

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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April 1, 7:00 pm ET

ISW assesses that the Kremlin has revised its campaign plan in Ukraine after the failure of its initial campaign to capture Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities and its subsequent failure to adjust its operations in late March. ISW previously assessed that the initial Russian campaign of the war—airborne and mechanized operations to seize Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and other major Ukrainian cities to force a change of government in Ukraine—had failed as of March 19.¹ The Russian military continued to feed small collections of reinforcements into operations around Kyiv and across northeastern and southern Ukraine in an effort to keep its initial campaign plan alive throughout late March. We assess that the Russian military has now halted these failed efforts and is beginning a new phase of its campaign in Ukraine with new objectives. We are updating the structure of our campaign assessments to reflect the new structure and prioritization of Russian operations.

Russia’s main effort is now focused on eastern Ukraine, with two subordinate main efforts: capturing the port city of Mariupol and capturing the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The Kremlin claims the entirety of these oblasts as the territory of its proxies in eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR).² The Kremlin is increasingly redeploying troops from other axes of advance and channeling its remaining reinforcements from Russia into eastern Ukraine. Russian forces are unlikely to conduct active operations on other fronts in the coming weeks.

The Kremlin may intend to capture Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts before seeking to negotiate a Kremlin-favorable ceasefire and claim that Russia has achieved its war aims. The Kremlin’s initial false justification for its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine was to protect the DNR and LNR from Ukraine and enable them to seize their “claimed” territory. The Kremlin is attempting to gloss over the failure of Russia’s initial campaign for a domestic Russian audience. The Kremlin has in fact been forced to alter its operations after the failure of its initial campaign. **Kremlin claims that Russian forces solely attacked northeastern Ukraine to degrade Ukrainian forces before achieving the “main goal” of capturing Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts—such as statements made by the Russian General Staff on March 25—are false.**³

Russian forces have three supporting efforts: Kharkiv and Izyum; Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine; and the southern axis, including Kherson.

- **Russian forces on the Kharkiv axis have abandoned efforts to take the city. Their new objectives are likely to 1) pin Ukrainian mechanized forces in place, and 2) drive southeast to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast.** Russian forces captured Izyum (southeast of Kharkiv) on April 1 after attempting to do so since at least March 7.⁴ Russian forces, including elements redeployed from the Sumy axis in the past week, will likely continue offensive operations in the coming days in an effort to cut off Ukrainian forces on the line of contact in Donbas.
- **Russian forces around Kyiv and in northeastern Ukraine seek to conduct a retrograde action—the orderly withdrawal of combat forces—for refit and further redeployment to other axes of advance.** Russian forces remaining on the forward trace of Russian lines are a covering force intended to screen the retrograde of most of the combat power previously deployed around Kyiv. Ukrainian forces retook substantial territory both northwest and east of Kyiv in the past 24 hours. Ukrainian forces likely advanced faster than Russian forces

