

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

Karolina Hird, Grace Mappes, Layne Philipson, George Barros and Frederick W. Kagan
July 24, 6:30 pm ET

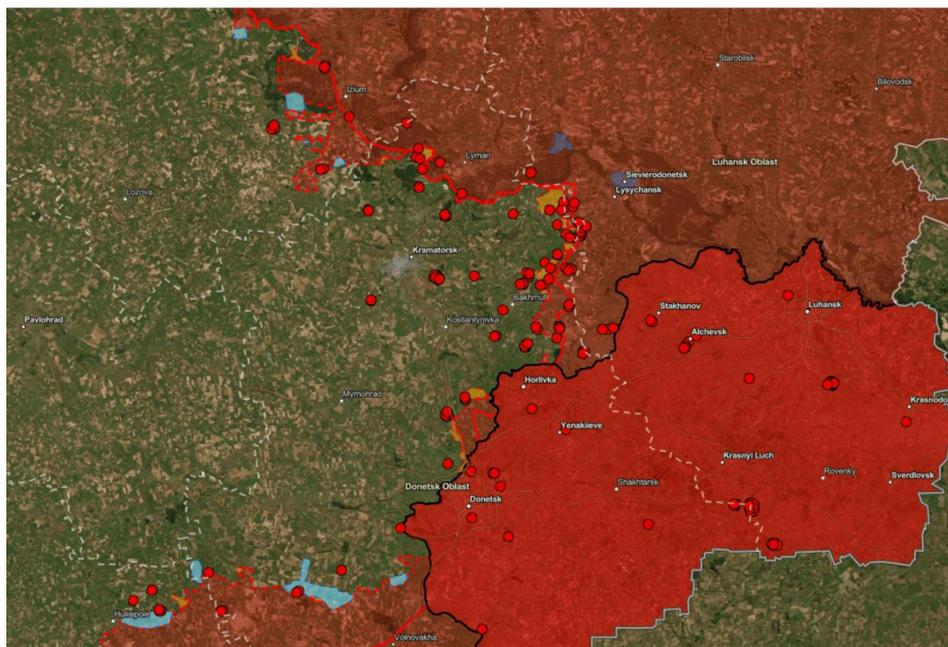
Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Ukrainian officials are increasingly acknowledging Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kherson Oblast. Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan stated on July 24 that Ukrainian forces are undertaking unspecified counteroffensive actions in Kherson Oblast.¹ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on July 23 that Ukrainian forces are advancing “step by step” in Kherson Oblast.² His statement does not make clear whether he is referring to small, ongoing Ukrainian advances in Kherson Oblast or a broader counteroffensive.³ Ukraine’s Southern Operational Command reported on July 24 that Ukrainian forces are firing on Russian transport facilities in Kherson Oblast to impede maneuverability and logistics support. This activity is consistent with support to an active counteroffensive or conditions-setting for an upcoming counteroffensive.⁴ Khlan also said that Ukrainian strikes on Russian-controlled bridges around Kherson City only aim to prevent Russian forces from moving equipment into the city without stopping food and other essential supplies from entering the city.⁵

Alarm in the Russian nationalist information space continues to grow as the pace of Russian operations slows in the face of successful Ukrainian high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) strikes on key Russian logistics and command-and-control nodes. Moscow Calling, a medium-sized Russian Telegram channel with 31,000 subscribers, posted an appraisal of the entirety of Russian operations in Ukraine since February 24.⁶ Moscow Calling defined three distinct phases of the war—the first spanning from initial invasion to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Kyiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv Oblasts and the second spanning between that point and the introduction of Western-provided HIMARS.⁷ Moscow Calling notably defined the arrival of HIMARS as a distinct turning point in the war and stated that previously provided Western weapons systems (such as NLAWs, Javelins, Stingers, and Bayraktars) did very little against Russian artillery bombardment (they are not designed or intended to counter artillery attack), but that HIMARS changed everything for Russian capabilities in Ukraine.⁸ Moscow Calling strongly insinuated that recent Ukrainian strikes on Russian warehouses, communication hubs, and rear bases are having a devastating and potentially irreversible impact on the development of future Russian offensives.⁹

This post is consistent with previous reports from Western defense officials that Russian troops are being forced to engage in various HIMARS mitigation tactics on the battlefield, including camouflage measures and constantly changing the location of equipment groupings.¹⁰ These mitigation tactics are impeding Russian forces from conducting the massive artillery barrages that they have widely employed over the course of the war, as evidenced by NASA Fire Information for Resource Management (FIRMS) data that shows consistently fewer observed heat anomalies over the frontline in Donbas since the introduction of HIMARS to Ukraine.

