

# Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 21, 2023

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**July 21, 2023, 8:00pm 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 12:00pm ET on July 21. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the July 22 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.**

**The arrest of former Russian officer and ardent ultranationalist Igor Girkin (Strelkov) on July 21 may be the public manifestation of a shifting balance of power among Kremlin factions, possibly to the detriment of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), in which Girkin had served.** The Russian Investigative Committee arrested Girkin on July 21, and Girkin will be held until September 18 on extremism charges.<sup>[1]</sup> Girkin's wife, Miroslava Reginskaya, reported that representatives from the Russian Investigative Committee detained Girkin at his home in Moscow, and noted later that the Moscow's Meshansky Court arrested Girkin and that he will be held until September 18 on extremism charges.<sup>[2]</sup> Girkin unsuccessfully attempted to argue in the court that he is not a high flight risk due to his sentence at the Hague Tribunal, but the court cited Girkin's notoriety and "connections in law enforcement" as the reasons for his immediate incarceration.<sup>[3]</sup> Girkin's lawyer, Alexander Molokhov, argued that Russian law enforcement is prosecuting Girkin for his May 25, 2023 Telegram posts, which reportedly discussed the lack of payments to servicemen of the 105th and 107th airborne (VDV) regiments.<sup>[4]</sup> Court documents, however, indicate that Russian authorities opened a case against Girkin on July 18 - the day on which Girkin published several harsh critiques of Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>[5]</sup> Girkin had been consistently criticizing Putin prior to July 18, however, but his past criticisms had not triggered an arrest.<sup>[6]</sup> Members of the Girkin-led "Angry Patriots Club" gathered for a small protest outside of the court demanding Girkin's release.<sup>[7]</sup> Some sources claimed that Girkin's arrest followed his conflict with a fellow Angry Patriots Club member about the Wagner Group.<sup>[8]</sup> Other sources speculated that Wagner complaints about Girkin may have triggered his arrest.<sup>[9]</sup> One source claimed that the arrest is related to Russian authorities targeting Russian "patriots" deemed disloyal to Putin.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Russian insider sources claimed that Girkin's arrest is part of the Russian Presidential Administration's efforts to crack down on select high-profile**

**Russian ultranationalists following Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s armed rebellion on June 24.** A Russian source affiliated with the Russian security services leaked a document – approved after the Wagner rebellion – in which the Russian Presidential Administration purportedly ordered the Russian authorities to “take repressive measures against those who are insane, including Strelkov-Girkin.”<sup>[11]</sup> The document additionally targeted several high-profile propagandists including Margarita Simonyan, prominent milbloggers, Russian State Duma deputies with extensive online presence, and Prigozhin. Russian insider sources have previously claimed that Kremlin factions have begun a struggle for control over the Russian information space and that First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration Sergey Kiriyyenko has been attempting to undermine Simonyan.<sup>[12]</sup> The Russian Investigative Committee – the government organization that reportedly arrested Girkin – is a structure subordinated to Putin. ISW previously reported that Kiriyyenko has been notably expanding his control over Russian social media outlets and increasing his reach in the Russian federal government since Prigozhin’s rebellion.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Girkin’s arrest follows other criminal charges against ultranationalists with past ties to Russian security services and indicates that unknown Russian officials may be targeting prominent ultranationalists who routinely reveal insider information about the Kremlin.** ISW has consistently assessed that Girkin likely has the backing of an unknown *silovik* – possibly within the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) – who promoted their interests by using Girkin as a conduit to reveal select information to Russia’s online ultranationalist community.<sup>[14]</sup> Russian authorities arrested on July 14 former FSB officer Colonel Mikhail Polyakov, who reportedly ran several popular insider Telegram channels that speculated on internal Kremlin and Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) dynamics between different factions.<sup>[15]</sup> Russian authorities also initiated a criminal case against Girkin’s affiliate, former Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Colonel Vladimir Kvachkov, on charges of discrediting the Russian Armed Forces on July 18 – the same day on which Girkin’s criminal charge was opened.<sup>[16]</sup> Girkin himself was an FSB officer and had been consistently using passports under fictitious names that he received from the FSB.<sup>[17]</sup> Girkin recently accused the FSB’s Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (UZKS) of deliberately censoring him by interfering with his presentations at a St. Petersburg bookstore on July 9.<sup>[18]</sup> The court publicized Girkin’s court proceedings, and the Russian media had been consistently televising Polyakov’s arrest and raids of Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin’s property – and it is possible that select Russian officials are trying to undermine the reputation of a security structure or of an affiliated *silovik* who protected Girkin.<sup>[19]</sup> One milblogger observed that the media attention around Polyakov’s arrest suggests that some unnamed figure is attempting to ruin the FSB’s reputation.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Wagner’s rebellion likely shifted the balance of power in the Kremlin, potentially depriving some patrons – including Girkin’s patron – of Putin’s favor and, therefore, of some of their power.** Girkin claimed on July 12 that Prigozhin’s rebellion shifted the balance of power within the Kremlin in favor of the group that reportedly includes Kiriyyenko.<sup>[21]</sup> Girkin claimed that members of the

“Ozero Cooperative” – an association unifying the dachas of Putin and several members of his inner circle in Leningrad Oblast – want to oust Putin in favor of one of its own members, such as Prigozhin or Kiriienko. Girkin warned that the “Ozero Cooperative” members will target the Ministry of Defense, Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, the FSB, and other structures outside the control of the presidential administration. While Girkin’s specific affiliations remain unknown, the recent crackdowns on ultranationalist figures in connection with the Russian security services are likely a public manifestation of a significant change within the Kremlin’s power politics.

**Russian forces conducted missile and drone strikes against southern Ukraine for a fourth night on July 21 following Russia’s withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative.** The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces shot down two of three Kaliber missiles, three of four Iskander missiles, and 13 of 19 Shahed UAVs launched at areas in southern Ukraine and that Russian forces also launched one Kh-22, one S-300 surface-to-air, and six Onyx missiles.[22] The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command reported that seven of the missiles damaged an unspecified infrastructure facility in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi Raion just southwest of Odesa City.[23] The Ukrainian Southern Operational Command also reported that Russian forces began targeting agricultural infrastructure including destroying 100 tons of peas and 20 tons of barely in strikes on a granary after three consecutive nights of targeting port infrastructure.[24] Ukrainian Southern Operational Command Spokesperson Captain First Rank Nataliya Humenyuk and Air Force Spokesperson Colonel Yuriy Ihnat reiterated that Russian forces are targeting Ukraine with specific missiles and tactics to complicate Ukraine’s ability to detect and intercept the missiles.[25]

**The Kremlin appears to be attempting to soften the Russian Ministry of Defense’s July 19 announcement about viewing civilian ships in the Black Sea as legitimate military targets.** Russian Deputy Foreign Ministry Sergei Vershinin stated on July 21 that the Russian MoD’s July 19 announcement that the Russian military will consider all ships en route to Ukrainian ports as potential military cargo vessels meant that Russian forces will inspect the ships.[26] The Russian MoD’s announcement, however, still indicates that Russian forces intend to treat civilian ships as legitimate military targets, and even Vershinin’s interpretation of the announcement states that Russian forces will board and possibly seize foreign civilian vessels.

