

Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 17, 2023

Grace Mappes, Karolina Hird, Nicole Wolkov,
Christina Harward, and Frederick W. Kagan

July 17, 2023, 8:30pm 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.

Click [here](#) to access ISW's archive of interactive time-lapse maps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These maps complement the static control-of-terrain map that ISW produces daily by showing a dynamic frontline. ISW will update this time-lapse map archive monthly.

Note: The data cutoff for this product was 2:30pm ET on July 17. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 18 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

The July 17 attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge will likely have continuing ramifications on Russian logistics in southern Ukraine. Russian authorities accused Ukrainian special services of conducting an unmanned surface vehicle strike against the Kerch Strait Bridge between Russia and occupied Crimea on the morning of July 17.[1] Footage of the aftermath shows that one Kerch Strait Bridge road span had collapsed and another span suffered damage but remains intact.[2] The Russian Ministry of Transport claimed that the strikes did not damage the rail bridge or supports of the road bridge, and rail traffic across the Kerch Strait Bridge resumed several hours after the strike.[3] Russian occupation authorities rerouted heavy civilian traffic from occupied Crimea to Russia through occupied southern Ukraine, and Russian sources reported extensive traffic jams in Crimea's Dzhankoy Raion and occupied Kherson Oblast towards Melitopol.[4] Russian tourists fleeing occupied Crimea likely exacerbated traffic and likely impeded Russian logistics from Crimea to rear areas in Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts. Occupation authorities asked civilians to consider alternate evacuation routes to mitigate the immediate traffic issues.[5] Ukrainian Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Spokesperson Andrii Yusov declined to comment on Ukrainian involvement in the incident.[6] The Kerch Strait Bridge and military areas in occupied Crimea are legitimate military targets for Ukrainian forces in their defense against the full-scale Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine, as ISW and Ukrainian officials have previously reported.[7]

The Russian government's continued failure to put Russian society on a war-time footing will have significant impacts on Russian logistics as traffic from Russian tourism to occupied Crimea jams Russian logistics to southern Ukraine in the midst of the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south. The Kerch Strait Bridge is along one of two ground lines of communication (GLOCs) supporting Russia's southern force grouping, with the other route passing through occupied Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson Oblasts. This sole remaining logistics route is now a single point of failure for the supply of the large numbers of mechanized Russian forces in southern Ukraine needed to resist Ukrainian counteroffensives. Russian and occupation officials have nevertheless continued to promote occupied Crimea as a tourist destination, however, urging Russian civilians to drive through and to a warzone rather than advising them to avoid it as a responsible government would.[8] Russian occupation authorities recently struggled to

mitigate traffic issues just from increased Russian tourism across the Kerch Strait Bridge, as ISW has previously reported.[9] Russian President Vladimir Putin even ordered the use of Russian military assets to ferry tourists across the Kerch Strait.[10] Some Russian milbloggers also suggested that the attack against the Kerch Strait Bridge should not reduce continued tourist flows.[11]

Russian logistics to southern Ukraine will likely suffer in the short and medium-term, likely exacerbating recent and significant complaints about inadequate Russian supplies in southern Ukraine. Former Russian 58th Combined Arms Army (Southern Military District) Commander Major General Ivan Popov’s recent complaints about the Russian military command’s mistreatment of Russian forces defending against the Ukrainian counteroffensive in southern Ukraine sparked great ire in the Russian information space.[12] Many of Popov’s complaints indicated that the 58th Combined Arms Army, and likely other Russian formations deployed in Zaporizhia Oblast, suffer from supply shortages that will further worsen if tourist and other civilian traffic slow down logistics routes supporting Russian forces in southern Ukraine.[13] Further issues with support for this grouping, and further resulting complaints that emerge in the Russian information space, are likely to draw further outrage from the Russian ultranationalist community and undermine confidence in the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[14]

Russian and occupation authorities appear to be consumed with mitigating the consequences of the attack rather than leveraging the incident to levy heavy informational attacks with rhetorical inflections. Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting instructing Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin to lead a headquarters and develop solutions to mitigate traffic issues across the bridge.[15] Khusnullin and other occupation authorities decided to lift curfews and passport checks along major highways to Russia in occupied territories, which are under Russian martial law, in order to mitigate some of these traffic issues.[16] Putin’s and other senior Russian officials’ statements were largely straightforward; the officials accused Ukraine of conducting a “terrorist attack” and promised retaliation, which is consistent with prior official reactions to claimed Ukrainian provocations.[17] The Russian Foreign Ministry accused Ukraine of conducting the strike in conjunction with American and British intelligence, forwarding a consistent Russian narrative aimed at falsely portraying Russia as at war with the West rather than Ukraine.[18] Some Russian officials connected the Kerch Strait Bridge attack to the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which expired today.[19] Senior Russian officials, including Putin, had signaled before the bridge was attacked that Russia was unwilling to renew the grain deal without significant additional concessions, however.[20] Russia was very unlikely to have engaged in negotiations around the continuation of the grain deal or any other negotiations with Ukraine in good faith, as ISW has previously assessed.[21]