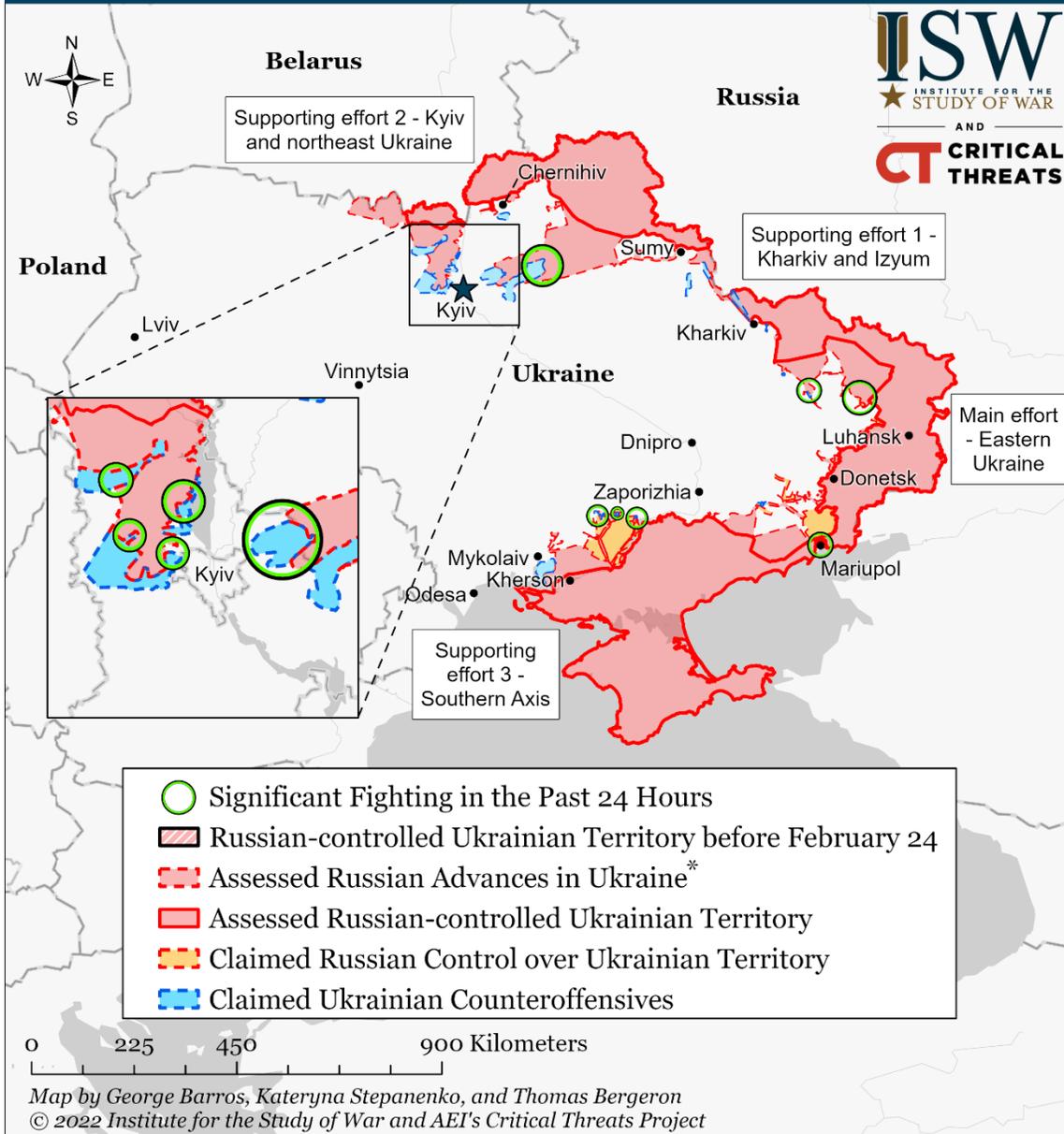
anticipated, but Russian forces successfully withdrew much of the damaged combat power remaining around Kyiv into Belarus.

- **Russian forces on the southern axis—centered on Kherson—are unlikely to conduct offensive operations in the near future and will aim to defend Russian-occupied territory around Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks.** Russian forces will additionally likely prioritize securing southern Ukraine against increasingly frequent Ukrainian partisan actions. Russian forces are unlikely to resume offensive operations west toward Mykolayiv or north toward Zaporizhzhia and Kryvyi Rih in the near future.

Key Takeaways

- **We now assess that Russia has revised its campaign plan in Ukraine after the failure of operations to seize Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities throughout March.**
- **The Kremlin’s claims that Russia’s main objective has been eastern Ukraine throughout the war are false and intended to obfuscate the failure of Russia’s initial campaign.**
- **Russia’s main effort is now concentrated on eastern Ukraine. Russian forces seek to capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.**
- **Russian forces will likely take Mariupol in the coming days but continue to suffer heavy casualties.**
- **Russian forces seek to fix in place the Ukrainian forces around Kharkiv.**
- **Russian forces captured Izyum after three weeks of fighting on April 1 and will attempt to advance southeast to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast in the coming days.**
- **Ukrainian forces recaptured large swathes of terrain both northwest and east of Kyiv in the past 24 hours, but Russia successfully withdrew elements of its damaged forces into Belarus.**
- **The Kremlin will continue to funnel reinforcements (including both low-quality individual replacements from Russia and damaged units redeployed from northeastern Ukraine) into operations in eastern Ukraine, but these degraded forces are unlikely to enable Russia to conduct successful large-scale offensive operations.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 01, 2022, 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: We have updated our map to show increased claimed Ukrainian counteroffensives across Ukraine, most notably in Kyiv Oblast, in the past 24 hours. We additionally recessed the assessed line of control for Russian forces in Kyiv oblast to north of the Uzh River given unconfirmed reports of Ukrainian counterattacks in Orane and Dytyatky on April 1. These Ukrainian attacks, if confirmed, indicate a Ukrainian threat to sever Russian lines of communication to Russian forces south of Orane. Russian forces' frontlines trace in Kyiv Oblast remain fluid and dynamic. We will refine our map as we observe and confirm more data.

