

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 10, 2023

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March 10, 5:15pm 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 maps that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

US intelligence warned that individuals with ties to Russian intelligence may be planning to attempt to instigate an insurrection in Moldova. CNN reported on March 10 that White House officials believe that Russian intelligence-linked individuals are planning to stage protests against the Moldovan government with the intent of fomenting a “manufactured insurrection” to install a pro-Russian administration in Moldova.[1] CNN reported that the US believes Russia has been spreading disinformation about Moldova’s purported instability and supporting it with information operations emanating from Russian-occupied Transnistria.[2] ISW has recently reported on several ongoing information operations in Transnistria premised on undermining the Moldovan government and sewing distrust of Ukraine and the West.[3]

Russian forces continue to establish defensive lines in rear areas far from current frontlines and areas in Russia that will likely never see fighting. Belgorod Oblast Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov claimed on March 9 that Russian authorities finished constructing the “zasechnaya line” of fortifications along Belgorod Oblast’s border with Ukraine.[4] Gladkov claimed that Russian forces should dedicate troops to defending this system of fortifications in case of an implausible Ukrainian attack on Belgorod Oblast. Russian forces would significantly misallocate forces that would be better suited supporting active offensive operations elsewhere in Ukraine by manning these fortifications. Gladkov also claimed that Russian officials spent 10 billion rubles (about \$132 million) constructing the defensive line, a likely waste of funds amid questions about Russia’s ability to fund its war effort in Ukraine.[5] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported on March 10 that Russian forces continued building fortifications along Kursk Oblast’s border with Ukraine, another area that will likely never see fighting.[6] Occupied Crimea head Sergey Aksyonov claimed on March 10 that Russian forces are constructing a defensive line in Crimea and implied that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the construction of the line.[7] These fortifications are far away from the current frontlines in southern Ukraine, and any Russian personnel and equipment deployed to these lines would similarly be better suited elsewhere in Ukraine. Russian officials in Kursk and Belgorod oblasts may be constructing defensive fortifications in support of information operations that aim to portray Ukraine as threatening Russian territory in order to frame the war in Ukraine as existential for Russia. Continued Russian fortifications in Crimea may suggest that Russian forces are unsure of their ability to hold occupied territories in southern Ukraine in the long term. ISW has not observed Russian forces deployed to any of these defensive lines at this time, and the fortifications are therefore currently inconsequential for Russian operations in Ukraine.

Russian Commissioner on Children’s Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, confirmed that the Russian government is using a variety of schemes to deport Ukrainian children to Russia in a comment that was apparently meant to disprove Western allegations of the illegality of these actions. In a Telegram post published on March 10, Lvova-Belova accused the West of artificially manufacturing fear regarding the deportation and forced adoption of Ukrainian children and claimed that children came to occupied areas of Ukraine and Russian territory “voluntarily” and can return to their families.[8] Lvova-Belova admitted that Russian authorities have taken children from Kherson, Zaporizhia, and Kharkiv oblasts to “sanatoriums” and health camps in occupied Crimea and Krasnodar Krai for “rest” and protection from hostilities and claimed that 89 “children of Ukrainian citizens” will be reunited with their families from such programs in Crimea and Krasnodar Krai.[9] ISW has previously reported on such schemes to remove children from Ukraine under the guise of rest and relaxation programs and noted that several children in Krasnodar Krai and Crimea have been held for forced adoption into Russian families.[10] An independent investigation by Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab found that of likely over 14,700 Ukrainian children deported to Russia, only 126 returned to Ukraine as of January 2023.[11] Lvova-Belova’s claim that a certain number of Ukrainian children are being returned to their families does not negate the reality that the vast majority of abducted children do not return to Ukraine. ISW continues to assess that the forced deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children is an apparent violation of the Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, as well as a component of a wider ethnic cleaning campaign.[12]

Key Takeaways

- **US intelligence warned that individuals with ties to Russian intelligence may be planning to attempt to instigate an insurrection in Moldova.**