NASA FIRMS Data near Donbas on July 15, 2022



[Source: NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System over Donbas, July 15 – July 23 and Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community]

The Kremlin is likely facing mounting (if still very limited) domestic dissent from within ethnic minority enclaves, which are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the Kremlin's force generation efforts. Vasily Matenov, founder of the “Asians of Russia” organization, stated in early July that he had officially registered the organization in order to advocate for “endangered and small-numbered peoples who are discriminated against by the Russian state.”¹¹ Matenov emphasized that the preliminary goal of “Asians of Russia” is to stop the war in Ukraine due to devastating statistics on the combat deaths of soldiers from minority groups.¹² Similarly, Advisor to Ukraine's Minister of Internal Affairs Anton Gerashchenko cited Ukrainian sources that claim Russian authorities pay triple amounts to families of deceased soldiers from Moscow compared to families of soldiers from the minority-dominant region of Buryatia.¹³ As ISW has previously reported, protest groups in ethnic minority enclaves have already formed in Tuva and Buryatia, and these communities will likely continue to protest the Kremlin's reliance on drawing combat power from peripheral groups of Russian society.¹⁴

Key Takeaways

- **Ukrainian officials are increasingly acknowledging Ukrainian counteroffensive operations in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin is facing mounting (if still very limited) domestic dissent from ethnic minorities who are disproportionately bearing the burden of the Russian war in Ukraine.**
- **Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults northwest of Slovyansk, east of Siversk, and south of Bakhmut on July 24.**
- **Ukrainian strikes have damaged all three Russian-controlled bridges leading into Kherson City within the past week.**
- **Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults in Kherson Oblast.**
- **The Kremlin continued constituting regional volunteer battalions and is leveraging private military companies' recruitment drives to generate combat power.**

- **Russian occupation authorities continued setting conditions for annexation referenda in occupied territories and are recruiting Russian civilians for reconstruction efforts.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 24, 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.

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.

- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and two supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian Troops in the Cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis
- Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine

Subordinate Main Effort—Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts (Russian objective: Encircle Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine and capture the entirety of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

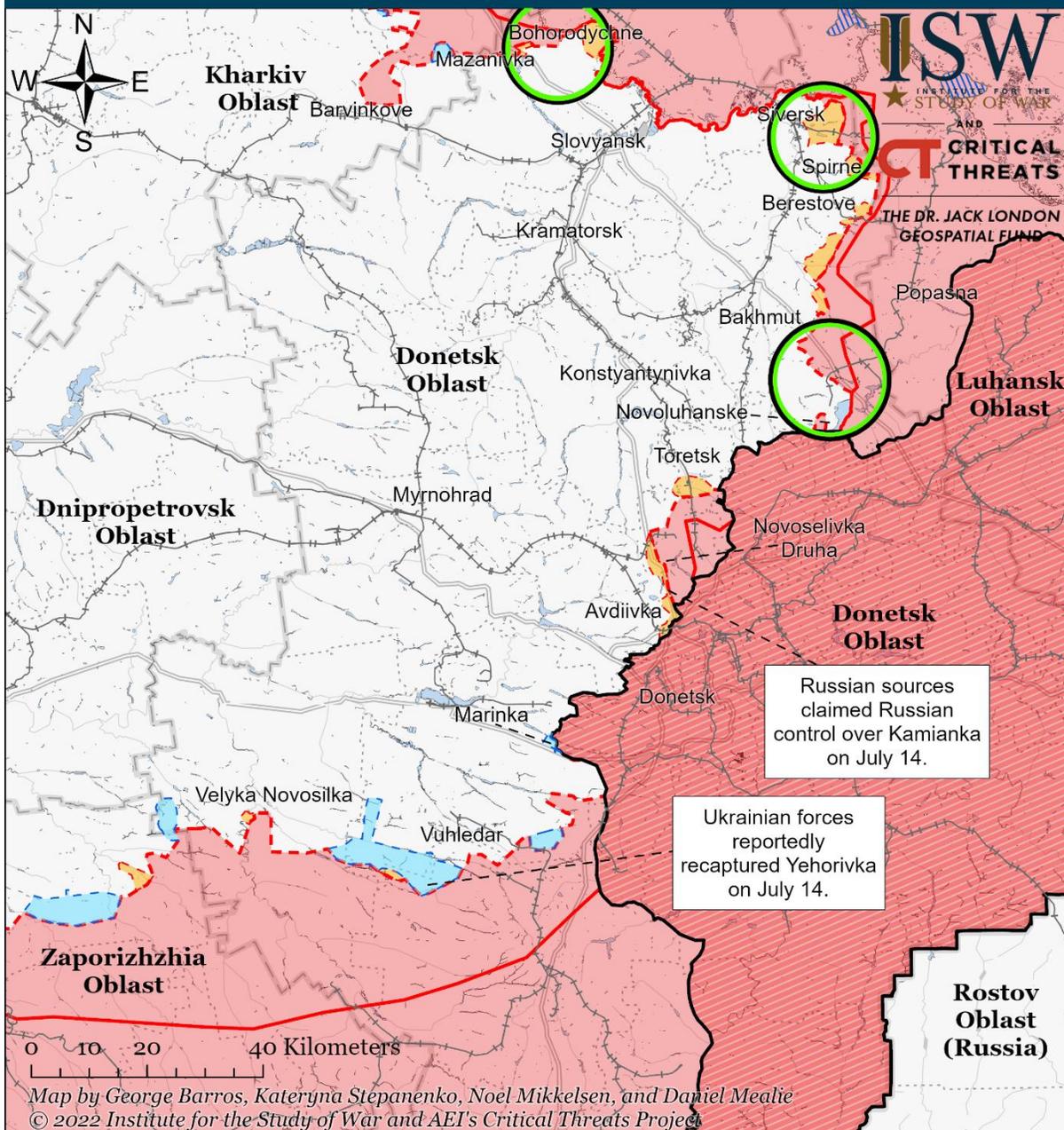
Russian forces conducted a limited ground attack northwest of Slovyansk on July 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops failed to take control of Bohorodychne, 20 km northwest of Slovyansk.¹⁵ Russian forces continued artillery strikes on settlements southeast of Izyum along the Kharkiv-Donetsk Oblast border; shelled Krasnopillya, Dolyna, Dibrovne, and Adamivka; and struck additional settlements southwest of Izyum around Barvinkove.¹⁶