The Russian milblogger response to the Kerch Strait Bridge attack largely criticized Russian authorities for failing to secure the bridge. Some milbloggers, including former Russian officer and critical pro-war nationalist Igor Girkin, offered the critique that Russian authorities have focused too heavily on road security and not enough on maritime security, thereby allowing the most recent attack on the bridge to occur.[22] Girkin complained that the Russian border officials have devoted too much time to checking civilian cars entering the bridge and not enough time investing in infrastructure that could protect against attacks launched by sea.[23] Another prominent milblogger and Kremlin-appointed member of the Russian Human Rights Council blamed Russian authorities for focusing too much on security on the land bridge and neglecting to take into account any maritime threats.[24] One milblogger emphasized that the strike was caused by poor internal

Russian decision making and posed a threat to the stability of Russian domestic peace.[25] Many Russian sources erroneously claimed that the strike will not impact Russian logistics in occupied Ukraine and called the attack a “terrorist act” to minimize the fact that the Kerch Strait Bridge is a legitimate military target in the rear of an active war zone.[26] Some Russian sources additionally advocated for retributive and retaliatory actions against Ukraine in the wake of the attack, but this brand of milblogger response closely resembles outcry following previous such events.

The Wagner Group continues to prepare to establish a permanent presence in Belarus. Independent Belarusian monitoring group “The Hajun Project” reported on July 17 that another Wagner vehicle convoy traveled towards the Tsel village tent camp near Asipovichy, Mogilev Oblast, Belarus, and that two other Wagner columns had traveled along this same route between July 11 and July 17.[27] Wagner-affiliated Telegram channels relatedly posted footage on July 17 of a Wagner column moving between Voronezh and Oryel oblasts before arriving at the training ground near Asipovichy.[28] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that over 700 Wagner fighters have recently settled in the Tsel-Asipovichy area and that Belarusian authorities have formed three Belarusian special-purpose units to train under Wagner leadership in these training areas.[29] Several Wagner-affiliated milbloggers additionally claimed that Wagner’s training ground in Molkino, Krasnodar Krai, will cease operations by July 30 and that Wagner will deploy elsewhere and they posted footage of Wagner fighters ceremoniously lowering Russian and Wagner flags at Molkino.[30] Wagner fighters will likely continue to redeploy to Belarus from training areas in Molkino and staging grounds elsewhere in Russia over the coming month.

Russia continues efforts to reorganize its domestic security apparatus in the wake of the Wagner Group’s armed rebellion. Russian State Duma Deputy Alexander Khinshtein stated on July 17 that the “Grom” special units of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) were officially transferred to the control of the Rosgvardia (Russian National Guard).[31] Khinshtein emphasized that the decision was made to capitalize on Rosgvardia’s key role in protecting Russia’s internal security.[32] ISW previously reported on July 4 that the decision to transfer “Grom” to Rosgvardia emphasizes the Kremlin’s desire to consolidate an effective anti-rebellion force under Rosgvardia command.[33] The Russian Duma additionally announced on July 17 that it is considering a bill to allow Rosgvardia to field heavy weapons by amending the federal law “On the National Guard Troops of the Russian Federation,” which will allow the Rosgvardia to be armed with transport aircraft, combat, transport, and multi-purpose helicopters, infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, communications complexes, boats, engineering equipment, and other military and paramilitary kit.[34] The transfer of “Grom” units to Rosgvardia, as well as the decision to provide Rosgvardia with heavy combat equipment, supports ISW’s previous assessment that the Kremlin is continuing efforts to consolidate its internal security apparatus around Rosgvardia’s structures. However, several actors within the Russian internal security sphere have voiced their concern and dissatisfaction over the “Grom” transfer, and the reorganization of domestic security organs may cause more tension within Russia.[35]

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front over the backdrop of increased Russian offensive operations along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border on July 17. Russian and Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces have launched active offensive operations and advanced in the Kupyansk area (between northeastern Kharkiv Oblast and northwestern Luhansk Oblast) in the past several days.[36] Russian forces likely are engaging in offensive operations in this area of the front in an effort to exploit Ukrainian

operational focus on other sectors of the front and draw Ukrainian reserves away from critical areas of the theater, namely the Bakhmut and western Donetsk, and western Zaporizhia Oblast areas, where Ukrainian forces are pursuing counteroffensive operations. The poor quality and composition of Russian troops currently deployed on this line, however, will likely hinder Russia's ability to achieve more than tactically significant gains or make an operationally significant breakthrough. Ukrainian and Russian sources have both reported the deployment of convict-formed "Storm-Z" assault units to the Kupyansk direction, and ISW has previously assessed that "Storm-Z" units have low operational effectiveness due to poor morale and discipline.[37] Ukrainian forces also continued counteroffensive operations near Bakhmut, south of Velyka Novosilka, and near Orikhiv in western Zaporizhia Oblast throughout July 17.[38]

Key Takeaways:

- **The July 17 attack on the Kerch Strait Bridge will likely have significant and sustained impacts on Russian logistics as traffic from tourism to occupied Crimea jams Russian logistics to southern Ukraine in the midst of the ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south.**
- **Russian and occupation authorities appear to be consumed with mitigating the consequences of the attack rather than leveraging the incident to levy heavy informational attacks with rhetorical inflections.**
- **The Russian milblogger response to the Kerch Strait Bridge attack largely criticized Russian authorities for failing to secure the bridge.**
- **The Wagner Group continues to prepare to establish a permanent presence in Belarus.**
- **Russia continues efforts to reorganize its domestic security apparatus in the wake of the Wagner Group's armed rebellion.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front over the backdrop of increased Russian offensive operations along the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border on July 17.**
- **Russian forces conducted active offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line and have likely made marginal tactical gains in this direction.**
- **Russian forces continued limited ground attacks southwest and south of Kreminna, around Bakhmut, and along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line.**
- **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area and advanced near the Donetsk-Zaporizhia administrative border.**
- **Russian forces conducted limited counterattacks in western Donetsk Oblast.**
- **Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks in the Orikhiv area in western Zaporizhia Oblast.**
- **Russian opposition outlet Verstka reported that Russian authorities have removed at least eight Russian military commanders without reappointing them to new positions since the start of the war, which is largely consistent with ISW's previous assessments.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to artificially increase the number of Russian citizens in occupied Ukraine ahead of the September regional elections.**

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because these 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 the Ukrainian 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.

- Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied areas

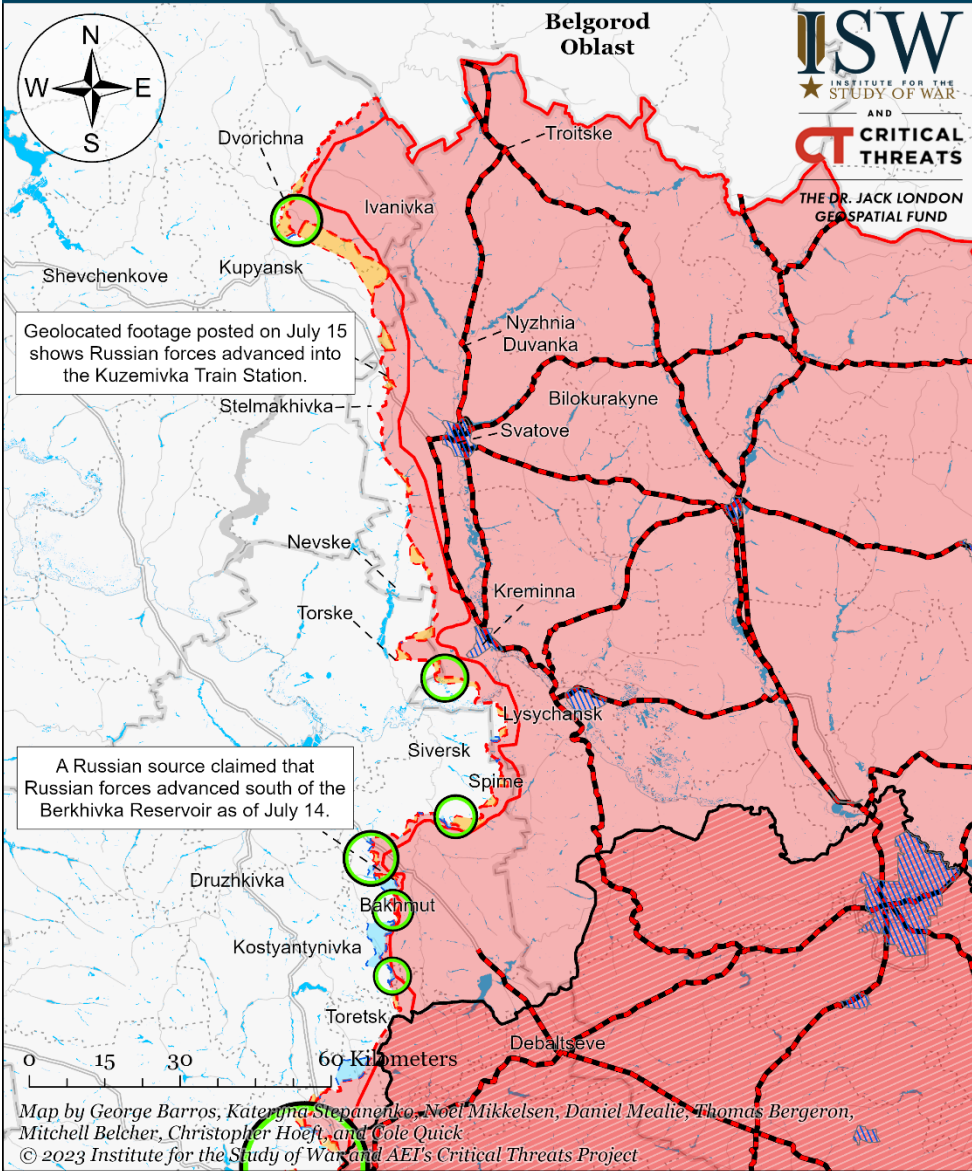
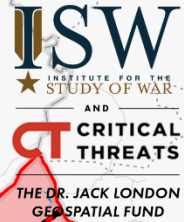
Russian Main Effort – Eastern Ukraine