**Russia is maneuvering to retain the option of modifying the current agreement rather than negotiating an entirely new one as it seeks to extract extensive concessions from the West.** Vershinin also argued that the July 22, 2022 memorandum underpinning the Black Sea Grain Initiative remains valid because neither Russia nor the United Nations (UN) gave notification about the termination of the memorandum that the UN, Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine signed.[27] Vershinin justified Russia’s exit from the grain deal by accusing Ukrainian forces of using grain corridors to conduct “terrorist attacks” against Russia, which is consistent with prior Russian official and milblogger narratives to justify Russia’s exit from the deal during periods of its renewal.[28]

The Russian MFA is likely trying to assert that Russia is still a *de jure* participant in the agreement despite its exit from the grain deal in an effort to leave open a channel for Russia to renegotiate the grain deal on conditions more favorable to Russia rather than negotiating an entirely new one. Ukrainian Ambassador to Turkey Vasyl Bondar reported on July 21 that the Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul, which monitors the grain corridors in the Black Sea, has stopped operating and that all Russian personnel at the center have left.[29] The Joint Coordination Center's halted operations indicate that Russia is engaging in efforts to further remove itself from the grain deal, although in ways that it could easily reverse.

Putin delivered an array of demands for Russia's return to the agreement on July 19, notably including the lifting of sanctions on Russian grain and fertilizer deliveries and the reconnection of Russian banks servicing food supplies to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) banking system.[30] The Russian military's intensifying strikes against Ukrainian port and grain infrastructure and threats of maritime escalation in the Black Sea likely aim to pressure the West to acquiesce to these demands among other things.[31] The Kremlin routinely engages in escalatory rhetoric aimed at prompting Western concessions and often will have some officials promote that rhetoric while having other officials feign willingness to engage in negotiations.[32]

**Putin continued efforts to sow intra-NATO and Ukrainian-NATO divisions likely aimed at supporting the Kremlin's Black Sea Grain Initiative effort and undermining long-term Western support for Ukraine.**[33] Putin's rhetoric heavily drew upon historical parallels meant to evoke fear and distrust between European countries and the United States as well as between Ukraine and Poland. Putin's rhetoric is consistent with prior rhetoric from Russian senior officials meant to sow distrust between Ukraine and its allies, undermine ongoing Western security assistance to Ukraine, and encourage Western states to push Ukraine prematurely into negotiations with Russia.

**Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 21 and made gains in some areas.** Geolocated footage published on July 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces made gains northeast of Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut) and closer to Pryyutne (12km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).[34] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations north and south of Bakhmut, where heavy fighting continues in the Orikhovo-Vasylivka-Paraskoviivka (up to 8km north of Bakhmut) and the Klischiivka-Andriivka (7km to 10km southwest of Bakhmut) directions.[35] The Ukrainian General Staff also reported that Ukrainian forces achieved success in the Novodarivka-Pryyutne (13km to 16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) direction in the Zaporizhia-Donetsk Oblast border area as well as the Novodanylivka-Verbove (up to 16km southeast of Orikhiv) and Novodanylvika-Robotyne (up to 12km south of Orikhiv) directions in western Zaporizhia Oblast.[36] US National Security Spokesperson John Kirby stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces have started to use US-provided cluster munitions and are using them effectively against Russian defensive

formations.[37] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns stated on July 21 during a speech at the Aspen Institute that Russian defenses in Ukraine have a number of structural flaws, including low morale and disorder among Russia’s political and military leadership.[38]

**Pro-Wagner Group sources continue to express loyalty to Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin as the future of the Wagner Group and Prigozhin’s role in the organization remains unclear.**

A Wagner-affiliated milblogger released an interview with an alleged unnamed Wagner platoon commander on July 21. The platoon commander claimed that none of the Wagner personnel he knows signed contracts with the Russian MoD except for fighters whom Wagner fired for drunkenness and looting and a Wagner commander with the surname Troshev (callsign “Seda”).[39] Putin notably claimed that he offered Wagner fighters the option to serve under a Wagner commander with the callsign “Seda” at the June 29 meeting with Prigozhin and Wagner commanders.[40] The platoon commander claimed that the goal of the Wagner armed rebellion on July 24 was to protest the “lawlessness” of the Russian military command who attempted to disband Wagner by forcing all volunteers to sign MoD contracts by July 1. The platoon commander expressed his dedication to Wagner by stating that he would not care if the MoD killed him, but he would not “disgrace [his] name or the name of Wagner PMC.”[41] He also claimed that Wagner would not have existed without Prigozhin, that all Wagner fighters took an oath to Prigozhin and to an unnamed Wagner commander (likely Wagner Group co-founder and commander Dmitry Utkin), and therefore, that they would remain with them.[42] ISW has consistently observed Wagner-affiliated sources voicing their support for Prigozhin despite Kremlin efforts to destroy Prigozhin’s reputation.[43] ISW has notably not observed Wagner-affiliated sources refusing to support Prigozhin or attempting to separate Wagner from Prigozhin.

**French Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonne was likely referring to dual-use technology and non-lethal aid when speaking about Chinese supplied equipment to Russia on July 21.** Bonn told a *CNN* journalist at the Aspen Security Forum on July 21 that China is supplying “massively [sic] military capabilities to Russia.”[44] *CNN* later quoted unspecified French officials as clarifying Bonne’s intent to speak of non-lethal aid, however.[45]

**A Russian milblogger affiliated with the Russian Airborne Forces claimed that recent speculations about the dismissal of 7th Guards Mountain VDV Division Commander Major General Alexander Kornev are false.**[46] The milblogger amplified footage of alleged personnel of the 7th VDV division denying Kornev’s dismissal as well as speculations that Russian authorities may intend to arrest VDV commander Mikhail Teplinsky.[47] ISW cannot confirm Kornev’s dismissal.

