

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 7, 2023

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July 7, 2023, 5pm 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 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 cutoff for this product was 1pm ET on July 7. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 8 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Ukrainian forces made tactically significant gains in the Bakhmut area and continued counteroffensive operations in at least three other sectors of the front on July 7. Geolocated footage published on July 6 indicates that Ukrainian forces have made tactically significant gains near Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut).[1] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations north and south of Bakhmut, and Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsykyi reported that Ukrainian forces established control over unspecified previously lost positions in the Bakhmut area.[2] Ukrainian General Staff Spokesperson Andriy Kovalev reported that Ukrainian forces also achieved partial success near Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[3] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast and along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts.[4] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and other Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in the Kreminna direction along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border.[5]

Russian forces have reportedly committed almost the entirety of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces to southern Ukraine. Ukrainian military observer Konstantin Mashovets stated on July 5 that the Eastern Grouping of Forces is comprised of the 5th Combined Arms Army (CAA), the 35th CAA, the 36th CAA, and the 29th CAA (all of the Eastern Military District).[6] ISW cannot confirm the exact composition of the Eastern Grouping of Forces, although it continues to appear that this operational direction command structure is largely coextensive with the Eastern Military District (EMD). Mashovets claimed that the 5th CAA's 127th Motorized Rifle Division and 60th Motorized Rifle Brigade are operating along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts and that the CAA's other main unit, the 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade, is operating south of Bakhmut. ISW has observed the 5th CAA's 127th Division and 60th Brigade in the Zaporizhia Oblast-Donetsk Oblast border area along with previous Russian claims that the 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade has been

operating on Bakhmut’s southern flank.[7] Mashovets stated that the 35th CAA’s 38th Motorized Rifle Brigade, 64th Motorized Rifle Brigade, and 69th Separate Cover Brigade are deployed to western Zaporizhia Oblast and that the 36th CAA’s 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade and 5th Separate Tank Brigade are deployed to areas south of Velyka Novosilka in western Donetsk Oblast.[8] ISW previously assessed that the 35th CAA’s Chief of Staff’s alleged death from a Ukrainian missile strike on June 13 in Zaporizhia Oblast suggested that significant elements of the 35th CAA are likely operating along the Zaporizhia front.[9] The Ukrainian General Staff previously reported on March 19 that elements of the 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade would deploy to western Donetsk Oblast.[10] Mashovets also stated that the 29th CAA, the smallest combined arms army in the EMD, is the only formation of the Eastern Grouping of Forces in reserve.[11] Mashovets added that the 58th and 49th CAAs and 22nd Army Corps of the Southern Military District (SMD) are committed to operations in Southern Ukraine.[12] Mashovets stated that elements of the 68th Army Corps (EMD) are also deployed to southern Ukraine, but suggested that the 68th Army Corps is not a part of the Eastern Grouping of Forces, making it the only higher-level EMD formation separate from the Eastern Grouping of Forces.[13] ISW has also observed elements of the EMD Pacific Fleet’s naval infantry brigades (40th and 155th) continuing to serve in western Donetsk Oblast after suffering heavy losses during the Russian winter spring 2023 offensive.[14] Mashovets’ reporting and ISW’s current observation of the Russian order of battle (ORBAT) in southern Ukraine indicates that almost the entirety of the EMD’s combat power is committed to defending against Ukrainian counteroffensives, primarily in southern Ukraine.

The deployment of almost the entirety of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces and extensive SMD elements to the frontline in southern Ukraine suggests that Russian defenses in southern Ukraine may be brittle.

Mashovets’ report suggests that the only reserve that the Russian military maintains in southern Ukraine consists of elements of the 29th Combined Arms Army – the Eastern Military District’s smallest combined arms army that has only one maneuver brigade: the 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade. Elements of the 36th Motorized Rifle Brigade participated in the Battle of Kyiv in early 2022 and fought near Vuhledar in early 2023 and are thus likely degraded.[15]

Russian defenses in southern Ukraine, while formidable, are not insurmountable. Russian forces in southern Ukraine would likely have to fall back on prepared defensive positions without significant support from operational reserves if Ukrainian forces achieved an operational breakthrough. Withdrawal in contact is an exceedingly difficult military task, and it is unclear that Russian forces in contact would be able to successfully withdraw from their first lines to other prepared lines in good order, especially if those forces - and the forces behind them in echelon - are worn-down and unsupported. ISW previously assessed that Ukrainian forces are likely conducting a gradual effort to systematically degrade Russian combat power in southern Ukraine over time, increasing the brittleness of the Russian defenses.[16]

Russia temporarily disconnected at least partially from the global internet during a test of its “sovereign internet” system overnight on July 4-5.

