

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 30, 2023

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March 30, 7:30pm 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.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on March 30 authorizing Russia's semiannual spring conscription which will induct 147,000 Russians between April 1 and July 15.[1] Russia conducts two conscription cycles per year with the spring conscription cycle usually conscripting 134,000 Russian men.[2] Russia may use Belarus' training capacity to support the increase of 13,000 conscripts from previous years. A Ukrainian military official reported on March 4 that Russian personnel training in Belarus do not exceed 9,000 to 10,000 at a time, and ISW previously observed Russian forces training up to 12,000 troops in Belarus.[3] Satellite imagery indicates that Russian forces training in Belarus at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground recently redeployed to Russia in mid-March, freeing up space for new Russian trainees.[4] The new conscripts will not increase Russian combat power in the short term, as Russian conscripts must undergo months of training and service before they see combat.

Putin remains unlikely to deploy newly conscripted troops to participate in combat in Ukraine due to concerns for the stability of his regime. Chairman of the Russian State Duma Defense Committee Andrey Kartapolov stated on March 30 that spring conscripts will not deploy to Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine during the spring 2023 conscription cycle.[5] Kartapolov also noted that Russian forces will not conscript men from occupied territories. Kartapolov's statements may be true given that ISW has not observed the Russian military use conscripts on any significant scale on the frontlines since the first months of the war and especially since the sinking of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's flagship, the *Moskva*, which had some conscripted sailors aboard.[6] Putin's use of conscripts during the winter-spring period of 2022 sparked social tensions in Russia, and Putin is unlikely to risk his regime's stability by deploying newly conscripted servicemen to the frontlines.[7] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Putin even publicly instructed Russian authorities to investigate alleged incidents of Russian conscript deployments to Ukraine on March 9, 2022 (which were technically illegal at that time).[8] Putin likely perceives the political cost of deploying conscripts to the frontlines as being higher than that of Russia's September 2022 mobilization. **Putin did not deploy conscripts from the spring 2022 conscription cycles in response to Ukraine's September 2022 counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast but instead mobilized reservists to stabilize collapsing frontlines. This decision indicated Putin's policy preference for mobilizing reservists rather than committing conscripts to battle — likely for political reasons — even though conscripts entering the final months of their annual service obligation might fight more effectively than civilian reservists.** A prominent Russian news aggregator criticized the Russian conscription system, noting that Russia's current staffing levels for contract servicemen are insufficient even though Russia has 250,000 available conscripts.[9] The aggregator added that it is "unacceptable" that "half of the Russian army is fighting with all its strength, while the other part is sitting in the barracks."

The start of the new conscription period, even with a slightly increased number of conscripts, may actually reduce Russian training capacity for reservists and other personnel recruited via crypto-mobilization campaigns. Russia has limited training capacity and allocating it to training conscripts who will not fight in 2023 deprives the Kremlin of the opportunity to train reservists and volunteers who would. The Kremlin may seek to increase its combat personnel in Ukraine by coercing spring 2022 conscripts who are finishing their one-year service into signing military contracts, since these freshly discharged conscriptions would need less additional training before deploying to Ukraine. It is far from clear how successful such an effort will be.

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed a prominent milblogger and Russian proxy battalion commander as a regional Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) official for occupied Donetsk Oblast, advancing several Kremlin efforts. Multiple Russian milbloggers reported on March 30 that Putin signed a decree appointing former Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Security Minister and current Vostok Battalion commander Alexander Khodakovsky as deputy head of the Main Directorate of Rosgvardia in occupied Donetsk Oblast, making him responsible for Rosgvardia's special rapid response and riot police (OMON and SOBR) in the region.[10] Khodakovsky announced on March 30 that he received this appointment in early February 2023 and posted a public recruiting ad for Rosgvardia OMON and SOBR units now under his command.[11] Khodakovsky publicly praises Putin and has been a loyal pro-Russian Ukrainian separatist since March 2014.[12] (Khodakovsky was a Ukrainian SPETSNAZ commander for the Donetsk Oblast

Alpha Group under the Ukrainian State Security Service before participating in Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine in 2014.[13]) Khodakovsky's appointment is analytically significant for several of ISW's running assessments:

- Khodakovsky's appointment indicates a Russian effort to generate more forces from occupied Donetsk Oblast. Putin passed a bill on March 27 removing the upper age limit and other barriers to entry for Rosgvardia recruits from occupied Ukraine.[14] Khodakovsky - a native of Donetsk City - is well connected with Donetsk People's Republic militia fighters, veterans, and pro-Russian patriot groups in Donbas, and can help facilitate recruitment drives.[15]
- The appointment advances a Kremlin effort to formalize legacy irregular Russian proxy forces in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and subordinate them to Kremlin-controlled structures.[16]
- Putin may use Khodakovsky's appointment to ensure that Putin maintains reliable control over new Rosgvardia elements in Donetsk Oblast. ISW assessed that Russian authorities may be conducting a sweeping corruption probe within Rosgvardia, possibly to weed out actors who are perceived to be unreliable to Putin.[17]
- The appointment could help Putin divide and conquer influential communities that the Kremlin does not fully control. Mixed reactions to Khodakovsky's appointment from various Russian milbloggers' — notably among Russian military veterans — indicate a significant fracture within the Russian nationalist veteran community.[18] ISW has previously assessed the Russian nationalist veteran community within the blogosphere to be more or less unified.