Russian forces continued ground attacks east of Siversk on July 24. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian forces unsuccessfully attempted to advance west of Verkhokamyanka and Bilohorivka toward Verkhokamyanske, 5 km due east of Siversk.¹⁷ The Russian Ministry of Defense indicated that Russian counter-battery fire focused on suppressing Ukrainian firing points to the east of Siversk, which is consistent with Ukrainian reports of continued Russian artillery fire on settlements in the area between the Luhansk Oblast border and Siversk.¹⁸

Russian forces continued ground attacks south of Bakhmut on July 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops are continuing to fight for control of the Vuhledar Power Plant and Novoluhanske and that Russian forces failed to advance from Roty to Semihirya, about 20 km southeast of Bakhmut.¹⁹ The Ukrainian General Staff noted that Russian forces are trying to create favorable conditions to capture the Vuhledar Power Plant.²⁰ Previous Russian attempts to advance from south of Bakhmut have largely been stymied by the water features in the Svitlodarsk area, which indicates that Russian forces likely hope to gain a foothold on the northern bank of the Vuhlehirske Reservoir and advance northward on Bakhmut across relatively even cross-country terrain.

Russian forces did not make any confirmed ground attacks toward Avdiivka and fired on Ukrainian positions along the Avdiivka-Donetsk city frontline.²¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



