of up to 1,000 kilometers.[72] Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mykhalo Fedorov announced on April 17 that Ukraine transferred 2,000 Ukrainian-produced short-range electronic warfare (EW) systems to the frontlines.[73]

Habeck and Ukrainian Minister of Strategic Industries Oleksandr Kamyshin attended the opening of the new Quantum-Systems GmbH drone production facility in Ukraine on April 18.[74] Quantum-Systems reported that this is the company's second site in Ukraine and that it will invest up to six million euros (about \$6.3 million) in its Ukrainian enterprises over the next two years.

Ukrainian defense officials are continuing efforts to combat corruption in the Ukrainian DIB. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov outlined on April 16 that the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) will prioritize defense planning, procurement for Ukrainian forces, defense production, and development of defensive technology over the next six months.[75] Umerov reported that Ukrainian defense officials completed a functional audit of the Ukrainian MoD and General Staff and noted that the Ukrainian MoD has completely changed its procurement system over the past 200 days. Umerov clarified that the new system is a two-level procurement system that complies with NATO principles, which has allowed Ukraine to change the legal framework that previously created favorable conditions for corruption. Umerov reported that the new procurement system allowed Ukraine to catch violations worth 2.16 billion hryvnias (about \$54.3 million).

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

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

Russian Information Operations and Narratives

The Kremlin continues efforts to frame the Russo-Chinese bilateral relationship as a “no limits” partnership ahead of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s April 24-26 trip to China. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed on April 22 that Russia and China continue to develop a dynamic and comprehensive relationship and coordinate their foreign policies due to the countries’ “significantly similar” positions in unspecified key issues.[76] Lavrov claimed that Russia and China have almost completely “de-dollarized” their bilateral trade and that more than 90 percent of bilateral trade is done in rubles or yuan. Russian state outlet *Izvestia* reported on April 16 that four large Chinese banks recently stopped accepting payments in yuan from Russian companies, however.[77] ISW continues to assess that China is likely avoiding fully committing to Russia’s envisioned “no limits” partnership.[78]

Russian milbloggers continued to respond 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 US policymakers from finalizing aid and degrade Western and Ukrainian expectations about the impact of US aid on the battlefield.[79] Russian milbloggers claimed that US aid will not impact the situation on the frontline and claimed that the US is only prolonging Russia’s “inevitable” defeat of Ukraine.[80] ISW assessed on April 20 that Kremlin officials and mouthpieces 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.[81]

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)

Head of the Belarusian Ministry of Defense’s (MoD) Department of International Military Cooperation Major General Valery Revenko stated on April 22 that Iranian Deputy Minister of Defense and rector of the Malek Ashtar University of Technology Mehdi Jafari arrived in Minsk to visit various scientific institutions of the Belarusian Armed Forces and the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences.[82]

Belarusian authorities are expanding cooperation with Russian regional governments on the transport of Belarusian goods, likely as part of sanctions evasions measures. Murmansk Oblast Governor Andrei Chibis and General Director of the “Arctic Gates” Marine Terminal Andrei Bunakov signed an agreement on April 22 on the construction of a sea terminal at the Lavna port for mineral fertilizers, petroleum products, and other cargo produced in Belarus. Bunakov claimed that the first cargo will arrive at the sea terminal in 2028.[83] Arkhangelsk Oblast governor Alexander Tsybulsky and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko also discussed the export of Belarusian cargo through the port of Arkhangelsk at a meeting on April 22.[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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