- **Russian forces continue to establish defensive lines in areas in rear areas far from current frontlines and areas in Russia that will likely never see fighting.**
- **Russian Commissioner on Children’s Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, confirmed that the Russian government is using a variety of schemes to deport Ukrainian children to Russia in a comment that was apparently meant to disprove Western allegations of the illegality of these actions.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Wagner Group forces entered the built-up AZOM industrial complex, and frontal assaults on the complex will likely be costly for Wagner Group forces.**
- **Russian forces made gains in Bakhmut, are clearing eastern parts of the city, and have advanced to new positions in northwestern Bakhmut within 800 meters of the AZOM metal processing plant.**
- **Russian forces continue reconnaissance activity near islands in the Dnipro River delta.**
- **The Wagner Group continues to expand efforts to recruitment efforts in Russia.**
- **Russian officials and occupation authorities continue to announce new infrastructure projects to increase connectivity between the Russian mainland and occupied territories.**

We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those 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 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

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

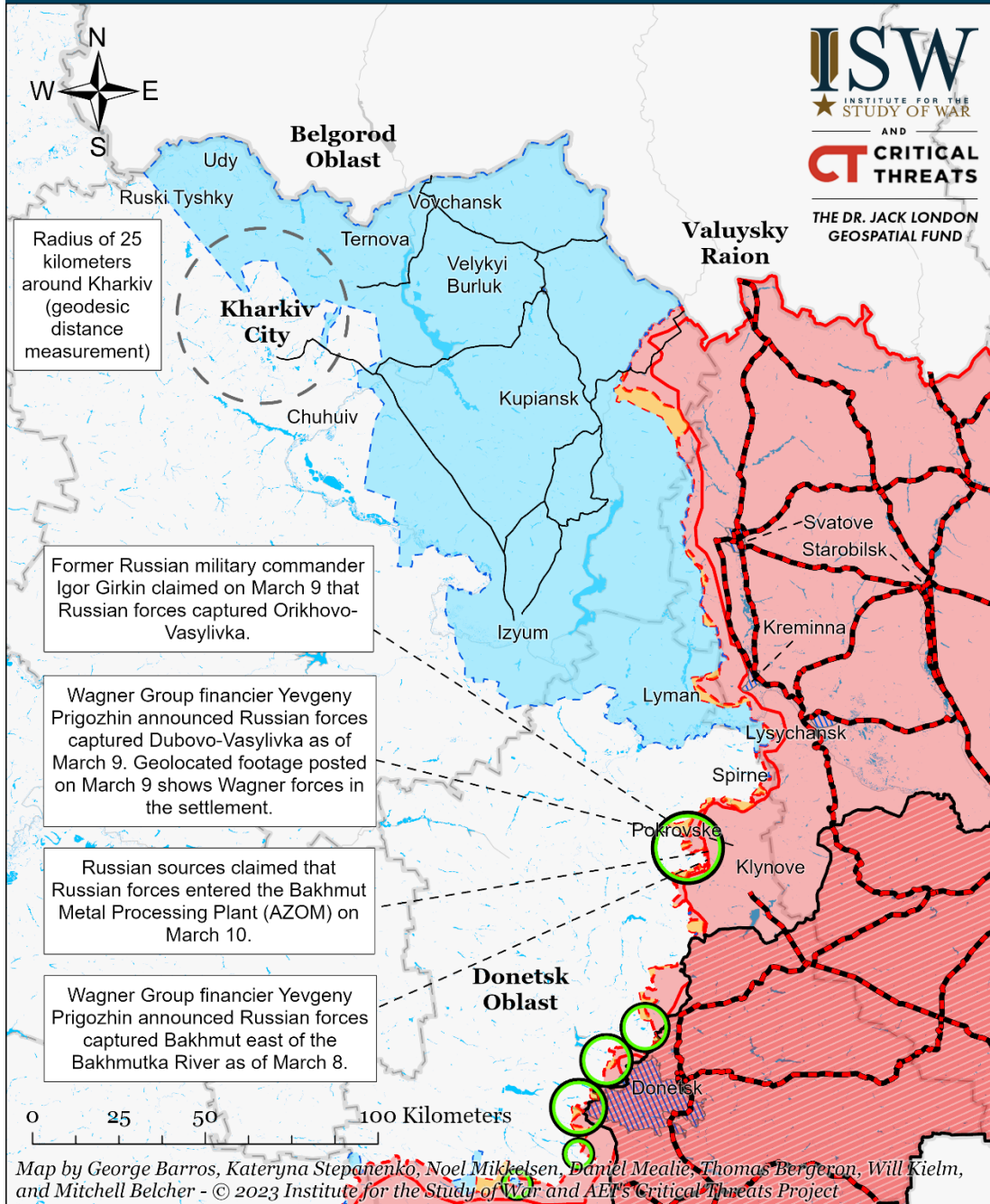
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1— Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks along the Svatove-Kreminna line on March 10. The Ukrainian General Staff did not report ground attacks in the Kupyansk or Lyman directions on March 10, a notable deviation from its normal reporting pattern. A Western Military District soldier claimed in an interview published on March 9 that Russian forces took control of important heights near Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna), but ISW has not observed any visual confirmation of Russian gains near Makiivka.[13] A video published on March 9 purportedly showed Luhansk People’s Republic 2nd Army Corps soldiers digging trenches near Kreminna.[14] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian attack on Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna).[15] Another milblogger claimed that unspecified elements of the BARS (Combat Reserve) unit “Kaskad” and an Airborne Forces (VDV) unit — possibly of the 76th Airborne Division — destroyed a squad of Ukrainian forces attempting to conduct a reconnaissance operation near Kreminna.[16] A milblogger praised Deputy Chief of Staff of the VDV Major General Aleksey Naumets, who purportedly commands Russian forces on the Svatove-Kreminna line, claiming that Naumets is competent at making advances while an unnamed commander (presumably Eastern Military District Commander Colonel General Rustam Muradov) senselessly loses Russian armor in Vuhledar.[17] The commitment of a high-ranking VDV commander to this area suggests that the VDV is prioritizing operations on the Svatove-Kreminna line and attempting to institute more doctrinally sound command-and-control procedures in the area.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- 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)