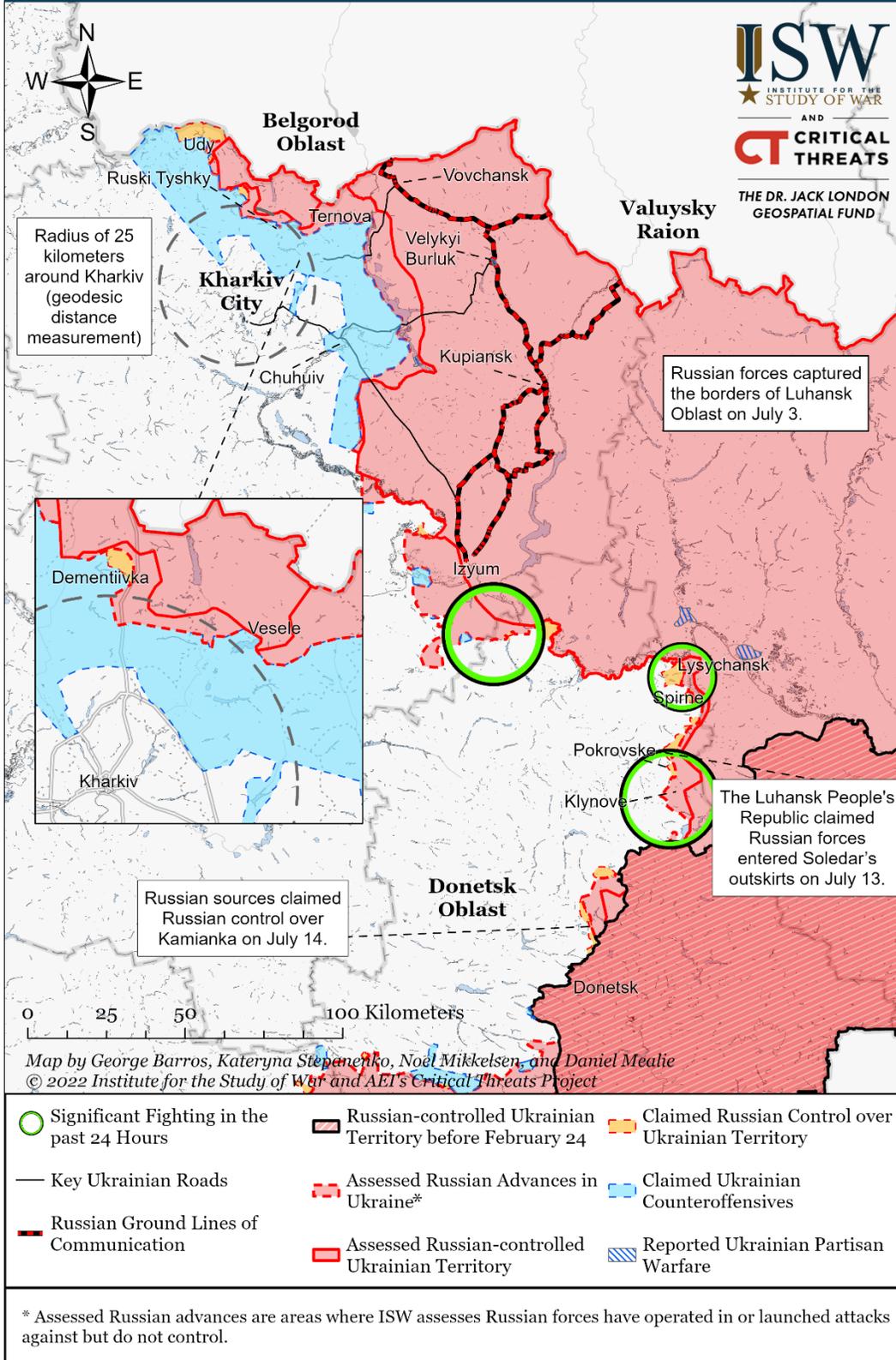
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Major Railroads
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*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

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

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum and prevent Ukrainian forces from reaching the Russian border)

Russian forces did not conduct any ground assaults and continued to conduct air and artillery strikes along the Kharkiv City Axis on July 24. Russian forces conducted airstrikes on Verkhni Saltiv and Mospanove, approximately 55 km southeast of Kharkiv City, and launched tube and rocket artillery strikes on Kharkiv City and settlements to the north, northeast, and southeast on July 24.²²

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of July 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Defend Kherson and Zaporizhia Oblasts against Ukrainian counterattacks)