Khodakovsky's appointment also indicates that Putin continues to prioritize loyalty over competence in his subordinates. One Russian milblogger criticized Khodakovsky's appointment and stated that Khodakovsky's incompetence as the Vostok Battalion commander in 2014 resulted in an especially bad friendly fire incident in which Khodakovsky's troops destroyed a Russian volunteer detachment, killing 42.[19] Former Russian officer and convicted war criminal Igor Girkin accused Khodakovsky of being a swindler and a "corrupt slug-traitor" and stated that the Kremlin's "failed personnel policy" of advancing "traitors, scum, and mediocrity" will lead Russia to ruin.[20] Putin has appointed loyalists ahead of competent people before. Putin replaced relatively competent Army General Sergey Surovikin, who effectively conducted a politically unpopular but militarily necessary withdrawal from upper Kherson in fall 2022, with Putin loyalist and Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov — who green-lit the disastrous campaign plan for the initial full-scale invasion of Ukraine — as theater commander for the Russian invasion of Ukraine in January 2023.[21]

Western officials reported that Wagner Group and conventional Russian forces have likely lost a substantial amount of manpower in the Bakhmut area, which will further constrain Russia's offensive on Bakhmut. US Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Mark Milley reported on March 29 that the Wagner Group has around 6,000 professional personnel and 20,000 to 30,000 recruits, mostly convicts, fighting in the Bakhmut area.[22] US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby reported in late December 2022 that the Wagner Group had 50,000 personnel in Ukraine including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 convict recruits.[23] The Wagner Group has deployed the vast majority of its force to support the offensive to capture Bakhmut, and it is likely that the difference between Kirby's 50,000 figure in Ukraine and Milley's 26,000 to 36,000 figure in the Bakhmut area is the result of casualties from Wagner's attritional offensive on Bakhmut. Kirby reported on February 17 that the Wagner Group had suffered 30,000 casualties, with 9,000 dead, in operations in Ukraine.[24] The Wagner Group may lose thousands more convict recruits in the upcoming weeks as convicts finish their six-month military contracts, and the Wagner leadership appears for now to be allowing pre-pardoned convicts to return from the frontlines to Russia at the conclusion of those contracts.[25]

The senior military advisor to the United Kingdom's mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Ian Stubbs, reported on March 30 that 30,000 Russian military and Wagner personnel have died or been injured in the Bakhmut area since the Battle of Bakhmut began in July 2022.[26] Stubbs stated that Russian and Wagner forces have particularly suffered significant losses in and around Bakhmut in recent weeks and that they urgently need to replenish their personnel.[27] These losses in manpower will continue to constrain Russian offensive operations in the Bakhmut area as well as the wider theater, and Wagner's significant losses will likely threaten its ability to maintain its influential role among Russian forces fighting in Ukraine.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Evan Gershkovich in Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast on charges of espionage on March 30. The FSB claimed that Gershkovich collected information constituting a state secret about the activities of a Russian military-industrial complex enterprise on behalf of the US, and Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that FSB officers caught Gershkovich "red-handed." [28] Russian authorities may have arrested Gershkovich as a retaliatory response to the US arrest of Russian national Sergey Vladimirovich Cherkasov on March 24 on charges of acting as an agent of a foreign power.[29] The Kremlin will likely use Gershkovich's detention to attempt to extract some type of concession from the United States and possibly

may seek to replicate a prisoner exchange similar to the December 2022 exchange of US basketball player Brittney Griner for Russian illegal arms dealer Viktor Bout.[30]

The reported site of Gershkovich's arrest is noteworthy. Yekaterinburg hosts 12 Russian defense enterprises that specifically produce anti-aircraft rocket systems, long-range anti-aircraft missiles, radio systems, ground support equipment for missiles and aircraft, electronic control systems for missile complexes, missile-related guidance systems and radars, self-propelled artillery systems, highly enriched uranium, rare earth metal alloys, heavy machinery, and optical systems for military aircraft.[31] These enterprises include Russia's primary producer of self-propelled artillery systems, Uraltransmash; one of Russia's leading optical enterprises, Urals Optical-Mechanical Plant; and Uralmash, which mass produced tanks during and after the Second World War.[32] It is not evident which military industrial enterprise is associated with the FSB's claims about Gershkovich's arrest, but many of them produce systems and equipment that Russian forces have lost or used in significant quantities in Ukraine. Others use microchips, which are in critically short supply in Russia and the object of intense smuggling and sanctions-evasion efforts. ISW assesses that significant equipment shortages are likely constraining the Russian military's ability to conduct mechanized maneuver warfare in Ukraine and that the Kremlin is trying to gradually mobilize Russia's Defense Industrial Base (DIB) to meet the Russian military's needs without conducting full economic mobilization.[33] ISW also previously assessed that the FSB may be trying to penetrate the Russian DIB in a way that is reminiscent of the KGB's involvement and surveillance of the Soviet military establishment.[34]

