

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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April 23, 6:30 pm ET

**Russian forces continued offensive operations along multiple axes even as they completed moving reinforcements drawn from the retreat from Kyiv into the east and continued redeploying some forces from Mariupol to the north.** The Russians have not taken time to refit troops moving from Kyiv or Mariupol before recommitting them to combat operations. They are not pausing offensive operations to wait until they have concentrated overwhelming combat power, and they do not appear to be massing forces on a few decisive axes of advance. They are continuing the pattern of operations they have followed throughout the war: committing small collections of units to widely dispersed attacks along multiple axes and refusing to accept necessary operational pauses to set conditions for decisive operations.

**Russian forces have thus far only committed a handful of battalion tactical groups (BTGs) to offensive operations in their various sectors, however, and could still launch a massed offensive operation.** We assess that such an operation is unlikely given observed patterns and the inherent limitations of available actual combat power in troops that have fought hard and suffered many casualties, as well as observed challenges with command-and-control at the regiment/brigade and division level. It is possible that the Russians are addressing or attempting to address some of those challenges and will soon launch an offensive in a new and better-coordinated form, but it remains unlikely.

**The objectives of Russian offensives around the Izyum-Donetsk City salient are unclear.** Russian forces may seek to reach the Izyum-Debaltseve road along two or more axes to encircle a large concentration of Ukrainian forces and built-up areas. Ukrainian officials suggested on April 23 that Russian forces near Rubizhne and Popasna may seek to encircle the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area rather than pursue the deeper envelopment.<sup>1</sup> It is too soon to evaluate the likelihood of this Russian course of action or the probability of its success.

## Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces continued their pressure on the Azovstal facility in Mariupol.**
- **Russian troops drawn from the retreat from Kyiv are re-entering combat in eastern Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces from around Mariupol are redeploying to the vicinity of Donetsk City and are likely to enter combat again soon and without rest or refit.**
- **Russia continued conducting small-scale ground offensives at multiple points along the front from Izyum to Zaporizhia Oblast.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of April 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Thomas Bergeron, Zach Coles  
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\* 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.*

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

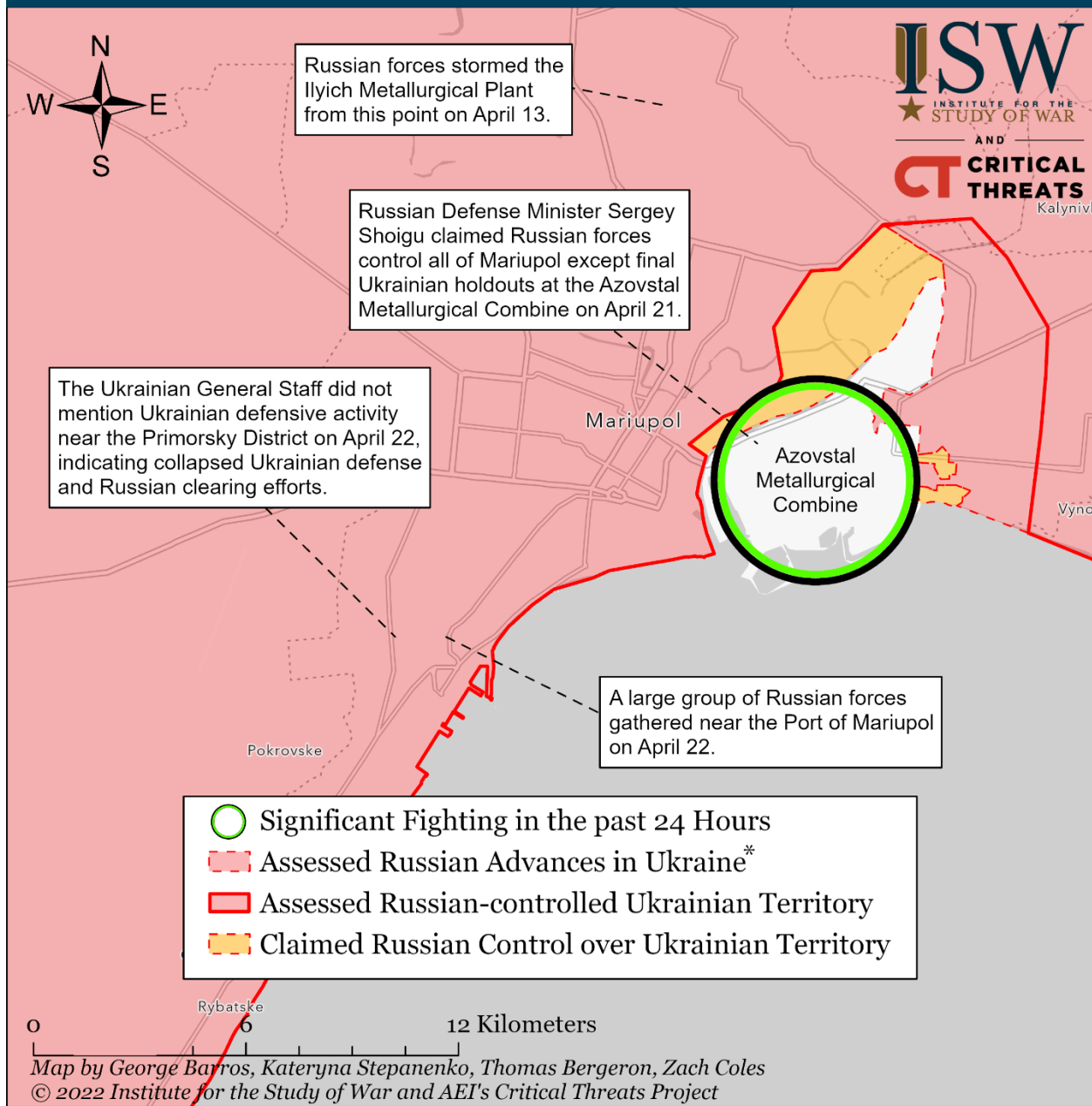
- Main effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate supporting efforts);
- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv and Izyum;
- Supporting effort 2—Southern axis;
- Supporting effort 3—Sumy and northeastern Ukraine.

**Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

**Subordinate Main Effort—Mariupol (Russian Objective: Capture Mariupol and reduce the Ukrainian defenders)**

Russian forces continued to attack Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal Steel Plant and are likely attempting to starve out those remaining within the facility.<sup>2</sup> Advisor to the Head of the Ukrainian President’s Office Oleksiy Arestovych stated that Russian troops tried to storm the plant and “strangle” Ukrainian resistance, though ISW cannot independently verify this claim.<sup>3</sup> Russian forces allegedly organized buses for civilian evacuation from Mariupol but canceled the evacuation on the grounds that Ukrainian “nationalists” were planning on attacking the civilians.<sup>4</sup> Such actions that spoil the evacuation process likely represent further attempts to shape the information space in Mariupol and globally, as well as to extend administrative control in captured portions of the city.<sup>5</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Mariupol as of April 23, 2022, 3:00 ET



The Kremlin declared victory in Mariupol on April 21 after capturing the city besides Ukrainian holdouts in the encircled Azovstal Metallurgical Combine. Russian forces will attempt to starve out remaining Ukrainian defenders in the Azovstal Metallurgical Combine rather than clear it through likely costly assaults. Russian war reporters filmed some Russian elements redeploying from Mariupol northward on April 22 and April 23. The Ukrainian General Staff notably did not mention Ukrainian defensive activity near the port of Mariupol or Primorsky District on April 22, indicating Russian clearing efforts. The Kremlin will spin the (still incomplete) capture of Mariupol into a major victory in Ukraine to compensate for stalled or failed Russian offensives elsewhere.