We do not report in detail on the deliberate Russian targeting of civilian infrastructure and attacks on unarmed civilians, which are 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.

ISW has updated its assessment of the four primary efforts Russian forces are engaged in at this time:

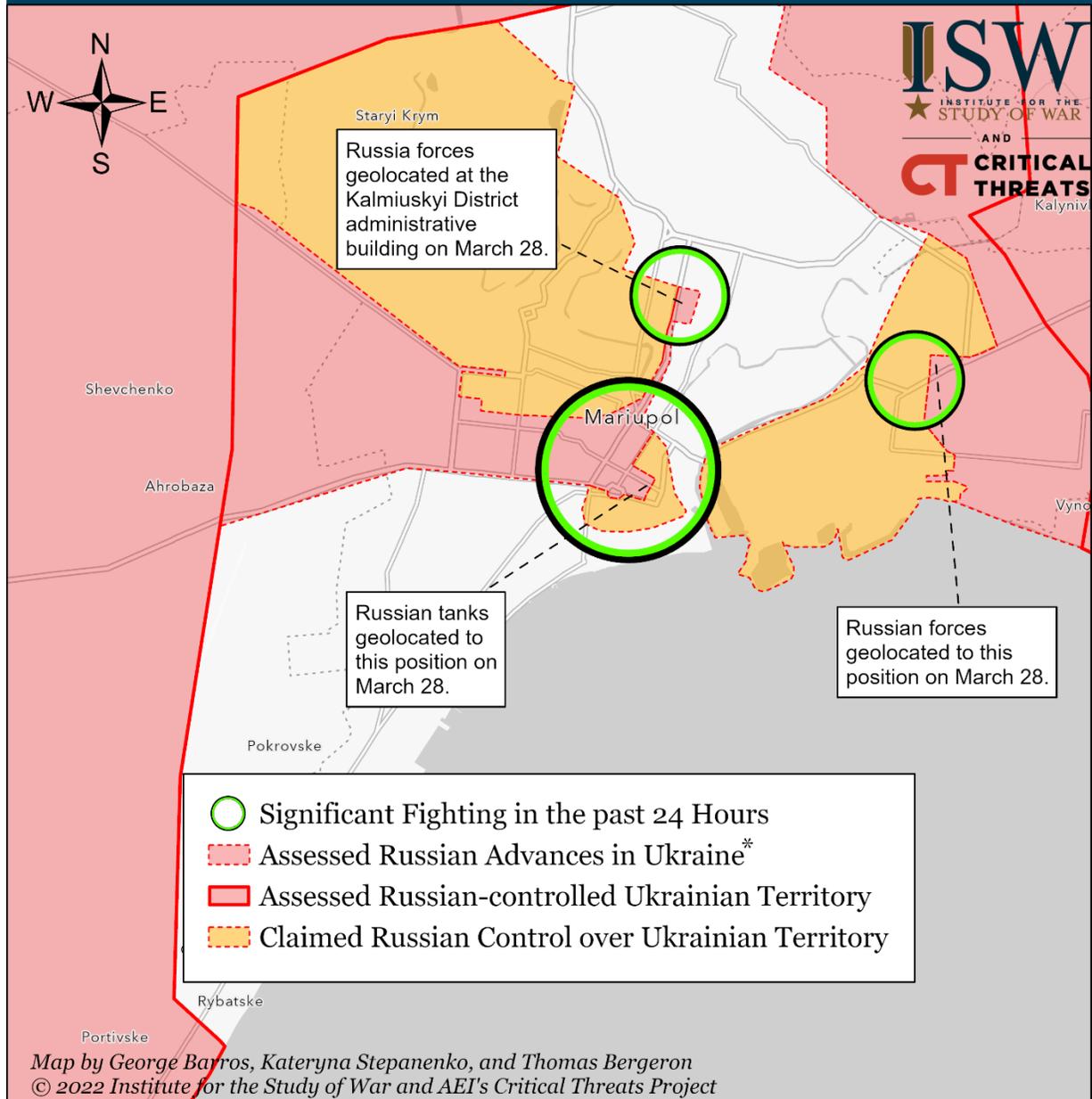
- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv and Izyum;
- Supporting effort 2—Kyiv and northeastern Ukraine; and
- Supporting effort 3—Southern axis.

