

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment

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June 21, 7:45 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.

The Kremlin recently replaced the commander of the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces and may be in the process of radically reshuffling the command structure of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, indicating a possible purge of senior officers blamed for failures in Ukraine. Several Russian outlets confirmed that the current Chief of Staff of the Central Military District, Colonel-General Mikhail Teplinsky, will replace the current Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrey Serdyukov.¹ Ukrainian sources previously reported on June 17 that the Kremlin fired Serdyukov for poor performance during the invasion and high casualties among paratroopers, but ISW could not confirm this reporting at the time.² Several sources are additionally reporting contradictory claims about replacements for the current Southern Military District Commander—and overall commander of the Russian invasion of Ukraine—Army General Alexander Dvornikov:

- Russian reserve officer Oleg Marzoev claimed on June 21 that Russian military officials will soon appoint General of the Army Sergey Surovikin, the current commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces, as commander of the Southern Military District (SMD), effectively replacing current SMD Commander Alexander Dvornikov.³
- Investigative journalism group Bellingcat previously reported on June 17 that Russian President Vladimir Putin planned to replace Dvornikov as the commander of the invasion of Ukraine following Dvornikov's excessive drinking and lack of trust among Russian forces.⁴
- Ukraine's Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) reported on June 19 that Putin replaced Dvornikov as the commander of the Ukrainian operation with Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko, the head of the Military-Political Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces.⁵
- An unofficial but widely followed Russian Airborne Troops social media page claimed that Dvornikov has been promoted and that Serdyukov will take his position within the SMD. This claim is highly unlikely to be true given that pro-Kremlin sources announced Serdyukov's retirement.⁶

ISW cannot independently verify these reports and will continue to monitor the situation for corroboration. However, if these varied reports are all accurate, former Aerospace Forces Commander Surovikin has replaced Dvornikov (who may have been forced to retire) as commander of the Southern Military District, but Zhidko has been appointed commander of Russian operations in Ukraine, despite not directly commanding Russian combat troops in his permanent role. Zhidko currently directs the body of the Russian Ministry of Defense responsible for maintaining morale and ideological control within the Russian military, rather than commanding a military district. As ISW previously reported, Southern Military District Commander Dvornikov was the natural choice to command Russia's operations in Ukraine following Russia's loss in the Battle of Kyiv, as the majority of Russian offensive operations are occurring within the Southern Military District's area of responsibility. The appointment of a separate commander over the Southern Military District, and the replacement of the commander of the SMD in the middle of major combat operations, is a drastic step that would speak to severe crises within the Russian high command, and possibly a purge by the Kremlin. **Such drastic rotations within the Russian military, if true, are not actions taken by a force on the verge of a major success and indicate ongoing dysfunction in the Kremlin's conduct of the war.**

Russian forces are successfully advancing toward Lysychansk from the south rather than making an opposed river crossing from Severodonetsk, threatening Ukrainian defenses in the area. ISW previously forecasted that Russian forces would seek to attack toward Lysychansk from the south to negate the defensive advantage that the Siverskyi Donets River would grant Ukrainian defenders opposing a direct assault from Severodonetsk. Russian forces appear to be securing such an advance and will likely attack the outskirts of Lysychansk within the coming week. **This Russian advance is a clear setback for Ukrainian defenses in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area, but Russian forces will likely require further protracted battles with Ukrainian forces similar to the block-by-block fighting seen in Mariupol and Severodonetsk in order to capture Lysychansk.**

The Kremlin is failing to deter the family members of sailors that survived the sinking of the *Moskva* from issuing an appeal against the deployment of surviving conscripts to the war in Ukraine as of June 20.⁷ Russian opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta* published an appeal from the parents of the surviving 49 conscript crewmembers of the *Moskva*, demanding that the Military Prosecutor's Office in Sevastopol, the Committee of Soldier's Mothers, and the Human Rights Commissioner immediately terminate the crewmembers' deployment. The appeal states that Russian commanders did not send the surviving conscripts home from their deployment following the sinking of *Moskva* and that they will be recommitted to hostilities on June 30. The appeal noted that the survivors refuse to participate in further assignments due to psychological distress and are currently stationed on the old ship *Ladnyi*, which the appeal claims is unfit for combat. The Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) previously reported that Russian forces have threatened the families of *Moskva* sailors with criminal prosecution and nullification of any financial benefits to prevent them from speaking out against Russian operations.⁸