**Key Takeaways:**

- **The arrest of former Russian officer and ardent ultranationalist Igor Girkin (Strelkov) on July 21 may be the public manifestation of a shifting balance of power among Kremlin factions, possibly to**

- the detriment of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), in which Girkin had served.
- **Russian insider sources claimed that Girkin's arrest is part of the Russian Presidential Administration's efforts to crack down on select high-profile Russian ultranationalists following Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin's armed rebellion on June 24.**
  - **Girkin's arrest follows other criminal charges against ultranationalists with past ties to Russian security services and indicates that unknown Russian officials may be targeting prominent ultranationalists who routinely reveal insider information about the Kremlin.**
  - **Wagner's rebellion likely shifted the balance of power in the Kremlin, potentially depriving some patrons – including Girkin's patron – of Putin's favor and, therefore, of some of their power.**
  - **Russian forces conducted missile and drone strikes against southern Ukraine for a fourth night on July 21 following Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative.**
  - **The Kremlin appears to be attempting to soften the Russian Ministry of Defense's July 19 announcement about viewing civilian ships in the Black Sea as legitimate military targets.**
  - **Russia is maneuvering to retain the option of modifying the current agreement rather than negotiating an entirely new one as it seeks to extract extensive concessions from the West.**
  - **Russian President Vladimir Putin continued efforts to sow intra-NATO and Ukrainian-NATO divisions likely aimed at supporting the Kremlin's Black Sea Grain Initiative effort and undermining long-term Western support for Ukraine.**
  - **Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on at least three sectors of the front on July 21 and made gains in some areas.**
  - **Pro-Wagner Group sources continue to express loyalty to Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin as the future of the Wagner Group and Prigozhin's role in the organization remains unclear.**
  - **French Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonne was likely referring to dual-use technology and non-lethal aid when speaking about Chinese supplied equipment to Russia on July 21.**
  - **A Russian milblogger affiliated with the Russian Airborne Forces claimed that recent speculations about the dismissal of 7th Guards Mountain VDV Division Commander Major General Alexander Kornev are false.**
  - **Russian forces conducted offensive operations in the Kupyansk, Kreminna, Bakhmut areas, and along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and reportedly advanced in the Kupyansk and Kreminna areas.**
  - **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in the Bakhmut area, and along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna and Avdiivka Donetsk City lines, and advanced in the Bakhmut area.**

- **Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast, the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast area, and south of Orikhiv, and reportedly advanced south of Orikhiv.**
- **Ukrainian forces conducted counteroffensive operations in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast area and in western Zaporizhia Oblast and made gains in the western Donetsk-eastern Zaporizhia Oblast area.**
- **Russian officials announced that they will amend a Russian State Duma bill originally aimed at incrementally raising the conscription age so that there is an immediate increase of the upper age limit for the spring 2024 conscription cycle.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to relocate Ukrainian children in occupied Ukraine to Russia.**
- **A Wagner-linked source reported that Wagner temporarily relocated its headquarters from Molmino, Krasnodar Krai, to Belarus and that Wagner's work to transfer combat experience to the Belarusian military is in full swing.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of July 21, 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)**

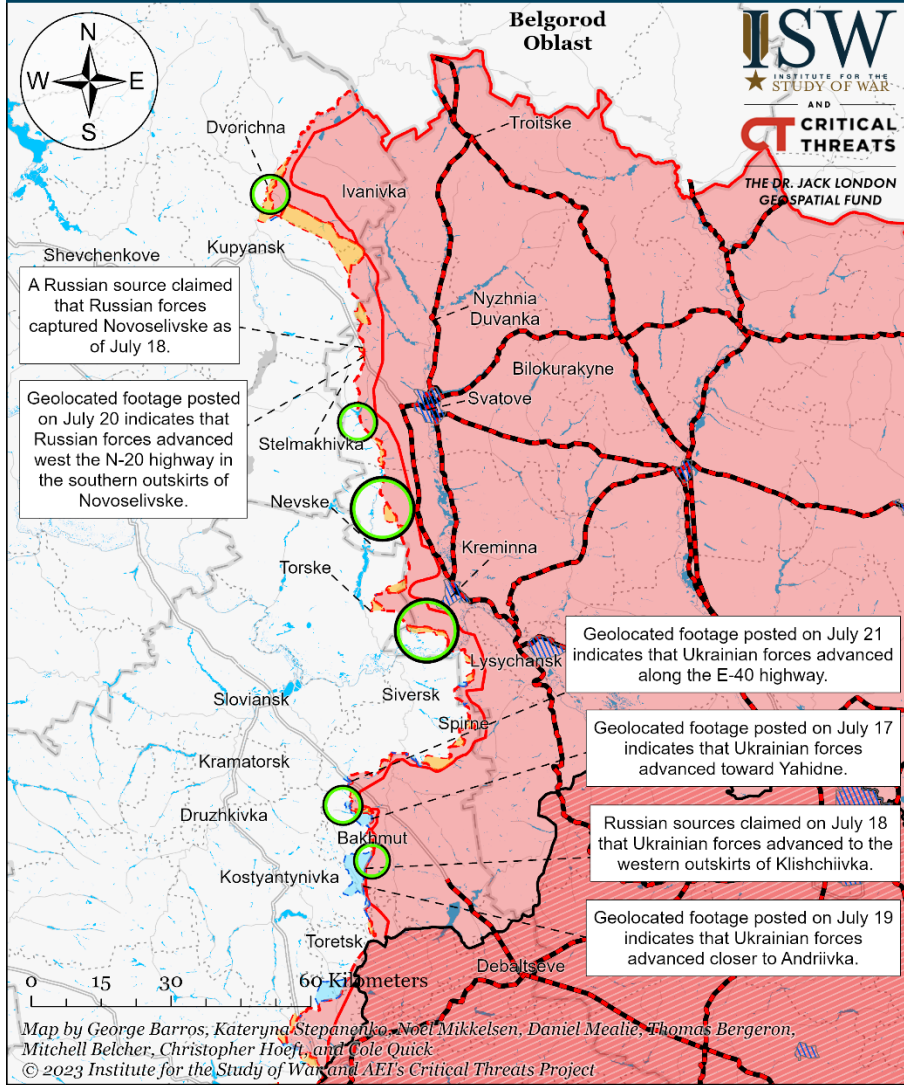
Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kupyansk area and reportedly advanced on July 21. The Russian Western Group of Forces Spokesperson Sergei Zybinsky claimed that Russian forces captured five Ukrainian strongholds and four observation points during fighting near the Senkivka rail station and Masyutivka (both 12-14km northeast of Kupyansk).[48] Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces advanced three kilometers in an unspecified area in the Kupyansk direction, captured the Movchanove rail station (just north of the Senkivka rail station), and attacked Ukrainian positions west and south of Lyman Pershyi (11km northwest of Kupyansk).[49] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced to unspecified positions at the Oskil River in the Kupyansk direction.[50] ISW has not observed visual confirmation of any of these claims. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks southwest of Masyutivka.[51] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated that Russian forces are attempting to seize the battlefield initiative in the Kupyansk direction.[52]