Main effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate main effort—Mariupol (Russian objective: Capturing Mariupol and reducing Ukrainian defenders)

Russian forces continued to advance in central Mariupol on April 1.⁵ The Ukrainian General Staff reported at midnight local time on March 31 that Ukraine’s 36th Marine Brigade and other units are maintaining the “circular defense” of Mariupol, but Russian forces continue to take territory.⁶ DNR officials shared footage on March 31 that they claimed showed a Ukrainian base in central Mariupol captured by Russian and DNR forces, though ISW cannot independently confirm this claim.⁷ Russian forces likely intend to capture Mariupol before advancing northwest to support ongoing operations to capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast. However, Russian forces fighting in Mariupol are likely suffering high casualties and will likely be unable to support further offensive operations after capturing the city.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 01, 2022, 3:00 ET



Russian forces continue their grinding advance into Mariupol, which they have encircled and are bombarding. Fighting is proceeding block-by-block and slowly. Russian forces began penetrating Mariupol's city center on March 24. ISW has not observed sufficient evidence to change assessed advances in Mariupol between March 31 and April 1, though Russian forces likely have advanced.

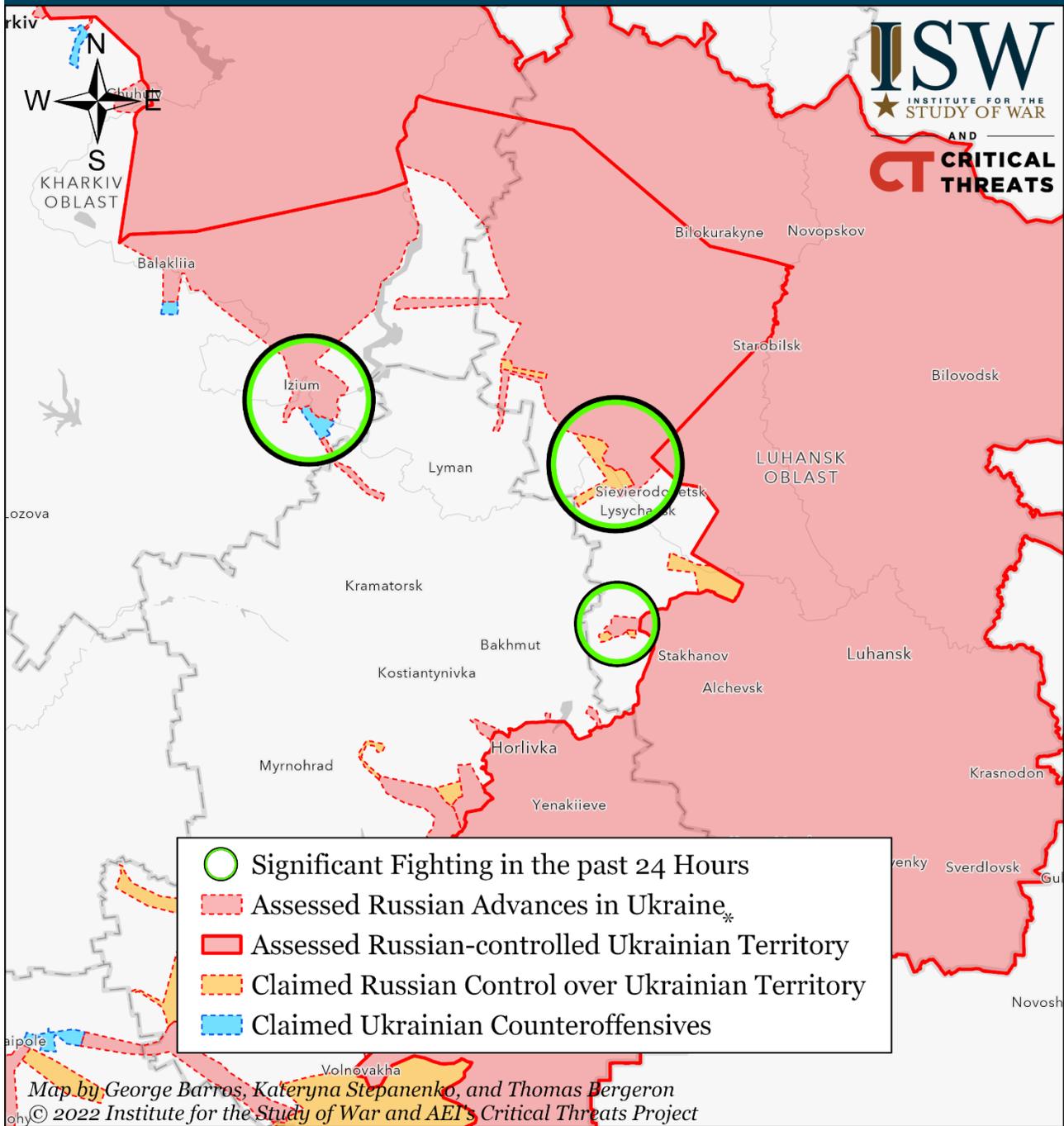
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Subordinate main effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