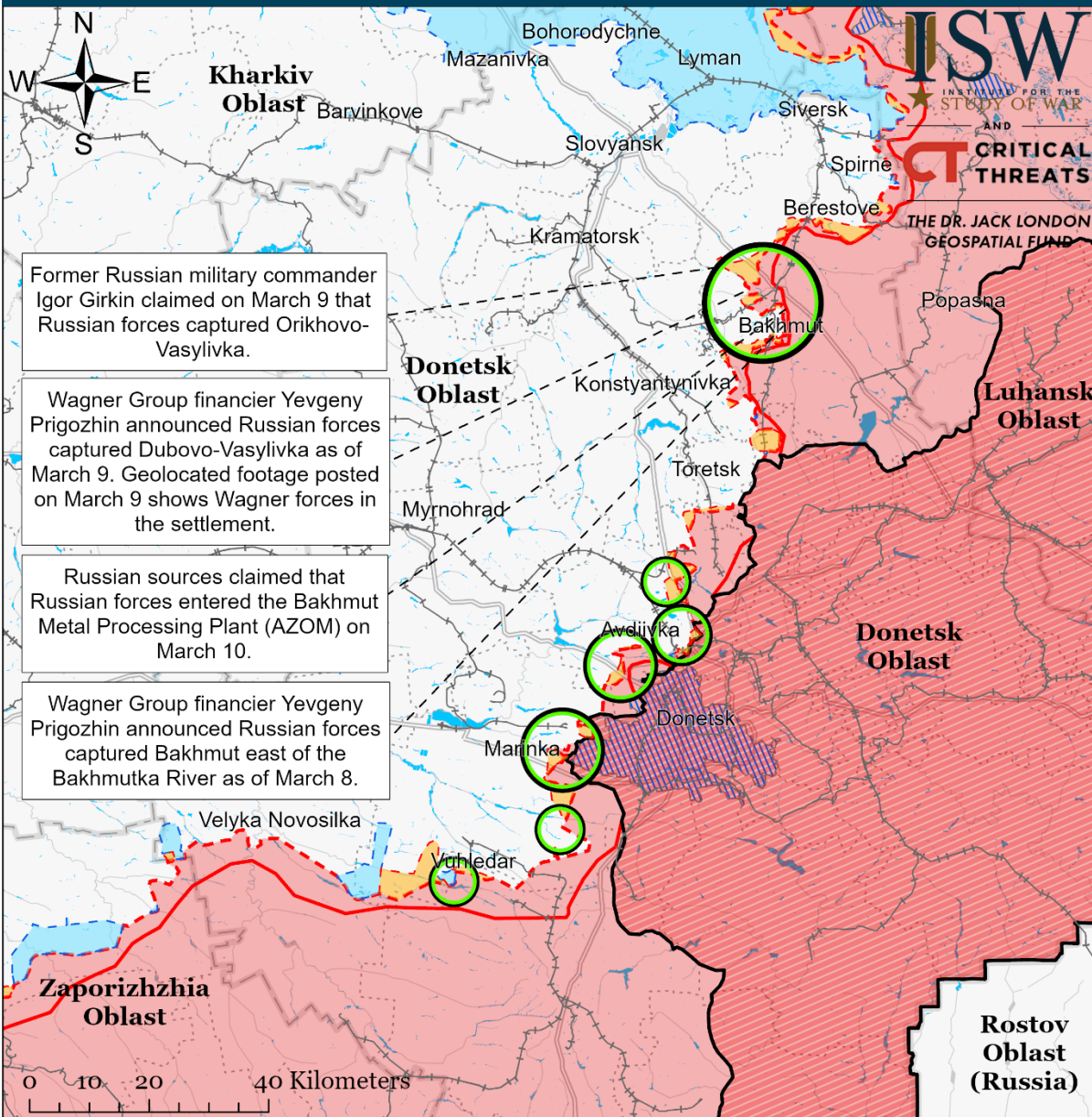
Russian forces made gains in Bakhmut and are clearing eastern parts of the city as of March 10. Geolocated footage posted on March 10 indicates that Russian forces have advanced to new positions in northwestern Bakhmut within 800 meters of the AZOM metal processing plant.[18] New drone footage posted on March 10 shows Russian soldiers removing civilians from buildings in eastern Bakhmut to an unknown location at gunpoint, indicating that Russian forces are conducting clearing operations in eastern Bakhmut.[19] Russian milbloggers widely claimed that Wagner Group forces entered the AZOM metal processing plant complex in northwestern Bakhmut and are moving deeper into the plant.[20] The apparent focus on a Russian assault on the AZOM industrial zone (a heavily built-up complex of multiple buildings) indicates that Russian forces are prioritizing a frontal assault on fortified positions in a tactically challenging industrial area instead of opting for a wider encirclement of western Bakhmut via attacks on Khromove. This assault will likely be very costly for the Wagner Group.