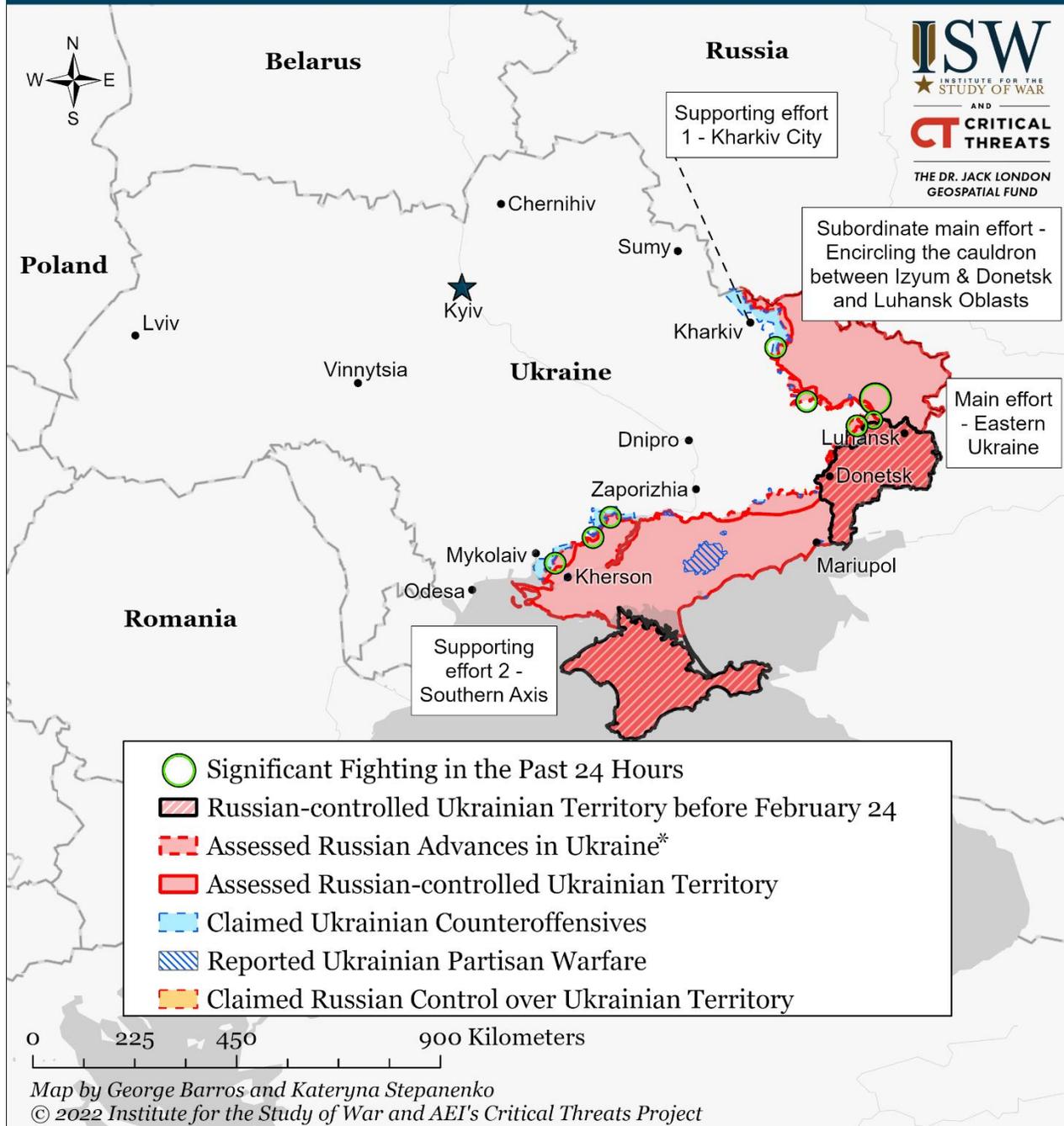
Russian forces continue to face force generation challenges and are committing unprepared contract servicemen to the invasion of Ukraine. The BBC's Russian service reported on June 20 that new Russian recruits receive only 3 to 7 days of training before being sent to "the most active sectors of the front."⁹ The BBC also reported that volunteers within the conventional Russian military, Rosgvardia units, and Wagner Group mercenaries have become Russia's main assault force, as opposed to full conventional military units. ISW has previously assessed that Russian units in eastern Ukraine are suffering from poor complements of infantry, slowing their ability to seize urban terrain. The Russian military is offering substantial financial incentives to secure additional recruits with increasing disregard for their age, health, criminal records, and other established service qualifications. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 21 that Russian Airborne (VDV) units are forced to recruit reserve officers for short-term three-month contracts due to significant officer losses, and the BBC reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense is offering to pay off the loans and debts of volunteers to entice recruits.¹⁰

Key Takeaways

- **The Kremlin recently replaced the commander of the Russian Airborne (VDV) forces and may have fired the commander of the Southern Military District and appointed a new overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, indicating ongoing dysfunction in the Kremlin's conduct of the war.**
- **Russian forces conducted several successful advances in settlements southeast of Severodonetsk on June 21 and may be able to threaten Lysychansk in the coming days while avoiding a difficult opposed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets River.**

- **Russian forces continued to launch assaults on settlements along the T1302 Lysychansk-Bakhmut highway to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs).**
- **Russian operations along the Izyum-Slovyansk axis are increasingly stalled as Russian forces prioritize operations around Severodonetsk.**
- **Russian forces likely recaptured the eastern bank of the Inhulets River from the Ukrainian bridgehead situated near the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border.**
- **Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Russian positions on Snake Island in the Black Sea, likely to destroy Russian fortifications and equipment on the island, but ISW cannot confirm competing Ukrainian and Russian claims of the results of the attack.**
- **Russian occupation authorities are continuing to face challenges recruiting local collaborators and are likely relying on Russian government personnel to consolidate their societal control of occupied Ukrainian territories.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of June 21, 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.