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1 – Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)

Russian forces conducted active offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove line and have likely made marginal tactical gains in this direction as of July 17. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Russian forces have been advancing in the Kupyansk direction since the end of last week and are attacking Ukrainian positions near Masyutivka (13km northeast of Kupyansk) and Novoselivske (14km northwest of Svatove) in order to push Ukrainian forces across the Oskil River.[39] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations south of Masyutivka, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces have advanced up to one to two kilometers in the Kupyansk direction.[40] Another Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the 21st Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Combined Arms Army, Central Military District) and “Storm-Z” assault units attacked Ukrainian positions near Karmazynivka (13km southwest of Svatove) and took control of two Ukrainian strongholds northwest of Novovodyane (15km southwest of Svatove).[41] ISW previously observed that Russian forces were drawing “Storm-Z” assault units to the Kharkiv-Luhansk Oblast border area over the past month, and it appears as though Russian forces have launched small-scale localized offensives in this sector using “Storm-Z” elements in order to try and take advantage of Ukraine’s operational focus elsewhere along the front.[42] ISW previously assessed that “Storm-Z” units are largely ineffective in pursuing more than small-scale, tactical breakthroughs, and the launch of Russian offensive operations on this front is unlikely to capture significant territory due to the force composition and capacity of the Russian grouping in this area.[43]

Russian forces continued limited ground attacks southwest and south of Kreminna on July 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted unsuccessful offensive actions west of Dibrova (6km southwest of Kreminna) and east of Vesele (30km due south of Kreminna), and Malyar also noted that Russian forces continued unsuccessful attacks in the Serebrianske forest area (about 10km southwest of Kreminna).[44] Russian milbloggers emphasized that Ukrainian troops are trying to defend against Russian attacks near Torske (15km west of Kreminna), and one milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces are conducting reconnaissance in small groups in the forest areas west of Kreminna.[45]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- - - Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Russian Ground Lines of Communication
- 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 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 reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces have recaptured a total of seven square kilometers within the past week and 31 square kilometers total since the start of the counteroffensive in the Bakhmut direction. The Ukrainian General staff reported on July 14 that Ukrainian forces achieved partial success in the direction of Andriivka. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2 – Donetsk Oblast (Russian Objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)

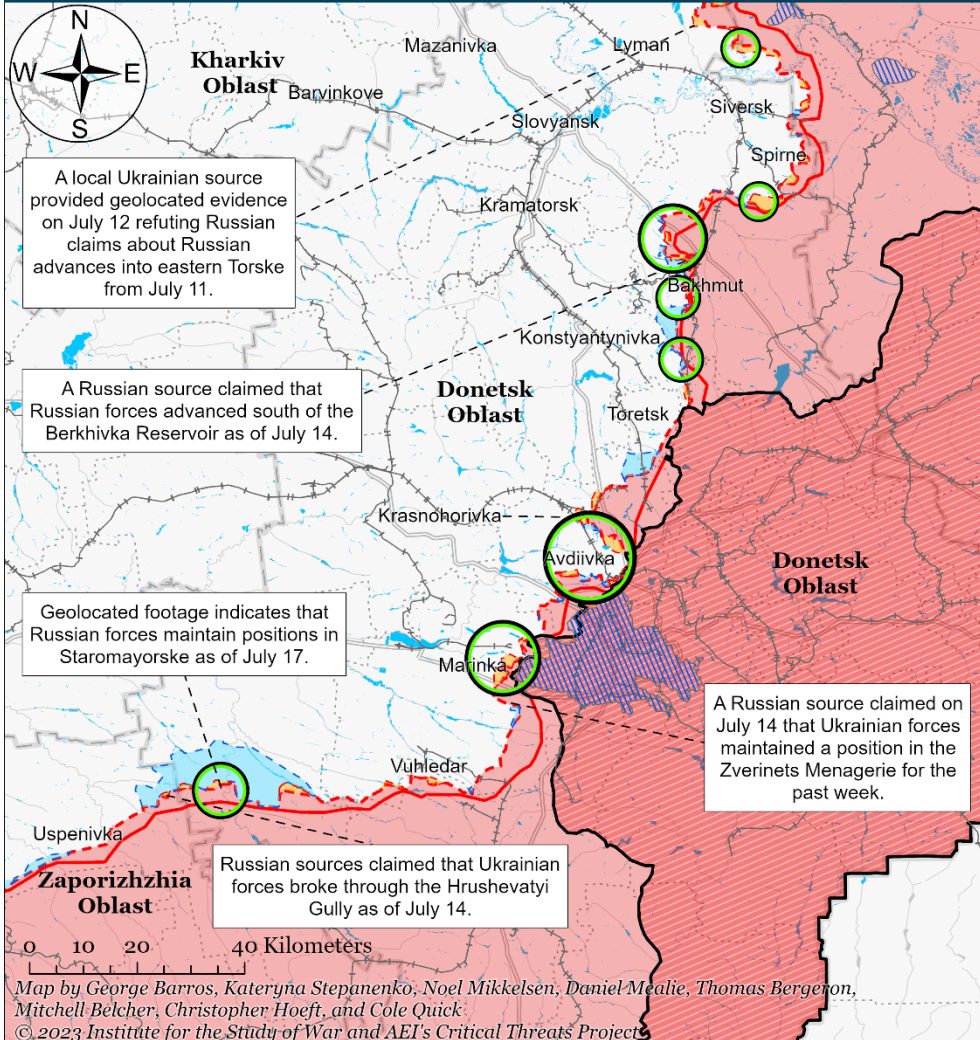
Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut but did not make any confirmed gains in the area on July 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut), Hryhorivka (8km northwest of Bakhmut), Ivanivske (6km west of Bakhmut), Kurdiuvivka (12km southwest of Bakhmut), and Bohdanivka (5km northwest of Bakhmut).[46] Russian sources also claimed that Russian forces are drawing reserves to Bakhmut and counterattacking on the flanks in order to restore lost positions. A Russian milblogger claimed on July 16 that Russian forces have been attacking Ukrainian forces on the northern flank of Bakhmut from the Berkhivka direction for the last five days and that Russian forces, including the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (14th Army Corps, Northern Fleet) and unspecified BARS (Russian Combat Reserves) and airborne (VDV) units, engaged with Ukrainian forces in the direction of Yahidne (2km north of Bakhmut).[47] Footage published by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) on July 17 purportedly shows unspecified VDV units using flamethrowers to repel Ukrainian forces attempting to enter the outskirts of Bakhmut.[48] A Russian milblogger claimed that elements of the Russian 106th Guards VDV Division counterattacked Ukrainian forces attempting to storm a stronghold west of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and claimed the Ukrainian forces were taking advantage of the command-and-control repercussions resulting from recent command changes in the Russian 106th Guards VDV Division.[49] The milblogger claimed elements of the 72nd Motorized Rifle Brigade (3rd Army Corps) and the 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade (5th Combined Arms Army, Eastern Military District) have prevented Ukrainian forces from occupying the higher ground near Klishchiivka and that Russian BARS units from Kreminna have arrived as reinforcements.[50] Another milblogger claimed that Chechen “Akhmat” forces are also fighting near Klishchiivka.[51]