Russian forces continued offensive operations in the Kreminna area and reportedly made marginal advances on July 21. A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces advanced in the Serebryanske forest area (10km southwest of Kreminna) from the northwest.[53] Another Russian milblogger posted footage of unspecified Russian Airborne (VDV) assault detachments capturing Ukrainian trench positions reportedly in a forest near Kreminna.[54] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Nadiya (15km southwest of Svatove), Makiivka (22km northwest of Kreminna), Nevske (18km northwest of Kreminna), Dibrova (7m southwest of Kreminna), and in the Serebryanske forest area.[55]

Ukrainian forces continued ground attacks on the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and did not advance on July 21. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled two

Ukrainian counterattacks in the Kupyansk area near Lyman Pershyi and Synkivka (8km northeast of Kupyansk) and attacks in the Kreminna area near Dibrova, Kovalivka (10km southwest of Svatove), Karmazynivka (12km southwest of Svatove), and Zolotarivka (12km south of Kreminna).[56] Russian milbloggers largely corroborated the MoD's claims and additionally claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian armored assault near Torske (15km west of Kreminna).[57]

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Luhansk Oblast as of July 21, 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: A Russian source claimed on July 21 that Russian forces made marginal advances in the Serebrynske forest area. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on July 19 that Russian forces advanced more than one kilometer in depth and up to two kilometers along the front in Luhansk Oblast. A Russian source claimed on July 18 that Russian forces advanced two kilometers west of Lyman Pershyi. The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed on July 18 that Russian forces advanced 1.5 kilometers deep along a two kilometer frontline in the direction of Kupyansk. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also 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. 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)**

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations on the northern and southern flanks of Bakhmut and made limited gains on July 21. Geolocated footage published on July 21 shows that Ukrainian forces advanced along the E40 (Bakhmut to Slovyansk) highway northeast of Orikhovo-Vasylivka (11km northwest of Bakhmut).[58] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces continued offensive operations north and south of Bakhmut where Russian forces deployed reinforcements.[59] The Ukrainian General Staff reported that heavy fighting continues in the Orikhovo-Vasylivka-Paraskoviivka (up to 8km north of Bakhmut) and the Klischiivka-Andriivka (7km to 10km southwest of Bakhmut) directions.[60] Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty reported that Ukrainian forces continue to hold the initiative in the Bakhmut direction, where Ukrainian offensives are making steady progress.[61] Cherevaty reported that Ukrainian forces are engaging in maneuver actions in the Bakhmut direction to avoid heavy losses.[62] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces north of Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut) and near Mayorske (17km south of Bakhmut).[63] A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces gained a foothold on the heights north of Orikhovo-Vasylivka.[64]

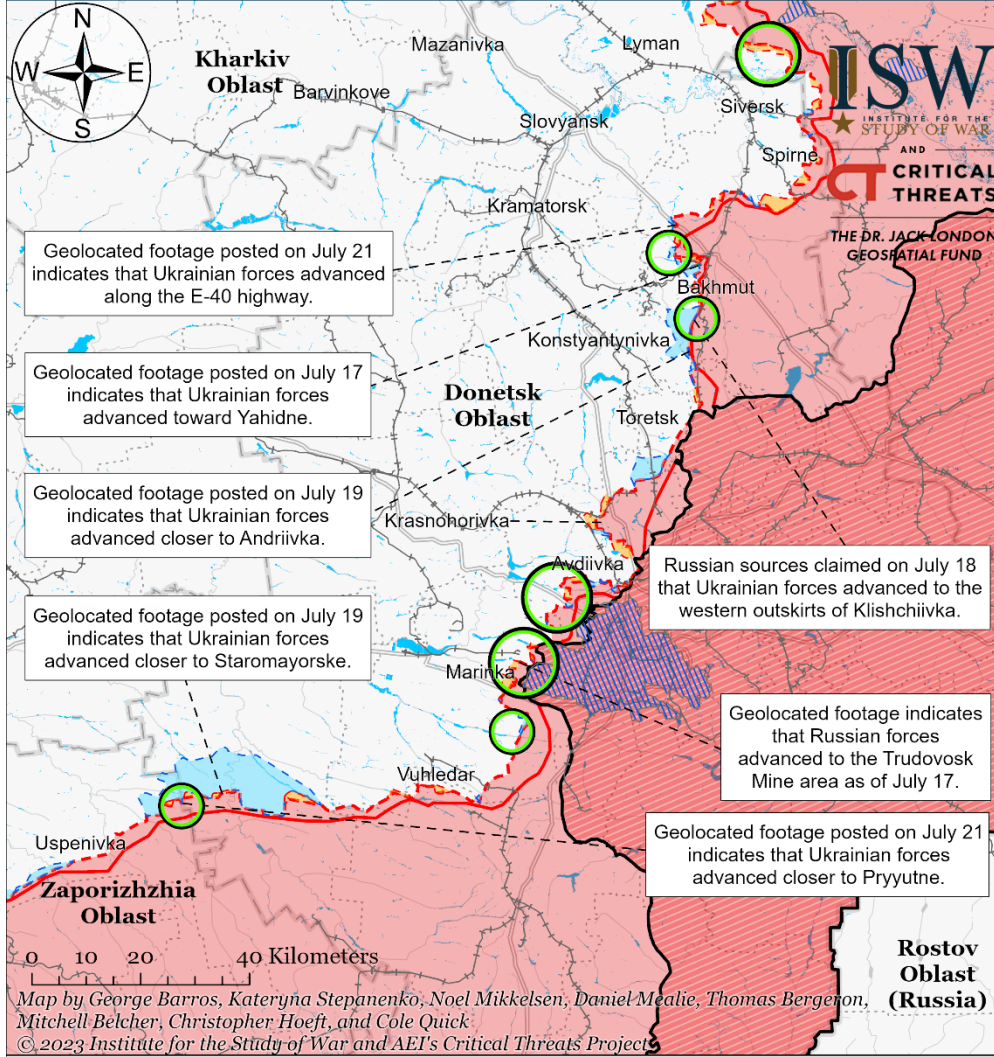
Russian forces conducted attacks in the Bakhmut area and made no confirmed gains on July 21. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian positions on the southwest outskirts of Klishchiivka and near Hryhorivka (9km northwest of Bakhmut).[65] A Russian milblogger claimed that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked Ukrainian forces from the direction of Berkhivka (6km northwest of Bakhmut).[66] Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that elements of the Chechen “Akhmat” Spetsnaz and “Sever-Akhmat” units, as well as elements of the Russian 4th Motorized Rifle Brigade (2nd Luhansk People’s Republic Army Corps) and 346th Special Forces Brigade, are operating near Klishchiivka.[67]

Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted limited offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and did not make any confirmed gains on July 21. Avdiivka City Military Administration Head Vitaliy Barabash reported that Ukrainian forces have achieved unspecified success in the area of Avdiivka in the past two to three weeks.[68] The Russian MoD claimed that Ukrainian forces unsuccessfully attacked elements of the Russian Southern Grouping of Forces near Vesele (5km northeast of Avdiivka), Marinka (27km southwest of Avdiivka), and Vodyane (7km southwest of Avdiivka).[69]

Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Avdiivka-Donetsk City line and made no confirmed advances on July 21. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces unsuccessfully attacked near Pervomaiske (11km southwest of Avdiivka), Nevelske (14km southwest of Avdiivka), Krasnohorivka (23km southwest of Avdiivka), Marinka, and Novomykhailivka (10km southwest of Donetsk City).[70] Russian sources claimed that Russian forces pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions near Vesele and

Kamianka (5km northeast of Avdiivka), but ISW has not observed visual confirmation of these claims.<sup>[71]</sup> Russian milbloggers claimed that Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions near Marinka, Krasnohorivka, and Nevelske.<sup>[72]</sup> Barabash reported that Russian forces are continuing attempts to encircle Avdivika and have been deploying reinforcements to the area, including unspecified naval infantry elements that were previously in Nikolske near Mariupol.<sup>[73]</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of July 21, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

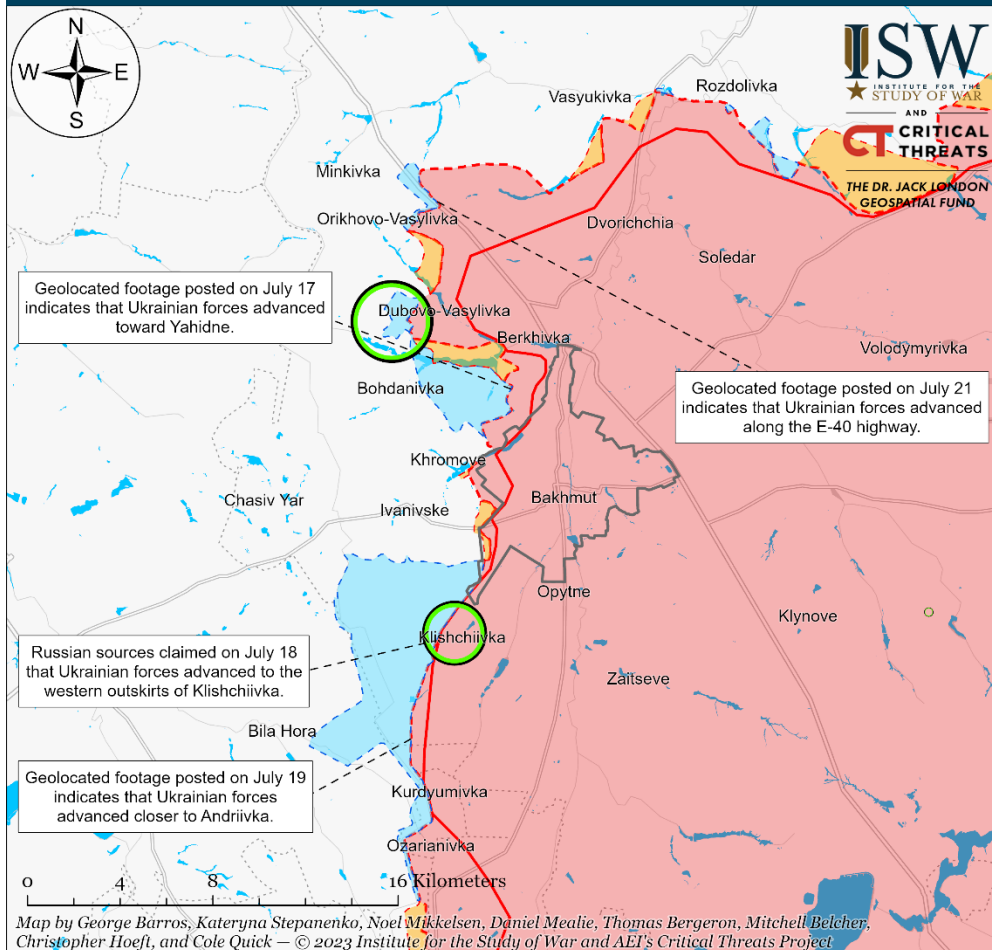


	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours		Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory		Major Railroads
	Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24		Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory		Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
	Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*		Claimed 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 Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on July 21 that Ukrainian forces are making measured and stable progress, capturing hundreds of meters daily in the Bakhmut direction. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Bakhmut as of July 21, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Bakhmut City Limits	Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory	Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine*	Claimed Russian Control over 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 Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on July 21 that Ukrainian forces are making measured and stable progress, capturing hundreds of meters daily in the Bakhmut direction. Commander of the Ukrainian Ground Forces Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsky stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advances approximately 0.5 kilometers to 1 kilometer daily in the Bakhmut direction. A Russian source claimed on July 20 that Ukrainian forces captured positions on the heights near Klishchiivka, but Russian forces still control the settlement. The Russian source also claimed on July 20 that Ukrainian forces captured positions near the M-03 highway near Orikhovo-Vasylivka and advanced toward Yahidne. Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar reported on July 17 that Ukrainian forces occupied almost all the dominant heights around Bakhmut. Malyar also 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

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

Russian sources claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted offensive operations in western Donetsk Oblast but did not advance on July 21. Russian milbloggers claimed that elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) repelled Ukrainian assaults with armored vehicles north of Mykilske (27km southwest of Donetsk City).<sup>[74]</sup>

Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations along the administrative border between Zaporizhia and Donetsk oblasts on July 21 and made gains in the area. Geolocated footage published on July 21 indicates that Ukrainian forces advanced closer to Pryyutne (16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>[75]</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces achieved success in the Novodarivka-Pryyutne (13km to 16km southwest of Velyka Novosilka) direction.<sup>[76]</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed that Ukrainian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks near Staromayorske (9km south of Velyka Novosilka).<sup>[77]</sup>

Russian forces counterattacked in the Zaporizhia-Donetsk Oblast border area on July 21 and made no confirmed gains. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful ground attacks to recapture previously lost positions north of Pryyutne.<sup>[78]</sup> A Russian milblogger claimed on July 20 that Russian forces counterattacked near Pryyutne and pushed Ukrainian forces out of positions north of the settlement.<sup>[79]</sup> The geolocated footage of Ukrainian advances in the area published on July 21 indicates that these Russian counterattacks were likely unsuccessful.