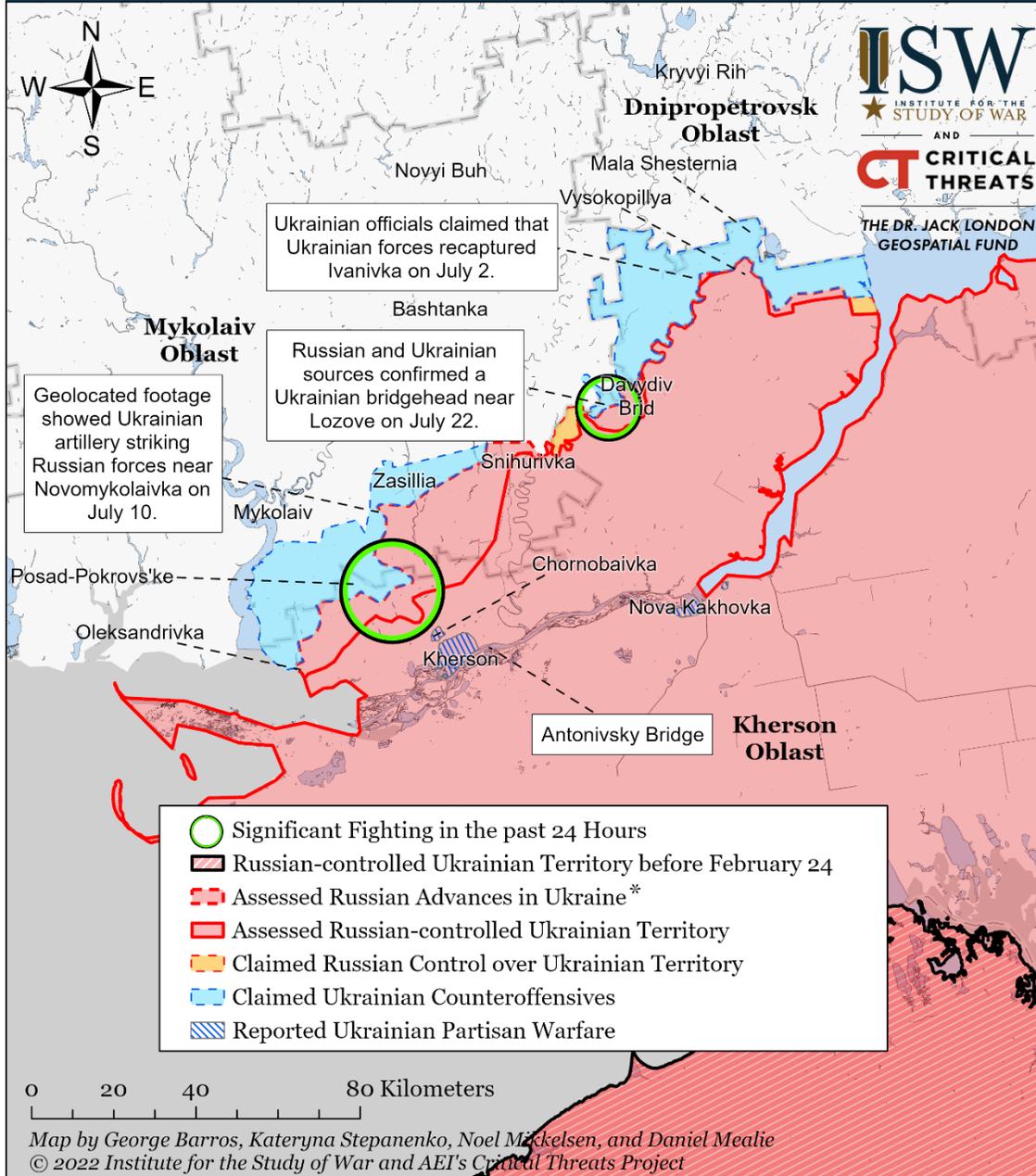
Ukrainian strikes have damaged all three Russian-controlled bridges leading into Kherson City within the past week as of July 24. Ukrainian forces struck the bridge over the dam at the Nova Kakhova Hydroelectric Power Plant on July 24, damaging the road but still allowing passenger vehicles to cross the bridge.²³ Russian sources claimed that Ukraine used HIMARS to strike the bridge and reported that repairs to the bridge are already underway.²⁴ Footage from July 23 shows passenger vehicles navigating around holes left on the Antonivskiy Bridge, suggesting that the damage to the free-standing Antonivskiy Bridge may be more complex to repair than the Nova Kakhova bridge.²⁵

Ukrainian partisans blew up a Russian-controlled railway near Novobohdanivka, Zaporizhia Oblast, 30 km north of Melitopol, overnight on July 23-24. Geolocated images of the aftermath show splits in a rail juncture in Novobohdanivka that cuts off Vasylivka and Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast from the main rail line to Melitopol.²⁶ Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces use the rail line to transport equipment and personnel from Melitopol towards Vasylivka and Tokmak.²⁷

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) released an urgent message on July 23 calling on civilians in occupied Enerhodar, Zaporizhia Oblast, and the surrounding areas to provide details on Russians and their movements in Enerhodar.²⁸ The GUR report specifically asked residents for addresses and geolocated coordinates of Russian forces' housing and deployment points, Russian ground lines of communication, residences of local occupation authorities, and the biographical details including names, addresses, and places of employment of all Russian collaborators and sympathizers.²⁹