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area on July 17 and have likely made limited gains. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar stated that Ukrainian forces have advanced in unspecified locations on the southern flank of Bakhmut.[52] Wagner commander “Lotos” stated in an interview with a Wagner-affiliated milblogger that Ukrainian forces captured a stronghold north of Klishchiivka and have established fire control over the settlement.[53] Lotos claimed Ukrainian forces also control areas north of Bakhmut near Zaliznianske (9km northwest of Bakhmut), the Berkhivske reservoir (4km northwest of Bakhmut), an unspecified section of the railway north of Bakhmut, ground lines of communication (GLOCs) along the Chasiv-Yar Khromove route, and the heights around Klishchiivka.[54] Lotos reported that Ukrainian forces are trying to capture Yakovlivka (14km northeast of Bakhmut) in order to interdict Russian lines of communication to Soledar (12km northeast of Bakhmut), where heavy fighting is ongoing.[55] Another milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attempted to break into Klishchiivka from the west and northwest but that Ukrainian forces regained lost positions in the Orikhovo-Vasylivka area near the E40 (Bakhmut-Slovyansk) highway.[56] [57]

Russian forces continued ground attacks along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line on July 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian forces near Avdiivka (north of Donetsk City) and Krasnohorivka (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City).[58] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian forces near Novomykhailivka (just southwest of Donetsk city), Marinka, and Pervomaiske (on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk city).[59] The Donetsk People’s Republic’s (DNR) People’s Militia

posted footage purportedly showing units of the 9th Brigade (1st DNR Army Corps) operating in the Avdiivka direction.[\[60\]](#)