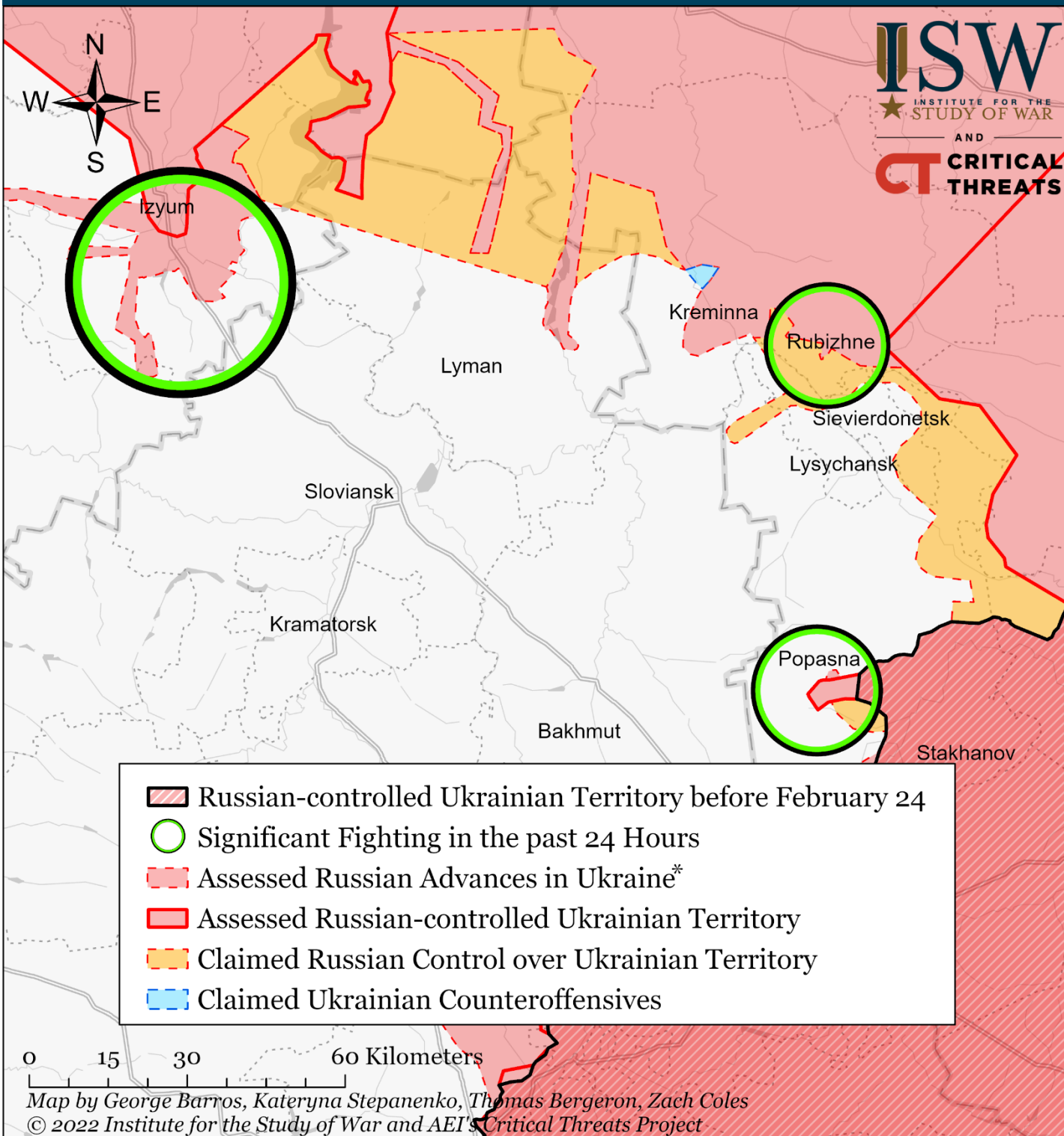
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

**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)**

Russian forces conducted limited ground offensives in Rubizhne, Popasna, and Marinka on April 23 but did not make any significant territorial gains.<sup>6</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff said that Russian forces are focusing on preparing to assault Severodonetsk while continuing unsuccessful ground attacks in the direction of Slovyansk and shelling settlements all along the frontline.<sup>7</sup> Social media users and foreign journalists geolocated Russian forces to the northeastern part of Rubizhne, where street fighting continued as of April 23.<sup>8</sup> Russian forces paused offensive operations on Avdiivka, just north of Donetsk City, after consistently targeting the settlement throughout the week. Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Russian units have reportedly been arriving in the vicinity of Donetsk City from Mariupol since April 21, and the Russian command will likely recommit these degraded units to offensives in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.<sup>9</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of April 23, 2022, 3:00 ET