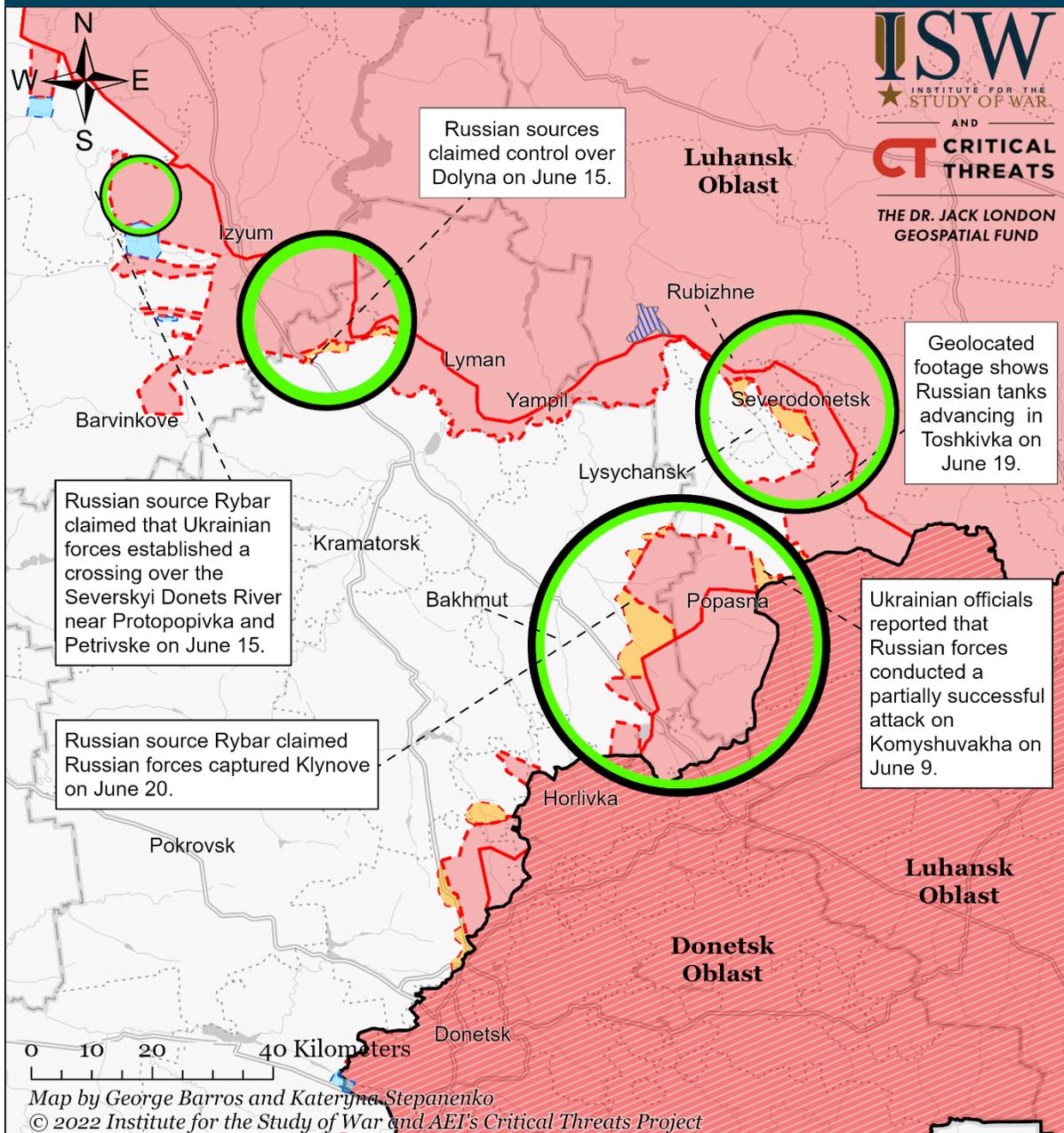
- Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of one subordinate and three supporting efforts);
- Subordinate Main Effort—Encirclement of Ukrainian troops in the cauldron between Izyum and Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts
- Supporting Effort 1—Kharkiv City;
- Supporting Effort 2—Southern Axis;
- Activities in 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 several successful advances in settlements southeast of Severodonetsk on June 21 and may be able to threaten Lysychansk in the coming days while avoiding a difficult opposed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets River. The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed that Russian forces seized Pidlisne, Myrna Dolyna, and Ustynivka and stated they captured portions of Bila Hora, all towns situated on the western Siverskyi Donets Riverbank within 10 km of the southern outskirts of Lysychansk.¹¹ Geolocated footage from June 20 indicates Russian forces captured terrain in contested Toshkivka, just east of the T1303 Lysychansk-Hirske highway.¹² Russian forces also conducted a partially successful attack against Hirske, and will likely attempt to carry out a shallow encirclement around Zolote.¹³ The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian assaults on Severodonetsk’s southeastern outskirts of Syrotyne and Voronove, likely to interdict Russian advances to the eastern bank of Siverskyi Donets River.¹⁴ Ukrainian and Russian sources reported that fighting is still ongoing at the Azot Chemical Plant in Severodonetsk as of June 21.¹⁵