Ukrainian forces continued to repel Russian assaults in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts on April 1. The Ukrainian General Staff reported at 6:00 am local time on April 1 that Ukrainian forces repelled seven Russian attacks in the past 24 hours, destroying three tanks, two armored personnel carriers, and two unarmored vehicles; Ukrainian forces also shot down an Orlan-10 UAV.⁸ Russian offensive operations in Luhansk Oblast are centered on Popasna and Rubizhne, and operations in Donetsk Oblast are concentrated on Marinka.⁹ Russian assaults in the Donbas region have not made meaningful territorial gains since March 24.¹⁰ The Kremlin will continue to funnel reinforcements (including both low-quality individual replacements from Russia and damaged units redeployed from northeastern Ukraine) into this main effort, but these degraded forces are unlikely to enable Russia to conduct successful large-scale offensive operations

The Ukrainian General Staff reported at midnight local time on March 31 that Russian personnel from Russia’s 7th Military Base in Abkhazia reinforced elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army operating in Donbas.¹¹ ISW previously reported on March 30 that Russia deployed forces from Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Ukraine but could not confirm their specific places of deployment at the time.¹²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 01, 2022, 3:00 ET



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

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast, and fix in place Ukrainian forces around Kharkiv)

Russian forces captured Izyum on April 1 and will likely seek to advance southeast to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast in the coming days. The Ukrainian General Staff and local sources confirmed that Russian forces fully captured the city and expelled Ukrainian forces from their defensive positions.¹³ Ukrainian forces successfully defended the city against Russian attacks from March 7 to March 31, delaying Russian operations and preventing the encirclement of Kharkiv.¹⁴ Russian forces, reinforced with elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army and 1st Guards Tank Army redeployed from the Sumy region, will likely launch further operations to drive southeast and link up with stalled Russian frontal assaults in Luhansk Oblast.¹⁵

Russian forces around Kharkiv continued to shell the outskirts of the city and likely seek to pin in place Ukrainian forces in the city. The Ukrainian General Staff and local Kharkiv authorities reported continued Russian shelling and stated that Russia is delivering additional artillery ammunition to its forces around the city.¹⁶ Russian forces have abandoned operations to encircle and capture Kharkiv. Russian forces will likely continue to shell the city and seek to fix in place Ukrainian mechanized units in order to prevent them from reinforcing Ukrainian defenses in the Donbas or conducting counterattacks elsewhere.