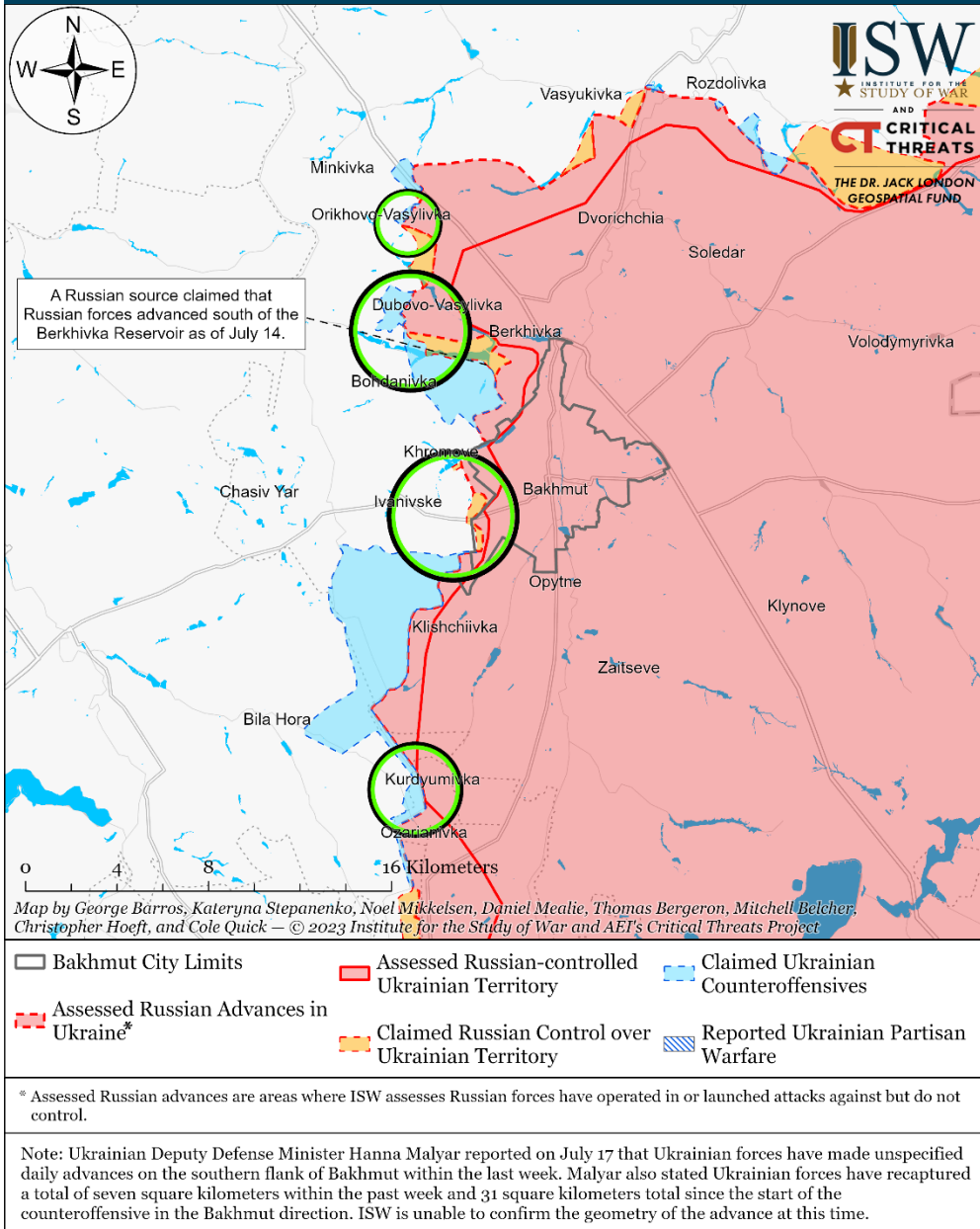
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces have recaptured a total of seven square kilometers within the past week and 31 square kilometers total since the start of the counteroffensive in the Bakhmut direction. Malyar also reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces recaptured 10.9 square kilometers within the last week and 179.5 square kilometers since the start of the counteroffensive in the southern direction. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in the Berdyansk direction in the past 24 hours. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Russian Supporting Effort – Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)

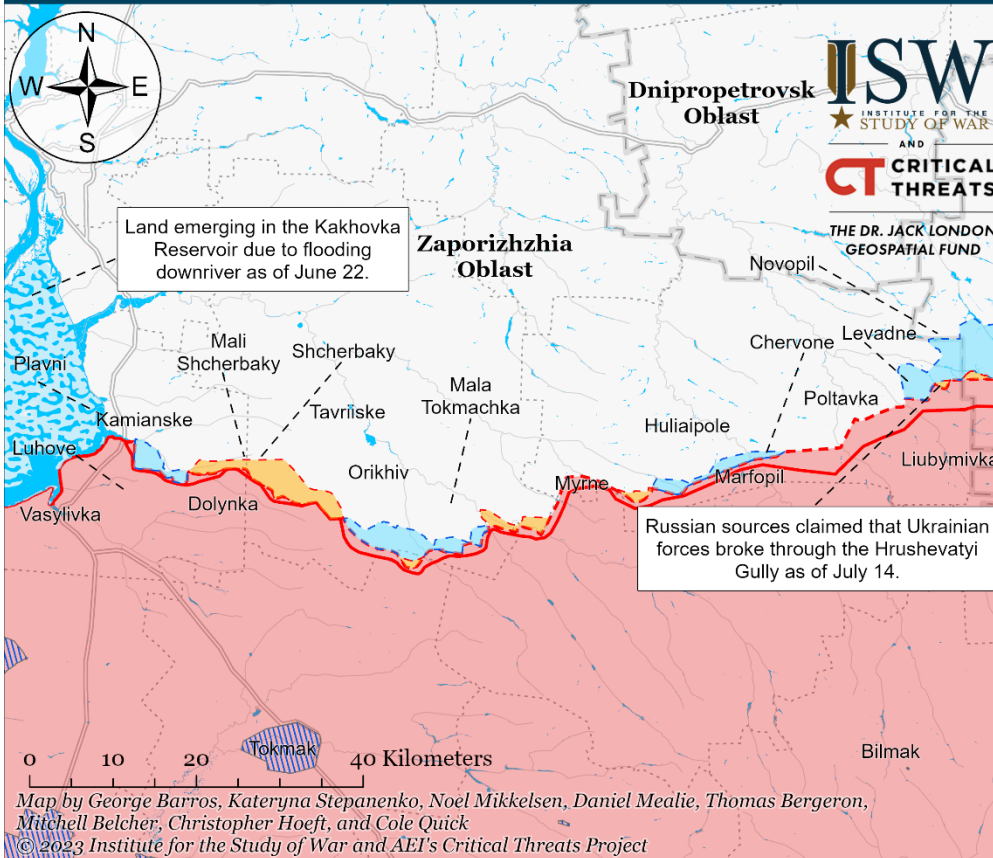
Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks and advanced near the Donetsk-Zaporizhia administrative border on July 17. Geolocated footage posted on July 17 shows Ukrainian forces reaching the outskirts of Staromayorske (about 8km south of Velyka Novosilka), before Russian active elastic defensive maneuvers pushed them back to previous lines.[61] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian troops captured positions on the outskirts of Staromayorske, and another Russian source reported