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk as of June 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



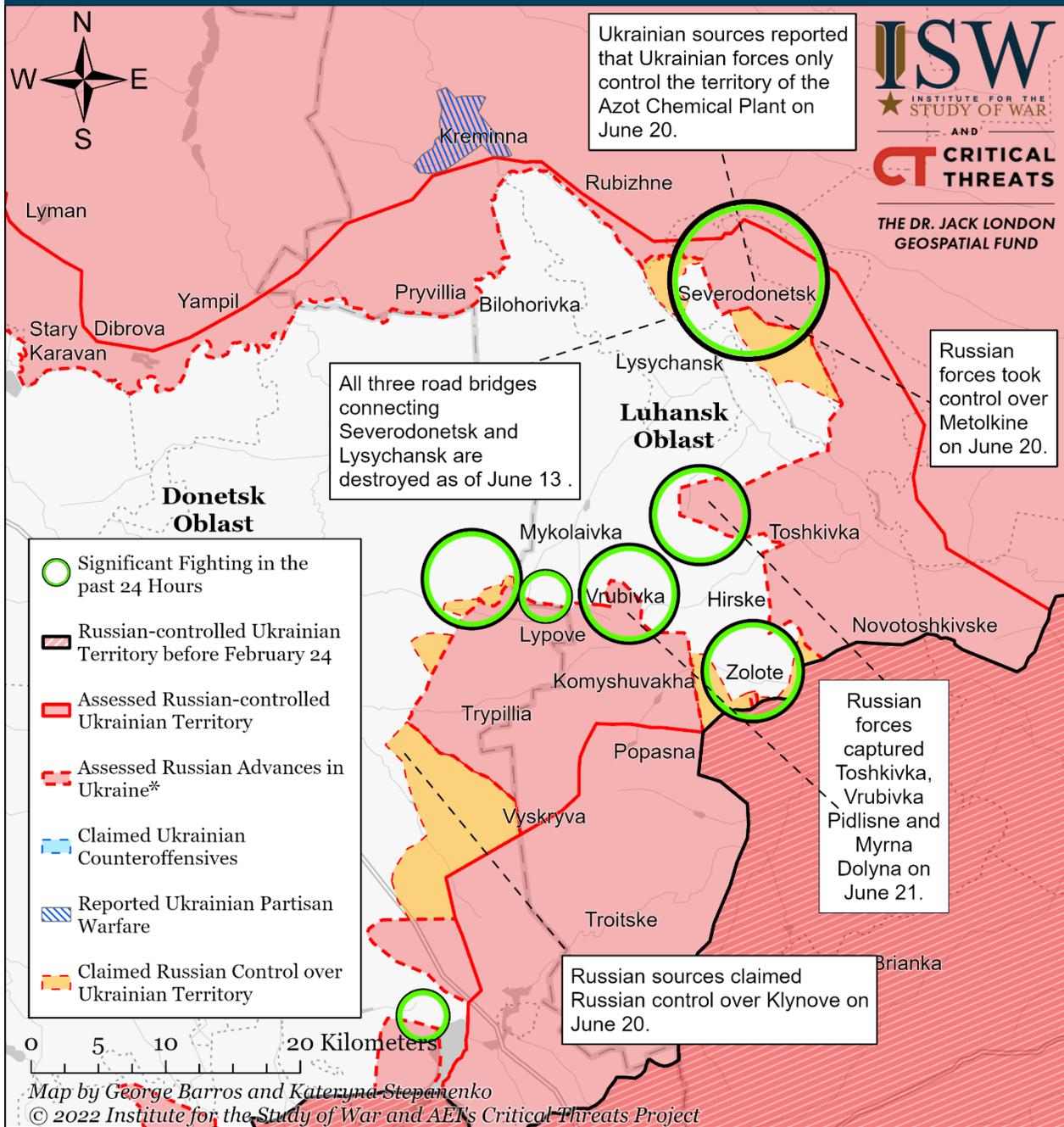
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian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