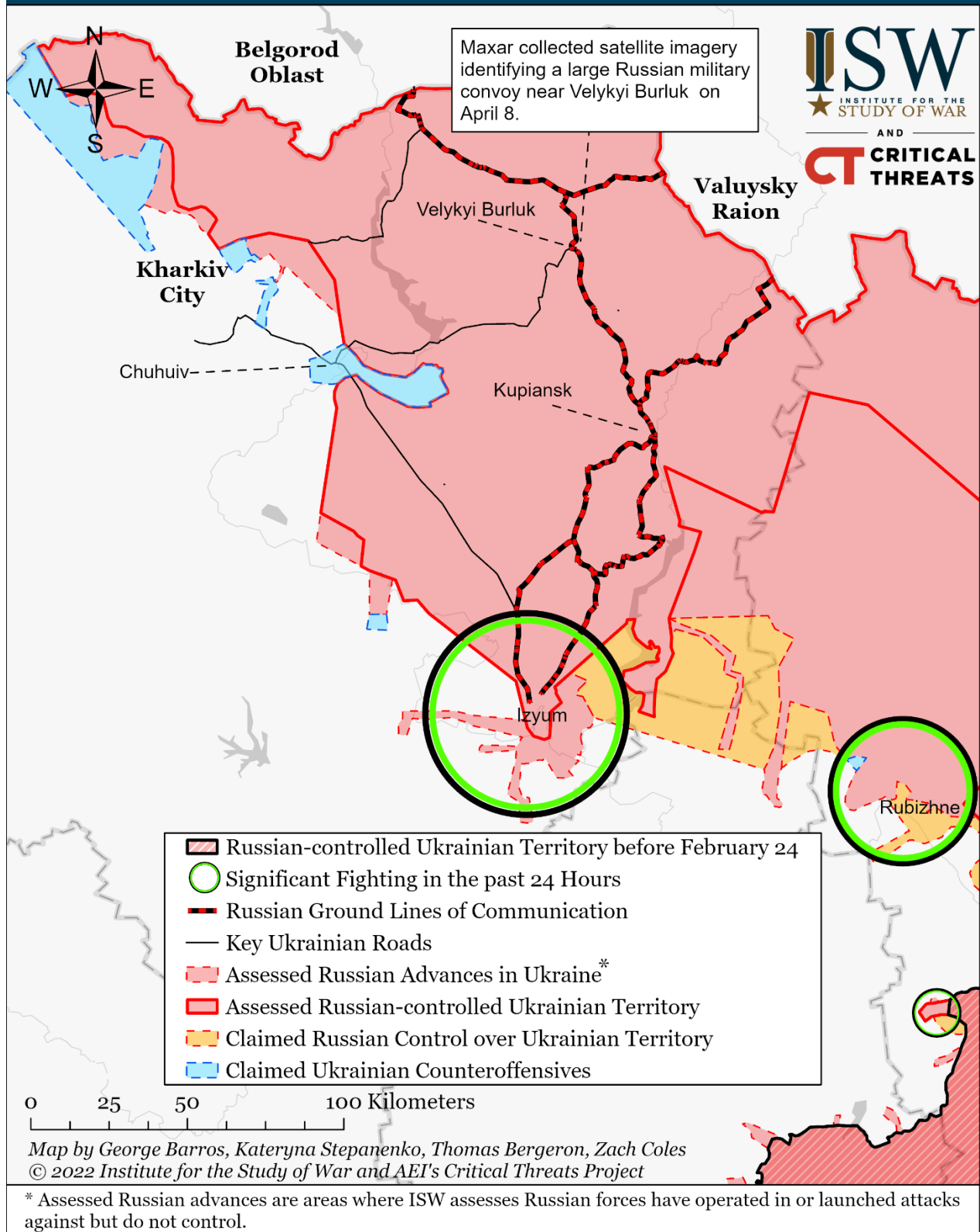
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

**Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum: (Russian Objective: Advance southeast to support Russian operations in Luhansk Oblast; defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to the Izyum axis)**

Russian forces conducted ground attacks from Izyum on April 23.<sup>10</sup> Arestovych said that Russian troops seized Lozova, approximately 100 km west of Izyum, on April 23.<sup>11</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that elements of the 35th Combined Arms Army's 1st Tank Army and the 68th Army Corps are participating in active combat in the area as of April 23.<sup>12</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff stated that elements of the 64th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 35th Combined Arms Army, which had fought in Bucha, are operating in the vicinity of Izyum.<sup>13</sup> Elements of the 64th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade sustained losses while fighting on the Kyiv axis earlier in the invasion, redeployed to the Izyum axis quickly, and therefore likely add limited combat power to the fight.<sup>14</sup>