that heavy fighting is ongoing in the vicinity of Staromayorske but that Russian forces control the settlement itself.[62] Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported that Ukrainian troops continue successful counteroffensive operations in the Berdyansk (western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia oblast) direction, specifically south of Velyka Novosilka near Makarivka, Staromayorske, and Novodarivka.[63]

Russian forces conducted limited counterattacks in western Donetsk Oblast on July 17. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces attacked towards northern Staromayorske.[64] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces managed to successfully regain lost positions near Pryyutne (14km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[65]

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces continued unsuccessful ground attacks in the Orikhiv area in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 17. A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked towards Robotyne (15km south of Orikhiv), and another milblogger noted that the pace of hostilities in this sector of the front has generally decreased and that Ukrainian troops are increasingly operating in small sabotage and reconnaissance groups.[66] Russian milbloggers additionally claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian attack near Pyatykhatky (25km southwest of Orikhiv).[67]

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhia as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

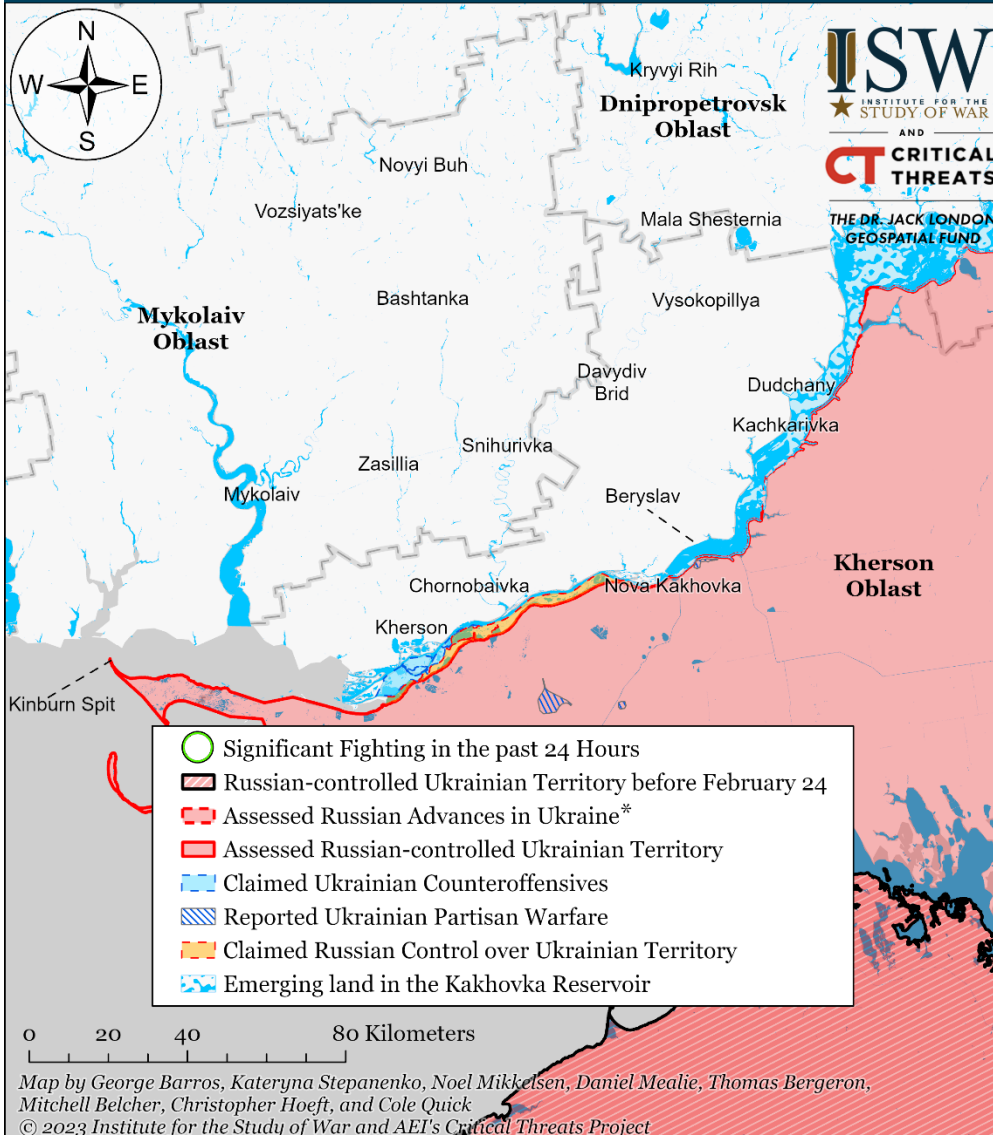


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian 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.