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

Russian forces continued to launch assaults on settlements along the T1302 Lysychansk-Bakhmut highway to interdict Ukrainian ground lines of communications (GLOCs). Russian forces attacked Mykolaivka and seized Vrubivka, both adjacent to the T1302 highway.¹⁶ Russian forces also launched ground assaults against Vershina and Semyhirya, approximately 12 km and 17 km south of Bakhmut. Russian forces will still need to seize the T1302 to cut off Ukrainian GLOCs running through Siversk to disrupt Ukrainian GLOCs to Lysychansk. The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Russian forces consolidated battalion tactical groups (BTGs) from the 5th Combined Arms Army and withdrew units of the 1st Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of the 1st Army Corps (the armed forces of the Donetsk People's Republic) to restore their combat capabilities, indicating that Russian forces are experiencing significant losses in ongoing operations in Luhansk Oblast.¹⁷

Russian operations along the Izyum-Slovyansk axis are increasingly stalled as Russian forces prioritize operations around Severodonetsk. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces launched unsuccessful ground assaults against Bohorodychne and Dolyna (north of Slovyansk) and did not attempt to conduct offensive operations in the Lyman area.¹⁸ Ukraine's Strategic Communications Directorate reported that Russian forces are redeploying several army-level headquarters units from frontlines in the Izyum and Lyman areas to Svatove and Horoshe, just 30-40 km east of Severodonetsk and Popasna.¹⁹ The redeployment of these headquarters units may further complicate Russian logistics routes and troop management in Izyum and Lyman and indicates that these units may be further shifting to the Severodonetsk axis. Satellite imagery from June 19 also showed that Russian forces constructed a pontoon bridge in Kupyansk, likely to improve supply routes to Svatove.²⁰ ISW previously reported on June 17 that Russian forces are deploying additional equipment via GLOCs in Svatove to support offensive operations in the Severodonetsk-Lysychansk area.²¹

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Severodonetsk as of June 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



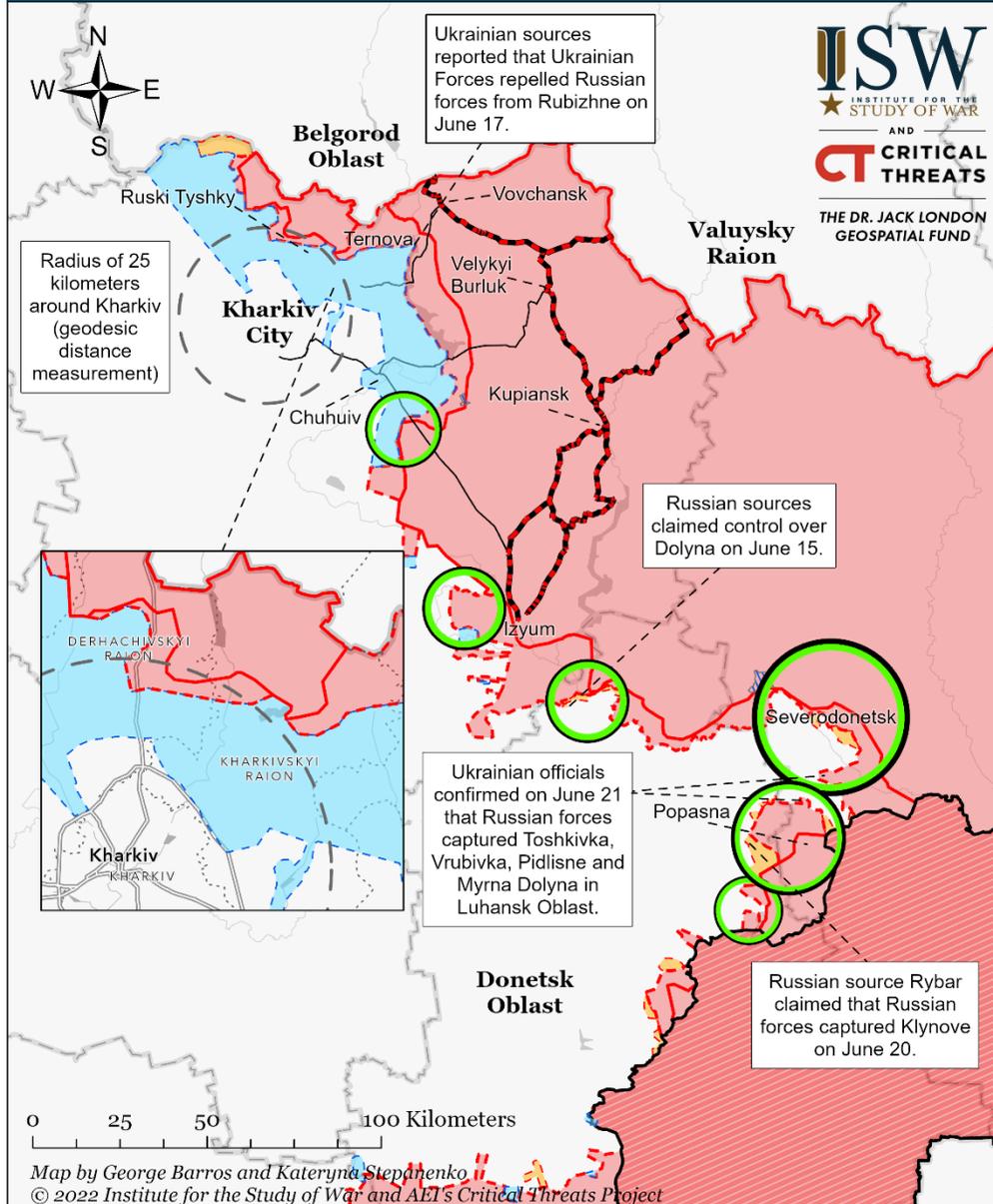
* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