The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian troops continued ground attacks on Bakhmut itself; northwest of Bakhmut near Zalizianske (10km northwest), Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest), and Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest); and west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west).[21] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that the combat intensity in Bakhmut is very high and that the Wagner Group has committed its “main part” to the fight, supporting ISW’s assessment that Wagner has increasingly committed high-quality operators to offensives in Bakhmut.[22] A Russian milblogger posted a crowdfunding request for Russian airborne (VDV) elements operating in the Soledar area northeast of Bakhmut, suggesting that VDV elements are likely supporting or supplanting Wagner operations along parts of the front in Bakhmut as ISW assessed in January 2023.[23] Russian sources, including Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin, claimed that Ukrainian forces appear to be preparing for a counteroffensive in the Bakhmut area.[24]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City frontline on March 10. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks on Avdiivka itself; in the Avdiivka area near Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka), and Severne (5km west of Avdiivka); on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane, Pervomaiske, Nevelske, and Krasnohorivka; and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka, Pobieda, and Novomykhailivka.[25] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian troops attacked Ukrainian fortifications in Avdiivka and Severne and that Russian forces are continuing to fight in Marinka.[26] One milblogger claimed that Russian troops resumed attempts to storm Novomykhailivka.[27]

Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack in western Donetsk Oblast on March 10. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops carried out unsuccessful offensive actions near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City).[28] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces resumed offensive operations against Vuhledar on March 10.[29] Russian naval infantry and Eastern Military District elements have suffered continued significant losses in failed offensive operations in this area over the last few weeks and likely are significantly understrength and therefore unable to mount a new wave of successful attacks on Vuhledar in the near future.[30] Russian sources also amplified footage of elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade and the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) “Kaskad” group operating near Vuhledar.[31]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 10, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Former Russian military commander Igor Girkin claimed on March 9 that Russian forces captured Orikhovo-Vasylivka.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced Russian forces captured Dubovo-Vasylivka as of March 9. Geolocated footage posted on March 9 shows Wagner forces in the settlement.