Russian state affiliated media outlet *RBK* cited telecommunications sources that claimed that Russia successfully conducted a test of the Sovereign Internet system overnight.^[17] The test reportedly prevented Russians from accessing common Western services including Google and Wikipedia while retaining access to Russian-hosted web services.^[18] The test likely disconnected some Russian government services, however, including Russian Railways and the Russian federal veterinary and agricultural oversight body Rosselkhoz nadzor.^[19] Russian telecommunications operators Megafon and Beeline also reported outages during the test.^[20] Continued tests and development of the "sovereign internet" indicate that the Kremlin continues long term efforts to be able to isolate Russia from Western influence and the global sphere, and this effort will likely have ramifications that spread beyond the information space.^[21] Russia's economy would likely significantly from protracted internet isolation, for example, because so much international commerce relies on the global internet.

Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against rear areas in Ukraine on June 6 to 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian air defenses shot down 12 of 18 Shahed-131/136 drones and seven of 11 Kalibr cruise missiles.^[22] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched the drones from areas near Primorsk-Akhtarsk in Krasnodar Krai and that Russian missiles struck Lviv City, an infrastructure facility in Zaporizhzhia City, and a residential building in Cherkasy Oblast.^[23] Ukrainian Permanent Representative to the UN Serhiy Kyslytsya stated that Russian forces have launched over 1,000 Iranian Shahed-131/136 and Mohajer-6 drones against Ukraine since September 2022.^[24]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ukrainian forces made tactically significant gains in the Bakhmut area and continued counteroffensive operations in at least three other sectors of the front on July 7.**
- **Russian forces have reportedly committed almost the entirety of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces to southern Ukraine.**
- **The deployment of almost the entirety of the Russian Eastern Grouping of Forces and extensive SMD elements to the frontline in southern Ukraine suggests that Russian defenses in southern Ukraine may be brittle.**
- **Russia temporarily disconnected at least partially from the global internet during a test of its "sovereign internet" system overnight on July 4-5.**
- **Russian forces conducted a series of missile and drone strikes against rear areas in Ukraine on June 6 to 7.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border. Ukrainian forces made tactically significant gains in the Bakhmut area between July 6-7.**
- **Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces launched a renewed wave of counterattacks in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast on July 7.**

- **The Russian occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) continues to restrict international monitors' access to the facility.**
- **The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly drafted a law that would expand the list of gross disciplinary offenses within the Russian Armed Forces.**
- **Russian authorities continue to portray themselves as responsible custodians of Ukrainian children in an effort to discredit Ukraine while continuing to forcibly deport Ukrainian children to Russia.**
- **A Belarusian military official stated that Wagner Group forces have not yet decided to deploy to Belarus while giving a press tour of the speculated Wagner Group base in Asipovichy on July 7.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 7, 2023, 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 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

