

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 2

Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko

March 2, 4:30 pm EST

Russian forces resumed offensive operations in support of their envelopment of Kyiv on March 2 but made few territorial advances. Russian forces resumed offensive operations on both axes of advance toward Kyiv after largely pausing for 72 hours to reinforce and resupply their troops north and west of Kyiv. Russian operations to envelop Kyiv are Moscow's main effort. Russian troops are also undertaking three supporting efforts, one to seize Kharkiv, one to take Mariupol and secure the "land bridge" connecting Rostov-on-Don to Crimea, and one to secure Kherson and set conditions for a drive west toward Mykolayiv and Odesa. The three supporting operations were active in the last 24 hours; Russian forces likely captured Kherson and began a bombardment of critical civilian infrastructure in Mariupol in a likely effort to force the city to surrender while making few territorial gains in Kharkiv.

The Russian attack on Kyiv likely consists of a main effort aimed at enveloping and ultimately encircling the city from the west and a supporting effort along the axes from Chernihiv and Sumy to encircle it from the east. The long Russian column of combat and logistics vehicles observed north of Kyiv in the last 48 hours is likely now supporting attacks directly into the city from positions Russian forces maintain in Kyiv's northwestern outskirts. However, Russian forces are more likely to prioritize the envelopment/encirclement in the coming days, rather than a direct assault into the city.

Russian forces resumed frontal assaults on Kharkiv on March 2 and continued using area-attack weapons, dramatically increasing the damage to civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties. Russian ground forces appear to be conducting another frontal assault on Kharkiv from the northeast rather than enveloping the city and will likely face protracted Ukrainian resistance.

Russian forces in the south likely secured Kherson, began bombarding civilian infrastructure in Mariupol in a likely attempt to force the city to surrender without a direct assault, and appear to be holding their positions south of Zaporizhya. Russian forces will likely resume offensive operations towards Mikolayiv in the next 24 hours but do not appear to pose an imminent danger to Odesa. Russian forces likely seek to force Mariupol to capitulate by destroying critical civilian infrastructure and killing civilians to create a humanitarian catastrophe – an approach Russian forces have repeatedly taken in Syria.¹ A Russian drive north through or near Zaporizhya to cut off Ukrainian forces fighting along the line of contact appears very unlikely in the next 24-72 hours.

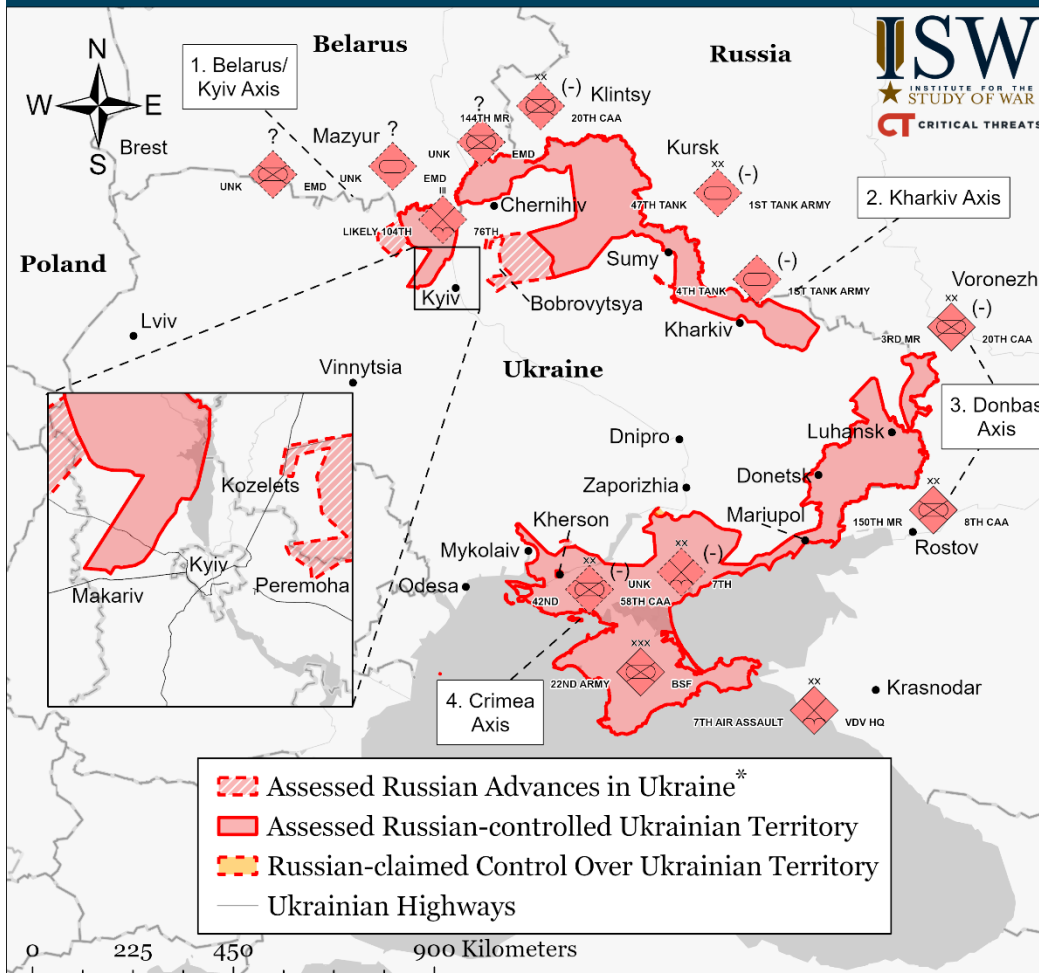
Russian forces are receiving needed supplies and reinforcements that may facilitate much more rapid and effective operations in the coming 24-72 hours. The Russian effort around Kyiv remains poorly organized, however, with elements of many different battalions combined into what seem to be ad hoc groupings rather than operating under standing regiment or brigade headquarters. The initial errors in the Russian force composition and organization in Belarus and western Russia that ISW has previously reported on, which contributed to Russian logistical and operational failures around Kyiv, will be difficult to remedy quickly and will likely continue to cause friction and reduce the effectiveness of Russian operations even as supply issues are addressed and reinforcements come into the fight.² It remains too early to evaluate the likely effective combat power the added Russian troops will bring.