Russian forces attempted limited ground assaults in Kherson Oblast on July 24. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground assaults in the Sukhy Stavok–Andriivka and Bruskinskye–Bilohirka directions near the Ukrainian bridgehead on the Inhulets River south of Davydiv Brid.³⁰ It is unlikely the fighting around the bridgehead is part of or directly countering the main Ukrainian counteroffensive effort. Russian forces reportedly used more S-300 anti-air missiles to strike ground targets in Mykolaiv City.³¹ A fire broke out at an oil depot north of Snihurivka, where Russian forces have previously conducted strikes.³² Russian forces continued shelling along the entire line of contact.³³ Ukrainian counterbattery fire struck a battery of Russian S-300 launchers, reportedly with HIMARS, near Zelenotropynske, Kherson Oblast.³⁴ Footage and images of the area from Russian and Ukrainian sources shows two destroyed S-300 launchers.³⁵ Ukrainian Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov reported that Ukrainian forces also struck the Russian-occupied Melitopol airfield overnight on July 23-24 and that Russian forces are unsuccessfully trying to restore the airfield.³⁶

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 24, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

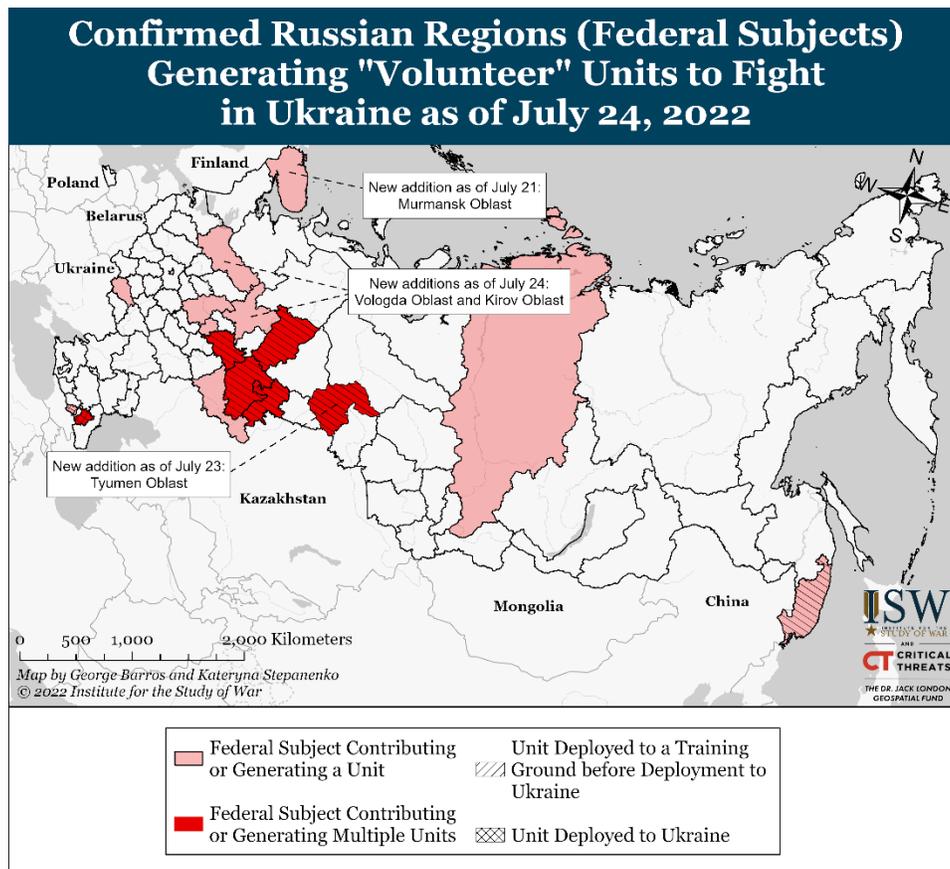


* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: ISW expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives to Lozove on the left bank of the Inhulets River on July 5. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on July 6 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian offensive in the direction of Lozove in Kherson Oblast, indicating that Ukrainian forces still maintain a position there. Russian Telegram Channel Rybar claimed that Ukrainian forces launched unsuccessful attacks on the Snihurivka-Lozove-Bila Krynytsya line on July 4. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian platoon counterattack in the Lozove area, indicating that Ukrainian forces are in Lozove. Russian Telegram channel Rybar confirmed that Ukrainian forces crossed the river and are in Lozove on July 22. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces defeated a Russian attack near Bilohirka on July 22, indicating Ukrainian forces also likely control Bilohirka. We will update our maps as we collect and confirm more information.