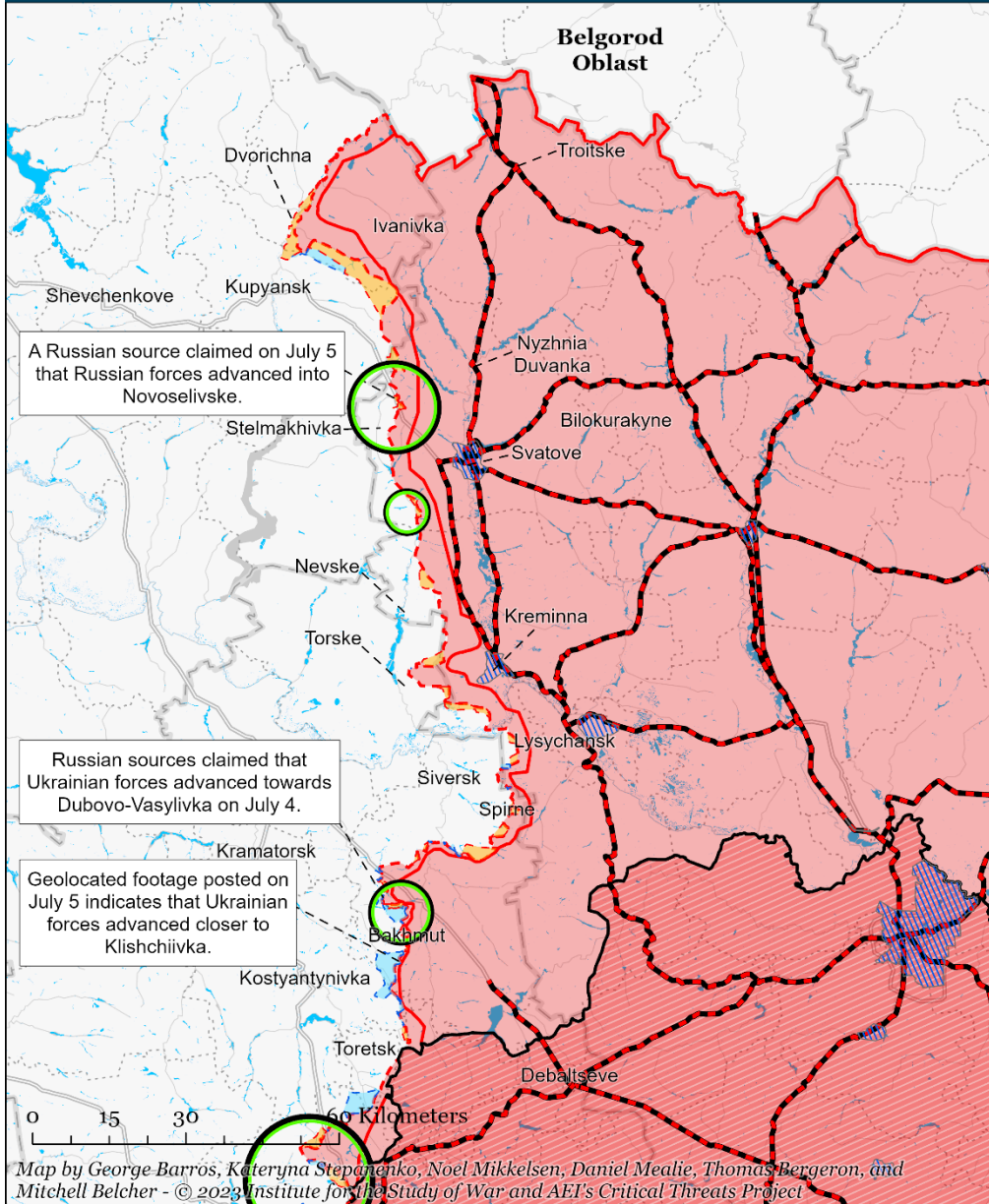
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

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 continued ground attacks on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on July 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Novoselivske (15km northwest of Svatove), Stelmakhivka (16km northwest of Svatove), west of Karmazynivka (13km southwest of Svatove), and northwest of Berestove (30km south of Kreminna).[25] A prominent Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces consolidated control over an industrial area in Novoselivske, advanced further into the settlement, and made marginal advances south of Novoselivske.[26] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that unspecified Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) elements recaptured some ground in the Serebrianska forest area (11km south of Kreminna).[27]

Ukrainian forces continued counterattacks on the Svatove-Kreminna line on July 7. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces attacked positions of elements of the Russian 15th and 30th Motorized Rifle brigades (both of the 2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) on the Karmazynivka-Krasnorechenske line (13-17km southwest of Svatove).[28] The milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces also attacked Russian positions near Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), Dibrova (5km southwest of Kreminna), and Bilohorivka (12km south of Kreminna), and in the direction of Shyplivka (8km southeast of Kreminna). Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian ground attacks near Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna), Yampolivka (14km west of Kreminna) and Torske (13km west of Kreminna).[29]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 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.

Note: Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar and Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reported on July 4 and 5, respectively, that Ukrainian forces are advancing at an unspecified rate in the northern and southern flanks of Bakhmut. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