Key Takeaways

- **Russian forces resumed offensive operations against Kyiv's western outskirts on March 2 after pausing for resupply February 27-March 1 but failed to secure any additional territory.**

- Russian forces launched offensive operations in Zhytomyr Oblast, expanding their envelopment of Kyiv further west than ISW previously assessed—likely to outflank stronger-than-anticipated Ukrainian resistance and limited Ukrainian counterattacks in Kyiv’s outskirts.
- Russian forces renewed advances towards northeastern Kyiv on March 2, reaching a line approximately 65km from the city center on that axis.
- Russian forces assaulted central Kharkiv and continued to heavily bombard the city on March 2.
- Russian forces fully encircled Mariupol as of March 2 and are conducting a deliberate campaign to destroy critical civilian infrastructure and residential areas in a likely attempt to force the city to surrender.
- Russian forces continued to reduce pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Kherson on March 2 and will likely secure the city in the next 24 hours if they have not done so already.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of March 2, 2022, 3:00 PM EST



Map by George Barros, Kathryn Tyson, and Thomas Bergeron
 © 2022 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Confirmed Russian units in the past 24 hours:

Elements of the 10th Special Purpose Brigade (Subordinate to the Russian General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate) attacked Mykolaiv Oblast.

Elements of the 36th Combined Arms Army (CAA) of the Eastern Military District attacked Kyiv Oblast.

Elements of the 11th Airborne Forces (VDV) attacked an unspecified location in the Northern Operational District.

Pilots of the 23rd Fighter Aviation Regiment (11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army of the Eastern Military District) struck civilian infrastructure in unspecified locations Ukraine.

Correction: ISW previously incorrectly reported that Russian elements observed in Bobrovytsya on March 1 were engaged in an effort to link up with Russian forces from the Sumy axis. ISW now assesses these forces are advancing directly southwest on Kyiv, not pivoting east from Russia's existing axis of advance. ISW also adjusted assessed Russian control of terrain in Chernihiv based on new information.

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

Russian forces are engaged in four primary efforts at this time:

- Main effort—Kyiv (comprised of three subordinate supporting efforts);

- Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv;
- Supporting effort 2—Mariupol; and
- Supporting effort 3—Kherson and advances westward.