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

The Kremlin continues to constitute regionally-based volunteer battalions for deployment to Ukraine. Artem Vikharev, Military Commissar of the Cherepovets Raion of Vologda Oblast, announced on July 20 that Vologda Oblast is forming a combat battalion.³⁷ The Vologda battalion is likely an artillery battalion. Vikharev stated that the volunteers will be sent to unspecified artillery units that are being formed in Luga, Leningrad Oblast. Luga hosts a large artillery training ground and the base of the 9th Guards Artillery Brigade (of the 6th Combined Arms Army).³⁸ Russian State Duma Member Maria Butina announced on July 13 that Kirov Oblast is forming the “Vyatka” volunteer battalion, which has reportedly been almost entirely assembled as of July 9.³⁹ It is unclear whether the “Vyatka” Battalion has deployed to a training ground or to Ukraine as of this publication. ISW has updated its map of Russian federal subjects generating “volunteer” units accordingly.



The Russian military leadership is leveraging recruitment drives carried out by private military companies (PMCs) to generate combat power. Russian Tyumen Oblast-based news outlet *72ru* reported that the Wagner Group PMC was actively recruiting residents of Tyumen Oblast for deployment to Ukraine on year-long contracts as early as July 9.⁴⁰ This is consistent with a report by independent Latvia-based Russian language newspaper *Meduza* that stated that Wagner Group units are increasingly acting as the primary “strike groups” of the Russian Armed Forces and are being “rented out” to forward-deployed Russian units.⁴¹ *Meduza* reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense previously ordered certain Wagner Group detachments to re-deploy to Ukraine from locations in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere in Africa and that the involvement of the Wagner Group in the capture of Popansa has increased their popularity, and likely their ability to galvanize recruitment. *Meduza* also noted that

other PMC elements, such groups formed under the auspices of the “Redoubt” PMC were rapidly constituted and are largely comprised of former soldiers and “blacklisted” officers.⁴²

Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative control of occupied areas; set conditions for potential annexation into the Russian Federation or some other future political arrangement of Moscow’s choosing)

Russian occupation officials continued setting conditions for referenda to integrate occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian Federation. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov reported on July 24 that Russian forces to plan to hold pseudo-referenda in occupied Ukrainian territories in early September, which is consistent with ISW’s assessment of the Kremlin’s potential annexation timeline.⁴³ Kherson Oblast Administration Advisor Serhiy Khlan reported on July 23 that Russian occupation authorities are accepting applications for a seven-person election commission for a referendum in Kherson Oblast.⁴⁴

Russian authorities are seeking to leverage domestic Russian labor to “reconstruct” destroyed areas of Ukraine. Tyumen Oblast news outlet *72ru* reported on June 24 that Russian officials are recruiting Tyumen Oblast citizens to reconstruct civilian infrastructure in Donbas territories.⁴⁵ *72ru* reported that Russian officials are offering Tyumen residents up to 200,000 rubles for employee rotations of 30 or 60 days.⁴⁶ The report stated that the recruiting company Stroykom will only accept men without criminal records and will pay for travel, accommodation, and meals.⁴⁷



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¹ <https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid027CqCky5b8GemTxbxP8rWNJsmCHjBbkJifCuJ65zyBPmthvyGdQVvoxCWB9xxLhf5I>

² <https://www.president.gov dot ua/news/zsu-krok-za-krokom-prosuvayutsya-v-hersonskij-oblasti-zverne-76637>

³ <https://www.president.gov dot ua/news/zsu-krok-za-krokom-prosuvayutsya-v-hersonskij-oblasti-zverne-76637>

⁴ <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/717>; <https://fb.watch/et1hU9fCvd/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid02mNxVjraNtihWzSyuC7WDPejknxHa54hTMSsqL7s4VUTGu9bRDwT35Jgkwzcx6pbSI>

⁶ <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9041>; <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9040>

⁷ <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9041>; <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9040>

⁸ <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9041>; <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9040>

⁹ <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9041>; <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9040>

¹⁰ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-07-22-22/h_f67f3f19270b94a27659a435d3f946a0

¹¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cf15A1KlxLB/>; <https://asiansofrussia.com/>

¹² <https://asiansofrussia.com/>

¹³ https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1550860310294274048

¹⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CgPH0xtllow/>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-18>

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<https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02nhjTHZo3NrLBFnSeJf6Jrr8pUan6YgH9KfAnrF5pgyuJpJCEjeu9CiA76Cm2uDw9I>

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¹⁸ https://t.me/mod_russia/17903;

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²¹ <https://t.me/m0sc0wcalling/9027>;