Russian sources claimed that Russian forces entered the Bakhmut Metal Processing Plant (AZOM) on March 10.

Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin announced Russian forces captured Bakhmut east of the Bakhmutka River as of March 8.

Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kiehm, 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-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- 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.

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

Russian forces continue reconnaissance activity near islands in the Dnipro River delta. Ukrainian Southern Operational Command spokesperson Natalia Humenyuk stated on March 10 that Ukrainian forces destroyed seven Russian naval vessels that attempted to reach the islands over the course of three recent unspecified days.[32] Humenyuk stated that neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces control the islands and that it would be dangerous for Ukrainian forces to establish permanent positions on the islands because Russian forces could easily introduce forces from the east (left) bank at any time.[33] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 10 that Ukrainian forces continued to shell Russian forces operating near the Velyki Potemkin, Kruhlik, and Bilohrudny islands south of Kherson City.[34]

Russian forces continued routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts on March 10.[35] Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces struck Kherson and Zaporizhzhia cities as well as targets near Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast and Ochakiv, Mykolaiv Oblast.[36] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces intentionally shelled Russian-occupied Oleshky on the east (left) bank in Kherson Oblast to accuse Ukrainian forces of shelling the settlement and facilitate “evacuations” of civilians from the east bank.[37]



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 10, 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.

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

The Wagner Group continues to expand its recruitment efforts in Russia. Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed on March 10 that the Wagner Group currently operates recruitment centers in 42 Russian cities.[38] The Wagner Group has also recently opened recruitments centers at Russian sports clubs and a youth club in Russia.[39] The Wagner Group is likely expanding the number of recruitment centers to augment the Wagner Group’s recruitment base after losing access to prisoner recruits, and to compensate for manpower losses following attritional attacks on Bakhmut.[40]



[Reported Wagner Group Recruiting Centers as of March 10, 2023]

Prigozhin indicated that Russian officials may have temporarily solved the Wagner Group’s issues with artillery ammunition, possibly to the detriment of other conventional Russian forces. Prigozhin thanked Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov and Russian defense firm Technodinamika CEO Igor Nosenkov for an increase in the production of ammunition on March 10 following a March 9 accusation that Russian officials stopped responding to Prigozhin’s inquiries about artillery ammunition shortages for Wagner Group fighters.[41] It is unclear if Russian officials have decided to solve the Wagner Group’s publicized shell shortages, but Prigozhin’s message of gratitude suggests that he believes they have decided to. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on March 9 that Russian forces have started moving artillery ammunition from other regions in Russia to Ukraine after expending most of Russia’s shell supplies in the central regions of Russia.[42] Russian forces are unlikely to solve persistent shell shortages in the short term, and if Russian officials have decided to prioritize shells for the Wagner Group then they will likely have to undersupply artillery ammunition to

conventional Russian forces elsewhere in Ukraine. Personnel of the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 58th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District, who are reportedly deploying to the Vuhledar area, released a video complaint on March 8 and claimed that Wagner Group forces in Bakhmut use a week's supply of artillery ammunition in a day while they do not have enough shells to conduct ground assaults.[43]

Some Russian milbloggers criticized Russian officials for planning to demolish an industrial facility that produces artillery ammunition during a widespread shortage of shells. Russian milbloggers amplified reports that Novosibirsk Oblast officials plan to demolish the Sibselmash plant in Novosibirsk Oblast to build a residential complex and technological center, and questioned why Russian officials would demolish a facility that could produce shells.[44] Russian officials reportedly began dismantling and removing equipment from the Sibselmash plant as of October 2021, however.[45] Novosibirsk Oblast Deputy Minister of Industry, Trade, and Entrepreneurship Maxim Ostanin responded to a question about the demolition of the plant during war time by stating that the number of registered defense enterprises in Novosibirsk Oblast increased from 30 to 98 between 2022 and 2023.[46]

Publicized complaints from Russian servicemembers appear to have increased over the past month. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reviewed video complaints from Russian servicemembers from the past month and reported on March 9 that such videos are increasing due to poor preparation, lack of equipment, and involvement in highly attritional assaults.[47] Formations from 16 Russian federal subjects have released compliant video addresses aimed at Russian officials, the Russian MoD, and Russian President Vladimir Putin in February and March.[48] Russian servicemembers released half of the 16 videos in March alone, the largest increase of such publicized complaints since the chaotic first few weeks of partial mobilization in fall 2022.[49] The Russian MoD has recently punished personnel who have participated in such videos but will likely struggle to punish larger numbers of personnel if the increased trend continues. Persistent supply issues and attritional offensive operations will continue to prompt Russian servicemembers to release these videos.