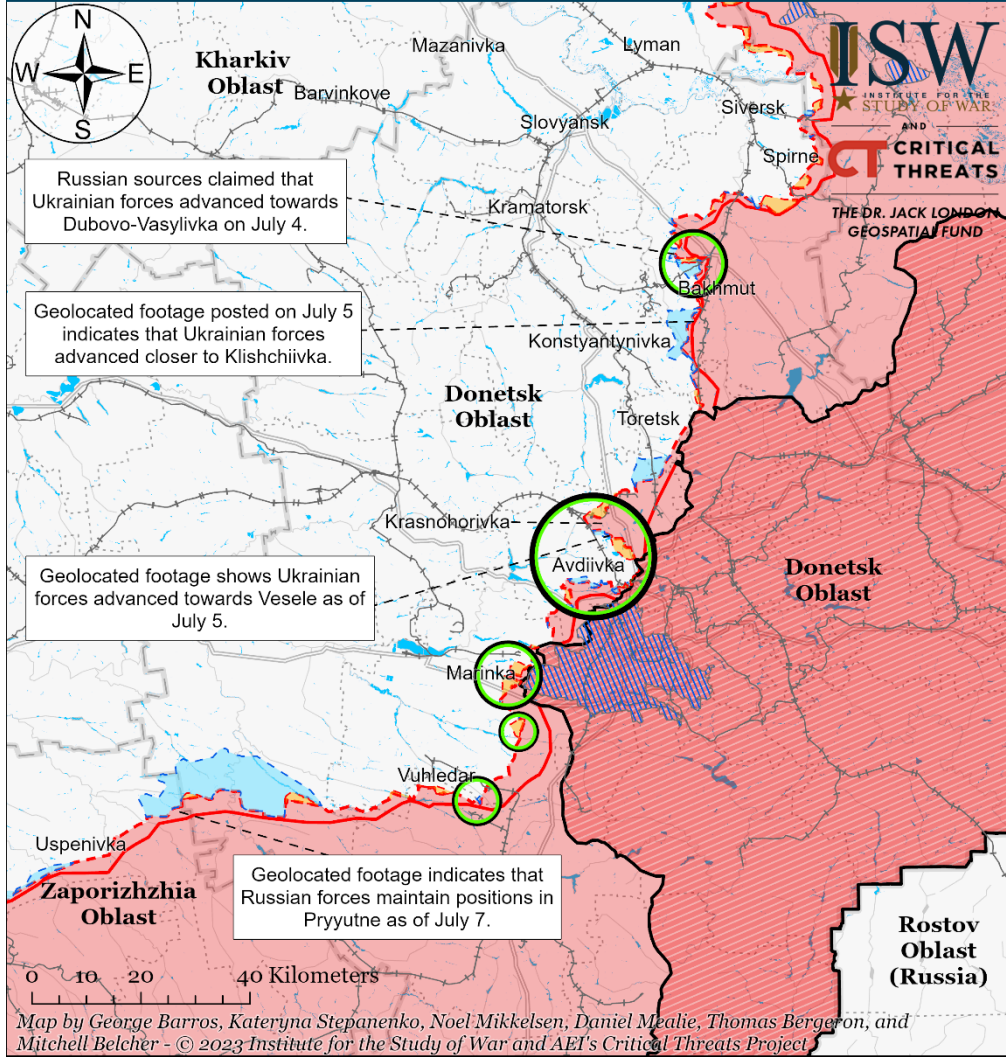
Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces made tactically significant gains in the Bakhmut area between July 6-7. Geolocated footage posted on July 6 shows that Ukrainian forces advanced west of Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut).[30] Ukrainian Ground Forces Commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi stated that Ukrainian forces are making progress and have retaken unspecified territory in the Bakhmut direction.[31] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations to the north and south of Bakhmut and repelled Russian attacks near Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[32] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted an unsuccessful offensive operation with forces of up to a company in size with armored vehicles south of Ozarianivka (16km southwest of Bakhmut) near the Mayorske checkpoint.[33] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Group of Forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Yahidne, Mayorsk (21km southwest of Bakhmut), and Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut).[34]

Russian and Ukrainian sources continued to disagree over the status of the heights surrounding Klishchiivka. Ukrainian General Staff spokesperson Andriy Kovalev reported that Ukrainian forces continue offensive operations north and south of Bakhmut and achieved partial success near Klishchiivka.[35] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces control important heights west and north of Klishchiivka.[36] Other milbloggers disagreed and claimed that Ukrainian forces do not control the dominant heights in the area.[37]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on July 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Novokalynove (11km northwest of Avdiivka), Avdiivka, Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske, Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), and Novomykhailivka (36km southwest of Avdiivka).[38] Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Captain Valery Shershen stated that Russian forces continue to focus their efforts on offensive operations in the Avdiivka and Marinka directions.[39] The Russian MoD claimed that elements of the Russian Southern Group of forces repelled Ukrainian attacks near Sieverne (6km west of Avdiivka), Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), and Vodyane (8km southwest of Avdiivka).[40] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted footage purporting to show Chechen Akhmat forces operating alongside Russian 255th Motorized Rifle Regiment (20th Guards Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Guards Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) near Marinka.[41]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