Note: We extended Russian assessed advances over Severodonetsk based on Luhansk Oblast Administration Head Serhiy Haidai's statement that Ukrainian forces only control the Azot Chemical Plant as of June 20. Haidai added that fighting is ongoing in some unspecified area of the industrial zone. We extended Russian assessed advances to Toshkivka based on geolocated footage of Russian tanks advancing in the settlement on June 19. Ukrainian sources confirmed Russian forces captured Toshkivka on June 21. ISW will modify our maps once we obtain more evidence.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City (Russian objective: Withdraw forces to the north and defend ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Izyum)

Russian forces continued to focus on hindering Ukrainian counteroffensives southeast and northeast of Kharkiv City. Russian forces reportedly continued to shell settlements around Kharkiv City to impede Ukrainian advances toward the Russian forces operating in Izyum and the international border.²² Geolocated combat footage showed local fighting near Yuchenkove, approximately 61 km southeast of Kharkiv City, though neither Russian nor Ukrainian forces conducted any major attacks.²³

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of June 21, 2022, 3:00 PM ET



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|---|---|--|
| 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.

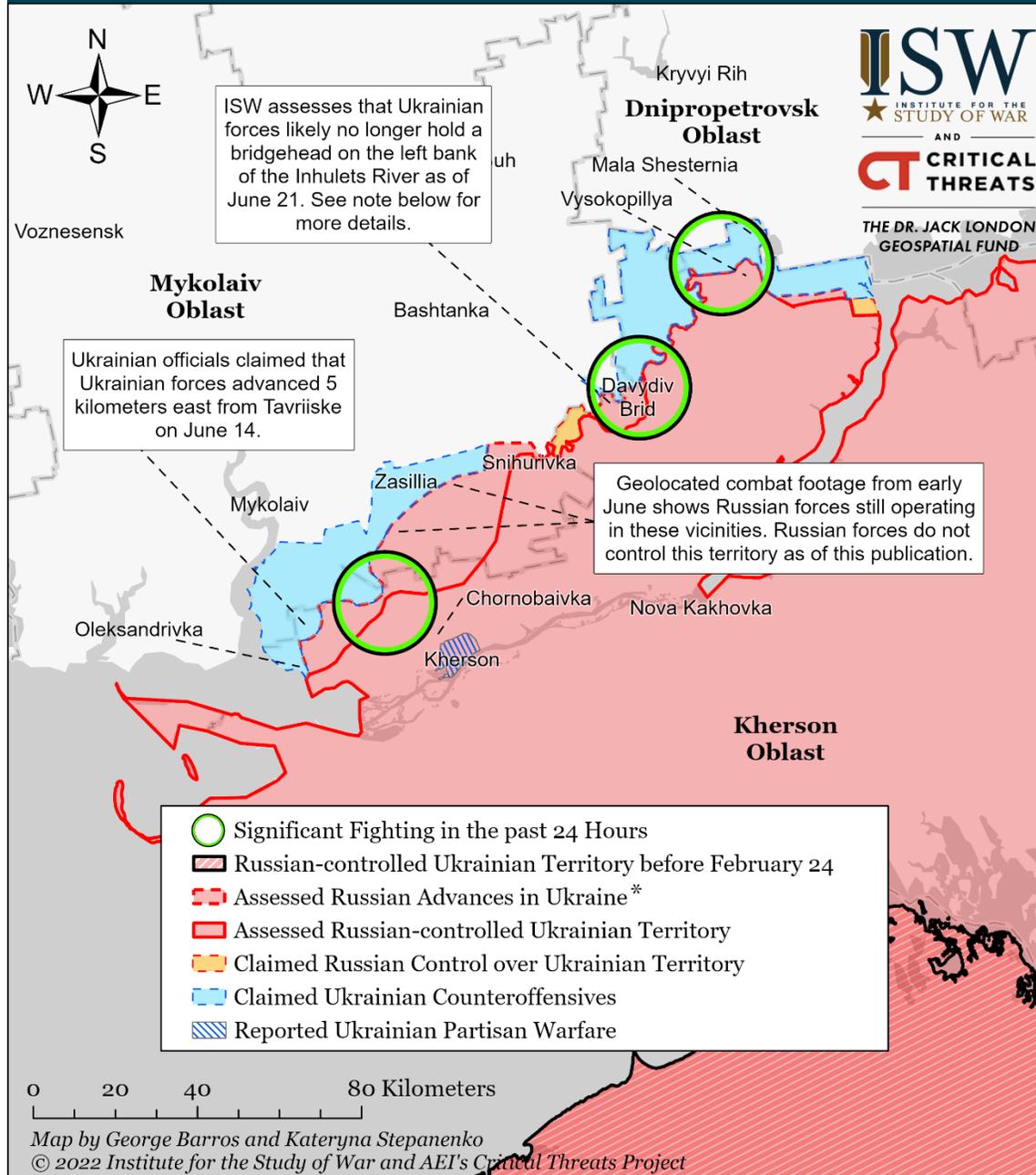
Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated on June 20 that Ukrainian forces have nearly reached the Ukrainian-Russian border. ISW will map Ukrainian counteroffensives when we observe corroborating evidence. We expanded Ukrainian counteroffensives in Rtyshchivka, just southwest of Chuhuiv, based on the Ukrainian General Staff report that Ukrainian forces repulsed Russian reconnaissance-in-force attempt on the settlement on June 20.