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces recaptured 10.9 square kilometers within the last week and 179.5 square kilometers since the start of the counteroffensive in the southern direction. Ukrainian Tavriisk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces advanced more than one kilometer in the Berdyansk direction in the past 24 hours. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 17, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoeft, and Cole Quick
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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.

Note: The Ukrainian counteroffensive layer displays areas previously assigned to the Russian control, Russian advances, or Russian claims layers where ISW now assesses that Ukrainian forces have established a presence beyond a short-term raid. Inclusion of an area on this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the area is part of any upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive operation.

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

Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported that Russian authorities have removed at least eight Russian military commanders without reappointing them to new positions since the start of the war,

which is largely consistent with ISW's previous assessments. *Verstka* reported that Russian authorities likely dismissed 1st Guards Tank Army (of the Western Military District) Commander Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel in March 2022, Black Sea Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Igor Osipov in May 2022, Southern Military District Commander General Alexander Dvornikov in summer of 2022, Western Military District Commander Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlyov in October 2022, Eastern Military District Commander Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov in April 2023, and Russian Deputy Minister of Defense for Logistics Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev in April 2023.[68] *Verstka* reported that speculation arose regarding Russian Aerospace Forces Commander and former Deputy Commander for the Russian grouping in Ukraine Army General Sergei Surovikin's removal after the Wagner rebellion on June 24 and that Russian pro-war Telegram channels started speculating about 106th Guards Airborne Division Commander Major General Vladimir Seliverstov's removal in mid-July.[69] *Verstka* also reported that the Russian command reportedly reassigned Major General Ivan Popov to an unspecified position in Syria after removing him as 58th Combined Arms Army Commander.[70] ISW previously noted that Muradov may similarly be serving in an advisory role for the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh.[71]

The Republic of Tatarstan reportedly formed three new volunteer battalions to fight in Ukraine. A Russian branch of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reported that the Republic of Tatarstan's Operational Headquarters for Mobilization announced that it created the "Hero of Russia Damir Islamov" Battalion, "Hero of the Soviet Union Boris Kuznetsov" Battalion, and a third unnamed battalion that will only consist of contract soldiers.[72] Russian opposition outlet *Mobilization News* reported that Tatarstan will recruit a minimum of 700 personnel to staff the new battalions.[73] The Republic of Tatarstan previously formed the "Alga" and "Timer" volunteer battalions in the summer of 2022.[74] ISW previously reported that the "Alga" Battalion suffered heavy losses near Vuhledar in March and April 2023.[75]

Russian officials reportedly intend to create another territorial defense unit. Russian outlet *Kommersant* reported that Oryol Oblast officials announced the creation of a territorial defense unit.[76] *Kommersant* noted that Oryol Oblast is the first oblast to announce the creation of a territorial defense unit that does not border Ukraine or a NATO member. Belgorod, Kursk, and Pskov oblasts previously announced the establishment of territorial defense units.[77]

Activities in Russian-occupied areas (Russian objective: Consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)

Russian occupation authorities continue to artificially increase the number of Russian citizens in occupied Ukraine ahead of the September regional elections. Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor reported that Russian occupation authorities are transporting Russian citizens from the north Caucasus and the Republic of Buryatia to Rubizhne in Luhansk Oblast.[78]

Russian authorities continue efforts to consolidate social control over youth in occupied Ukraine through pro-Russian youth programs. The Kherson Oblast occupation administration claimed that personnel of the Kherson "Vasily Margelov" volunteer battalion are teaching Ukrainian children in occupied Kherson Oblast to use weapons as part of the Russian Young Army Cadets National Movement (Yunarmiya) program.[79] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration reported that children will also meet with veterans who fought in Ukraine and learn about Russian

traditions.[80] Russian occupation officials have continually leveraged the Yunarmiya military-patriotic movement to instill pro-Russian and militarized ideals in youth in occupied Ukraine.[81]

Significant activity in Belarus (Russian efforts to increase its military presence in Belarus and further integrate Belarus into Russian-favorable frameworks).

ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, as part of ongoing Kremlin efforts to increase their control over Belarus and other Russian actions in Belarus.

See topline text.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

[1] <https://t.me/bazabazon/19619>; <https://meduza dot io/news/2023/07/17/sk-vozbudil-ugolovnoe-delo-iz-za-vzryva-na-krymskom-mostu-po-statie-terakt> ; https://t.me/sledcom_press/7670; <https://t.me/rusbrief/136866>; <https://t.me/rusbrief/136907>; <https://t.me/Aksenov82/2844>

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