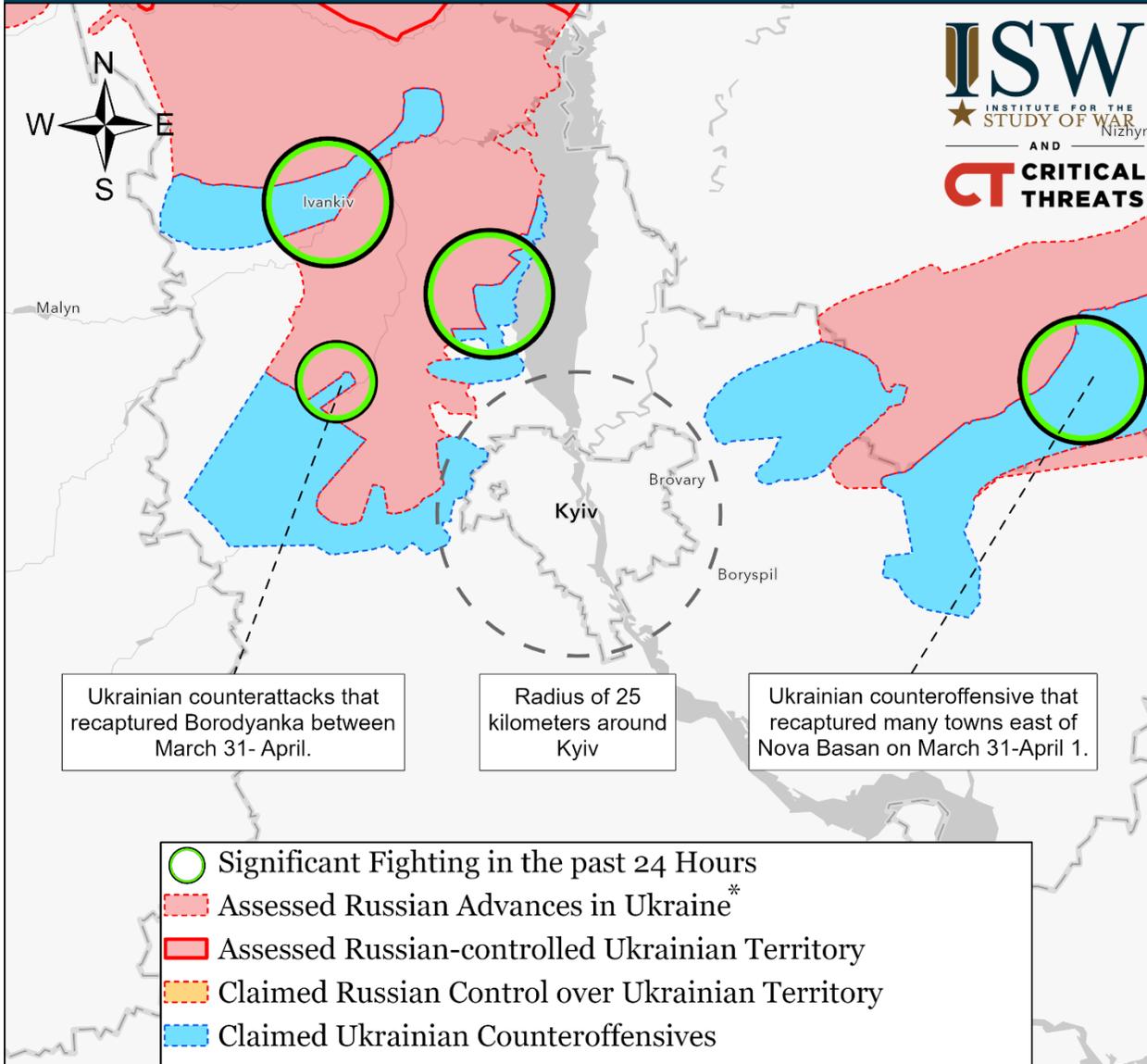
Supporting Effort #2—Kyiv and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)

The Ukrainian General Staff stated at midnight local time on March 31 that Russia has withdrawn up to five battalion tactical groups (BTGs) from around Kyiv into Belarus for refit and redeployment to other axes of advance.¹⁷ The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces mined vacated terrain and used artillery to screen their movements and did not claim that Russian forces collapsed or routed.¹⁸ Russian forces withdrawn into Belarus are likely heavily degraded and are unlikely to provide meaningful combat power in the near term, despite the successful withdrawal of some portion of damaged Russian units.

The Ukrainian military, local civilian administrators, and footage on social media confirm that Ukrainian forces either recaptured or Russian forces withdrew from large swathes of previously contested terrain—including Bucha, Hostomel, Ivankiv, and several smaller towns—in counterattacks March 31–April 1.¹⁹ Ukrainian forces attacked both directly north from Kyiv (through Bucha and Hostomel) and additionally advanced northeast from Zhytomyr Oblast into Ivankiv, likely isolating pockets of Russian forces in Kyiv Oblast. Ukrainian forces will likely conduct further offensive operations to drive Russian forces to the Belarusian border in the coming days.