Ukrainian National Security Defense Council Secretary Oleksii Danilov stated on March 30 that Ukrainian authorities do not intend to expel the Kremlin-affiliated Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra by force.[35] Independent Russian news outlet *Meduza* reported that parishioners of the UOC MP prevented a Ukrainian Ministry of Culture commission from entering the Lavra to conduct an inventory of the property.[36] *Meduza* reported that Ukrainian officials ordered the UOC MP to leave the Lavra on March 10 by March 29, and the UOC MP stated that it did not intend to comply.[37]

Key Takeaways

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on March 30 launching the semiannual spring conscription cycle, which will conscript 147,000 Russians between April 1 and July 15.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed a prominent milblogger and Russian proxy battalion commander as a regional Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) official for Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Western officials reported that Wagner Group and conventional Russian forces have likely lost a substantial amount of manpower in the Bakhmut area.**
- **The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested Wall Street Journal correspondent Evan Gershkovich in Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast on charges of espionage.**
- **Ukrainian National Security Defense Council Secretary Oleksii Danilov stated that Ukrainian authorities do not intend to expel the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra by force.**
- **Russian authorities arrested Bryansk Oblast Acting Deputy Head Elena Egorova and Second Deputy Governor Tatyana Kuleshova for reportedly receiving bribes.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Kupyansk and along the Svatove-Kreminna line.**
- **Russian forces continued offensive operations in and around Bakhmut as well as along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front.**
- **International Atomic Energy Agency Director (IAEA) Rafael Grossi stated that plans to ensure the safety of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) have evolved.**
- **Pardoned Wagner Group convicts are continuing to commit crimes in Russia following the end of their contract service with Wagner.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue efforts to set conditions for September 2023 elections by further integrating occupied territories into the Russian legal apparatus.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 30, 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.

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.

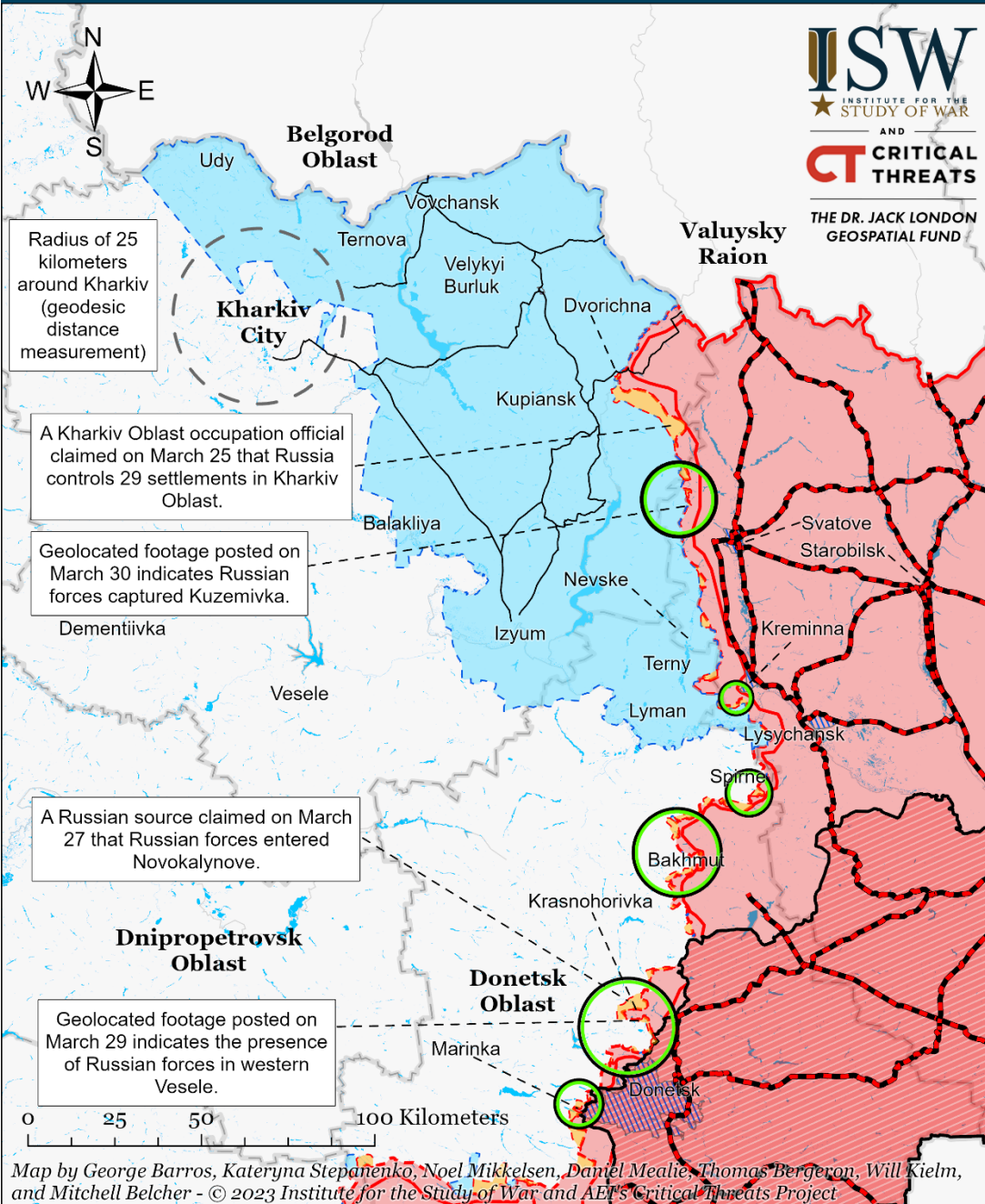
- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of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