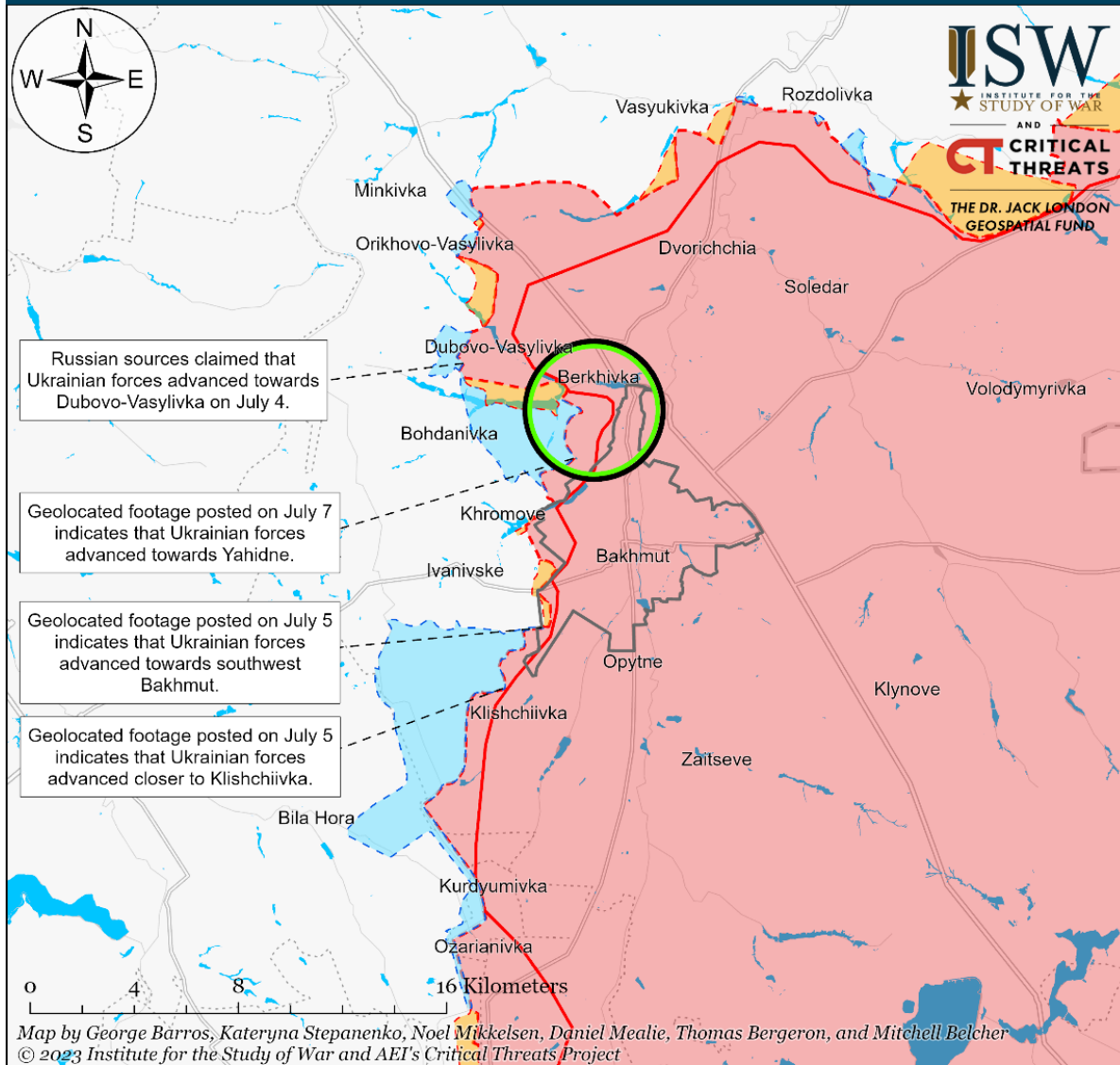


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- ▬ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▬ Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Major Railroads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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff Oleksii Hromov reported on July 5 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 7.5 kilometers deep in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 7, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Dubovo-Vasylivka on July 4.

Geolocated footage posted on July 7 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced towards Yahidne.

Geolocated footage posted on July 5 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced towards southwest Bakhmut.

Geolocated footage posted on July 5 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced closer to Klishchiivka.

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

- Bakhmut City Limits
- ▬ Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- ▬ Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- ▬ Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- ▬ Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- ▬ 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.

Note: Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar and Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy reported on July 4 and 5, respectively, that Ukrainian forces are advancing at an unspecified rate in the northern and southern flanks of Bakhmut. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

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

Russian and Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on July 7. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive actions near Blahodatne (just south of Velyka Novosilka).[42] A Russian milblogger also claimed that Russian forces attacked and recaptured several positions northwest of Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).[43] Russian sources additionally claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted ground attacks south and southwest of Velyka Novosilka near Staromayorske (7km south), Urozhaine (9km south), Novodonetske (13km southwest), and Pryyutne (15km southwest).[44] A group of mobilized Russian fighters from Altay Krai, Republic of Sakha, and Primorsky Krai posted a video appeal on July 7 claiming that the Russian military command abandoned them on the frontline in the face of Ukrainian counterattacks in Novodarivka (15km southwest of Velyka Novosilka), and that their unit has lost 66 men in this area since January 2023.[45] The soldiers complained of a lack of artillery support, provisions, and water, indicating that some Russian forces fighting in western Donetsk Oblast are likely facing high levels of exhaustion and attrition in the face of continued Ukrainian counterattacks.