Ukrainian forces conducted similarly successful counterattacks east of Kyiv on April 1. Ukrainian forces likely broke the encirclement of Chernihiv and pushed Russian forces east from Brovary and captured Nova Basan, nearly to the Supiy River.²⁰ The governor of Chernihiv Oblast reported on April 1 that Russian forces are withdrawing from the region for likely redeployment elsewhere.²¹ The Ukrainian General Staff reported at midnight local time on March 31 that elements of Russia's 1st Guards Tank Army are screening withdrawals from the Chernihiv axis by other unspecified Russian units.²²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kyiv as of April 01, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, and Thomas Bergeron
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We have updated our map to show increased claimed Ukrainian counteroffensives in Kyiv Oblast and southern Chernihiv Oblast in the past 24 hours. We additionally recessed the assessed line of control for Russian forces in Kyiv oblast to north of the Uzh River given unconfirmed reports of Ukrainian counterattacks in Orane and Dytyatky on April 1. These Ukrainian attacks, if confirmed, indicate a Ukrainian threat to sever Russian lines of communication to Russian forces south of Orane. Russian forces' frontlines trace in Kyiv Oblast remain fluid and dynamic. We will refine our map as we observe and confirm more data.

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Supporting Effort #3—Southern axis: (Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)

Ukrainian forces conducted successful counterattacks in northern Kherson Oblast on April 1, capturing several towns and pushing Russian forces south from Kryvyi Rih.²³ The Ukrainian General Staff and Mykolayiv regional authorities reported that Ukrainian forces repelled limited Russian attacks toward Mykolayiv from March 31 to April 1.²⁴ The Ukrainian General Staff additionally reported that Russian forces continued efforts to set up occupation administrations in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.²⁵ Mounting Ukrainian partisan operations in southern Ukraine will likely continue to tie down Russian Rosgvardia units in the coming weeks. Russian forces are highly unlikely to successfully resume offensive operations toward Mykolayiv in the coming days and will likely prioritize defending Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces will likely capture Mariupol or force the city to capitulate within the coming days;
- Russian reinforcements and the capture of Izyum on April 1 may enable a renewed Russian offensive through Slovyansk to link up with Russian forces in Luhansk Oblast;
- Russian forces withdrawn from the Kyiv axis are unlikely to provide meaningful combat power in eastern Ukraine in the coming days.
- Sustained Ukrainian counteroffensives east of Ivanikva (northwest of Kyiv) toward the Dnipro River may sever lines of communication to Russian forces that have not yet withdrawn toward Belarus.



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¹ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-19>.

² <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-update-6>.

³ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-25>.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/267245612255191>.

⁵ <https://t.me/milchronicles/107>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1509691081654517761?cxt=HHwWgoC-qciCwPMpAAAA>;
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⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285055927140826>.

⁷ <https://t.me/millnr/7921>.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285205550459197>.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>;

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¹⁰ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-24>.

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¹² <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-30>.

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¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/267245612255191>.

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>.

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>; <https://t.me/synegubov/2783>.

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285055927140826>.

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>;
<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285055927140826>
¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>; <https://t.me/kyivoda/2860>;
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²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>; <https://t.me/stranaua/34180>;
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²¹ <https://t.me/stranaua/34168>; <https://t.me/stranaua/34154>.

²² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285055927140826>;
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²³
[https://www.facebook.com/okPivden/posts/pfbid02ggJeziookGAeBn7rzkpqp58GuAUfQGKDK4L47yFi7pJQnhTuaL6yToFSDAVhatbl?__cft__\[0\]=AZUX6ijkVCs6WGFHuy5haaV9afkhiPS-SwipwmBEYBtpjtbPylkWcmpKg3DhdgxxpNH0eZzhB6Rch36dK5vlq18aOxsMuDCxAp5juaZwsg-oNL8OIcultAhxTssKjyXnTpnZFv_pOPfkyApNV4XXLc1ptD-U2E1QEuHHLy06iw4guhLkx_23vXQ009MVuRYRU5dXQj7n06rTI5J7E5hqiR9_Fx0ytmbpCy_KJfNF1Ae4Gw&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/okPivden/posts/pfbid02ggJeziookGAeBn7rzkpqp58GuAUfQGKDK4L47yFi7pJQnhTuaL6yToFSDAVhatbl?__cft__[0]=AZUX6ijkVCs6WGFHuy5haaV9afkhiPS-SwipwmBEYBtpjtbPylkWcmpKg3DhdgxxpNH0eZzhB6Rch36dK5vlq18aOxsMuDCxAp5juaZwsg-oNL8OIcultAhxTssKjyXnTpnZFv_pOPfkyApNV4XXLc1ptD-U2E1QEuHHLy06iw4guhLkx_23vXQ009MVuRYRU5dXQj7n06rTI5J7E5hqiR9_Fx0ytmbpCy_KJfNF1Ae4Gw&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/285392763773809>;
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