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 forces conducted limited ground attacks north of Kupyansk and along the Svatove-Kreminna line on March 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Berestove (24km northwest of Svatove), Stelmakhivka (12km northwest of Svatove), Kuzmyne (3km southwest of Kreminna), and Vyimka (27km southwest of Kreminna).[38] Geolocated footage published on March 30 indicated a marginal Russian advance near Kuzemivka (14km northwest of Svatove).[39] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Russian forces operate in more doctrinally sound formations using “classic tactics” and therefore are not suffering losses in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction as high as those they suffer in other directions.[40] Cherevaty also stated that Russian forces fired at Ukrainian positions 301 times in the Kupyansk-Lyman direction. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces conducted ground attacks supported by artillery near Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove), Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), and Bilohorivka (10km south of Kreminna), and attempted to attack Krokmalne (20km northwest of Svatove), Stelmakhivka, and Terny (17km west of Kreminna).[41] Combat footage published on March 30 purportedly shows elements of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division (20th Combined Arms Army, Western Military District) attacking Ukrainian positions near Makiivka (23km northwest of Kreminna).[42] A Russian news aggregator claimed on March 29 that the 144th Motorized Rifle Division advanced along the Terny-Torske line (14 to 17km west of Kreminna).[43]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of March 30, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

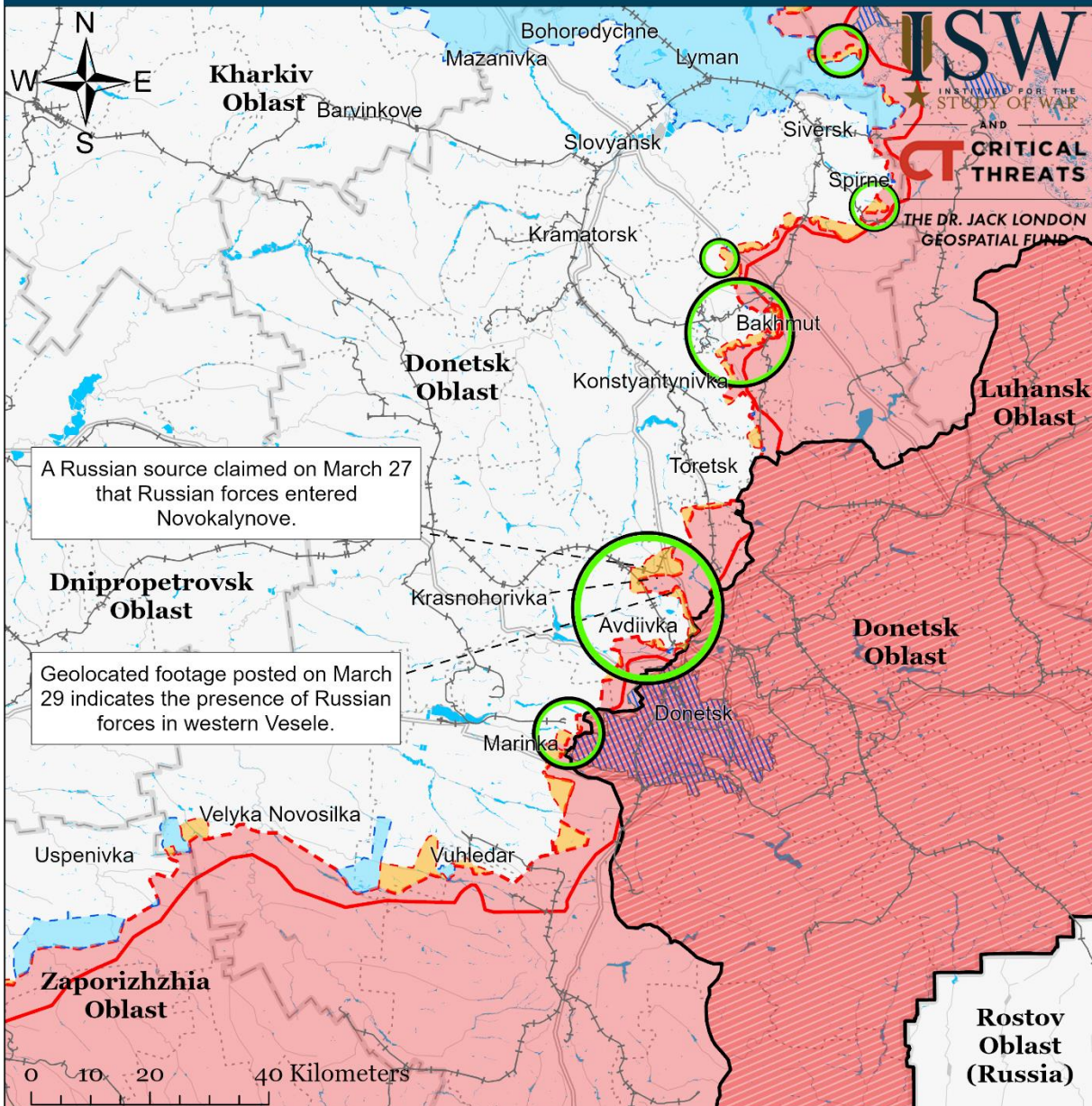
Russian forces continued offensive operations in and around Bakhmut on March 30. Geolocated footage published on March 29 indicates that Wagner Group fighters made marginal gains in southern Bakhmut.[44] Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner fighters continued assault operations in the industrial zone in northern Bakhmut, advanced north of the Bakhmut City Market in the center of the city, and have completely cleared neighborhoods in southern and southwestern Bakhmut on March 29 and 30.[45] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 30 that Russian forces captured the Bakhmut City administrative building, although ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.[46] A Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner fighters are changing tactics within Bakhmut and are concentrating forces to pinpoint specific areas of the city for decisive assaults.[47] Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner fighters are focusing on putting pressure on Ukrainian forces in Khromove (2km west of Bakhmut), attempting to break through Ukrainian positions near Bohdanivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut) and Minkivka (14km northwest of Bakhmut), and conducting assaults near Ivanivske (6m west of Bakhmut) and Predtechyne (14km southwest of Bakhmut).[48] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces continued assaults on Bakhmut and conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Orikhovo-Vasylikva (11km northwest of Bakhmut).[49]