Russian forces maintained their positions northeast of Kharkiv city and continued to shell surrounding areas on April 23.<sup>15</sup> Reports of Russian reinforcements from the Kyiv axis in Kharkiv Oblast likely indicate that Russia intends to maintain pressure on Kharkiv city, contradicting the Russian claim that Moscow's focus is on securing the borders of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. Russian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) do not currently run through or even near Kharkiv city, and the most recent Ukrainian counteroffensives near the city are unlikely to threaten Russian GLOCs from Belgorod to Izyum.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of April 23, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



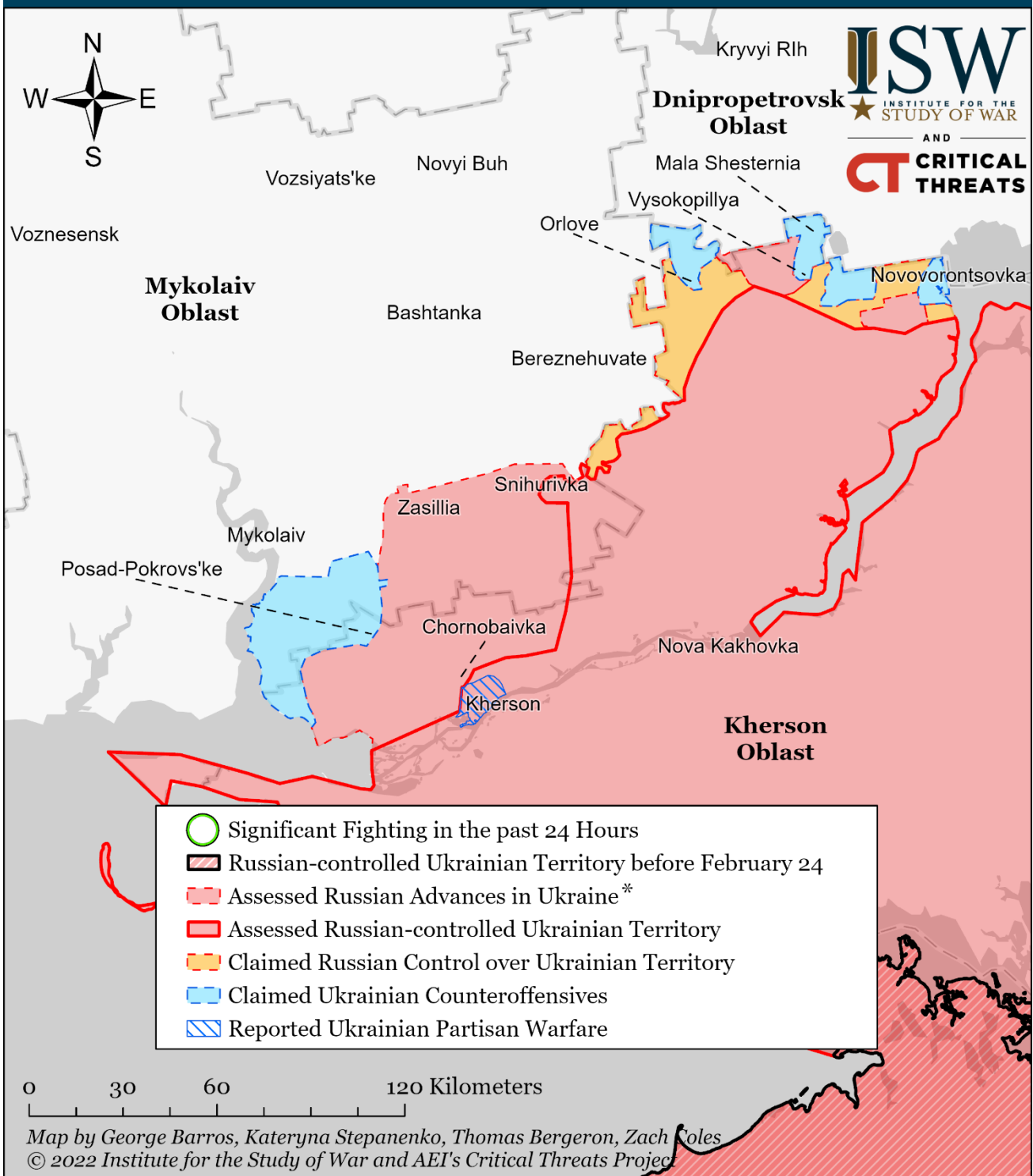


## **Supporting Effort #2—Southern axis: (Russian Objective: Defend Kherson against Ukrainian counterattacks)**

Russian forces continued a limited offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast but paused ground offensive operations in northern Kherson Oblast on April 23.<sup>16</sup> Oleksiy Arestovych, chief advisor to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said that Russian forces advanced several kilometers in the direction of Hulyaipole, Zaporizhia Oblast, likely intending to stop Ukrainian counteroffensives in the area or to secure the N15 highway.<sup>17</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that one Russian BTG from the 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army moved in the direction of Zaporizhia. This unit was likely one of three sent to Melitopol early in March and is not likely a fresh unit, although it may have had time to refit and replace losses.<sup>18</sup> Russian forces are reportedly regrouping separate units of the 8th and 49th Combined Arms Armies, the 22nd Army Corps, Black Sea Coastal Troops, and airborne troops to retain occupied frontiers in southern Ukraine.<sup>19</sup>

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate claimed that Ukrainian forces struck a command post of the 49th Combined Arms Army in an unspecified frontline location in southern Ukraine on April 22, killing at least two generals and destroying the post.<sup>20</sup> ISW cannot independently verify this strike or its casualties. The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that an organized resistance movement has killed 100 Russian occupation personnel since the start of the war, including 30 since April 12.<sup>21</sup> Russian forces are attempting to forcibly mobilize residents of temporarily occupied settlements in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts, despite growing resistance movements.<sup>22</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of April 23, 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.

## **Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine: (Russian Objective: Withdraw combat power in good order for redeployment to eastern Ukraine)**

There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours.