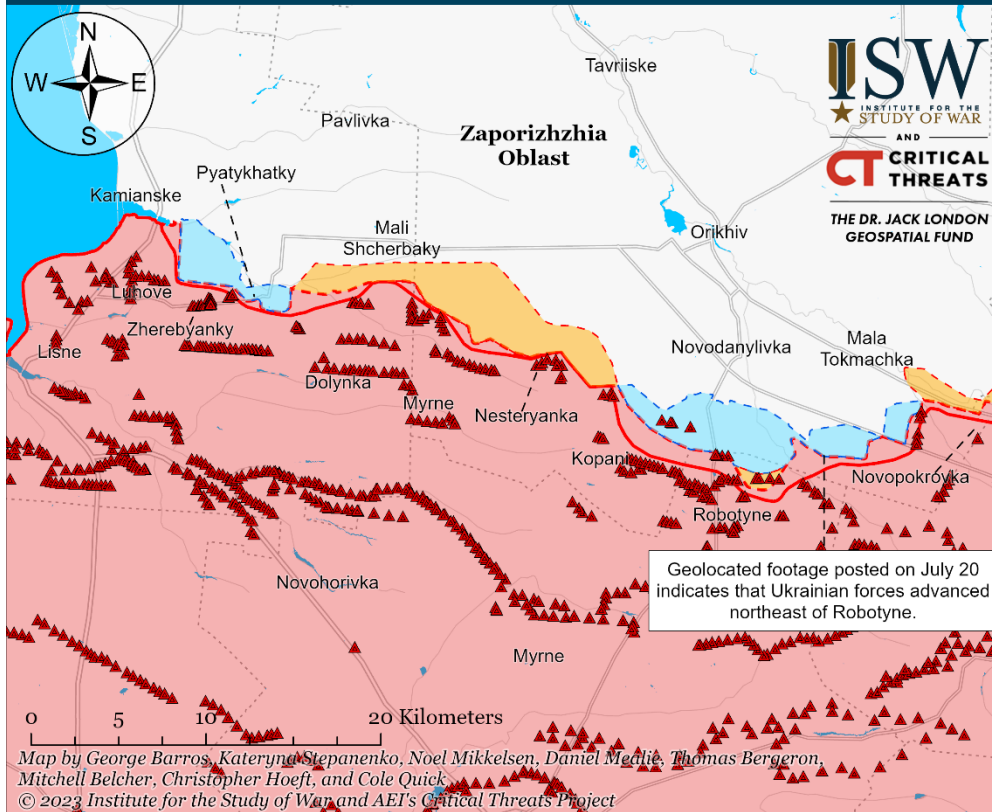
Ukrainian forces continued counteroffensive operations in western Zaporizhia Oblast on July 21 and made no confirmed gains in the area. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Ukrainian forces achieved success in the Novodanylivka-Verbove (up to 16km southeast of Orikhiv) and Novodanylvika-Robotyne (up to 12km south of Orikhiv) directions.<sup>[80]</sup> The Russian MoD claimed that Russian forces repelled a Ukrainian assault near Mala Tokmachka (6km southeast of Orikhiv).<sup>[81]</sup> Russian sources claimed that small Ukrainian groups conducted ground attacks towards Verbove as well as along the Pyatykhakty-Zherebyanky line (up to 26km southwest of Orikhiv).<sup>[82]</sup>

Russian forces reportedly counterattacked south of Orikhiv and advanced in the area on July 21. Russian sources amplified footage on July 21 purporting to show elements of the Russian 291st Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (42nd Motorized Rifle Division, 58th Combined Arms Army, Southern Military District) at recaptured positions following successful counterattacks near Robotyne.<sup>[83]</sup> ISW has not observed visual confirmation of recent Russian advances near Robotyne.

Russian sources claim that Ukrainian forces maintain a presence on the east (left) bank of Kherson Oblast and that fighting continues near the Antonivsky Bridge as of July 21. A Russian milblogger claimed that fighting is ongoing near Ukrainian positions close to the Antonivsky Bridge and that Russian forces repelled a small Ukrainian group that attempted to land near Hola Prystan (12km southwest of Kherson City).<sup>[84]</sup> Kherson Oblast occupation administration head Vladimir Saldo claimed on July 20 that small Ukrainian groups continue attempts to land on the left bank of Kherson Oblast.<sup>[85]</sup>



# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Pyatykhatky and Robotyne as of July 21, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



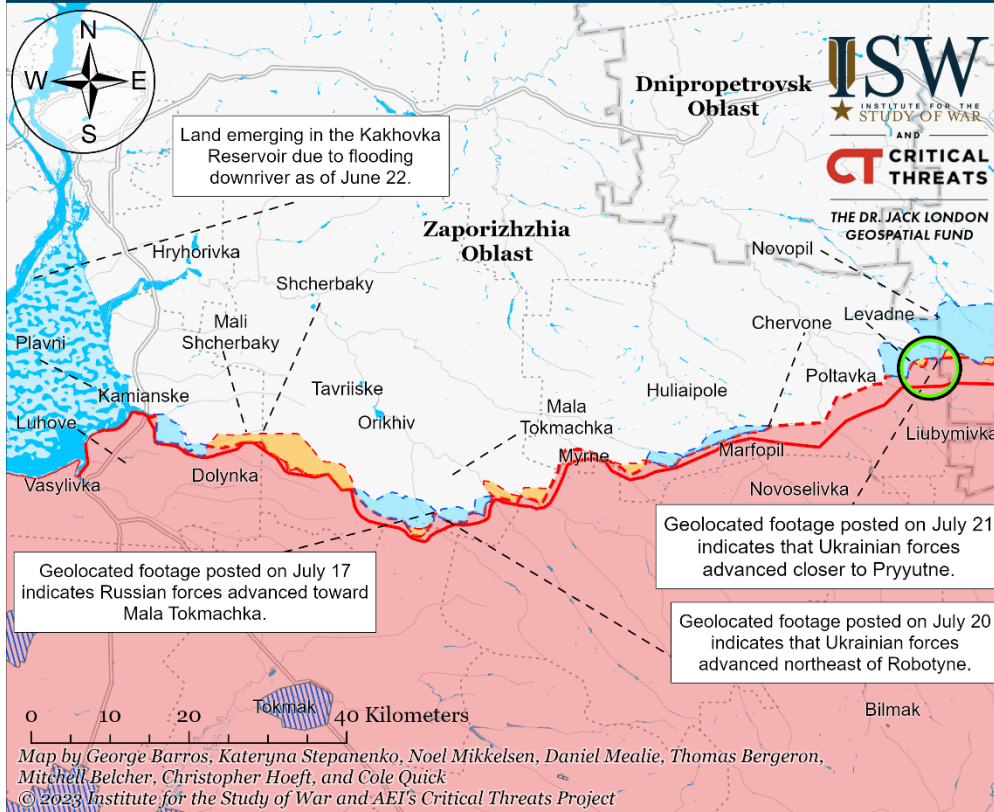
Map by George Barros, Kateryna Stepanenko, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Medlie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, Christopher Hoeft, and Cole Quick  
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- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- ▲ Russian Field Fortifications
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*