A Ukrainian commander serving in Bakhmut reported that the tempo of Russian offensives in the Bakhmut area is declining. Ukrainian Colonel Yevhen Mezhevikin stated on March 30 that Russian assaults in the Bakhmut area have slowed and that Ukrainian forces have thwarted an imminent threat of encirclement.[50] Mezhevikin stated that Russian forces previously were able to launch simultaneous assaults in all directions in the Bakhmut area but that those capabilities are now declining.[51] Mezhevikin stated that Ukrainian forces stabilized their flanks to the north and south of Bakhmut and that Russian forces are now focusing on fighting through the city itself because the buildings and urban environment protect them from Ukrainian fire.[52] ISW previously assessed that Russian forces would face significant delays and losses if the Ukrainian defense of Bakhmut forced Russian forces to fight through the urban terrain of central Bakhmut.[53]

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City front on March 30. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Avdiivka itself; within 14km north of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka, Novokalynove, and Stepove; and within 27km southwest of Avdiivka near Sieverne, Vodyane, Pervomaiske, Krasnohorivka, and Marinka.[54] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 29 that Russian forces continued positional battles south of Novobakhmutivka (14km northwest of Avdiivka), near Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka), and west of Krasnohorivka (9km north of Avdiivka).[55] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that Russian forces experienced some unspecified successes north of Avdiivka in the direction of Krasnohorivka and near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka).[56] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 29 that Russian forces cleared areas on the outskirts of Pervomaiske near the Izmaylovskiye Ponds and advanced further in the area, although geolocated footage published on March 30 — if recent — indicates that Ukrainian forces likely still hold positions in the southern outskirts of Pervomaiske along the E50 highway.[57]

Russian forces did not conduct any confirmed ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on March 30. Pushilin claimed that Russian forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to conduct reconnaissance-in-force operations and to improve tactical positions in the Vuhledar area (30km southwest of Donetsk City).[58]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of March 30, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