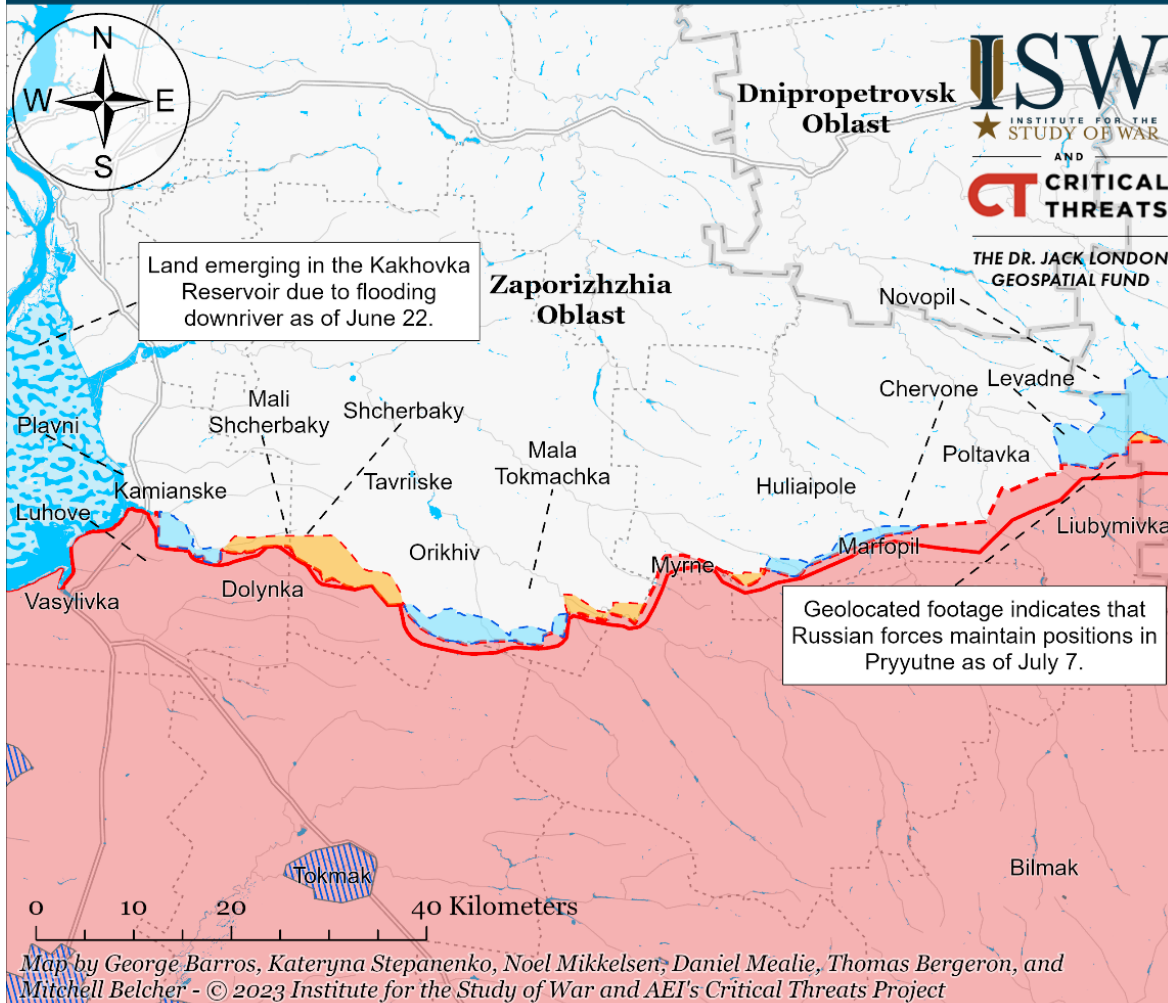
Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces launched a renewed wave of counterattacks in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 7. Several Russian milbloggers claimed that small Ukrainian infantry groups conducted a series of assaults along the western Zaporizhia Oblast frontline on the night of July 6 to early morning of July 7. The milbloggers noted that Ukrainian forces were particularly active southeast of Orikhiv towards the Novofedorivka-Verbove line (20km southeast) and southwest of Orikhiv towards the Nesteryanka-Kopani (10km southwest) and Pyatykhatky-Zherebranky (25km southwest) lines.[46] Russian sources claimed that elements of the Southern Military District, particularly the 19th and 42nd Motorized Rifle divisions, repelled all Ukrainian attacks in these areas.[47]