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

Russian forces likely recaptured the eastern bank of the Inhulets River from the Ukrainian bridgehead situated near the Kherson-Mykolaiv Oblast border. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces fired on Ukrainian positions on the western bank of the Inhulets River, likely indicating that Ukrainian forces lost access to the bridgehead on the eastern riverbank, which they had occupied since May 28.²⁴ Geolocated footage of Ukrainian forces striking Russian forces in Andriivka (situated east of the Inhulets River) also indicates that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces west of the river.²⁵ Russian forces continued to build long-term firing positions, conduct air reconnaissance, and shell settlements on the Kherson-Mykolaiv and Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast borders on June 21.²⁶

Ukrainian forces reportedly struck Russian positions on Snake Island in the Black Sea, likely to destroy Russian fortifications and equipment on the island. Ukraine's Southern Operational Command reported that Ukrainian forces are conducting an ongoing concentrated attack on Snake Island and inflicted unspecified damage on the Russian garrison as of June 21.²⁷ The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Russian air-defense systems repelled an attack against the island by more than 15 Ukrainian drones on June 20.²⁸ Russian officials also claimed that Ukrainian drones struck gas production platforms near Crimea after Russian forces defeated the Ukrainian attempt to capture Snake Island.²⁹ ISW is unable to independently confirm either claim and will continue to monitor the situation as it unfolds. The UK Defense Ministry also stated that Ukrainian attacks on Russian ships off Odesa shores have "neutralized" Russia's ability to control the sea and derailed Russian plans to block Odesa Oblast from the Black Sea.³⁰

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of June 21, 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 assesses that Russian forces likely destroyed the Ukrainian bridgehead on the left bank of the Inhulets River at an unknown date before June 21. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on June 21 that Russian forces shelled Murakhivka and Bila Krynytsia in order to “contain” Ukrainian forces, indicating that Ukrainian forces are not beyond those points on the right bank of the Inhulets River. Combat footage posted on June 17 and 21 showed Ukrainian forces shelling Russian positions near Lozove and Andriivka on an unspecified date, indicating that Ukrainian forces are likely not in those locations anymore. The assessment that Russian forces destroyed a bridgehead on the left bank of the Inhulets river is consistent with unconfirmed Russian claims that Russian forces expelled Ukrainian forces from this area around June 6. We will update our maps as we collect and confirm more information.

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 authorities are continuing ad-hoc annexation policies in Donbas and southern Ukraine. The deputy head of the Russian Kherson Oblast Military-Civil Administration, Kirill Stremousov, made another announcement stating that Russian-occupied Kherson Oblast may conduct a referendum to join Russia in the fall of 2022.³¹ Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin previously claimed that the DNR will hold a referendum to unite with Russia after the end of the “special military operation” in Ukraine, which he hopes will end by winter 2022—another indicator that the Kremlin and its proxies expect the war to protract.³² It is unclear when or if the Kremlin will pursue a full annexation of Donbas and occupied southern Ukrainian territories, but Russian occupation authorities continue to produce disjointed timeframes and preconditions for referendums. The DNR Territorial Defense Staff also reported that the DNR added Lomakyne, just east of Mariupol, to the “zone of DNR responsibility.” It remains unclear whether or not the DNR is responsible for all newly occupied settlements.³³