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

Note: Ukrainian Deputy Director of the Department of Application Planning of the Main Directorate of the Ukrainian National Guard Colonel Mykola Urshalovych stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advance a “few hundred” meters every day. Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than one kilometer in the Melitopol direction. 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of July 21, 2023, 3:00 PM ET

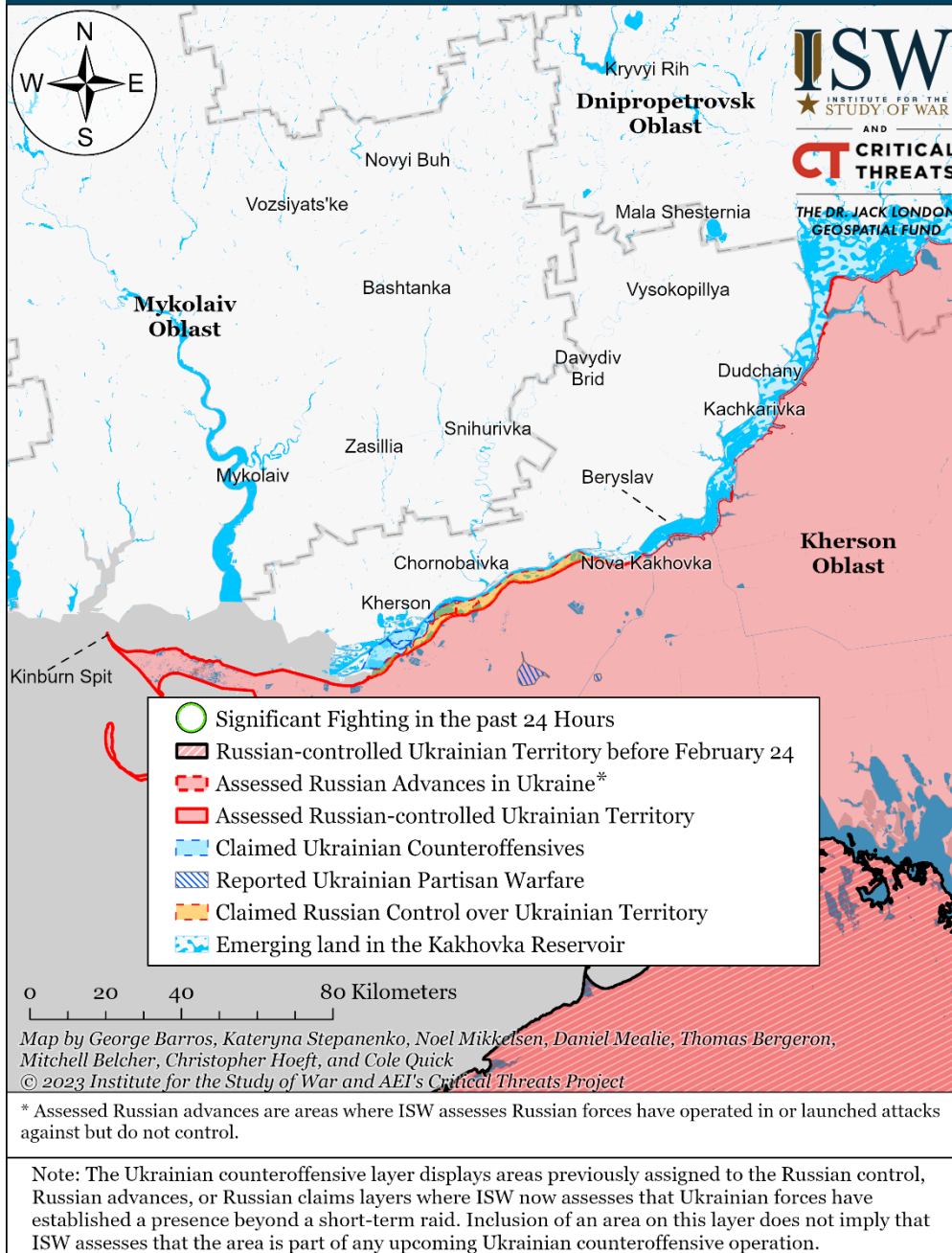


- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Emerging land in the Kakhovka Reservoir
- Assessed Russian 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 Director of the Department of Application Planning of the Main Directorate of the Ukrainian National Guard Colonel Mykola Urshalovych stated on July 20 that Ukrainian forces advance a “few hundred” meters every day. Ukrainian Tavriivsk Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Valerii Shershen stated on July 19 that Ukrainian forces advanced by more than one kilometer in the Melitopol direction. 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. ISW is unable to confirm the geometry of the advance at this time.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of July 21, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



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

Russian officials announced that they will amend a Russian State Duma bill originally aimed at incrementally raising the conscription age so that there is an immediate increase in the upper age limit for the spring 2024 conscription cycle. Duma Defense Committee Head Andrey Kartapolov announced that the new amendment will increase the upper limit of the conscription age range from 27 years old to 30 years old but will not change the lower limit of 18 years old.[86] Kartapolov stated that the change in the conscription age range will take effect in the spring 2024 conscription cycle and will not affect the autumn conscription cycle this year.[87] The original bill proposed an incremental increase of the draft age of 19 to 30 years old in 2024, 20 to 30 years old in 2025, and 21 to 30 years old in 2026.[88] Russia State Duma Defense Committee Head Andrey Kartapolov allegedly stated that the lower limit will remain at 18 years old and will not increase to 21 years old as the bill previously proposed because many young men want to join the army.[89]