Main effort—Kyiv axis: Russian forces resumed offensive operations against Kyiv’s western outskirts on March 2 but failed to secure any additional territory.³ Russian forces additionally launched offensive operations in Zhytomyr Oblast, expanding their envelopment of Kyiv deeper west than ISW previously assessed, likely to outflank stronger-than-anticipated Ukrainian resistance and limited Ukrainian counterattacks in Kyiv’s outskirts. Russian forces additionally successfully renewed advances toward Kyiv along the Chernihiv axis on March 2. Russian operations on the Kyiv axis consist of a main effort aimed at enveloping and ultimately encircling the city from the west and supporting efforts along the Chernihiv and Sumy axes to encircle it from the northeast and east.

Subordinate Main Effort along The West Bank of The Dnipro

- Russian forces began establishing forward logistics camps in Borodyanka, Katyuzhanka, and Gavronshchyna to support this axis of advance on March 2, likely drawing from the convoys observed in northern Ukraine on February 28 and March 1.⁴ ISW is unable to assess the overall combat power Russia may have additionally deployed at this time.
- Russian forces steadily advanced into the northwest outskirts of Kyiv to a line extending through Horenychi, Hostomel, and Demidiv, approximately 30-40km from the city center.⁵ Ukrainian forces repelled assaults on Demydiv and Irpin as of noon local time on March 2.⁶ Kyiv’s regional administration reported that Ukrainian forces control all of Bucha as of 9:00 am local time on March 2, and social media depicted several destroyed Russian vehicles in the area following a failed assault.⁷ Russian forces have not yet advanced south of Horenychi, roughly parallel east-west with central Kyiv. Russian forces continued to shell residential areas and inflict civilian casualties on March 2.⁸ Russian forces will likely continue to assemble supplies to resume assaults on northern Kyiv in the next 24-48 hours.
- **Russian forces may be attempting a deeper envelopment of Kyiv from the west than ISW previously assessed, attacking into Zhytomyr Oblast.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported that up to three Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) from the 5th Combined Arms Army are active at an unspecified location in Zhytomyr Oblast. Russia’s envelopment of Kyiv has previously only extended as far west as Makariv, approximately 60km west of Kyiv, which Ukraine’s 14th Mechanized Brigade recaptured on March 2.⁹ Russia may assess it necessary to conduct a deeper envelopment further west of Kyiv to retain the ability to conduct operational maneuvers if Ukrainian forces retain the capability to conduct local counterattacks closer to Kyiv. An envelopment or encirclement so far from central Kyiv would require considerable Russian combat power to complete and to maintain against Ukrainian counterattacks. ISW is unable to assess whether Russia has concentrated enough combat power north of Kyiv to complete such an operation.
- The Ukrainian Air Force reportedly remains active over Kyiv. The Ukrainian General Staff claimed two Ukrainian Mig-29s shot down two Russian SU-35s over Kyiv the night of March 1.¹⁰
- Russian efforts within and in the immediate vicinity of Kyiv have reportedly relied on saboteurs and reconnaissance elements, often out of uniform or wearing Ukrainian uniforms, rather than on attacks by regular combat forces. ISW cannot confirm any new developments in central Kyiv on March 2.

Subordinate Supporting Effort—Chernihiv Axis

- **Russian forces continued to shell Chernihiv but do not appear to have launched assaults on the bypassed city as of March 2.** Chernihiv Mayor Vladyslav Atroshenko called on residents to prepare for possible urban warfare and organize round-the-clock patrols on March 2.¹¹ Russian forces continued to shell Chernihiv, including residential areas, on March 2.¹² Chernihiv is an important road junction on the Desna River, and

Russian forces may intend to capture rather than bypass it to open up the arterial highway leading southwest toward Kyiv on the east bank of the Desna.

- **Russian forces renewed advances toward northeastern Kyiv on March 2, reaching a line approximately 65km from the city center.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported halting up to 17 Russian BTGs in Kozelets, Bobrovytsia, and Makiiv—a front approximately 50km wide.¹³ ISW previously incorrectly reported this movement as a likely effort to link up with Russian forces from the Sumy axis. ISW now assesses these forces are advancing directly southwest on Kyiv, not pivoting east from Russia's existing axis of advance.
- Russia is likely deploying additional forces from Belarus to reinforce the Chernihiv axis. Belarusian social media users filmed a column of Russian light vehicles and trucks equipment marked "V," likely Russian Naval Infantry from the Pacific Fleet, moving from Gomel, Belarus towards Chernihiv on March 2.¹⁴
- ISW cannot confirm the presence of any Belarusian forces in operations on the Chernihiv axis. Ukrainian Territorial Defense authorities claimed on March 1 that Belarusian combat troops have entered Chernihiv district in support of the Russian offensive.¹⁵