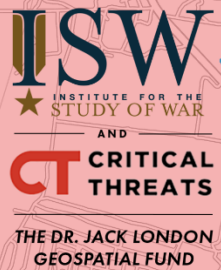
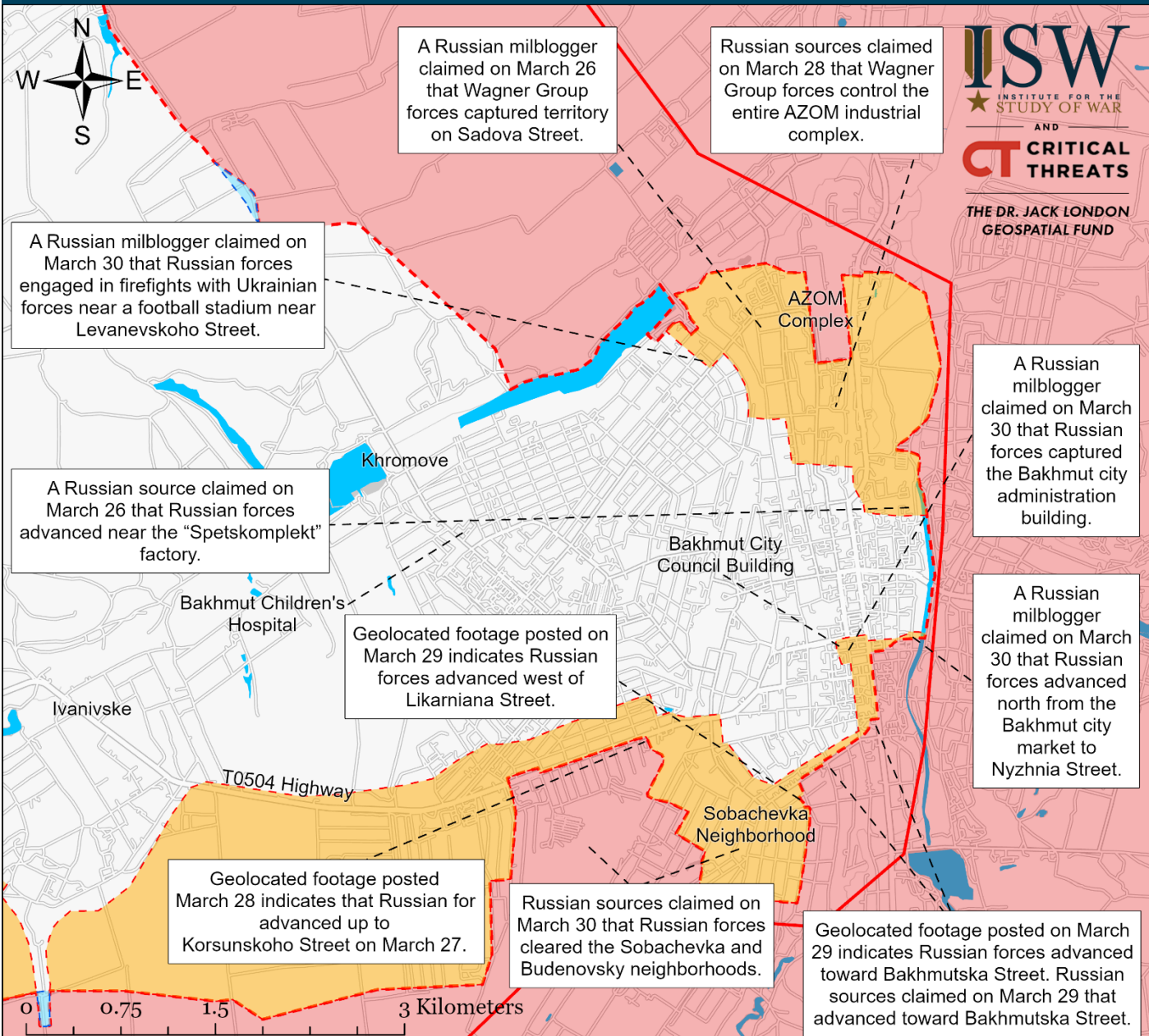


Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Will Kielm, and Mitchell Belcher - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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

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

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of March 30, 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

- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- 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.