Ukrainian sources reported that Russian officials plan to form volunteer formations to enforce mobilization efforts in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 10 that Russian officials plan to form a Zaporizhia People's "Druzhina" consisting of volunteers from all of Russia to "maintain order" in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[50] The Resistance Center assessed that Russian officials would likely instruct the volunteers to stop residents on the street and collect information for an upcoming mobilization wave in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[51] Ukrainian Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov stated on March 10 that Russian occupation authorities are preparing to forcibly mobilize residents in Zaporizhia Oblast.[52]

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian officials and occupation authorities continue to announce new infrastructure projects to connect the Russian mainland and occupied territories. Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Deputy Vladimir Rogov amplified Russian Federal Road Agency Head Roman Novikov's statement on March 10 that Russia will soon announce regulatory acts to integrate roads in occupied territories into Russia's federal highway network.[53] Rogov claimed that Russian authorities plan to construct the "Tavrida-2" four-lane non-expressway road to connect Crimea with Rostov-on Don through Simeropol, Crimea and Henichesk, Kherson Oblast, and the northern shore of the Sea of Azov.[54]

Russian officials continue to establish new checkpoints in Donetsk Oblast's border areas and the Russian mainland, suggesting that Russia may be struggling with administrative management of occupied territories. Ukrainian Mariupol Mayor Advisor Petro Andryushchenko amplified Rostov Oblast Governor Vasily Golubev's statement on March 10 that his administration has introduced additional security measures for transit between Rostov Oblast and Donetsk Oblast, including additional searches and filtration measures.[55] Russia's recent intensification of measures to regulate movement between Russia and occupied territories undermines the Kremlin's assurances that occupied territories are part of the Russian Federation and fall under Russian law.[56]

Russian occupation authorities are attempting to maximize the attractiveness of occupied territories as the summer holiday season approaches. Zaporizhia Oblast Occupation Head Yevheny Balitsky claimed on March 10 that the Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration established an interdepartmental commission in preparation for summer tourism.[57] Balitsky claimed that the interdepartmental commission will create a tourist cluster from Berdyansk to Kyrylivka, Zaporizhia Oblast, emphasizing that the area has more than 1,500 facilities that can accommodate approximately 200,000 people.[58] Crimean occupation head Sergey Aksyonov stated on March 10 that the occupation administration plans to increase the number of passenger trains in Crimea, emphasizing that occupied Crimea maintained a successful tourist season in 2022 despite the ongoing war.[59]

Russian officials and occupation authorities announced further plans to construct new healthcare facilities to treat Russian servicemen as hospitals near the frontlines remain overfilled and understaffed. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Timur Ivanov met with Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev in Crimea on March 10 to evaluate the development of civilian and military infrastructure in Crimea. Razvozhaev claimed that military builders are constructing several facilities in Sevastopol, and that construction has begun to build a military hospital with 150 beds.[60] Razvozhaev emphasized that the military hospital will include a modern medical and diagnostic building, an infectious diseases department, a blood transfusion station, and an oxygen station.[61] The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the new military hospital will employ 300 people.[62]

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.

Russian and Belarusian forces continue conducting joint exercises in Belarus. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements of the joint Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) continue joint combat training including unit coordination at night, small arms training, driving military vehicles, tactical medicine, engineering training, and psychological conditioning.[63]

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Airborne companies of the Belarusian 103rd Air Assault Brigade conducted force-on-force company tactical exercises at the Losvido Training Ground in Vitebsk, Belarus, on March 10.[64] Elements of the Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade also conducted reconnaissance diving exercises in the Mukhavets River to support a river crossing mission on March 10.[65]

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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[7] <https://ria.ru/20230310/krym-1856910388.html>

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[10] <https://isw.pub/RusCampaignAugust23>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar012723>

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