### **Immediate items to watch**

- Russian forces will likely continue attacking southeast from Izyum, west from Kreminna and Popasna, and north from Donetsk City via Avdiivka or another axis.
- Russian forces will attempt to starve out the remaining defenders of the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol and will not allow trapped civilians to evacuate.
- Russian forces will likely increase the scale of ground offensive operations in the coming days, but it is too soon to tell how fast they will do so or how large those offensives will be. It is also too soon to assess how the Russians will weight their efforts in the arc from Izyum to Donetsk City.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/301224008857351>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=775822470053693&ref=sharing>

<sup>4</sup> <https://t.me/andriyshTime/444>

<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1517821496244252673>;

<https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1517575907006840832>

<sup>6</sup> <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/1906>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/301224008857351>;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/300852938894458>; <https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/1918>;

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<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1517822790396690432>; <https://twitter.com/nabihbulos/status/1517615210877624324>

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1517825445739347969>; [https://vk.com/video-211194011\\_456239107](https://vk.com/video-211194011_456239107)

<sup>10</sup> <https://t.me/syngubov/2969>;

<https://twitter.com/Angelo4justice3/status/1517413394575282176> ;

<https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/151782682531303424>

<sup>11</sup> <https://focus.ua/voennye-novosti/513227-vs-rf-otchasti-prodvinulis-v-zaporozhskom-i-izyumskom-napravleniyah-arestovich-video>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/300852938894458>

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- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/300852938894458>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://gur.gov.ua/content/rosiiskyykh-viiskovykh-iaki-chynyly-zvirstva-v-buchi-znovu-povertaiut-v-ukrainu.html>; <https://gur.gov.ua/content/voennye-prestupnyky-neposredstvenno-uchastvuiushchye-v-sovershenyy-voennykh-prestupleniyi-protiv-naroda-ukrayny-v-h-bucha-voennosluzhashchye-64-otdelnoi-motostrelkovoii-bryhady-35-oa-vvo.html>; <https://inforesist.org/razvedka-obnorodovala-imena-voennykh-rossijskoj-brigady-kotoraya-byla-v-buche/>
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- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/300852938894458>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/297545889223505>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/2022/04/22/u-melitopoli-partyzany-znyshhyly-ponad-100-okupantiv/>;
- <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-14>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/301224008857351>;
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