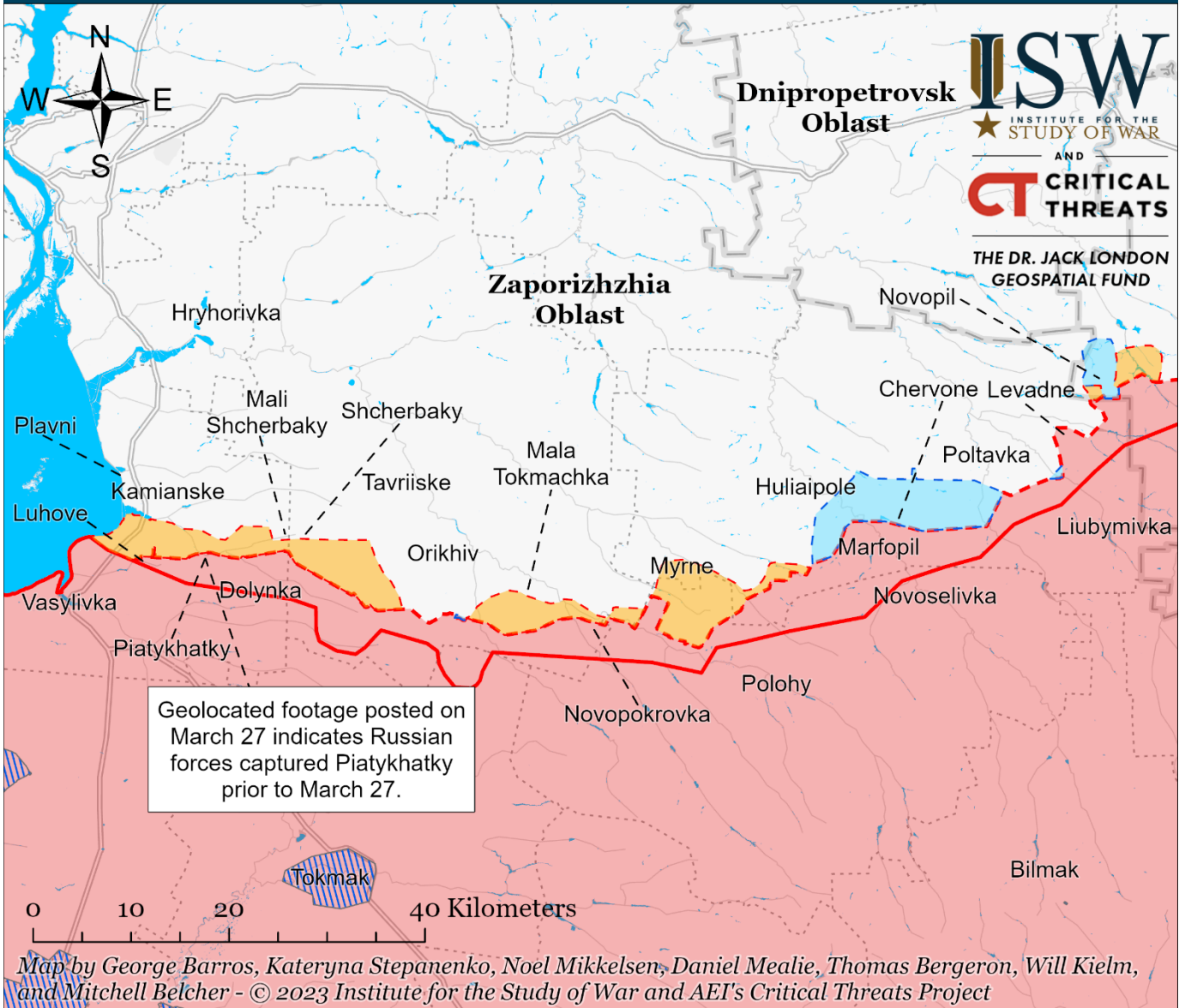
Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

International Atomic Energy Agency Director (IAEA) Rafael Grossi stated that plans to ensure the safety of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) had evolved. Grossi stated that the plan to ensure the nuclear safety of the ZNPP had changed from the initial proposal to establish a zone around the ZNPP to focus on “what should be avoided to ensure its protection.”[59] Grossi also stated that he discussed the challenges facing the reduced number of staff at the plant with ZNPP management. Advisor to the Head of Rosenergoatom Renat Karchaa claimed that Rosatom plans to increase the number of employees at the ZNPP to 4,500 by the end of April.[60] Karchaa claimed that over 3,100 employees at the ZNPP have signed contracts with Rosatom and 200 applications are in the final stages of consideration and verification. About 11,000 personnel worked at the ZNPP prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[61] Energoatom reported on October 28, 2022, that of 6,700 ZNPP workers who remained to operate the Russian-occupied ZNPP, 4,300 employees left Russian occupied territory and 100 employees signed contracts with Rosatom under duress.[62] The Ukrainian General Staff stated on January 10 that Russian forces barred ZNPP access to almost 1,500 employees who refused to receive Russian passports and sign contracts with Rosatom.[63]

Geolocated footage published on March 29 shows explosions at a Russian airbase in Hvardiiske in occupied Crimea.[64] Satellite imagery from early March shows a Russian aircraft sitting at the airbase in the general area of the explosions.[65] A Russian milblogger claimed on March 30 that Russian authorities would dispose of old ammunition in the Sevastapol raion so residents should not be concerned over sounds of explosion.[66] Hvardiiske, in Simferopol Raion, is located 47km northeast from the closest border of Sevastopol Raion.

Russian forces conducted routine shelling in Zaporizhia, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts on March 30.[67]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of March 30, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

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

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of March 30, 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)

Pardoned Wagner Group convicts continue committing crimes in Russia following the expiration of their contract service with Wagner. A Russian news aggregator reported that Russian authorities arrested former Wagner convict Ivan Rossomakhin as a suspect in the murder of a pensioner in Kirov Oblast.[68] Rossomakhin returned from the frontline on March 21. The aggregator reported that the convict began threatening to kill people shortly after he left Wagner. Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that it is a pity that Rossomakhin committed a crime and noted that Russians should notify Wagner if pardoned convicts are acting aggressively.[69] Prigozhin noted that Wagner officials would return unruly convicts to the frontlines and claimed that since the release of thousands of convicts and the expungement of crimes from their records there have been only 20 recorded crimes linked to Wagner-pardoned convicts.[70] Russia's crime rate will likely increase further as most Wagner-recruited convicts have only recently completed their contracts and have not spent much time in Russian society.