Russian occupation authorities continue to restrict international monitors' access to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Raphael Grossi reported on July 7 that IAEA monitors have gained more access at the ZNPP since July 5 but still cannot reach the roofs of the reactor buildings, where Ukrainian officials have warned Russian forces may have placed objects resembling explosive devices.[48] Grossi stated that the IAEA submitted an official request to the Russian occupation leadership of the ZNPP for access to the nuclear reactor containment unit roofs.

Russian forces conducted missile and artillery strikes on the west (right) bank of Kherson Oblast on July 7. The Ukrainian Kherson Oblast Administration stated that Russian forces conducted 77 artillery strikes against west bank Kherson Oblast on July 6-7.[49] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command spokesperson Nataliya Humenyuk reported that Russian forces additionally targeted the west bank with S-300 surface-to-air missiles and Shahed drones.[50] Russian milbloggers claimed that the situation on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast near the Antonivsky bridge remains unchanged

and reported that Ukrainian and Russian forces are conducting mutual artillery shelling of positions on the opposite banks.[\[51\]](#)

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of July 7, 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
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- 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: Ukrainian Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Department of the General Staff Oleksii Hromov reported on July 5 that Ukrainian forces advanced up to 7.5 kilometers deep in the Melitopol and Berdyansk directions. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 7, 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.

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

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

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly drafted a law that would expand the list of gross disciplinary offenses within the Russian Armed Forces. The bill reportedly would make failure to take measures to respect the “rights and freedoms” of military personnel as well as the issuance of an order without determining measures for logistical support a gross disciplinary offense for Russian commanders.[52] The bill also would make “obstruction” and “disobedience” towards Russian military police a gross disciplinary offense.[53] The Russian MoD may be expanding the list of these administrative offenses as a demonstrative response to persistent Russian criticism that commanders mistreat Russian servicemembers in Ukraine.

Russian officials are reportedly continuing to rely on large enterprises for force generation efforts. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on July 7 that representatives from Russian Railways subsidiary Transbezopasnost stated that the MoD ordered all large enterprises to provide employees for military service.[54] *Verstka* also reported that enterprises are paying employees bonuses for signing contracts with the MoD and are also specifically hiring new personnel willing to sign military contracts in order to meet recruitment quotas instead of sending existing employees.[55] Some of these larger enterprises reportedly placed ads on job search websites explicitly asking for employees willing to fill roles within the Russian military and not with the companies themselves.[56]

Russian sources claimed that the Russian military approved a Karakut class corvette for service and that it has joined or will join the Black Sea Fleet. Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian officials accepted the state test certificates for the “Zyklon” corvette, with one claiming that the ship will join the Black Sea Fleet in the future and the other claiming that it entered service on July 6.[57] One milblogger claimed that three more Karakut corvette class ships will enter service by the end of 2023.[58] The milblogger claimed that each Karakut class corvette can carry eight Kalibr missiles and may be retrofitted to carry Zircon hypersonic missiles.[59] The milblogger also claimed that the Vasily Bykov class corvette patrol ship “Viktor the Great” will enter service by the end of 2023.[60]

Omsk Oblast Governor Vitaly Khotsenko stated on July 7 that Omsk Oblast universities will create a drone research center in Omsk City in accordance with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s orders to increase drone production. Khotsenko stated that the Omsk State Technical University and the Omsk State Agrarian University will create the drone research center and that the Omsk Aviation College will offer accreditations for drone operators.[61]

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 authorities continue to portray themselves as responsible custodians of Ukrainian children in an effort to discredit Ukraine while continuing to forcibly deport Ukrainian children to Russia. Kherson Oblast Occupation Head Vladimir Saldo announced in a meeting with Russian State Duma Vice Speaker and former Russian Children's Rights Commissioner Anna Kuznetsova that the Expert Council of the Russian State Duma Commission to investigate claimed “Ukrainian criminal acts against minors” will collect information and develop mechanisms to support and rehabilitate children.[62] Saldo also announced that Kherson Oblast Deputy Head Tatyana Kuzmich will serve on the Expert Council. Saldo stated that the Kherson Oblast Occupation Administration has already sent thousands of Ukrainian children in occupied Kherson Oblast to medical institutions and health and recreation camps in Russia. The Kherson Oblast Occupation Administration amplified footage on July 6 showing 185 children from Henichesk Raion in occupied Kherson Oblast at the “Lan” Camp in Adygea Republic.[63]