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<https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1551121024510558210>;

<https://twitter.com/neonhandrail/status/1551127181023068161>

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²³ <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1551067578851885056>; <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1551105638213849088>;
<https://t.me/milinfohive/87599>

²⁴ <https://t.me/voenkorKotenok/38632>; <https://t.me/milinfohive/87599>; <https://t.me/milinfohive/87600>;
<https://t.me/milinfohive/87607>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1551149497941639168>; https://t.me/rian_ru/172081;
https://t.me/rian_ru/172081/?single; https://vk.com/milinfohive?w=wall-123538639_2838500

²⁵ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1551119977595502592; <https://t.me/The3rdForceUA/7864>

²⁶ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1551091693914554370; https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/305;
https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1551106827223535616; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1551112759768645632;
https://twitter.com/Se_Yu_later/status/1551110766752940033; <https://t.me/stranaua/54045>

²⁷ <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/2022/07/24/partyzany-pidirvaly-zaliznychnu-koliyu-u-melitopolskomu-rajoni/>;
https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/305?single; https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16095

²⁸ <https://gur.gov.ua/content/povidomlennia-hur-meshkantsiam-mista-enerhodar-ta-prylehlykh-terytorii.html>

²⁹ <https://gur.gov.ua/content/povidomlennia-hur-meshkantsiam-mista-enerhodar-ta-prylehlykh-terytorii.html>

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02nhjTHZo3NrLBFnSeJf6Jrr8pUan6YgH9KfAnrF5pgyuJpJCEjeu9CiA76Cm2uDW9l>

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=45917478900438>

³² <https://twitter.com/wammezz/status/1551246424226103297>; <https://twitter.com/wammezz/status/1551247903238373376>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/pfbid02nhjTHZo3NrLBFnSeJf6Jrr8pUan6YgH9KfAnrF5pgyuJpJCEjeu9CiA76Cm2uDW9l>;
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https://t.me/mykola_lukashuk/804

³⁴ <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/717>; <https://fb.watch/et1hU9fCvd/>; https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16119;
<https://t.me/milinfohive/87629>; https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16122

³⁵ <https://t.me/khersonskaODA/717>; <https://fb.watch/et1hU9fCvd/>; https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16119;
<https://t.me/milinfohive/87629>; https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16122

³⁶ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/305?single; https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/308;
https://t.me/Bratchuk_Sergey/16095

³⁷ <https://cher.all-rf.com/news/2022/07/20/35/cherepoveckij-voenkom-rasskazal-o-podrobnostyah-sluzhby-po-kontraktu-v-imennom-batalone-dlya-svo>

³⁸ <https://cher.all-rf.com/news/2022/07/20/35/cherepoveckij-voenkom-rasskazal-o-podrobnostyah-sluzhby-po-kontraktu-v-imennom-batalone-dlya-svo> ;
https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Ground%20Forces%20OOB_ISW%20CTP_0.pdf

³⁹ <https://aw-journal.com/in-kirov-they-complete-the-recruitment-of-contract-soldiers-to-the-vyatka-battalion-with-a-salary-of-300-thousand-rubles/>; https://vk.com/wall31690263_78335; <https://www.newsru.com/society/2022/06/13/v-kirove-sobirayut-batalon-vyatka-dlya-sluzhby-na-ukraine>; <https://vk.com/public40345024>;
<https://www.mk-kirov.ru/politics/2022/07/09/v-kirove-zavershayut-nabor-kontraktikov-v-batalon-vyatka-s-zarplatoy-v-300-tysyach-rublej.html>; <https://www.mk-kirov.ru/politics/2022/07/09/v-kirove-zavershayut-nabor-kontraktikov-v-batalon-vyatka-s-zarplatoy-v-300-tysyach-rublej.html>

⁴⁰ <https://72.ru/text/gorod/2022/07/09/71463431/>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1550964249249431553>

⁴¹ <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/07/14/a-mercenaries-war>

⁴² <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/07/14/a-mercenaries-war>

⁴³ https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_melitopol/308

<https://www.facebook.com/sergey.khlan/posts/pfbid0rh3KY3Ds6SdyV1fJthdbPmi8FiieU3M1iVUYwXDR8VFSNs5igbYNUo2Sm1Pd6CvI>

⁴⁵ <https://72 dot ru/text/gorod/2022/06/24/71431919/>

⁴⁶ <https://72 dot ru/text/gorod/2022/06/24/71431919/>

⁴⁷ <https://72 dot ru/text/gorod/2022/06/24/71431919/>