Russian servicemen and military command are reportedly sexually abusing Russian female soldiers in Ukraine. *Sever Reali* interviewed several Russian servicewomen, who revealed that Russian officers rape female soldiers serving within medical detachments.[71] One servicewoman noted that there are numerous instances of sexual harassment on the frontlines as Russian officers often abuse their authority. One former Russian servicewoman noted that the Russian Armed Forces had long cultivated a sexist environment in which female soldiers were treated as "prostitutes."

The Kremlin continues its efforts to revive its defense industrial base (DIB). Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev visited the Kazan Powder Plant in Kazan on March 29, where he reportedly held meetings about the need for ammunition, gunpowder, and modern weapons.[72] Russian milbloggers also amplified footage published by Russian state media claiming to show employees of the Tambov bread factory constructing "Bekas" drones.[73] A milblogger claimed that the Tambov bread factory opened a specialized workshop designed to produce quadcopters to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The milblogger claimed that the factory assembles up to 200 drones per month using purchased drone parts and 3D printing. The pictures appear to be staged, possibly indicating a Russian information operation to show that Russian authorities are establishing drone production facilities in civilian industries to sell a narrative that all corners of Russian society support the invasion.

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

Russian occupation authorities continue efforts to set conditions for September 2023 elections by further integrating occupied territories into the Russian legal apparatus. Head of the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Leonid Pasechnik claimed on March 30 that he signed three laws to complete the legal framework of LNR governance as a Russian federal subject in accordance with Russian law.[74] Pasechnik claimed that he signed another law creating an executive authority for Luhansk Oblast in line with other Russian oblasts to replace the abolished LNR government.[75] Pasechnik also claimed that he signed two other laws to define occupied Luhansk Oblast's system of local self-government, creating city and district bodies whose members will be "elected" in the September 2023 elections.[76] Pasechnik emphasized that connection to the unified Russian legal system will simplify interactions between occupied Luhansk Oblast and other regions of Russia, accelerate socio-economic development, and transition occupied Luhansk to Russian standards.[77]

Russian occupation authorities continue to target Ukrainian children to consolidate political and societal control of occupied territories. Head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin stated on March 30 that youth in occupied Donetsk Oblast may participate in a contest to serve in the Young Parliament of the DNR.[78] Pushilin claimed that the first two convocations of the Youth Parliament of the DNR resulted in youth participating in DNR administrations and districts, the People's Council of the DNR, ministries, and other departments and organizations.[79] Pushilin stated that the deadline to submit candidacy for the upcoming competition is April 17.[80]

Russian officials and occupation authorities continue to emphasize their benign intentions to support Ukrainian children amid growing global uproar that they are illegally deporting Ukrainian children to Russia. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated on March 30 that Russia intends to hold a meeting using the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) Arria formula to discuss Russia's evacuation of children from conflict zones in Ukraine after Russia assumes the UNSC chair in April.[81] Zakharova claimed that Russia intends to meet with UNSC members informally to discuss the measures Russia has taken to protect minors from Ukrainian shelling, prevent other alleged rights violations against children, and place affected youth in safe areas.[82]

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.

The Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) will hold elements of its premiere annual joint military exercise in Belarus in 2023.[83] CSTO Joint Staff Press Secretary Vladislav Shchegrikovich stated on March 30 that the CSTO decided to conduct at least five component exercises of the CSTO's annual joint "Combat Brotherhood 2023" operational-strategic command staff exercises in Belarus.[84] Combat Brotherhood 2023 has five centerpiece component exercises in Belarus: "Interaction-2023," which consists of combined arms combat planning exercises with the CSTO's joint Collective Rapid Reaction Force to "resolve a crisis situation in the CSTO's Eastern European collective security area"; "Search-2023" special reconnaissance exercises; "Echelon-2023" logistics exercises; "Barrier-2023" chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) protection exercises; and "Rock-2023" special exercises involving unspecified Ministry of Emergency Situations elements with CSTO Rapid Reaction Force elements.[85] The CSTO stated that Combat Brotherhood 2023's final stage with CSTO "peacekeeping forces" - likely the capstone combat exercise - will occur in Kyrgyzstan.

It is unclear whether CSTO member states Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan will commit elements to participate in the exercise events in Belarus given Russia's de-facto occupation of Belarus and ongoing invasion of Ukraine. The CSTO's recurring Combat Brotherhood exercises typically occur from October through November.[86] The Kremlin may use Combat Brotherhood 2023 exercises in Belarus to support an ongoing Russian information operation against Ukraine and the West to make it appear as if Russian forces will attack Ukraine from Belarus.

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. Unspecified Belarusian airborne infantry elements of the Belarusian Brest-based 38th Air Assault Brigade conducted airborne parachute exercises from Il-76 aircraft at the Brest Training Ground on March 30.[87]

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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