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed at least 25,710 Ukrainian civilian casualties between February 24, 2022 and June 30, 2023. The report recorded 9,177 killed and 15,993 injured Ukrainian civilians in 1,504 settlements of Ukraine and noted that the actual casualty counts are “considerably higher” because the OHCHR is unable to corroborate reports of civilian casualties in Russian occupied areas.[64] The OHCHR reported that explosive weapons with wide area effects, including artillery, tank, and MLRS fire; cruise and ballistic missiles; and air strikes, caused 90.5 percent of all civilian casualties.[65]

Russian authorities continue efforts to forcibly change the demography of occupied Ukraine by transporting Russians to occupied areas. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities have brought 157,000 Russian military personnel, civil servants, and civilians to occupied Sevastopol, Crimea since Russia’s occupation of Crimea in 2014.[66] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities also bring workers from across Russia to work in occupied Ukraine. ISW has previously reported on Russian efforts to change the demographic composition of occupied areas of Ukraine by importing Russian military personnel and civilians while forcibly relocating Ukrainian civilians to Russia.[67]

Russian occupation officials may be using the threat of potential escalation around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) to coerce Ukrainian civilians to relocate deeper into Russian and occupied territories. Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko reported that lines at the Novoazovsk border crossing between occupied Donetsk Oblast and Russia reached up to 30km long because civilians are afraid of escalation around the ZNPP.[68] Andryushchenko also noted that lines are long on routes into Crimea due to Russia’s reliance on the Novoazovsk-Simferopol highway as the main logistical artery supporting occupied Crimea.

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks)

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

A Belarusian military official stated that Wagner Group forces have not yet decided to deploy to Belarus as of July 7. Assistant to the Belarusian Minister of Defense Major General Leonid Kasinsky conducted a press tour of the suspected Wagner Group base near Asipovichi, Belarus, on July 7 and told international journalists that the base is intended to train Belarusian military officials and Belarusian territorial defense forces.[69] Kasinsky denied that the base is connected to the Wagner Group but stated that Wagner personnel may inspect the base (presumably to evaluate using it) when Wagner Group personnel make a "final decision.... to deploy or not to deploy to Belarus." [70] CNN also visited the camp and provided video from the tents.[71]

Kasinsky's statements suggest that Wagner Group personnel have not yet decided whether to go to Belarus (presumably to follow Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin if Prigozhin relocates to Belarus), sign contracts with the Russian MoD, or retire – the three options that Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Wagner fighters on June 26.[72] ISW previously reported that Prigozhin may not be upholding the deal that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko mediated given that Lukashenko stated that Prigozhin was not in Belarus as of July 6.[73] The status of the Wagner Group's reorganization and possible redeployment to Belarus may not be clear until fall 2023 considering that a Belarusian source reported on July 1 that the Wagner Group's reorganization, transfer of heavy equipment to the Russian MoD, and relocation to Belarus would take one-to-two months.[74]

Russian military personnel and equipment are reportedly redeploying from Belarus to Russia. The Community of Railway Workers of Belarus reported that at least five military cargo trains with Russian military equipment and personnel departed Belarus for Voronezh Oblast in Russia between July 3 to July 5.[75] ISW previously reported on July 6 about the observed dismantling of Russian field camps across multiple Belarusian training grounds in Brest, Vitebsk, and Mogilev oblasts in early July 2023.[76] It appears that these Russian forces are redeploying to Russia after completing training in Belarus but remains unclear if these Russian trainees will remain training in Russia, enter service in reserve, or deploy to frontlines in Ukraine.

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.

[1] <https://t.me/RVvoenkor/48783> ;
<https://twitter.com/dcitoTV/status/1677061732534210560?s=20>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02UmNfCuN2oAZPrA5JmwXhkvkVpV33FMf6UTQoUEKTyWYNG4wY42dyt1f8Scc3oCy6l> ; <https://t.me/osirskiy/172>

[3] <https://t.me/militarymediacenter/2456>

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02UmNfCuN2oAZPrA5JmwXhkvkVpV33FMf6UTQoUEKTyWYNG4wY42dyt1f8Scc3oCy6l>

[5] https://t.me/mod_russia/28161 ; https://t.me/rusich_army/9793

[6] <https://t.me/zvizdecmanhustu/995>

[7] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar052123> ; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar061223> ;
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