Subordinate Supporting Effort—Sumy Axis (approximately 115 kilometers from Kyiv)

- Ukrainian forces halted Russian advances from Sumy at Nova Basan and Kozelets as of noon local time on March 2.¹⁶
- Russian forces continued operations to reduce pockets of Ukrainian resistance around Sumy on March 2. The Ukrainian General Staff reported Ukrainian forces continue to defend Sumy, Lebedyn, and Okhtyrka from Russian assaults as of 6:00 am local time on March 2.¹⁷ Residents of Konotop, 120km northwest of Sumy, filmed a Russian delegation arriving in the city to demand its surrender.¹⁸

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv: Russian forces resumed assaults on central Kharkiv and continued to heavily bombard the city on March 2. Local Ukrainian authorities reported repelling a Russian assault on the Kharkiv Military Medical Center, near the city center, as of 6:00 pm local time on March 2.¹⁹ Early reports of a Russian airborne landing in the city were likely incorrect. Russian forces continued to deliberately target civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv with MLRS systems, tube artillery, cluster munitions, and Kalibr cruise missiles on March 2, inflicting numerous civilian casualties.²⁰ The Russian air, artillery, and missile barrage may also be intended to generate panic and reduce the morale of Ukrainian defenders in Kharkiv and elsewhere. It is not likely to achieve that effect. It is too early to evaluate the likelihood that a renewed Russian ground offensive will succeed in taking the city.

Supporting Effort #2—Mariupol: Russian forces fully encircled Mariupol as of March 2 and are conducting a deliberate campaign to destroy critical civilian infrastructure and residential areas in a likely attempt to force the city to surrender. Deputy Mayor of Mariupol Serhiy Orlov informed the *BBC* that the city is "near to a humanitarian catastrophe" after 15 hours of Russian bombardment on March 2.²¹ Orlov confirmed Russian forces have advanced to within several kilometers of the city on all sides and are particularly targeting critical civilian infrastructure. Russian forces have taken a similar approach of creating a humanitarian catastrophe by deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure throughout the Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Russian forces claim to have completed the encirclement of Mariupol by land and sea on March 1, though the Ukrainian General Staff claimed Russian forces have failed to "block" Mariupol as of March 2.²²

Ukrainian forces separately claimed to have launched two separate counterattacks in Donbas that ISW cannot confirm at this time. A Ukrainian Presidential representative stated on March 2 that Ukrainian forces plan to retake Horlivka in Donetsk Oblast, describing it as Ukraine's first offensive operation "in a different direction" since the war began.²³ The Ukrainian 95th Airborne Brigade assaulted Horlivka on March 1 but has failed to secure it as of 7:00 pm local time on March 2. The Ukrainian 93rd Separate Mechanized Brigade separately

claimed to have pushed Russian forces "back to the Russian border" at an unspecified location on March 1, stating it would later provide pictures and details.²⁴ ISW cannot confirm this advance as of publication.

Supporting Effort #3—Kherson and West: Russian forces continued to reduce pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Kherson on March 2 and will likely secure the city in the next 24 hours if they have not done so already. A Ukrainian Ministry of Defense Spokesperson stated Ukrainian forces retain control of portions of Kherson city as of 11:00 am local time on March 2.²⁵ Multiple sources reported elements likely of the 7th Airborne Division and SPETSNAZ units throughout Kherson City on March 1, including a VDV assault on the city SBU building, and Ukrainian forces will likely lose control over the city within the next 24 hours.²⁶

Ukrainian forces likely repelled Russian advances towards Mykolayiv on March 2. Ukrainian forces took Russian prisoners at several locations on the outskirts of Mykolayiv.²⁷ Russian forces will likely consolidate following the capture of Kherson before resuming advances west towards Mykolayiv and Odesa. Russian forces additionally launched limited attacks north toward Zaporizhyya on March 2 but did not make territorial advances.²⁸ Russian forces are likely deprioritizing the axis of advance north from Crimea in favor of operations west towards Mykolayiv and east towards Mariupol.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces maneuvering to the west and southwest of Kyiv to envelop and then encircle it
- Russian forces securing the crossings over the Desna near Chernihiv and/or linking up with forces advancing from the Sumy axis to open a new front against Kyiv from the east
- Belarusian ground forces might begin actively participating in the Russian offensive campaign
- Russian ground offensive against Kharkiv following the air/missile/artillery attacks
- Russian forces around Kherson resuming their advance toward Mykolayiv and Odesa
- Russian and proxy force offensive to take Mariupol or continued air/missile/artillery campaign to force the city to surrender.

¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/report/russian-military%e2%80%99s-lessons-learned-syria>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Report%20-%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20Dead-End%20Diplomacy%20in%20Syria%20-%20November%202019.pdf>; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-syria-russia-assad-deliberately-targeted-civilians-aid-convoy-war-crimes/>; <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/american-security-is-at-risk-in-aleppo-why-syrias-second-largest-city-matters-to-the-us>.

2

<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Putin%27s%20Likely%20Course%20of%20Action%20in%20Ukraine%20Updated%20Course%20of%20Action%20Assessment%20ISW%20CTP%20%282%29.pdf>;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine%20Invasion%20Forecast%20Series%20Part%202%20ISW%20CT%20December%202021.pdf>;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine%20Invasion%20Forecast%20Series%20Part%201%20ISW%20CT%20December%202021.pdf>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-28-2022>.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/262194402760312>.

⁴ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-1>.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/262842542695498>.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263000569346362>.

⁷ <https://www.koda.gov.ua/operativna-informacziya-stanom-na-900-2-03-2022-shhodo-sytuacziyi-na-kyiyvshhyni/>;

<https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498989441154703365>; <https://t.me/uniannet/34163>;

<https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498914470600527876>.

⁸ <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/149892422277632003>; <https://twitter.com/COUPSURE/status/1498706479058235392>;

<https://twitter.com/Liveuamap/status/1498788260918796289>.

-
- ⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/CinCAFU/posts/259431339685692>.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263028896010196>.
- ¹¹ <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3417875-chernihiv-mayor-to-residents-no-other-choice-but-to-brace-for-urban-warfare.html>.
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498991990163361792>;
- ¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263000569346362>.
- ¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/MotolkoHelp/status/1499012350262845440>;
- <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/262060372773715>.
- ¹⁵ <https://t.me/suspilnechernihiv/6484>, <https://gur.gov.ua/content/spysky-kerivnoho-skladu-viiskovykh-chastyn-viiskovo-povitrianykh-syl-respubliky-belarus.html>;
- <https://www.facebook.com/DefenceIntelligenceofUkraine/posts/261783329466428>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263000569346362>.
- ¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/262842542695498>.
- ¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1498952937653125120>.
- ¹⁹ <https://nv.ua/ukr/kharkiv/harkiv-u-misti-visadivsyia-rosiyskiy-desant-napali-na-shpital-sbu-novini-harkova-50221458.html>.
- ²⁰ <https://twitter.com/KofmanMichael/status/1498722285347295232>;
- <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498994068965232642>; <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498910366528638976>;
- <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498919025031712772>;
- <https://twitter.com/GeneralStaffUA/status/1498751635035672586>; <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498720233598734337>;
- <https://twitter.com/christogrozev/status/1498940319211130881>
- ²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60585603>.
- ²² <https://twitter.com/rianru/status/1498638111156457480>;
- <https://twitter.com/IntelCrab/status/1498670083249512457?cxt=HHwWkoC9uYOgrMwpAAAA>; <https://www.interfax.ru/world/825475>; <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263000569346362>.
- ²³ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/2/7327458/>;
- <https://twitter.com/komitet2012/status/1498777305686106121>; <https://www.032.ua/news/3341348/zsu-vzali-pid-svij-kontrol-castinu-okupovanoi-gorlivki>.
- ²⁴ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/2/7327350/>; <https://nv.ua/ukraine/events/boycy-93-ya-ombr-zahvatili-rossiyskih-razvedchikov-video-novosti-ukrainy-50221696.html> <https://www.facebook.com/93OMBr/posts/1789154617947987>.
- ²⁵ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-02-22/h_94fb56edc8c774021fe635cda015d2fd.
- ²⁶ <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498855012532989956>;
- <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498904155406184454>;
- <https://twitter.com/RALee85/status/1498830842264698884>;
- https://twitter.com/aldin_ww/status/1498800948885475333;
- ²⁷ <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1499029512302243845>; <https://twitter.com/GirkinGirkin/status/1498992272100188162>;
- https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1499017705843744770; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1499014347745640451;
- https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498990615413022725; https://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/1498989858999648260.
- ²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/263000569346362>.