Russian occupation authorities are continuing to face challenges recruiting local collaborators and are likely relying on Russian government personnel to consolidate their societal control. Enerhodar Mayor Dmytro Orlov noted that many young people are fleeing Enerhodar and are refusing to cooperate with Russian occupation forces.³⁴ Orlov reported that Russian forces have mistreated the remaining employees of the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant who stayed back in the city to minimize the risks of a nuclear emergency.³⁵ Ukrainian Telegram channel MariupolNow noted the arrival of a large convoy of Russian cars and busses near Mariupol, possibly carrying Russian non-military personnel.³⁶ Russian occupation authorities installed Russian television networks in Kherson Oblast and are continuing to restore railways in Mariupol despite being unable to consolidate societal control in newly occupied territories.³⁷



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¹ [https://by dot tsargrad.tv/news/novym-komandujushhim-vozdushno-desantnymi-vojskami-rossii-stal-urozhenec-donbassa_567530](https://bydot.com/grad.tv/news/novym-komandujushhim-vozdushno-desantnymi-vojskami-rossii-stal-urozhenec-donbassa_567530); <https://www dot chita.ru/text/society/2022/06/17/71417513/>; <https://www dot tellerreport.com/news/2022-06-21-hero-of-russia-teplinskiy-presented-state-awards-to-russian-servicemen.BkxKc720t9.html>

² <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-17>

³ https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1539141454894977024; https://t.me/marzoev_oleg/783

⁴ <https://nv dot ua/world/geopolitics/aleksandr-dvornikov-zhurnalist-bellingcat-nazval-prichinu-otstraneniya-rossiyskogo-general-a-50250424.html>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekQB8pOwsC4&t=932s>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7ipsUZlnsk>

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- ⁵ <https://gordonuadot.com/news/worldnews/vmesto-dvornikova-rukovodit-vs-rf-v-ukraine-naznachili-general-a-zhidko-cit-i-bellingcat-1613521.html>
- ⁶ https://vk.com/russia_desant?w=wall-106160452_313230
- ⁷ <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/06/20/vyzhivshie-na-zatonuvshem-kreisere-moskva-srochniki-rasskazali-cto-ikh-vnov-posylaiut-v-zonu-boevykh-deistvii-ikh-roditeli-potrebovali-prokuraturu-vmeshatsia-news>
- ⁸ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-7>
- ⁹ <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1539044145301528576>; <https://bbc.global.ssl.fastly.net/russian/features-61848550>.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/344672697845815>;
<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1539044145301528576>; <https://bbc.global.ssl.fastly.net/russian/features-61848550>.
- ¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/345040321142386>;
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/GeoConfirmed/status/1539278403152519168>;
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- ¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/345040321142386>;
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- ¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/345040321142386>
- ¹⁵ https://t.me/miroshnik_r/7704; <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/06/21/shturmovi-diyi-rosarmiyi-poblyzu-biloyi-gory-ta-syrotynogo-na-czej-chas-bezrezultatni-sergij-gajdaj/>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/344672697845815>; <https://t.me/stranaua/48127>;
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- ¹⁹ <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/06/21/okupanty-peremishhuyut-svoyi-komandni-punkty-podali-vid-frontu/>;
<https://t.me/AFUStratCom/3257>
- ²⁰ https://twitter.com/pravda_eng/status/1538940368225546241; <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/06/20/7353653/>; <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-skhemy-dobuduvally-perepravu-kharkiv/31906520.html>; https://twitter.com/The_Lookout_N/status/1538941244755386368
- ²¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-17>;
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- ²² <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/344672697845815>; <https://t.me/syngubov/3478>;
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- ²³ https://twitter.com/Blue_Sauron/status/1538927398237921280;
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- ²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/344672697845815>
- ²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/36obmp/videos/697150018054236>;
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²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=5644786742221692>

²⁸ https://t.me/mod_russia/16966; https://t.me/mod_russia/16940

²⁹ <https://novayagazeta dot eu/articles/2022/06/21/v-krymu-soobshchili-o-pozhare-na-platfome-chernomorneftegaza-posle-udara-ukrainskikh-voennykh-sem-chelovek-chisliatsia-propavshimi-bez-vesti-news>

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1539118536085409792>;

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<https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1539119045856862210>

³¹ <https://t.me/stranaua/48048>

³² <https://t.me/stranaua/47326>

³³ https://t.me/TRO_DPR/3734

³⁴ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-okupanty-pratsivnyky-zaes/31908073.html?fbclid=IwAR36X2k7OviA0J3ggI1GiOEXVE8xUscPS-7J0qMhuu74LGnL8GE74r0eq38>

³⁵ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-okupanty-pratsivnyky-zaes/31908073.html?fbclid=IwAR36X2k7OviA0J3ggI1GiOEXVE8xUscPS-7J0qMhuu74LGnL8GE74r0eq38>

³⁶ <https://t.me/mariupolnow/14045>

³⁷ https://t.me/mod_russia/16954; https://t.me/TRO_DPR/3738