Russian schools will teach children how to operate combat drones starting on September 1, 2023. Russian Federation Council Deputy Chair for Digital Economy Development Council Senator Artem Sheikin announced on July 21 that the Digital Economic Development Council worked with the Ministry of Education to develop this proposal.[90] Sheikin claimed that the Russian MoD stated that the program will allow students to study drone types, purpose, performance characteristics, general structure, reconnaissance of an area, and methods of countering enemy UAVs.[91] Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his support for this initiative on April 28, 2023.[92] ISW previously reported that Russian officials in St. Petersburg allocated one million rubles (about \$11,000) to buy 15 training drones for drone education programs in St. Petersburg schools and that prominent Russian milbloggers have previously advocated for schools to offer educational drone programs to support long-term drone production and training efforts.[93]

The Kremlin continues to pull forces originally stationed at Russian bases in former Soviet states to serve in Ukraine, further weakening Russia's military influence in Central Asia. A Russian news aggregator posted footage on July 20 claiming to show Russian soldiers departing the 201st Military base (Central Military District) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan for the frontlines in Ukraine.[94] The Ukrainian Center for Defense Strategies, a Ukrainian national security think tank, reported on January 1, 2023, that unspecified elements from the 201st Military Base were operating in the Kharkiv direction.[95] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)* reported on September 14, 2022, that Russia deployed approximately 1,500 Russian personnel from the 201st Military base to Ukraine and planned to deploy 600 more personnel from facilities in Dushanbe and Bokhatar, a southern Tajik city, in the future.[96] Russia's removal of troops from Tajikistan in September 2022 possibly contributed to Tajik President Emomali Rahmon publicly demanding respect from President Putin during the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit on October 14, 2022.[97] Rahmon even went so far as to note that he was present in the meetings prior to the fall of the Soviet Union and that Russia is not paying attention to Central Asia now as the Soviet Union did not back then.[98] The Kremlin's decision to pull more forces from Tajikistan could indicate that the Kremlin has chosen to prioritize the war in Ukraine over Russia's long-term relations with Central Asian countries.

Russian sources claimed that the Russian military is relying on Soviet-era equipment to make up for battlefield losses in Ukraine. A Russian milblogger posted satellite imagery on July 20 claiming to show that Russian forces recently moved unspecified Soviet-era artillery systems from storage facilities.<sup>[99]</sup> The milblogger claimed that Russian forces removed 100 152mm “Hyacinth,” 200 203mm “Peony,” and 100 240mm “Tulip” self-propelled guns from an undisclosed military location, presumably to be used in Ukraine.<sup>[100]</sup> The milblogger claimed that this will allow Russian forces to make up for the equipment that Ukrainian counterbattery fire has destroyed but questioned the long-term feasibility of using Soviet equipment to replace battlefield losses.<sup>[101]</sup>

**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 relocate Ukrainian children in occupied Ukraine to Russia. Kherson Oblast occupation administration government chairman Andrei Alekseenko announced on July 21 that the Kherson Oblast occupation administration sent nearly 2,000 children to “children’s camps” in Yevpatoriia in occupied Crimea, Kabardinka in Krasnodar Krai, Adygea Republic, and Yaroslavl Oblast since the beginning of summer.<sup>[102]</sup> The Kherson Oblast occupation administration announced that 84 children from the Henichesk, Kalanchak, and Oleshky raions in occupied Kherson Oblast are currently at a summer camp in Kabardinka.<sup>[103]</sup> Alekseenko reported that the Kherson Oblast occupation administration plans to send an additional 1,000 children to camps in the Kuban region of Russia, Adygea Republic, Voronezh, Kaliningrad, and Pskov oblasts.<sup>[104]</sup>

Russian occupation officials reportedly will conduct door-to-door voting in occupied Ukraine in order to fabricate voter turnout in the September 10 regional elections. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities intend to hide the lack of local participation in the regional elections by opening early voting on August 31 and going door-to-door to collect residents’ votes on September 8 and 9.<sup>[105]</sup> The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities will likely claim that Ukrainian civilians voted early or at home when Ukrainian civilians fail to appear at polling stations on September 10.

The Kremlin is reportedly planning to create a new “unified information agency” to increase media control in occupied Ukraine. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the “unified information agency” will operate in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and employ foreign FSB recruits.<sup>[106]</sup> The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that the Kremlin plans to present the agency as the creation of French journalist Christelle Neant, who has been cooperating with the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Ministry of State Security for years.<sup>[107]</sup> Russian occupation authorities have already established Kremlin-controlled media outlets in occupied Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts.<sup>[108]</sup>

Russian occupation authorities may be coercing Ukrainians into joining the Russian military and moving Russian citizens into occupied Ukraine. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian military personnel operating near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) are “local residents.”<sup>[109]</sup> The Russian MoD may be referring to Russian citizens who moved to occupied Ukraine as “local residents” or may be suggesting that local Ukrainian citizens are serving in the Russian military. ISW has previously reported on Russian efforts to increase the population of Russian citizens living in occupied Ukraine and attempts to coerce Ukrainians in occupied territory into joining the Russian military.<sup>[110]</sup>

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

A Wagner-linked source reported that Wagner temporarily relocated its headquarters from Molkino, Krasnodar Krai, to Belarus and that Wagner’s work to transfer combat experience to the Belarusian military is in full swing.<sup>[111]</sup> The source provided no details on how long Wagner’s “temporary” headquarters would remain in Belarus or to where the headquarters will be relocated in the future.

The same Wagner-linked source reported that Wagner personnel are training elements of the Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade at the Brest Training Ground.<sup>[112]</sup> The Belarusian Ministry of Defense reported on July 21 that elements of the Belarusian 38th Air Assault Brigade conducted parachute drops at the Brest Training Ground but did not mention any Wagner participation.<sup>[113]</sup> Wagner Group personnel may have participated in this airborne exercise to refresh Wagner personnel’s airborne skills; The Wagner Group recruits extensively from Russian airborne and special forces personnel who should have been previously airborne-qualified. Wagner forces may seek to compete against Russian forces as Belarusian training partners. The Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade historically trains with the Russian 76th VDV Division and Russian and Belarusian airborne forces regularly conduct joint exercises with sister units.<sup>[114]</sup> The Wagner Group may seek to supplant some of those Russian-Belarusian unit relationships.

**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.**

**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.**

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